

Depute Leader's Report

Cllr Mandy Watt



December 2024

The budget challenge

This Council has a strong track record of financial management, balancing the city's budget whilst protecting our day-to-day services – but the challenges are mounting.

Not only are we facing a housing and homelessness crisis, which has resulted in escalating costs for temporary accommodation, we face severe pressures on health and social care services and our population is continuing to grow year on year.

Other councils in Scotland are facing the same financial challenges and, like them, we'll need to make difficult decisions in the weeks and months ahead. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't be ambitious for our city – or stray from our commitment to protect those services that we know many of our most vulnerable residents rely upon.

Following the UK Government's budget in October, early indications are that we should expect an improved settlement from the Scottish Government, but Edinburgh's needs are growing and we're still expecting to face tough choices when we set our budget in February.

So, as we look at ways of closing the budget gap while investing in Edinburgh's future, we're keen to hear from those it matters to the most – our residents.

Please take the time to [take part in our online budget consultation](#), which is open until 14 January, and let us know what you think.

Tackling our housing emergency

Never has our need for more housing been greater and our city needs to grow to accommodate this.

This is where West Edinburgh offers incredible potential. Just last week, [councillors approved planning in principle for West Town](#) – the biggest housing-led development in Edinburgh for 50 years. This is a major £2 billion development of 7,000 energy efficient homes, alongside shops, schools, local amenities and lots of greenspace.

This will provide a huge opportunity to create new affordable housing and places for people to rent, which is welcome news for the city, for our climate ambitions and for our economy.

When combined with other projects in the pipeline and homes being developed as part of the [Granton Waterfront regeneration](#), we're looking at over 12,000 new homes to be agreed this year, with 35% of these affordable – the biggest development of affordable homes in the city for decades.

Supporting our most vulnerable residents

One of our main priorities throughout the pandemic, and since, was ensuring everyone had a safe place to live – and, in many cases, the stark reality facing us was to house people in unlicensed properties or leave them to sleep on the streets – which, of course, no one wanted.

In recent months, it became clear that we had to end this practice urgently and accelerate our efforts to find alternative temporary accommodation for our tenants.

That's why our officers have been working hard to increase our stock of temporary accommodation – with significant work going into speeding up the turnaround of empty Council homes. We've also been working with registered social landlords, while encouraging as many providers as possible to apply for their licence.

My thanks go to our colleagues in the Housing and Homelessness service for their dedication and hard work, to our partners who have shown continued support and finally, to our tenants for their patience and understanding.

Credit where it's due

Through their vital work in supporting people to stay out of the justice system or to rehabilitate into their local communities following time in prison, our Justice Social Work service plays a hugely important role.

I'm delighted, then, that the team has now been recognised by the Care Inspectorate for their work on piloting a new self-evaluation tool to monitor performance and provide quality assurance on services provided to our residents.

The Inspectorate praised the high quality of the service, their leadership, as well as noting the positive and constructive culture right across the board.

It's incredibly encouraging to see this service, which is often less visible than other Council services, acknowledged as making a real difference to the lives of people and communities affected by offending. They deserve great credit.

New green corridor links Roseburn to the Union Canal

I was delighted to see that the new [Roseburn to Union Canal active travel route](#) was officially opened to the public on Monday.

It was great to see so many residents and school children out enjoying this new community resource, which I'm sure will prove to be a great success for Dalry and the wider area.

This project breathes new life along the route by creating a green corridor with easier and safer walking, wheeling and cycling connections. The route also links to one of our other flagship active travel projects, the City Centre West to East Link, and other established off-road networks.

Expanding these routes in our city is a key priority for us and forms an important part of our ambitions to become a net zero city. I'd like to thank our teams for their hard work and to Transport Scotland and Sustrans who have been instrumental in bringing this project to life.

Sharing in the Christmas spirit

Edinburgh is home to a huge number of fantastic small businesses, the lifeblood of our high streets across the city. They play a key role in our communities, creating vital job opportunities and contributing to the economy. So, I was pleased to see [Small Business Saturday](#) marked last weekend to encourage everyone to choose to 'shop local' wherever possible.

I was also pleased to learn recently that the majority of the Edinburgh's Christmas stalls are run by local traders. The celebrations are of course well underway, bringing welcome additional footfall to the city centre – and don't forget that a [20% discount is available to all Edinburgh's residents](#) on rides and attractions.

Everyone should have the opportunity to take part in these events, but we know that, despite our best efforts, Edinburgh's wealth divide is growing. It was heart-warming, then, to hear that our destination marketing team, Forever Edinburgh, and the Lord Provost's charity, the OneCity Trust, have teamed up to [donate cultural experiences](#) to more than 500 local people in our communities.

Wishing you a happy and healthy 2025

Sticking with the 'spirit of giving', I'd like to finish by giving my thanks to everyone across our Council teams, emergency services and other partners across the city who have worked so hard this year to give their time and support to help others, particularly those most in need of our support.

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 year here in Edinburgh.

I want to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and best wishes for 2025.

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