

Report

Proposer: Green Group of Edinburgh Councillors (decided on:
06/18/2022)

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Report

1 This Green group year started with our AGM in June 2021 when Claire Miller and
2 Steve Burgess succeeded Melanie Main and Alex Staniforth as Green group co-
3 conveners. There was also a minor reshuffle of portfolios between councillors
4 with Susan Rae taking over housing lead, Chas Booth moving to culture &
5 communities and Alex Staniforth replacing Mary Campbell on planning.

6 The council went into recess at the end of June until early August and then
7 resumed its meetings online.

8 Notable issues in August included a concerted campaign against spaces for people
9 cycle provision introduced during lockdown, where Claire Miller worked with
10 local supporters of the temporary segregated cycle lanes on Lanark road that
11 were in danger of being scrapped.

12 At Finance committee Gavin Corbett led on support for a co-housing bid for the
13 council-owned Comiston farmhouse. Unfortunately councillors from all other
14 parties backed a higher commercial bid.

15 In September, Edinburgh Council continued to meet online. At Full council, with
16 the latest UN IPCC report being described as a "code red for humanity", Steve
17 Burgess challenged the council leader that the council's approach to the climate
18 emergency needed a greater sense of urgency as advocated by Edinburgh's Climate
19 Commission.

20 In the week before the United Nations COP 26 negotiations in Scotland,
21 Edinburgh's Green councillors again led on the climate emergency at the council
22 meeting, with Green co-convenor Claire Miller raising the national embarrassment
23 of the climate-busting UK government budget and challenging the council leader
24 over the council's questionable record on cutting climate changing pollution.
25 Greens also formally proposed that the council's pension fund should rapidly
26 divest from fossil fuel companies but this was once again voted down by all
27 other political parties.

28 On planning committee, Chas Booth also pushed for the council to rule out
29 climate busting airport expansion from the forthcoming city plan and pressed
30 hard to make the plan a better fit with the city's net zero ambitions.

31 October also saw Cllr Gavin Corbett's last council meeting as he stepped down to
32 take up a Scottish Government post working with the two new Green ministers,
33 after over nine years of dedicated work as a Green councillor.

34 Following the UN COP 26 meeting in early November, Green councillors highlighted
35 the failures of the UK government and the need for cities like Edinburgh to
36 forge ahead with their plans to reduce climate-changing pollution.

37 Claire Miller also led on the Green group approach to the independent enquiry
38 led by Susan Tanner QC into serious abuse perpetrated by a former Council
39 employee which resulted in a suite of recommendations to ensure that lessons are
40 learned and that changes to practices will mean that such abuse can't remain
41 hidden or unchallenged ever again.

42 In Education, Mary Campbell met with the new head of education children and
43 families to discuss Green group priorities particularly expanding outdoor
44 learning, climate education, and inclusion.

45 At Full council, Alex Staniforth successfully proposed that tenants rights
46 should be at the heart of any improvement to standards for Houses of Multiple
47 Occupation (HMOs).

48 In the new year, 2022, thoughts began to turn to the forthcoming council budget
49 and the next council election in May. In Education, Mary Campbell proposed
50 better support for school staff and recognition of the difficult circumstances
51 they were operating under as a result of lockdown. Steve Burgess was successful
52 in getting council agreement to sign up to the global "Fossil Fuels Non-
53 Proliferation Treaty" campaign.

54 In February, Alex Staniforth led on producing a Green group budget for 'Climate
55 and Social justice'.

56 Only the SNP–Labour coalition budget secured enough votes to pass but Green
57 councillors lobbied hard to prioritise funding for action on the climate
58 emergency and helping those most in need with the cost of living crisis.

59 In March, Edinburgh Council started winding down its political decision-making
60 prior to the pre-election period in April before the council election on the 5
61 May.

62 At its last Full council meeting, the significant contribution to the council
63 over the last five years by councillors Melanie Main and Mary Campbell, the two
64 Green councillors who were standing down at the election, was highlighted during
65 the meeting.

66 The Council then went into the pre-election campaign period in April and on May
67 6 election results were announced at the EICC.

68 After a hard fought election campaign by volunteers and staff of the Edinburgh
69 Green party, Greens were successful in electing a record 10 Green councillors in
70 Edinburgh. This included councillors in two wards that were previously not held
71 – Kayleigh O’Neill in Forth ward and Dan Heap in Sighthill – Gorgie ward. Jule
72 Bandel was also successful in winning back Inverleith ward.

73 The only disappointment was that Gavin Corbett's tight 3-member ward,
74 Fountainbridge–Craiglockhart, was not held despite Megan McHaney attracting 20%
75 of first preference votes. Alys Mumford in Portobello – Craigmillier and Ben
76 Parker in Morningside made up the five new faces in the Green group, joining
77 continuing councillors Claire Miller, Susan Rae, Alex Staniforth, Chas Booth and
78 Steve Burgess.

79 Following the election, after speaking with most parties it became clear to the
80 Green group of councillors that, given the Labour group could not enter any
81 formal arrangement with any other party, that the most beneficial possible
82 outcome for the city would be an SNP-Green minority coalition. Green
83 councillors, supported by the negotiating support group from the Edinburgh
84 branch then worked hard to draft a coalition agreement with the SNP.

85 After overwhelming approval by the individual members of the Edinburgh Greens,
86 this coalition agreement was brought to the Edinburgh council meeting on the 26
87 May. However it was defeated by a proposal to form a majority

88 Labour–LibDem–Conservative administration.

89 At June's policy and sustainability committee meeting, interim Green group co-
90 convener, Steve Burgess questioned the new Council Leader, Labour's Cammy Day,
91 about the lack of a political program for the new administration. It remains to
92 be seen if anything will come forward to the first business meeting of the new
93 Council at the end of June.

94 Meanwhile the new Green group on Edinburgh Council pledged to push for action on
95 the priorities of transport, housing, poverty and inclusion, and the climate
96 emergency along with other progressive policies in the Green manifesto and the
97 SNP-Green coalition agreement.

98 An early win, in the absence of a policy program from the Lab-Lib-Con
99 administration, was a joint SNP-Green initiative to propose that officers
100 marshal council resources and report on the two priorities of poverty and
101 inclusion and climate emergency in the lead up to the council budget in
102 February.

103 As ever, there was far too much Green councillor activity over the year to
104 report fully here, particularly the work by Green councillors in their wards –
105 you can find the full monthly reports for the year here:

106 <https://www.edinburghgreens.org.uk/msp-and-councillor-reports/>