



October 2012



## Opening up democracy

Taking part in or [creating a petition](#) is a new way that individuals, community groups and organisations can get involved in what the Council does. It allows people to raise issues of public concern and gives councillors the opportunity to consider the need for change.

The new Petitions Committee, chaired by Councillor Maggie Chapman one of our opposition colleagues in the Green Party, is set to consider petitions for the first time on Monday 3 December. If there is something you are keen to have considered you can get information from the Council's web pages, libraries and other Council buildings.

The committee is part of a [package of measures and a new committee structure](#) aimed at creating a more accessible and transparent organisation by opening up decision-making and improving scrutiny of the Council's work. The meeting will also be [webcast live](#) as part of a year long pilot programme aimed at opening up democracy in the city.

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## Best large European City of the Future

Edinburgh was recently awarded **Best Large European City of the Future** by fDi magazine in recognition of Edinburgh being a great place for businesses. The magazine has followed this up with a short film that looks at why Edinburgh is proving so popular for inward investment. You can view the film on [fDi's website](#).

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## Festivals contribution to Edinburgh

This summer while London hosted elite athletes and the next generation of sporting talent from around the world, Edinburgh celebrated the worldwide cultural phenomena that are Edinburgh's Festivals.

With audiences holding steady, and in some instances increasing, the impact of Edinburgh's Festivals has been shown to generate [£261 million](#) for Scotland's economy and 5242 full-time jobs in Edinburgh. What the results of summer 2012 really tell us is that Edinburgh's Festivals have this year seized the opportunities arising from the UK hosting of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The breadth and depth of [Edinburgh's festival programmes](#) with their vast array of premieres and commissions, provide the distinctive cultural offering that are the envy of cities around the world and each year attract artists, audiences and media from every continent and over 70 countries. We should be rightly proud.

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## Investing in our future

The Council invests around £11 million annually in tourism promotion and infrastructure and enjoys a strong position in the international tourism market. However, if we are to grow our success and improve on our position we need to find a way to continue to invest during a time of budget constraint.

We had been considering the potential for a transient visitor levy (TVL) or 'tourist tax'. You may have experienced this charge or heard about it when travelling to other European or American cities. However, having spoken to many in the industry, the clear view is that businesses would rather support a voluntary investment model and not be compelled to make a specific charge to customers.

We agreed at the [Policy and Strategy Committee](#) on 2 October to look at options based on the principle of a voluntary funding mechanism and will be consulting further before deciding on the best arrangements to make.

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## Trams

The project is making good, steady progress and every effort is being made to complete work early in the revised schedule where possible. Passenger services from the airport to York Place are scheduled to run by summer 2014. Now 22 trams have been delivered to the tram depot, with the remainder to be delivered by the end of November 2012.

The main utility diversions are on target to be cleared by November 2012, substantially reducing the risk of the project schedule slipping. The construction of the civil engineering and system elements of the project are also progressing well, with a significant amount of track construction underway. A number of areas are presently ahead of schedule.

A more detailed report is being considered at Council on 25 October. This will go live on the Council's [committee papers online](#) system in the week beginning 22 October 2012.

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## Bin collection changes

On 10 September we introduced changes to bin collections which affected nearly 160,000 properties. The scale and complexity of these changes were bigger than any our waste services have seen in decades. Even so, there is no denying that the recent level of disruption to the bin collection service experienced by some residents has been unacceptable.

Although progress has been made I recognise that for some, the service is unfortunately still not what it should be. I would like to reassure these residents that getting this right is our highest priority and we will continue to listen and resolve these matters as quickly as possible.

However, by introducing this managed weekly recycling and waste collections, we will make significant improvements in recycling rates and this will reduce what the Council spends on landfill tax by up to £2.4 million per year.

I will be pushing for the service to learn from its mistakes and to continue to make it easier for all residents to recycle more to help protect our environment for future generation. Further progress reports including improvements to customer complaint handling will be looked at the Transport and Environment Committee. This will go live on the Council's [committee papers online](#) system on Monday 19 November 2012.

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## Portobello High School

We desperately need a new school and in the shortest possible timeframe. Following recent legal challenges to building on our preferred site on Portobello Park, a huge amount of work has gone into looking at all the options available to us.

These options are recorded in some detail in the [report to Council on 25 October](#) which highlights that we are pursuing several of them simultaneously. We are examining the potential to challenge the recent legal decision not to build on the preferred site while at the same time looking at potential alternative sites.

We need to make a decision quickly and a further report will be considered at the next Council meeting on 22 November.

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