

### Chair's Report – 18<sup>th</sup> January 2022 Public Meeting.

- **Overview** – MCC enters 2022 in good shape. MCC is fortunate in having an active team of committed members of our local community, with a range of backgrounds and ages. I am grateful that MCC members participate constructively in ongoing scrutiny of community issues, planning applications and licencing applications, and in developing innovative community projects to improve wellbeing of residents.
- **Associate Members** – George Watson's College has nominated Amelie Lcey & Henry Reynolds as Associates for 2021-22. We welcome them both and encourage them to participate in MCC activities.
- **Covid** – Continues to dominate our lives, directly and indirectly (including constrained services to the public) and is likely to do so for the foreseeable future. The current Omicron upsurge presents heightened risks, both of increased transmissibility (higher risk of infection) and increased prevalence of virus circulating. Optimistic predictions are that serious infections may peak soon, may then subside over the next month or so, but will not disappear. There is also a risk that new variants may emerge.

Meanwhile, it is wise to adopt the “precautionary principle” by minimising non-essential contacts, including minimising one's exposure to air-borne infection risks in busy places.

Covid infection risks & restrictions on public gatherings means that MCC will continue meanwhile to meet virtually using Zoom, rather than revert to in-person meetings.

- **Leaf-Clearing Project** – The innovative MCC leaf-clearing project, well managed by Joan Houston and Helen Zealley, has been widely welcomed and generated some “controversial” reactions from residents. Several residents advocated that CEC, not residents, should be doing leaf-clearing, and also some advocated that they should be able to reclaim part of their Council Tax bill for “reduction in service”. This is unrealistic: Council Tax is a TAX levied on residents, not a bill for services received. Also, leaf-clearing is not a defined statutory duty on local authorities, but a discretionary subsidiary activity arising from CEC's responsibilities for maintaining roads and pavements. Similarly, residents cannot claim a partial reduction from their council tax because they claim not to use education or social work or council housing services etc.

CEC is clearly suffering from shortage of staff and monetary resources, plus carrying additional burdens and costs from Covid. CEC has indicated that tough priority decisions about best use of scarce resources must be made, and leaf-clearing is a

much lower priority than essential services such as Education, Social Work, Refuse Collection, etc.

- **Police Reports** - I have written again to Police Scotland to request resumption of Police reports and participation in MCC public meetings. I am following up a message MCC received from St Leonard's Police Station, offering to resume Police reports (unclear whether reports would be documents or online participation by police officers).
- **School Crossing Patrols** – Following MCC's recent discussion about school crossing patrols, I had a chat with the crossing patrol at Craiglockhart Primary and mentioned that MCC is concerned that CEC has difficulty in filling crossing patrol posts. He gave me several reasons why it is difficult to fill these important road safety posts, including:
  - Minimal Pay - Normally only paid for 12 hours a week. Low hourly rate.
  - Crossing patrols don't get paid during school holidays.
  - The work is very constraining. Crossing patrols must be reliably in position in plenty of time and turn out in all weathers, both early morning and again mid-afternoon, but receive only a couple of hours pay with no payment for the rest of the day. This sporadic work contract makes other activities (remunerated and domestic) difficult.
  - Crossing patrols carry a big personal responsibility for road safety, which is not reflected in their remuneration or recognition.
- **Recycling** - SEPA recently published its latest waste disposal statistics (for 2020). Edinburgh City Council's household recycling was 37%, lower than all-Scotland average of 42%. Edinburgh's recycling in 2020 was also lower than the 38.6% equivalent for 2019, (Scotland average 44.9% for 2019).

Landfill for CEC is shown as only 2.2% of household waste, but there is unexplained "other diversion from landfill" of 59.8% (the highest of any Scottish Council – average 30.8%) - Does this indicate that a large proportion of Edinburgh's waste is incinerated?

Link: <https://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/waste/waste-data/waste-data-reporting/household-waste-data/>

- **Fire and Smoke Alarms** – A reminder that new fire and smoke alarm regulations become mandatory for every house (owned & rented) in Scotland from 1st Feb 2022.

Key new stipulation is that alarms MUST be interlinked, so that when any alarm is activated, they all go off together. Alarms may be either mains-powered (for which a qualified electrician must do the installation, which increases the cost considerably) or battery-powered (which can be done on a DIY basis). I have done the latter after some research and found it fairly straightforward (apart from risks from climbing ladders!).

Caveats re Alarms:

- Some fire alarms on sale do not comply with the British Standards specifications stipulated in the regulations. One well-known alarm system is specifically named as NOT compliant with the BS specification.
- Residents may not be covered by their home insurance in the event of a fire if they are not fully compliant with the new fire and smoke alarm regulations.

Official information and advice:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/fire-and-smoke-alarms-in-scottish-homes/>

- **Chair's meetings as MCC 's representative:**

- 9<sup>th</sup> December - SW Community Grants Funding Panel Meeting
- 16<sup>th</sup> December - EACC meeting. Issues discussed included 'Population increase and its impact on primary care in Edinburgh', report from Edinburgh Partnership meeting on 15 December, Edinburgh Community Council Survey results, and 5G masts and the planning application process.
- 13<sup>th</sup> January - SW Locality Community Planning Partnership Meeting

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Ian Doig. MCC Chair. January 2022.