

Still no leadership at the City Chambers



View from the City Chambers

At this morning's council meeting some convenership posts and appointments to outside bodies were approved, but there is still no Council Leader or policies to follow.

Two motions were lodged at the reconvened City of Edinburgh Council meeting this morning, one by the Conservative group and one jointly by three of the political groups the Labour, LibDems and the Green Group. Only the SNP remained silent. It is obvious why, as they want to lead the council, even in a minority coalition.

Labour and the SNP have been talking about a coalition for most of the three weeks since the council election, but there is no resolution as yet. This is largely laid at the door of the Scottish Labour Executive who have not yet approved any deal put to them. Today's meeting was a continuation of that held last week which was adjourned for further discussions.

The Edinburgh Reporter had already had sight of today's cross-party motion, but at the last minute the Conservative group said they had lodged a motion too. In the confusion which followed the Lord Provost called a ten minute recess for that to be circulated.

Speaking about the Conservative proposal to run the city by Executive Committee Conservative Leader Councillor Iain Whyte said : "The people of this city expected better. They expect us to take the city forward in a way which is beneficial to all of our citizens, that has not happened and there is a need for it to happen.

“We must break the deadlock and we propose an innovative solution to allow all of us to take part in governing this city. In the background there seems to be a deal between the SNP and Labour groups. It is the deal that shall not speak its name. No-one knows its terms and the Labour Group are scared to make the deal.

“It smacks of something cobbled together in what would have been called ‘smoke filled rooms’ in days gone by. I am surprised by the weakness of the LibDems and the Greens.

“We won the popular vote and Labour who lost the most councillors and lost the popular vote should not be holding this council to ransom in this way.

“People voted for change in the recent election. Edinburgh needs governed and we have suggested an innovative solution to do that.”

Taking up the matter after some debate he explained that although there were cross party talks with the Chief Executive yesterday it would have been ‘inappropriate’ for him to put forward this proposal then. He refuted the suggestion that the Tory group had somehow reneged on yesterdays discussions to find a way to form a council.

Councillor Whyte said : “There was a commitment to setting the membership of various committees in proportion to the number of the councillors elected for each political party. The General Election is governing everything here, not the councillors. Our motion does cover all the essential business.”

Councillor Mowat seconded the Conservative motion which suggested that any further delay would be damaging, particularly as a coalition is not forthcoming.

She said they proposed a system of an Executive Committee of 13 members of the council. The parties would be represented in

the same proportion as the votes achieved by each party so this would mean 4 SNP members, 4 Tories, 2 Labour, 2 Green and 1 Liberal Democrat. This cabinet structure would replace the council's Policy and Strategy Committee.

Clearly such an arrangement would be beneficial to the Conservatives whose last minute proposal was very much regarded as an attempt to get more power for themselves.

Labour Leader Councillor Cammy Day presented a motion to allow the businesses in the city to continue to operate.

He said : "It is disappointing that the Conservative group have proposed this at just a few minutes after 10am this morning when we had a meeting yesterday with the Chief Executive to discuss ways forward.

Councillor Steve Burgess seconded the motion and said : "This motion is intended to ensure that in the absence of a political coalition residents and businesses are not held up any more than they have been already. This will allow planning and licensing matters to be dealt with. Appointing councillors to some outside organisations will allow those bodies to get on with their business too.

"Importantly it sets the ball rolling to work with the new locality model. And it will allow five Bailies to be appointed to help you, Lord Provost, to deal with your heavy workload.

"It is disappointing that the Conservatives have simply sprung this motion on the council this morning and we must question their motives in doing that.

"It seems it will take time for a set of arrangements to be agreed but in our view it is much better to have pragmatic arrangements in place to deal with that over the next few weeks."

LibDem councillor Kevin Lang said that he was pleased with the

cross party motion being proposed. He claimed : “The current lack of political leadership is not healthy and cannot be allowed to continue for long. There is a case for being flexible on the council meeting dates in June to get clarity and certainty as soon as possible.”

But he warned against one party having outright power in any joint arrangements to come.

He concluded : “If a two party coalition is formed then it would not have a majority and it be wrong for such a coalition to have a majority on any committees. But a cabinet structure would be wrong and would not reflect the votes cast in the recent election.”

SNP Councillor and group leader, Adam McVey railed against the last-minute proposal from the Conservative Group and said : “This is just a guddle! We are not prepared to entertain the silly antics of the Conservative party.”

Conservative Councillor Nick Cook observed that everyone has a duty to form a council and matters should not be put in abeyance to save the political skin of one of the members of the Labour Party. He was referring to Ian Murray MP who is standing for re-election in the Edinburgh South constituency. It is widely speculated that the Labour executive will put off approval of any coalition with the SNP until after the General Election when they hope he will be returned to Westminster.

The Lord Provost had suspended Standing Order 1 at the beginning of the meeting to ensure that the council would be acting within its legal limits.

There are rules to deal with the way the council acts both just after an election and once it is constituted. These [standing orders](#) ‘govern and guide the decisions made by the Council and its officers and ensures that robust, clear and accountable organisational frameworks are in place’.

The Labour Green and Scottish LibDem Groups lodged their motion this morning to ask the Chief Executive to consult with all political parties and propose some reform in the way the council committees operate.

The redesign is requested on a streamlined Executive Committee model all based on the political make up of the council, and which will reflect the new locality model adopted by the council.

Until a new council administration is formed the Chief Executive will have to take political guidance from all political group leaders.

Cllrs Work, Cameron, Staniforth, Aldridge and Rust were appointed as Bailies to help the Lord Provost with his workload.

Various other councillors were appointed as Conveners and to the boards of outside bodies and we will confirm these when we get the full list from the council. It became a bit of a tedious meeting towards the end and there were far too many names to write down!

This is not an auspicious start for the new council. The SNP have the largest group and [want to run the city](#) which they believe they will be able to do with some help from the other smaller groups. It was clear from the way the votes fell today that the Tory group, who have only one councillor less, are very much out on their own. The plan proposed by the three smaller groups was approved by 43 votes to 17.



The SNP group lead by Cllr Adam McVey on the left