

Report

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Title: Councillors Group

Report

1 ANNUAL REPORT

2 From the Co-Conveners

3 On 6th May 2022, you elected 10 Green Councillors for Edinburgh. Since then,
4 it's been a whirlwind year full of political instability - not just in
5 Westminster and Holyrood, but here in the Council too. Despite the challenges,
6 we have worked hard to honour the promises we made to branch members (and the
7 public) to use our platform to fight for climate justice, to tackle inequality
8 and to build a city which works for everyone.

9 Casting our mind back to a year ago, it's funny to think about what we now know.
10 The year started with lots of negotiations, as Councillors and branch members
11 worked together to prepare a proposal to take Greens into administration for the
12 first time with the SNP group. Whilst this was ultimately unsuccessful, as a
13 last-minute Labour deal with the Tories and Lib Dems handed them control of the
14 Council, we remain proud of the robust, transparent and democratic process we
15 went through to try and get the best deal for the people of Edinburgh.

16 Since then, the group has been taking every opportunity to fight for climate and
17 social justice - whether that's by interrogating the crises in health and social
18 care, winning more action for biodiversity, or scrutinising the use of private
19 companies for Council business. We've worked with all parties - and none! - to
20 achieve real, tangible changes for our constituents, as well as trying to change
21 the very structures by which we do politics, talking about culture change,
22 access and inclusion in Council practices.

Our Councillor group is an extension of our branch, and nothing we achieve would be possible without our members. We want to particularly thank Zoe, Rob and the rest of the Edinburgh Committee who have been unfailingly supportive, as well as Green MSP Lorna Slater, her staff team, the central office and the network of Green Councillors across Scotland. Special thanks too, to Chas Booth and Jule Bandel who have taken on the role of Communications Officers for the group this year - spreading the Green message through press stories, twitter threads, and memes (yes, really).

The year is ending as it began in many ways - with a Labour administration relying on votes from right-wing parties to maintain control of a volatile and lively Council. We don't know what the future will hold for Edinburgh Council, but we hope this snapshot of our work over the past year will demonstrate that - however and whenever we can - Greens will be steadfast in our fight for positive change across the city.

In solidarity,

Alys and Ben

Green Group Co-Conveners

COUNCILLOR ALYS MUMFORD

Name: Alys Mumford

Ward: Portobello / Craigmillar

Portfolio: Finance & Economy

Committees: Policy and Sustainability committee; Finance and Resources committee; COSLA Leaders (representing all Green Councillors in Scotland); Edinburgh International Conference Centre Board; Edinburgh Award Panel

Biggest achievement from Portfolio:

The first thing I did, in my first Committee, was to bring a motion calling for the council to adopt a gender-budgeting approach. Looking back on it now it was probably trying to run before I could walk, but we managed to get it passed and I think we are slowly getting the message across that economic decisions impact on different groups in different ways!

Biggest achievement from your committees:

While we weren't able to get our budget through Full Council, we were successful - a few weeks later - in passing our proposals for the fees and charges for the council. This meant that we increased parking charges across the city in order

to reduce the cost of things like funerals and creating a fund to help community groups access Council venues.

Most challenging thing:

As group Co-Convener, alongside Ben, I've been pushing hard to improve council business practices, and to tackle the systemic discrimination which is built into them – last minute deadlines, opposition to hybrid meetings and resistance to the use of technology to name but a few. It has been exhausting to have to keep raising the same issues, but we now have agreement that there is a need for a radical review of how we do things, and I'm looking forward to working with officers to make some positive improvements – we have a long way to go to make the Council more accessible!

Council snack of choice:

I was a fan of the pink custard we had one month (because it matched my hair at the time - intentional, I'm sure)

Most cringe thing you accidentally said on the record?

I described our tactical voting at budget time as 'shenanigans' to a reporter, and it's stuck...

Best compliment you've received?

A lovely Councillor from another party emailed me to thank me for something and said at the end "yer some wummin" which made me smile then and still does now!

COUNCILLOR ALEX STANIFORTH

Name: Alex Staniforth

Ward: Craignentinny & Duddingston

Portfolio: Empowering Communities

Committees you sit on (inc. Relevant boards): Policy & Sustainability, Finance and Resources, Culture and Communities

Biggest achievement from Committee:

I ensured that an in-house option for operating 'mid market rent' properties will be considered at the end of the next contract term.

Biggest achievement from your ward:

I asked for planters installed at the Seafield end of Portobello Prom, stopping people from using it as a car park and allowing better access for pedestrians and cyclists.

Most looking forward to next year:

Getting the night-life coordinator position approved and appointed to the benefit of everyone involved in our night time economy.

Most disappointed not to have achieved (yet):

Our (joint SNP/Green) plan for a more progressive form of council tax didn't quite get over the line in terms of the legal limits of our powers – but set a good foundation for next time.

Funniest moment you've witnessed at Council:

Alys unable to control her laughter when a Tory councillor pulled a face at Finance and Resources committee.

Council snack of choice:

Chocolate-covered coffee beans, my only way of ingesting that sweet, sweet caffeine for the long days of full council.

COUNCILLOR BEN PARKER

Name: Ben Parker

Ward: Morningside

Portfolio: Climate and Environment

Committees you sit on (inc. Relevant boards): Policy & Sustainability committee; Housing, Homelessness & Fair Work committee; Climate and Sustainability All Party Oversight Group; COSLA Environment & Economy board; Edinburgh Community Solar Co-op

Biggest achievement from Portfolio: In February, I successfully brought a motion to declare a nature emergency. Since then, we have seen nature be given a much higher profile in the Council – for example, we now have a dedicated “climate and nature emergencies” section for officers to complete in all reports they bring forward. Relatedly, there's also been a renewed focus on trees and tree maintenance / protection in the Council – especially in relation to events in parks – and this is certainly in response to the high level of scrutiny we've applied to this issue. I'm now at a stage where officers and Councillors from other parties are proactively getting in touch with me about nature / tree related issues – that feels like good evidence that I've carved out a niche over the year!

Biggest achievement from Committee: I've been pleased to push officers on issues relating to accessible housing at Housing, Homelessness & Fair Work committee and we're expecting a large programme of work to come forward on this issue over the next year.

Most disappointed to have not achieved yet: There have been a number of occasions where the ugly policy of “no recourse to public funds” has reared its head – either through casework or at committee. Because of this toxic UK government policy, the Council is limited in support it can offer some people in need and the powerlessness I have felt on these occasions has been as frustrating as it has been heart-breaking. On a more positive note, I have been proud to raise this issue at committee and Full Council and we have made good connections with campaigners working at a UK wide level on the issue as a result of this.

Council snack of choice: Given the reaction of colleagues (and my part in nearly killing off a Council officer who is allergic to citrus fruit during a meeting), I have come to realise that my Council “snack” of eating at least one full pack of satsumas a day is abnormal / excessive.

Best compliment you’ve received: On more than one occasion I’ve had meetings with officers who have said words to the effect of “We always know that you will read the papers thoroughly and ask the detailed and difficult questions” – that makes me feel like I’m doing my job properly!

COUNCILLOR CHAS BOOTH

Name: Chas Booth

Ward: Leith

Portfolio: Planning

Committees you sit on (inc. Relevant boards): Planning Committee; Development Management sub-committee; Licensing Board; Local Review Body (1), Local Review Body (2)

Biggest achievement from Portfolio:

I worked with colleagues and stakeholders, including Living Rent, to strengthen planning guidance on short term lets to make it clear that STLs which lead to a further reduction of amenity for residents in mixed areas would not usually be granted, along with further changes.

Biggest achievement from Ward:

Succeeded in persuading Transport Committee to grant a reprieve on the council’s plans to demolish the Pride Bridge over Lindsay Road in Newhaven, and agreed to work with the community to find an alternative way forward.

Most disappointed not to have achieved (yet)?:

Along with colleagues, I brought an amendment to Planning Committee to change the council's definition of "affordable housing" to remove some of the tenures which Greens don't feel are really helping people on low incomes, specifically golden share and intermediate rent. This amendment was unfortunately voted down by Labour, Lib Dem and Tory councillors.

Council snack of choice:
Coffee and biscuit from the member's lounge

Best compliment you've received:

As part of an email thanking me for my work to support the Leith Low Traffic Neighbourhood: "I don't think we had realised quite how intrusive the traffic noise had become until it was largely gone. The change really has been quite dramatic."

COUNCILLOR CLAIRE MILLER

Name: Claire Miller

Ward: City Centre

Portfolio: Health & Social Care

Committees you sit on (inc. Relevant boards): Integration Joint Board (health & social care), Transport & Environment Committee, Group Risk and Best Value Committee, Joint Consultative Committee (the joint trade unions)

Biggest achievement from Portfolio:

I have been working really hard to bring out into the public domain a range of different issues in health & social care which had been going on behind closed doors without public scrutiny or democratic decision making. I've been successful in raising awareness of the empty council care home at Drumbrae, stopping consideration of closure of four other council care homes, showing the impact of budget choices, and procurement of private sector care against the political direction of our council for community wealth building and in-sourcing.

Most challenging thing:

I've found it really hard to get to grips with the way the Integration Joint Board governs health & social care. We've been advised not to be political and elected members make up only a small portion of the board, but it's a highly political subject and residents quite rightly view us as their representatives when we make decisions about care homes, GP surgeries, mental health services and much more.

203 Most looking forward to next year:
204 Now that I have learned more about the different health and social care services
205 that the council and NHS offer to our residents, and I've also taken on the role
206 of 'climate champion' for the IJB, I feel excited about working towards
207 meaningful changes and using my position to make improvements.

208 Weirdest email/request:
209 On the day Humza Yousaf was elected as Scotland's new First Minister, I received
210 an email from a constituent who had wasted no time and written to him
211 immediately about potholes, only to be directed by the FM's office to contact
212 their local ward councillors. I have to have admiration for both the resident
213 who decided that this was the ideal moment to get his attention, and also the
214 staff in the FM's office who decided just as fast that it was not.

215 Councilsnack of choice:
216 An americano and a cake from The Milkman on Cockburn Street will always help me
217 through any hangry moments.

218 **COUNCILLOR DAN HEAP**

219 Name: Dan Heap
220 Ward: Sighthill/Gorgie
221 Portfolio: Culture
222 Committees you sit on (inc. Relevant boards): Culture and Communities; Gorgie
223 Memorial Hall Management Committee.

224 Biggest achievement from Portfolio: Crossing both portfolio and ward, the
225 possible closure of the West Park Place studio in Dalry is a major threat to
226 arts provision in the SW of the city, and to the livelihoods of the resident
227 artists. I got Council backing to hold talks with the studio operators and the
228 artists, with a view to keep the studios opening, and it is unlikely the Council
229 would have done this without me stepping in.

230 Biggest achievement from Committee: There have been lots of smaller and medium
231 wins that add up. With Alex and the input of other Green Councillors, we've
232 strengthened the environmental and climate oversight of the festivals and other
233 big events. I was also pleased to be able to get support to expand tennis ball
234 recycling at the newly-refurbished tennis courts that are opening in the next
235 year, and to get the ball rolling on a slavery and colonialism audit of the
236 museum collections.

237 Biggest achievement from Ward: Despite having a majority opposed to it just

238 hours before the vote, I negotiated unanimous support for a motion to ensure
239 Gorgie Farm remains free to enter and in non-private sector hands when it
240 reopens.

241 Best compliment you've received: It is always a nice surprise to get genuinely
242 grateful e-mails from constituents you have been able to help. Recently, I got
243 the council to formally congratulate a new theatre group that has just launched
244 and which is having its inaugural performance in Saughton Park in my ward. They
245 seem genuinely touched that I had gone to the effort to do so, and I found that
246 touching too. I've had similar experiences with the West Park Place artists and
247 constituents who have reached out for help with housing and other issues.

248 Most "we've got this" moment:

249 There have been several Culture and Communities Committee meetings when Greens
250 have brought in more policy changes tabled at the meeting, despite being the
251 second smallest group. It shows how much prep and hard work we do, relative to
252 other, often better-resourced groups.

253 **COUNCILLOR KAYLEIGH O'NEILL**

254 Name: Kayleigh O'Neill

255 Ward: Forth Ward

256 Portfolio: Equalities

257 Committees you sit on (inc. Relevant boards): Planning Committees, Education,
258 Children & Families Committee, Edinburgh Waterfront All Party Oversight Group,
259 Forth Green Freeport cross-party sounding board

260 Biggest achievement from your portfolio:

261 As Equalities spokesperson I have worked across every committee and with all
262 portfolio holders. My personal achievement is starting my Dropped Kerb campaign
263 where I will be auditing every street in my ward and reporting this to the
264 Council to take action on.

265 Biggest achievement from your committee:

266 In Planning committee, I am most proud of the instances that I have raised
267 accessibility as a factor or issue when determining applications. Officers have
268 told me that this is an area they now think of and take seriously when reporting
269 – a small but major win!

270 Most challenging thing?:

271 The most challenging part of being a Councillor so far is the extremely dated

272 attitude of what a Councillor should be and how one should act!

273 Biggest surprise this year:

274 The biggest surprise of the year has to be my resilience as a young disabled
275 women in politics; being an elected official is a difficult job, but I could not
276 be more grateful of where I have gotten to and where I'll go next.

277 Council snack of choice:

278 My committee treat is a hot cup of hot chocolate from the Member's Lounge coffee
279 machine – no matter how warm it is inside and out!

280 Best compliment you've received:

281 The best compliment I have received came from a student at an event I was
282 sponsoring with Trinity Academy. They told me that my work is "so simple and
283 boring but so important!" I'm taking that as a compliment.

284 **COUNCILLOR JULE BANDEL**

285 Name: Jule Bandel

286 Ward: Inverleith

287 Portfolio: Transport

288 Committees you sit on (inc. Relevant boards): Transport and Environment

289 Committee, Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee, Transport for Edinburgh
290 board, South East Scotland Transport Regional Partnership

291 Biggest achievement from Committee:

292 I have terrible memory, so I'll go with a recent example: I got committee to
293 agree that parking your bike in a secure cycle hangar should on principle be
294 cheaper than parking a car – seems pretty intuitive, but some car parking
295 permits still cost less than the annual charge for a cycle hangar! We are now
296 going to explore various options for making cycle hangars more affordable.

297 Biggest achievement from Ward:

298 The piece of casework I'm proudest of was helping a young autistic constituent
299 get their reasonable adjustments at school reinstated. I spent a lot of time
300 emailing and phoning people about it before their first day of term and it was
301 such a relief when I heard the school had reconsidered their decision.

302 Most challenging thing:

303 Although councillors are supposed to work (and are paid) part-time, the workload
304 has been much higher than I was expecting. It's been challenging balancing this
305 with the degree I'm still trying to complete, and a lot of the time I've felt

like I'm half-assing* two things, so I'm looking forward to being able to really focus on councillor-ing once I've handed in my dissertation.

*Editor note: Jule might feel this way, but this is definitely not how it is perceived!

Best moment you've witnessed:

Long days in committees are exhausting, and councillors tend to stop having a filter around 4pm which is when things often get funny. My personal favourite moment was the Lord Provost asking councillors "are we all agreed?" after the Tories proposed something and Susan – who was joining online and had forgotten to turn off her mic – loudly bellowing "No!!!" from where she was displayed on a huge screen.

Most cringe thing you've accidentally said on the webcast:

Trying to end a speech about supporting better bike storage in schools that I didn't prepare in advance: "It's got bikes! For kids! What more do you want!"

Best compliment you've received:

I've developed somewhat of a reputation at Transport and Environment Committee for always having a thousand questions on the reports at Agenda Planning Meetings – Scott Arthur may make comments about it, but I'm taking it as a compliment that I've done my homework.

COUNCILLOR STEVE BURGESS

Name: Steve Burgess

Ward: Southside-Newington ward

Portfolio: Education and Pensions

Committees you sit on (inc. Relevant boards): Education, Children & Families Committee; Pensions Committee; Corporate Parenting Board; Placing in Schools appeals panel; Consultative Committee with Parents; Steering group on Learning for Sustainability; Committee on Pupil Student Support; The Royal Company of Merchants Endowment Trust; Torness Local Liaison Committee

Biggest achievement from your portfolio?:

I secured backing from Education committee to set up a steering group to develop Learning for Sustainability in schools which includes Climate & Nature emergencies. Every school will now have a teacher with half-a-day a week dedicated to developing their school's activities. We are also looking at ramping up 1.5MAX to develop climate projects between schools across the world.

Biggest achievement from your ward:

Won approval from Culture & Communities committee for a proposal to turn a disused bowling green in Prestonfield into a community growing garden. A local consultation led by Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust is happening later this summer.

Most looking forward to next year:

As part of 'Project Forth' Lothian Pension Fund officers are proposing to do away with the council Pensions committee and replace it with a 'professional' board which would remove democratic oversight of pensions investments by councillors and any chance of achieving divestment. We are hopeful this will be rejected by the council.

Most "we've got this" moment:

It's been amazing to see how capably our newly elected, young councillors - several in their 20s (!) - have taken on key roles, including Co-Convenership of our group with enthusiasm and energy – the future is bright green indeed!

Best moment at Full Council:

A standout moment this term was when Susan and I held hands under the desk in full council as we voted to keep the Tory budget in the ring in order to oust Labour's climate-unfriendly budget. This resulted in a perhaps the most staggering event when the Labour Group then voted with Tories for the LibDem budget which included support for compulsory redundancy and privatisation of council services but at least it contained essential funding for climate work!

COUNCILLOR SUSAN RAE

Bio (all essential)

Name: Susan Rae

Ward: Leith Walk

Portfolio: Housing

Committees you sit on (inc. Relevant boards): Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work committee; Regulatory subcommittee; Licensing subcommittee; Jean F Watson Bequest committee; Lothian Homes Trust, Edinburgh Living LLP; Baillie

Biggest achievement from Committee:

I was irritated to have to raise concerns about lengthy delays to lift repairs again but I'm now pleased that the Council is finally taking action and we have commitment to a multi-million pound investment for new lift repairs over the next 5 years.

Biggest achievement from Ward:

I'm excited about the tram project now being complete in Leith, but I'm also proud of the work I've done with Leith Chooses. Post-COVID, it has been a very challenging landscape and despite cuts to budgets, we've been able to secure a future for Leith Chooses, including extra funding for next year.

Most surprising thing this year:

That a wee boy in a hatchback thought that, from a standing start, he could knock over a 5ft woman (me) stood in the road as a human bollard blocking a pedestrian crossing at an old left turn (London Road). I was not expecting that this year I would have to literally put my body on the line for this job but there we are!

Most looking forward to next year:

The decline and fall of the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative pact, and final fall of the Conservative Government in Westminster! But also, the introduction of a pavement parking ban which will finally see us be able to take some action on Leith Walk against the worst offenders.

Best moment at Full Council:

I never pre-write my speeches and on budget day I was so horrified about how things were playing out that I did stand up and speak to our proposal for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). I explained that the only way to get rid of poverty is to get rid of the HRA / make fundamental changes to how it works!

Funniest moment you've witnessed at Council?:

When Alys and Ben submitted our amendment to the Business Plan, Kevin Lang (leader of the Liberal Democrats), inflated with righteous indignation, railed against the amendment on the grounds that they had done too much work and it was taxing for him to read it all. Better still, he then felt compelled to apologise for his comments at the next Full Council meeting.