



December 2017

Schools review

I want to begin this month's report by reassuring you that the guiding principle behind our [review of schools](#) in the west and south west of Edinburgh is to improve the learning opportunities for our children, helping us to deliver on our goal of narrowing the attainment gap. It is absolutely right that we prioritise learning needs and focus on our aspirations for all our pupils and future generations.

We fully appreciate there are many questions and comments from parents and school communities about the review and I want to repeat our pledge that we will take on board all of them and any impact it may have on schools and community facilities.

Please remember this is purely an informal consultation and no decisions have been made. Nothing can be taken forward without a statutory consultation so the ongoing feedback from local communities is welcome as we shape any future proposals.

Homelessness provision

You may remember from last month's report that we have created a cross-party task force to address the unprecedented pressures facing our homelessness services.

I'm delighted, therefore, that we've now been able to announce the provision (via the EdIndex Partnership) of 275 permanent housing association and council homes over an 18-month period for homeless people living in Edinburgh. This is in addition to the thousand-plus social lets already provided each year.

A range of new support services will also be piloted in partnership with third sector providers to assist tenants to remain in their homes.

This is a valuable addition to the work already being done with our partners across the city to support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, from support and advice on housing options, to assessment services and permanent and temporary accommodation.

Still time to #PlayYourPart

A big thank you to the 1000+ of you who have already taken the time to [share your views](#) in this year's budget engagement and, whilst the response so far has been encouraging, we're still keen to hear as many views as possible (between now and 19 December).

As part of this, we hosted our annual 'Question Time' event last Monday and members of the public took the opportunity to quiz our panel of senior Councillors on the Council services that mattered to them.

It was a lively debate, with the Chair, Evening News' Euan McGrory, taking contributions from

the floor and from those watching at home. The panel was challenged about budget proposals for 2018/19, the proposed tram line to Newhaven, a possible tourist tax, our health and social care service and the introduction of a charge for garden waste. If you didn't catch it live, you can still [watch the webcast](#) on our archive.

Health and Social Care update

I've spoken at length in this report about the challenges facing our Health and Social Care service. I therefore welcome the report going to the next meeting of the Integration Joint Board (IJB) outlining an [ambitious improvement plan](#) for the New Year. Councillors will have a further opportunity to scrutinise the plan at a special meeting of the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee in January.

The improvement programme, is focused on doing the basics well, improving performance and quality, strengthening governance, and growing important relationships with partners and stakeholders. It will also see the development of long-term plans to resolve the outstanding issues

The IJB is also making progress on the recruitment of a new Chief Officer. The Board, Council and NHS Lothian have agreed the process, with a closing date for applications of 12 December. This should see an appointment in early Spring.

Time for a tourist tax

The case for the introduction of a transient visitor levy, or tourist tax, isn't a new one, but it's a strong one. As is the (growing) body of opinion behind it. The public backing at last week's 'Question Time' event certainly indicated broad support amongst the people of Edinburgh.

The city welcomes over four million visitors a year, worth some £1.3bn to the national economy, with around 60% of visitors going on to see other parts of the country. Our world-class cultural offer is also a vital stimulus for the region's wider creative and service industries and its attractiveness to skilled workers, businesses and students.

I believe the next stage is a consultation with industry leaders and the Scottish Government. We need a clear, balanced and thoughtful debate, considering the merits and disadvantages of every option. Reaching an agreement on the best route forward, with everything on the table.

With an appropriate level of funding in place, Edinburgh would be in the position to support our thriving hospitality industry, protect and build on our cultural and heritage offering, support existing festivals, afford global destination marketing campaigns and create new events to entice visitors into the city all year round.

State of the estate

You may have read reports in the media regarding a recent condition survey of the Council's estate, which set out the financial challenges we face in keeping our buildings properly maintained and fit for purpose.

The estimated cost of bringing all buildings up to a good or satisfactory standard in the next five years is £153.5m. We currently have £20m committed in our capital budget with a further £70m available over the next five years. This leaves a shortfall of around £60m to bring the entire estate up to our desired condition and prevent further deterioration.

I am acutely aware of the magnitude of the challenge we face and that many of our properties require significant investment. We are working hard with council officers to find a way of addressing the problem and I've written to the Scottish Government to request a meeting to discuss potential future funding that could help in areas, such as schools. Our property team is also working extremely hard to ensure that all of our buildings are as well used and, of course, safe.

Celebrating young talent

Congratulations to the 17 young people who celebrated the completion of their modern apprenticeships at a graduation ceremony at the City Chambers last week. I am delighted that we are helping them make such a positive step at this very important stage of their lives.

The programme brings great benefits to the young people themselves while, at the same time, making a direct and valued contribution to our workplaces. They are employed across a range of occupations including business administration, joinery, highway maintenance, procurement, health and social care and arboriculture and horticulture.

We currently have 68 apprentices working in the Council and we are planning to recruit around another 40 in the coming year. The vision of the [Edinburgh Guarantee](#) continues to grow across the city as companies are pledging jobs, paid work experience and training and mentoring every day. Since it launched six years ago, together we have helped 263 young people through the Modern Apprentice Programme.

Farewell to a sporting legend

Last Sunday, having served our city so well over the past 50 years, Meadowbank Stadium closed its doors for the final time.

Built for the Commonwealth Games in 1970 (and then having hosted it again in 1986), many athletes and sportsmen and women – professional and amateur - from across the world, together with the thousands of spectators cheering from the stands, will have great memories from within its walls and around its track.

By reaching this milestone and starting the work to decommission the old building, a new era has now begun. A planning application will be submitted in the New Year; the next step towards the creation of a state-of-the-art sporting facility that residents from across the city can enjoy for decades to come.

Season's greetings

Since 1947, Edinburgh has welcomed the world to enjoy its festivals and, I am happy to say, 2017 brought us one of our most successful summer seasons of celebrations on record.

To send off this milestone 70th anniversary year, our Hogmanay festivities will feature a spectacular three-day party with an extended *Midnight Moment* fireworks display above Edinburgh Castle. We have gained a reputation in Edinburgh as one of the best places in the world to count down to the new year, and with 60,000 partygoers expected to join us on the 31st alone, it looks like this year's events will be no different.

Our Christmas attractions will of course remain open until 6 January, and we'll also be launching a [new light project with author Val McDermid](#) to cheer up the dark nights of January.

All that remains for me to do is to wish you a very Merry Christmas and all the best for 2018!

Get involved

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