

Leader's Report

Cllr Cammy Day



March 2023

Getting the basics right

Despite the unique demands of a capital city, Edinburgh continues to receive the worst grant funding per head of any local authority in Scotland. Years of local government cuts have now come to a head, forcing us to find £76m of savings this year – on top of the hundreds of millions we've made already.

That was the backdrop for our budget deliberations last month and, while I was obviously disappointed by the result and the way it came about, I remain determined to continue working with other groups to find a way forward that best meets our priorities as a council and as a city.

I was pleased, of course, that councillors agreed to allocate substantial additional money to improve roads, paths and pavements and that additional funding will be made available for the city's parks and greenspaces. I was pleased too that we found the funding to save the King's Theatre (more on that below).

Just yesterday, we agreed a [major spending programme for council housing](#). We're investing £173m over the next 12 months bringing new life into old council homes, adapting them to be warmer, better places to live. We'll continue to build much-needed new social housing, adapt homes to better meet people's health needs and bring void properties back into use for people currently without a home.

Of course, supporting people who are homeless involves colleagues from across the Council working hard to deliver services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The same can be said for the rest of our teams and, over the past few months, I've met nearly 1,000 people from right across the 700 services we deliver – most recently our waste and recycling teams at Bankhead depot, whom I visited this morning. It's been a real pleasure to be able to thank colleagues in person for their commitment and hard work over the past few challenging years – and to reassure them that they're truly valued.

Building blocks for our children's future

Last week saw two significant milestones for our young people in Edinburgh with the opening of the new Granton Early Years and Childcare Centre and the [planning application being approved](#) for a replacement Liberton High School.

Granton is one of five state-of-the-art early years buildings we've opened in recent months with over 500 children benefitting from these amazing new facilities. A child's earliest years are so important as they have a significant impact on their long-term development and what they learn at this stage will have a lasting effect on them especially when they start school.

That's why we are continuing to invest in our learning estate across the city making our schools innovatively and sustainably designed so they are inspirational places for learning. Work has already started on the new Currie High School, our first Passivhaus classroom building at Sciennes Primary will open in June and work continues on new £45m school facilities at Wester Hailes.

All these exciting developments demonstrate [our firm commitment](#) to providing the very best environments for our young people to thrive in as they start on their journey towards a lifetime of achievement.

Warm and welcoming spaces

Back in December, I launched our citywide [Warm and Welcoming Spaces initiative](#) in response to the unprecedented cost-of-living crisis facing us all.

From family fun days in Leith to coffee mornings in Corstorphine, movie matinees in Wester Hailes to dance classes in Newhaven, there's something for everyone. Council venues such as libraries, museums and galleries, alongside partner and community spaces, have been putting on free activities – all designed to boost residents' wellbeing and offer a safe space to access information and support.

Since the launch, we've grown the network by over a third, with more than 90 of these venues now spread across the city, and 10 partner organisations offering support, guidance and advice to our residents who need it most.

Oxgangs Neighbourhood Centre has been a key part of the network and, earlier this week, I had the pleasure of meeting staff and customers there during a visit to promote the [Household Hardship Fund](#). It was great to see first hand the huge amount of selfless work that goes into running the centre, as it does in so many others like it across the city.

Embracing equity

Earlier this week we marked [International Women's Day](#) – celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women worldwide.

I'm proud to lead an organisation with so many inspiring women in each and every one of our services. From what would have traditionally been classed as male-dominated roles, such as construction, through to what historically may be known as 'men in grey suits' at the management table, we have inspiring women at the heart of them all.

Women make up 70% of our total workforce and, with new Executive Director of Corporate Services, Dr Deborah Smart, joining us last week, three-quarters of our Executive Directors are now female.

Of course, we still have a long way to go to secure gender equality in our organisation, but this is undoubtedly a step in the right direction.

Gorgie Farm on firmer footing

I'm delighted that Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council (EVOC) are on board to lead on establishing a community-led, collaborative and financially [sustainable future for Gorgie City Farm](#). They've got a proven track record in supporting community and voluntary organisations and are the ideal third sector partner to find a solution for this much-loved community asset.

The work by campaign groups, volunteers and other partners has been really impressive and shows the strength of support for the farm. I want to thank everyone who is working so hard – both publicly and behind the scenes – to find a solution. It's a vital community asset, not just for the local area but for everyone across the city.

EVOC will now bring together a Steering Group, including representatives from the voluntary sector, campaign groups, the local community and the Council to come up with proposals to secure its future and ensure that we can all enjoy everything it has to offer for years to come.

Granton Waterfront celebrates its first major milestone

Tomorrow I'll be joining residents of north Edinburgh to cut the ribbon at the official opening of the new [Granton Station Square](#). This is the first major milestone in our £1.3bn regeneration of the Waterfront and it's great to see new life being brought into the old site having lain vacant for so long.

Those attending will also be able to enjoy a sneak peek of the adjacent historic Granton Station building and Wasps, the social enterprise charity who'll occupy the building later this year, will be offering guided tours. Going forward, they'll be providing much-needed affordable workspace for artists and the creative industries.

We're creating homes, jobs and new communities right along the Waterfront and you can already see construction well underway on the first of the 3,500 net-zero carbon homes. Also included in the plans are a new primary school, health centre, active travel routes and improved transport links, as well as workspace, community and cultural spaces.

We'll also be marking the start of works on the neighbouring iconic [Granton Gasholder](#) shortly. Once complete, it will create a multifunctional public space that can be used and enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

Future of King's Theatre secured

As I touched on above, I'm delighted that [The Old Lady of Leven Street will be back](#) better than ever following confirmation that the funding target has been met to complete the redevelopment and reopen her doors.

The King's Theatre is a treasured piece of our history and this project will make sure it is preserved and a world-class venue accessible to all. Our increased investment pledge, plus that of the Scottish Government and additional fundraising since January, accounts for the majority of the £8.9m funding gap which emerged last summer due to rising costs.

The King's is, of course, part of the Capital Theatres Trust and it was with great sadness that we learned of the death of [Duncan Hendry](#) last week. Duncan served as Chair of the Trust from 2012 to 2019. He was a well-respected, creative and passionate voice not only for theatres in Edinburgh, but right across Scotland. Our thoughts and deepest condolences are with his family and friends.

Encore for the EIFF

Finally, our cultural sector received a further welcome boost this week with the news that the Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF) will return for its landmark [76th edition](#) this summer.

Running from 18–23 August as part of the Edinburgh International Festival, the EIFF will have a hand-picked programme (to be announced in June) celebrating the work of exceptional local and global filmmakers.

Following the uncertainty over its future last year, this is an exciting opportunity for a fresh approach to the festival, which I hope will sustain it for generations of cinema goers to come.

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