

Opposition claim lack of democracy at the City Chambers

The next meeting of The City of Edinburgh Council's Policy and Sustainability Committee on Thursday will for the first time deal with business that would normally be on the agenda of the council's Annual General Meeting (AGM,) normally held at this time of year.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic normal committee meetings including any meetings of the full Council have been suspended although there are plans to introduce other committee meetings in the coming months as and when it is possible.

Controversially, despite attempt by the Conservatives, LibDems and the Edinburgh Party of Independent Councillors (EPIC) the independent councillors have been denied a place on the Policy and Sustainability Committee which currently runs the council.

The agenda for Thursday includes the annual Review of Appointments to Council Committees and Boards when each political group nominate their members for all council committee.

This has led to a political anomaly where this business, which would normally be dealt with by all 63 elected members, will be decided by only seventeen of them, and without any independent councillors on the committee in the first place.

Commenting on the situation, Cllr Gavin Barrie, one of the EPIC councillors, said: "Early signs are that those with a vested interest will continue, for a third time, to deny independent councillors a voice on any single council committee. The annual Review of Appointments to Committees is in normal times the business of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the City of Edinburgh Council, where every elected member has a vote and opportunity to express their views.

"Despite repeated attempts to seek representation on committees, using the same method that other groups get their place on committees, Independent Members look to be denied the opportunity to carry out the duties of an elected member by the votes of other elected members.

"In nearly forty years of working in organisations based on democratic principles, I have never known one where a group who were members of that organisation were denied a vote on matters that were for consideration of the Annual General Meeting.

"If, as expected, the SNP/Labour Administration, with the assistance of the Greens, refuse to uphold the principle of proportionality of political groups on committees via this process, then democracy at The City of Edinburgh Council will have hit an all time low. Any one of them with a democratic bone in their body should hang their heads in shame for supporting this stance."

Cllr Iain Whyte, Conservative Group Leader said: "It has been a long standing principle at Edinburgh Council that committee places are allocated in proportion to the size of party groups on the Council as a whole. That has always been reviewed annually, and so that it takes account of by-elections and other changes. It also fits with wider Scottish views of local democracy as published in guidance to Councils.

"While there may be some who, for their own political

advantage or because of personal animosity, wish to throw principle and democracy in the bin we Conservatives will stick to the democratic principles. Parties who don't should remember this could work against them in future even if it is in their favour now. We will be proposing that committee places are allocated democratically in line with party strength – whether for new parties or old.”

SNP councillor and Chair of the council's SNP Group, Ellie Bird, said: “The Council has bigger issues to focus on than three councillors who left their party in disgrace, or in a huff.”