

# RBS Six Nations – Scotland 27 Ireland 22

✖ Another heroic performance from Stuart Hogg and the dark blues stopped the Irish fightback in a hotly contested Six Nations opener.

This was a dramatic start to the Six Nations Championship as Ireland were beaten by an in-form Scotland side brimming with confidence.

Mercifully the weather held off and one of the best Six Nations openers at Murrayfield unfolded.

The hype around the Scottish team leading up to the tournament feels well deserved after this performance, reminiscent of the form Glasgow have produced on the European stage.

Stuart Hogg was rampant at full back, his blistering pace and eye for space means his place in the British and Irish Lions team is surely now a certainty and his man of the match performance and two tries made the difference.

The team held their own, Scotland captain Greig Laidlaw's decision making was vital, Richie and Johnny Gray amongst many others put in a shift and the win was the least their performances deserved. The omission of WP Nel from the line up was a source of concern but Ireland failed to make their dominance at the scrum pay.

✖ An impressive first half display by Scotland, putting three tries on the scoreboard, built a platform that withstood the inevitable Irish onslaught at the start of the second half. The resurgence from Ireland was ferocious, but ultimately they gave themselves too much to do.

Scotland took their chances when going forward and their

defence held up remarkably well in the first half to take a 21-8 lead into the break.

Ireland hit back with a flurry of tries to take a two point lead before Scotland sealed the win with two penalty conversions late in the game to win 27-22.

After a high intensity start a smart passing phase by Scotland ended with an unfortunate knock on after a mix up between Finn Russell and Huw Jones. The Scottish scrum also seemed to misfire in the initial stages of the game with a few penalties awarded against Allan Dell.

Scotland's passing game soon began to work and Stuart Hogg calmly gathered a loose pass from Finn Russell to score Scotland's first try.

A pivotal moment in the game came soon after as Ireland turned down an opportunity to take three points after kicking two penalties into touch near the Scottish try line. Perhaps the Irish team sensed this was going to be a high scoring affair or perhaps a shade of overconfidence crept into the Irish side's thinking.

Rory Best was caught accidentally offside after separating from the maul just yards from Scotland's try line, and with that Irelands chance to hit back immediately was gone.

Having weathered that spell of Irish possession, Scotland came knocking again and delivered in style, this time Hogg running the best part of forty yards to score yet again. After only their second significant attack Scotland once again cut through the Irish defence and the crowd at Murrayfield were again in rapturous applause.

The Irish did retaliate soon after the second try, as the Munster winger Keith Earls burst through Scottish lines for Ireland's first try. The Irish attack was tantalisingly close

to being scuppered as Tommy Seymour almost swept up Simon Zebo's long wayward pass.

Scotland were almost immediate in their response when a five metre line out drill outfoxed the Irish defence. Inside centre Alex Dunbar could have pirouetted across the try line if he had wanted, catching the ball and diving across the try line completely unchallenged.

Ireland managed to pick up a penalty but Scotland mounted serious pressure on the Irish defence before the end of the first half and were pressing for a fourth try before Zebo pinched the ball from Alex Dunbar. His kick and chase was an exhilarating end to an energetic first half.

The defeat of New Zealand was now long forgotten and the ashen faced Irish side came out with a sense of determination in the second half that was necessary to make this game salvageable.

The Scottish defence had so far stoically withstood everything the Irish could muster, albeit a one dimensional Sexton-less offense, but Paddy Jackson offers a different kind of game, not quite blessed with the same ability to control a game or to steer the defence out of trouble with his boot. He made incisive and dinky runs and plenty of crafty passes but he failed to dictate the tempo of the game and even with the mainstay of possession Ireland were simply going through the phases in the first half without looking threatening.

This all changed in the second half and Ireland dominated possession but this time with purpose and guile.

Within ten minutes of the restart, Ireland stormed into the Scottish 22 and Ian Henderson scooped the ball up from the foot of a ruck on the Scottish try line and dived over for the try.

Another Irish try was to follow after the onslaught of possession was beginning to take its toll, the Scottish defence began to grow weary and tackles that were made in the

first half were beginning to be missed as the game wore on.

Huw Jones, a man many expect to make an impact in this Six Nations was substituted by Mark Bennett. He returned from injury and had not played since the autumn tests, so he may have lacked the necessary match sharpness for his Six Nations debut to shine in the way he did against Australia, but there is still time in this tournament left for him to make an impact.

Ultimately Scotland's game management and the coolness of Greig Laidlaw made the difference at the final period of the game. Scotland's brief foray into the Irish half led to two kickable penalties in quick succession, converting the first and kicking into touch for the second, winding down the precious minutes before winning another penalty and sealing a hard earned and well deserved Six Nations victory.

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## **Indoor hockey – Holders Inverleith fall at final hurdle**

✖ Inverleith's reign as Scotland's indoor champions is over after their defeat in the Division One final by arch rivals Grove Menzieshill.

The Edinburgh side lost 7-3 after being 3-1 behind at the break and a goal from Scottish outdoor international, Gavin Byers, proving pivotal.

Byers, who has recently spent some time playing hockey in Australia, slotted home soon after former Olympian Stephen


Dick opened Inverleith's account.

Byers' score made it 3-1 in favour of the Dundee side, who were runners-up last season, and they never looked back at Bell's Sports Centre, Perth.

Grange were beaten by Bromac Kelburne in the third and fourth place play-off while Hillhead lost 8-6 to PSL Team Sport Clydesdale in the fifth and sixth place play-off.

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## **Women's basketball – Pride take a fall as Nottingham cruise home**

 Caledonia Pride were dismissed 72-47 at Nottingham Wildcats in the Women's British Basketball Trophy.

Siobhan Prior top scored with 19 points and Ashley Harris pocketed 16 points and collected 20 rebounds.

The Scots lost the opening session 20-12 and were overpowered in the second, Wildcats scoring 26 points against seven.

Pride rallied in the third, winning it 16-10 but Wildcats edged the final quarter 16-12 for a comfortable win.

They move on to next Saturday when they play Manchester Mystics in a crunch clash to decide who progresses from the pool.

Bart Sengers, Pride's head coach, must regroup and his highest points scorers on the day were Tricia Oakes with 16 and Natalie Bastian with 12.

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# Ice hockey – Capitals claim second nail-biting win in 24 hours

❌ Elite League: Fife Flyers 4, Edinburgh Capitals 5; Sheffield Steelers 5, Dundee Stars 4; Braehead Clan 4, Belfast Giants 5

Edinburgh Capitals claimed their second straight win in 24-hours by coming from 4-3 down to snatch a 5-4 victory at arch rivals Fife Flyers in a thriller at Kirkcaldy.

Player/coach Michal Dobron, who guided his side to a 4-3 penalty shots success at Dundee Stars on Friday, proved the hero when he levelled the game at 4-4 with less than six minutes remaining.

And the Czech Republic defenceman slotted after 69 seconds of the overtime period on the power play to claim a valuable two points.

Fife fans were left stunned but earlier Ian Schultz opened the scoring with a short-handed, unassisted goal for Capitals after 12 minutes.

Chase Schaber levelled two minutes later but Taylor MacDougall put the visitors ahead for a second time two minutes after that.

The see-saw game exploded again when Fife levelled in the 22nd minute from Carlo Finucci but Karel Hromas netted Capitals' third after 30 minutes.

Seb Thinel after 41 minutes and Mathew Sisca in the 51st

minutes scored, both on the power play, to put Fife ahead for the first time.

Dobron was not to be denied and his first came in 54 minutes before he ended the contest early in the extra period.

Fifth-placed Braehead Clan's hopes of a home victory over second-top Belfast Giants were dashed by a Michael Forney game-winner less than five minutes from time after the sides were locked at 4-4 in Glasgow.

Second-bottom Dundee let slip a 3-2 lead to go down 5-4 at third-placed Sheffield Steelers with Levi Nelson snatching the winner with eight minutes remaining.

Cale Tenaka missed a penalty shot for Dundee with the scoreline at 2-1 against the Scots.

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## Hockey – Scotland v Ghana, World League 2, Valencia

*Scotland open their account with a win in Valencia*



Scotland's first match in World League 2 in Valencia was against unfancied Ghana. Aim for Scotland was a win. By how much was irrelevant and that 'how much' was 1-0.

The first half of the match was almost totally played in Ghana's half, with the large majority of that inside the 25.

The Ghanaian defence was under all sorts of pressure, but, once the ball was fired into the 'D', Scotland were finding it

difficult to get stick on ball. The size of the defenders had a hand in this, but the sheer numbers didn't help.

The goal came early in the second quarter from an Ami Costello short corner which she fired into the bottom right giving the keeper no chance to save.



Ghana did make a couple of incursions into the Scots' 'D' during the half, but keeper, Nicola Cochrane was barely troubled and the ball was soon back at the other end.

The second half was much the same, with Scotland causing Ghana a great deal of trouble down the left touchline with Jennifer Eadie – who's parents arrived minus any luggage – and Nikki Lloyd causing general mayhem.

In this half the goal area was a bit more difficult to penetrate, but their best chance came from a scramble on the floor involving Edinburgh University's, Becky Merchant. However, the umpire blew for foul play and the chance was gone.



There was a bit of a scare with about eight minutes to go when Ghana were awarded a penalty corner, but the ball was deflected over the bar.

The final few minutes were about keep-ball, and this way the Scots played out the remaining time to take their opening win of the tournament.



This match had been preceded by the other match in Pool B, which turned out in the end to be a fairly average encounter between Poland and Ukraine.



Poland opened the scoring with a penalty stroke just on the 15 minute mark, but Ukraine struck back from a penalty corner the other side of the break to draw level.

Poland drew clear in the second half through two field goals, but the Ukrainians pulled one back just before time to finish the match 3-2 to Poland.

*Images from the match will [appear here](#) over the next few days*

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# Impressive Hearts Cruise to Victory at Fir Park



**Motherwell 0 Heart of Midlothian 3**

**Ladbrokes Premiership, Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2017 – Fir Park**

After their demolition job on Rangers at Tynecastle on Wednesday night, Hearts headed for Lanarkshire on Saturday in fine fettle. The Maroons record away from Gorgie this season has not been impressive – indeed, Hearts last league win on their travels was at Fir Park in September when they won 3-1. But they were confident of recording another win on Saturday.

Head Coach Ian Cathro made a couple of changes from the team that put Rangers to the sword in midweek. Recent signings Tasos Avlonitis and Tziolis were brought in at the expense of midweek scorer Krystian Nowak and, rather surprisingly, captain Perry Kitchen.

The 12.15pm kick-off for the benefit of satellite television didn't quite lend itself to the same raucous atmosphere of

Tynecastle but Hearts began the game in positive fashion. Just four minutes had passed when Isma Goncalves fired an effort from just outside the penalty box and his effort was inches wide.

Moments later, the home side had a chance when Moults header bounced off the goal line before Hearts keeper Jack Hamilton collected the ball. Home appeals that the ball had crossed the line were pointless as the striker was offside in any case.

Jamie Walker then nearly replicated his goal against Rangers in midweek when he dispossessed Jules but the winger's effort on goal went over the bar.

The impressive Lennard Sowah then set up Walker but this time his effort hit the side net.

On the half hour, Malaury Martin fired in a free-kick which lacked power but nonetheless forced home keeper Samson to push the ball wide.

Motherwell nearly went in front just before half-time when Ainsworth's effort on goal was scrambled clear by Avlonitis.

### **Half-time Motherwell 0 Hearts 0**

Ian Cathro made a change at the interval, taking off Bjorn Johnsen and replacing him with Choulay.

Hearts were dominating the game without making the breakthrough but their chances were given a boost in the 52<sup>nd</sup> minute. McHugh challenged Don Cowie and his attempt to get the ball was deemed dangerous by referee Andrew Dallas who promptly showed the Well man a red card. It seemed a harsh decision but then Mr Dallas was having one of those days his refereeing father Hugh occasionally had, underlined by his decision to book Malaury Martin in the first half for tripping a Motherwell player when the 'offence' had been committed by a Motherwell team mate.

On the hour mark, Hearts at last took the lead. Tziolis fired in an effort from 25 yards which took a deflection before spinning over the head of keeper Samson and into the net.

Despite being reduced to ten men, Motherwell almost grabbed an equaliser when Lasley fired an effort which whistled past Jack Hamilton's post.

The home side kept pressing but the visitors sealed the points with two goals in the final five minutes. In the 85<sup>th</sup> minute Choulay burst forward at speed and fed Goncalves who fired past Samson to double Hearts lead.

It was Goncalves who put the icing on the cake when he scored again with just two minutes left. Again, it was fine play from Choulay who delivered a teasing cross into the penalty box which Goncalves took first time to drill past Samson.

It was another fine performance and result for Hearts who dominated the game and thoroughly deserved their victory.

Now they look forward to Hibernian in the Scottish Cup at Tynecastle next Sunday.

**Motherwell:** Samson, Tait (McMillan, 17'), Hammell (Lucas, 55'), Heneghan, McManus, Ainsworth (Pearson, 55'), McHugh, Moul, Cadden, Lasley, Jules.

**Hearts:** Hamilton, Struna, Avlonitis, Hughes, Sowah, Cowie, Tziolis, Martin (Kitchen, 60'), Walker (Nicholson, 75'), Goncalves, Johnsen (Choulay, 46').

**Ref:** Andrew Dallas

**Att:** 4,651

**Top Man:** Isma Goncalves

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# Hibs come from behind to grab share of points against Ayr United



Hibs came from behind to grab a share of the points in a hard fought encounter with Ayr United at Easter Road this afternoon.

Head Coach Neil Lennon made two changes to the starting XI that beat Queen of the South last Saturday with front pair Grant Holt and Jason Cummings making way for Martin Boyle and Chris Humphrey.

Former Hibs' midfielder Paul Cairney started for Ayr United.

Ayr won the toss and chose to kick toward their own supporters in the Dunbar end and their plan paid early dividends when they took the lead in the 3rd minute.

Rab Crawford picked up the ball in midfield and the Hibs' defenders backed off allowing him to get his shot away. Ross Laidlaw appeared to have it covered but despite getting both hand to the ball it squirmed over the line.

From then it was one way traffic with United time wasting from the 7th minute, much to the annoyance of the home supporters.

The first half was littered with fouls and eventually referee Crawford Allan took action, booking Jamie Adams for a foul on

Fraser Fyvie.

Greg Fleming did well to parry a James Keatings' free kick then Conrad Balatoni was shown a yellow card for barging into the back of Darren McGregor and United boss Ian McCall was spoken to for over protesting.

Humphrey's shot was deflected into the path of Boyle but Fleming was alert to the danger and managed to clear the ball.

Hibs almost equalised in the 35th minute after some great skill by John McGinn. He found Lewis Stevenson on the left and Andrew Shinnie toe poked his cross goalwards but again Fleming managed to save.

Moments later Shinnie should have scored but his diving header from Fyvie's inch perfect cross flew over the bar.

Shinnie was booked on the stroke of half time.

Grant Holt replaced Humphrey for the second half and Hibs continued to dominate possession as they looked to get back into the game.

A David Gray cross from the right was headed off the line with Holt ready to pounce.

Lennon then replaced Shinnie with Jason Cummings on the hour mark and McGregor had a chance when Fleming dropped Keatings' corner but his half volley went over the bar.

It looked as if it was going to be one of these days for Hibs but they managed to grab an equaliser with 1 minutes remaining. Keatings picked up the ball on the right and sent a great cross into the danger area and Cummings headed the ball into the net.

Brian graham replaced Boyle and Hibs continued to push forward as Ayr wasted time then in time added on goalscorer Crawford went down apparently injured after a challenge by Fyvie, The

Hibs fans were convinced that he was feigning injury and booed his time wasting.

The referee made a point of showing his watch to the crowd suggesting that he was taking the injury into account then to the fury of the home supporters he blew for full time within seconds of the restart.

The referee and his assistants left the field to a chorus of boos from the frustrated Hibs' fans.

The result moved Hibs nine points clear at the top of the table however second placed Dundee United faced Raith Rovers in the late kick off.

Hibs: Laidlaw, Gray, Fontaine, McGinn, Fyvie, Stevenson, Boyle, Keatings, Shinnie, McGregor, Humphrey Subs: Gallacher, Bartley, Holt, McGeouch, Graham, Cummings, Crane.

Ayr United: Fleming, Devlin, Boyle, Crawford, McDaid, Harkins, Cairney, Adams, Meggatt, Balatoni, Docherty. Subs: Hart, Gilmour, Rose, Murphy, Forrest, Wardrope, McGuffie

Referee Crawford Allan

Attendance: 14,349

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## Nine stand for posts of Hibs' supporter representative non-executive directors



Nine individuals will be standing for the two positions of

supporter representative non-executive director, following the nominations process.

The candidates all met the fans at the Hibs Supporters Club in Sunnyside on Tuesday night and voting starts on Monday.

Fans wishing to vote will need their client reference number.

Amongst those standing is club legend Pat Stanton who captained the Turnbull's Tornadoes side to the 1972 League Cup victory, Hibs first cup win in 70 years.

He also managed the side in the early 80s and played a prominent role in the Hands of Hibs campaign.

Both current supporter representatives, Frank Dougan and Amit Moudgil are also standing.

The candidates are (in alphabetical order):

- Frank Dougan
- Martin Dundas
- Charlene Feeney-Seale
- Matthew Gilchrist
- Amit Moudgil
- Gordon Munro
- Tracy Smith
- Pat Stanton
- Duncan Walker

Supporters are able to read the personal statements from each candidate [HERE](#).

The two candidates should be in position by the March board

meeting. More information on the voting will follow in due course

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## Ice hockey – Capitals battle back to shoot down Stars

❌ Elite League: Dundee Stars 3, Edinburgh Capitals 4 (after penalty shots)

JACOB Johnston netted the game-winner in a shootout as bottom club Edinburgh Capitals edged second-bottom Dundee Stars 4-3 on Tayside.

The basement clash was locked at 2-2 after normal time and sudden death overtime but Matt Tipoff and Johnston netted for the visitors in the shootout and Joey Sides and Mikael Lidhammar failed for Stars.

Earlier, Mason Wilgosh broke the deadlock after 17 minutes for Capitals and Jared Staal made it 2-0 on the power play nine minutes later.

The home side battled back with a double from Cale Tenaka. His first arrived after 30 minutes with Sides and Felix-Antoine Poulin assisting.

And he struck again less than a minute later with the same players setting him up.

Stars led for the first time after 50 minutes when Joey de Concilys scored, Kevin Hart assisting, but Johnston levelled 27 seconds later to take the game to overtime and then penalty shots.



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# A new season at Bedlam Theatre

If you've ever walked past the corner of Forrest Road and Bristo Place, you may well have wondered what actually goes on inside the church behind the bright red door. The place is clearly no longer used for religious purposes – but it's equally clearly used for *something*. You may have even seen the sign, 'Bedlam Theatre' – but what's that?

The neo-Gothic New North Free Church – for this was the building's first incarnation – was erected in 1849 near the site of the Edinburgh Bedlam Mental Institute. In the 1970s, the Edinburgh University Student Association took over the building for its Chaplaincy – but in 1980 it was given to the **Edinburgh University Theatre Company** (EUTC), who named it **Bedlam Theatre**.

Bedlam is unique; it's an entirely student run and maintained 90-seater venue in which EUTC puts on 40+ shows a year, plus workshops and post-show discussions. And it's not just for actors – students are offered the chance to learn about all aspects of theatre, including lighting design, soundscaping, stage design, producing, directing and acting. EUTC also runs the **Bedlam Theatre Youth Project** for children and young people. Old Bedlamites include **Ian Charleson** (*Chariots of Fire*), **Hamish Clark** (*Monarch of the Glen*) and **Miles Jupp** (*Balamory*, *Rev*, *The Thick of It*). You can watch a short film all about Bedlam here:

This spring at Bedlam EUTC is offering a packed programme of shows, from an existentialist tragi-comedy to a poignant drama about one of the world's most famous diarists:

✖ ***The Diary of Anne Frank*** is showing **7-11th February**. **Frances Goodrich** and **Albert Hackett's** stage adaptation of *The Diary of a Young Girl* premièred at the Cort Theatre on Broadway in 1955; it received the Tony Award for Best Play and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The play takes the audience through two years of tense, fearful, heart-warming and sometimes amusing episodes in the Frank family's life in the secret annexe, hidden behind a bookcase in Otto Frank's place of work, during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands.

***Cut Once***, showing **15-16th February**, is an original play by ✖ **Rob Younger**, seeking to explore what it's like for ordinary people to live through extraordinary change. It's a late spring evening in 1926 Prague when a director, a producer, a porter, an actress, a gambler and a pair of students gather together to discuss life, the Great War, Shakespeare, particle physics and, of course, alcohol. Some of the people know each other, some don't. Some experienced the war first hand, others didn't. Some will admit they're unhappy, others won't. Yet whether or not they like it, they can't hide from the world outside.

✖ From **28th February to 4th March**, EUTC presents **Tom Stoppard's** masterpiece ***Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead***. This relentlessly funny and absurd subversion of the story of *Hamlet*, as told from the point of view of the titular minor characters, shows them attempting to navigate their way through a plot that uses them up and spits them out, all the while trying to grasp onto some form of meaning in their illogical situation.

**Tom Wells' *Me. as A Penguin***, showing **8-9th March**, is ✖ 'a charmingly offbeat, surreal comedy of knitting, penguins and Battenberg.' Stitch is hitting the gay scene of Hull. Or at least dipping his toe in the water, while staying with his heavily pregnant sister Liz and her shabby sofa-loving partner Mark. But why won't Stitch let anyone into the bathroom even though Liz is dying for a pee? And who is the man in the giant

penguin costume? *Me. as A Penguin*, was Wells' first play, and showcases his gift for warm-hearted and truthful comedy with a distinctive Northern bent. The Yorkshire born playwright's other works include *Notes for First Time Astronauts*, *About a Goth* and *The Kitchen Sink*.

✖ Showing **14-18th March**, the final play of this semester is **Zinnie Harris's** modern classic ***Further than The Furthest Thing***, returning to Edinburgh for the first time since its première at the **Traverse** 17 years ago. On a remote island (the play's starting point was the story of the people of Tristan da Cunha) in the middle of the Atlantic secrets are buried. When the outside world comes calling, intent on manipulation for political and economic reasons, the islanders find their own world blown apart. 'A moving play that explores issues of identity, sin, redemption, murder, commitment, sex and love.' (*Culture Vulture*)

Tickets (average price £5-£6) for all shows may be obtained via Bedlam's website [here](#) or from the Box Office on 0131 629 0430 (open 45 minutes before each performance).



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## Police initiative to tackle drug crime across the capital



Police in Edinburgh have launched a new initiative to tackle

drug crime across the city and help drug users find appropriate support.

As a result of the 'Your View Counts' survey, communities in the Capital identified drugs as one of the top priorities they want police to address and Operation Eagle was devised to investigate drug offences and signpost addicts to rehabilitation services.

The campaign commenced on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> February with intelligence-led searches of five properties in Rannoch Road, Longstone Street, Oxbgangs Park, Granton Medway and Wardieburn Street West, Edinburgh.

During this activity heroin, cocaine, cannabis and diazepam with a value of £9500 were recovered along with £2400 in cash.

One man and two women aged 36, 47 and 38 were arrested and charged under the Misuse of Drugs Act and will appear at Edinburgh Sheriff Court on Monday 6 February 2017. Another woman aged 28 was arrested on warrant and will also appear at Edinburgh Sheriff Court on Monday 6 February 2017.

Further enforcement action as part of Operation Eagle will take place whenever intelligence is received and communities are urged to come forward with information that can help tackle drug crime in their area.

Detective Chief Inspector Alwyn Bell from Edinburgh CID said: "The sale of drugs is often linked to serious and organised crime, both of which are priorities for Police Scotland and Edinburgh Division to tackle.

"The intelligence we gather to tackle drug crime is vital and it is because of the overwhelming support of the public in coming forward with information that we have been able to establish Operation Eagle.

"We will not tolerate drug offences at any level and will

continue to work alongside our communities to identify those responsible and bring them to justice.”

Superintendent Lesley Clark added: “Our communities have made it abundantly clear that they will not tolerate drug crime and drug dealers in their area and we have listened.

“Operation Eagle will utilise the information we receive from the public to carry out further enforcement activity across the city, making it even more difficult for those involved in these offences to evade us.

“However, we know that to truly address this issue, enforcement activity must be supported with specialist assistance to those who have a dependency on drugs and by working alongside our relevant partner agencies, we can direct substance users and addicts to a range of services that can help them break the cycle of offending.”

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## **Darren McGregor credits Neil Lennon for instilling desire into players**



It has been a good few weeks for Hibs. After dropping to second place in the Championship, Neil Lennon’s men have fought back and following a run of victories in January, they now sit eight points clear at the top with a vastly superior goal difference.

Darren McGregor has played his part in ensuring that the side have the best defensive record in Great Britain but he is

quick to point out that football is a team game and everyone deserves credit.

The popular defender also paid tribute to Head Coach Neil for installing a desire amongst the players and he is determined to keep up the good form this afternoon at home to Ayr United.

McGregor told Hibernian TV: "It's been a great start to the year. At the tail end of December we were tucked behind Dundee United and we knew from playing against them that they were a good team but we knew that we were a better team and we have proved that

"We have went to two very difficult away venues, Queen of the South and Dumbarton and managed to come away with two clean sheets and six points which is testament to the mind-set that the manager has installed.

"The will to win and the desire are all traits that he carries and we have followed suit and take that on the park with us.

"You know what you get from the gaffer. He can be vocal and you have to take it on the chin and for me he is really open and honest and tells it how it is.

"If you perform well he will tell you. If you perform badly then expect to get a bit of a lashing but his passion for the game has definitely rubbed off on the players.

"As a defender I'd like to take the credit for clean sheets, but there's another 10 guys in the team, so it's not just the defence.

"Forwards help out, the midfielders do a power of work in front of us as well, and then the goalkeeper. Plaudits do have to go to the whole team.

"From a selfish point of view, defenders look for a clean sheet whilst forwards look for goals, so as long as that continues, we've got a right good chance of winning games.

“An eight point lead sound a lot but we all know in football that you are just a couple of results away from being back in the fight so we are well aware of that and complacency is something we are concerned about. We don’t want other teams climbing up the league.”

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## Ice hockey – Capitals sign Fife-born back-up netminder



Photo by Ian Coyle

Michal Dobron has signed back-up netminder Jordan Marr to bolster Edinburgh Capitals’ play-off bid.

Fife-born Marr joined the Murrayfield club on loan in December for two games against Belfast Giants.

Then goaltender Marr went back to Hull Pirates who play in the English Premier League.

The 25-year-old said: “I thoroughly enjoyed my brief stint with the Caps when I was loaned out for the Belfast games before Christmas.

“I’m looking forward to improving my game so that I can be at my best whenever I’m called upon.”

He will understudy Capitals No 1 Travis Fullarton and coach Dobron said the talented goaltender was a useful addition to the squad.

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# Basketball – Kats aim for double Scotch

✖ Kats, and their under-18 team, the Kool Kats, contest their respective Scottish Cup finals at Oriam, the new National Performance Centre, at Riccarton this weekend.

Undefeated Kool Kats play Boroughmuir Blaze in their final on Saturday and will be looking to continue the strong performances they have put in throughout the season.

Coach Doug Reilly and his assistant, Jenny Simpson, have developed a strong team.

Many of the players have stepped-up to the senior team to make key contributions and they include captain Casey Morrison, Tia Davies, Niamh Mackle, Celina Eisenhardt and Zoe Gibson.

Reilly said: “Cup Finals are always an exciting time for the players, parents, supporters and coaches.

“This is another fixture in the development of the players and I hope that they enjoy the build-up and the game.

“I would expect a competitive occasion based on our last game just before Christmas.”

He added: “It has been great to work alongside Jenny (Simpson) and this group of girls who have been willing to work hard developing their skills as individuals and as a team.

“Watching them week after week is very rewarding.”

Meanwhile, Kats last week lifted the Scottish Basketball Championship when they beat Tayside Musketeers 72-53 at



Portobello High School.

Gareth Lodge, their spokesman, said: "League form counts for nothing when it comes to Sunday's final as they face-off against the same team."

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## Travel advice for rugby fans



As the Six Nations matches begin at Murrayfield today those travelling nearby are being advised to take note of travel arrangements.

Today Saturday 4 February, Scotland take on Ireland in their first match of the tournament, with the match kicking off at 2:25pm. A sell-out crowd of 67,000 fans is expected.

The public are being urged to leave as much time as possible for any journeys to or near the stadium, as delays are expected.

A [series of road closures](#) will be in place – Russell Road will be closed from 9:00am and Corstorphine Road, Haymarket Terrace, West Approach Road and West End Crescents will be closed from 4:00pm, resulting in all traffic being diverted via Ravelston Dykes.

On Saturday 25 February , Scotland will host Wales in a match kicking off at 2:25pm – again, a full crowd of 67,000 spectators is anticipated.

For this match, Russell Road will close at 9:00am , with the Corstorphine Road, Haymarket Terrace, West Approach Road and West End Crescents closures coming into effect at 4:00pm.

On Saturday 18 March, Scotland's final Six Nations clash for 2017 will take place against Italy with a kick off time of 12:30pm.

A near sell-out crowd is expected with Russell Road closing at 7:00am and the closures of Corstorphine Road, Haymarket Terrace, West Approach Road and West End Crescents closures coming into effect from 2:00pm.

Those travelling to the games by public transport can find [live information on bus services](#) on Lothian Buses' website, while Edinburgh Trams will again be running an enhanced service to Murrayfield, with [full details online](#).

Transport Convener Councillor Lesley Hinds said: "Scotland Six Nations home games always generate huge excitement in the city and as ever there will be large crowds heading to Murrayfield to watch the action live this month and next.

"Make sure you've checked out all the information you might need so you can plan your journey in advance. Have fun – and come on Scotland!"

Find out more about [road closures and diversions](#) on the Council website and keep up to date by following [EdinTravel](#) on Twitter.

More information about getting to BT Murrayfield can be found at on the [Scottish Rugby website](#).

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# Fishing – river project

# looking to work with community groups



The River Almond in Almondell Country Park on a glorious recent day in winter

RiverLife is an ambitious project targeted at reconnecting communities and wildlife with the Almond and Avon rivers and to restore the natural heritage.

The bulk of the project is made up of works including improving fish passes in the River Almond.

Volunteer and training programmes are being co-ordinated and the project, which runs until summer 2020, will work with community groups to see how they want their river improved.

So why is the project under way? The answer is that both rivers have a heavy industrial past including shale mining, mills in the 19th-century and also by significant urbanisation.

The rivers run through West Lothian (including Bathgate and Livingston), Falkirk and City of Edinburgh and projects aim to improve access, education and skills training.

Providing training and volunteering opportunities to communities based around the River Almond and River Avon is one of the project priorities.


A fund totalling £40,000 over four years is available and organisers expect that individual grants will be in the range of £250 to £5,000.

The money is intended to support individuals, organisations, and communities and projects could be from art to practical environmental work.

The criteria also includes improving understanding of the natural heritage along the rivers, surveying habitats, working with young people to inspire the next generation of river custodians and producing materials that enhance the river experience.

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## **Women's basketball – In-form Kats aim to claim double Scotch**

 Kats and their under-18 team, Kool Kats, contest their respective Scottish Cup finals at the National Performance Centre this weekend.

Undefeated Kool Kats play Boroughmuir Blaze on Saturday and coach Doug Reilly expects a competitive game based on their last clash before Christmas.

He said: "Cup Finals are always an exciting time for the players, parents, supporters and coaches.

"This is also another game in the development of the players and I hope that they enjoy the build-up and the game."

Kool Kats have developed a strong squad with several players stepping up to the senior team throughout the season to make key contributions.

They include captain Casey Morrison, Tia Davies, Niamh Mackle, Celina Eisenhardt and Zoe Gibson.

Kats last week lifted the Scottish Basketball Championship when they beat Tayside Musketeers 72-53 at Portobello High

School.

League form counts for nothing, however, when it comes to Sunday's final as they play the same team.

Reilly said: "It's been great to work alongside Jenny Simpson and this group of girls.

"They have been willing to work hard developing their skills as individuals and as a team."

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## **Leeann Dempster thanks Hibs' fans following derby ticket sale**



Leeann Dempster has thanked supporters who queued in person or online to buy tickets to support the team in the forthcoming Cup match against Hearts at Tynecastle.

While every effort has been made to ensure tickets were made available to those supporters who enjoy priority for away match tickets – Away Season Ticket Holders and Season Ticket Holders – inevitably many have been left disappointed due to the enormous demand for this fixture.

Club staff, in particular ticket office staff, worked hard to cope with the high demand.

The tickets were split equally between online/phone and the ticket office in an effort to ensure all supporters were given as equal a chance as possible. Those online sold out quickly.

Ticketmaster had 60 people briefed and on call to deal with calls.

People began queuing overnight for the tickets which went on sale via the ticket office. When the queue reached a point where the number queuing exceeded the number of tickets available from the Ticket Office a voucher system was used, to ensure supporters did not waste hours of their time queuing with no possibility of getting a ticket.

Chief Executive Leeann Dempster said: "I'd like to thank everyone who continued to show their support for the Club, and I'm sorry that we simply aren't able to take everyone with us.

"Whenever demand far outstrips supply, as in this case, there will be those who feel disappointed and sometimes angry. I understand that, people who love and support the Club want to be at the match.

"However, despite our best efforts we simply aren't able to meet everyone's wishes on this.

"We know that the high numbers unable to obtain a ticket has again opened conversation around a loyalty points scheme. This has also been raised with the Club by both supporter directors, Frank and Amit.

"On Loyalty Points I would say this: similar high numbers would have been disappointed. There may have been some differences in who got the tickets, but thousands of supporters would still have been left disappointed.

"When the decision was taken to scrap our loyalty points scheme last year, it followed months of debate and discussion with supporters and working groups. There were good reasons, and for those keen to revisit these there are links below for more information.

"Suffice to say that we are aware the issue has resurfaced, we

have no immediate plans to reintroduce it, but we are open-minded on the issue going forward and are content to have a conversation with supporters around this.

“Finally, thank you again to everyone for your continued support – it is much appreciated.”

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## **CCTV footage released following Queen Street attack**



Police in Edinburgh have released CCTV footage of three men that officers wish to trace to assist them with their enquiries in connection with a serious assault which took place around 2.45pm on Sunday 30 October 2016 on Queen Street, at the junction with North St David Street.

A 40-year-old man sustained a serious facial injury and detectives believe the men pictured in the footage may be able to help with the investigation.

Detectives are particularly keen to trace the first man who is described as white, with dark hair, clean shaven, of heavy build and wearing a dark green jumper.

The second man is described as white, with short dark hair and wearing a pale blue and white checked shirt.

The men were in the company of the third man shown in the footage and were last seen heading south towards St Andrew Square

Detective Constable Andy Cory of Gayfield CID said: "The victim was on a night out in Edinburgh when he was attacked and left with a serious injury.

"We continue to investigate and would ask anyone who recognises any of the men in the footage to get in touch."

Anyone with information can contact Police Scotland on 101 or



report this anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

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# Letter from Scotland



You're fired!

I'm proud of my fellow Scots this week. While we were busy debating our national budget, thousands of people found time to turn out on street demonstrations against Donald Trump's latest outrage...the arbitrary ban on some Muslims and refugees entering the United States. And tens of thousands signed an on-line petition calling for his state visit to Britain to be cancelled.

Monday was not a particularly nice night, cold and damp, but there were protest [marches in Edinburgh](#), Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee organised by "Stand up to Racism Scotland". We are not in the front line of this battle, and the ban is largely symbolic (since it only lasts 90 days and only affects people from seven Muslim countries) but the immediate public anger against even a whiff of Trumpism was uplifting.

*Throwback to last night's anti-Trump march along Princes Street [#ScotlandAgainstTrump](#) [pic.twitter.com/FENnAv90yD](https://pic.twitter.com/FENnAv90yD)*

*– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [January 31, 2017](#)*

But down to the budget. The minority SNP government managed to squeeze its £30bn budget through parliament with the help of the 6 Green MSPs, thus avoiding a general election. The Conservatives voted against, because the budget taxes the rich too much. Labour and the Liberal Democrats voted against,

because it taxes the rich too little.



Derek Mackay, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution appears before the Finance and Constitution Committee to give evidence on the expenditure proposals in the Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2017-18. During this session Derek Mackay also answered questions from the public via Twitter. 16 January 2017. Pic – Andrew Cowan/Scottish Parliament

This year's budget was the first under the new devolution settlement which allows income tax rates and bands to be raised or lowered in Scotland. The SNP have chosen to keep the rates as they are but have not followed the Conservative government's policy in England and Wales of lowering the threshold for the 40 per cent band. The Greens wanted to introduce a new 60 per cent band for top earners but were willing to accept a compromise which will mean anyone in Scotland earning over £43,000 a year will pay up to £400 a year more in income tax than people in England and Wales.

The funding of local councils was the key issue in the budget debate, with the opposition parties saying council budgets were being cut by £327m but the government insisting that they are being given an extra £240m when special programmes are taken into account, such as £120m for school head teachers, and diverted NHS money for care in the community. The Greens managed to get the core funding for councils increased by £160m which they say will go some way to reversing the SNP's tendency to centralise public services.

That £120m for head teachers, by the way, is being handed out according to the number of children from deprived backgrounds attending each school. It will allow the school to decide how to close the so-called "attainment gap", with for example,

more teachers, or more home-work clubs or better technology etc.

Back to international affairs, and the people on the streets have not been left to do all the heavy lifting. MPs too have been fighting the good fight to keep Britain in the European Union – as 62 per cent of Scots wanted in last year's referendum.

[All of Scotland's 59 MPs](#) – bar one, the only Conservative, David Mundell – voted against the triggering of Brexit negotiations in the House of Commons on Wednesday night. And the first minister Nicola Sturgeon was in Cardiff on Monday to join with the leaders of the other devolved administrations to urge the prime minister to consider a “soft Brexit”, keeping Britain in the single market and the customs union.

It appears they got nowhere and that led Ms Sturgeon to declare that time was running out on a compromise and Scotland was closer than ever to independence. The trouble is that the latest opinion polls show there is still no majority in Scotland for independence and only 27 per cent of Scots want a second referendum any time soon.

Shetland, of course, is just about independent already, or at least sees itself as half Scandinavian. On Tuesday night the Vikings paraded through Lerwick in the traditional “Up Helly Ah” ceremony and burnt their boats with the rest of Britain. The sight of the 58-strong jarl squad with their glistening helmets, axes, shields and flaming torches certainly makes me wonder which country I'm living in and which century.

The University of Reading was telling us this week that the Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights, are retreating north at an alarming rate. Apparently we won't be able to see the “lights”, even in Shetland, in 50 years' time because of changes in the Sun's activity and the magnetic field of the Earth. I've only seen the lights once, at a scout camp in

Aberdeenshire, and they are a magical sight, a reminder that we live in a universe not just a planet.

All is not what it seems either on the ground. To our embarrassment we've discovered that the "Great Scottish Run", supposedly a half marathon, is not 13.1 miles long after all. The course last October in Glasgow was 150m short and the 32,000 runners have all been given false times.

A few puzzled folk at the time wondered why they had suddenly improved their personal bests and the organisers were eventually persuaded to measure the course again. It turns out that they had made changes at the last minute because of road works and the new distances had not been properly measured. No refunds are being offered but runners are being guaranteed entry for next year's "Even Greater Scottish Run."

*Photo of President Donald J Trump by The White House, via Wikimedia Commons*

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## Police release CCTV following Grassmarket attack



Police in Edinburgh have released images of three men they wish to trace in connection with a serious assault which took place between 1.30am and 1.45am on Sunday 27 November 2016 in the Grassmarket.

Two men, both aged 21, were walking towards King Stables Road when one of them was punched several times, sustaining serious

facial injuries.

The second man was also assaulted, but was uninjured. □

Officers are eager to trace the men pictured as they may be able to help with the ongoing investigation.□

The first man is described as in his twenties, 5ft 10ins tall, of medium build, with black hair, stubble and wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and black trousers.□

The second man is described as in his twenties, 5ft 7ins tall, of slim build, with dark hair, and wearing a light-coloured jumper and dark jeans.□

The third man is described as in his twenties, 6ft tall, of medium build, with dark hair, and wearing a black shirt and black trousers.□

The three men were last seen heading in the direction of Victoria Street.□

Detective Constable Andy Cory of Gayfield CID:□ “We’ve conducted numerous enquiries in the area since the incident, but are today appealing for the public’s help.□

“Anyone who recognises these men is urged to contact us as soon as possible.□

“Likewise, if the men see this appeal, they are asked to get in touch with us themselves.”□

Those with information can contact Police Scotland on 101 or report this anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.□

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# MSP welcomes additional funds for Pentlands primary schools

✖ As part of the £120 million Pupil Equity Fund schools in Edinburgh will share £7.5 million which is intended to improve standards in schools across the city.

Most local primaries and secondaries are set to receive additional support. It will be up to teachers and school leaders to decide the best way of using the funding to close the attainment gap in their schools.

Welcoming the announcement, Gordon Macdonald MSP for Edinburgh Pentlands said, “Every child in Scotland should have the best possible start in life, and it is unacceptable for children from the poorest backgrounds to have their chances limited by circumstances outside their control.

“The SNP in government has made closing the attainment gap our number one priority, and our new £120 million Pupil Equity Fund is aimed at doing just that.

“This new announcement will let parents, teachers and school leaders in Edinburgh see how much funding they can expect to drive up standards and tackle the inter-generational cycle of deprivation in their school.”

Some of the beneficiaries in the Edinburgh Pentlands constituency are: –

Bonaly Primary	£7,200
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Broomhouse Primary	£127,200
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Canal View Primary	£223,200
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Clovenstone Primary	£94,800
Currie Primary	£34,800
Dean Park Primary	£10,800
Juniper Green Primary	£31,200
Longstone Primary	£37,200
Murrayburn Primary	£117,600
Nether Currie Primary	£9,600
Oxgangs Primary	£57,600
Ratho Primary	£15,600
Sighthill Primary	£84,000
St Joseph's RC Primary	£68,400
Stenhouse Primary	£110,400

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## Queensferry Crossing – last section in place – third bridge connects north to south

 This morning the last section of the new Queensferry Crossing was lifted into place.

This third bridge at North and South Queensferry now links Fife to the southern shore of the River Forth.

There have been 122 section lifts in total and this is now a landmark in the construction of the new bridge.

Each section weighs about 750 tonnes, is 40 metres wide and about 16 metres long. The final closure unit was only 12.1 metres long, but it still required a painstaking very precise lift to ensure that it fell into place correctly.

This is a video of the first deck lift using the balanced cantilever method:

The bridge is 2,633metres long with the approach viaducts on north and south included.

Work now turns to the completion of the deck of the south approach viaduct.

Michael Martin, Project Director for Forth Crossing Bridge Constructors (FCBC) said:

“This final deck lift is the culmination of a world class team effort stretching all the way back to the very first day of construction in 2011.

“The final “closure” is always one of the most significant milestones in any bridge construction programme. On a bridge of this magnificent scale, well, it’s more than a bit special. It is a real pleasure to pay tribute to the skill and dedication of everybody involved and to congratulate them on an outstanding achievement.

“We are now focused on completing the huge range of finishing works and bringing the Project to a successful conclusion.”

Economy Secretary Keith Brown witnessed the preparations for a historic moment as engineers start to lift the last section of deck on the Queensferry Crossing.

He said: “The public have been fascinated by the spectacular



progress on the Queensferry Crossing. While there is a lot of work left before opening to traffic in May, completing the deck represents a true landmark moment that we've all been looking forward to.

"It's the moment Fife and Edinburgh are connected by a third, stunning structure across the wide waters of the Forth. It's a privilege to be here to see it.

"Every time I visit the bridge I'm struck by the expertise and endeavour of the workforce. Today is a hugely important milestone, one everyone involved should be very proud of. I'm sure I speak for many of us when I thank them all for their continued hard work and this fantastic progress ."

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## Edinburgh Telecoms firm get into the groove



Telecoms firm TenTel have celebrated their record growth with a dance.

The Edinburgh based firm announced that they had recently reached their target of consistently signing up more than 100 customers a day, and to give themselves a pat on the back they went dancing.

Robert McKechnie, Managing Director, said: "The figures speak for themselves, as a business we have enjoyed a fantastic year.

“Fundamentally this growth has been down to the hard-work and creativity of the Tentel team. We have almost 100 employees and work very hard to foster a culture of ‘One Team’.

“We believe every employee plays a key part in delivering our vision – to hear all our customers say WOW!”

The company enlisted the help of Scotland’s national dance company, Scottish Ballet and came up with concept of a dance-themed team building event. Planning began in the summer of 2016 with teaser emails sent out to staff every week.

On the day of the event at the spectacular Hub in Edinburgh, employees were split into three groups and taken to rehearsal areas. Led by a team of talented dancers and choreographers, the groups explored and perfected routines under three themes – Urban, Bollywood and Flower Power.

TenTel celebrated one year at its office in Shawfair on the edge of Edinburgh in 2016. Starting out with a core team of 30 sales, technical and administrative staff it now employs more than 80 people.

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## Trump placards and banners to go to the People’s Story Museum



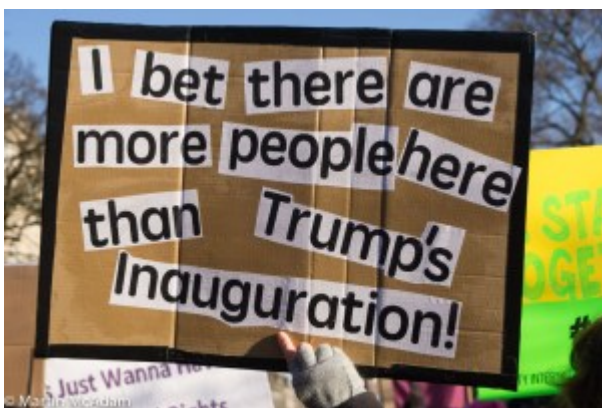
Thousands of protesters took part in the anti-Trump protests which took place last [Monday evening](#) and during [the previous weekend](#), all displaying some good humour with their chants and their placards.

More than thirty of the banners and placards have now been donated to the city's People's Story Museum and will be retained there.



The City of Edinburgh Council's Museum Collection collects historical artefacts relating to gatherings of people in Edinburgh to campaign and protest.











Visitors to the People's Story Museum in the Canongate can discover a collection of campaign materials ranging from the early 20th Century Suffrage March in Edinburgh to a display of LGBT materials as part of the '[Proud City' exhibition](#), which has an extended run to coincide with LGBT History Month.

Gillian Findlay, the Council's Curatorial and Engagement Manager, said: "We've been utterly delighted with the sheer number of donations offered and we'd like to thank everyone who has contributed. The city's protesters have been eager to share their stories and we really welcome the response.

"This is just the start of the story and we hope to place many of the pledged items on display. Edinburgh people have always has been brave when it comes to marching and protesting for what they believe in. Protesting is part of our shared history and recent events prove this is just as much the case today as it has been over the centuries."

A volunteer has been appointed to coordinate the donations, loans and stories for a display and possible event with the working title, 'In Scotland We Build Bridges'.

Councillor Richard Lewis, Edinburgh's Culture Convener, added: "Our museum collection includes protest material of national and international significance. There are banners in support of political reform, trade unions and the anti-apartheid movement. No matter what your political stance, protests of this scale will always have historical significance. In years to come, your items might be considered a fascinating part of

the people of Edinburgh's protest history."

A special donations display will be set up later in the month. The Museum asks interested parties to get in touch with [g.findlay@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:g.findlay@edinburgh.gov.uk)

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# Looking ahead to Cheltenham Trials Weekend at Musselburgh



This weekend is one of the biggest moments in Musselburgh Racecourse's calendar.

There is more than £260,000 of prize money available over the two days with champion trainers champing at the bit to get racing.

Trainers Paul Nicholls, Alan King, Charlie Longsdon and Donald McCain are all represented while Scottish trainer Lucinda Russell leads the homegrown challenge.

The Edinburgh Reporter spoke to Musselburgh's Racecourse Manager about the newest race the £40,000 Bet365 Edinburgh National Handicap Chase which is being run over four miles. This is regarded as a preparation for the Grand National later this spring.

*There's an exciting weekend of racing coming up [@MusselburghRace](#) Although he doesn't give racing tips Bill Farnsworth had lots to tell us! [pic.twitter.com/tVHRbMid2f](https://pic.twitter.com/tVHRbMid2f)*

Bill Farnsworth said: “We like to try new things and the Edinburgh National will be the longest race ever staged at Musselburgh Racecourse. We usually have good ground, even in the winter, so this gives trainers a chance to run horses over four miles without the extra burden of facing soft or even heavy ground, which can be very demanding. With 20 entries it has been well supported by owners and trainers.”

Top weight is the Paul Nicholls trained Just A Par which concedes up to 11lbs to his rivals and this class horse is partnered with young conditional jockey Harry Cobden, who makes his first visit to the East Lothian course.

Cheltenham-based Fergal O’Brien plans to send Alvarado, a horse with a real Grand National pedigree and which was runner up in last year’s Scottish Grand National at Ayr and was placed fourth in the 2014 and 2015 Aintree Grand Nationals.



In the day’s most valuable race, the £50,000 Bet365 Scottish County Hurdle (3.15) top weight is claimed by the Dan Skelton trained Optimus Prime, Somerset trainer Jeremy Scott could make a rare appearance at Musselburgh with form horse Unison, while shrewd punters could fancy Traditional Dancer and the partnership of trainer Iain Jardine and jockey Shane Shortall – the same combination which won this race last year with Shrewd.

In the Bet365 Scottish Triumph Juvenile Hurdle, Paul Nicholls has entered Cliffs of Dover which has won six out of his last seven starts over hurdles and which already holds an entry for



the Triumph Hurdle at Cheltenham, while Royal trainer Charlie Longsdon sends The Queen's horse, Forth Bridge, back to Musselburgh following its win over course and distance in December.

Nicky Henderson's highly rated Charli Parcs, a strong winner at Kempton over Christmas, will be looking to make it three wins on the trot with the Lambourn trainer preferring Musselburgh because "they always get decent ground there".

Bill Farnsworth added: "With the new four mile Edinburgh National, the Scottish County Hurdle and Scottish Triumph Hurdle, no one can question our ambition for putting on high quality racing at Musselburgh. We are competing against Sandown on Saturday but we like to give the bigger tracks a run for their money and the new weekend format is something we can build on in the years ahead."

On Sunday (5 Feb) Cheltenham trainer Neil Mulholland will fancy Peter The Mayo Man, the highest rated horse in the Sky Bet Supreme Scottish Trial Novices' Hurdle, and which has won its last three races, while Nicky Henderson's River Wylde won both its last outings at Ludlow.

In the Pertemps Qualifier (4.10) Nicky Henderson has Barry Geraghty booked for the ride on Cup Final, which won the same race last year under the same jockey before going on to win at the Punchestown Festival.

Gates open on Saturday at 11am and 11.30am on Sunday, and

first race is 12.25pm and 1.40pm respectively.

For more information and to book tickets visit [www.musselburgh-racecourse.co.uk](http://www.musselburgh-racecourse.co.uk)

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## Neil Lennon looking forward to Easter Road return after month on the road



Neil Lennon, the Ladbrokes Championship Manager of the Month for January is looking forward to getting back to business at Easter Road after almost a month on the road.

January was a particularly good month with no goals conceded resulting in an eight point gap at the top of the table and a place in the 5th round of the Scottish Cup.

In addition, key players such as Fraser Fyvie and John McGinn have returned from injury.

Hibs face Ayr United tomorrow knowing that the last time the pair met in Leith it was the Honest Men who took the points after Marvin Bartley was wrongly sent off with the hosts 1-0 up.

Speaking to Hibs TV, Lennon said: "January has been a fantastic month. I couldn't have asked for any more from the players.

"Three great league wins and progressing to the next round of

the cup so it's been excellent consistency with some really good performances as well.

"Fraser (Fyvie) and John (McGinn) returning from injury was huge for us. They are both quality players. We lost Dylan (McGeouch) at the same time although we had him back for the Dundee United game.

"They are the heartbeat of the team and are excellent players who could play at the highest level, certainly in Scotland.

"We did miss them but we always felt that it would have been tight for a while but when we got a healthy squad again the performances would return and that turned out to be the case but I'm not putting it down to just those three coming back.

Also Chris (Humphrey) has done very well since coming in although we gave him a bit of a rest last week.

"The whole team and the squad have played very well in that period and now I'm looking for more of the same.

"I'm very much looking forward to getting back onto home turf, it has been a while, almost a month. Hopefully we can replicate our last performance.

"The atmosphere that night was the best I'd experienced at Easter Road. The fans were unbelievable, so we're looking for more of the same.

"We can't go into the game with any complacency, Ayr have beaten us this season. It's a dangerous game, but it's one with great incentives for us as well.

"Ian McCall is a very shrewd manager and he's been working with a limited budget. They play a diamond in the majority of games and are well set up defensively at times. Most of the teams that come to Easter Road are lifted and find a little bit more so we have to be ready to overcome it.

“Dylan is back training. He played a development game on Tuesday and came through that OK. Mavin (Bartley) is back from suspension, and maybe another week for Ofir (Marciano) Paul Hanlon may require surgery which will keep him out for a couple of weeks but it’s not major surgery which is a bonus but it needs doing which is a blow for us.”

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## **Speedway – Bandits double act takes over on centre green**



Berwick Bandits will have a new centre green announcement team this season.

Steve Hawyard and Roy Clarke take over from Dick Barrie and co-owner Scott Courtney said: “Roy and Steve will be putting a very different spin on things.

“The dynamics of a two man presentation team is a very exciting prospect.”

He added: “Dick Barrie has given a fantastic service to the club throughout the years.”

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# Gordon Aikman dies aged 31



Gordon on the left with his husband Joe Pike.  
The couple married in March 2015.

Gordon Aikman, the Motor Neurone Disease (MND) patient and campaigner, has died. He was 31 years old.

Gordon was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease (MND) at the age of 29 in 2014. Following his diagnosis, he formed the [Gordon's Fightback campaign](#) successfully lobbying the First Minister to double the number of MND nurses and fund them through the NHS. He also raised over £500,000 for research to help fund a cure for the terminal condition. He received a British Empire Medal in the Queen's 2015 Birthday Honours and an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Edinburgh in the same year for his work to transform care for people with MND and efforts to find a cure.

## **His family said in a statement:**

"We are heartbroken. Gordon was beautiful, kind, funny and utterly determined. He achieved more in the few short years after his diagnosis with MND than many of us do in a lifetime. Gordon's campaigning and fundraising has truly inspired people, changed lives across Scotland and we are so proud of him. We will miss him terribly."

Gordon dealt with his illness with great humour and only on 1 January I smiled at the black humour in this tweet:

*Oh hi 2017, I didn't expect to see you. Thanks for all the love and support that's helped get me here.*  
[pic.twitter.com/0qsRY8hFhm](https://pic.twitter.com/0qsRY8hFhm)

– Gordon Aikman (@GordonAikman) [January 1, 2017](#)

Joe Pike tweeted this morning :

*My beautiful husband [@GordonAikman](#) has died. We are all heartbroken. He was my best friend, my soulmate and the love of my life. [pic.twitter.com/nxPPz1ZVNB](https://pic.twitter.com/nxPPz1ZVNB)*

*– Joe Pike (@joepike) [February 3, 2017](#)*

Commenting on the death of Gordon Aikman, Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Willie Rennie MSP said: “This is incredibly sad news. Gordon was a generous and determined gentleman. My thoughts go out to Joe, Gordon’s family and friends.

“His contribution during the independence referendum campaign was both intelligent and joyful. I have great memories of working with him. He has left a great legacy that no one will forget.”

**Gordon’s main achievements include securing a doubling of the number of MND nurses, transforming care for patients with MND in Scotland. He also campaigned for the Living Wage for carers along with others.**

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## **Extra monies from Holyrood as Edinburgh Council debate their budget next week**



Even as the media met with Councillors Rankin and Cook yesterday afternoon, (the Convener and Vice-Convener of Finance and Resources respectively), the good news came in that the council will receive a further tranche of cash from

Holyrood.

But this pair are ever-cautious, and it is not in their nature to act quickly or without considerable forethought. So when the draft budget goes forward to the full meeting of the council next Thursday for ratification, there will be no real mention of the extra cash available or how it will be used. Instead they will wait until the Finance and Resources committee meets on 23 February to decide what they will do with the extra money.

## ***POLITICS***

Of course there are two ways of looking at this. It may be viewed as extra money, or it may just mean that the amount of funding for Edinburgh is not cut by just as much as it might have been. It rather depends on your political stance. Before yesterday's government budget the position appeared to be that £327 million was being taken out of local authority spending across Scotland. Certainly the Council Leader Andrew Burns writing after the draft budget announcement in December was gloomy about the prospect of local government finances.

Burns said in December : "Tragically, the undeniable conclusion that I've regrettably come to is that, for the City of Edinburgh Council, this is the worst revenue settlement from the Scottish Government since the onset of devolution in 1999.

"Of course, I know the Budget announced on Thursday last week is still Draft, and that it may change between now and its final adoption – but as things stand at the moment; year-on-year, we've got some £37million less revenue from the Scottish Government this year, than last, to spend on services.

"That's on top of recent, and recurring, revenue reductions all of which has led to the Council having well over 1,300 less people in employment than 2 years ago.

“And this is all against a backdrop of the Scottish Government actually receiving, year-on-year, more revenue this year than last, from the Westminster Government.”

Some of the politics of other Edinburgh councillors was meanwhile being played out on Twitter by Labour Councillor Lesley Hinds. Councillor Hinds who announced her retirement at May's council elections is in charge of the city's Transport and Environment brief.

Councillor Hinds was tweeting most of yesterday, taking Green Party councillors to task in particular, telling them that their Green colleagues down the hill were voting for a budget which would mean cuts to services.

*[@nigelbagshaw](#) [@melaniemain](#) but your Green MSPs are voting for the budget which will mean cuts to services?*

– Lesley Hinds (@LAHinds) [February 2, 2017](#)

Green Councillors were more welcoming of what they saw as additional funds:

*...and that means an addition £12 million for [#edinburgh](#) Council. Constructive engagement, better than loud empty rhetoric of other parties <https://t.co/pwcI55docE>*

– Melanie Main (@melaniemain) [February 2, 2017](#)

Scottish Greens co-convener, Patrick Harvie said after yesterday's budget session : “Green MSPs have achieved more in a single budget than the Labour Party has in a decade of opposition.”

Harvie welcomed details of the Scottish Government's offer to increase funding to local councils by £160million.



The Greens explained : “In an exchange of letters to coincide with yesterday afternoon’s Stage One debate and vote on the draft Scottish budget, Mr Harvie confirmed that Green MSPs would support the budget, and expect to see amendments over the coming weeks. It follows discussions with ministers, in which Green MSPs proposed a range of ways to prevent cuts to council services such as education and social work.

“Scottish Ministers have agreed to only one concession on income tax, abandoning their proposed tax giveaway for higher earners and instead keeping the 40 per cent income tax threshold at £43,000 rather than raising it to £43,430. An additional £160million will be allocated directly to local councils for them to spend on local priorities.”

## ***FIGURES***

Despite the political comment, the assurances we were being given in another part of the City Chambers were that there would be no cuts to services.

Councillor Cook said that although the council’s finances have in effect flat-lined over recent years, and that there are demographic challenges to council spending as well as challenges from inflation on anything that the council has to buy, the council has managed to cut its borrowing by £100 million.

Councillor Rankin also explained that the council is far from bankrupt. He pointed out that the city has a £13 million reserve as Audit Scotland suggested it should have as a minimum. He went on to assure us that the current administration is handing over a sound financial position to the next administration.

He also said that moving to the localities model of providing services and the council’s Transformation Programme mean that there is more money for frontline services.

When the two councillors met to draft their budget before Christmas they had anticipated that The Scottish Government would reduce their overall grant funding by a net 2.9% after increases in Council Tax are taken into account. With the announcement yesterday afternoon the reduction is less, and now overall funding from Holyrood will be cut by about 2% in net terms. Having estimated a larger reduction, and having balanced their budget within those confines, this announcement appears to leave them with some wiggle room.

We asked Councillor Rankin about that:

*The [@Edinburgh\\_CC](#) Finance Convener talked to us ahead of next week's budget meeting [pic.twitter.com/E8DRFi0xN3](https://pic.twitter.com/E8DRFi0xN3)*

*– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [February 3, 2017](#)*

He said : “It does provide us with, we estimate, about £10 million more in terms of our annual revenue spend and about £2 million on capital for buildings for example, and the repair and maintenance of council buildings, that kind of thing.

“It is a decision that the administration will be making, between now and the meeting of the Finance and Resources committee on 23 February.

“We don't feel we can sensibly make a decision about what to do with that money at the moment as we don't know whether there are any particular conditions attached to that money. Perhaps it is one-off funding for one year or its recurring funding for example.

“But once we have that detail we will be able to make decisions about how that money can best be spent in the city.

“There's no shortage of good things we could spend that money

on'

"One of the things we hear about very regularly is about roads for example. We could also usefully put some of that money towards health and social care where there is a rising demand for council services and we have a statutory obligation to provide those services.

"There are plenty of other areas, but one other I would mention now is the repair and maintenance of the council's own property estate. We could easily spend that amount of money several times over to keep the council's estate somewhere beyond what we currently aim to do, which is to keep buildings wind and watertight and secure from a health and safety point of view. What we would like to do is put more into longer term maintenance and investment in these buildings.

"As I say there are plenty of options."

The Scottish Government has to work within the confines of the Conservative-led UK Government's financial plans and how much they give to Holyrood, and it is clear that the council also has to work within the Holyrood budget. That budget was only saved by a last-minute deal between the SNP and the Greens yesterday afternoon in a stormy debate at the foot of the Royal Mile.

Following discussions with other parties, the Finance Secretary also confirmed, as part of an agreement with the Scottish Green party to support the passage of the budget bill, Scotland's local authorities would benefit from an additional £160 million investment – including £30 million capital – to support local services. This means just over £12 million extra will be paid to Edinburgh Council than the amount announced in December. Just under £10m will fall into the category of revenue and the rest will have to be used on capital projects.

There was also some additional funding of £7.3 million from the Education Attainment Fund announced by Holyrood earlier in the week which will be given straight to schools across the city since it is ring-fenced funding.

Cllr Cammy Day, Education, Children & Families Convener, said: "We welcome this additional funding from the Scottish Government, which will enable schools to carry out more work to tackle the effects of inequality and poverty on pupils. As a Council we are committed to closing the attainment gap and already have many initiatives in place aiming to give all children the same start in life, despite the challenging local government settlement for Edinburgh.

"Individual schools and head teachers will now assess their funding allocation to decide how money is best spent."

Notwithstanding all of this the council may still have to find savings of about £11 million by measures such as reducing spending on agency workers and consultants.

## ***So what does the budget proposed by the Labour/SNP coalition mean for us living in Edinburgh, if it is approved next week?***

Council tax will go up by 3%. Band D council tax will be £1204.07

Parking charges will increase by 4.5% per year over four years

Second homes will no longer get discounts on council tax.

Council rents will rise by 2%

Up to £1 million is set aside for the council to negotiate along with other councils in the wider East of Scotland area to secure a City Deal.

All libraries will remain open as at present.

***In the financial year 2017/18 the council will deliver capital projects including the following:***

£16.3m on new schools including Boroughmuir High School, replacement of St Crispin's Special School and a new St John's RC Primary School.

£8.9m on the Water of Leith Flood Prevention Scheme

£18.5m on roads and pavements

£12.5m on street lighting including £8.7m on upgrading

£2.5m on Leith Walk/Constitution Street

£11.1m on property asset management works – to upgrade and maintain the council's own buildings

£34.7m on National Housing Trust delivery of affordable housing

***The council plans to invest in capital projects over the next five years as follows:***

£12m on refurbishing the North Bridge

£12.7m on a new primary school for South Edinburgh

£7.9m contribution to Meadowbank Sports Centre

£1.6m for a new care home at Dumbryden

£6.7m to address the costs of rising school rolls

£2.5m investment in roads and bridges

# Looking ahead

But looking ahead Councillor Rankin was quite clear that the Transformation Programme by which the council's staff will be reduced by around 1500 full-time positions by May 2017, will not be enough on an ongoing basis.

Further ways to increase income for the council will have to be found. But that will have to wait till next January when the new administration of whatever political persuasion is in power and is setting a budget for the financial year 2018/19.

The council will meet to discuss and approve its draft budget next Thursday 9 February 2017. [You can watch online here.](#)

The papers for next week's meeting are [here](#).