

# **Climate Commission urges Edinburgh councillors to work together**

**Edinburgh's newly-elected councillors have been urged to work together and "seize the mandate for action" to deliver on the city's ambitious climate targets.**

Dr Sam Gardner, chair of the Edinburgh Climate Commission, said the council's new policymakers have "no reason to pause" following last month's election, after which Labour formed a minority administration with initial support from the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives.

During the last decade the city council has been run by SNP and Labour groups, first with Labour Leader Cllr Andrew Burns at the helm and secondly with SNP leader Adam McVey in charge.



Dr Sam Gardner

Prior to the election, the Commission – an independent group made up of 15 climate change experts sponsored by The City of Edinburgh Council and the University of Edinburgh’s Climate Change Institute – wrote to all parties asking them to outline their climate commitments.

“We found strong cross-party support from the Green Party, Labour, Liberal Democrats and the SNP to many of the actions we need to see in the coming months,” said Dr Gardiner, who is Head of Climate Change and Sustainability at Scottish Power.

The group received no response from the Conservatives, who are

the only group on the council not committed to Edinburgh's 2030 Climate Strategy, which has set a target of delivering a net zero city by the end of the decade.

Dr Gardiner added: "The latest global scientific report from the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) reminded us, if we needed reminding (and we really shouldn't), that the climate crisis isn't on hold.

"At its publication, the UN Secretary General said: "We are on a fast track to climate disaster: Major cities under water. Unprecedented heatwaves. Terrifying storms. Widespread water shortages. The extinction of a million species of plants and animals.

"This is not fiction or exaggeration. Climate promises and plans must be turned into reality and action, now. It is time to stop burning our planet and start investing in the abundant renewable energy all around us."

"With this warning ringing in our ears, Edinburgh now faces the challenge of turning its targets and commitments into meaningful action."

Election manifestos published by Labour, SNP, Lib Dem and the Greens this year included pledges to take action to implement the Climate Strategy, with commitments to ensure new housing developments and schools are built to maximise energy efficiency, and invest in the sustainability of existing homes.

Labour, now leading the local authority's response to the climate crisis, has promised to invest £700 million in the next five years to ensure council tenants "have the lowest bills possible".

The SNP, who are likely to pursue plans for a workplace parking levy and congestion charge and will have to see if these are supported by the new administration, said it will

work to see investment in defences in response to the impact of extreme weather events linked with climate change to upgrade gullies and other drainage infrastructure.

The manifesto published by the Lib Dems stated global warming is the “single most pressing and important issue facing humankind” and, like other groups, pledged to deliver a more integrated public transport network, active travel routes, park-and-ride sites and electric vehicle charging.

And acting on the recommendations of the 2030 Climate Strategy was a key focus of the Greens’ election campaign. The group said the council must “invest in the skills and capacity required” to meet the ambitious target and take steps to cut emissions including planting more trees, decarbonising the council’s light and heavy vehicle fleet and establishing an ‘Edinburgh Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy’ that “assists and facilitates building owners and tenants to improve the fabric of their buildings”.

The Conservatives in Edinburgh are unapologetically critical of the city’s current climate targets.

The 2030 net zero goal was criticised for having “no detailed costings or delivery plan” by the Tories ahead of the election.

“Without billions of pounds the council doesn’t have it is physically impossible to achieve in eight years,” the group’s manifesto stated.

It pledged to create a “realistic plan to address the council’s own carbon emissions” that is “both physically and financially achievable”.

Dr Gardiner continued: “With all the main political parties bar the Conservatives, committed to the published Edinburgh’s 2030 Climate Strategy there is no reason to pause, every reason to seize the mandate for action, and for all parties to

work together to deliver positive change for our Capital.

“We know what steps we need to take for Edinburgh to get on track for net zero. We know we have the technology. And we now know we have the public support for change.

“Edinburgh’s new Council administration must work across the Chamber to push forward the positive changes citizens of Edinburgh overwhelmingly voted for.”

## **by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter**

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