



### ***Tourist and workplace parking levy success***

We're another step closer to gaining the powers to introduce a Transient Visitor Levy (TVL) or 'tourist tax'. This comes courtesy of the Finance Minister's welcome announcement yesterday that the Scottish Government will bring forward the necessary legislation in Parliament as part of the SNP/Green budget deal.

After many months of robust research and feedback, and assuming councillors approve the [finalised case](#) following our consultation, we will submit our proposals to Ministers and MSPs for their consideration with a view to Edinburgh becoming the first council in the UK to introduce a levy.

We have been clear throughout that an Edinburgh TVL should reflect the needs and interests of everyone in the city, including our citizens, businesses and the hospitality industry. I'm confident our proposals offer a fair scheme which will be simple to implement but we'll continue to work closely with industry to ensure our scheme works for everyone.

The Scottish Government's indication of acceptance of the Green amendment to the Transport Bill will also allow us to explore further the introduction of a 'Workplace Parking Levy', which could provide much-needed revenue to invest in public transport, active travel and other key public services while tackling congestion. This policy already formed part of our [Programme for the Capital](#) so I'm looking forward now to having a more thorough conversation with the city about the prospects of taking this forward.

### ***Still time to have your say on our budget proposals***

What also became clear yesterday in Holyrood was an improvement in the grant settlement we are set to receive from the Scottish Government.

We are currently analysing the figures in more detail but we will now have more flexibility when considering our spending and saving options when we set our budget for the next financial year (on 21 February).

While we will undoubtedly still have to make some tough decisions, this doesn't mean we've lost our ambition for our city or our commitment to protect those services that we know our most vulnerable residents rely upon.

A number of the proposals have already been well documented in the press but I would urge you to read directly what is being proposed in our [change strategy](#) and give us your feedback on what this will mean for you. You can [take part online](#) until 11 February and [contact your local councillor](#) ahead of our budget meeting later this month.

### ***New Edinburgh Living homes welcome first tenants***

Our new and very welcome housing partnership with Scottish Futures Trust is already delivering much-needed affordable housing in the city. Edinburgh Living will deliver around 1,500 new affordable homes over the next five years with the first 44 high quality energy efficient homes at Clermiston now ready for tenants.

The new development has 22 flats to be let at mid-market rent while the rest will be retained by the Council for social rent. There's already been huge interest – with over 50 viewings – and I'm sure the tenants will be delighted with their new homes when they move in. There's been a real effort, not only to provide quality homes, but also the facilities that people value, such as drying greens, storage and terraced landscape gardens.

The proposal to set up the Edinburgh Living partnership formed part of the City Region Deal, signed in August 2018. The initial homes will be delivered as part of our award-winning housebuilding programme, which is targeting 20,000 new affordable homes over the next 10 years, as part of a joint commitment for the city with housing association partners.

### ***Top marks for new Queensferry High School***

We've reached another major milestone in our latest school project with a special topping out ceremony held for the [new Queensferry High](#), which is due to open in spring 2020.

It's a great example of what we are trying to achieve around designing and building our schools for the future – much-needed community facilities easily accessible to the public, a more inclusive environment promoting greater health and wellbeing and above all a modern, fit-for-purpose building.

There's plenty more on the drawing board, with six more high schools identified in our £207m Wave 4 programme, and planning applications submitted for a replacement Victoria Primary School, a new primary in south east Edinburgh and a new nursery at Craigentenny Primary – all ensuring we can give our children the best start in life.

## ***Garden waste – sign up for this year’s service***

Gardeners all over Edinburgh will be eagerly anticipating milder temperatures and the chance to get their green spaces spruced back up. If you haven’t already signed up for our fortnightly garden waste collection service, we’re opening another registration window from 4 to 19 February. This is your last opportunity to sign up for collections running throughout the summer until October.

The price remains fixed at £25 per brown bin and the revenue raised is enabling us to channel over £1.4m into essential services. We introduced the new service back in October alongside a significant shake-up in household waste and recycling collections. A change on this scale was always going to prove challenging, however residents are quite right to be frustrated by the level service they’ve received in recent months.

My colleague Cllr Lesley Macinnes left senior management in no doubt as to what is expected of them and a number of actions are underway to get collections back on track. I’m pleased that these are having an impact, with complaints dropping substantially week-on-week since the middle of last month. We’re keeping a very close eye on progress to make sure these improvements continue so that we can deliver the high standard of service residents deserve and expect.

## ***Brexit – EU Nationals are Edinburghers on equal terms***

As an international capital city, Edinburgh’s workforce depends on the contribution and talent of staff from all over the globe. In this highly uncertain time, when the wrangling and debating over Brexit continues to dominate the news agenda, people are understandably anxious about what this all means for family members, friends and work colleagues.

It’s a mark of Edinburgh’s continued appeal as place to live, work, visit and study that the Capital is home to far more EU nationals – around 40,000 – than any other Scottish city. And the Council employs more staff hailing from EU countries than any other Scottish local authority – five per cent of our workforce.

We’re acutely aware that as citizens of EU countries, many of our residents face a period of uncertainty. We’re working hard to provide timely and relevant support and guidance to our own staff throughout this unsettling period, and we’d urge all organisations in the city to do likewise.

No-one yet knows for certain how the Brexit saga will play out and these are worrying times for us all. I want to reassure all our residents that we will do whatever we can to make sure the Capital is in the strongest possible position – and continues to offer the warmest possible welcome – whatever the outcome.

## ***Burnshot Bridge replacement***

The reconstruction of Burnshot Bridge is a major project for the Council, and I know how much this transport link means to the community too, so I’m delighted that we’ve now completed the design, and are aiming to begin construction before summer.

This is an extremely complex project and its progress is dependent on a number of factors, but we’ve been liaising with residents, businesses and local groups throughout to keep them up-to-date with its development. We’ve also been consulting closely with active travel groups and other stakeholders to ensure the new design meets the needs of all users – which I’m confident it does.

I’d like to take the opportunity to thank the local community for their patience as we deliver this essential improvement to our transport infrastructure.

## ***A century of Lothian buses***

It’s hard to imagine the city without them – from the moment they appeared on our streets 100 years ago, Lothian buses have been serving all corners of the Capital continuously. Edinburgh – and the buses – might have changed immeasurably since then, but what hasn’t changed is the quality of the award-winning service, which has gone from strength-to-strength.

As we celebrate Lothian’s centenary, it’s a chance to look forward, and this week, they’ll launch their ambitious Bus 2020 strategy. Lothian, the largest bus provider in the city, is already making great strides towards reducing air pollution in Edinburgh and I’m looking forward to working with them on their commitment to replace their whole fleet with low emission vehicles by 2020.

Sustainable travel is central to our vision for Edinburgh, where residents and visitors benefit from a reliable, environmentally-friendly and integrated public transport system worthy of a major Capital, and where trams run alongside buses to connect people seamlessly from A to B. It’s clear that Lothian is essential to achieving this, and I’m confident that they will continue to evolve to meet the city’s needs for many years to come.

## ***Counting down to Chinese New Year***

Scotland’s largest ever celebration of Chinese New Year will kick off tomorrow (2 February), promising a fortnight of live music, lectures, bright lanterns and a brand new gallery of East Asian history at the National Museum of Scotland.

Recognising the steady growth of the Capital’s Scots-Chinese community and the city’s appeal to Chinese visitors, the festival aspires to develop and amplify Edinburgh as a vibrant place to enjoy Chinese New Year with a Scottish twist. And from bespoke Chinese New Year cocktails in bars along George Street to gifts of lucky red envelopes in shops like Harvey Nichols, I’m pleased to see the business community actively joining in the celebrations too.

As we celebrate the Year of the Pig on 6 February, it will be a great chance to learn more about Chinese culture and I hope people from all backgrounds and all walks of life feel welcome to take part in what is going to be our best [Chinese New Year Festival](#) yet.

## ***Get involved***

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