



Council Leader's Report

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A more positive start to the year

With the new year came another step closer to 'normality' and, alongside the lifting of Covid restrictions introduced in December, our services are increasingly returning to full capacity.

Our customer hubs are back operating as normal and offering residents their usual welcoming experience, the vast majority of our community centres and libraries have reopened, with alternative locations being sought for the remaining few being used as test centres, our recycling centres have extended their opening hours and the Usher Hall and Assembly Rooms are all set with an exciting programme of events for 2022.

Of course, the coming weeks and months won't be without challenges. As is the case across the country, our Health and Social Care colleagues are still facing significant pressures, and we're continuing to do all we can both directly and with our partners to meet the care needs of people across the City.

We've relied on the dedication of our teams since the beginning of the pandemic – from the staff who've gone above and beyond to keep our schools open to the waste crews whose efforts and resilience have helped to maintain a high level of service throughout – and I won't tire of thanking them all for keeping our vital services running for those who need them most.

I would urge everyone to keep at it, get vaccinated if you haven't already, 'take a lateral flow before you go' and continue to follow the guidance.

Driving forward positive cultural change

At our next Council meeting, we'll discuss a plan for how we take forward proposed changes to our whistleblowing and wider organisational culture as a result of the two independent and well-publicised reports carried out by Susanne Tanner QC late last year.

I again want to thank everyone who came forward to speak to the Inquiry and Review teams, including colleagues past and present. I know this has been a really difficult process for those affected but it is thanks to their testimonies that we're now in a position to implement this plan and deliver positive change.

The culture of the Council has to be as positive, open, safe and supportive as it can be so that colleagues can feel confident in raising issues and that they will be properly investigated and responded to. Although Susanne Tanner QC highlighted positive progress and improvements to the Council's culture in recent years, she pointed to significant work still to do and made a series of recommendations that we've accepted in full.

The implementation plan outlines the next steps we must take to meet these recommendations – making sure we're in the strongest position to support our colleagues and to deliver the best possible services for the people of Edinburgh.

Supporting our business community

On the back of another difficult festive period for our hospitality and leisure sector businesses, our teams have been hard at work reaching out to those affected to offer further support. To date, we've issued £8.3m of vital funds to over 2,500 businesses and this continues with a [new fund for B&B owners](#), open now to those impacted by the cancellation of Edinburgh's Hogmanay.

Our ongoing work to shine a spotlight on all that our Capital has to offer has continued through the winter months with our [Forever Edinburgh](#) campaign. We're featuring partnerships with our new furry mascot Hamish the Highland Terrier and acclaimed author Ian Rankin, capturing the imaginations of thousands. This activity has seen real impact on the ground with businesses like Yotel Hotel, featured in the author's prize weekend, seeing an uplift in bookings, while more locals have been getting on board with Edinburgh Bus Tours thanks to our Resident Rewards initiative.

It's great to see the business sector continuing to innovate with, for example, [egg & co](#), Scotland's largest community for female-led businesses which has opened a new collaborative business and retail experience on George Street. We've also seen exciting new revamp plans revealed in recent weeks for the former Jenners and Debenhams buildings on Princes Street, which all signal part of a new era as we look to adapt to a changing retail and leisure landscape. We're expecting work to begin on these sites very soon and we'll work with developers and Essential Edinburgh on the look of these spaces and others as they take shape.

In other positive news, [research from Knight Frank](#) names Edinburgh as the UK's most innovative city outside of London, with more than half of students in Edinburgh intending to stay after they graduate and high scores for quality of life. This, alongside our continuous climb up [Tripadvisor's Travellers Choice](#) list – Edinburgh is now the 12th most popular destination for city lovers in the world. As restrictions continue to ease, we can only expect this to flourish.

A step closer to Trams to Newhaven

The Trams to Newhaven route is really beginning to take shape, with 60% of the track now laid (2.8km) and construction work complete on two new tram stops at McDonald Road and Ocean Terminal. That the project remains on track for carrying passengers by spring 2023 and within the £207.3m budget, despite the challenges posed by Covid, is testament to the hard work and careful planning of the project team.

Having [returned the newly restored Burns statue](#) to his rightful home on Bernard Street as part of a new improved pedestrian space, our attention turns to the [next phase of the project](#), which involves linking the existing line with the new route. With trams terminating on Shandwick Place until April, Edinburgh Trams have shared [advice on alternative travel](#) to the city centre and, as work on the west side of Leith Walk nears completion, we'll also be making some traffic management changes so we can carry out improvements on the opposite side.

Of course, a project of this magnitude is bound to cause some traffic disruption, and while we've worked hard to minimise this, I'd like to thank all the residents, businesses and commuters for their patience. Ultimately, the project will bring significant benefits to the local area and, as we progress through the final year of construction, we're getting ever closer to taking trams through Leith and on to Newhaven.

Bridging the digital divide

It was great to visit Leith Academy recently for the ongoing roll out of [digital devices for pupils and staff](#) across our schools. The pupils were receiving their new iPads as part of our Empowered Learning project, which is helping us to provide equal access to education across the city.

Thanks to this major £17.5m investment in our young people, this project will see every pupil from Primary 6 upwards given their own iPad. In total 39,000 devices are being distributed to our pupils and teaching staff as part of our ambitious and inclusive education strategy 'Edinburgh Learns for Life'.

It's a real game-changer for education in Edinburgh by improving outcomes, increasing engagement and motivating our young people. It's so important we do everything we can to allow them to reach their fullest potential and close the equity gap as far as we can.

Don't miss your chance to vote on 5 May

With only three months to go until the Local Government elections, it's important to make sure you're [registered to vote](#).

When you cast your vote on 5 May, you'll be voting for local councillors to represent your ward, with three or four elected in each. The councillors you elect will make important decisions on the future of our Capital and on your local services, like education, social care, waste management, libraries, planning and much more.

The vast majority of people who were registered to vote at the time of the Scottish Parliament elections last year will still be registered to vote this time. However, if you've moved house since then, you'll need to register at your new address.

You have a range of options for casting your ballot: in person, by post or by appointing someone you trust to vote in your place, known as a proxy. The deadline to register to vote is midnight on 18 April. [Find out more from the Council website](#).

Get involved

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