



Council Leader's Report

Adam McVey

•EDINBURGH•
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

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Straight out of the blocks for a new decade

Almost exactly at the midway point of our five-year term, the Administration is making real headway on some of our most far-sighted and transformative plans for the Capital. This first month of the new decade has seen us [set out our stall](#) on how we plan to grapple with the twin challenges of climate change and population growth.

There's a huge amount of work to be done and we're under no illusion that any of it is going to be easy. The truth is, though, that the status quo is simply not an option. From transport, air quality and placemaking to planning guidelines, short-term lets and managing tourism, we owe it to current and future generations – as well as to the planet – to do what it takes to get this right.

Of course, as we look ahead, we need to make sure we're getting the basics right and delivering the highest possible level of services to our residents. Evidence of this can be seen in the continued improvement in our waste collection service, with complaints at a five-year low, and conditions on our roads seeing the greatest annual improvement in more than a decade.

This care and attention is mirrored in the ongoing reinstatement of East Princes Street Gardens following the Winter Festivals, with work forecast for completion (weather permitting) earlier than ever before. This will, of course, be considered in more detail as part of our planned public consultation on our Christmas and Hogmanay celebrations, as we strive to strike the right balance in managing our major events.

For all the challenges that come with delivering more than 700 services in Scotland's fastest-growing city, I firmly believe that our approach to managing this growth – and our ongoing success – will bring a brighter future for us all.

Time for a change: creating a greener, healthier and more sustainable Capital

There's no doubt that we're embarking upon a period of significant change – and for the better. As we begin a new decade we are preparing to face climate change and population growth head-on, but we can only do this if we think big.

In the last few weeks we've published not one but two ground-breaking draft strategies setting out the future of both transport and development in Edinburgh, envisioning an environmentally-friendly, accessible transport system, inextricably linked with sustainable, adaptable growth in housing and development.

Now we want to know what you think of proposals under the [draft City Mobility Plan](#) and the [Choices for City Plan 2030](#), with a two-month consultation live from today (31 January) on our [Consultation Hub](#). Together, these radical plans support our bold ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030, to manage our burgeoning population and to create a fairer, more inclusive environment for everyone.

By taking part in our consultations you can play your own part in shaping the Capital's future, creating the kind of city future generations will thank us for. Have your say online or by coming along to one of our [drop-in events](#), where you can find out more.

Putting residents first – our new tourism strategy

We're on the brink of major change in Edinburgh, not least when it comes to managing our city's growth so that everyone who lives here has the chance to share in its success.

This extends to tourism and our work with the Scottish Government to bring forward new powers for us to introduce a tourist tax and [regulate short-term lets](#) which will help make the experience of tourism better for everyone.

Speaking at [Edinburgh's annual tourism conference](#) yesterday, I was overwhelmed by the positive response from industry to these changes and for working together on [our new tourism strategy](#), as endorsed by councillors last week. The strategy will bring about a fundamental shift in policy over the next decade, moving away from encouraging visitor growth to managing it sustainably, while promoting fair work and prioritising people, place and environment.

My challenge to the industry was to engage more with residents and local groups, meet the environmental challenge, sustain Edinburgh's authentic offer and embrace fair work across the board by giving security of employment and higher salaries.

We LOVE Gorgie

I was delighted today (31 January) to [welcome a new operator](#) for the much-loved Gorgie City Farm site, LOVE learning, which has promised to continue the community-focused, educational and sustainable ethos this unique venue offered until its closure in November.

I know many people were worried that it would be the end for this much-loved community asset when it shut down last year, so it was extremely heartening for everyone who rallied round to get the farm back for our city. Thanks also to liquidators MHA Henderson Loggie, whose hard work over the last few months has resulted in this fantastic outcome.

LOVE Gorgie, as it will now be known, will be free for all, open seven days a week with a welcome focus on supporting and providing opportunities for vulnerable young people and adults. I'm looking forward to working with LOVE learning to provide a fantastic facility for locals and visitors to enjoy.

Investment in our estate tops £100m

We all agree our buildings should be in a good condition – fit for the purpose they were intended for, be that working, teaching, visiting or playing sport. So that's why it's a real achievement that over £100m has already been invested in upgrades and improvements to our buildings since the start of this Administration in 2017.

[Reaching this financial milestone](#) is a clear sign of our determination to improve the quality, safety and future sustainability of our buildings – as part of our £193m five-year major works programme.

Over 75% of the investment has resulted in direct improvements in schools and nurseries but there have also been major works to other buildings including Edinburgh Leisure-managed venues such as Dalry and Leith Victoria Baths.

Setting our sights on a three-year balanced budget

Councils up and down the country are preparing to set their budgets for the year ahead but, in Edinburgh, we're setting our sights further. We intend to set a longer term, [three-year balanced budget](#) – paving the way for investment in our schools, our transport system and supporting our most vulnerable.

Now that Derek Mackay has announced that he intends to outline his spending plans on 6 February, we'll be holding a special Finance & Resources Committee on 14 February, where precise proposals for spending and investing will be considered in more detail, ahead of agreeing plans as a Council on 20 February.

Until then, no decisions have been made and our priority remains setting the best budget for the people of Edinburgh; one that supports people out of poverty, responds to the climate crisis and helps all our residents to share in our city's success.

Supporting EU nationals to stay beyond Brexit

After years of Brexit debate and many months of planning within the Council, today (31 January) we've reached the UK's final day in the European Union.

Time can only tell what the long-term impact will be but, no matter what, our focus will remain on our people and supporting our residents of all nationalities to keep calling Edinburgh their home. Our international mix of residents is part of what makes our city so unique and we boast more EU Nationals than anywhere else in Scotland.

We've already [supported 2,265 people to apply for settled status](#) from the Home Office and tens of thousands more have applied directly. As more clarity is given about living, working and studying post-Brexit, we'll continue to offer as much guidance and support to residents and businesses as we can.

Moving towards making Edinburgh a Million Tree City

I'm delighted that, following approval by Culture and Communities Committee, we're going to be joining counterparts around the world to become a [Million Tree City](#), uniting with others from New York to Shanghai, London and Los Angeles to help lessen the impact of climate change.

We already have more trees per head than any other Scottish city - over 730,000 urban trees compared to around 519,000 residents. Last year we also became the first Scottish local authority to support [Charter for Trees](#), pledging our full commitment to cherish, nurture and celebrate our trees, as well as participating in the fantastic [TreeTime](#) initiative letting people adopt or plant trees around Edinburgh.

There are many more benefits of having a green and leafy city and, by joining this initiative, we'll be able to encourage more tree-planting on both public and private land, working with partners to reach our target of one million trees. This will enhance our city today, contribute towards our ambitious 2030 carbon neutral commitment and help create a better place to live, work or visit for many years to come.

Proudly flying the flag for LGBT+

Today I was pleased to attend the raising of the LGBT+ rainbow flag at the City Chambers, where it'll fly for the whole month of February to mark UK LGBT+ History Month.

I was joined by members of the Council's own STRIDE network, who have been instrumental in bringing together colleagues from all over the organisation, promoting awareness and a culture of inclusion. They've got a busy calendar of events lined up for the year ahead, not least celebrating the 25th anniversary of Edinburgh Pride in June, which looks set to be a fantastic event.

Garden waste numbers keep on growing

We're approaching the end of the last registration period for anyone wanting to sign up for our fortnightly garden waste collections this service year (which runs until early October).

More than 3,500 households have already subscribed since we opened registration on 20 January and we're expecting a busy weekend of sign-ups as the deadline approaches (2pm, Monday 3 February).

Thanks to the green-fingered, green-minded efforts of the 68,000+ city households already using our brown bin service, we've transformed over 20,000 tonnes of garden waste into nutrient-rich compost for gardens, parks and farmland. [Sign up](#) and join our garden waste collection service today.

Burns statue time capsule reveals messages from the past

I was extremely lucky last week to witness conservators prising open a [120-year-old time capsule](#) discovered under the Robert Burns statue in Leith during [Trams to Newhaven](#) construction work. The experts carefully lifted out 19th-century artefacts revealing a glimpse into life at the time, from newspapers to coins and even a list of crimes investigated in 1897 Edinburgh!

What we also found was that, since it was first placed in the statue's plinth in 1898, our predecessors had a peek inside the time capsule too – when the statue was moved in 1961. Copies of the Evening News, Scotsman and other '60s newspapers added to the collection of Victorian mementos offered an extra insight into our city's past.

The contractors and archaeology team working on the Trams to Newhaven project are making sure historic elements of the area are preserved as works progress. Now, as we look to the future of Constitution Street, where the Burns statue belongs, we want to create a new legacy by burying our own time capsule alongside the original when the statue is returned. I can't wait to see what the next generation of Leithers decide to bury.

Get involved

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