



Councillor Group

Annual Report 2023-2024



From the Co-Conveners

We are now at the end of our second year as Co-Conveners of the Green group, and it has been a real honour to convene such an amazing group of Green Councillors for Edinburgh.

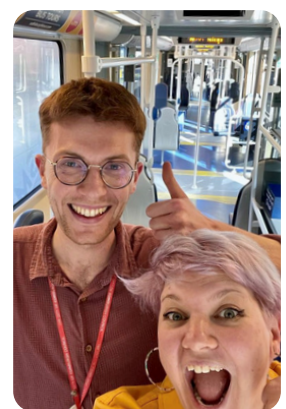
The city is facing real challenges - dealing with a lack of funding from national governments, becoming a modern accessible place while respecting heritage rules and regulations, and coping with the effects of climate change which are already being felt. All of which makes it even more important to have strong Green voices advocating for climate justice, equality, and better lives for everyone who lives, works, studies or visits the city.

You can read more about the work of individual Councillors to progress our manifesto in the portfolio reports on the next pages. However, alongside these wins, it's important to know that lots of our work sits outside the portfolio structure too, for example our budget successes over the past 2 years - achieved both through 'shenanigans' and more conventional methods - to secure resources for climate action, and our work to keep Palestine high on the Council agenda.

But as well as policy wins, over the past two years we have worked hard to try and change the culture of a Council which is often described as the most 'traditional' in Scotland (and we all know what that means...). And we're beginning to see some of this work pay off. From a Council which couldn't even provide an accessible space for us all to work from at the beginning of term and which saw equality impact assessments as a tick-box exercise, we have managed to secure dedicated staff resource to work on equalities. We're also seeing Council Officers reach out to the Greens before submitting reports to check that they reflect our priorities, and we are beginning to see a more collaborative approach from other parties in the Council.

We're also seeing a closer relationship between Councillors and our amazing party members. It's not an exaggeration to say that the Member-Councillor Forums are the highlight of our months and bring all of the Councillors renewed hope and enthusiasm (and a reminder that we are in the right party). And although paused for the General Election, our Manifesto Working Group will mean that Councillors are continuing to carry out the aims and priorities of the Edinburgh Green Party.

So we'd like to finish up our stint as Co-Conveners with a huge thank you to you, our members ❤️



Alys & Ben

Culture

What is the Culture portfolio?

As a cultural city that has such a high national and international cultural profile, it is a busy and very interesting portfolio. Given access to culture is so unequal, there is a lot of scope for Greens to make the case for a more inclusive cultural sector, and most other parties usually do little on this. Culture officers are generally very well-engaged and largely sympathetic to our approach to culture, so they are mostly very good to work with, and the portfolio holder can get stuff done.



Dan Heap

Top 3 portfolio achievements

- Progress made towards having more power points for outdoor events, reducing the need for diesel generators.
- Stopping Firework Control Zones from being kicked into the long grass and building support for a city-wide zone.
- Moving the need to provide free tickets significantly up the agenda, and achieving significant (100s%) increases in the free tickets available through the Winter Festivals.

What does the future hold?

The future is uncertain given the continuing vulnerability of the cultural sector and venues, for example Summerhall. The re-opening of the Filmhouse in October and the King's Theatre will be key events. November will be a key period for us, as (hopefully), the city's first Firework Control Zone will launch. There is work to be done on:

- Greening the cultural grants system
- Making access to culture more equal
- How the Council can support co-operative models of culture. The worker co-op rescues of the Jazz Bar and Filmhouse have been hugely positive.
- Reducing the need for diesel generators for events, as that work now does have some momentum

What has been the biggest challenge?

Many cultural organisations and venues are vulnerable financially, and there have been several organisations that have collapsed or otherwise are facing crisis, e.g. Filmhouse, Dancebase. They vary in how transparent they are about the challenges they are facing, so the work sometimes has to be very reactive, after the organisation has collapsed, or when it is on the brink, e.g. in the case of Filmhouse. The system of cultural grants is opaque and complicated, so it can be challenging to understand it sufficiently to see how it can be made more Green. Winter Festivals take up a huge amount of time relative to the relatively short duration and the complicated contractual situation can make change hard to win. The summer Festivals are obviously the biggest single cultural event in the city, but they can be difficult to influence because so many organisations are involved and the Council's influence is limited and often indirect. Officers are not especially receptive to how the Festivals and other cultural events so currently dependent on air travel of performers, equipment and audiences could be changed to make it more climate-neutral.

How can members get involved?

Members can lobby the Council to introduce a city wide Firework Control Zone by emailing the Council at fireworkcontrolzones@edinburgh.gov.uk

Read our [manifesto pledges for Culture](#)



Communities

What is the Communities portfolio?

This is about devolving power to local communities as well as ensuring people feel safe and empowered when going about their day to day lives.



Alex Staniforth

Top 3 portfolio achievements

- Creation of a night-time coordinator role which will improve the safety of the night time economy and help it thrive.
- Including in the consultation on the review of community councils methods of improving how community councils work such as term limits and gender balancing.
- Raising the issue of Uyghur forced labour when the Lord Provost visited Shenzhen- sometimes it's not just about local communities!

What does the future hold?

The community council review is still ongoing – making sure the community council scheme is fit for purpose is something we should continue to focus on until it's done. Changes to library operations are also in consultation.

What has been the biggest challenge?

That our national rules and the ruling council administration don't really favour radical democracy.

How can members get involved?

Get involved in your local community council if you can! Look out for the consultation on library opening times which will likely affect everyone in the city one way or another; it should be coming some time late this month.

[Read our manifesto pledges for Communities](#)

Putting communities' needs first

Edinburgh is too often a city where our communities feel alienated, cut off, and isolated, where a lot of the time it's making decisions about their present instead of genuinely engaging with them.

Edinburgh is also a city where people don't have access to high quality green spaces and community facilities, and public spaces are too often being commercialised.

Edinburgh should be a city that puts decision making in the hands of local residents in the places that matter to them, building trust and community and support through local action and ensuring that only a support and resources in their neighbourhoods.

Edinburgh should be a place where people are connected through walking, cycling, playing and public spaces to essential services, community facilities and high quality green spaces. As we recover from COVID-19, Edinburgh should be a place that provides spaces for community groups to gather and shared their local areas, strengthening some of the bonds that were rekindled during national lockdowns.

OUR PLEDGES

With more Green Councillors elected, we will ensure our streets are part of neighbourhoods and communities we can enjoy and be proud to call home by implementing across our city to place the needs of people at the heart of our approach to transport and urban design and turn our abandoned streets into spaces where people have energy.

Empower communities

- Support community-led initiatives and community events
- Create a plan for better community use of our outdoor public spaces and public facilities, and boost the commercialisation of public spaces through clear rules on private events
- Encourage and support community groups to take ownership of their buildings through community asset transfer by giving advice, funding, and training wherever possible



Education

What is the Education portfolio?

Overseeing the delivery of primary and secondary education is the priority for Education, Children & Families committee. However, the committee is also responsible for children's social work including looked-after children and justice services. The Education, Children & Families committee is fairly consensual being about the delivery of a curriculum set a national level. Also delivery of education is significantly devolved to schools and head teachers.



Steve Burgess

Top portfolio achievement

A Green motion secured the creation of teacher sustainability champions in every school in Edinburgh, who have protected time to develop this work in their schools. This was protected to proposed cuts, thanks to Green efforts at budget time. A Global Schools climate summit was held involving 500 children from across 4 countries.

What has been the biggest challenge?

An ongoing challenge is the protection of funding.

How can members get involved?

Green members could be involved in a mini campaign as budget setting approaches.

Housing

What is the Housing portfolio?

Housing is the key to tackling serious poverty, which despite Edinburgh being one of the richest cities in the world, continues to grow.

Top portfolio achievement

This year the council declared a Housing Emergency – and the Scottish Government followed suit despite freezing council tax and cutting £200m from the housing budget. Within the Council, we have pushed hard to have action meet the declaration, prioritising refurb of empty homes, review of emergency accommodation, and the greening of social housing areas. We have put cooperatives on the agenda and worked on student homelessness.

What has been the biggest challenge?

Homelessness and the spread of purpose-built student accommodation

Read our manifesto pledges for Education

Ensuring education for life

Edinburgh is a wealthy city, but the learning gap and inequality in Edinburgh's schools has made worse by the pandemic, and public needs have grown, especially the need for more mental health support and educational activities. Edinburgh's schools need serious levels of investment to re-equip it to meet its need to be our best school by 2030. Children in care need our full support, and Edinburgh needs to help protect the interests of all our pupils.

OUR PLEDGES

- With more Green councillors elected we will:
- Make sure the focus is on inclusive learning
- Secure early learning in primary schools to predominantly play-based and offer extensive opportunities for outdoor learning, and social and learning, and access to local community resources such as parks and libraries.
- Focus on a more person-centred approach to the curriculum and how we assess progress and promote continuous assessment based on teacher judgement.
- Work with our MSPs in the fight to keep school class sizes down, improving staff to pupil ratios and ensuring the number of children and support staff.
- Improve the progression, training and conditions for pupil support assistants.
- Support pupils at risk of falling behind and who have additional support needs, including alternative provision for those who need it, and reduced exclusions.
- Invest more support in schools for children from disadvantaged groups, including out-of-school and out-of-school activities and LGBT+ young people.
- Invest and expand on opportunities for children learning as part of the core school work, including for expanding forest school learning.



Susan Rae

Read our manifesto pledges for Housing

Securing warm, safe homes for all

Edinburgh is facing a housing crisis. Good housing is key to our health, wellbeing and security, yet needs have increased by 25% in the last decade and especially in 'luxury' markets, student accommodation and holiday lets. Underpinning this is a massive deficit in affordable housing, with many homes in poor condition and poor-quality materials, not homes where people live and build communities. People are struggling to pay rent for housing which is not fit for purpose and often unsuitable for their needs, or they are priced out of living in Edinburgh altogether.

OUR PLEDGES

- With more Green councillors elected we will:
- Tackle fuel poverty and cut climate emissions in our homes
- Establish a comprehensive and fully funded Edinburgh Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (EHEES), to assess and enable building energy audits and repairs, to improve the fabric of our buildings and decarbonise heat supply, with an aim of installing at least 300,000 smart meters for the city by 2030, and continue to make the case for Council-Owned Communities that deliver high-quality housing to deliver this.
- Recharge Energy for Edinburgh, the council's energy services company, with a new role to deliver smart and heat decarbonisation under the EHEES, and to participate in support on the existing work of the recent Energy Performance and Energy Innovation mechanisms such as Heat as a Service and community asset ownership to drive clean emissions and fuel poverty.



Equalities

What is the Equalities portfolio?

This portfolio is important as we cannot have climate justice without social justice and vice versa.



Kayleigh O'Neill

Top 3 portfolio achievements

- Call for more inclusion and anti-bullying work in schools to make trans and non-binary kids safer.
- Started work to create Edinburgh as the next Feminist City.
- Rerouting mobility aids from landfill to Ukrainians and Palestinians.

What does the future hold?

In more areas of the Council than ever before, equalities and inclusion are higher on the agenda – or on there for the first time! It is a great time to teach others and yourself how to be the best ally and elected member for your constituents.

What has been the biggest challenge?

The wish to overlook equalities issues in all committees.

How can members get involved?

Keep an eye on how inclusive, accessible and fair our city and services become over the next few years. Where there are improvements to be made, we want to make them.

Health & Social Care

What is the Health and Social Care portfolio?

Health and Social Care is an essential pillar of our public services, ensuring that everyone, regardless of wealth, is able to access the care they need free at the point of service. It is intrinsically linked to Green values of social justice. Locally there have been threats to both health and social care services because of underfunding so it is an important area of service to defend.



Claire Miller

Top 3 portfolio achievements

- When two of the Council's externally run care homes were going to transfer into the Council from the operator (Four Seasons), it transpired that there were workers who were concerned about insecure work visa status. As a result of working to provide secure employment to them, we secured a new Council-wide policy to provide sponsorship rather than just employ workers who have an existing entitlement such as study or spousal visas.
- After considerable campaigning to highlight that Drumbrae care home has been sitting empty since 2019, the Council finally agreed that it would re-open the home and is about to report back with recommendations on what kinds of care are best offered in this facility. The home should be reopened soon!
- In her first year on the IJB, Claire challenged officers for not proposing a balanced budget and abstained on the vote in protest. At the budget meeting this year, officer brought a balanced budget, and Claire proposed a range of changes to the way that the process should work. She has also been supporting third sector providers whose budgets were cut to ensure that budgets are reinstated and potentially even increased in future, in recognition of the incredible preventative benefits they provide.

What has been the biggest challenge?

The budget is the obvious answer, but the most challenging thing has actually been the governance culture - the board has largely followed officers' recommendations with little challenge, and the Council has been prevented from thoroughly scrutinising its own social care services.

How can members get involved?

Campaigning is likely to continue on the need for good quality, council provided residential care - there is an imbalance between public and private care in Edinburgh where losses of public care facilities are felt keenly. It will be great if members can join in calls to save and protect our public care homes in the coming years.

[Read our manifesto pledges for Health & Social Care](#)

Creating a healthy and caring capital

Edinburgh is suffering from the long-term neglect of our social care system, which the COVID-19 pandemic exposed. The lack of national funding and investment for over a decade set against the increasing number of elderly residents has created a crisis in social care.

80% of home care is outsourced with the majority to the private sector. Some provider companies have stopped individual care packages or closed and have left the council to pick up the pieces. 30% of staff resources remain unskilled, putting further pressure on our already overstretched and exhausted workforce and increasing waiting lists.

Health inequalities have deepened in recent years and have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Drug and alcohol-related deaths are rising and people's mental health is worsening.

Edinburgh should be a city where residents live in good health and where there is a strong green space, healthy and community support for all to take charge of our physical health and mental wellbeing.

The Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership should be a locally delivered and accountable care service, with community involvement at its heart. Its staff should be valued and the pay and conditions of all care workers should reflect their expertise. Social care services should be sustainable and have net zero emissions by 2030.

OUR PLEDGES

- With more Green councillors elected we will:
 - Ensure that there is good quality green space within walking distance of all our homes with consideration to its connection to public and commercial services so we can all enjoy the benefits all year round
 - Ensure that the majority of care at home and care home services are provided by the public and voluntary sectors
 - Ensure that every opportunity to bring private care at home and care home services in-house directly is taken up, increasing control and accountability and ensuring continuity of care for all

What does the future hold?

The budget landscape is still pretty bleak, and there are lots of problems to solve when it comes to funding. However, there are opportunities now that we have closer working between our Green representative and Trade Unions, 3rd sector organisations and community representatives on the board. Changing the way that the budget evaluates investment in 3rd sector services will be really important.

Planning

What is the Planning portfolio?

This portfolio deals with planning policy (i.e. setting the rules that new planning applications should stick to) and deciding on some of the larger or more contentious individual planning applications. For Greens, key themes are ensuring the planning system contributes to tackling the climate crisis and ending poverty, and democratisation of the planning process so more people find it understandable and can get involved in decision making.



Chas Booth

Top 3 portfolio achievements

- Securing a council-wide short-term let control area, and pushing to ensure it's robustly implemented.
- Ensuring that all senior planners and members of planning committee are offered climate literacy training.
- Pushing to ensure cycle parking in all new developments complies with council guidance on accessibility.

How can members get involved?

If you are involved in a community council or other community body, you may want to consider starting work on a local place plan – this is a community-led plan which, once agreed, needs to be taken into consideration when new planning applications come forward. There are also likely to be many council consultations on updates to planning guidance.

What has been the biggest challenge?

The pace of change in the planning system in general, and in Edinburgh in particular, is glacial

What does the future hold?

City Plan 2030 will shortly be approved, which brings with it stronger policies on affordable housing, zero carbon new buildings and a host of other Green priorities. Now we need to review planning guidance to ensure it's equally robust. There's also an opportunity to build on the work of Kayleigh and others to ensure the planning system addresses gender inequality, and that we build a feminist city.

[Read our manifesto pledges for Planning](#)



Planning our common future

Edinburgh is a place where the planning system has not kept pace with the city that communities want to see. With a high influence on people's lives, whether they live and work in Edinburgh, the current planning system has often allowed high carbon emitting, and car-dominated developments, and does not do enough to provide genuinely accessible housing options. Affordable housing and car-free streets and mobility are essential to change this to create a fair, just, sustainable city, with clean air, where communities are supported and nature is protected.

Edinburgh should be a city with a planning system where local residents and communities are fully engaged in the decision-making process, where local people have the power to shape the communities that we live in, where their voices are listened to and respected, and where they have more influence over decisions, and big developers have less. We also need the planning system to play a part in tackling the climate and nature crises and making poverty, through reducing the need to travel, encouraging and enabling less carbon based and sustainable, and ensuring delivery of genuinely affordable housing.

OUR PLEDGES

With more Green councillors elected, we will:

Create a planning system with people at its heart

- Support local place plans and development plans, led by local communities, in order to 'test and' the planning system.
- Complete a review of the council's planning guidance, including consultation of applicants and the council planning panel to ensure it is easy for people to use and understand information about proposed developments in their local area, and ensure they can comment and shape them as far as possible.
- Review the council's planning enforcement processes to ensure that developers deliver on all conditions of their planning permission, and planning breaches are handled effectively and swiftly.
- Push the Scottish Government to further reform the planning system to allow local residents to have say in planning matters, including but not limited to a five party right of appeal.

Transport

What is the Transport portfolio?

Transport is a key lever when it comes to reducing climate emissions as well as connecting people and improving their health. As transport lead, it's been my job to make it as easy, accessible and safe as possible to get people out of their cars and onto their feet, wheelchairs, bikes, buses, and trams..



Jule Bandel

Top 3 portfolio achievements

- After calling for bike parking to be cheaper than all car parking in my first year, I was proud to recently approve significant cost reductions for secure bike hangars. Having a safe place to store your bike is now 75% cheaper in our least well-off neighbourhoods and half-price for everyone else.
- While the work is far from done, I'm pleased we were able to pass the Circulation Plan which sets out how we are going to reallocate road space away from cars as well as a more radical transformation of the city centre which will significantly cut motor traffic and improve conditions for people who walk, wheel, cycle and take the bus.
- Building an equitable, inclusive transport system has been a key principle for me. One change I successfully pushed for were changes to which pavements get prioritised for improvements. As a result, more investment will now be focused on pavements that are too narrow and/or located in areas with high levels of multiple deprivation.

What has been the biggest challenge?

While many parties are happy to approve high-level transport strategies, the political will often falters when it comes to putting plans into practice locally and inconveniencing motorists. Transport officers also regularly report struggling with workloads and being under resourced to deliver all of the projects they've already been tasked with which makes it difficult for us to push for even more.

How can members get involved?

The consultation on tram extension options will open later in the summer. We're also always grateful for anyone who makes positive noises about sustainable transport – whether that's in your everyday life, online, or in consultations. Let's change the conversation about what it means to have a well-connected city!

What does the future hold?

A radical reduction of cars in the city centre, 7-7-7 bus lanes (trials), and, perhaps most excitingly, trams.



Connecting our city

Edinburgh is congested and polluted and many journeys by walking, wheeling and cycling are unappealing or unsafe because of road noise and traffic. Our transport system excludes many disabled people, children and young people, and older people who find it difficult to get around our city.

Too many lives are lost or tragically altered on our roads, and the air pollution from transport and the physical inactivity that our transport system encourages is shortening lives and making us ill. Transport is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions Scotland-wide and the second largest source in Edinburgh.

Edinburgh should be easy, safe and enjoyable to get around by walking, wheeling and cycling. Our public transport should be affordable and appealing because it's easy to get a bus, train or tram for part of the journey.

It should cost less and be more accessible and convenient to get around using low and zero carbon transport. People on lower incomes should be able to get around without worrying about the cost.

The air in Edinburgh should be cleaner with less pollution from vehicles. As more people choose to walk, wheel and cycle for more of their journeys, our residents' health will benefit.

OUR PLEDGES

With more Green councillors elected we will:

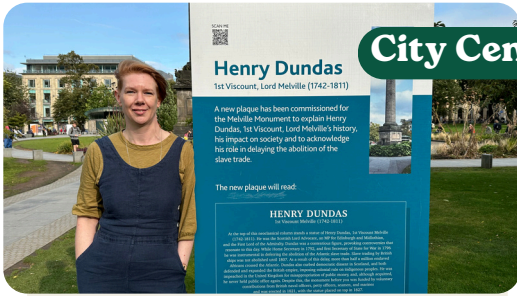
Help more people to get around safely using sustainable transport

- Ensure the council is fully resourced to deliver its transport strategies (City Mobility Plan and City Centre Transformation) and making any necessary adjustments to these strategies to allow for post-pandemic travel patterns and needs in Edinburgh
- Bring forward a new action plan to achieve Vision Zero – eliminating deaths and serious injuries on Edinburgh's roads and footways
- Overhaul the process of consultation, engagement, design and delivery of walking and cycling infrastructure so that projects can be delivered in a suitable timeframe, incorporating local expertise, and pushing the Scottish Government to speed up reforms to streamline processes

**Read our
manifesto
pledges for
Transport**



Across the city



City Centre

Claire got a replacement plaque for the Melville monument



Forth

Representing Greens at COSLA



Ben worked with Living Rent members

Morningside



Susan visiting the postal museum

Leith Walk

Jule at a local Zero Waste event



Inverleith

Alys opened a Beach Library



Portobello / Craigmillar

Steve at former Prestonfield bowling green and future community garden



Southside / Newington

Craigentinny / Duddingston

Alex at Meadowbank where he attends Edinburgh Leisure meetings



Dan with MSP Lorna Slater launching Government consultation on halting nature loss

Sighthill / Gorgie



Leith

Chas welcoming LTN street art designed by school children