

# Coronavirus – the council looks back over the last year

**This week it is one year since the first Covid-19 lockdown began here in Edinburgh and all over Scotland.**

The National Day of Reflection was promoted by end of life charity, Marie Curie. They noted that three million people lost loved ones in this past year – every death a devastating loss for their families. The occasion was marked by political leaders in The Scottish Parliament on Tuesday.



The Presiding Officer was joined on the Garden Lobby staircase by the Deputy Presiding Officers, the five parliamentary party leaders and the Clerk/Chief Executive to mark the National Day of Reflection being held across the UK to remember those who died during the coronavirus pandemic. Presiding Officer Ken Macintosh MSP (front centre) is joined by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP, front left), Ruth Davidson MSP (front right), Willie Rennie MSP, Anas Sarwar MSP, Alison Johnstone MSP, Deputy Presiding Officer Lewis Macdoanld MSP, Deputy Presiding Officer Christine Grahame MSP, and Linda Fabiani MSP. Pic – Andrew Cowan/Scottish Parliament. 23 March 2021.

The milestone offered the opportunity to look back over the year at some of the work the council has done during the biggest public health crisis.

Council Leader Adam McVey said: “The pandemic has dramatically affected everyone’s lives over the past year. As Edinburgh joins the minute’s silence to remember those who have sadly lost their lives during this crisis, including some of our own colleagues, and to show support for those who’ve been bereaved, it is a time for us all to pause, reflect and

remember.

“This has been a year of real trauma but also one of incredible resilience. I have never been prouder to lead this Council – the organisation has gone above and beyond to keep essential services going and look after this city and all our residents.

“Since March 2020, Council services have had to change significantly to respond to the urgent and critical support needed in our communities. From care workers to refuse collectors, teaching staff to those helping families in crisis, our officers have been doing, and continue to do, an amazing job, working with unfaltering dedication for over a year now to cope with this incredibly challenging and ever-changing situation.”

Depute Leader Cammy Day said: “On this poignant anniversary of the first national lockdown it’s important to reflect on what we’ve lost over such a difficult year. But it’s also helpful to look ahead and consider the steps we can take towards healing.

“All our services have faced challenges and pressures they’d never encountered before. In a huge cross-Council effort, we’ve seen our welfare and benefit teams strengthened to provide immediate support to those in financial crisis, brought in measures to support families who need school meal payments and food parcels and we’re providing childcare support to some of our city’s key workers.

“We’re immensely grateful to the people of Edinburgh for the way they’ve pulled together and looked after one another, listening to the public health messaging and following the guidance to keep everyone safe.

“One day, and I hope it’s soon, I predict we’ll look back on this as a very difficult but at the same time inspiring period in our city’s recent history when Team Edinburgh truly shone.”

One of the ways the Council reacted was setting up schools as hub for key worker children and providing targeted support for other pupils:

Alexa Pope, Head Teacher at Juniper Green Primary School said: "Last year we closed the doors of Juniper Green Primary School believing that in a couple of weeks our Juni Family would be back together again and life would quickly get back to normal. I can't believe that that was almost a whole year ago and life has still not returned to normal.

"One of the significant events in the lockdown of 2020, of which there were many, was the reopening of Juniper Green as a hub for 11 schools in the north west of Edinburgh. At the time I was the acting head teacher and had just managed to switch our school to online learning, which was challenging enough, but the complexities of providing essential child care and support to the children of key workers was another challenge that as a team we tackled head on.

"The hub, or 'the Kindness Club', as it was named by the children who were accessing it was amazing. The staff of the schools worked together with the common goal of ensuring that they provided a safe, calm and fun place for every child to be. New friendships were formed, plans for future play dates were arranged and staff from the different schools enjoyed being part of a fantastic team.

"By the end of June we really did feel like a family and closing the doors once again on the last day of the summer term was harder than we all expected it to be."

Kasia Kzpolska has been with the Council for over three years and has been a food waste driver throughout the pandemic.

She said: "I'm very happy, it has been hard but this job is always going to have to be done. As people have mainly been at home it is like Christmas every day with the amount of food waste we are collecting.

“It’s lovely to see the children waving at us and I find people generally to be very kind. Traditionally, some people leave gifts for waste crews at Christmas but we’ve been seeing this more over the last year which had been really nice and greatly appreciated. One thing that has made things a bit easier is that there has been less traffic on the roads and less people on the streets so we can get about the city quicker.”

Services also had to adapt with officers changing their everyday roles. Colleagues in Early Years were tasked with providing food boxes for families in need across the city.

Paula Greenhill, Early Years and Childcare Manager said: “From early April until the beginning of September we organised the delivery of 300 food boxes, every two weeks. The boxes were delivered to families who had children under 5-years-old and who needed additional support. They were packed, distributed and delivered within a two-hour window with great support from the Mitie team and other colleagues. The speed at which I can pack a food box has greatly improved! Early years staff and social workers who knew the families best delivered the food boxes to those who needed them.

“The supplies were gratefully received by the families and staff shared that the children were so excited and eager to open the box to see what was inside. Although the boxes had to be left on a doorstep or at the end of a path to reduce transmission, many parents shared that seeing someone they knew was a great comfort and that they appreciated the connection. Staff shared that by delivering the boxes they were able to sign post parents to further supports if required.

“Many families shared that nappies, baby food and changing supplies were difficult to access due to variety of reasons and as a response a large amount of these were also distributed with the food boxes. Over the weeks we added

support leaflets, books, play packs, transitions story book and a teddy bear to the food boxes.”

How the Council responded:

- They helped around 19,000 local businesses to get grant funding, paying out around £181.4m in Coronavirus business support grants since March 2020.
- Their employability providers spent 853,160 minutes supporting people to access training, employment or learning opportunities. Over 1,500 people went on to secure a job, training or other positive outcome following support from the services.
- A total of £146,600 has been awarded to small businesses to help them recruit young people and help those with additional barriers to getting a job.
- The Advice Shop has assisted 4000 people to obtain information and advice regarding benefits and debt matters.
- Over £8.5m in financial gains has been achieved for Edinburgh citizens including those who have lost work, have significant health issues or are struggling to afford life’s essentials.
- The council has provided a frontline service at dedicated Council Resilience Centres to customers requiring an emergency homeless and temporary accommodation service.
- The council reduced rough sleeping in the city to fewer than 10 people each night
- The council took all families out of B&B and eliminated breaches of the unsuitable accommodation order for families.
- Delivered over 70,000 flu vaccinations at our drive-through / walk-in clinics
- A dedicated shopping campaign #ShopHereThisYear went live in November and aims to encourage residents to support local businesses in Edinburgh.

- The council's dedicated refuse collectors are still picking up more than 300,000 bins a week and in the last year have collected 173,020 tonnes of waste.
- The last 3 months of 2020 was the Planning department's busiest in 2½ years in terms of incoming planning applications.
- The council says its commitment to delivering affordable homes within safe and sustainable neighbourhoods across the city has not wavered. Between April 2020 and March 2021, they completed 281 affordable homes – 112 for social rent and 186 mid-market rent homes for Edinburgh Living.
- Through Spaces for People they have introduced measures to support physical distancing including 39km of pop-up cycle lanes, widened footpaths in 11 key shopping streets, safety measures at every Edinburgh school and installed 165 temporary signs on the active travel route network and in parks, to remind people of the need to physically distance and follow the off-road Paths Code of Conduct.
- Keeping residents informed, the council website was visited 16,193,404 times (+89% on last year) and pages were viewed 36,435,159 times.