



Steering the Capital towards a brighter future

We're about to take a decision crucial to Edinburgh's future growth and prosperity – whether or not to proceed with taking trams to Newhaven. This isn't simply a transport decision; it's about helping the Capital's economy grow sustainably as more than 100,000 new residents will call our city home over the next two decades.

Trams are key to unlocking brownfield development sites in the north of the city – creating homes, jobs and connecting thousands of people to major employment, leisure and travel hubs in an accessible way that cuts down congestion on our already busy road network.

Through extensive consultation and engagement with the local community and stakeholder groups, the project team have built up respect and mutual trust – and I want to thank them for getting the business case to this stage.

It's a robust case that takes on board lessons from the first project, incorporates a very conservative risk allocation, meets our key commitments to support businesses through construction and highlights significant benefits for communities in Leith, Newhaven and north Edinburgh – and, crucially, doesn't add any pressure to council budgets.

Transforming our city centre

Last week's Transport and Environment Committee marked not one, but two major decisions on the future of sustainable, inclusive transport in the city, when members approved the key aims of our ambitious [City Centre Transformation](#) project.

We are a modern, growing Capital, facing many of the same pressures as other cities of this size. It's clear that we need to reassess the way we manage our centre if we're to create a city fit for the future. What's heartening is that the public evidently share this desire. A remarkable 88% of the 5,000+ respondents to our major consultation told us they wanted to see changes made – with more than half calling for radical measures to deliver a more liveable environment.

Our people-centred approach to managing the city is about so much more than transport solutions. By putting people at the heart of our thinking, whether by increasing pedestrian space, enhancing public transport connections or creating more outdoor areas for the public to sit and relax, we see the transformation of our city centre as an enabler for improving communities, driving economic growth while creating a better and more vibrant environment to spend time in.

Investing in our ambition for the city

Last month our Council passed the [second budget of this administration](#). This is a budget that will protect frontline services, invest in services for young people and the city's most vulnerable residents whilst also continuing to invest in the huge ambition we have for the city – ensuring our economy and public services are more inclusive so everyone can enjoy the benefits of sustainable and well-managed growth.

One of the most important aspects of the budget-setting process has been listening to the public to find out where they want us to spend and save. In the year ahead, we're investing significantly in schools and early years, we're committing record levels of investment in our roads, including almost £30m on potholes and resurfacing works, and we're allocating up to an additional £16m to address the increasing demands on our health and social care services.

Thanks to feedback from more than 2,700 residents, we were able to change and add to our budget proposals, for example restoring funding for teachers in nurseries and providing transitional funding for Marketing Edinburgh.

Commission finds out first-hand what it's like living in poverty

We're determined to make sure that all residents can share in Edinburgh's success – and tackling poverty and understanding its causes are central to this.

At their first meeting last year, the [Edinburgh Poverty Commission](#) committed to putting people at the heart of their work – and that's exactly what they've been doing. In the past fortnight, members have visited the Moredun Multis, hearing from residents about their challenges, speaking to advisers at the Granton Information Centre and volunteering at the Tron Church Foodbank to find out first-hand the challenges facing our most vulnerable citizens.

This first phase of work has been focusing on 'pockets' – the pressures that keep incomes low and living costs high for people. Attention will then turn to 'prospects' (attainment, skills, career progression and wellbeing) before considering 'places' (housing, transport, and community services).

The Commissioners will present their recommendations for change by the end of the year; recommendations that will be for all partners across the city to take forward as we work together to better support our citizens and tackle the devastating and unnecessary impacts of poverty and deprivation in Edinburgh.

Street begging research is first step in long term strategy

Alongside this news on the work of the Poverty Commission, this week saw the [publication of important research](#) by the Edinburgh Community Safety Partnership and partners Shelter, lifting a lid on the hardships of those begging on Edinburgh's streets.

The report is the first detailed piece of research into begging undertaken in any UK city for 20 years. It documents reasons behind begging, what people's lives are really like as well as their struggle day-to-day. The report confirms that not all rough sleepers beg and not all those begging are sleeping rough – but this shouldn't be interpreted as people having access to secure accommodation. Street begging is a hugely complex issue and, whilst we all want to help people to move on from begging, we must first improve our understanding of it.

This research is just a first step along the road to producing a strategy to support people into positive destinations but I am proud that Edinburgh has been first to commission this long overdue and important work.

Closing the skills gap with the City Region Deal

Helping people improve their skills has a direct impact on their employability and making our economy more inclusive. The [City Region Deal Joint Committee](#) has now approved the skills programme that will help thousands of people gain the skills they need to succeed in key sections of the Deal such as construction and data innovation.

The Committee also welcomed funding for the Edinburgh Futures Institute based at the former Royal Infirmary, which will see scores of researchers working alongside businesses in growth sectors such as FinTech and Creative Industries to explore how data-driven innovation can unlock solutions, including improvement in public services.

These are just the latest in a long line of examples demonstrating how City Region Deal funding is being used to unlock opportunities in the future and, crucially, help everyone share in the region's economic growth going forward.

Leith Walk By-Election approaches

Fulfilling the role of a local councillor is an extremely rewarding and interesting job, something I've learned from nearly seven years representing the Leith ward. Following Marion Donaldson's departure from the neighbouring Leith Walk ward, we're now on the look-out for a new representative to take up this responsibility, with a by-election scheduled for 11 April.

Our elections team work very hard to ensure votes such as these run smoothly, and they're already raising awareness of key dates in advance of the by-election. Poll cards will soon be hitting the doormats of constituents who have registered to vote, but I would encourage anyone in the area who is eligible, and who hasn't already, to register by 26 March, ensuring councillors can truly represent the people who live there.

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