



Council Leader's Report

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EDINBURGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

November 2019

New school plans pass with flying colours

South Edinburgh has been crying out for more school accommodation with the rising population in the area so it's really exciting that plans have been approved for a [new school and nursery in Canaan Lane](#) – scheduled to open in August 2021.

The new building, which will accommodate 420 children with 80 more in the nursery, has been sustainably designed to complement the Grange Conservation Area. There's a special emphasis on outdoor learning and the inclusion of air source heat pumps to supply renewable energy is a visible sign of our bold commitment to becoming a [carbon neutral Capital city by 2030](#).

This is the latest in a series of exciting [new school developments](#) with work having started on a replacement Castlebrae High School and a new St Crispin's School, with the new Queensferry High opening its doors to pupils next April.

Leading efforts to secure a future for Gorgie City Farm

Like so many people across the city, I was saddened to learn that Gorgie City Farm had gone into liquidation. I know it has been a very difficult time for the farm's staff and volunteers but I have been really encouraged that there has been such a positive response to the fundraising appeal – it's a clear signal of just how much our residents value it.

Adults and children from all over Edinburgh and beyond have enjoyed visiting the farm for many years and we'd dearly love this same opportunity to continue. That's why we've made it clear to the insolvency practitioner that we want to make every effort to secure its future and I thank her for her efforts in meeting this request.

There has already been interest from a number of charitable and other organisations, which is very encouraging, and we hope for further positive developments in the coming weeks once a short list has been drawn up. We'll share any updates from the insolvency practitioner as we receive them.

I'd also like to reassure you that the animals are being cared for before they are found new homes.

Trams to Newhaven: all systems go as work begins

We're gearing up to start [construction work on the Trams to Newhaven project](#) from 18 November – a major milestone for Leith and the whole of north Edinburgh.

Our project team and contractors continue to work very closely with residents and businesses affected by the works to minimise disruption and make sure everyone has all the support and information they need. A multimedia campaign to promote the area, alongside local businesses' own ingeniously-named #StrongConstitution campaign, will launch ahead of work starting – part of a £2.4m package of Support for Business measures developed with businesses themselves.

The project has launched a new Twitter account [@TramstoNewhaven](#) – give them a follow and they'll be happy to answer questions and signpost key information as work progresses.

Edinburgh's Christmas

Edinburgh's Christmas festivities are due to get underway this weekend with Sunday's spectacular – and free – community Light Night event on the Royal Mile (from 3.30–5pm).

There has been much debate over the layout of the market in East Princes Street Gardens and understandably, residents want assurances that the Gardens are protected and the safety and comfort of all those attending the markets is secured. As I write, the Building Warrant has been granted and our Public Safety officers are carrying out final inspections and checks. Please be in no doubt: the site will not open until the Council is 100% satisfied that it is safe.

Edinburgh's Christmas is hugely popular with locals and visitors alike, with tens of thousands of residents enjoying the attractions every week, making a significant contribution to our economy. And it brings many other benefits besides, supporting the One City Trust and other local charities, while contributing towards our Hogmanay celebrations – which would simply not be possible otherwise.

We want everyone to be able to enjoy the festivities and have recommended and approved pedestrian-only access on Waverley Bridge. This will be in place from 11am to 5pm on Saturdays and Sundays, making it easier to move around in a more relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

Next year we'll kick off a broader conversation around how we want our Christmas and Hogmanay offer to look in future. It's important that all voices – residents, businesses and heritage bodies – are part of that discussion.

Key stage reached in Picardy Place improvements

It's safe to say Edinburgh is undergoing a period of significant transformation, not least in the east of the city centre, where we'll soon see the major Edinburgh St James project completed, the start of works to take trams down to Newhaven and a new, more people-friendly layout at Picardy Place.

This month we reach a key stage in the work to improve Picardy Place which, once finished next year, will enhance public realm, deliver new cycle links, wider footpaths and better tram-bus integration. In order to carry out essential elements of the project, with minimum disruption to residents and people travelling through the area, we're implementing a traffic management plan involving the [closure of York Place](#) westbound for two weeks, reopening the road in time for the busy December period.

This process will help make sure this stage of the project is carried out as quickly as possible, and we'll continue to monitor the situation closely. Ultimately, these improvements will deliver major benefits to the residents, in line with our broader ambitions for a sustainable, accessible and better-connected capital.

Ending poverty together

Our [mission to eradicate poverty in Edinburgh](#) took a significant step forward recently with the publication of the Edinburgh Poverty Commission's interim findings. The Commission has done a huge amount of work already this year and we're looking forward to hearing Chair, Jim McCormick, setting out immediate next steps when he addresses the Policy and Sustainability Committee later this month (26 November).

These priority actions include measures to maximise incomes and reduce living costs for people struggling to get by, to promote fair work and wages and to improve relationships. The Commission is clear from the evidence it has heard so far that people in poverty are calling for greater control over their lives and the ability to contribute to a progressive, inclusive and forward-looking city where everyone can flourish.

At their next meeting on 5 December, commissioners will reflect on all of the valuable research and work carried out so far, with their final recommendations due to go out for consultation at the end of January.

Climate Emergency: your city needs you!

As well as tackling poverty and inequality, another major driving force behind the work we want to accomplish during this administration is the need to address the potentially catastrophic impacts of climate change before it's too late.

This week we're opening what we hope will be a very fruitful dialogue with our citizens on all things sustainability. Our survey, which will go live on the Consultation Hub on Tuesday (19 November), is designed to raise awareness of the climate emergency and to gauge views and attitudes among our residents on ways we can all do our bit to tread more lightly on the planet.

Leaving a healthier, greener, fairer Edinburgh for future generations won't be possible unless each and every one of us does whatever we can to make a positive difference. By completing our survey, you're already showing your commitment.

Honouring our veterans

As [Edinburgh fell silent in remembrance](#) for Armistice Day, the thoughts of many people turned to loved ones who have served or are still serving for their country.

I couldn't help but reflect on the sacrifice and selflessness of one person in particular, local veteran Tom Gilzean. Tom truly served his country and his community until the very end, making it his mission to help others by shaking a tin for charity and raising an incredible £1m for local causes. It has been our honour to open a [book of condolence for Tom](#) in the City Chambers, which many citizens have already signed.

It feels apt, then, that our Council has just been recognised for its commitment to both veterans and reservists all year round as they resettle after time in service. We were presented with the very highest award an employer can receive from the Ministry of Defence – the Gold Award from the Employer Recognition Scheme which is a source of pride for our Council.

Making a stand against transgender discrimination

One of Edinburgh's many strengths is its diversity and I'm proud that that we're recognised as a welcoming city. That's something we'll be celebrating when we raise a flag to stand with our transgender community.

Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and by flying a flag on [International Transgender Day of Remembrance](#) (20 November) we hope to celebrate transgender people in our city and draw attention to the inequalities, discrimination and violence too many people still face, at home and around the world.

A library fit for the 21st century

As the country prepares for another annual celebration of books for [Book Week Scotland](#), our Culture & Communities Committee has given go-ahead for a project team to explore ambitious [plans to develop our much-loved Central Library](#).

Nestled at the heart of Scotland's Capital – the world's very first UNESCO City of Literature – Edinburgh's Central Library is a place of contemplation and inspiration for our citizens, as well as those who visit, work and study here.

It's one of our most iconic buildings and the proposals being considered would make the library fit for the 21st century so that it can continue to be enjoyed for generations to come.

And for those who might find it tricky getting there or to their local library, our fantastic five-vehicle strong mobile libraries outreach service is just the ticket. We're delighted to see the spotlight being shone on these terrific facilities on Scotland's first ever [National Mobile Libraries Day](#) on 20 November.

Make sure you can have your say in the UK Parliamentary Election

With [candidates for Edinburgh's five constituencies](#) published yesterday and election trails already hotting up, General Election 2019 is almost upon us. Turn on the TV and there's no escaping arguments from all sides, but just as important as deciding whom to vote for is making sure you're able to vote in the first place.

Our eyes are on 12 December but we mustn't forget the **voter registration deadline of 26 November**. If you're a UK citizen and are not registered or aren't sure if you're already registered, it's easy to check by visiting www.gov.uk/register-to-vote. And if you'll be away from home on Election Day, make sure you register in time for a postal or proxy vote too.

Get involved

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