



# Council Leader's Report

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EDINBURGH  
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

December 2020

## ***Stick with it this Christmas***

First of all, I'd like to thank every household and business across Edinburgh for sticking to the rules so carefully over recent months. It's down to you all that we're seeing Covid-19 case numbers coming down in the Capital. In recognition of this improving picture, I'm continuing to work closely with the Scottish Government to look at ways of easing restrictions here – helping to support businesses, in particular the hard-hit hospitality industry, through this challenging time.

There's no doubt that this Christmas will be vastly different from normal. I know we're all desperate to see loved ones and to spend time with friends during this time and that the [easing of restrictions](#) to allow 'bubbles' of three households will be good news for many. But we must not forget the ongoing threat from this virus. If you're spending time in another household over the period, it's essential that you observe the guidance, keep a safe distance from one another, wash your hands and use hand sanitiser regularly and avoid hugs. This will be hard – but it will help keep us safe.

Despite the brilliant news of the rollout of a vaccine, starting in just a few days with our frontline health workers, please keep following the rules: wear a mask, get tested when you've got symptoms and avoid other people's houses. We'll work closely with NHS Lothian to help facilitate the rollout as quickly and efficiently as possible and do everything we can to help communicate details to residents as plans are finalised.

There's light on the horizon, so let's keep following guidance, looking after each other and stay the course. We'll get through this together.

## ***Rallying round our high streets***

As well as looking after ourselves and each other to help us get through these difficult times, we've all got a responsibility to rally round our city centre and local high streets, giving something back to the shops and businesses who have worked so hard to support us during this pandemic.

Roddy Smith of Essential Edinburgh said this week that, when we emerge from the other side of this pandemic, we'll need "both bustling local communities and a vibrant city centre", and I couldn't agree more.

Shops right across the city, from Princes Street to Portobello High Street, Corstorphine Road to Queensferry High Street have pulled out all the stops to ensure they can welcome customers safely and there's an amazing range of cafés and places to eat.

As well as continuing to promote the City Centre through channels like Edinburgh.org, #foreveredinburgh, on events pages and city guides, and across our social media channels, we're running a year-long [#ShopHereThisYear campaign](#) to celebrate the quality independent retailers, eateries and shopping experiences that are the heartbeat of our communities, create local jobs and feed into local supply chains. We're encouraging everyone to share their love for their favourite places to eat and shop across the city on social media.

The campaign also coincides with [Small Business Saturday](#) this weekend (5 December), which is a great opportunity for businesses across the city to showcase their passion for their products and services. We're so lucky in Edinburgh to have a brilliant mix of businesses that all contribute to making the Capital such a great place to live.

## ***More work needed to fulfil our potential***

The [Accounts Commission's latest Best Value report on the Council](#) was published last month and I'm pleased to say there's a lot to take heart from, with positive recognition of our ambition and leadership in pushing forward our vision of a fairer, more sustainable Capital. Earlier this year we were named one of the [most forward-thinking cities in Europe](#), and we're determined to continue in that vein.

The Commission also points up [areas where we need to do more](#) and work harder and we're grateful for their insight and recommendations. We'll take all the findings on board to help us build more empowered and engaged services in our communities. Our new Council Business Plan (in early 2021) will focus on achieving our long term aims for Edinburgh – and for the benefit of all residents.

## ***Your views help shape our priorities***

The ambitions we've set for this city and for which the Accounts Commission gave us credit were established using direct feedback from the citizens we're here to serve – and [we need to hear from Edinburgh's residents again](#) as we embark on setting a budget for the next three years.

We're running a survey just now on our [Consultation Hub](#) to find out how the impact of tackling the pandemic on our core services has affected people's lives, which services they've missed especially and what residents want us to prioritise as we move forward through and out of this unprecedented crisis.

More than 1,200 people have already had their say. The [survey](#) runs until 10 December. By taking just a few minutes of your time to make your voice heard, you'll be helping shape the services we deliver for several years to come.

### ***Controlling short-term lets***

We've been leading calls for new legislation to help tackle the problem of multiplying short-term lets, which have blighted so many of our communities over recent years. So, I'm delighted that Parliament is expected to consider legislation ahead of the Christmas recess, including control areas and a new licensing regime to help local authorities manage the issue.

This follows a consultation by the Scottish Government in the autumn, to which we've just [published our response](#). If these powers are introduced as expected in the spring, we're working on how they can help us control the number of short-term lets in the city through a combination of planning and licensing policies.

It's so important that we act decisively and swiftly on this. In recent years, short-term lets have reduced Edinburgh's housing stock, hollowed out our communities, driven up rents and impinged on residents' quality of life through noise, antisocial behaviour and putting pressure on resources like litter and waste.

Control areas will enable us to limit the number – something that we're very keen to do and it's clear our citizens feel the same. Our 'Choices' consultation for our next local development plan – 'City Plan 2030' – showed overwhelming support for this.

### ***Ten-year plan to end poverty in Edinburgh***

As Scotland's Capital city we need to be at the forefront of change for the better and that's exactly what we're doing with our ambitious ten-year plan to eradicate poverty in the city by 2030.

The proposals contained in our [End Poverty in Edinburgh Delivery Plan 2020-2030](#) report were approved last month and outline a series of key actions that need to be taken by us and our partners over the next decade. The comprehensive plan has been drawn up in response to the [final report of the Edinburgh Poverty Commission](#), which acted as a call to action, especially in the midst of the pandemic that has sadly hit those on the lowest incomes hardest.

Preventing poverty through people-focused and 'poverty-proofed' council services, helping households maximise their incomes, establishing Edinburgh as a Living Wage City and pressing the UK and Scottish Governments for changes to housing investment and social security policy are among the priority actions outlined in the plan.

We're the first local authority in the UK to set a target date to end poverty and it's going to take a 'Team Edinburgh' approach with all our partners across the Capital working as one. The year ahead is critical: we must pull together and make a start on the long-term work we must do to eradicate poverty in this city.

### ***Sir Geoff Palmer leading review of historical legacy***

Last month we appointed eminent professor and human rights activist Sir Geoff Palmer to chair the new independent [Edinburgh Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review Group](#).

Sir Geoff brings a wealth of experience, knowledge and leadership to the post and is currently recruiting further members to the group. Together they will consider any features within the Council boundary that commemorate those with close links to slavery and colonialism including, but not limited to, public statues and monuments, street or building names. The group will ultimately make recommendations to Council about the short and long-term measures we might take to redress this history.

We have a responsibility to face up to our city's past – celebrating the good and acknowledging the bad. Our history must be honest so we can best understand its impact on modern-day Edinburgh. This review is about the story of our Capital – it's not just about statues, it's about people living here now and the place that they call home.

### ***Reaching out to the bereaved this Christmas***

Losing a loved one is always extremely hard but it's been particularly difficult and distressing for anyone who's been bereaved this year with Covid-19 measures restricting funeral services.

At our Mortonhall Crematorium, the team are doing great work this Christmas to reach out and support those who have lost someone dear to them with their [annual memorial service](#), which is being held online at 1pm on Sunday (6 December). If you would like the name of a loved one included in the service and a candle lit to remember them, please email [calan2021@gmail.com](mailto:calan2021@gmail.com).

This year more than ever you may also feel you'd like to [leave a message on our annual Christmas Tree of Remembrance](#) for your loved one. We're providing this digitally in 2020 to keep everyone safe, in line with government guidance. It's a lovely way to record a personal tribute in memory of someone you love.

### ***Wishing you all the best for 2021***

This is my last Leader's Report of 2020 and I want to take the opportunity to say a very special thank you to all the frontline (and other) colleagues who've gone above and beyond to keep essential services running during exceptionally difficult times this year – I have never been prouder of our Council officer colleagues and the impact they are having to support our residents.

As a city, we've shown grit, community spirit and resilience through everything this year has thrown at us. Thankfully, the rollout of a vaccine means there's cause for optimism about when our Capital can get back to a much closer version of normal.

This renewed optimism will give all of us a desperately welcome boost as 2021 arrives. For our part, we'll be pressing on with our core priorities to bring about lasting, positive change for Edinburgh – tackling climate change and poverty, investing in thousands of new affordable homes for our residents, progressing Trams to Newhaven and other sustainable transport choices, building new schools to give our children the best possible start in life and much, much more. All while focusing on getting the basics right. There's a power of work to be done and we're ready to embrace the challenge.

I wish you all a happy and restful festive period and a much better 2021!

### ***Get involved***

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