

# Leader's Report

## Cllr Cammy Day



March 2024

### Community rallies round in time of need

You may have seen or read about the [major fire in Bonnington](#) yesterday (14 March). Thankfully everyone was quickly evacuated from their homes and, after 12 tireless hours by 70 firefighters, the fire was successfully put out last night. We unfortunately saw two firefighters injured in the line of duty and we wish them a speedy recovery. As ever, our gratitude goes to them and their colleagues for keeping the community safe.

Sadly, this has meant that many residents, including young families, have been displaced. However, on my visit to the rest centre set up by our Health and Social Care Partnership colleagues, I was able to see first hand just how quickly the local community had rallied round to support them.

By lunchtime, local business Pizza Geeks had already delivered 80 pizzas and charities Cyrenians and Granton Clothing Store had donated food, blankets and warm clothes. This, on top of the incredible support from our council housing, catering and health and social care teams, meant that the rest centre acted as a warm and comfortable sanctuary during what was clearly a very distressing, uncertain time for the residents – all of whom thankfully had a guaranteed roof over their heads by the time I left.

Our thoughts are of course with them as they look to rebuild their lives and we'll continue to do everything possible to make sure they get all the support they need.

### A Visitor Levy for Edinburgh

I was pleased to see [our plans for a Visitor Levy take another significant step forward](#) in Parliament this week and welcome the continued support from MSPs across the chamber.

The Minister's commitment to allowing local flexibility in how the scheme is designed – and how we invest the proceeds – was particularly good to hear. And, while I remain frustrated at his reluctance not to reduce the 18-month implementation period, particularly given the amount of [consultation we've already done](#), I do acknowledge the additional time this will give the hospitality sector to prepare.

On the same day, members of the Policy and Sustainability Committee considered the [results of our recent engagement exercise](#), which revealed that our proposals have the support of residents, visitors and large parts of the hospitality industry.

We will of course continue to work with and listen to all voices and, with Holyrood set to pass the Bill shortly after Easter, we're on track to publish our final proposals by the end of the year.

### Investing in our city and our residents

Sticking with our finances, I was delighted to have [delivered a balanced budget](#) last month; a budget with a real and determined focus on protecting frontline services on which our residents and communities rightly depend.

This budget will help us to keep on getting the basics right by improving our roads and parks and greenspaces, supporting our schools, tackling poverty and facing into the climate crisis.

In the year ahead, we'll invest an additional £27m in our schools and young people and an extra £12.5m in roads, pavements, lighting and drainage improvements – including £900,000 to 'Scrub our Streets'. And, with an additional £500,000 towards child poverty reduction and close to £3m towards tackling homelessness, we're working hard to eradicate poverty and protect our most vulnerable residents.

We're committed to boosting the biodiversity of Edinburgh's award-winning parks and greenspaces, with £600,000 put towards climate improvements, with additional funds for tree planting and new climate jobs. Additionally, up to £750,000 extra every year for three years will be spent on a rolling programme of localised and coastal flood prevention.

It's no secret that we remain the lowest funded local authority in Scotland and, for all that we were able to balance the budget, I'm disappointed that we couldn't commit more towards our ambitious targets and commitments. We need fairer funding for our capital city – and I won't stop fighting until we get it.

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## Pressure mounts to address housing emergency

Four months since this Council took the unprecedented step of declaring a Housing Emergency in our city, momentum is building nationally to address it.

Rents here in Edinburgh are some of the highest in the UK and, due in no small part to the cost-of-living crisis, around 5,000 households are now facing homelessness. We simply do not have enough good quality, affordable housing currently to meet demand.

Urgent, collective action is needed so I was pleased to join Housing Convener, Jane Meagher, at a Housing Summit hosted by the University of Edinburgh earlier this month. The lively debate saw partners and charities from all over the Capital, including Shelter, coming up with fresh ideas and actions.

I'm confident this collaborative way of working – alongside the detailed [Housing Emergency Action Plan](#) we've already drawn up – will help us tackle many of the unique challenges we face here in Edinburgh. We'll be using our collective voice to call yet again for greater action – and funding – from the Scottish Government.

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## Special landmark for our carers

This year heralds a very special landmark for our award-winning Foster Care team, as they mark 25 years since the [specialist disability carers scheme](#) was launched. We celebrated the occasion this week with an intimate event in the City Chambers where our carers came together with their children to share experiences, successes and stories.

The service has gone from strength to strength since it began in 1999 with hundreds of children growing up with caring families across our communities. Many of our carers now foster other children alongside those with a disability, allowing brothers and sisters to stay together – which is so valuable.

The love and support our foster carers provide for our most vulnerable children, often against the odds, is truly inspirational and they deserve every bit of our respect and support.

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## Tram stays well on track

Congratulations to our Trams to Newhaven project team who've been [shortlisted in the 'Future Places' category](#) at this year's Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards, which celebrates examples of innovation and best practice from local government across the UK.

We do of course wish the team all the best at the Awards but, regardless of the result, the tram's success is there for all to see with close to 10 million journeys taken in 2023 – and customer satisfaction remaining outstandingly high.

There's clearly an appetite for tram travel in Edinburgh and, as we look to expand the service between Granton and the BioQuarter, we'll soon be asking people for their views on the proposals. By further extending the network, we'll be providing a high-capacity, sustainable and reliable transport link to many more residents and boosting the local economy along the route.

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## Caring for our communities

Finally, in further awards news, I'm delighted to announce that the [One City Trust](#) has been shortlisted in the 'We Care' category of the Travis Perkins Managed Services 'Better Together' Awards taking place next week.

This award recognises initiatives that exhibit 'outstanding commitment to caring for individuals, fostering empathy and inclusivity, and promoting a culture of compassion and support within the community'.

Dedicated to the alleviation of inequality, social exclusion and poverty in Edinburgh, the One City Trust has supported 265 different projects across our city with over £1.3m of funding allocated in grants since its inception in 2003.

I can't think of a more deserving winner!

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