

Leader's Report

Cllr Cammy Day



June 2023

Reflections on a busy first year

I was delighted this week to announce the [launch date for passenger services](#) on the newly completed tram line to Newhaven.

While 7 June will undoubtedly be a day of celebration, it will also be a chance to reflect on what has been a major, complex project and I'd like to take the opportunity to thank residents and businesses once again for their patience and perseverance throughout its construction.

Its success owes much to the lessons learned from the previous project, together with a great deal of hard work and dedication from our in-house Council team who have led and delivered the project on time and on budget.

This is a major milestone moment for our city but also for me, coming as it does at the 12-month mark in my role as Council Leader. Serving the people of Edinburgh has been the greatest privilege of my life and I'm delighted to be able to continue the great work we've started.

Over the past year, we and our partners have responded to the many major challenges put in front of us, from the city's humanitarian response to Russia's illegal war on Ukraine to dealing with the cost of living crisis and the death of HM The Queen.

And we've done this while staying true to the priorities laid out in our Business Plan: tackling poverty, playing our part in the global fight against climate change by becoming a net zero city by 2030 and creating good places to live and work for our residents.

Creating a green, integrated transport system is essential if we're to meet our ambitious 2030 targets and the successful delivery of the tram will bring huge economic, social and environmental benefits to North Edinburgh – and beyond. But it also links the city centre with one of our most important and ambitious developments in decades: the regeneration of Granton Waterfront, creating 3,500 new affordable low-carbon homes and Europe's largest coastal park.

Meanwhile, we've committed to putting in new kitchens, windows and doors and other improvements to over 3,000 of our older homes. We're also investing £173 million over the next year to completely overhaul the fabric of hundreds of council homes to address damp, drive down fuel bills and carbon emissions and make buildings energy efficient.

With the chastening [news of the Paris Agreement](#) at risk of being breached, it was really encouraging that [Forbes Advisor ranked Edinburgh](#) amongst the top five UK cities most likely to reach net zero targets. To help us achieve this we've put together a suite of action plans addressing everything from air quality to public transport, cycling and walking improvements to road safety – and we want to know what you think. [Take part in our online consultation](#) to share your views.

We're focusing on improving our everyday services too, from doubling our spend on roads, pavements and potholes to £22 million to investing in waste and cleansing – and the latest [street cleanliness scores](#) tell us that missed kerbside collections are at their lowest level for three years. Reports of overflowing communal bins are reducing – by an incredible 85% – and we've seen a rise of almost 10% in mixed recyclables collected citywide.

We've shown over the last year that we can rise to major challenges, and I've no doubt that we'll continue to do so over the next 12 months – and beyond.

Striking the right balance for our residents

Not only is our city visually stunning, but it's also walkable, filled with historical charm, green spaces whilst being diverse and progressive in its outlook. It's always nice to hear others feel the same way too.

Time Out ranked Edinburgh as the best city in the world to visit and, earlier this month, our city topped the [Totaljobs Quality of Living Index](#) for the cities where workers can find the best work-life balance in the UK.

Clearly, we're striking a balance between the needs of everyone who lives here and those who visit, but this work maintaining everything people love about Edinburgh comes at a cost. As we grapple with the challenge of climate change, we also face a growing population and increased pressure on our services as a result of the welcome return of tourism post-covid.

This is, of course, against a backdrop of budget pressures where we remain the lowest-funded Council per resident in Scotland. We need to look at additional ways of raising finance to maintain and invest in the city and make Edinburgh fairer and greener – and a visitor levy is an important step in the right direction.

I'm delighted, then, that after years of campaigning, the Scottish Government has finally listened to our calls, with Parliament [publishing a discretionary Visitor Levy Bill](#) just this week. This legislation will pave the way for us to introduce a levy and, in doing so, raise much needed funds for improving our city.

Part of Edinburgh's visitor appeal, of course, is our globally renowned cultural scene, programme of festivals and thriving hospitality industry. All these factors make Edinburgh a truly incredible city to live in, too.

We want to make sure everyone can benefit from this so I'm pleased that, through our [grants programme agreed last week](#), we were able to reaffirm our commitment to the sector and help residents to enjoy cultural activities no matter where they live in the city.

Capital conference confronts cost of living crisis

The reason we have such a thriving culture scene is, of course, thanks to the thousands of our people who work in the industry, across hospitality and tourism too. We know that many of these jobs can be seasonal and hourly so it's really important we foster a culture in our city where workers are treated - and paid - fairly.

I was really pleased, then, to see Kat Brogan appointed co-chair of the Edinburgh Living Wage Action Group. As Managing Director of Mercat Tours, a leading Living Wage employer, Kat is a champion for fair working across the tourism sector.

She joined my colleague and fellow co-chair Councillor Jane Meagher this week as Edinburgh's award-winning efforts to see workers paid a fair wage for a fair day's work was celebrated at the inaugural [Living Wage Places](#) event.

Bringing together more than 70 delegates from 16 towns and cities across the UK, the conference in the City Chambers was a chance to build on our formal recognition in 2021 when we became a Living Wage accredited city. It was great too that the members voted overwhelmingly to choose Edinburgh as the host city.

Over 630 Edinburgh-based employers have now signed up to pay the living wage, which is a great achievement. With the cost of living crisis serving as a stark reminder of what life on low pay means for workers, tackling in-work poverty has never been more vital. We must work together to break down barriers and champion the true value of people's jobs.

Top marks for our schools and early years

Providing the best education for our young people and ensuring they get the best start in life is, of course, another key priority for us – so I'm delighted that two of our schools and one nursery have been shortlisted for prestigious UK and Scottish education awards.

Firrhill High School is in the running to be named the best high school in the UK after being nominated for the [Times Education Supplement Secondary School of the Year](#) category – the only Scottish school to make the list. Hope Cottage Nursery, meanwhile, is shortlisted in the 'Making a Difference' category in the Scottish Education Awards and James Gillespie's High School has been nominated in the Gaelic Education Category. Congratulations to them all – and best of luck at the Awards!

This is great news for our school community, as is our ongoing commitment to investing in modern, state-of-the-art facilities. Following the opening of the outstanding Castlebrae Community Campus last year, we're planning to spend well over £400m on new schools in the next decade. Construction work has already started on a new Currie Community High School, one of the first Passivhaus-designed schools in the country, and work will shortly begin on a fantastic new community campus to replace Liberton High School.

When the Apple Ripens: Peter Howson at 65

Finally, I'm very much looking forward to the City Art Centre's new exhibition, When the Apple Ripens: Peter Howson at 65, which opens this weekend.

Spanning all four floors, the exhibition includes Howson's early work, dominated by depictions of working-class Glasgow men – dossers, boxers and bodybuilders – and his more recent work, which responds to issues such as the pandemic and ongoing war in Ukraine. The very top floor includes seminal major works from the last decade, such as Prophecy and Babylon, as well as a series of new paintings.

I want to pay tribute to the team at the City Art Centre, who have worked tirelessly to bring together, what is, a major retrospective of one of the UK's leading painters, with many of the 100 works never seen before in Scotland.

Visit our [Museums and Galleries website](#) to buy your tickets and find out more.

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