



One year on...

A year has passed since we formed the SNP-Labour coalition here in the Capital. In laying out our priorities last summer, we committed ourselves to improving the quality of life of all residents, enhancing the environment, delivering better infrastructure and building on what is already a fantastic place to live, work and visit.

Edinburgh is a vibrant, thriving city that is experiencing huge economic growth but at the heart of this Coalition is our commitment to improve opportunity, increase inclusion and tackle inequality and poverty. Building thousands of new affordable homes, opening outstanding new schools and supporting hundreds of young apprentices each year are just some of the ways in which we can ensure everyone has the best chance to be involved in and benefit from that growth.

Some of the positive steps we are taking towards these goals are featured in my regular update below but there are many more in the pipeline, such as: the imminent signing of the City Deal, confirming over £1bn of investment in the region; plans for a new Meadowbank Sports Centre; a campaign to promote the next stages of our Edinburgh 2050 Vision project; and, as I reported last month, our ongoing efforts to secure the powers to introduce a Transient Visitor Levy.

Our five-year programme is a bold one that will take a great deal of hard work to deliver. But we've made real inroads in our first year and, with our smarter performance measurement tool, the city will be able to track our progress in the coming years as we deliver for the people of Edinburgh.

Sharing in our success

Promoting inclusion and innovation are at the heart of our new [Economy Strategy](#), approved by councillors earlier this month. This is an important shift in the focus of our work and will help to ensure that all growth is accessible to everyone.

Although Edinburgh remains the second most prosperous UK city outside London, we recognise that jobs growth alone has not been enough to tackle the inequality that still exists. As such, I'm looking forward to working with the public, private and third sectors to fully exploit every opportunity to promote, advance and sustain good growth practices that will benefit all of our residents.

The strategy is based around three key themes: inclusion, innovation and collaboration and includes eight steps, all with action plans. It fits in well with the most recent Scottish Government Economic Strategy and UK Industrial Strategy, both of which have placed increasing emphasis on the need for inclusive growth in Edinburgh, and its delivery will be a big step towards achieving our coalition objectives.

Bold actions to tackle homelessness

Preventing homelessness remains a key priority for us – and so I'm encouraged to see that our Homelessness Task Force has made a number of [bold recommendations](#) to further that work. When implemented, they will improve the quality of life for some of the most vulnerable people in the city.

We want to move towards the ending of B&B use as temporary accommodation, particularly for families, but this will take time. So, in the mean time, we are ensuring B&Bs allow people to wash their clothes, store food and cook during their stay. Service users will also be able to rate the accommodation they are living in so that we can monitor feedback in real time.

At the same time, we are increasing the number of beds available for those sleeping rough through the Rapid Access Programme. And we've committed to finding better solutions for young people requiring temporary accommodation.

We will be applying for funds raised by Social Bite at Sleep in the Park for support packages for homeless people with complex needs using the Housing First model. And, in order that homeless people can get quicker access to a permanent home, the EdIndex board has also agreed to provide an additional 275 homes for homeless people to access through the allocations process. This is precisely the type of innovative partnership working that will lead us to finally making homelessness a thing of the past.

Further progress on Health & Social Care

Last week's meeting of the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board saw universal endorsement for the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership's [Primary Care Improvement Plan](#). The report outlines the Partnership's plans to implement the new 'General Medical Services Contract' and details how, working with colleagues in primary care, we will support a sustainable and stable model for the future.

This support from the EIJB is another positive step for the Partnership coming on the back of the approval of the [Plan for Immediate Pressures and Longer-Term Sustainability](#) last month, which highlighted the areas of investment that will deliver continued and lasting improvements for the IJB and the people it supports.

It's no secret that we face significant challenges in health and social care. However, I am confident in the Partnership's plans to address these and that their approach, which includes a shift towards preventative and early intervention activity, will see a real reduction in dependency on emergency hospital care.

Taking trams to Newhaven

Plans for taking trams to Newhaven continue to take shape, helped enormously by the very welcome input of the local Leith community. I was particularly encouraged by the strong collaborative approach taken by the attendees at our [first design workshop last week](#), which looked at a series of options to make the section between Pilrig Street and the Foot of the Walk as accessible as possible for walking and cycling.

One option – with significantly widened footways and segregated cycleways on both sides of Leith Walk as well as protected loading for businesses – emerged as a clear favourite. The project team will now examine a number of outstanding issues and bring back their recommendations to another workshop next week.

The team has already made a number of amendments to the plans, using feedback submitted during the six weeks of public consultation in March and April. These include moving the Balfour Street tram stop to maintain access for Balfour Street and Cambridge Gardens residents and introducing three new signalised pedestrian crossings between Pilrig Street and the Foot of the Walk.

We continue to work extremely hard to make sure the proposals we'll eventually vote on as a Council later this year are as community-based as possible, and deliver the best road layout for everyone who's going to use the route, whether as a resident, shopper, commuter or visitor.

Changes to Garden Waste

When we set our Budget back in February, we decided to introduce a charge for garden waste collections, a non-statutory service. By doing so we'll be saving around £1.3m, helping us to continue providing essential services like education, road repairs, social care and housing.

By charging a small amount of £25 a year for brown bin collections – which works out at less than 50p a week – we'll be able to continue providing the service while increasing the frequency from every three weeks to fortnightly.

The changes will come into effect from October and, over the coming weeks we'll be writing to households with tips and advice on the changes, and how to sign up. There's [lots of information on our website](#), where you can sign up, as well as guidance for anyone who no longer wants to have their brown bin collected.

If you receive a Council Tax reduction, you will continue to receive brown bin collections for free. But please note you'll still have to register for the service.

The show must go on

The Edinburgh International Film Festival is now fully underway and, to me, the event always signals the start of our busy festival season. And, I'm pleased to say a first flick through the programmes for the Film, Jazz, Book, Fringe, Tattoo and International Festivals suggests this year's events are going to be as ground-breaking as ever.

This summer marks the 40th anniversary of the city's beloved Jazz and Blues Festival and to celebrate, stars who have performed over the last four decades will make a return. It's sure to be a great celebration of music making.

At the Fringe, theatre productions inspired by the *#MeToo* movement will debut, while over at the Book Festival, the First Minister will interview author Ali Smith about Brexit. These events are constantly reinventing themselves and are always relevant, and it is because of this that Edinburgh remains the world's best Festival City.

Year on year, it takes a lot of forward planning and nimble work by Council staff at all levels to support the delivery of our festivals and keep the city moving, and we'll be supporting our Festival partners to get the show on the road once more.

George Grubb

Earlier this week, I joined hundreds of people at the funeral of the Reverend Dr George Grubb.

A former athlete, parish minister, councillor for Queensferry and the first ever Liberal Democrat to become Lord Provost of Edinburgh, George will be widely remembered as a true gentleman of local politics and a man of great community spirit.

I regret only meeting him a handful of times since becoming Council Leader, but I know I speak on behalf of many current and past colleagues when I say he will be remembered fondly by all who knew him.

On behalf of myself, the Council and everybody in the city he represented for so long, I wish to pass on my sincere condolences to his wife Liz and the rest of the family.

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