



Council Leader's Report

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EDINBURGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

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Tests, jags and FACTS to keep Capital Covid cases down

With the success of the vaccination roll-out, we're making good progress in the fight against Covid, but [we still have much to do](#).

Cases are rising fast across the country and they remain high in Edinburgh too. This means we've got to redouble our efforts to break the chain of transmission by sticking closely to the public health guidance and by taking regular tests so we can catch it and isolate before it spreads.

There are lots of ways you can get a test, either come along to one of our [community testing centres](#) and take a rapid test or collect a pack of tests for use at home. You can also [order free home testing kits online](#). And remember, if you do test positive and therefore have to self-isolate, there's [financial support and help available](#) if you need it.

Having both doses offers the best protection so it's vital everyone attends their appointments when they're called forward. I've had my first and looking forward to the second soon! And finally, if we all take care to follow FACTS, especially if we're meeting up with more people now than in recent weeks, then we can get through this more quickly together.

Positive progress despite the pandemic

Our [latest performance reports](#) paint a holistic picture of the Council's performance in recent years and, while there is of course scope for improvement in some areas, it's encouraging to see that we're making good progress, despite the huge pressures placed on our services by the pandemic.

We've had to make massive changes to the way we deliver hundreds of lifeline services to residents to make sure we keep the city going and ensure our most vulnerable are supported.

Major and important projects like taking trams to Newhaven and the new Meadowbank continue to progress well, the number of children receiving 1,140 hours of early learning and childcare continues to grow, we've successfully reduced our carbon emissions and our performance in areas like building warrant applications has improved despite the need to allocate resources elsewhere. Meanwhile, vital services such as bin collections continued thanks to early actions taken to ensure our colleagues could work safely.

While dealing with the immediate public health needs of the city, it's inevitable that progress has slipped in some areas but we've managed to improve and maintain progress in many more, which is testament to the sheer dedication and commitment of our workforce.

The changing face of our city centre

Several major landmark projects are coming to fruition in the city centre, bringing a real sense of optimism about the area's prospects as we look towards recovery. Next week we'll see the new Edinburgh St James opening its doors on a reinvigorated shopping and leisure offering, while at the west end, Johnnie Walker Princes Street is sure to be a huge draw when it opens later this summer.

This multi-million pound refurbishment of the old Frasers department store, together with transformations for key Princes Street buildings, including the former BHS and Debenhams stores and the iconic Jenners department store, herald a great new chapter for the area.

These major developments are testament to the enduring appeal of Edinburgh for investors and will act as a catalyst for our city centre's resurgence, creating new job opportunities and building the momentum needed to drive up footfall and turnover to the benefit of all businesses.

These principles are at the heart of our [Economic Development Strategy and City Centre Recovery Plan](#) as we focus on Edinburgh's wider recovery. We've worked with key stakeholders, partners and business leaders to refresh both reports and, as we take them to wider consultation, I'll be excited to see how they develop and progress.

Help Edinburgh get climate-ready

With only a few months to go before the world's eyes are on Scotland for COP26, we've launched a major public consultation on our draft 2030 Climate Strategy, which sets out how Edinburgh will work together to become a net-zero, climate-ready city by 2030.

It sets out how, by the end of the decade, citizens will be able to have their needs met locally, reducing the need for travel; communities will be protected from the impacts of climate change by a network of green and blue routes across the city, and people's heat and energy needs will be met through new heat networks and energy-efficient buildings.

Over the summer months, residents will be able to share comments and opinions on the strategy by [taking part in the consultation online](#) and I'd urge you to have your say. Your responses will form the basis of a finalised strategy, which will be brought to Committee later in the year.

Supporting business to help Edinburgh recover

We've seen an incredible amount of innovation from traders who've been hit so hard by this pandemic – taking their businesses online, developing takeaway offers and diversifying to keep going as circumstances have changed.

We're committed to doing everything we can to support businesses and help them bounce back. Over the past year, we've made 19,000+ payments totaling over £250 million through Scottish Government-provided grant funds to help businesses to stay afloat. And we're in ongoing discussions with the Scottish Government around support for businesses while we remain in level 2.

We also continue to look at where sectors are struggling, where there are gaps and how we can help with additional training support. We're seeing that the hospitality sector, in particular, is experiencing a real skills shortage after workers were forced to find work elsewhere during prolonged lockdown periods, plus the loss of students and impact of Brexit.

Through the Edinburgh Guarantee, we're actively working with our partners to increase training opportunities for people looking to get into hospitality. This piece of work will be finalised in the coming weeks and, together with the wider [Joined Up For Jobs](#) network, we hope it'll make a real difference.

Transporting Edinburgh to a safer, more sustainable future

Our plans for a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) are one step closer after councillors approved [a city centre zone for consultation](#). The LEZ is key to cleaner air tackling the impacts poor air quality can have on the health of our residents. Not only will it significantly reduce harmful emissions, but its introduction next year will have a knock-on effect around the city businesses, transport providers and other private vehicles convert to lower-emission options to comply with the changes.

Please be assured that the majority of vehicles won't be affected by the measures thanks to already being compliant and, for those that aren't, enforcement won't begin until 2024 to help people adjust. Exemptions for blue badge holders and other essential vehicles will also be in place.

As part of the [City Mobility Plan](#), the LEZ is central to our ambitions to create a healthier and more sustainable future for Edinburgh. This ethos has guided our [assessment of the future of Edinburgh's Spaces for People schemes](#). Since their introduction, so many people have benefited from the changes, from giving residents the confidence to try out cycling to providing space for families to stroll to the park. We know not all of the changes have worked as well, and I look forward to a constructive discussion on the longer-term replacement for schemes we propose to keep in place, as well as improvements in areas where schemes are removed.

Of course, we need to get the basics right if we are to help the public make sustainable transport choices so I'm delighted that councillors also approved a comprehensive [review of winter weather maintenance](#). Amongst the actions based on lessons learned from last year will be a doubling of gritting provision for pavements and work to plug gaps in the city's network of gritted cycle routes. These efforts will be bolstered too by the agreement of an [additional £6m investment](#) in improving our roads and pavements, providing a safer environment for all road users.

Mapping out 20-minute neighbourhoods for Edinburgh

Earlier this month, a new strategy was approved that will find ways for residents to meet their daily needs within 20 minutes of their homes by walking, using public transport, wheeling or cycling. This brand new approach for the Capital aims to deliver more sustainable places, improve public services, and build on what is already a powerful sense of local community across the city.

[Twenty-minute neighbourhoods](#) are about helping local people access the services they need, where and when they need them. They're also a way of empowering communities, fostering stronger partnership working at a local level and, where appropriate, delivering multiple services from stand-alone 'hubs'.

We know this can help organisations work more efficiently within our communities, providing better outcomes for our residents. I'm very much looking forward to seeing this pivotal project move ahead.

There's no place like home

It was great to see the valuable work done through our [Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan](#) recognised this month. The multi-pronged approaches we're taking to prevent homelessness, reduce pressures on our temporary accommodation and reduce the number of people rough sleeping are making positive steps in the right direction.

In just over a year, 324 households living in the private rented sector have been prevented from becoming homeless thanks to the Council's Private Rented Service (PRS) Team, which has helped them keep their existing tenancy or to move to a new private or mid-market rent-secure tenancy. Edinburgh Help to Rent has supported this work by providing rent deposit guarantee bonds for 50 households since February 2020.

This comes as we also [celebrate helping 250 households into affordable, safe and warm mid-market rented homes through our Edinburgh Living partnership](#). It's fantastic to hear how we're making a real difference to individuals and families on low to medium incomes by helping them secure quality properties, improving the diversity of communities and promoting the regeneration of parts of Edinburgh.

Festivals' return puts Culture back at centre stage

After the challenging year we've all had the disappointment of not being able to enjoy the festivals in the usual way last year, it's fantastic we're now on the cusp of another Edinburgh festival summer – albeit one with a difference.

Festival organisers have really stepped up to make sure they're putting public safety and Covid guidance at the heart of their plans and it's great to see such diverse programmes where audiences can share in the live performance experience again alongside the online offerings.

The [Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival](#) recently announced a fabulous programme, kicking off on 16 July and showcasing amazing Scottish musicians. Later this month sees the return of the [Edinburgh Science Festival](#) and, in August, we'll be spoilt for choice with plans for in-person or online events for the [Edinburgh International Festival](#), [Edinburgh Art Festival](#), [Edinburgh Festival Fringe](#), [Edinburgh International Book Festival](#) and the [Edinburgh International Film Festival](#).

Join the next generation of Scottish politicians

There's only a couple of weeks left for the next generation of aspiring politicians to register their interest in becoming one of the 12 young people to represent Edinburgh in the next [Scottish Youth Parliament](#) (SYP).

If you know anyone aged between 14 and 25 who's passionate about issues such as climate change, racism, poverty, equality and their community, let them know that by standing as an MSYP they can make a real difference to young people's lives both here in the Capital and across the country.

Aspiring candidates need to register an interest by 30 June, with polling taking place in November for the six constituencies here in Edinburgh. Anyone interested should contact jackie.barr@edinburgh.gov.uk.

Schools out for summer

This has undoubtedly been the most difficult year that our education system has ever faced. The constant uncertainty over schools reopening and closing, classes self-isolating and interruptions to learning and teaching has been unprecedented.

So top marks must go to all our teaching staff and everyone working in our schools – from cleaners to cooks – who have done an incredible job in the past 12 months. And let's not forget our young people themselves and their families, who have shown great strength and perseverance with everything that the pandemic has thrown at them.

I'm sure brighter times are ahead of us as the vaccine roll-out gathers pace and I wish everyone in our school communities a safe, happy and well-deserved summer holiday.

Get involved

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