

Councillor Frank Ross – ready to be Council Leader?

✘ Councillor Frank Ross will become the third leader of the SNP group in this five year term when he takes over as Deputy Council Leader on Thursday afternoon. But he is perhaps the one who could become the city's SNP Council Leader at next year's Council elections. He is modest enough to say that he would first of all have to be re-elected by the people of Corstorphine, but if the pundits and pollsters are to be believed, the SNP caravan rolls on, and that effect may trickle down to council level.

The group started out with leader Councillor Steve Cardownie who demitted office saying that he needed more time with his family, and who was replaced only last year by the fiery Councillor Sandy Howat who took one of the Meadows/Morningside positions.

Only a few weeks ago Howat's outburst at the full council meeting left those listening to him short of breath. (He can fit more words into one minute than most!)

The council is made up of the SNP group in coalition with the Labour Group led by Councillor Andrew Burns, and despite some evident struggles over trams and the like, the coalition has appeared to work well in most quarters since 2012.

But the SNP group leader used the last full council meeting to grandstand about government financing of local authorities. Councillor Burns is of the view the the local authority funding model is 'broken'. He told The Edinburgh Reporter that this year's budget was the most difficult he had ever been involved in, and he had written a response to the Deputy First Minister's letter (sent to the council after The City of Edinburgh Council budget was set on 20 January).



Outgoing SNP Group
Leader Cllr Sandy
Howat

Councillor Howat took about five minutes to tell all the other 57 councillors his own views on the terms of that letter.

You can watch him on the council webcast [here](#) at 49.00.

He said: "What I really want some clarification on is our budget, because I am heartened to read in Councillor Burns' reply to Mr Swinney that I am not in any disagreement on the potential social values of the policies being pursued. That's why we are a coalition because we share those values and I will come on to that in a moment.

"But I am also quite concerned that he talks about it 'under duress', because two weeks ago we all stood here categorically and set a budget, a budget while we knew our financial position, a budget when we knew the settlement of the government passed down to us on December 16th, and a budget that we all welcomed. Indeed in that budget we also welcomed the improved investment in health and social care allowing us to move £5.9 million demography money. It's clear in our budget.

"I am a bit confused as to why Councillor Burns then feels the need to write a letter which talks about children who are going to be suffering. He also talks about pulling the rug from under Scotland's young people. Did we do that when we set the budget? If we did, then why did we set the budget?

"If I go back to that budget motion and actually refer to Appendix 1 at the very start it says that 'to ensure that every child has a first class education' is one of our most important pledges; pledges we as a coalition agreed on. We currently spend £234 million on education, and we will be

increasing this funding by £1.8 million a year.

“Where in our budget (that we set in agreement with great emphasis on delivering stability in this capital city) where in that budget did we set a budget that brings suffering to our children? Where in that budget have we set details that pulled the rug from under those children? I didn’t feel duress then, I don’t feel duress today. I unfortunately feel the politics of desperation coming through from the Labour Party.

“I would also like clarification of what that is. I’d seek some clarification that Councillor Burns has spoken to the Labour Party branch manager recently regarding their opportunity to take forward a one penny rise in income tax, a flat one penny rise across all levels. I would like to see if he agrees with this – that there is hardly a nurse, policeman, teacher or council worker in Scotland who won’t be paying this tax increase.

” ‘These are the very people the SNP claimed it wanted to help and instead they will be hit the hardest.’ I am not quoting myself. I am quoting Gordon Brown some years ago. Sometimes he was right, and sometimes he wasn’t quite so right shall we say.

“So who is this penny tax going to be hitting the hardest. Is it going to be hitting the council workers we’re here to look after and deliver transformational change? I am concerned if we have this combined action, this combined purpose because the language that has been used lately has been theatrical.

“My question is again for clarification. From the point of view that when you look at the Oxford Dictionary the definition of a coalition is a temporary alliance for combined action. I am very much in favour of combined action to deliver the shared outcome we all want for the people of this city. Does Councillor Burns share those same actions or is he

concentrating on it being a temporary alliance?”

Councillor Burns briefly thanked Councillor Howat for his speech, for that is what it was, rather than a question as it ought to have been, of his Leader's Report, the point under discussion. So perhaps with the benefit of some hindsight the stage was already set for a new broom in the SNP group?

The Edinburgh Reporter had a brief chat with Councillor Frank Ross this morning, and it is clear that he has had to make some key personal decisions before even deciding to stand as possible group leader. Having done so, he was voted in at last night's AGM with a decisive 11-6 in his favour, so it appears to have been a canny move.

The main decision he had to make was simply whether to stand at next year's council elections. He had told The Edinburgh Reporter some time ago that he planned to be a councillor for one term only, and would then return to the business sector. That position has now radically changed.

As the city's Economy Convener Ross has had much to celebrate, in the Edinburgh Guarantee and the delivery of the council development at Atria on Morrison Street. He said to us today that all of this could be luck or a combination of luck and hard work on his part.

Ross said: "I am honoured to be elected as leader of the SNP Group. As a group we have annual elections for every single post which is unique, but as a democracy to have annual elections is a strength.

"I shall now stand as a candidate next year in the council elections. So having changed my mind I came forward as a candidate and got the support of the group in that decision.

"Now I have the chance to shape the SNP manifesto for the council elections next year. Perhaps I have been fortunate, perhaps I have done a good job as Economy Convener. I have

handed off my diary to my successor Councillor Gavin Barrie, and will spend the next day or two briefing him on the portfolio.

“We now have fifteen months left until the Council elections. But, remember, this is a coalition which has survived the referendum campaign on different sides of the question.

“We have a big job to do here in Edinburgh. We are a growing city. Our population increases by 1% a year. This has a huge impact on infrastructure, and we have a job to do across the whole of Edinburgh.”



Councillor Michael
Bridgman

Councillor Michael Bridgman will become convener of the regulatory committee in place of Councillor Barrie.

Councillor Alasdair Rankin will remain as Finance Convener where he has, according to the new group leader, developed a very good working relationship with his Vice-Convener Bill Cook. This key role is one that the new group leader is keen to highlight as one of the best features of the coalition.



Councillor Bill Henderson

Councillor Bill Henderson will now take on the role of Convener of the Police and Fire scrutiny committee.

Sandy Howat will now be relegated to the back benches, but The Edinburgh Reporter believes this will not be the last we hear of him.

He always has a lot to say!