

Leader's Report

Cllr Cammy Day



September 2023

Edinburgh Tram Inquiry

Earlier this week, nine years and £13 million later, we received Lord Hardie's [Edinburgh Tram Inquiry Report](#).

As I said on Tuesday, we know serious mistakes were made on the original project and these had a significant impact on the city, causing a great deal of disruption to residents and businesses, as well as damaging our reputation. So, it was entirely right that I offered an apology on behalf of the Council.

I will not, however, apologise for building a better connected, environmentally friendly transport system, nor for our ambition to develop it further. How else are we to help people move more quickly and conveniently around our thriving capital city? And, in the week the Prime Minister watered down the UK Government's climate targets still further, how else are we to achieve our net zero goals?

We shouldn't forget that in the nine years since the line between Edinburgh Airport and York Place opened to the public, the service has flourished to become a hugely successful transport route for thousands of residents and visitors each day.

Or that we've now launched passenger services on the completed line to Newhaven, the success of which was down to the hard work and expertise of our in-house project team and partners, but also thanks to [lessons learned from the first project](#). The numbers speak for themselves, with Edinburgh Trams carrying 1.2 million passengers in August alone.

For all that, we will of course continue to digest Lord Hardie's findings and recommendations and consider our response and any actions required. A follow-up report will go to the Transport and Environment Committee in November, and then to Full Council in December.

We need speedy resolution to pay dispute

I'm disappointed that our young people are going to miss yet more time in the classroom due to next week's strike action (26-28 Sept). It's clear to me that the Scottish Government still hasn't learned the lessons from previous disputes.

Educating our young people is our priority and we've done everything we can to try to keep our schools and nurseries open. However, although teachers aren't striking, we can't open them safely without pupil support assistants, early years workers, catering and cleaning colleagues.

I stand behind our trade union colleagues in their fight for fair pay and will continue to urge the Scottish Government and COSLA to get round the table and put an end to the dispute once and for all.

Governments must cover RAAC costs

Issues with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) continue to dominate the news agenda, not just here in Scotland, but across the UK.

I've written to both the UK and Scottish Governments [calling for full funding](#) to deal with the significant and growing cost of our surveys and ongoing remedial work.

We've been carrying out surveys since March, beginning with our schools. Eight schools so far have been affected and I'm pleased to say that none has had to close thanks to the measures we've put in place.

We've now extended our survey programme across the rest of the estate to include libraries, community centres, council homes, leisure centres and care homes. So far only one additional building, Blackhall Library, has had to close temporarily.

I want to thank all parents, colleagues and residents who've been affected by the works – I appreciate your support and understanding. We'll [continue to publish updates](#) on our dedicated web page.

Looking after people who live here all year round

It was great to see our city back to its very best in August, welcoming visitors from all over the globe, and providing an unparalleled cultural offering for our residents.

I'm proud that the Council continues to support our festivals, an integral part of Edinburgh's identity, heritage and international appeal. But I'm equally aware that this comes at a cost. It's crucial, then, for us to strike the right balance between promoting our city while looking after the people who live here all year round.

With that in mind, we remain committed to [addressing the growing number of short-term lets](#) in the city and, while acknowledging the strength of feeling on both sides of this debate, I continue to believe that the new controls being introduced by the Scottish Government on 1 October are an important step in the right direction.

With just over a week to go until the deadline, I would urge all operators to make sure they're clear on what's required of them and to apply without delay. We've [published full guidance](#) on our website.

Delivering the right type of homes

With our social housing stock devastated by the Right to Buy scheme – leaving us with only 14% of homes, compared to a Scottish average of 23% – the need has never been greater for us to deliver the types of homes Edinburgh needs.

I'm pleased to report then that August and September have been our busiest months for site starts since the pandemic. And it was great to see work getting underway on [100 new homes for social rent in South Queensferry](#).

Coming as it did on Scottish Housing Day, it should also be said our housebuilding strategy would be nothing without the people who work to build, develop, plan and maintain them.

This includes two of our fantastic new apprentices, [Jakub and Marlena](#), as well as our Head of Housing, Strategy and Development, [Elaine Scott](#), who retires at the end of month after more than 30 years with the Council. I'm sure you'll join me in wishing Elaine all the very best for the future.

Have you registered to save a life?

As Organ and Tissue Donation Week 2023 draws to a close, it's a sobering thought that more than 7,000 people in the UK are currently waiting for a life-saving transplant.

From lighting up Council buildings, to supporting our colleagues in government and the NHS, to lending a hand to fundraisers, we've been playing our part to support this great cause week here in Edinburgh.

Only 1% of people die in a way that makes organ donation possible, which means every donation is precious. And we can all play our part by registering our decision to be a donor or opt out.

Over half of people in Scotland have done so, but there's still a lot of work to be done. If you're over 16 and yet to record your decision, please visit www.organdonation.scot

Living well locally

Many of our residents already enjoy the benefits of a 20-minute neighbourhood, but we want everyone to be able to live in a cleaner, greener city that brings its people and communities together.

Our initial strategy, which was approved by councillors back in June 2021, outlined a vision for a city where everyone can meet most of their daily needs within a short walk, wheel or cycle from their home. The [refreshed strategy](#), published this month, provides the latest information on [key projects that we're progressing](#), alongside the overall direction and delivery of the concept here in Edinburgh.

We're currently focusing on our town and local centres, which are at the heart of built-up areas and have many of the services and facilities that meet people's daily needs. However, they're often built around busy main roads with cramped public spaces which make them difficult to access and spend quality time in. That's why we're working with local communities to explore opportunities to improve the streets, public spaces and facilities in places like Gorgie Dalry, Portobello and Craigmillar.

You can [find out more](#) about the latest on these – and related projects across the city – on our dedicated web pages.

From the heart

Earlier this week I had the privilege to attend a preview of the 'Kyiv is the Unbreakable Heart of Europe' exhibition at the Museum of Edinburgh. I was incredibly moved seeing the images from Kyiv – an important reminder of the brutality, and human cost, of Russia's illegal war against Ukraine.

I would encourage you to [visit the exhibition](#) which opens to the public this weekend.

I remain incredibly proud of the support we've provided as a Council, and as a city, to those fleeing the horrors of war over the past year and a half. We'll continue to offer this for as long as is necessary.

Thank you, Hugh

I can't end this month without mentioning our Service Director of Finance and Procurement, Hugh Dunn, who leaves us after 37 years' service with the Council and its predecessors.

Hugh has been a fantastic servant to the Council and the city and will be hugely missed by both his colleagues and all elected members for his wise advice and ever-helpful demeanour. I'm sure you'll join me in wishing him all the very best for a long and happy retirement.

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