

Leader's Report

Cllr Cammy Day



September 2024

Budget challenge

I'm going to start with some good news: not for the first time, Edinburgh has been named as the best UK city outside of London for growth and economic performance, with the city standing out for its high levels of productivity, income and employment, and health.

Having studied 11 cities across the UK, the researchers from OCO Global found that we were first for gross disposable income per head of population, at £24,161, and also had the highest percentage of citizens in good health at 86 per cent.

This is, of course, encouraging and adds to the positive story we're able to tell about Edinburgh as a place to invest and do business.

However, it won't surprise you to learn that researchers also found that house prices and rents were high here too – highlighting once again the huge amount of work we need to do to tackle the housing emergency.

That's why we need more, not less, support from the Scottish Government to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Their decision to slash nearly £200m from the affordable housing budget earlier this year couldn't have come at a worse time and, with the Finance Secretary's grim financial statement earlier this month, the signs aren't good.

Let's not forget that local authorities have already suffered a decade of continuous real term funding cuts, and Edinburgh is no exception. In fact, we remain the lowest funded council per head in Scotland and are now facing into a budget shortfall of £30m next year.

The [savings suggestions being put forward by officers](#) reflect the increasingly difficult challenges we face, and there will undoubtedly be some tough decisions ahead. Our [budget engagement programme](#) is continuing and nothing will be agreed until we set our annual budget in February. In the meantime, I will continue to press the Scottish Government for a fairer funding settlement for Edinburgh.

A visitor levy for Edinburgh

One way of tackling our funding challenge is to generate our own income streams – and so I was delighted that our ambitious plans to introduce a visitor levy took two further steps forward in the last few weeks.

First of all, [councillors agreed key details of the scheme](#), followed by confirmation from the Scottish Government that the [commencement date of the Visitor Levy \(Scotland\) Act](#) would be 20 September.

This allows us to begin our 12-week public consultation next week, seeking views from residents, visitors and businesses on our draft scheme. The results of that will then help us shape the final scheme, which councillors will consider early in the new year.

With the potential to raise tens of millions of pounds a year once it's established (we're on track for summer 2026), this presents a huge opportunity for us to invest sustainably in maintaining and improving the things that make our city such a great place to visit – and live in all year round.

All eyes on Princes Street

It's fair to say that 'Scotland's premier shopping street', as it was once known, is going through a period of transition – but there are very good reasons for that, not least the changing behaviour of shoppers. But that in itself has presented a huge opportunity for change.

The old St James Centre in the east has been replaced by the St James Quarter, visited by over 18m people annually, while Johnnie Walker has completely transformed the former House of Fraser store in the west. Uniqlo has breathed new life into the old BHS building and work is well underway to respectfully revitalise the much-loved Jenners building, complementing the transformation of St Andrew Square.

Our [bold new vision for Princes Street and the Waverley Valley](#), published earlier this month, demonstrates our ongoing commitment to continue redeveloping this area in a sympathetic way, entirely in keeping with our World Heritage Site and net zero goals.

One of our greatest attractions is Princes Street and, in particular, its Gardens – and we have our Victorian forefathers to thank for their generous investment in this city centre idyll.

We know there's a real desire from our residents (and visitors) to see us invest and make them more accessible for everyone to enjoy. Together with the proceeds from the tourist levy, this plan has the potential to breathe new life into the whole area and make sure it's cared for and invested in for many years to come.

Staying true to our climate ambitions

When we set this year's Council budget in February, we stayed true to our ambitious climate targets, renewing our pledge to make Edinburgh a cleaner, greener city for everyone to enjoy.

Boosting the biodiversity of our award-winning parks and greenspaces, we committed £600,000 for climate improvements, with additional funds for city-wide tree planting and bringing in more expertise to our dedicated in-house climate team.

We also recognised that a changing climate presents new risks to how we live, both now and in the future. Put simply, we need to adapt, and quickly. That's why we've committed £750,000 extra a year for three years into a programme of local and coastal flood prevention, acting on our [Climate Ready Edinburgh strategy](#) – a city-wide partnership plan for how we prepare for climate change.

[Scotland's Climate Week](#) (23–29 September) presents another opportunity to showcase these projects – while reminding us of the significant and costly challenges that still lie ahead, especially when it comes to reducing emissions from our buildings. We can't do this alone, and our success depends on urgent investment and collaboration from all partners, including the Scottish Government.

Turning pink for Organ Donation

This year, the NHS Organ Donor Register celebrates 30 years, and I'm delighted that both the City Chambers and the EICC will be turning pink for Organ and Tissue Donation Week, which runs from 23–29 September.

Sadly, there are currently more than 7,600 people in the UK waiting for a life-saving transplant from a donor. That's why it's so important we play our part as a Council to help raise awareness. But we also have a part to play as individuals, registering our decisions to be a donor (or not).

Almost 60,000 lives have been saved since the Register was created in 1994, so whatever your choice may be, the important thing is to make it and discuss it. If you're 16 years old or over and yet to record your decision, you can do so by [visiting the Organ Donation website](#).

'You should know there's nowhere else to go' this Hogmanay

Hot off the press this week was the exciting announcement that Scottish rockers [Texas will headline this year's Hogmanay celebrations](#). With local star Callum Beattie supporting, it's a fantastic homegrown line-up to help us bring in 2025 in style.

Following their hugely successful greatest hits tour, Texas will become the first band to headline the festival three times and it marks their first appearance since 2005. It promises to be yet another fantastic party, boasting unrivalled views of our world-famous midnight moment over Edinburgh Castle. Tickets go on sale from Friday (20 September).

Further details of the four-day programme will be announced in the coming weeks, but we can look forward to the return of the Torchlight Procession, Night Afore Disco Party and a packed programme of free New Year's Day events for all ages, including the First Footin' culture trail and Sprogmanay.

Roll with it

Speaking of big announcements, it won't have escaped your attention that Oasis are set to take to the stage at Murrayfield Stadium for three nights next August.

It's great that Edinburgh continues to attract some of the biggest, and most anticipated, gigs in years – bringing huge benefits to the local economy and great enjoyment to many thousands of local residents who attend.

We are, of course, equally aware that they're taking place during what is already one of the busiest times of year for us here in the Capital. So, the preparations begin now.

We'll work closely with Scottish Rugby, local residents and businesses, and our partners to get plans in place to manage the crowds, minimise disruption and make sure that these events are remembered as another huge success story for our city.

It's alive!

Finally, you may have spotted the Royal Mile being transported back in time for Guillermo del Toro's upcoming adaptation of Frankenstein.

The area around St Giles' Cathedral and Makar's Court were transformed with Victorian marketplaces appearing in West Parliament Square and a gallows in Makar's Close. Filming also took place in Bakehouse Close and the Canongate with the Museum of Edinburgh and People's Story featuring.

It's a source of great pride that Edinburgh attracts such high-profile film and TV productions, projecting our beautiful city on to screens around the world – bringing with it economic benefit, employment opportunities and the type of promotion money can't buy. Last year alone, our in-house [Film Edinburgh](#) team facilitated 178 productions in the city, generating direct spend of close to £10m.

These productions are, of course, exciting for film fans but it's hugely important that the film-makers limit disruption and are respectful of local residents and businesses. I gather the filming of Frankenstein generated no complaints and the director is now looking for a flat in Stockbridge – so we must be doing something right!

Get involved

Keep up to date with all Council news. You can [watch live Council and committee meetings](#) on our webcast service and join the debate on Twitter using #edinwebcast. If you wish to [unsubscribe, please email us](#).

[Follow us on twitter](#)



[Follow us on Facebook](#)

