

Leader's Report

Cllr Cammy Day



August 2024

Summer spectacular

I love Edinburgh all year round, but there's always something extra special about August, with our residents and visitors enjoying access to thousands of outstanding performers and shows they'd otherwise have to travel the world to find.

With this year's summer festivals well underway, the familiar buzz is all around us and it's great to hear audience numbers remain strong. The Fringe alone listed a record 3,919 productions this year – featuring performers from no fewer than 50 countries.

We mustn't forget, however, just how important the tourist industry is to our city, generating £2.7bn of visitor spend each year, and creating and sustaining well over 30,000 jobs. The festivals alone support 7,000 jobs, contributing £407m to the local economy. Beyond that, of course, it affords us, as residents, the choice of restaurants, bars and other attractions that simply wouldn't exist otherwise.

The ongoing health and success of our festivals also underlines just how important culture is to our residents, as well as our visitors, reinforcing Edinburgh's - and Scotland's – reputation on the world stage. That's exactly why I'm calling on the Scottish Government to urgently set out their plans for long-term investment in our culture sector.

Sharing in our success

We do acknowledge, of course, that there's another side to this success – for all the buzz we enjoy in August, it's also extremely busy – and we're fully aware of our responsibility to find the right balance between the needs of our residents and visitors. One way of doing this is through a visitor levy – and I'm delighted that we've taken yet another step forward with the [publication of our draft scheme](#).

Whether it's additional investment in sustainable transport, infrastructure and public spaces or enhancing our culture, heritage and festival programmes, while supporting our tourism and hospitality sector, this is a huge opportunity for us to sustain and improve the things that make our city so special – both for our visitors and for our residents who live here all year round.

I mentioned in my last report that, had a levy been in place over the weekend of the Taylor Swift concerts, it would have generated more than £600,000. The summer festivals would bring in ten times that – and our latest calculations tell us that, by 2030, it could be worth up to £50m a year to the city.

We're continuing to work closely with industry, VisitScotland and other partners to develop the scheme, which will be [considered by councillors this Thursday](#) (22 August), before going out to public consultation next month. We'll publish our final scheme in January with a view to going live in 2026.

A fair day's pay for a fair day's work

I'm sure that, like me, you were hugely relieved to hear that the proposed strike action across Scotland was suspended to allow union members to consider the latest offer from COSLA - and I'm cautiously optimistic that they'll accept.

On working with COSLA to put the latest deal on the table, I'm grateful that the Scottish Government has finally listened to local authorities and recognised the value of our hard-working colleagues here in Edinburgh and across Scotland.

We know from our previous experience of industrial action two years ago the huge impact it had on our streets – and our reputation – demonstrating just [how important our frontline colleagues are to the running of our city](#).

That's why I firmly believe that all council colleagues deserve to be paid fairly for the work they do and have every right to take action and have their voices heard. As the lowest funded council in Scotland, it's time for the Scottish Government to properly fund our capital city and its services.

Edinburgh 900

Turning to our city's historic birthday celebrations, I was delighted to see the [launch of Edinburgh 900](#) – a celebration of nine centuries of our shared history and traditions as a Royal Burgh.

The launch event was a great opportunity for the Lord Provost to meet the many community organisations who will be involved in the celebrations – from arts groups to refugee solidarity, printmaking to leisure, our city has such an incredibly diverse range of stories to tell.

We've been clear from the start that the people of Edinburgh should be at the heart of the celebrations, so it's been great to see the overwhelming response we've had from groups across the city – so much so that we've made an additional £120,000 available for those wishing to put on events of their own.

We can now look forward to 18 months of community and other events, shining a light on the wonderful and often colourful history of our fantastic city, and of the people and communities who've helped make it what it is today. For more information, please visit the [Edinburgh 900 website](#).

Back to school

With the new school year getting underway, I want to extend a warm welcome to all our young people, families, carers and teaching staff. I hope you all had a great summer and are looking forward to a busy year ahead!

Over 12,000 of our high school pupils studied for and took their exams last academic year and I know many of them will have had a nervous wait for their exam results earlier this month.

I was delighted, then, to see that we bucked the national trend, with [levels of attainment](#) for pupils across the city remaining above those achieved before the Covid pandemic, as well as closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Not only is this testimony to the hard work of our young people but also to our teachers and staff who worked so hard in preparing pupils for these exams.

Of course, there are many different routes to attainment and our schools are always on the lookout for new and exciting pathways to help our young people into positive destinations – be that employment, apprenticeships, higher or further education.

Celebrating our green city

We're incredibly fortunate to live in the greenest city in the UK, boasting 144 parks and green spaces, which make up an incredible 49% of our total area.

Like you, I know the value of these spaces, not only for the environment but for our own well-being. That's why, when setting our annual budget in February, we approved an additional £3.5m investment in our infrastructure and facilities.

Keep Scotland Beautiful clearly share our view and have once again recognised 38 of our parks through their Green Flag Award scheme – as many as the rest of Scotland put together! Not only does this highlight the quality of our green spaces but also the tireless efforts of those who work so hard to maintain them. My thanks go to our wonderful Parks team – as well as to the many Friends groups across the city who volunteer so much of their time throughout the year.

Meanwhile, with more trees (around 750,000) per resident than anywhere else in the UK, we're well on our way to becoming a [Million Tree City](#) by 2030.

But there's always more we can do and, through our [Edinburgh's Thriving Green spaces 2050 strategy](#) and ongoing partnership with [Fields in Trust](#), we're working hard to ensure all our residents live within a ten-minute walk from a well-kept and protected green space.

Going for gold

It's been a busy summer of sport here in Edinburgh – and further afield.

Back in July, we [played host to the World Orienteering Championships](#), attracting 250 world-class athletes from 45 countries and thousands of spectators, with many more watching the TV coverage beamed across the world.

As ever, we put on a great show and I was delighted to hear that feedback from participants, organisers and spectators was overwhelmingly positive about our city, our staff and all involved in contributing to, what was, a hugely successful event.

Speaking of great shows, I'm sure many of you also tuned into the Paris Olympics, cheering on Team GB and our very own Josh Kerr, who came so agonisingly close to adding Olympic gold to his stunning World Championship win a year ago.

Josh joined Edinburgh Athletics Club aged just eight, training with them for many years at Meadowbank. How fitting, then, that 150 budding young athletes gathered there for a 'watch party' to cheer him on – no doubt dreaming of winning gold medals of their own.

Another local Olympian to have learned her trade at one of our world-class venues is Grace Reid, who began her diving career at the Royal Commonwealth Pool. Not only did Grace compete in her third Olympic Games in Paris, reaching the final of the 3m Springboard, she also made history earlier this year by becoming the first-ever British woman to win an individual medal at the World Championships.

I look forward to cheering on Josh, Grace and our other Edinburgh athletes in Los Angeles in four years' time!

Edinburgh Award

I want to end by congratulating Homeless World Cup co-founder and social entrepreneur, Mel Young MBE, who has just been named the [18th recipient of the Edinburgh Award](#).

A proud Edinburgh citizen, Mel has spent most of his life working tirelessly to eradicate poverty and tackle homelessness in Scotland, the UK and around the world. In 2003, he founded the [Homeless World Cup](#), which now has partners in 70 countries and touches the lives of over 100,000 homeless people every year. Mel also co-founded the Big Issue in Scotland in 1993 and was Chair of sportscotland from 2016 to 2024.

I'm sure you will agree with me that Mel is a worthy recipient of the Edinburgh Award, and I look forward to attending the ceremony at the City Chambers later this year.

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