

Council to consider 'Brexit motion' on Thursday

The Council Leader Adam McVey may write to the Brexit Secretary – raising concerns over the Capital's jobs market and the status of European nationals if the UK leaves the EU with the Government's proposed deal.

Edinburgh is home to more than 39,000 non-UK EU nationals, more than any other city in Scotland. With worries over whether Theresa May's draft deal will gain the support of MPs, the SNP city council leader has tabled a motion for Thursday's full council meeting which will also set out the city's preference of remaining in the European Union.

If approved by councillors, Cllr Adam McVey will write to Brexit secretary Stephen Barclay "expressing the council's position regarding the UK's relationship with the EU, setting out concerns about labour supply if Brexit occurs in the form proposed by the UK Government, opposing any costs charged to EU nationals through the settled and pre-settled status applications".

The motion also sets out support for a People's Vote on any Brexit agreement.



Council Leader Adam McVey

Cllr McVey said: “Scotland’s capital voted overwhelmingly in favour of staying in the European Union, with 74.4 per cent opting for remain.

“A People’s Vote would give us the opportunity to reaffirm our support for our EU citizenship. We’re also endorsing the First Minister’s call for the transition period to be extended to avoid a cliff-edge scenario when the UK leaves the EU. Ultimately, whatever transpires with Brexit, we have to do whatever we can to make sure Edinburgh is in the strongest possible position and we send a clear message of support for our citizens who hold EU nationalities.”

If the motion is agreed, the council will publicly state that remaining in the European Union is “the best option for the social and economic wellbeing of the city”.

Conservatives have called on the SNP-Labour coalition to focus on providing services to the people of Edinburgh and labelled

the motion “political grandstanding”.



Conservative
councillor Jason
Rust

Conservative group chairman. Cllr Jason Rust, said: “The council administration could barely get a shaky coalition agreement cobbled together so I don’t think anyone will seriously envisage that it has the least idea about future international trade deals or agreement with the European Union.

“Let’s not forget the administration’s own working group specifically dedicated to looking at the impact of Brexit on the council workforce and on council projects and service delivery did not even meet for a year. The administration would be better concentrating on issues within its remit such as our school infrastructure, its abysmal record on waste collections and the pressing issues with health and social care.”

Labour backbencher Cllr Scott Arthur welcomed discussions about Brexit, but said the council leader and his SNP colleagues are “playing politics”.

He said: “It’s very clear that there’s little support for the Brexit deal that the remaining members of the Tory Government are willing to support. That means that MPs must use all the levers of the UK parliament to improve or stop the deal, so a People’s Vote should definitely be on the table.

“It’s clear, however, that Edinburgh’s nationalist councillors are playing politics with this. The SNP were ready to throw the EU under a bus in 2014, and currently they want to leave the EU and the UK in the hope that they can possibly re-join the EU on unknown terms at some unknown point in the future.”

The authority currently employs around 1,000 non-UK EU nationals, If the motion is agreed on Thursday, the council’s chief executive Andrew Kerr will “continue to provide information and advice to support EU citizens in the Capital, as they go through the process of having to apply for settled status by June 2021, as well as Edinburgh residents with family living in the EU.”

People’s Vote motion

An independent councillor will bring forward a separate motion calling on the authority to publicly back calls for a People’s Vote on Brexit.



Cllr Ashley Graczyk

The campaign to give the public a final say on Brexit has been supported by Cllr Ashley Graczyk, who left the Tories to sit as an independent councillor in July.

She said: "We now know that the deal the UK Government has negotiated to exit the EU is against Scotland's interests and jeopardises the rights of EU citizens who have made Scotland their home. It is also of course against the democratic will of the Scottish people, who voted to remain in the EU.

"The issue is particularly acute here in Edinburgh where we have a large, settled population of EU nationals making a valuable contribution to our economy and society. In my ward, in Gorgie-Dalry, EU nationals comprise one per cent of our community, and many are very worried about their status here. I am determined to stand up for my constituents and will ensure their voices are heard and their rights as Scottish citizens are protected."

The motion highlights alleged "serious offences" by the Leave campaign and points to a People's Vote in helping to "rebuild trust and engagement in the political process".

If the motion is agreed, the council will express public support for a People's Vote and require council leader Cllr Adam McVey to write to local MPs and Theresa May to inform them of the authority's stance.