



Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Pentlands

Gordon Macdonald MSP

March 2024 Newsletter

Standing Gas and Electricity Charges



Gordon called on the UK Government to scrap the unfair standing gas and electricity charges and institute a more equitable price structure for consumers in Scotland in Parliament last month. In his Members' Business debate he highlighted that Scottish customers could be paying up to £335 per year before they use any power to heat or light their homes, which, in the context of the cost of living crisis, will negatively impact Scottish consumers already grappling with sky-high energy costs.

During the debate Gordon said: "In principle, standing charges are there to cover the cost of energy infrastructure divided between consumers on an equal basis, but that policy does not work in practice for those paying the bills. As standing charges also cover network investment, maintenance, supplier failure support and net zero targets.

"This results in an average electricity standing charge for Edinburgh residents of £221 per annum, before any electricity is used, which is higher than the UK national average and 60% higher than the London standing charge of £138. The result is that the 2.5 million households in Scotland are paying an additional £212 million more than if they were on a comparable standing charge with London.

"Then there is the gas standing charges of £101 per annum, which is surprisingly fixed at the same rate across the whole of the UK. In total, my constituents are paying £335 every year before they turn on a light, heat their home or cook a meal." You can watch the full debate [here](#).

Year-Round Support for Edinburgh Students



Higher education students can now apply to spread their student financial support package over a 12-month period for the first time this coming academic year. The year-long package of support will be available for eligible undergraduate students from August 2024. The change will ensure that payments of relevant student loans and bursaries can continue throughout the summer months. This follows a successful two-year programme, which saw care experienced students being given the option of 12-month support.

Care-Experienced students will continue to receive additional support for their living costs under the Summer Accommodation Grant from Summer 2024. Students eligible for the grant - which will replace the Care-Experienced Accommodation Grant - will be entitled to a payment of up to £1,330 to help ensure they do not fall into rent arrears over the summer.

These changes will coincide with the £2,400 increase to the annual support package, which sees the main undergraduate funding package rise up to £11,400.

Gordon said "Coping financially as a student in Edinburgh can be extremely difficult but the changes announced to the way students can receive their funding will make a huge difference across the summer months.

"This is another example of the actions being taken by the Scottish Government to support students through the cost of living crisis. Scotland already has the lowest student debt levels in the UK, thanks to the commitment to free tuition and enhanced student support."

Representing: Baberton, Balerno, Blinkbonny, Bonaly, Broomhouse, Buckstone, Calders, Colinton, Colinton Mains, Currie, Dreghorn, Fairmilehead, Firrhill, Hermiston, Juniper Green, Kingsknowe, Longstone, Oxfangs, Parkhead, Ratho, Redhall, Saughton Mains, Sighthill, Spylaw, Stenhouse, Swanston, Wester Hailes and Whitson.

Age Scotland at the Scottish Parliament



Gordon recently met with Age Scotland at the Scottish Parliament. Commenting Gordon said: "Age Scotland are a great organisation providing a range of support to older people through their website, helpline and also fund over 1,100 member groups for older people in local communities across Scotland."

Last year Age Scotland published a free-to-use Benefits Calculator which can help you find out what benefits you could be owed. Also available is information on avoiding scams, a wealth of information to support wellbeing and health in later life as well as general information and advice to ensure older people in Scotland know their rights and are able to make informed choices.

Gordon encourages older people to visit Age Scotland's [website](http://www.agescotland.org.uk) or call their helpline on 0800 12 44 222 in order to benefit from their support and resources.

Family Fund Exhibition



Gordon attended an exhibition stall held at the Parliament by Family Fund, the UK's largest charity for families on low incomes with a disabled or seriously ill child.

Family Fund provides grants for items include clothing and bedding, white goods, furniture, kitchen appliances, sensory and play equipment, and digital devices. More information is available on [their website](http://www.familyfund.org.uk).

Gordon said "I share Family Fund's belief that families should have the same quality of life and opportunities as all others. Their grant programme will provide finance for families for essential household items, leisure activities as well as workshops and resources to get the most from digital devices." Information about the digital workshops is available [here](http://www.familyfund.org.uk).

Ravelrig Quarry Extension



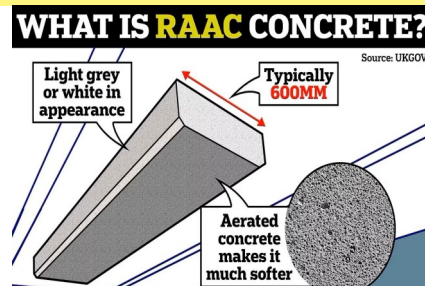
Gordon would like to draw attention to the Pre-Application Consultation on the southerly extension to Ravelrig Quarry. The proposal is for an extension to the quarry to allow the

continued extraction of hard rock, rock processing and despatch of aggregates over the next 24 years.

Gordon commented "I'm aware that this proposed development could have a significant impact on the surrounding areas including neighbouring Balerno and Kirknewton. Should residents wish to share concerns with the developer's they can contact Dalgleish Associates Limited by calling 01786 822339 or send an email to the developer at willie.booth@dalgleishassociates.co.uk".

There is also an opportunity to meet developers and air your views by attending drop-in events at Balerno Bowling Club on Monday 18th March 2024 or Tuesday 2nd April 2024 between 3pm-8pm.

RAAC in Schools Update



Edinburgh Council have released a report on the presence of RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) in Council buildings.

RAAC has been found to be susceptible to structural failure when exposed to moisture and that its lifespan should not extend beyond 30 years. Local authorities use RAAC in a variety of buildings including many schools.

The report details the remediation work required at schools including Colinton and Pentland Primary Schools as well as Currie High School. The work is anticipated to cost over £5m and will take place throughout 2024/25.

Gordon said "I welcome the proactive approach taken by Edinburgh Council to ensure the safety of our school buildings. I will continue to monitor the situation to ensure public buildings in the constituency are remediated to a safe and usable standard."

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Gordon holds open weekly surgeries for constituents every Friday at 10am.

The locations for these can be found at: <https://www.gordonmacdonaldmsp.info/surgery>