

Edinburgh Councillor blogs – Councillor Norma Austin Hart blogs from Brighton 2



Vice-Convener of
Culture & Leisure
– Norma Austin
Hart

Councillor Norma Austin Hart is the Labour Councillor for Liberton/Gilmerton. Councillor Hart is the Vice-Convenor for Culture and Sport and this weekend she is attending the Labour Party's National Women's Conference in Brighton.

She is keeping us up to date with her conference experience.

The Oxford Hall in the Hilton hotel on Brighton Seafront is the elegant backdrop to discussions on some of the most difficult subjects affecting women today. I was at a session calling for an end to violence against women. The panel was chaired by Vera Baird MP and the former Solicitor General in the last government. The speakers called for each council to have a unit with specific responsibility for violence against women and girls which would be responsible for co ordinating all the ways the council is involved in educating, sheltering and supporting women in violent situations.

For example could we have our library staff trained to respond to women who are experiencing domestic violence?



Stella Creasey MP spoke passionately about how the Labour Party must not take the foot off the accelerator regarding domestic violence. Across the UK there has been a drop of 12% in DV prosecutions. She encouraged councillors to ask questions locally about things like adequate provision for women seeking refuge from domestic violence both by the council and housing associations. The shadow Home Affairs team is also working with the police to find ways of keeping women safe online while using social media like Twitter and Facebook.

One in three young women say they have experienced some kind of sexual harassment, and it is clear that this is a major issue.

One aspect of conference which can make or break the experience is your accommodation. My choice of bed for this year's conference has been influenced by the imminent arrival of my first grandchild. Baby's due date was 14 September so my departure for conference was left till the last minute. I decided a few weeks ago not to book into a seriously expensive B&B – Brighton at conference time becomes New York for price – and instead I accepted an offer of a sofa in the self catering apartment of my fellow delegates from Edinburgh.

As conference drew nearer and my grandchild reluctant to make an appearance, the reality of this sofa started to come into focus. I bottled it. I managed to find a single room in a small guest house with a shared loo but my own shower. Privacy comes at a price but at least no one was kept awake by my snoring. The offer of the sofa had been upgraded to a bed in a twin room – but my B&B hosts found me a 'superior' room in their neighbour's hotel along the street.

Although I could stay in the Balmoral for the same price I am grateful for another night of comfort.
Who knows where for tomorrow night?