



**June 2020**

## ***Leaving lockdown, one step at a time***

There's no question the past three months have been incredibly tough, but I'm proud of how our communities, council colleagues and frontline workers have come together. Working as one city we've managed to protect people's health and support our most vulnerable residents. Together, we've worked to control the spread of Covid-19, adapting our lives – and our usual ways of working – to deal with some of the biggest challenges Edinburgh has ever faced.

Thanks to sticking to the guidance, we've reached a stage where families and friends can be reunited again. I'm sure many parents will be delighted to hear that plans are now being put in place to open up our play parks, while couples will be pleased that weddings can now start to take place.

The message is still very much about staying close to home but, with non-essential shops set to open up at the end of the month, this will provide a much needed boost to local businesses and help to secure jobs. I would encourage everyone who can to shop local wherever possible. We're doing what we can, helping businesses to do things differently by providing advice and licenses for outdoor spaces – as well as improving the environment around them through our 'Spaces for People' programme.

Meanwhile, after many months of lying still, the dozens of cranes which rise above the Edinburgh skyline are finally on the move again, with vital construction projects such as the building of new homes, schools, [Trams to Newhaven](#) and other transport improvements progressing once more.

Edinburgh really is starting to emerge on the other side of this crisis, but we need to leave lockdown one step at a time. The virus is still amongst us and we must all do our bit to suppress it and prevent further spread. I understand how difficult that is when the warmer weather provides a welcome opportunity for us to safely meet up with loved ones outdoors, but we must use common sense. Physical distancing remains in place for one very important reason – to save lives.

## ***Black Lives Matter***

The peaceful protests that have taken place in Edinburgh over recent weekends have been an incredible show of the strength of feeling for the Black Lives Matter movement. There is no place for prejudice of any kind and at any time and, while the Capital is an increasingly diverse and welcoming city, we are absolutely committed to addressing racism in all its forms.

We recognise the need to review commemorations in the City with close links to slavery and colonialism, including public statues and monuments, street and building names. Telling our City's history accurately is important and [a new plaque is now being installed](#) at the foot of the statue of Henry Dundas in St Andrew Square to explain better who he was – specifically detailing the role he played in delaying the abolition of slavery.

We're also reviewing our museum and gallery collections to help present new and more accurate perspectives on the City's art and artefacts. We're speaking with young BAME people, parents and staff of Wardie Primary School to re-examine the school's playground mural, which acts as a reminder that people once thought differently from the way we do today.

As an employer, too, we're working closely with our BAME network to listen and identify any changes we could make in our organisation – making sure everyone feels valued and listened to on equal terms.

## ***Adapting our services to deliver more support***

Throughout this crisis, we've worked hard to deliver Council services to those who need them most and, as we emerge from lockdown, we must continue to provide this support.

Working with partners, we've helped to deliver 10,000 food parcels to vulnerable people across the City. Over £1m has been paid out to families in school meal payments and a further £1m in [Crisis Grants](#) and Community Care grants have been paid to those who've needed additional support getting by. We've also helped around 8,000 local businesses to get grant funding, paying out over £104m in [business support grants](#), while helping to accommodate many people at risk of rough sleeping.

As restrictions lift, we're working to [bring other services back](#) as quickly and safely as we can. Already, most of our waste collection services are running to pre-Covid schedules and teachers have returned to school. The truth is, however, that we still have a long way to go. We're having to make really difficult decisions about the safest way to deliver services without putting our workers and residents at risk. Our number one priority at all times has to be the health of the people of Edinburgh.

For thousands of our young people, this will mean adapting to a new way of learning. For small businesses, the months ahead will be challenging and require physical distancing measures. Such changes won't be easy and, as the financial impact of the crisis on the Council and the economic impact on Edinburgh begin to unfold, they'll present us with some of our biggest and most difficult choices yet.

## ***Back to school***

We now know that schools can plan for 100% reopening in August with no physical distancing measures in place. This is based on us managing to sustain progress in tackling COVID and, [following the Cabinet Secretary for Education's announcement in Parliament yesterday](#), we'll continue working hard with our schools and the Government to deliver this.

I know the past few months have put a strain on family life, with many juggling work commitments and home learning, so it's great to be able to see light at the end of tunnel. I'll be pleased to see our children and young people being able to spend time with their friends again and get some much-needed structure back into their lives and their learning.

While this is based on the ongoing suppression of the virus over the summer holidays, we can now focus on doing everything possible to ensure our schools are safe to reopen, closely following the most up to date advice from the Scottish Government and other agencies.

Thanks to the hard work of our teaching staff and other council teams in recent weeks, we now also have robust contingency plans in place – all of which reflect our aims of maintaining high quality learning and teaching, delivered in a safe and equitable way.

I want to thank them all for the tireless effort they have put in over the last three months, in particular to continue the education and support of children and young people throughout this challenging time.

## ***Keeping people safe and supporting business recovery***

One clear positive already emerging from the crisis is the number of people taking advantage of quieter streets and cleaner air for exercise or travel to essential work by bike. With that has come many requests to make streets safer and more space available for people. We also know that we need to support our businesses to re-open and adapt to a new way of operating, with space for queuing or for outdoor seating. We're not alone and, across the world, cities are adapting streets to make it easier for people to keep an appropriate distance.

With an award of £5m from the Scottish Government's [Spaces for People fund](#), we're putting in place quick, [temporary changes](#) – and we're doing so at a faster rate than anywhere else in Scotland, [listening to ideas](#) from residents and businesses and adapting plans as we go.

We've already delivered more than 10 interventions at key 'pinch points' across the city, including over 5km of pop-up cycle lanes leading to our two main hospitals. Work has started in [key city centre locations](#) and, in local shopping areas, such as Gorgie and Portobello, we'll address concerns around narrow pavements and support for small retail businesses. We want to give cafes, bars, restaurants, shops and other services the very best chance of success in the difficult months ahead.

The feedback on the improvements has been overwhelmingly positive so far and the development of yet more clean, sustainable transport options, where fewer cars result in less air pollution, can only support our long-term goal of a carbon neutral Edinburgh.

## ***Building a better Edinburgh, together***

Finally, I truly believe that, amongst all of the difficulties we face, there's an opportunity here to build an even better Edinburgh for the future. We've made sure that the cornerstone of our 'Adaptation and Renewal' strategy is [Edinburgh's 2050 Vision](#) – so that the decisions we make now lead us to create a fair, thriving, pioneering and welcoming City.

Our priority has always been to look after our most vulnerable people – that's not going to change. We need to build on the great work being done by the [Edinburgh Poverty Commission](#) to support those who need it most and use the crisis to inform how we tackle poverty in our City in the future. We also need to take steps so that our young people leaving school have positive destinations awaiting them to allow their careers to develop. We're exploring options with leaders from across Edinburgh's employability and skills sector about what we can do as a City to support them – building on the success of the [Edinburgh Guarantee](#).

This crisis has shone a light on the health of our people and planet and, as we plan our recovery, we'll also need to grapple with climate change, sustainability and accessibility. Following a decade of growth, our new tourism strategy has fundamentally changed how we approach attracting and managing visitors to our city, protecting the envied residents' experience and enjoyment of our Capital that bring so many visitors here in the first place. We made a commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030 and we must hold to that.

There is so much more to come for this City and I know that, together, we can build a better Edinburgh for us all.

## ***Get involved***

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