

Comment – Essential Edinburgh in mammoth effort to clean up

This is a comment piece by Roddy Smith, Chief Executive, Essential Edinburgh which is the Business Improvement District (BID) covering the city centre.



Roddy Smith CEO of Essential Edinburgh

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The vital support provided by Essential Edinburgh's Clean Team in August offered a graphic demonstration of the value of private sector businesses paying to supplement the services provided by local authorities.

While other parts of the city centre were, literally, littered by ever-mounting piles of uncollected garbage as the city bin strike hit hard, the Business Improvement District bounded by Princes Street and George Street was noticeably cleaner.

Our team members filled over 1400 sacks of over-spilled rubbish during the strikes, an amazing quantity and testament to their hard work on behalf of our levy paying businesses, and tangible evidence of the value of the private sector investing in its city centre.

It was disappointing that the bin strike had such an adverse impact on the face we were able to present to the world as our famous summer festivals returned post Covid 19 pandemic. I have no comment to make on the rights or wrongs of the strike but there is no doubt that at our busiest time of the year, when the world was watching, the city looked so bad.

However, while the numbers may have tracked a little below the record-breaking pre pandemic levels of 2019, it was very encouraging to see the city so vibrant and busy. It was pleasing to see lots of international visitors – particularly from the USA – in the city. Numbers for the Far East were still low, and also the Middle East, so proactive marketing to these key markets should be a priority moving forward.

In terms of how the city centre performed, footfall and retail sales are still reporting a very mixed bag. With footfall still tracking circa 10% below 2019 levels we need to work hard to bring residents and tourists back in.

A key part of the city centre community still not returning is our office-based workers. Understandably as we recover many businesses are maintaining a hybrid work system or indeed allowing their staff to work from home full time. This includes a number of large employers including both the local and national government. It is hoped that numbers return in the medium term and although it is anticipated that home working will continue indefinitely a greater proportion of working time in the office will greatly aid city centre recovery, and it would be very helpful to the myriad businesses who depend on this demographic to see our governments encouraging more staff to return more often.

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