

Council under fire for 'undemocratic' process

Edinburgh residents' group is concerned about the way the Council is working during the Covid-19 crisis.

So far there has been no action to set up accessible virtual meetings of the Council.

Edinburgh East Save our Services want an immediate return to a more transparent decision-making process.

Lorna Frost of Edinburgh East Save our Services said: "Since mid-March CEC has changed its way of operating.

"Other organisations have already formulated guidelines for meetings, and it is timely for our council to rethink the way it proceeds during the Covid-19 crisis. Our community group wanted to take these issues up with the council but our attempt to 'talk about it' has been rebuffed.

In addition, our councillors, who are our elected representatives, have been told any issues they raise with a council officer must be virus-related. But we think the current crises across our city – in care homes, schools, Lothian Buses and those regarding poverty and mental health – are all virus-related.

"It is crucial that the Council re-engages fully with the people of Edinburgh, their elected representatives, and voluntary groups immediately. Community councils should also be reactivated in a secure way. We need to work together to tackle the severe issues of poverty and inequality arising from the Covid-crisis."

Edinburgh East Save our Services tried to ask the council a question for consideration at yesterday's Policy and Sustainability Committee, the only substantive council committee which continues to meet.

The following is their account of what happened:

The Policy and Sustainability Committee is due to meet on 14 May. This is the only part of Edinburgh City Council holding meetings during lockdown. The meeting is online but only 17 councillors are involved. EESOS understood that 'delegations' to the committee in the form of emails are allowed.

We sent the following question by email:

EESOS submission to EDC PSC 14/5/20

Edinburgh East Save our Services submits the following questions to the meeting of the Policy and Sustainability Committee on Thursday 14th May 2020 at 10am.

The questions relate to the Council's Interim Political Management Arrangements for 2020 (item 4 Minute of the LAP 23/4/20)

Why have no measures been taken to set up accessible virtual meetings of the Council and its committees since mid-March?

How long does the Council intend to continue proceeding in this way? (The Scottish government has already formulated guidelines for meetings.)

Why have restrictions (namely that any issues should be virus-related) been put on our councillors (our elected representatives) raising issues with a council officer?

What exactly are the criteria which define virus-related?

Aren't the current crises across Edinburgh, in care homes, schools, Lothian Buses, poverty, and mental health virus-related?

In reply we were told that the council refused to accept our submission. Convener McVey says it does not meet the requirements of a deputation as it relates to a decision that was taken in April.

This is an astonishing response since the decision was not taken through the council's normal democratic processes.

We have responded as follows:

Dear Convener McVey

We would appreciate clarification on governance concerns, particularly on the following matter.

We have read the minutes of the April EDC LAP meeting and our understanding of

To note that the Chief Executive would report to the first meeting of the Policy and Sustainability Committee in May 2020 on potential options for holding meetings of Full Council.

is that accessible/transparent meetings of the Council and its committees may or may not go ahead depending on the report of the Chief Executive tomorrow.

Our opinion is that it is very important the affairs of the city are conducted in an open way, particularly in this time of crisis, and we wanted to aid discussions and provide some input that could lead to more transparent and effective decision-making.

From our reading of the minutes it seems this decision has not already been taken, but that it will be taken tomorrow, and that is why we wanted to influence this decision.

You are responsible for and entrusted with the wellbeing of the people of Edinburgh and we are disappointed with your response and also the lack of any additional explanation. It seems very difficult for residents to interact with their

local authority in a meaningful way, if at all.