

Coronavirus – What are our councillors doing?

The City of Edinburgh Council is in recess.

This means they no longer meet as a council nor do any of the councillors attend the City Chambers which is closed.

But what are our councillors doing during this unexpected and unusual recess? Well we asked them....and of course just because they are not featured here, it does not mean they are doing nothing.

It may just mean they are too busy doing something useful to reply to us, and of course everyone's personal circumstances vary.



The Rt Hon Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh, Frank Ross with the Lady Provost welcome VIP guests for drinks before the 2020 Burns Supper in January. Photo: Martin McAdam

Our Lord Provost, Frank Ross is mainly at home with the Lady Provost Hanna, and although he has few occasions on which to wear his official chain these days, he is far from idle.

He has signed up as a volunteer with The Red Cross and he is also helping The Torfin in Corstorphine, with the distribution of free meals each day to those who need them.

The Torfin says it is about to do a different kind of delivery service, the 'Torfin Cook-Along'.

A spokesperson explained: “We have been so busy delivering to the vulnerable in our community that we have put on hold the Torfin delivery service, however, we have been working hard to come up with a way to bring a little Torfin to your home.

“Introducing our first ever Catalan Chicken cook along on Thursday 2nd April! We will deliver everything you need to make our famous Catalan Chicken and join us at 6pm to cook along with us on Facebook live from our flat! All you will need is a cooker & oven and two frying pans.

“We need a decent amount of people to join us to make this as interactive an experience as possible – from regulars to members of the Torfin team we can’t wait for you all to join us, so please drop us a message on facebook so we can arrange payment & delivery.

“£6 per person for all ingredients, no delivery charge ☐
[#SupportLocal#CookAlongwithTheTorfin](#)



Depute Lord Provost Joan Griffiths at the recent opening of the LOVE Gorgie Farm

Depute Lord Provost Joan Griffiths said: “Whilst working from home I am still very much in communication with my constituents trying to deal with their concerns but also just taking time to listen to constituents on the phone who just need someone to talk to.

“At present I am trying to work with others to get support for a number of vulnerable people in my area, by providing them with links to organisation and groups that can assist.

“Some of the issues that I have been dealing with are ensuring that parents with a special needs child got the information they needed regarding what, if any, special schools were being kept open.

“I have been making contacts to help an elderly constituent who was very upset that his wife had to be moved to a care home. He’s wondering why this needed to happen just now.

“On a personal level, I am trying to keep contact with my son who has a profound disability and does not understand why he cannot see his mum.

“I have set up FaceTime which means I can see him and see that he is doing okay, but he has very little sight so not sure how much he sees, but he definitely hears my voice and is reacting to it.”



Cllr Cammy Day

Cllr Cammy Day is the Depute Leader of the council and is still involved in council business. He told us: “I’m keeping myself busy with supporting my mother, daily and regular conference calls with the Council Leader, Adam, the Chief Executive and Executive Directors. I then go to support and deliver food packages to people through the Rainbow Club Day Centre. Every other day I am going for a run to get out and about and get some fresh air.

“I spend my evenings in contact with family and friends making sure they are all safe and well... and of course a Saturday night online Karaoke with friends to lighten the week!

“In my local ward area, Pilton Equalities, Scrans Academy, North Edinburgh Arts, Spartans, Rainbow Day Care, LIFT project, Granton Churches and many more are all working,

providing help and support to those in need.”

Cllr Adam McVey, the Council Leader, told us he is busy keeping things together, and of course he is also working from home. He is putting out regular messages on social media.

*My message on yesterday's decision to cancel [@edfests](#) [@edintfest](#) [@edfringe](#) [@EdinburghTattoo](#) [@EdinburghJazz](#)
We look forward to welcoming the world back to Edinburgh when we can. <https://t.co/NwnE9t5s7H>*

– Cllr Adam McVey (@adamrmcvey) [April 2, 2020](#)



Councillor Scott Arthur

Cllr Scott Arthur represents the Colinton/Fairmilehead Ward. He told us: “As the husband of a nurse and the father of a hotel worker, I fully understand the human and economic impact the crisis is having on our capital. I have been humbled to see the way people in my Ward have come together to help each other, but also angered to hear about stockpiling and NHS staff lacking the safety equipment they need.

“My first duty as a local Councillor has been to keep people in my Ward up-to-date with what’s happening, and also to help those in immediate need.

“A real challenge has been supporting the many key workers in my Ward by ensuring they have the childcare they need to do their job.

“Over the space of 3 or 4 days last week I was contacted by many local parents at the frontline of the fight against this awful virus who were still waiting on childcare – Doctors, Nurses, a Community Therapist, Paramedics, an Intensive Care Consultant, a Paediatrician, Health Centre workers, etc .

“This culminated with the case of a nurse who looks after patients on ventilators arriving exhausted and in tears on my doorstep because of the delays in setting up childcare.

“I was proud to see council staff promptly react to all of these parents and provide childcare for the 20-30 children involved.

“The fight against the virus won’t end soon, but while it’s ongoing I feel blessed to live in a community where people are doing all they can to defeat it. From the pensioner in Buckstone who has built a gym in his garden, to hospital staff like my wife who get up at the crack of dawn every day to ensure the NHS will be there if we need it in the coming weeks.”



Cllr Gavin Barrie

Cllr Gavin Barrie is at home too, working alongside others in the household at the dining room table. He told us: “I am invited to join the weekly phone in of group leaders with the Chief Executive, but I am frozen out of the Leadership forum which is about making decisions.

Emails have noticeably dropped off but residents are still raising issues with us, and not just about Covid-19.

“What else am I doing? I’m making sure I get my daily hours exercise, I choose to do this mostly at night 9’ish and reckon I can cover circa three miles in an hour walking at a pace. I’ve volunteered to deliver hand sanitiser for Port of Leith Distillery (I’m on their reserve list), to prepare/deliver food with Scran Academy, (not called on yet) but I am happy to be doing my first lunch delivery with Spartans/Social Bite on Thursday morning. Oh, and if it warms up a bit my garden might even pass muster this year!”



Cllr Steve Burgess PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter

Cllr Steve Burgess told us what he is doing. He said: “It’s been pretty full on in our house with home schooling two primary age children, and my wife working full time from home, as well as keeping up with council work.

“I’m pretty sure my children are not giving me the respect that they give their teachers. It’s a bit like trying to herd kittens at the moment!

“There are still a few council meetings happening online like a working group of the Education Committee who are reviewing the grant allocations for organisations working with children and families.

“As a member of the Licensing Board I’ve also been considering some licenses for restaurants and cafés that want to switch to a delivery or take-away service.

“The Green group of councillors is also regularly meeting online to scrutinise the reports going to the Leaders Advisory Panel. This panel is providing the political oversight of the council now, since the council’s main committees have been suspended.

“I’m signed up with a couple of local community groups in my area through the Next Door and Facebook platforms but haven’t had any requests for help yet. The huge response from residents willing to help their neighbours has been really heartwarming to see.

“I’ve seen today that Volunteer Edinburgh now have some specific roles to fill, like drivers to deliver food packages and care assistants, so I may well sign up for something like that to do in the spare time I have.”



Cllr Gavin Corbett photographed near Boroughmuir School on the canal

Green councillor Gavin Corbett said: “These are unique times for all of us and that is just as true for councillors.

“So much of our work normally involves being out and about, at community meetings, working with groups, being involved in local projects and, of course, a lot of that has had to go on pause.

“We are still meeting online as a Green group to share views and, of course, responding to queries from local residents via phone, email and social media. Beyond that a lot of my time

personally has been taken up by helping to facilitate people who want to help others and people who need help. I already have a large and growing list of helpers with whom I am in regular contact.

“I’ve been blown away by the sea of kindness we’ve seen: from offers by neighbours to pick up shopping to providing a secure parking space for an NHS worker coming off night-shift.

“I’m also involved with the network of community and voluntary organisations in the South West seeking to make sure there is a co-ordinated response to where need is (for food delivery, for example) and where there might be extra volunteer capacity.

“So much has changed even in two weeks and we need to be prepared for it being a long haul.”



Cllr Ricky Henderson

Cllr Ricky Henderson is councillor for Pentland Hills and also also Vice-Chair of Edinburgh Integration Joint Board which deals with social care.

Sadly, Cllr Henderson has been dealing with a family bereavement in the last few weeks. However, he told us he has been busy with council-related work too.

He said: “I’m back at ‘virtual’ work and trying to catch up via my laptop in my kitchen. I’m keeping in touch with the IJB Chief Officer and Chair and have been updated on current activity.

“In my ward a number of local support groups have been established, largely based around community council activists. I had a call last night with Juniper Green and Baberton Mains Community Council and there’s one tonight for Balerno.”



Cllr Melanie Main

Cllr Melanie Main is one of the representatives in Morningside. She has been at home since the beginning. She explained: “It’s been almost three weeks since I started to ‘stay at home’ for family reasons.

“I have always enjoyed working from home and online meetings are not new to me, I enjoy the freedom and headspace.

“But, being Co-convener of the Green Group , means I’m still in meetings and briefings – all be it digital ones.

“I am so very impressed with council staff – at all levels working quietly behind the scenes for quite a few weeks longer than you might think, with clear priorities, planning to keep this huge city functioning, reacting hourly to a changing landscape.

“From Andrew Kerr our Chief Executive and the Directors, right down to the cheery bin men on my street, we all owe them a lot. My portfolio is Health and Social Care: I think of them as the ‘calm’ profession, but they are preparing to face the storm, for us.

“At home that ‘time to get round to all those things I never

do' continues to be elusive, for some reason always just round the corner.

"Our street has always been sociable, but now it is community central – help on hand for whatever is needed, even just a chat – we're having a socially distanced birthday party tomorrow.

"I miss going into the local shops, but still getting everything by email and phone, thanks to fearless and fabulous Dig-in Greengrocer, New Leaf, Cheesy Peesie and many more – even the cats are still catered for by my local Bruntsfield Pet Shop.

"Local is good for all of us all and the planet. Something good has to come out of this, perhaps it's that, living local."



Cllr Amy McNeese-Mechan

Cllr Amy McNeese-Mechan represents Leith Walk and lives in her ward. She is also Vice-Convener of Culture and Communities and so was involved in the decisions around the Fringe and other festivals. She said: "I've had a lot of emergency meetings with the various festivals boards and cultural venues as you can imagine, initially 'socially distanced' as much as possible, and gloved and masked when travelling on the bus, but now all moved to Zoom or Skype.

"Luckily I've been using the latter for years to keep in touch with friends and family overseas, so that's mostly a dawdle.

"I'm fortunate that the majority of my daily work can be done pretty much wherever there's a phone signal and internet access, as long as I can find a quiet corner (My distance vision is rubbish, but I have no problem reading reports and briefings from my phone screen!).

“I was pretty ill for a week or so (not COVID-19 though, thank God and the NHS), but now I’m able to get out and take groceries and supplies to friends and neighbours who are on immunosuppressants or having to isolate due to an at-risk family member.

“Just basic stuff like being able to top up someone else’s electricity key when I take mine along to top it up can be helpful to someone if they’re struggling financially or just unable to get out.

“Healthwise, I try to get out every day or so for fresh air. Living in a tenement building without any outdoor space, or even a window box, is hard on me because I miss my daily nature fix!

“Truthfully I confess to envying my friends who have a balcony, whether they’re serenading their neighbours from it or not.

“I’ve been so impressed by the community spirit here in Leith. One of the things I’m trying to do online is to share lots of art, music, the occasional cartoon or funny thing to cheer people up.

“I think it’s important to share factual information on how to keep ourselves and our communities and loved ones safe, but also just to remind ourselves of all the positivity and creativity and caring out there.”



John McLellan is one of the councillors for Craightinny/Duddingston Ward. He is also Director of the Scottish Newspaper Society and a former editor of the Edinburgh Evening News and Scotland on Sunday. He is also an honorary professor at the University of Stirling teaching journalism.

He told us: “Apart from council work, advising constituents and finishing my university teaching remotely, I’ve spent a considerable amount of time advising news publishers and engaging with The Scottish Government, The Scotland Office, COSLA, advertising agencies and advertisers to ensure trusted independent news brands survive the pandemic.”



Rob Munn with Councillor Amy McNeese-Mechan and Council Leader Adam McVey

Cllr Rob Munn represents the Leith Walk Ward. He is also pretty busy.

He said: “I’m presently working from home as a councillor – dealing with constituent queries and keeping updated on coronavirus and its impacts on Council services – feeding in views and queries to colleagues to try to get through this.

“I am also working at my job for Ben Macpherson MSP remotely, and dealing primarily with queries about coronavirus along with general casework.

“I’m at home with my family and limiting outside contact by following the guidance. Limited visits to shops, solely to the supermarket for food. There is a good system at my local Tesco, and reasonable stock. We’re supporting a neighbour who is vulnerable and at present that is the only volunteering we are doing as a household. I’m making daily phone calls to my mother who is 87 and self-isolating at home in Fife – she’s doing well and her neighbours are keeping her cupboards stocked.

“As part of my daily exercise I will be walking/cycling round parts of my ward both to get out but also to try to keep an eye on things.”



Cllr Hal Osler Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

Cllr Hal Osler represents the Inverleith Ward. She has an outside job as an SQA invigilator, so normally she would be very busy during the months of April/May/June, and of course would be busy as a councillor with meetings and reading material.

She explained her reaction to having to stay at home rather than her busy time as a councillor. She said: “This lockdown has been a shock to the system, and I am not going to lie, it has taken me a period of time to adjust to.

“Whilst my Committee work has been reduced my ward work of supporting the residents I represent has increased and

diversified, depending upon what the government has released and people's changed circumstances.

"It has been a challenge trying to find information and get it out to people. I do have a good network but sometimes by the time you have got the information shared the situation has moved on.

"As well as answering resident enquires and keeping up with my Committee commitments, I am at present focusing my time on supporting my networks of residents, making sure that they have what they need in terms of information so they can pass it on. I've been checking on older and vulnerable individuals that they have support they need, (not forgetting my own neighbours). I've been sharing as much information as I can to help keep people stay connected, informed and hopefully feel less isolated.

"Outside of that I have been supporting food networks in my area helping residents and the Drylaw Neighbourhood Centre at the beginning getting starter packs ready for families. Also I have been supporting Spartans and Social Bite in their 100 free packed lunches (Monday to Friday) initiative and volunteering with the Scran Academy at Fet-lor, labelling and packing around 450 meals.

"If there is anyone in North Edinburgh who might benefit from either of the free lunches provided by Spartans/ Social Bite contact Allan.hosey@ea.edin.sch.uk or hot meals from the Scran Academy hello@scranacademy.com

"What they could really do with is funding to make sure that this service can continue. If you can donate then please do so on their Just Giving page. justgiving.com/crowdfunding/scranmeals

"If you live in the Inverleith Ward and need any assistance please do let me know hal.osler@edinburgh.gov.uk



Cllr Susan Webber Pentland Hills Ward PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

Cllr Susan Webber who represents the Pentland Hills Ward said she has also signed up as a volunteer with The Red Cross.

She said: "I am doing my best to ensure all the villages have appropriate and functioning support networks. There is so much on social media as you know but often the most vulnerable are not on Facebook. So, to help with this I have generated this poster and it has been sent to all GP surgeries in my ward, all pharmacies, all churches and all community councils

"I am working with the co-ordinators on the various support Facebook pages and networks to ensure we generate that safety net and identify all those needing support now, or likely to in the near future.

"Community councils are taking a lead, and many are hosting conference calls to ensure their communities are resilient and all working together along with some SUPER local businesses."

UPDATE from Pentland Hills Councillor, Susan Webber



We are facing unprecedented challenges as we tackle the realities of this new Coronavirus.

Our communities are resilient and have plans in place to help you and the most vulnerable should you find yourself on your own and struggling with either self-isolation or the current shut down.

If you are needing assistance reach out. I will do what I can to ensure one of the hundreds of local volunteers makes appropriate contact with you.

If you are on Facebook there is a Self-Isolation Support Group for your area

- **Balerno Cares** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/313991906228362/>
- **Self Isolation Support Currie**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/138878134185553/>
- **Lend a Hand Juniper Green Baberton Mains**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/146698036593352/>
- **Lend a Hand RATHO** <https://facebook.com/groups/919139205189603>.

If you are unable to access, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

Right now we must adhere to the Government's advice : **STAY HOME AND STAY SAFE**

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