

Council Leader invites other political leaders in Edinburgh to form a plan for the city

The leader of The City of Edinburgh Council, Cllr Cammy Day is issuing an invitation to the other political group leaders to contribute to the council's plans for the years ahead by making their own suggestions for a plan for the city. The invitations will go out in the next week or so in a new kind of consensual politics, avoiding what Cllr Day said would be opposition for opposition's sake.

Cllr Day has been leader of the council since the end of May in a rather surprising political move following the election in early May. Labour entered a deal with the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives on Edinburgh Council to support them into forming a minority administration.

But the leader is adamant that this is no coalition of any

kind – it is instead a new form of consensual politics. And far from turning their backs on their history Labour is continuing to promote the policies put in place when they were part of the last administration. Cllr Day said particularly of transport policies: “People worry that a new administration is coming in and we’ll dump all the previous administration’s plans. We were part of that administration you know. We were a heavy player in that administration in there with 50% of the policy responsibilities across the city. So we will not be dumping any of that.

“The support to roll out more active travel, cycle lanes that’s all going to be the same work that was happening. What we’ll do is update it to take account of our manifesto and the discussions we will have over the summer with whatever parties will join us.”



Cllr Cammy Day is looking for input from all of the other political parties

Some of the non-political roles have been filled by LibDem and Conservative councillors, leading to much criticism that the Labour group has “got into bed” with the Tories. Cllr Day is adamant that this is not the case and that moving forward the

other parties are free to back Labour or not.

Shortly after the first council meeting when Labour assumed the reins of the administration, Cllr Kevin Lang endorsed this by telling The Edinburgh Reporter: “We will continue to sit as a constructive but robust opposition party. We voted to put Labour in place, but we are very clear that where we agree we will vote with them and where we disagree we will say so and vote accordingly. They cannot take us for granted, but I think it a good thing that Labour will have to reach out and engage with other political parties.”

There were 13 Labour councillors elected at the beginning of May although two of those – Cllr Katrina Faccenda and Cllr Ross McKenzie – abstained from the initial vote to put the Labour administration into place at the end of May. The newly elected councillors have now been disciplined by the Labour Group Whip and suspended from any party involvement for eight weeks. As you will hear the council leader is emphatic that the pair knew what the consequences of their actions would be in breaking the party whip.

Settle down with a cup of tea and listen to the way that the leader expects some of the key areas to unfold in Edinburgh – a new Transport for Edinburgh which will keep Lothian Buses in public ownership while they renew their fleet with more sustainable vehicles, and the prospect of new tram extensions. A transcript of the conversation is below.

Transcript of the podcast recorded on 7 July 2022 when Phyllis Stephen

and Cllr Cammy Day met in The Meadows to have a cup of coffee (Listen up for the cyclist sounding their horn who is indeed Professor Joe Goldblatt who cycles in The Meadows regularly accompanied by his dog Coco):

So this morning, I'm with Councillor Cammy Day. Cammy you are the still rather unexpected leader of the city council. And you're going to be able to tell me how long you've been really there.

So just 26th of May. So that would be just over a month. So it's been an exciting, exciting and busy thing in the last few weeks.

So just to explain. You're the leader of a 13 strong group, as was elected at the beginning of May. And out of 63 councillors, you're running a minority administration. I think we have to deal with the elephant in the room first, because to get to that point of you actually running the council, you had to enlist the help of the Lib Dems and the Tories. And two of your group did not vote with you. They abstained. So tell us about tell us what's happened with them? And what your view on that is.

So yes, we have a 13 strong group that includes – more than half of them are brand new counsellors full of energy and ambition and challenge the city to do better. So we're really excited about that. And yeah, we we offered up an arrangement to run the council to all the parties and two other parties supported that.

There's no coalition, there's no deals being done – apart from

voting for a Labour administration. And we will work proactively with people over the next few weeks and months to try and get the best for the city.

In terms of the two people that disappointingly chose not to stand by the democratic processes on which they were elected that's dealt with. The group whip has interviewed them. They've been disciplined and appropriate action been taken. And I hope that – they've been suspended free. They have been suspended for eight weeks. And the rules of the group mean that they're not allowed to take part in any group activities during that period, or be around the group office for that time as well. And people knew the consequences of it all that was explained to them way before When you are selected to stand as a Labour councillor, you're interviewed by the city party, and asked if you will abide by the group whip's decision, the group's decision. And every candidate, every one of our candidates across the city agreed to abide by that.

So that's now in the past, because when the weeks is up, that will be just ahead of the second full council meeting at the end of August. You've already had your first one. And we noted that they were sitting slightly apart from the rest of the Labour group as was only right.

So what now? What have people what have the Lib Dems and the Tories helped to get into power? What are you the labour administration? What are you going to do?

So we are open and accept that there's no majority running the council and we'll have to work differently across all five political parties to be fair, and I have met with all the group leaders to discuss ideas and proposals on how we might work together going forward I put a motion to council last week.

Last week, that's a week ago today, of course, a week ago.

We will be asking the parties to join us over the summer, and

try and work on a plan for the city, you know. The reality is that about 70 80% of all our manifestos are saying the same kind of things. We all want to address poverty, housing and the climate. How we get there, we all have different views on that I appreciate But the opportunity for five parties to try and sit together and develop a plan for the city or a plan for our citizens rather than a political plan, for me is what we're trying to get to. That offer has been extended to every party. And whilst they

Are they taking you up on it?

The invites will go out, we have a session this afternoon for the Labour conveners to try and set the scene for that. And then in the next few weeks, invites will go to all the parties You've seen last week that the Lib Dems and Conservatives stood up saying we don't agree with everything in the labour manifesto but we'd be happy to work with you to look at where there are areas we can work together. And disappointingly, the other two parties didn't support that last week, but the invite will still be open for them to come and join us. I don't think the Green and SNP party would walk away from or want to obviously walk away from getting key areas around climate into a city plan for our residents. And I'm not suggesting that everyone is going to vote for every part of it, but if there's 70 to 80% of our manifestos that we work together on that for me is a city plan.

Well that would seem consensual politics would seem to be a more positive way of running the city. And then you can get all the argy-bargy done outside the city Chambers as it were outside the chamber rather than in the meeting,

I don't think the public wants to see us infighting, they want local members to work together to get the best for their community. That's what we're trying to do. Try to get basic services right, so that the public can see there has been a change. I'm genuinely opening that door to say, can we work

together and we've seen from last week that this supposed coalition that doesn't exist – on the first vote, we voted differently from every other party in the chamber. And the second one was that there was a vote on a motion from the SNP about working to set up a drugs facility. And we didn't vote against this motion. Yeah, we didn't vote against that we added... we accepted that and asked to add to that we would respond positively to Paul Sweeney's bill, going through the Scottish Parliament, and also organise an Edinburgh wide summit on drugs, which we thought was quite a reasonable thing. And in fairness, the other parties didn't accept that, so we didn't win that vote. That's democracy, of course, and I absolutely accept that and other votes that happened during the day, we supported the Greens and SNP on some things, the Lib Dems, Tories and other parties back us on some things. So for me, it's consensual politics, there are some things we will win and lose.

This is a whole new way then of doing business. Because, you know, for the last 10 years, effectively, Labour and the SNP have said this is what's going to happen and everybody else has wriggled and squirmed or, or laid down and accepted it whichever way it happened to be. So this way should mean that most of the parties get at least some bits of their manifesto.

The last council got quite toxic, I appreciate that Covid didn't help. Being online didn't help not having the opportunity to speak to people face to face and in the corridors or members Lounge has always been an issue. But you know the PR system works in Edinburgh, probably more than it wasn't any other place in Scotland, that that's not public relations. Yes the voting system. That, you know, most other cities in Scotland, it's quite a choice between one party or the other, and Edinburgh because of its make up the votes are split five ways. So I don't think we'll ever see the amazing result that happened in West Dunbartonshire where Labour took control of that council with a majority and that's amazing.

But I don't think any party will ever see a majority in Edinburgh. And so we need to have this consensual politics and trying to work differently. That's why offer to the do e to the councillors, but being maybe more important than to the city who wants to see us working together.

So where where does that take us? here we are July is a month of recess anyway. But coming up we've got a festival and you know moving on from there you've got various other things – so one of the things that was discussed last week was looking at a plan for literally cleaning up the city and literally getting litter and whatever picked up and streets cleaned and stuff like that. But you know if you were to look at your your plans – and your priorities – where do your priorities now lie?

So I suppose in our budget last year we put in money to clean up the city centre because we accept that during Covid things got a bit stale and there needs to be a bit of investment so that's been agreed. I think for me there's just something about you know we're a world leading capital city and we need to get basic services right whether that's cleaning up the city centre for people who live there people come there to work and obviously for the increased tourism we're happily seeing back to the city but more importantly making sure for the residents of this city across the whole city. How can we just get the basic services right. Most people want to have their bins picked up the streets cleaned a decent house live in decent services nearby, and I suppose it's that principle that can we get basic services right is one of our main things

I suppose on top of that, Some of the key things we want to push forward and will be about the results of the Poverty Commission that reported during Covid to make sure that this is at the forefront of what we're doing in Edinburgh to make sure the 80,000 people or so that were in poverty – now that may obviously have increased given the cost of living crisis we are in just now.

But, but there seems to be a problem with with food banks and things in Edinburgh to say that it's all over Scotland so not just Edinburgh.

Yeah, I mean, last week I chaired the Edinburgh Partnership which brings together the most senior people in public bodies across the city. And, you know, I heard from them that they are all experiencing in both their own staff teams that's in the NHS the police force, further and higher education, the council, the voluntary sector, saying that the increase and worry they have got is the accessibility to cheap or free food and staples.

It's just not there. And the availability of food banks as there's more and more pressure on them. The Poverty commission reported that in addition to people who are in poverty there is a working poverty now. That again, was reported prior to the current cost of living and energy prices. So I think we will be seeing even more people that are in professional jobs needing to access cheap or free food and that's really worrying.

Previously I said we should never fund food banks because it just – it normalises the need for that handout, but.....

...the reality is a bit of a stigma.

Yes but you know when parents and their families, and there is just no food in the cupboard? You know, you can be proud and not eat.

What can you do you know, how do you address a problem as big as that?

So I've called Edinburgh Partnership to have an emergency meeting during the summer to look at exactly what can we do and get specialists in about what access to food can we get? For example I went during the visit Empty Kitchens Full Hearts last week to see them deliver hundreds of meals every day to

people's doors. Now that, you know, that's brilliant, but it's also quite sad that we've got to have a local tiny charity run by volunteers effectively feeding our city.

They have effectively an industrial scale kitchen making I don't know a thousand litres of soup every day to get out to people. And they're doing fantastic works, as are all the people who are providing food banks and that type of help.

How do you make it that that's not needed?

You know, in the midst of the crisis and fuel costs, both your vehicles if you use them, but also just your home, people not having enough money to heat your home and not enough money to eat. I mean, the news we're hearing this morning that Boris has gone. I would hope calls for a general election which might change the direction of government. The fact, when they reversed the increase in Universal Credit, that's a huge £20 extra in someone's pocket during a crisis to buy food, for me would be

That would be the difference between a food bank and not

And the Scottish Government who doubled their child allowance payment and my party in Holyrood asked that that would be doubled again, even if that was a temporary measure during this crisis would give another £10- 20 pounds a week. And that might seem nothing to Joe Public, but for a lot of people that £10-20 bag of shopping will be the difference in whether you eat or not.

Just tell everybody this is not your dog, or a dog.

I love dogs! That difference between £10 or £20 from child allowance increase or Universal Credit increases what we need to keep calling for...

But then, so so you're going to have a meeting over the summer with the Edinburgh partnership and some emergency plans might

hopefully be wheeled into place. What about bins and things like that? We're sitting at the edge of The Meadows which is lovely. But you know, there is a fairly scrappy looking bin over there Cammy come on could that one not do with with being replaced. That's doing its job. Do you see things so when you're walking about and do you report things?

So I took a video in Albert Street because one of the shops had one of the restaurants had littered their belongings and napkins all over the road so I sent the video to the head of the service. And then just the other morning as I was coming across St Andrew Square, the lane was full of McDonald's wrappers. So now our officers are speaking to McDonald's and if they pick up their game then action will be taken against them and so I dont take a picture of everything though!

So your role is to keep reporting stuff

I think it's up to local members job to keep the areas they represent in the best condition they can. I'm not gonna pretend that I sned everything I pass in the street to someone – I need to take some time out as well. But I think when there are areas is just not looking their best It's our job to highlight that

So what are you going to do then about cleaning up the city because I do think that there were other cities during lockdown who were, you know, spraying streets and hosing down streets and all sorts things. And we didn't seem to be doing any of that.

So I say this reminding everybody that Edinburgh is the lowest funded Council in Scotland, according to the SNP government's own figures. So I keep making that point that Edinburgh is a growing successful city, with huge demand on our services, and we are the lowest funded So everybody wants a bit of the council's money so we'll try to spread it as best we can to provide the huge number of increasing services that people

need. But in February, we put – I can't remember the amount – about half a million pounds extra into a clean up of the city.

There's a bin rollout of the communal bins to replace them all and particularly in tenemental areas, you've got brand new bin hubs, we've got all the bins in one rather than rubbish at one end and recycling at the other

It's still happening. It's definitely happening in Leith because I've seen them.

And it also be fair to say that the Conservatives under the leadership of Iain Whyte did ask for this in their manifesto. So with that, you would seem to be on the same page.

Yes and you know, the motion that went up from the Conservatives basically echoed the article I put into the media a few weeks back saying we need to clean up the city and get basic services right.

So I suppose that is back to one of the points that probably none of the parties would disagree with that there is a need to get the city a bit of a wash down as you said, and so we'll start on that it needs to be taken into context – that costs money, and that money might be needed to spend on on services, but older people care at home or, you know, fixing potholes. So we need to spread that money across all these areas, but absolutely we are committed to give a clean up of the city. And we also put money in last year's budget to put some of that resource into each of the localities across the city. So then local people can influence that in local partnerships and see where that money should be spent.

One of one of the kind of early criticisms of your new administration, was that how on earth you are going to get a budget passed whenever you need to do that? I think you don't need to do that until next February. Correct. But you need to be thinking about that now I guess?

It will be part of the discussion we're having this afternoon, is to start that kind of vision about how will we do that? You know, there are a number of authorities around Edinburgh actually in Edinburgh and Lothian who have the same type of arrangement – a Labour minority administration, they don't have the same openness to work with other parties that I have put out there but I know we've got a difficult decision to make in February once we get our undoubtedly reduced budget from SNP Green Government in December, or an indication in at least in December, we'll have to look at how we manage to get a budget through

isn't it difficult to balance the books? I mean, you have to present a balanced budget, that's your statutory duty. But it must be very difficult then, and I know you've said this to me before that, you know, as a new councillor, it was one of the first things you had to do was slash a budget for something or another. But you know, at the same time at last week's meeting you were able to find, and I think it was 50,000 pounds for each of the Prentice centre and the Drylaw Neighbourhood Centre. Which ...are they in your ward? Not quite? Prentice is, so there is a little bit of slack...

That came from the reserves, you know, the reserves is the councils to deal with anything that crops up that is of a serious nature. Many years ago when all the mining areas in the South Side crashed, we had to spend a lot of money to fix that. So that money is there for I suppose issues that may come to the city now and again. And you know, we shouldn't spend that resource by motions to the council. I appreciate there was an emergency situation there. So we'll do what we can with awarded up to £50,000 to each of the projects.

But then they have to make themselves sustainable, going forward, or are they have to be allowed to collapse?

So yes, we were quite clear and all the parties agreed the wording on that that this is a one off if they require it,

because we need to do some due diligence to make sure that both organisations are viable. One of them seems to have just decided to tell us they're closing a few days later, which is quite worrying. So we're not going to throw a public money at projects that don't have a sustainable plan for the future. And nor nor can we commit to anything other than this.

Little because it is public funds – you and I – our council tax that funds this and people would argue that there are projects across the city that would like £50,000 to keep them surviving. Nor do we want to see community based projects have closing down on our watch. But, you know, the idea that projects now have to merge and work differently that's just the reality now. And I know one of the projects who we spoke about in the Southside community centre who now have arts projects based in there and they are a festival venue so they've diversified their funding

You have to have money coming in to...

The public purse continues to shrink in the capital city. People need to think differently as does the council We are looking to reduce the amount of buildings we operate from to try and reduce that cost to the public as well and that would apply to the voluntary sector as well

So one of the one of the good things about being a brand new leader coming in, is that you're going to get to be at the opening ceremony of the new £47 million Meadowbank Stadium, just in a week or two. And I realised that's been a long time coming and you can't claim full responsibility or where it can be. But that's going to be a good thing for the city, isn't it?

I hope to be able to open that and I personally don't take credit for it. I think the previous administration, some of the local councillors, my colleague, Councillor Joan Griffiths, who seems to have championed that for more years

than I think I've been around. And I think to be fair, all local members have supported that, the city has supported it. And like you, I had a tour a few weeks back, and it looks amazing, you know, it's really exciting. £47 million pound investment there

I have just come from a meeting at the King's Theatre this morning to hear their £30 million plans to completely renovate the King's Theatre. So of course, the city is putting money into that , they've had a public crowdfunding as well.

They've got great patrons who've donated, crowd funders there is money coming from the council, the government, I think both UK and Scottish. Yesterday, I met with the UK minister to argue that – not argue, but to ask that they keep Edinburgh in their mind as the capital city when they're having further discussion about levelling up or any other funding that might come from UK Government to help the capitalcity. So you know, we'll keep pushing. And you know, in the next few months, when we see the final part of the tram, this part of the tram stage finished. We will open that as well and that'll be an exciting time. And again, not every party in the council has supported the trams but if you get time to watch the flyover video the fly through it is amazing the work that has happened there, and it's due to finish the end of this year, a few months testing and be open by around May next year.

And so then I have to ask you I guess about your temporary transport convener and what's going to happen after, after his tenure, however short or long that is has come to an end? Where are the policies for transport? Is there going to be a north south tram extension? Are you going to look at, you know, extending cycle lanes? Are you going to look at making low traffic neighbourhoods in various areas of the city? What are your thoughts on that?

So my colleague, Cllr Scott Arthur is doing an amazing job in transport and environment. He didn't expect to have that role.

And I'm really pleased he has taken it on. His background's in that kind of area

He is a professor of civil engineering isn't he he should know about it?

So maybe he'll help us do the next tram project...

Why is he not the best guy to just leave in the job then.

So that may well happen. So I've yet to have a discussion when we look to reform the committee structures around September and October, I'll be having a discussion with my group about who would lead that. The work that Cllr Arthur is doing just now I think is really progressive. So he may well be encouraged to stay in that job. And people, people worry that a new administration is coming in and we'll dump all the previous administration's plans. We were part of that administration.

You know, we were a heavy player in that administration in there at 50% of the policy responsibilities across the city. So we will not be dumping any of that. The support to roll out more active travel, cycle lanes that's all going to be the same work that was happening. What we'll do is update it to take account of our manifesto and the discussions we will have over the summer with whatever parties will join us.

We didn't put the term the next iteration of the tram into our manifesto. Would you be open to that? I would absolutely be open to that. I think we accept that the tram is successful. And I think when the tram line opens into Newhaven up Leith Walk it will be hugely successful It will transport people from one of the most populated parts of the city out and about into the wider parts of the city. I accept longer term of course, I would like us to finish line 1B which connects Newhaven into Roseburn and that cuts through my ward so it would be fantastic to have that.

That could can be your legacy

It also cuts through the city's biggest public sector investment at Granton Waterfront. So it's absolutely right to have a modern efficient transport hub through that part of the city. But I also accept that there's a strong case to take the trams up into the south of the city where there's the SickKids the Royal Infirmary, the BioQuarter, and huge housing developments. So I'm not against it, I think we just need to be clear of the timings and the pressures on public finance or the term funds itself.

That's not, that's not what the public thinks public thinks that you've scalped Lothian buses to pay for the tram.

So Lothian Buses continue to be the best bus company in the UK, award winning every year. And one of my first jobs with the transport convener was to meet with the chief executive and the board of Lothian buses recently, to hear about their grand plans to renew the fleet to renew their commitment to sustainability in a new fleet of buses.

They are looking at different models, and that will be amazing for the city.

But I suppose we publicly committed in our manifesto to keep loving buses in public ownership, you know, and is the envy of local authorities across Scotland, if not the UK that we have a publicly funded bus company, run for lifts for residents and run as a as a business, of course, and one of the best. But we're also committed to bring the Transport for Edinburgh group, the tram group and the bus group into one company for Edinburgh so that they can all work together. And that that's,

that seems to be a little bit of kicking and screaming going on There has been

But I can assure you that in the last few weeks that that has moved on. And we know prioritising that to bring together the

three companies into one. And then obviously we go to the appropriate recruitment to find a new management team for that new model. But I think that will streamline the efficiencies out. That would also include perhaps rehiring some of the existing staff

Absolutely, all the current staff can of course apply for the new roles whatever they might be. But I think it's smarter for the city to have one transport body that runs trams buses, and then hopefully in some time in the future, a new bike scheme for the capital as well. And take some responsibility for overseeing like I was talking about extending cycling lanes and it should all fit together active travel transport, as well. So it's exciting times for us. But I hope what we're going to do is enhance the last business plan, enhance the current council business plan to make it a plan for the city. And as I said I encourage as many of the other parties to be part of that process.

So actually, what you call the to all the other party group leaders is talk to you know, get their get their demands or asks in now so that they can be included and their ideas can be included in your overall manifesto moving forward.

I suppose I'm asking them to not be oppositional for oppositional sake, and and put politics aside a little on this and say, you know, we're in really difficult times in public financing. The city's citizens are crying out for help from us and, and by being oppositional is not going to help that. Of course, we're politicians so we will not agree on everything. But I don't think we need to fight for no reason. So my call is to all the parties come work with us at least to develop a plan or the key things that we can agree to work together on. And then anything else of course, they can vote separately in however they want to. So yeah, my call is to leaders to come and join us. play your part in that plan for the city particularly in these challenging times. Thank you very much for your time this morning.

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