

Remembering Daphne Sleigh

Former Lord Provost, Eric Milligan, remembers former councillor, Daphne Sleigh, who died recently aged 82, as 'feisty'. He said: "I remember her so well. She was a forceful determined Conservative and unafraid to express her opinions in support of the Conservative cause, but never in a personal way – always from a position of policy and principle.

"I remember in particular her accompanying me to Buckingham Palace for the Queen's Golden Jubilee. She was delighted to be there and later to receive her honour. I extend my condolences to her husband Lindsay Walls. I have known him even longer. He served as a Conservative councillor and I consider him a personal friend albeit a political opponent."

Former Council Leader, Donald Anderson remembers her with admiration. He said: "I thought Daphne Sleigh was a fantastic person. A robust and forthright politician who was fundamentally decent and passionate about Edinburgh. I particularly remember three encounters that showed the measure of the woman. Firstly, when Nelson Mandela got the freedom of the city there was a reception at the 'Caley' hotel.

"I was completely star struck meeting one of the world's greatest statesmen, and mumbled a few words. Not so Daphne, when she was introduced as the leader of the Conservative group, Nelson responded by saying, "Ah like Mrs Thatcher". "Absolutely", she responded and they had a long chat with many jokes and laughs. She was at home with everyone and had a great sense of humour.

"She was also responsible for the development of one of Britain's finest visitor attractions, as she was the first person to call for Mary King's Close to open as a visitor attraction. We used the money from selling a building for the Edinburgh Dungeon to fund the development. I still think it's

one of the best visitor attractions anywhere, and that's down to Daphne. She was full of ideas and passionate about the city. Daphne didn't just criticise for the sake of it, she always wanted results.

"At a time when our politics seem as divided as ever, Daphne is a great example that there are good and decent people in all of the political parties, and we'd do well to remember that. She's a great loss to the city and I'll miss that mischievous grin and great sense of humour. I also remember Daphne telling me after one heated debate we had after a council meeting on housing. "Donald," she said, turning her head to one side with one of her cheeky grins, "you know I think you should be in the Conservative Party".

"Not for the first time I was lost for words with her. I didn't know what to say."

Cllr Iain Whyte, Conservative Group Leader, marked the former councillor's death by speaking about her at the September council meeting. He said:"She was the first Conservative Group leader on the new City of Edinburgh Council when it was formed in the mid 1990s. She served for 21 years in total, including time on the District Council, and nine years as Group Leader. She was awarded the MBE for services to local government on her retirement in 2003.

"Daphne was much more than the numbers and the facts. Being a woman in politics at the time she was likened to Margaret Thatcher as Edinburgh's Iron Lady. She was a stalwart for us Conservatives at a very difficult time in the mid 1990s. For a two year period from 1997 when we had no Scottish MPs and The Scottish Parliament was yet to be established she was the most senior elected Conservative in Scotland, because she led the largest council group here in the capital city.

"When parties have difficult times – and we all do – in our case Daphne helped regrow the Scottish Conservatives from our

lowest ebb. She wasn't a career politician. Her politics were very local and full of good humour. I can only agree with what Sir Malcolm Rifkind said when he said she was highly intelligent, full of fun and quite mischievous. She had a love for life and served her local community splendidly.

"She used her humour to political advantage too. Daphne was born in Lahore, then in India which is now in Pakistan. She lived there as a child. At a time when addressing some gatherings was seen as difficult for Conservatives, she was asked to address a Scottish-Pakistani gathering. Of course she delighted her audience when she began with the words 'My fellow Pakistanis'.

"For me Daphne was a giant in local government, a witty and insightful debater and never afraid to push her own line."

Cllr Robert Aldridge the leader of the Liberal Democrat group remembered her too. He said: "I had the privilege of sharing many years on both the old District Council and The City of Edinburgh Council with Daphne. Her dedication to the Conservative cause during their most difficult years in Scotland was matched by her fierce championing of the community of Fairmilehead. She and her husband Lindsay who represented the neighbouring Ward made a very formidable team both inside and outside the council. Daphne Sleight was deeply mischievous, great fun and had an infectious sense of humour.

"It is her wicked sense of political humour that I will remember particularly fondly. She was a really good servant of her party. She served her community really well, she served the city very well, and she was fantastic company. She will be sorely missed and my heart goes out to Lindsay Walls and her family."

Cllr Rob Munn, Interim Finance Convener, said: "I am the only member of the SNP Group to have served on this council alongside Daphne. As others have said she was a formidable

character with a very good sense of humour.

"I think when I was first elected in 1996 that she was the first member of the Conservative group to congratulate me on the by-election victory. At the end of full council she made a beeline for me and said: 'I'm Daphne, and we should have a talk because I am sure we have a lot in common. As a brand new councillor, and one from Leith to boot, I was unaccustomed to meeting Conservatives in any guise in those days.

"I pay tribute to Daphne and her contribution to the city council, and to cross party working on issues that were in the interest of the city. I was involved as the only SNP member of some of those groups at the time on the council. She participated whole heartedly and across party lines with determined demeanour on those issues that she held dear, and she always treated others with good grace and humour."