

Five things you need to know today



S'no Snowin' is it? – Edinburgh International Festival Launch – Information sessions on Housing Benefit changes – Gordon Macdonald MSP – Mike Crockart MP

Looks like the weather might be cold again today. The snow yesterday caused some traffic delays and a bit of grumbling from drivers.

Princes Street Gardens was closed for a time due to the snow but re-opened later in the day. We took some live footage of traffic in the city centre (filmed on an iPhone) which you can watch below, and which features a mini snowplough clearing the pavement on Queen Street Gardens.

If you want to know what the likelihood is of your street and pavement being gritted by the council then you can [have a look at this map here](#). This shows you the Priority 1 gritting routes in red which should be the first to receive attention from the grifters. There is also a map of pavement gritting routes. Any comments? Let us know!

The Edinburgh Reporter is off to the launch of the Edinburgh International Festival programme today. Now this is always accompanied by lovely bacon rolls, so while we will be tweeting like mad later on, and [running a liveblog to cover the event here](#), there may be a lull while we partake of the refreshments on offer while perusing the programme for summer 2013. We also plan to interview Festival Director Jonathan Mills, and anyone else we can find...



The Council is running some information sessions on the changes to housing benefits over the next week or so.

The events are designed to help tenants who may be facing cash shortfalls due to new under-occupancy changes.

In addition a series of radio adverts are being aired to advise tenants about the changes and directing them to the Council website.

The future planned open days are as follows:

- *Leith/City Centre Neighbourhood: **Wednesday 13 March:** South Leith Church Hall, 11am to 3pm, **Monday 18 March** – Cables Wynd House Concierge Office, 6.30 to 8.30pm*
- *North Neighbourhood: Weekly surgeries on Wednesdays at the Neighbourhood Office, 8 West Pilton Gardens , 10am to 1pm*
- *South Neighbourhood: Drop in surgeries at the Neighbourhood Office, 40 Captain's Road – phone 0131 529 5151*
- *South West Neighbourhood: **Wednesday 13 March** – Wester Hailes Library, 3pm to 7pm. **Tuesday 23 April** – Broomhouse One Stop Shop, 3 Broomhouse Market*
- *West Neighbourhood: **Monday 18 March** – Get On' – Gateway Bus at Drumbrae Hub between 10am to 12.30pm and South Queensferry (Scotmid Store) – 1pm to 3pm; **Tuesday 19 March** – Corstorphine Library, 10am to 2pm; **Wednesday 20 March** – Kirkliston Hub 1pm to 4pm; **Thursday 21 March** – 10am to 2pm, **Friday 22 March** – Drum Brae Hub, 10am to*

2pm

- **East Neighbourhood: Thursday 21 March:** Northfield Community Centre, Northfield Road , 1pm to 4pm

Around 20,000 tenants in the capital have already received letters highlighting the potential financial impact the new rules will have when they come into force across the UK next month.

The biggest effect is going to be on tenants who have spare bedrooms as they will now receive less housing benefit from April. This means they will have to pay the difference to their landlord.

Anyone under occupying will lose 14 % of their total rent due if they have one spare bedroom or 25% of their total rent due for two or more spare bedrooms. Housing officers from the Council will be on hand to cover areas like paying rent, moving to a smaller home, maximising income and sharing with friends, family members or lodgers.



*Vice-Convener of
Health, Social
Care & Housing –
Cammy Day*

Councillor Cammy Day, Housing leader for the City of Edinburgh Council , said: “These are very dramatic changes. Tenants need to know just exactly what they will mean to them and the potential financial impact it’s going to have.

“The Council will have housing staff at the drop in sessions who will advise tenants on the best financial options open to them. Some tenants could be faced with a 25% reduction in their housing benefit.

“We are advising people to come along to one of these sessions or get in touch with their local housing team now to discuss the various options open to them.”



Our photo shows you MSP for Edinburgh Pentlands, Gordon Macdonald, who has issued his annual report which you can also read in full below. Gordon is going to distribute the boxes of reports to people and organisations throughout his constituency.

Gordon said:- “After my election in 2011 I made the commitment that I would keep the residents of Edinburgh Pentlands aware of my activities within parliament and my work in the community.”

The annual report which will start being distributed in the next few weeks is one of a number of methods that the MSP uses to keep in touch with his constituents. In addition to his annual report Gordon also has a monthly e-newsletter, a [Twitter account](#), a [website](#) and a [Facebook page](#).

He continued: “I am here to try and help and will always do my best to do so. If I can’t help you directly I will support you as much as I can and try and find someone who can help. It is a great honour and pleasure to work on your behalf.”

[Gordon Macdonald Annual Report a3 2013 2](#)



Mike Crockart is LibDem MP for Edinburgh West. He is aiming to use technology to make it very easy for his constituents to contact him about their problems. Here is what he said in his latest newsletter:-

“I know that sometimes it can be difficult to get the time to come to see me at one of my advice surgeries. To make it easier for you to speak to me I have launched e-surgeries.

The first e-surgery will be held on 28th March 5pm to 6pm. All you need to do is to have access to the free software Skype. You can [email me](#) to make an e-surgery appointment.”