

# Union accuse Conservative councillor of hypocrisy

**UNISON Edinburgh Council branch has told us that they have been angered by a newspaper article by Conservative group leader, Cllr Iain Whyte.**

Cllr Whyte offered his own suggestions to address what he perceives to be the council's 'flaws'. For example, he suggests being locally flexible on schools and putting children into classes during what might otherwise be school holidays, presumably after the national lockdown is ended. He also makes a reasonable comment that Edinburgh should recruit educators to record sessions for use in Edinburgh's schools. This would help the offering of online learning for everyone. The [BBC](#) have of course also put educational programmes on TV.

The councillor then suggested that some staff could be redeployed to tasks like 'winter maintenance' on a voluntary basis. This is where UNISON was most annoyed, and asks for public support for council workers.

Tom Connolly, UNISON Edinburgh branch secretary, said: "Cllr Whyte should be praising the work of council staff who have been providing services above and beyond throughout the pandemic. Again this is an example of Conservative hypocrisy, clapping workers on the Thursday then slapping them on the Monday."

Criticising Cllr Whyte's call for staff to be compulsorily redeployed to tasks 'like winter maintenance', Tom Connolly

added: "I'm sure the public would have questions to ask if staff were taken off tasks like child protection or environmental protection to clear pavements. The fact is that council workers have volunteered in droves to help out throughout the pandemic, inventing new ways of working and ensuring services are delivered where possible. They deserve thanks not criticism.

"Thankfully, the public see the real picture. They see under-pressure, underpaid NHS, Social Care & Council staff and all key workers putting themselves on the frontline to help the vulnerable.

"Councillor Whyte's comments are the more galling given the Conservative austerity onslaught that has seen local government cut to shreds with 50,000 public service jobs cut in Scotland. The local Conservatives should do something meaningful, such as calling for greater public sector investment

"The real lesson the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us is not so-called flexibility to cover up cuts. It is that if all public services had been adequately maintained and grown, we would have been in a much better place to respond.

"UNISON stands with our members and all keyworkers and thanks them for all that they have done and continue to do."

The Edinburgh Reporter spoke to Council Director, Stephen Moir last week. Mr Moir is Executive Director of Resources and is responsible for staff matters. He explained to us then that very few of the council staff can be furloughed, and offered us an example of members of staff being very flexible. The staff who usually run the parking fines section had been retrained to deal with the business grants which the council is processing on behalf of The City of Edinburgh Council and Midlothian Council.

The Inverleith councillor referred in his article in the

Edinburgh Evening News on Monday to matters such as:

- the virtual learning for school pupils – where ‘learning broke down on the first day’. (It is widely known that this was a failing on the part of Microsoft Teams, not the council.)
- Winter weather – reporting that the council had bought 16 mini-tractors without ensuring that they have staff to drive them. The Council has told The Edinburgh Reporter that they bought three additional tractors to cover the Spaces for People routes. This meant they needed another nine drivers plus extra to cover any Covid related pressure. They now have those in place and confirm that they always have enough tractors and operators to cover the priority one network.
- the vaccine roll out – which is in the hands of The Scottish Government – saying that only one third of care home residents and staff have been vaccinated when the national level was about 50%. He also said that over 80s await appointments but are supposed to receive a dose by February 5. (The First Minister repeated again on Tuesday the intention of the government’s Vaccine Deployment Plan to have vaccinated all JCVI priority groups – which includes all those over 80 – by the beginning of February. She explained that by definition some of those will not be vaccinated yet, but they will be by the beginning of February.
- Cllr Whyte referred to the [apparent row](#) over the number of council homes being built by the council administration, saying the SNP-Labour led council will miss the target by half which the administration denies. In the article at the link the administration offer their response.