

Leader's Report

City of Edinburgh Council

13 November 2003

1 Introduction

1.1 I am pleased to present my report to the Full Council of 13th November

2 Report into death of Caleb Ness – progress on action plan

2.1 To follow.

3 MTV European Music Awards update

3.2 To follow.

4 Unemployment trends

4.1 The latest claimant unemployment figures show that there are 7,379 people out of work in Edinburgh, amounting to 2.5% of the working age population (September 2003).

4.2 This is about 700 higher than the equivalent figures for 2002 and 2001, reflecting the mood of economic uncertainty which has interrupted the recent period of sustained growth. These figures are worrying and underline the need to avoid complacency regarding the strength of Edinburgh's economy.

4.3 Current unemployment is still much lower than it was at any point during the 1990s. Ten years ago it stood at 20,939 – nearly three times the present level.

4.4 Some recent job losses have arisen from the continuing shrinkage of the city's manufacturing base. This has partly been prompted by Edinburgh's economic success, as high land and property values can make it profitable to sell up and relocate to modern premises outside the city. This is exemplified by the closure of bottling plants at Leith and Fountainbridge. The imminent loss of medical suppliers Ethicon is also a major concern.

- 4.5 Another increasing threat to local jobs is the proposed dispersal of government departments and agencies, of which Scottish Natural Heritage is a high profile example.
- 4.6 Despite the recent small increase in unemployment rates, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that the Edinburgh labour market is still relatively constrained, with a large number of vacancies in relation to applicants, and many employers looking at innovative ways of recruiting and retaining staff. Many observers expect to see an upturn in business confidence during 2004, with Scotland and Edinburgh being well-placed to benefit from this.

5 'Investing In Travel Improvements' Public Information Programme

- 5.1 A major public information programme has begun on future investment in travel improvements. Approximately 1 million leaflets are being distributed to households and businesses throughout Clackmannanshire, Edinburgh, East Lothian, Falkirk, Fife, Midlothian, Scottish Borders, Stirling and West Lothian (collectively SESTRAN*), as part of a £150,000 information programme
- 5.2 The distribution of 'Investing in Travel Improvements' leaflets coincides with the lodging of a Draft Charging Order on a proposed congestion charging scheme for Edinburgh, which is designed to significantly reduce congestion in and around the city.
- 5.3 The leaflets detail approximately £1.5 billion of investment in travel improvements in Edinburgh and south east Scotland, over the next 20 years. Feedback is sought on proposals for the congestion charging scheme, detailed as part of the public information programme.
- 5.4 In addition to distributing to households and businesses, leaflets will also be available in a number of public outlets. Other awareness activities throughout SESTRAN include adshel poster sites, advertising, exhibition, detailed documents, meetings with over 200 stakeholder groups and the www.ititime.com website.

6 Test-purchasing survey of fireworks

- 6.1 Edinburgh Trading Standards has just completed a test purchasing survey using young people aged 16 who attempted to purchase fireworks from retailers in the city.
- 6.2 This year's results continue to provide disturbing reading. Legally, fireworks can only be sold to those aged 18 or over and the test purchasers were instructed to be truthful about their age when asked.

- 6.3 Over two weekends, 17 retailers were visited - 4 (24%) sold fireworks to young people. Most worrying of all was that major retailers were engaged in this illegal practice.
- 6.4 In 2002 when the Council undertook a similar survey, 28 test purchases were made and 15 retailers (54%) were found to have flouted the law.
- 6.5 Consideration is now being given as to further action that the Council will take against those retailers who sold fireworks to the young people.
- 6.6 I have also asked for a report to come before the Council on any incidents of concern taking place this year, including the incident at the Meadowbank display.

7 Containerisation update

- 7.1 The programme has been proceeding satisfactorily in the Marchmont and Dean wards. Officers from the Containerisation section continue to monitor the position. Environmental Wardens are also monitoring new container sites to deal with the illegal disposal of trade waste. Reports from the Task Force Managers in these wards have been very positive, with both managers noting a vast reduction of street litter since the introduction of the containers.
- 7.2 Planning applications were required for most of the container sites within the Stockbridge ward. A total of 2327 properties are to be converted from sacks to containers. All applications for this ward have been submitted. Planning permission has been approved for containers serving 1408 properties. Deliveries of containers to these properties have been scheduled for the middle of November 2003.
- 7.3 The Scottish Ministers have returned two planning applications for this ward on a technicality. These have been re-advertised and will be resubmitted to the Planning Committee.
- 7.4 Planning permission was required for 840 of a total of 1380 properties in the Trinity ward. All applications have been submitted. Consent has been granted for four out of the eight applications. Deliveries to those Trinity areas where permission has been granted have been scheduled for the beginning of December 2003.
- 7.5 The Northumberland Street Residents Association has made an approach to the Environmental and Consumer Services Department suggesting that they may be able to accommodate individual wheeled bins. They have requested that this could be trialled in a limited section of Northumberland Street. This request is currently under consideration.

7.6 16 out of the necessary 22 planning applications for the World Heritage site have been submitted to the planning department.

7.7 A total of 501 properties were converted from sacks to containers in September 2003.

8 Capital Christmas

8.1 Edinburgh's Capital Christmas has grown in popularity over the past four years and this year's programme looks set to continue the trend.

8.2 Residents and visitors can expect some of the usual highlights including the festive lights, the popular Edinburgh Wheel, Winter Wonderland, the Traditional German Christmas Market and 'Santa Comes to Town' – a fabulous free event in Festival Square.

8.3 Children can expect an extra treat this year when West Princes Street Gardens becomes home to Santa's Reindeer Garden for the first time. Pony and trap rides and Edinburgh's own Robert Brothers Circus will add to the festive fun. Also new to the programme this year is the Nativity Blessing Service in West Princes Street Gardens.

8.4 We have decided not to hold a street parade this year in order to extend the programme of events. This will ensure residents and visitors can experience Capital Christmas whenever they visit the city centre during December. In taking this decision, the views of Princes Street retailers was the deciding factor. Retailers did not feel the parade brought them any major benefit, so we felt it could be dropped from the programme.

9 Leith Tourism Action Plan launched

9.1 A fifteen-year master plan to transform Leith into a tourism destination delivering world-class facilities and customer service has been announced. The plan outlines ambitious goals to develop what Leith offers visitors as well as enhance Leith's environment, improve access to the area and promote Leith.

9.2 The plan was developed in workshops with more than 40 local stakeholders. One specific target is to boost visitor figures to more than 470,000 a year by 2008.

9.3 This is part of a wider programme to boost the area, including Heritage Lottery funding for streetscape improvements, a shopfront improvement scheme and the hosting of the MTV European Music Awards by Leith.

10 Edinburgh Convention Bureau

- 10.1 The Edinburgh Convention Bureau showcases the city to clients who may consider Edinburgh as a potential destination to host conferences for their organisation or society.
- 10.1 This year, for the first time, they are organising a 'Christmas Cracker Familiarisation Visit'. The aim is for clients to enjoy a weekend experiencing Edinburgh during the festive period, whilst having the opportunity to view the excellent conference products that the city provides. Several organisations have already accepted invitations.
- 10.2 This follows on from their successful 'Festival Fireworks Familiarisation Visits' which has resulted in conference business.

11 Concorde comes to Scotland

- 11.1 It is fantastic news that British Airways are donating one of their Concorde fleet to the National Museums of Scotland for display at the Museum of Flight, East Fortune.
- 11.2 This will clearly be a major boost for the Museum of Flight and for tourism in the East Lothian area. The arrival of Concorde will form part of a major investment programme at the site which is likely to total some £8 million. The Scottish Executive have already agreed to provide £2 million for the transfer, housing and display of Concorde.
- 11.3 Details are still being confirmed, but it is likely that the aircraft will arrive in the spring and be on display to the public by early summer.

12 Wolfson Microelectronics

- 12.1 Wolfson Microelectronics, the Edinburgh-based maker of chips for electronic devices, has recently successfully floated on the stock market.
- 12.2 The Lothian Pension Fund initially invested in the company in late 1993 after it was spun out of Edinburgh University. After the successful flotation last month the Pension Fund received £12 million as they sold their entire Wolfson stake. The initial investment was £245,000. This is good news for the pension fund.

13 Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade

- 13.1 The Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade is working innovatively with the private industry. In 1999, in the first partnership of its kind in Scotland, The Royal Bank of Scotland and Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade signed an agreement to ensure the highest standards of safety across the bank's UK network of buildings.

- 13.2 On the back of this, further partnerships were formed with the Bank of Scotland, later expanded to include the new HBOS group and Standard Life UK Group in 2000 and 2001 respectively.
- 13.3 The brigade are currently in discussion with other companies with a view to entering into further partnerships in the near future.
- 13.4 This is a very significant achievement for the Board, and I am sure that all members of the Council will join me in congratulating all staff involved.

14 New Homework Centre at Granton Library

- 14.1 A new library based Homework Centre has opened in Granton. The centre has 10 computers with fast free internet access and new books and information to help with homework.
- 14.2 Young people living in Granton and Royston have been involved in designing the centre and were delighted to see it open its doors on Tuesday. The library has gained 35 new members in the first week and up to 20 children a day are coming in to study together.
- 14.3 Adults will also have opportunities to use the new computer facilities and classes will be offered by Telford College in the new term.

15 mPark

- 15.1 Last month, on-street parking in the city centre became that bit more user-friendly. Edinburgh is now the first city in the UK to offer the public a parking payments service via their mobile phone. Not only can payment be made via the mobile phone but users can also opt to receive an SMS message 10 minutes before their voucher expires.
- 15.2 mPark is a highly innovative wireless technology developed by Itsmobile, a Dublin based mobile payments software company. The new service is now available at all 266 pay & display machines in the city centre.
- 15.3 The City Development Department should also be congratulated for having now completed the replacement of all old style parking meters with the innovative solar powered parking meters now evident on our streets.

16 Environmental Wardens update – fines pass 1000 mark

- 16.1 Environmental Wardens continue to rigorously enforce the law relating to environmental crime. Recently a business found to be dumping trade waste illegally was successfully prosecuted. The Sheriff commented

that she regarded the failure to comply with legal responsibilities related to waste disposal as a serious matter and imposed a £350 fine.

- 16.2 In total, the wardens have issued 1050 Fixed Penalty Notices for littering offences. 167 of these are for dog fouling offences – seven of which followed introduction of the Dog Fouling (Scotland) Act on the 22 October. Edinburgh has levied more fines than any other council in Scotland.

17 Recycling update

- 17.1 Edinburgh is currently recycling approximately 9-10% of total waste, and 11% of household waste. This is approximately double the rate of 2001/02. Overall, 8015 tonnes of recyclable material was collected by the end of July 2003. This represents an increase of 68% on the same period last year.

- 17.2 As members will be aware, the increase in recycling since 98/99 is 124% (as outlined in an answer to a Council question, 16 October 2003).

- 17.3 Edinburgh compares well to other local authorities - Aberdeen is recycling approximately the same rate as Edinburgh. The rate in Glasgow is 7%. In 2001/2002, the municipal waste recycling rates of the various city councils in Scotland, including centralised composting, were as follows:

Aberdeen	5.7%
Edinburgh	5.0%
Glasgow	4.8%
Dundee	21.1%*

(*includes 9.1% incineration ash)

- 17.4 The paper collections are going well with approximately 530 tonnes per month now being collected. In the current financial year (to the end of August 2003) the Council has collected 4,339 tonnes of paper - 2,614 tonnes from kerbside collections and the rest from paper banks. This period, however, included the phased implementation of the system. In addition, the Environmental and Consumer Services Department has recently launched a paper recycling competition which should maintain and even increase participation.

- 17.5 The new garden waste collections had collected 1,411 tonnes by the end of July 2003.

18 Edinburgh in Bloom

- 18.1 At September's Beautiful Scotland in Bloom Awards, the Council won the Wright Sustainable Development Award for the city's tree planting programme, while Moredun won the High Flat Village Award.

- 18.2 Congratulations also to Balerno who once again reached the finals of the urban community category but unfortunately did not win an award on the day. I have organised a lunch to thank the Balerno in Bloom committee for all their hard work and efforts over the many years.
- 18.3 The Council will continue to encourage and support communities entering the national awards. Gilmerton in Bloom have already started planting bulbs in preparation for the 2004 campaign. The Edinburgh in Bloom Co-ordinator will provide guidance to the groups and will be producing a community action pack to help community groups get started.
- 18.4 In addition, the Council will be running an annual competition - Keep Edinburgh Growing. Anybody who resides in Edinburgh can participate, whether they have a hanging basket, a tiny front garden, allotment, community garden, a pub or an industrial estate. The competition will be formally launched in January 2004.

19 Portobello beach

- 19.1 A number of initiatives aiming to promote and improve Portobello are being progressed as part of the Council's commitment to Edinburgh's waterfront. This work is being developed and delivered by an inter-departmental working group.
- 19.2 Environmental improvements to the Promenade are continuing with the replacement of old railings, introduction of new street furniture and re-surfacing works around the Pipe Lane toilets. This aim is to complete this work by Spring 2004. Other achievements include the installation of new visitor signage and information boards in association with the local community and the support of local community events such as Golden Days.
- 19.3 The long overdue improvement of the John Street Paddling Pool site is also on the agenda as a local community planning pilot project and its progression is subject to adequate funding being sourced.
- 19.4 SEPA has designated the water quality at Portobello Beach central as excellent and good at Portobello West. This is great news and we want to build on this - an objective is to achieve a Seaside Award for Portobello. For this, a number of requirements need to be met relating to cleanliness, information and facilities. Work is currently on-going to satisfy the criteria before an application is made.
- 19.5 Focus is also very much on Portobello High Street with the Shopfront Improvement Scheme and a planned investment of over £200,000 to improve the pedestrian environment of the High Street in future years.

20 Houses In Multiple Occupation

- 20.1 This Council has led the field for many years in raising the standard of rented accommodation in the city. The new powers, introduced in 2001, for the mandatory licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation ensures that safe, clean and functional housing is provided by this sector.
- 20.2 Edinburgh has received over 2,000 applications from the larger flats to be licensed and, from 1 October 2003, all accommodation with three or more unrelated people living in them are required to be licensed.
- 20.3 The Council will pursue vigorously any landlord who does not make such an application and a special enforcement team has been set up within Environmental and Consumer Services to follow this through. A number of cases are already with the Procurator Fiscal and a protocol for liaison with Lothian and Borders Police on information sharing has been developed.
- 20.4 In addition, the Chief Executive is reviewing the operation of the Regulatory Committee which handles HMO applications. This will enable the meeting to be more effective and avoid such long meetings, which is a typical occurrence.

Councillor Donald Anderson
Leader – City of Edinburgh Council