

# **Lord Provost looks back over his five years in office**

**The Rt Hon Lord Provost Frank Ross is approaching the end of his term in office when the elections take place in May.**

He is rightly proud of the honour which was bestowed on him five years ago when his political group were elected to lead the coalition, and has enjoyed it – although the formal activities were curtailed somewhat during the pandemic.

He said that it has been a true perk of the job to enjoy a heated seat in the Royal Box at BT Murrayfield at rugby matches sitting alongside the patron of the SRU, The Princess Royal. There are others such as an official car bearing the number 50 which is also often used by visiting royalty, and he has been driven or accompanied to official functions by any one of the three city officers.



Cllr Frank Ross the Rt Hon Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh. Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)

The Rt Hon Lord Provost (LP) is Edinburgh's civic head, an ancient office dating back to the 13th century, and the incumbent is normally elected every four years from the 63 members of The City of Edinburgh Council. The LP is the Convener of the Council and continues to carry out the normal duties of an elected member, while at the same time remaining non-political. The LP is also Her Majesty The Queen's personal representative in the lieutenancy area of Edinburgh.

We sat down in the Lord Provost's room in the City Chambers where I had followed him five years before to take the first photograph of Cllr Ross when he had just been installed as Lord Provost and Lord Lieutenant, and looked back over the past five years.

The Lord Provost said: “It has been a tremendously fast five years and very full on. I had not appreciated just quite how full on it would be. It is your life for five years. Of course you have to remember that you have a dual role – as Lord Provost and as Lord Lieutenant of the capital city. With the level of royal activity it is another experience and opportunity – but then you are also a ward councillor at the same time.”

Within 24 hours of being installed, the Lord Provost was conducting his first Ceremony of the Keys at Holyrood Palace with the Princess Royal – and joked about the experience “I had no clue what I was doing, or why I was there”.



A pageant was held to mark the 250th anniversary of Sir Walter Scott’s birth. The Rt Hon Lord Provost and the Bailies took part in the procession. PHOTO Martin P McAdam

But he heaps praise on his team of city officers and office staff who have worked hard to keep him right. He said: “Without the great team that I have had behind me here in the last five years especially during the first twelve months it

would have been very difficult. Within the first two years were were averaging 1,300 civic events each year. It was fantastic getting to meet people and go places that you would never have had the opportunity to do, but then Covid came. It curtailed a lot of the physical activity but did not diminish the amount of work that we were doing. We went on line very quickly.

“As Lord Provost you are directly involved in many organisations as a trustee, patron or chair of more than 100 organisations in the city. During normal times I would have been out visiting these groups but going digital for two years actually allowed me to access more organisations than I would have done by doing civic visits. In many ways that was a good thing. Doing all the headline events like the Tattoo, the Ceremony of the Keys and the Riding of the Marches is fantastic but actually a key element of the job is getting out into the community and meeting ordinary people. The people who are doing fabulous work behind the scenes and who are dedicated to their own communities. It is very nice to turn up with the bling on and get photos taken and give the various bodies the oxygen of publicity, but actually just having a conversation over Zoom or Teams and giving them recognition meant just as much to the people involved.”



Celebrating the Chinese New Year with The Rt Hon Lord Provost Frank Ross, Chinese Consul General in Edinburgh Ma Qiang and Angus Robertson MSP Minister for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

During the first couple of years the Lord Provost visited China several times, travelling to several cities and building on the work he had done previously as Economy Convener.

“We have done fantastic work with China setting up an incubator in Shenzhen and mirroring that in Leith swapping high tech digital companies and that gave us a tremendous base to build on.”

One of the early visits was to a huge event in the twin city of Xi’an, and while the UK was the country of honour, the Lord Provost explained that Edinburgh was given half an hour to speak to the 2,500 delegates in attendance – three times as long as other UK cities and areas like the Northern Powerhouse.

He said: “People may think these twinning events are just

ceremonial but they are not – especially when you are abroad. Perhaps our perception of them is that they are more administrative or tribal but not overseas. We punch way above our weight. Our new economic strategy no longer allows us to twin, but Shenzhen approached us saying they wanted to be associated with Edinburgh. And that has led to a lot of work on the back of that with universities, Edinburgh Airport, the chambers of commerce. A trade mission might turn up but if it is not led by someone who at least appears to be a political figure then it is not really worthwhile. We know that the office of Lord Provost is not a political one, but it helps on overseas trips where it is seen as important.”

We are heavily involved with [Eurocities](#) despite Brexit, and I went on visits to some of our other twin cities like Krakow and Florence.



Lord Provost Frank Ross, St. John's Church, Edinburgh, 6th Aug. 2021

© 2021 J.L. Preece

The Lord Provost is also in charge of full council meetings

running the business with 63 councillors present. I suggested that this is quite a spectacle – and the Lord Provost agreed but also said that it is quite taxing even when online. He said: “I have about 80 people to keep control of when the meeting is online. I do object to those who are attending the meeting but who turn their cameras off as I don’t know as the chair of the meeting whether they are listening to the debate or event there. One of the advantages of a physical meeting is that you can at least see people so even if they are not participating. Some people do not turn their cameras on at all at online meetings which I think is rude.”

The technical team at the council has now worked out a way of councillors voting remotely which is much more efficient than roll call votes – with each councillor being asked in turn which way they were voting. This took ages and so the electronic voting is much better all round.

But the Lord Provost is forthright about what is expected of a councillor. He said: “I think councillors have a duty to physically attend – it is only one day a month that councillors have to attend full council and I think we have lost out in certain ways by not having people in the City Chambers now. And I bemoan the loss of the Members’ Lounge where councillors have coffee and can read the papers. It is a perk of course but it gave an opportunity for councillors of all parties to have those more relaxed conversations. During Covid we have become more confrontational since we don’t meet in person – that is not just me thinking that. People have told me that watching council meetings is not really a pleasant experience.”





Rt. Hon. Lord Provost, Frank Ross. Diwali Festival of Lights 2020. Photo: Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com) 2020. Photo: Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)

The one thing that the Lord Provost really regrets was missing the remembrance service for HRH The Prince Philip which he was unable to attend as he was self-isolating. He said: "I was the only Lord Lieutenant in the whole of the UK who was invited to attend – because of the Edinburgh connection. So not to be able to attend was a low point for me."

The high points are more difficult to pick out one or two out of the many events which he has attended. But he recalled sailing under the Forth Bridge aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth standing up in the crow's nest as one of the moments which he really enjoyed personally. The council has loaned a dinner service to the captain of the aircraft carrier bearing the Edinburgh crest, so that wherever the ship is in the world there will be a connection to the capital.

Another memorable occasion was the opening of the Queensferry Crossing in September 2017. when both Her Majesty The Queen

and HRH Prince Philip both attended – even though Prince Philip had officially retired by then.

The OneCity Trust is the city's social inclusion charity, and the Lord Provost has run several Burns Suppers to raise money for that. He explained that the charity “empowers communities to do what they want to do”. Some of the grants may be small amounts of money but they make a huge difference to the people who receive them.

He concluded by saying that it has been an honour to hold the position and has put his own stamp on the role, but concedes that it is time for someone new to come into the role and to make it their own. He said: “It will be strange but of course there is no guarantee I will even be elected. All I am doing is standing for election in May and I have already been a councillor for ten years now – probably longer than I first anticipated, but I have community projects in my ward which as local councillor I would like to finish.”

Listen to our full length interview with the Rt Hon Lord Provost on [Anchor.fm](#).

<https://twitter.com/EdinReporter/status/1520662290072276992?s=20&t=6Gofrly9A9r3Gh1m9bHWew>



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. Photo: Martin McAdam



The Lord Provost cuts the cake at Ferrymuir House in 2019  
PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter



The Rt Hon Lord Provost Frank Ross named this street in Shenzhen



Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh The Rt Hon Frank Ross  
PHOTO ©2017 The Edinburgh Reporter