

The Lady Mayor's speech at the 2026 Burns Night Supper Mansion House, Monday 26th January 2026

First Minister. Your Excellency. Fellow Aldermen. Sheriffs. Chief Commoner. Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good evening.

First Minister, it is my *great* pleasure to welcome you to Mansion House to celebrate Scotland's national poet...the inimitable Robbie Burns!

I'm afraid to say that, unlike my immediate predecessors, I can't play the bagpipes and I don't have my own tartan...

But, as Lady Mayor, I'm *proud* to act as global ambassador not just for London, but for the *entirety* of the UK's financial and professional services sector...

Which means I help connect capital with opportunity from the Square Mile...to Edinburgh's Royal Mile - and beyond.

Often, when people talk about Scotland and England, they highlight our differences:

- accents and appetites, thistles and roses, parliament and football...

Of course, those things matter: they make us who we are.

But, in many areas...including financial and professional services...we couldn't be more closely aligned.

London and Edinburgh are the UK's two *leading* financial centres...with complimentary specialisms and expertise.

At a time when businesses and investors are reevaluating their global strategies, our combined strengths must help ensure they choose *here*, not there.

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In recent years, there has been an increased appreciation of what our respective financial sectors can gain from deeper cooperation...

We worked closely together to shape the development of a new concierge service for international firms.

And we came together in October for Scotland's Global Investment Summit, which promoted Scotland as a destination for investment and showcased Scottish excellence in financial services, life sciences, and renewables.

Tonight, I want to talk about how...bolstered by the refreshed Partnership Agreement the First Minister, the City Corporation's Policy Chair, Chris, and I signed this evening...we can *build* on this collaboration and face down some of the key risks threatening the world today.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos last week, three key challenges dominated our discussions...

- geopolitical uncertainty...misinformation...and how polarised society is becoming.

Let me mention each briefly in turn.

Economic conflicts between major powers are reversing *decades* of integration, and threatening the stability, efficiency and interconnectedness of global financial services...

So, Edinburgh and London - open, connected capital cities at the *heart* of this global network, whose success *rests* on global commerce and respect for the rule of law - must collaborate more closely than ever before.

We are each other's largest trading partners, with shared economic goals, shared values, and deep, interwoven cultural ties...

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Our universities collaborate on world-class research that fuels innovation in key areas, like AI...

Our energy grids, digital networks and transport links all depend on plans that support us both...

Anything that damages one of us, damages the other. So, strong cooperation between Edinburgh and London isn't just sentiment, it's common sense.

At a time when other countries are rolling down the shutters, we must keep ours open - to each other, and to likeminded international partners old and new.

Because, as the father of economics and free trade - and proud Scotsman - Adam Smith said, "*every man lives by exchanging*".

Secondly, misinformation.

As a country, we're quick to shout about what we're *not* good at...but *much slower* to highlight the areas where we do excel - green finance, fintech, data, AI.

To cite just one example, with a pipeline of 40.5 gigawatts, Scotland now ranks among the top ten offshore wind markets in the *world*.

So, this self-deprecation *has* to stop.

Because, while we're being modest, there are people out there who are actively undermining our good standing by pushing false narratives about the UK...

If we want to remain competitive in a fast-changing world, we have to combat those naysayers and remind the world that the UK is one of the safest and best places to invest, work and live...

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And that success is underpinned by the fantastic City of London Police, whose expertise as the national lead force for fraud in England, Wales and Northern Ireland not only supports the security and prosperity of the City, but the wider country, too.

As the UK's ambassador for FPS, I've been singing the UK's praises here and abroad...

...and, tonight, I urge you all here to use your own voices, and let's create a wave of sound that drowns the doom mongers out.

Finally, divisions in our society...an issue which is close to both of our hearts, First Minister.

Burns hoped for a future where "*man to man*" the world over shall be brothers.

Unfortunately, the world's not quite there yet...

...but all of us in this room *do* have the power to make a difference.

While London and Edinburgh have earned their reputations as two of the most open places in the world, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds working in UK financial services progress 25% slower than their peers, with *no* link to performance.

That's not right.

So, the Partnership Agreement includes a specific commitment for us to work together to build ladders of opportunity and ensure people from *all* backgrounds can succeed in financial services.

Of course, while we're building the workforce of tomorrow, we also need to ensure we're supporting innovation and business creation *today*...

Founding a new business can be risky.

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Some fail, that's the nature of life...but those that succeed create jobs and real livelihoods, and generate taxes which pay for the public services we all rely on...

And, in some cases, products and services that change our world.

Scotland has a *rich* history of innovation...

But if we want that legacy to continue...if we want to see the next steam engine or telephone...we need to foster an environment where entrepreneurs and innovators are welcomed and celebrated, not deterred or criticised.

And we'll work with the Scottish Government to ensure we're regulating for that new business and growth, and to increase the flow of capital into fintech, data, and AI.

In closing, 2026 is, of course, a huge year for Scotland.

Your men's team has qualified for the World Cup for the first time in nearly thirty years. On behalf of all of us here in the City, we wish you luck...but not *too much* luck.

We may be adversaries in the tournament, but, when it comes to financial services, we are natural partners, with complementary strengths...

So, let's leave any rivalry for the football pitch, and keep working together to unlock new investment, break down barriers, and secure our mutual prosperity.

In these turbulent times, we must remember that cooperation isn't conformity - it's strength.

Thank you.