



Council Leader's Report

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• EDINBURGH •
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

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Proof of our progress

Our latest [Annual Performance Report](#) illustrates the huge amount of progress we've made as a Council over the last 12 months, proving that we can continue to improve core services and resident satisfaction while also delivering on our long-term ambitions for Edinburgh.

From an update on the thousands of new homes we're building to figures showing improvements in the conditions of our roads, lower carbon emissions in line with our net zero carbon by 2030 ambitions and better educational attainment, we're recording improved performance in many of the areas we know are important to residents.

In our waste collections, requests following missed bins have dropped by over 5,000 in just two years, while customer satisfaction with our contact centre is now sitting at 76%. The strides we've made in education and the incredible efforts of our school staff are resulting in early level literacy and numeracy going up, plus more school leavers – an impressive 95.1% - have been heading into positive destinations.

With almost two years left of this term, we're also well on our way to achieving 48 of our 52 [Coalition Commitments](#), having delivered plans for more classroom assistants and smashed our target for new trees with a net increase of more than 12,000 delivered so far. Meanwhile, major infrastructure improvements like the new Meadowbank Sports Centre and Trams to Newhaven, both well underway, will be crucial to our city's wellbeing and sustainable future.

For residents, for visitors: Forever Edinburgh

It's heartening that the Capital is starting to return to a sense of normality with our city centre and local high streets seeing businesses reopening safely and many more of us being able to get out and enjoy what they have to offer. While this hasn't been the packed August festival season we're used to, our options for enjoying a day out with family or a night catching up with friends are continuing to grow.

Huge efforts have been made by restaurateurs, attractions (including the City Art Centre, which we hope to bring back soon), cafés, hotels and more as they re-open their doors to customers across the Capital. With strict rules for physical distancing still in place, the city is coming together to make sure we protect against the virus as far as possible, while inviting residents and visitors back in now that lockdown restrictions have been relaxed.

Launched just last week, the new [Forever Edinburgh campaign](#) is helping to support the hospitality industry to get back on its feet by informing and inspiring people to feel confident in, and prepared for, rediscovering their city. The website has a host of information on how to plan a visit to Edinburgh responsibly and recommends lots of things to see and do. For those coming from further afield, it also has suggestions on where to stay and what to do to enjoy and protect yourself and others if you're a guest in the Capital.

As we've seen in Aberdeen and some parts of England, we need to remain mindful that this virus has not gone away. For locals and visitors alike, we want to welcome people back to enjoy what they love most about Edinburgh in a way that doesn't compromise anyone else's health. So, please revisit old gems and discover new ones. Our hotels, shops, bars, cafés and attractions have done a brilliant job in putting public safety first and this should give us an enormous amount of confidence in getting out and rediscovering parts of Edinburgh again. Our businesses need our support – and our purchases – but please follow guidance and do so responsibly.

Spaces for People improvements continue in the right direction

While life returns to something near normality, the fight against COVID-19 is far from over. That's why our Spaces for People team is still hard at work implementing measures to give more space for people to walk, cycle and wheel. They've already installed segregated cycle lanes on key routes, widened pavements in shopping streets, removed street clutter to help people get around who have mobility issues or other disabilities and improved signaling for pedestrian crossings. Improvements have also been made around schools to help children get to and from school safely.

One of the next schemes we'll be implementing is [Edinburgh's first Low Traffic Neighbourhood](#) in East Craigs. People have told us via our online Commonplace tool that they want to see better conditions for active travel in the area, feedback echoed in our recent work on the West Edinburgh Link project. This will be the first of what I hope will be more schemes to prioritise residents' spaces. We'll be closely monitoring the temporary changes as they're introduced, reducing through-routes for rat-running traffic to create a safer, more relaxed neighbourhood for residents and families.

In the coming weeks, we'll be adding to our temporary network of segregated cycle lanes, increasing pavement widths at more schools and enhancing measures in key shopping streets by replacing cones with semi-permanent and more attractive 'cylinders'.

We all know just how much shops, cafés, restaurants and other businesses have suffered over recent months and these changes aim to support economic recovery across the city by making it easier, safer and more pleasurable for people to spend time in their local shopping streets. Recently we published a [report](#) highlighting evidence from around the world on just how beneficial high-quality spaces and accessibility for walking and cycling can be for the economy, and we remain committed to bringing those benefits to residents and businesses across the Capital.

A new vision for Waverley

Travel by rail has long been critical to the Capital's development and connectivity and, as such, we value the many people who work on and operate the trains that get us from A to B. I'd like to pay tribute to the three people who tragically lost their lives following the Stonehaven derailment on 12 August. As a Council we joined ScotRail and train stations in Edinburgh and across the country observing a minute's silence to mark their passing, and my heartfelt sympathies go out to their families and friends.

Earlier this month I joined partners from the Scottish Government and Network Rail to launch ambitious [concept designs for the Edinburgh Waverley Masterplan](#), which aims to transform the station and surrounding area. A revamped Waverley is crucial to providing equal, carbon-neutral travel, with rail well integrated with bus and tram, pedestrians, cyclists and those with mobility issues.

We'll be continuing to provide input into the development of the Masterplan in the coming months and years. We'll also play an important role to play in monitoring and scrutinising the project's progress, ensuring it conserves our city's unique heritage and aligns with our own plans for the city centre and for a net zero carbon future, whether that be through City Centre Transformation, or developing a wider vision for the Waverley Valley.

Winter Festivals done differently

Like all events, Edinburgh's Christmas and Hogmanay is having to adapt to operating in a new norm and tomorrow we'll be discussing draft plans as to how our [Winter Festivals](#) could run this year.

The proposals being tabled are designed to put Edinburgh's residents and businesses first as the city celebrates the festive season in new ways. This would include dispersing the Christmas market from the city centre, a carefully managed Torchlight event which will thank key workers during the pandemic and marking Hogmanay with visually spectacular moments across the city. We'll be able to keep numbers lower in each location while also spreading people further out to help support local businesses and communities.

Everyone involved recognises the uncertainty of the situation and we're all committed to meeting the significant requirements for anything Edinburgh hosts to meet appropriate public health guidance. The safety of the public remains our priority and no events or activities will go ahead unless it is deemed safe for them to do so. If they do go ahead, the events will reflect the comments and feedback from residents on how Christmas and Hogmanay should look and feel in Edinburgh – with a strong emphasis on local year-round business and moving away from using green space to use hardstanding locations.

Our young people back where they belong

It's been a very long and challenging five months, but it was a great relief for parents across the city to finally see our young people back in school learning and seeing their friends again. This has been a very difficult journey but thanks to the enormous amount of work by our teaching staff and other council teams, we've done everything possible to ensure their safe reopening.

We're continuing to follow the most up-to-date advice from Scottish Government and other agencies and, clearly, we all hope that the virus doesn't result in any localised closures but, if it does, we have robust contingency plans in place.

Finally, on exam results: I'm sure our young people, parents and teachers will be pleased and relieved that their voices were listened to. The Scottish Government's announcement that the SQA's downgrades would be reversed and replaced with the original teacher estimates was the right decision and, having just come through a global lockdown, it's the hope for the future our young people needed and deserved.

Go green with a garden waste permit

Green-fingered residents across the city have been busy ordering garden waste permits with 32,000 already purchased for the next year. If you want to join them then, you have until 2pm on 9 September to [renew your permit or sign up](#). Remember the collections are fortnightly and cost £25 a year.

The current service year for brown bin collections was due to end on 4 October, but we're extending permits so they're valid until 8 November to compensate for the loss of service during spring, when we needed to suspend collections due to the pandemic.

A big thank you to everyone who uses the service – since last October you've helped us turn nearly 10,000 tonnes of garden waste into compost, which is used on farms, gardens and green spaces.

Back to committee business

Throughout lockdown and during what would traditionally be political recess, we've continued to meet regularly to take urgent decisions and oversight of events facing the Council. The efforts and agility of fellow elected members and of officers over this time has been remarkable, and I want to thank them for that. Together we've been able to quickly take decisive action and maintain scrutiny of Council business, despite the uncertain situation we were operating within.

Like many other sectors in the city, digital decision-making and remote working is something we've embraced across the Council. We're now [re-instating all of our Committee meetings](#) to pre-COVID levels and, while we're still in a state of public health emergency, we'll be keeping these meetings online for now. You can visit the [Committee Calendar](#) for a note of upcoming meetings and how to watch them live online.

Get involved

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