

Leader's Report

Cllr Cammy Day



December 2023

Community spirit shines through

I was devastated to hear of the gas explosion in Baberton Mains last Friday night, which sadly claimed the life of local resident, James Smith. My thoughts are with Mr Smith's family and friends, and with those still affected by this tragic incident.

I want to pay tribute to the emergency services who responded so quickly and worked tirelessly through the night, evacuating the scene and making the surrounding area safe. I know that council officers assisted into the early hours and are continuing to work closely with the police and other partner agencies to provide [full support to those affected](#), helping them to get back into their homes as soon as it's safe to do so.

It's heartwarming to learn of the great community response, with offers of help continuing to come in and [fundraising efforts](#) ongoing.

No time to lose in tackling our housing emergency

Last month we declared a housing emergency in Edinburgh, so I was pleased to see decisions being taken this week by our housing committee to take forward an [action plan](#) to address the crisis.

We all know that having a home is a basic human right, but it's harder to grasp the scale of homelessness, which is often hidden within plain sight. You might be shocked to learn that every single night, close to 5,000 households are now sleeping in temporary accommodation here in Edinburgh, wondering when they will receive the security of a permanent place to live.

By highlighting the issue we're determined to do everything within our means to address it and to continue to press the Scottish Government into action so that we can build and buy the additional affordable homes our city needs. We've seen an outpouring of support from the third sector and industry which gives us comfort that we can work together to improve the situation, and I'd urge anyone who is worried about homelessness to [seek help](#).

Striking the right balance

One way in which we can increase our housing stock is to better manage the number and location of short term let (STL) properties across the city – and, in so doing, bring more homes back into residential use.

It's well known that we face unique pressures here in Edinburgh, with a small but densely populated city centre and fast-growing population, and it's vital for us to strike the right balance between promoting our visitor economy while looking after the people that live here all year round.

Clearly, however, we must do this according to the legislation and, following last week's judicial review finding, we need to make sure it's as fair and effective as it can be – for both residents and operators. Assuming agreement at our Council meeting next week, a report setting out next steps will be brought back before councillors early in the new year.

It's important to reiterate that, following the ruling, residential properties that began being used as STLs after the control area came into force on 5 September 2022 still require planning permission. Those that began before that date may still need it and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Ready for winter

We're well prepared to keep the city moving over the winter months, with 12,000 tonnes of salt stockpiled, our colleagues on standby and a fleet of gritting lorries and mini gritters ready to treat the city's pavements, cycle lanes and roads. Our teams have already been out making streets safe during the recent cold snap and, as we get deeper into winter, I'd encourage you to take a look at our [winter weather pages](#) to find out more about our priority gritting routes and where your nearest grit bin is.

Winter is also the busiest time of year for our housing service, with an increase in demand for council house repairs, largely due to weather-related issues, and a huge amount of work has gone into making sure we're prepared. Support is available for tenants, residents and vulnerable people who are struggling with the increased costs of living during winter. [Find out about support with bills, money worries, free school meals and clothing grants](#) and more on our website.

As we continue to get ready for winter, we're helping people to celebrate more sustainably with our [Green Christmas campaign](#) too. We can all help by choosing sustainable and homemade gifts, cutting down on food waste, [properly recycling our waste](#) and disposing of our Christmas trees.

The passing of two great servants to our city

I was deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Alistair Darling, one of the most important UK Chancellors in modern history, and a dedicated, committed and principled public servant to his core. He represented Edinburgh diligently for well over 30 years as a councillor and MP and his loss will be felt across the city and in his local community of Morningside.

I was lucky enough to know Alistair for many years and he was a constant source of sage advice, good humour and humility. My thoughts and condolences are with his wife Margaret and his family at this difficult time.

Sadly, the city lost another great servant in Norman Irons, who also passed away last month. Norman served his constituents as a councillor for over 20 years and became a fantastic ambassador for the city as Lord Provost between 1992 and 1996. Again, our thoughts are with his family and friends.

Global leaders in sustainability

Our capital city is widely recognised as one of the world's most popular visitor destinations – but it has to be sustainable, which is why our [2030 Tourism Strategy](#) was developed with a particular focus on creating a more sustainable and fairer visitor economy.

So I was very proud that Edinburgh has been crowned the world's leading sustainable travel destination at this year's [World Travel Awards](#). We've been working tirelessly to achieve our goal of net zero carbon by 2030 and the award is testament to this.

I was delighted also to hear that Leith has been recognised as 'the best neighbourhood in the UK and Ireland' at this year's [Urbanism Awards](#). Leith is an area rich in culture and history, with a fantastic array of independent restaurants, pubs and shops that contributes to its strong sense of community.

Small businesses are a huge part of what makes Leith, and the rest of Edinburgh, such an incredible place to live, work and shop and my colleague Cllr Jane Meagher took the opportunity to visit some of Leith's finest to mark [Small Business Saturday](#) last weekend.

An award-winning welcome

Since the first days of Russia's illegal war against Ukraine, we've stood shoulder to shoulder with the Ukrainian community and that solidarity and support remains undiminished.

I was pleased, then, to show the Secretary of State for Scotland, Alister Jack, around our [new Welcome Hub and aid warehouse](#) last month. It was particularly fitting to do so alongside so many of the partners who've been integral to the city's response.

These efforts were deservedly recognised and rewarded at the [Scottish Public Service Awards 2023](#) this week. Edinburgh's Warm Scots Welcome, a collaboration with EVOC, Volunteer Edinburgh, Capital City Partnership and AUGB Edinburgh, won the Voluntary Sector Partnership Award, while the Edinburgh Ukrainian Welcome Hub, a partnership between the Council and NatWest Group, won the Commercial Partnerships Award.

Also successful on the night was the [Integrated Regional Employability and Skills programme team](#), part of the City Region Deal, who picked up the Project and Programme Management Award. Congratulations to them – and also to the Granton Waterfront Regeneration team, who were shortlisted in the Sustainability category, and to the Whole Family Equality Project, nominated for the Championing Diversity and Inclusion Award.

Elsewhere, the Mixed Tenure Improvement Service team were shortlisted at the [SURF 2023 Awards](#) for their trailblazing work to [improve the condition and energy efficiency of housing](#) in our neighbourhoods.

I also want to pay tribute to our Communications Team who were recognised again at the CIPR Scotland Pride Awards last month, having also been named best In-House PR Team of the Year at the national [PRCA Awards](#) in October.

A huge well done to all concerned. Richly deserved recognition for all your hard work and commitment to delivering great services for the people of Edinburgh.

Edinburgh Award 2023

Congratulations are also due to Nicola Benedetti CBE, who was [presented with the Edinburgh Award](#) by the Lord Provost at a reception in the City Chambers on Tuesday evening.

The award celebrates people who have made a unique contribution to Edinburgh, as well as bringing national and international attention to the city.

From her role as the Director of the Edinburgh International Festival, to the work of the [Benedetti Foundation](#), based in Edinburgh, as well as a world-renowned musician, she represents Edinburgh with dedication and pride. Nicola joins previous Edinburgh Award Winners such as Ann Budge, Ian Rankin OBE, and Dottie Weir, to name but a few.

Investing in culture

We all know how valuable culture is to the success, reputation and wellbeing of our city and our residents – which is why it's so important that we continue to invest in this success.

Last month [we committed £60,000 towards a renewed Edinburgh Filmhouse](#), and we'll continue to work with Filmhouse (Edinburgh), Creative Scotland, the Scottish Government and other partners to sustain a vibrant home for cultural cinema in the heart of the city while supporting the wider sector.

Then, just yesterday, I was delighted to attend the [topping out of the King's Theatre's new fly tower](#) and sign the commemorative plaque. This is an important milestone in the refurbishment of this hugely popular Edinburgh institution, to which we [committed a further £3 million earlier this year](#), and I look forward to seeing the 'Old Lady' back to her dazzling best in 2025.

Tis the season...

It's fantastic to see the city getting into the festive spirit. In the first two weeks since the opening of Edinburgh's Christmas, there were [over 750,000 visitors to the attractions](#) in East Princes Street Gardens alone. Meanwhile, community events at the Ross Bandstand, including the Opening Concert and Edinburgh's Diwali, have welcomed audiences of over 10,000 people.

We have [something for everyone this Hogmanay](#), with the welcome return of the Torchlight Procession on 29 December, internationally acclaimed ABBA sensations Björn Again headlining the Night Afore Disco Party and pop pioneers Pulp bringing in the bells at the Concert in the Gardens.

After the difficult years of the pandemic, I'm overjoyed that our festivals are back to their brilliant best and providing such high-calibre cultural offerings for our residents and visitors.

All the best for 2024

I want to end by wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and best wishes for the year ahead.

I know, for many, the work doesn't stop over the festive season, so whether you're taking time off or are part of the many teams working around the clock to keep our city moving, safe and clean, I want to thank you all for your hard work and commitment over what has been another challenging but rewarding and exciting year here in our capital city.

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