



Council Leader's Report

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• EDINBURGH •
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

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Forever Edinburgh

I know that many of you will have been disappointed with the announcement of new local restrictions coming into effect this weekend – there's no getting away from how difficult this whole situation is.

These measures are designed for immediate impact with the ultimate aim of slowing the spread of the virus – which is a real concern here in Edinburgh and across the central belt – while keeping our local businesses and schools open over the coming months and, more importantly, saving lives.

I want to pay tribute to our local hospitality businesses for providing safe environments for us all to dine in and visit and to the staff and customers who have overwhelmingly followed the guidance. And all while they grapple with the impact of the pandemic. While these measures are necessary, we have to recognise how much they affect local businesses and jobs within an already hard-hit sector. These businesses need our help now more than ever.

On top of supporting the Shop Local and #ForeverEdinburgh campaigns, working with partners on a new Edinburgh Guarantee and making support available to those facing job uncertainty, we're working with the Scottish Government to help our local businesses through this challenging time. We're also exploring how best to help them access the £40m fund that has newly been made available, as well as building on the range of support measures we've been providing since the start of lockdown.

While there's no doubt that this is challenging, it's incredibly important that we follow these new measures, protecting our own health and that of others around us. At the same time, I encourage everyone to support where they can: visit your local cafes and unlicensed premises, look out for your neighbours and continue to follow the public health guidance provided.

Eradicating poverty

Last week, we became the first UK local authority to commit to ending poverty by a specific date. This follows an excellent and in-depth report from the Edinburgh Poverty Commission which outlined seven areas of action to [eradicate poverty from our city within the next 10 years](#) and received strong support at the recent Policy & Sustainability Committee.

Tackling poverty in Edinburgh remains one of our key priorities as a Council – making sure everyone can take advantage of everything our Capital has to offer. We've already made significant resources available to help people and are working hard to eradicate poverty, but this commitment isn't just about our own actions – Governments, partners across the Capital and the Council need to take on board the research and recommendations from the Commission as we work towards our goal of ending poverty in the Capital by 2030.

We know that this will not be an easy task, but Edinburgh is a city of wealth and enormous talent and we're determined to work with the Scottish and UK Governments, city-wide partners – and of course, our residents – to drive the change that is so greatly needed.

A new leaf for libraries

It's great to see six of our libraries back serving our communities as part of our successful phased reopening. This is new territory for our libraries' teams, so I want to thank them and other Council colleagues who've worked so hard to get these valued services up and running again safely.

We've rightly prioritised the health and safety of our colleagues and the public in doing so and are actively looking at reopening more libraries in the near future. The feedback has been really positive with residents delighted to be back in these familiar and friendly buildings – one family even tweeted to say their children were 'squealing with joy' when they were told they were going to their library to borrow new books!

School sports facilities back on track

Equally welcome is the news that – in partnership with Edinburgh Leisure – our community access to sports facilities in our secondary schools will start up again next month. Initially it will be extended lets only for both indoor and outdoor facilities with other activities like swimming lessons and public swimming returning on a phased approach in the coming months.

The reopening of libraries and these sports facilities is part of our wider plan to make sure everyone can access valuable resources at the heart of our communities. We've made good progress in seeing some community centres open for essential services like food banks, and access to equipment and resources to support outdoor activities with children and young people. We want to do more and are pressing for more local provision for our young people – but only if it's safe to do so.

Providing refuge for rough sleepers

At the height of this pandemic, we worked hard to make sure no one had to sleep rough, offering safe places to stay to everyone who needed it. The public health emergency we were responding to then sadly still remains part of our day-to-day lives, so it's especially important as we enter the colder months that we do all that we can to keep vulnerable people safe, warm and sheltered.

This week, we've taken the step of providing emergency funding towards a new [Welcome Centre](#) at the Haymarket Hub Hotel, working jointly with the Scottish Government, Bethany Christian Trust and Social Bite to provide a place of refuge for many this winter. With up to 65 self-contained rooms and adequate space for social distancing, the centre will help to protect communities from the spread of Covid-19. It will be a place where anyone who faces a night on the streets can be offered a safe and secure place to sleep, a hot meal, and – crucially – access to immediate housing and health advice so that we can try to lift them out of homelessness.

We'll be supporting the shelter to run from now until May and I want to thank the staff and the volunteers providing this service. Together, we'll continue to take every possible action we can to end rough sleeping in our city.

Let's walk, cycle and wheel into winter

With winter fast approaching, so too are longer nights and chillier mornings. During lockdown we saw a surge in the number of people walking, cycling and wheeling and we want to see this continue. This month we launched our annual *Be Bright Be Seen* campaign, urging drivers to take extra care of vulnerable road users and encouraging cyclists to wear bright and visible clothing if they can.

By encouraging people to make healthy, active travel choices we're reducing the congestion, carbon emissions and pollution associated with private car journeys. We've just marked Clean Air Day, and while we weren't able to celebrate it together in person, it was a chance to reflect on the importance of good air quality to people's health, the environment and general quality of life.

And what better time to start good travel habits than during your school years? October is International Walk to School Month and we're just at the end of Walk to School Week, which has seen pupils across the Capital don their walking shoes to get to the school gates. It's fantastic to see the enthusiasm for walking amongst children and we want to make getting to school on foot, bike, scooter or wheelchair as easy as possible.

A green, sustainable new neighbourhood at Meadowbank

Our ambitious plans to revitalise Meadowbank as one of the city's greenest neighbourhoods [took a major step forward this week](#). The masterplan was shaped in response to views shared by local residents – who were keen to see more quality greenspace, places for play and better-connected walking and cycle routes brought to the area.

The £100 million project is expected to become the first development of its size in Edinburgh to promote our net zero carbon by 2030 goals by creating a low-car, low-carbon community and energy-efficient new homes.

The sustainable mixed-use development will also create jobs and a significant economic boost by regenerating a five-hectare area next to the new Meadowbank Sports Centre – already set to become one of the greenest and most accessible centres for community sport in the country when it opens next year.

Edinburgh this Christmas

It's fair to say that the festive period in the Capital will be different this year. Earlier this month we announced that, following the most recent restrictions and taking into consideration the likely additional strain on services over winter, our focus would shift to celebrating Edinburgh's Christmas 2020 online.

Understandably, this will be hugely disappointing to the hundreds of thousands of residents who enjoyed Edinburgh's Christmas and the visitors who supported our local businesses. Supporting local businesses was at the heart of plans developed for this festive period and we continue to explore ways that will help local all-year-round operators get the benefit of Christmas spend to help them survive and thrive.

Christmas is a special time in our city, and we want to be clear that Edinburgh's Christmas isn't cancelled and our businesses right across the city will be offering their usual festive cheer for us to take advantage of. We look forward to announcing details of an innovative digital 2020 programme soon.

Get involved

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