



January 2018

Work in progress

Last summer, we published our '[Programme for the Capital](#)', setting out our commitments for the five years to 2022, with a particular focus on delivering improved services for Edinburgh's residents and communities.

I'm pleased with the progress we have made thus far but I want to ensure that we remain a coalition of action and that [our commitments remain relevant to the emerging challenges we face as a city](#).

Having received further details of our funding settlement from the Scottish Government, we are working closely with officers to determine how this affects our budget assumptions for the coming financial year – and, with that, the extent to which we can invest in priority areas, such as Health & Social Care. We will then agree our 2018/19 budget on 22 February. In the meantime, I remain in regular contact with Scottish Ministers to ensure our settlement is as good a deal as it can be for Edinburgh.

Of course, some of these milestones have been in the diary for some time, such as the opening of our new Boroughmuir High School, but I'm confident that this represents an ambitious plan for the first half of 2018.

Where possible, and relevant, we will provide more detail around new initiatives in the coming months and, of course, report back on our progress.

Year of Young People

We have so much to celebrate about our young people in this fantastic city and so it's fitting that we launched [Edinburgh's involvement in Year of Young People 2018](#) with a special event at the City Chambers last week.

The evening, hosted by my colleague and deputy Education convener, Cllr Alison Dickie, celebrated the achievements of young people in the Capital with over 30 of them receiving their Duke of Edinburgh Silver Awards, accompanied by some very entertaining musical performances by our school pupils. Read more about [Alison's hopes for the year ahead](#) and taking our children more seriously.

I'm delighted also that a looked-after young person is going to be invited to co-chair the Corporate Parenting Group and the Young People in Care Council. It's really important we do what we can to ensure our future generations are able to shape the decisions that affect them.

Taking homelessness to task

I don't for one minute pretend to know how it feels to be homeless but my involvement in last month's [Sleep in the Park](#) gave me a taste of what it is like to sleep out in sub-zero temperatures. And it wasn't at all pleasant. All credit, then, to Social Bite who did a great job raising over £4m to support homeless people all over Scotland. I look forward to working with them on projects they are taking forward in Edinburgh.

Of course, the Council is already carrying out a huge amount of work in this area and our new cross-party homelessness task force met for the first time at the end of last year and made some bold commitments for us to deliver by the summer.

One particular focus will be on ending the use of B&B accommodation for families, young people and care leavers, while trying to reduce use of these properties overall. Increasing the stock of temporary accommodation, as well as continuing the reduction in homelessness presentations and implementing the 'Housing First' approach should all help to achieve this.

Hub of activity

We're making it easier than ever for the public to access Council services, with the opening of the new and improved Customer Hub at 249 High Street. Earlier this month, I paid a visit to see the refurb, which I'm pleased to say has created a much more user-friendly space, making it simpler for people to come in and make payments and applications.

As well as the introduction of self-serve kiosks, our new automated 'q-matic' reception service means customers can avoid queueing and take a seat while they wait to be seen. The space has undergone an impressive renovation too, with a better layout and redecoration – much of which has made use of existing equipment and furniture – contributing to a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere.

This has been particularly important for the relocation of Registration Services from Lothian Chambers. It's essential that visitors are met with a friendly and sympathetic environment at what can be a difficult, or equally joyous, time while registering a birth, death or marriage. We are now able to offer space for confidential meetings, tailored desk points and new, fresh surroundings for appointments, and I'm delighted to hear that customer feedback has been extremely positive so far.

Water of Leith flood prevention

Earlier this week, we marked a major milestone with the official completion of phase two of the [Water of Leith Flood Prevention Scheme](#) at Murrayfield. Not only was this ahead of schedule but was also significantly under budget, which is thanks to the hard work and excellent project management of the team involved.

Now, more than 400 homes in the area, which was amongst the worst hit by the severe floods of 2000, will benefit from flood defence walls and embankments along 1.2km of the river at Murrayfield and Roseburn, as well as nearby properties like Murrayfield Stadium and the Ice Rink.

We've worked closely with the community to ensure that those strolling along the banks of the river will gain from the scheme too, with enhancements to the riverside walkway, two new bridges and improvements to Roseburn Park delivered as part of the project.

Picardy Place designs revised

Plans to revamp one of the key gateways into Edinburgh's World Heritage Site are now a step closer after yesterday's special meeting of the Transport and Environment Committee [approved updated designs for Picardy Place](#).

Around 1,000 public responses helped shape the revised designs, which now include improved public space on the island site, as well as plans to further increase pedestrian space outside St Mary's RC Cathedral and at the foot of Little King Street. Better provision for pedestrians and cyclists also emerged strongly from the feedback submitted during our extended consultation and are now reflected in the new designs.

As a cyclist and frequent bus user myself, I know from first-hand experience how poorly Picardy Place currently functions. The proposed new layout will provide the most effective solution for the needs of all road users and give us flexibility to adapt the design to respond to changing transport needs in future years.

Final phase for 20mph rollout

After almost 18 months of hard work, I'm delighted we're now on the home straight towards becoming Scotland's first 20mph city, with the [last phase](#) due to go live in South Edinburgh on 5 March.

We began the citywide roll-out back in July 2016 after in-depth public consultation revealed the majority of Edinburgh residents wanted calmer speeds on residential, shopping and city centre streets. This is backed up by a [nationwide survey](#), which found that 65% of Scots support 20mph becoming the default urban speed limit.

Keep an eye out for 20mph signs and lines going down from Greenbank to Fairmilehead, Oxbgangs to Colinton on all but a strategic network of 30mph and 40mph roads over the coming weeks.

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