

Leader's Report

City of Edinburgh Council
2nd June 2005

LEADER'S REPORT – JUNE 2005

1. G8 Planning on Course

- 1.1 Arrangements for the Make Poverty History march and G8 related events in Edinburgh are progressing well. The objective must be to ensure those with a legitimate cause have the opportunity to make their protest safely and peacefully and that the public are properly protected. Safety is paramount and City of Edinburgh Council, Lothian and Borders police and the organisers of Make Poverty History and have established excellent relationships. I want to pay tribute to the organisers for their responsibility and willingness to accommodate necessary requirements, and to do so in good natured and positive manner. Staff from Make Poverty History will also be in the police control room on the day to observe how the event is going.
- 1.2 It is inevitable that media coverage will unduly focus on, and thereby increase, fears of violence and trouble. The senior officer in charge of policing, ACC Ian Dickinson, has stated that there is no robust intelligence to suggest that Edinburgh will be a target for significant disruption, violence and criminal damage.
- 1.3 With regard to the Stop The War Coalition, the Regulatory Committee meets the day after the publication of this report. It is a matter for the Committee, but my own view is that the march should go ahead. I do appreciate that there will be associated disruption but it is vital that the democratic right to protest is protected. The Stop The War Coalition have a distinct and different message from the Make Poverty History march and, as such, have every right to demonstrate.
- 1.4 A G8 website and advice line for the public has been launched by Lothian and Borders Police and Edinburgh City Council. These provide general G8 information, details of events and protests and advice and can be accessed at www.lbp.police.uk/g8 and www.edinburgh.gov.uk/g8summit. To supplement the web pages residents will also be able to contact a newly set up G8 Enquiry Centre.

Open between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday staff will endeavour to answer queries on everything from traffic matters to general advice for those living and working in the city centre. Residents can phone the dedicated G8 enquiry line 0131 200 2343 for all their information needs. I would urge businesses in particular to contact the police should they have any concerns about the impact of G8 related events.

2. Edinburgh City Region Brand

2.1 Information to follow.

3. Delayed Discharge

3.1 As part of a bid to drive down the number of people being affected by delayed discharge, the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian jointly agreed a target with the Scottish Executive Health Department for 2004/05 of a 20% reduction in the total number of people delayed. The target figure for Edinburgh was 182. At the census date of 21 April 2005, the actual number of delays was 175. Whilst these figures are awaiting final validation, both the Council and NHS Lothian are very confident that the targets have been surpassed.

3.2 We must, however, be careful in sounding congratulatory about there being 175 people classified as delayed discharges across the city. The fact that there are 175 delays means that there is still a considerable challenge for us to face but credit should be given to those in both organisations who have worked hard on this issue, taking difficult decisions in order to bring real benefits to people across the city. The hard work continues. The targets for 2005/06 are being finalised and will be more challenging than those for 2004/5. The provisional target for Edinburgh for April 2006 is 130 people delayed – a further 26% reduction. We have shown this year that partners working closely together can meet challenging targets. We are working to meet the new targets and to achieving year on year reductions in line with the Joint Delayed Discharge Action Plan. Our discussions with Rhona Brankin highlighted the challenge of meeting targets and a further meeting is being sought to secure agreement on the way ahead.

3.3 Providing sufficient care home places in Edinburgh is, of course, particularly challenging given the specific difficulties associated with our buoyant property and labour markets. These have led to the closure of four care homes in the last year with a loss of 130 places. The only way to keep care homes in the city open is to increase the payment we make to them. A report commissioned by COSLA from the Scottish Local Authorities Management Centre on care home costs (March 2004) confirms the higher cost of labour and capital in Edinburgh and recommends that an additional allowance, over and above the national figure, should be made in respect of care home places in the city. The report's findings include that, because of pressures on land, the land

cost per bed in Edinburgh may be as much as £15,000, compared with an average of £2,000 for Scotland as a whole.

4. New St Peter's and Oxgangs Primary Schools Opened

- 4.1 Over 800 nursery and primary pupils in Oxgangs and St Peter's RC schools moved into new school buildings at the start of the summer term. Staff worked hard to ensure that the move from previous accommodation went smoothly and both schools are now feeling the benefits of bright and modern facilities, designed around the needs of their school communities.
- 4.2 With the refurbishment work at Firrhill High School complete the school look forward to the completion, in June, of a new teaching block that will provide 15 general classrooms, 11 laboratories, a central work area and various science support areas. The students already have access to the new sports hall and gyms, with their full range of equipment. Remaining areas of the sports complex, such as the hydrotherapy pool will be ready for the opening of Braidburn school. Graysmill and Willowpark will close in the last week of the summer term to facilitate the move to Braidburn.
- 4.3 With work on schedule we are confidently looking forward to concluding the building construction phase of PPP1 in early June which will see over 15% of Edinburgh's school pupils learning in new buildings delivered through this contract.

5. Young Peoples Event Marks Start of Children and Families

- 5.1 To celebrate the start of the new Children and Families Department a unique event took place on the 14th April in the Old Orleans restaurant with young people from across the city. The event was organised by young people for young people in partnership with staff from the Children and Families Department.
- 5.2 The purpose of this event was to emphasise the significance of involving and engaging with young people in the development of the new Children and Families Department and to explore the variety of ways that this could occur. To highlight the importance of communication a comprehensive leaflet entitled 'The Children and Families Department: What does this mean for young people?' was launched. This leaflet had been created and designed in partnership with young people.
- 5.3 Councillor Ian Murray opened the day and reinforced the importance of involving young people in shaping the Children and Families Department. Workshop groups explored the question of 'What does the new Department mean to me?' and then considered how best they could inform other young people about it.

6. Downing Street Reception Recognises Edinburgh School Staff

- 6.1 Seven staff from Edinburgh's schools were invited to a special reception in Downing Street to thank them for their contribution to education. The reception, hosted by Prime Minister Tony Blair and Cherie Blair brought together two hundred staff from across the United Kingdom to recognise the role that the wider school staff make to their own schools and community.
- 6.2 I was delighted to learn that seven staff had been invited from Edinburgh. They were Audrey Palmer and Kate Preston, two of our primary school business managers: Paul Gray, Service Support Officer at St Margaret's Primary; Rachel McCabe and Lynne Brown, job-share Librarians at Gracemount High School; Margaret Bissett, School Secretary at Hillwood Primary and Anne Masson, Learning Assistant at Pirniehall Primary.
- 6.3 The fact so many staff from Edinburgh's schools were chosen recognises the high quality of staff we have in our city schools. The role of our support staff should not be underestimated - they contribute greatly to the smooth running of our schools and all play an important role and I would like thank not only the seven staff who went to Downing Street but all our staff for their continuing support.

7. Volunteering in Edinburgh

- 7.1 As Members may be aware 2005 is the UK Year of the Volunteer. Activities in the City will occur throughout the year across the voluntary and community sector and within the Council.
- 7.2 The annual Edinburgh Volunteers Week 2-7th June is setting the scene for the city's activities, with a range of local events including the launch of Scotland's first pilot local "Investors in Volunteering" Scheme, and a civic event co-ordinated by Volunteer Centre Edinburgh. The Volunteer Certificate Ceremony, sponsored by the Council, will occur on 7th June in the City Chambers, and be attended by both myself and the Lord Provost, who will open the accompanying exhibition "Edinburgh Volunteers – A Century of Change". This evening will provide an opportunity for over 100 nominated volunteers across Edinburgh's communities, to receive a certificate of thanks and acknowledgement of their continued commitment in helping others. A further 2,500 certificates will be distributed throughout the year across the city's volunteering sector.
- 7.3 In a complementary event, I will be hosting an evening reception "Celebrating Council Volunteers" in the City Chambers on 14th June. This occasion is aimed at those that make a regular voluntary commitment to helping the Council deliver services, or support fellow citizens to access Council services. This is a first for the Council, and will

enable me to personally present on behalf of all members a certificate of thanks, co-signed by the Lord Provost, to over 100 individuals that give their time across a diverse range of services. These include volunteer youth and childrens workers, school board members, those that support child safety, help disabled people use social care services, and those volunteers that participate in parent teacher associations, contribute to the work of libraries and museums, comprise the city's network of childrens panels and for those on equality forums that help shape Council policy and strategy.

- 7.4 The Council benefits from the support of around 2,500 regular volunteers across the city. Each will subsequently receive a certificate of thanks and I am arranging to visit a number of areas in the Council where volunteers give their time.
- 7.5 Volunteers make a huge contribution to the city and the quality of life enjoyed by its residents. Volunteers benefit also from keeping up an active lifestyle, to learning new skills and opening up employment opportunities.

8. Central Edinburgh Traffic Management

- 8.1 The CETM project took a big step forward on 15 May with the removal of general traffic from Princes Street. This project will make our city centre a safer and more pleasant place in which to work, shop and live. Eastbound general traffic was removed in 1996. This enabled us to widen the pavements on the shop side (they are now about three times their original width in places) creating more space and a safer environment for pedestrians who, on a busy day, can number more than 70,000 on Princes Street alone. Serious accidents on Princes Street dropped by 55% since cars were taken off the eastbound carriageway and accidents overall have fallen by 35%.
- 8.2 Passengers will now see a significant improvement in bus services along Princes Street – less congestion and quicker journey times. This means that the public can get in and out of the city centre quicker and have better access to shops and businesses. It is early days but this part of the project seems to have been achieved very smoothly with none of the chaos predicted in some sections of the media. I would like to express my thanks to all those involved in developing and implementing this complex project.
- 8.3 Since removing Eastbound general traffic in 1996, it has always been the intention to also remove general Westbound traffic. I have therefore been dismayed at media coverage suggesting that this is part of a conspiracy against motorists following the outcome of the Transport Edinburgh referendum. One recent Scotland on Sunday article which made this assertion also selectively quoted the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce. I was delighted to note that Ron Hewitt, Chief Executive of

the Edinburgh Chamber, clarified the true position in a letter to the paper. Ron wrote ;

“Maybe Murdo MacLeod had a particular agenda to promote regarding Edinburgh's roads last week. When he suggested that the City Council was deliberately punishing motorists for the congestion charge 'no' vote, I did say I had heard the allegation. I also totally refuted it. Your article has me, by implication, supporting this idea which I regard as totally preposterous.”

- 8.4 It is disturbing that a national newspaper will go to such lengths to manufacture a story such as this. It is very difficult to know how to respond to such an approach. This Council is not anti-car and it is truly absurd to suggest that road works would be organised to disrupt traffic. However, I think that we need to be aware that no matter how firmly it is rebutted, or how far detached from reality it is, it is seen as a good story.
- 8.5 On the positive side no-one appears to have taken it seriously. Ron Hewitt's response is typical of others I have heard, and this does highlight the difficulty of having a rational political debate on an issue as important as transport. The condition of our roads is a serious issue. I have said before that it is the Council's Achilles heel. A report is due forward in the near future to do more to repair and maintain them. If we can do so then hopefully that will contribute to a better understanding of the issues faced by the Council and the city.

9. Major Road Maintenance Works

- 9.1 As reported last month, over 200 roads and footways across the city will benefit from the £16.6m in the Capital Budget for 2005/6 for road and footway maintenance works, which is approximately £12m more than last year. I am pleased to report that the Canongate will be one of the first streets to benefit from this increased investment with both footpaths from Horse Wynd to St Mary's Street being reconstructed using natural Caithness stone. This work is expected to commence during June.

10. Ingliston and Hermiston Park and Rides

- 10.1 The construction works are nearly complete with final hand over programmed for 13 June. This will allow the bus operators approximately 4 weeks to undertake the commissioning phase. It is proposed that the official opening for both the Ingliston and Hermiston sites will take place on 17 July.

11. Bus Stop Improvements

- 11.1 This scheme has entered the second year of its three-year programme. Total funding is £945,000. Elements currently being progressed include Bus Stop Improvements, Bus Stop Clearways and monitoring a trial of providing lighting for bus shelters using solar power. If successful, and

the early signs are encouraging, we will be able to provide lighting inside new bus shelters without having to dig up the road or pavement to tap into the nearest electricity supply.

12. Haymarket Interchange

- 12.1 The Scottish Executive have granted funding of £900k for the development of a Master Plan for the Haymarket Area including a detailed feasibility study for the redevelopment of the railway station interchange. The Council is at present seeking through competitive tender a Project Manager, on a seconded basis to manage the study.

13. 20 mph zones around schools

- 13.1 A total of 38 schools have been incorporated within a full time or part time 20-mph zone installed during financial year 2004/05. Thirty-eight additional schools will be treated by April 2006, subject to available funding and the necessary public consultation and statutory processes. Schools in areas less suitable for traffic calmed 20-mph zones will have part time speed limits installed to coincide with the entry and exit times of the school.

14 Lothian Buses

Airport & Airlink service

- 14.1 As part of the continued development and expansion of Edinburgh Airport the Lothian Buses airport to City Centre express coach service, Airlink, has been relocated directly outside the terminal building immediately adjacent to the domestic check-in and arrivals exit doors. This new higher profile site will hopefully increase the number of flyers using public transport. Currently, Edinburgh Airport has the highest percentage of public transport (bus) use of any BAA airport in the UK. To complement the move, Lothian Buses have announced an order for a further 5 new double deck coaches to operate on the Airlink service and brings their total investment in new vehicles for this service to £6million since 1999. Plans are also being drawn up for a new ticketing and information centre to be located at the new bus stance.

Praised by MSPs

- 14.2 A recent Scottish Parliament Transport Committee's report applauds Edinburgh and the Lothians' main bus operator, Lothian Buses, for providing quality services and value-for-money fares.
- 14.3 The report of the Local Government and Transport Committee looks into issues arising from the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 and considers options for changes to the bus regulatory regime. Over a 7-month period (June to December 2004), the Parliamentary Committee received evidence from bus user groups, bus industry watchdogs, local

authorities, and the Confederation of Passenger Transport, as well as hearing from Nicol Stephen, the Transport Minister for Scotland, and officials from Transport for London.

- 14.4 In particular, the Committee of MSP's praises Lothian Buses on a number of occasions, viz:

“the Committee concludes that Lothian Buses delivers excellent services at good value to users.”

“The Committee was struck by the evidence it heard on the successful operation of Lothian Buses, which appears to be able to combine quality services and continuing investment in the business with both profitability and a form of public ownership.”

“The Committee was impressed with the achievements of Lothian Buses,” and the Minister, Nicol Stephen, stated, “Lothian Buses is a good example of an effective, profitable bus company that is still publicly owned.”

- 14.5 It is good to see that MSP's share the Council's high opinion of the services Lothian Buses provide for the people of Edinburgh and the near Lothians.

New Night Buses

- 14.6 As part of a package of service improvements planned for 17 July 2005, Lothian Buses will be introducing a further two Night Bus services. Like the existing ten other Night Bus services, the new N11 (Ocean Terminal – Newhaven – Pilrig - Princes Street – Tollcross – Morningside – Fairmilehead - Kaimies) and the new N31 (East Craigs – Corstorphine Rd – Princes St – Cameron Toll – Kirk Brae – Bonnyrigg), they will mirror the day-time bus services of the same number. Since the introduction of the new Night Bus network in 2002, Lothian Buses have seen passenger numbers treble and they are without doubt one of the most economical and safest ways to get home after a night out.

15. Design Initiative

- 15.1 It is now one year since we appointed Terry Farrell and Riccardo Marini as Design Champion and Design Leader respectively. In that time, both have been vocal advocates for raising design awareness amongst elected members, officials, developers and the general public. In parallel, a number of practical actions have also been introduced. These include design training initiatives for staff and members, a closer working relationship between design officers and policy staff within Planning and better and quicker communication with applicants.

- 15.2 Terry and Riccardo will doubtless be involved in the debate about how and whether we can accommodate taller buildings while preserving our

unique heritage. I look forward to this debate which I think will be a healthy exchange involving citizens, politicians and professionals in a discussion about the future shape of our city.

16. Strategic Development Team

16.1 Also within Planning there is now a special unit dealing specifically with planning applications for the Waterfront redevelopment areas. This team is now fully operational and is already proving its worth. In the last full month alone applications that will lead to an increase of 800 homes in the city's housing stock have been negotiated to approval. This team, through links with Housing colleagues, also covers the affordable housing programme.

17. Finance Department - Revenues and Benefits Division

17.1 I am delighted to report that the Division has once again been successful in obtaining funding from the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) for its Modernising Benefits agenda.

17.2 £176,000 has been obtained to allow the Division to develop a mobile computing strategy based on wireless technology which will enable benefit visiting officers to access our live computer systems from a customers home. This follows success in obtaining funding for leadership development, intelligent benefit on-line form development, image and workflow technology and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)

17.3 I am also delighted to report that following its success with SVQs the Division has been appointed as adviser to a DWP sponsored vocational qualification project to roll out benefit vocational qualifications in Wales.

18. Edinburgh Military Tattoo – Sydney

18.1 Rodney Cavalier, Chairman, Sydney Cricket & Sports Ground Trust, wrote to Brigadier Mel Jameson about the Tattoo's recent stint in the city:-

“The Tattoo knocked Sydney over. It knocked our guests over. It knocked me over.

I have not written before now, as I should have, because I was still in a state of grace about just how fine these performances were – all of them, getting better each time. It says something for any performance that no-one had a bad word to say and plenty of people had good words to say, glowing words about the music, the movement, the colour, the atmosphere. Your people provided a very rich evening of entertainment.

People travelled considerable distances, none of them had cause to regret it. Many of a Scots heritage, probably just as many did not have our heritage.

On the arena and at all times the members of the bands represented Scotland and the Tattoo with honour. Sydney felt their presence. If it is because you are military, people behaved so well, well and good. Whatever the reason, you did Scotland proud.

It was a privilege to have met you and to have hosted the Tattoo. I speak on behalf of everyone who came into the orbit of the Trustees, we had a simply marvellous time.

That final night when the military choir sang the Skye Boat Song was magic. The magic was magic you had conjured in the nights before. The performers did no more than tap into it."

19. The BUPA Great Caledonian Run

- 19.1 The return of this event to the Capital this year saw a starting line up of over 7000 runners. A glorious sunny day attracted many spectators to cheer the competitors along the scenic but demanding 10K course. An elite field saw the European athletes beat off the African challenge as Juan Carlos de la Ossa of Spain won the men's race and Yelena Prokopcuka of Latvia claimed a shock victory for the women over twice Olympic champion Derartu Tulu. The mass participation line-up included at least two colleagues with Councillor Ricky Henderson, Executive Member for Culture and Leisure, and seasoned veteran Councillor George Grubb posting highly respectable times.

20. Festival of Scottish Writing

- 20.1 The annual Festival of Scottish Writing got off to a flying start at the Central Library on 16 May, where it was formally launched by Councillor Ricky Henderson. Susan Deacon, MSP, fresh from hearing an impassioned Bob Geldof at the Scottish Parliament, also spoke warmly in support of this initiative. An exciting programme of events for all ages was compiled by staff in the Libraries division. The Festival, now in its fifth year, ran from 14 to 29 May at many libraries across the city.

21. Bookstart

- 21.1 Bookstart also celebrated its fifth birthday, at the City Arts Centre on 25 May. Bookstart, the highly-regarded literacy scheme, aims to introduce babies and toddlers to books as early as possible, hopefully fostering a love of literature, which will stay with them throughout their lives. The 'bounce and tickle' sessions are also enjoyed by adults! Local Bookstart projects are run in Craigmillar, North Edinburgh, Sighthill and Wester Hailes.

- 21.2 Libraries have also initiated an interesting project at Saughton Prison. Bookstart staff have begun working with fathers to enhance and improve their story-telling skills. In this way visiting times can become much more enjoyable and fruitful for both parents and children.

22. Positive Action Traineeship

- 22.1 The Museums Service has been working with the Scottish Museums Council, Glasgow Museums and the Black Environmental Network to host one of two traineeships targeting people from black and ethnic minorities to address under-representation in our workforce. Funding has been secured from the Scottish Museums Council and the Culture and Leisure Department's Diverse Futures Fund.
- 22.2 The successful applicant will join the museum service in June this year and will gain part-time on the job training and also undertake a part-time postgraduate course in Museum and Gallery Studies at St Andrews University. The aim of the two-year traineeship is to contribute to the creation of a more diverse workforce within the Scottish Museums Sector by increasing the representation of people from black and ethnic minority groups.

23. Museum of Childhood

- 23.1 The Museum of Childhood has been voted one of the Best Museums in Scotland. BBC Scotland's 'Where I Live' website runs a monthly feature called 'Local Knowledge' and users were asked for suggestions for 'best museum' and the Museum of Childhood was nominated as being the best in Edinburgh and Lothian.
- 23.2 One of the BBC readers wrote:

"I nominate the Museum of Childhood because, while it has toys and games which the children can play with, it is educational as well. The playground exhibit, with its soundtrack of children singing play songs, is very good for jogging your memory of your own childhood".

24. Crematorium Staff – Outstanding Customer Service

- 24.1 I was delighted to recently receive an extremely complimentary letter which praised the outstanding customer service provided by our Crematorium staff. The observation made by members of the public chimes with my own impression of our crematorium gleaned from nearly 20 years of being an elected member (and with Mortonhall crematorium within my own Ward).