

# **Council elections 2022 – still no administration ten days on**

**Just over a week after the election results were announced at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre there is still no formal deal among the two parties with most elected members in Edinburgh – the SNP and Labour groups who have 19 and 13 councillors respectively.**

While it is these two political parties which have run the council in Edinburgh for the last decade, it appears there may be little or no prospect of them forming an official alliance for the next five years very soon, and we are told by everyone we have managed to speak to that “talks between all parties are continuing”.

There are rumours about hypothetical alliances involving all colours, and it seems certain that any suggestions are simply guesswork – and nobody will really know until a workable solution is found.

The difficulty in simply striking a deal between the two biggest parties is said to be largely due to the intransigence of the Scottish Labour leader, Anas Sarwar, who ruled out any **formal coalitions** of councillors before the election. The emphasis (which is ours) seems important – if Edinburgh Labour

can find any way around that then they could turn out to be the kingmakers.

Leaders of all the parties remain tight-lipped about any negotiations, but a council meeting is on the agenda for this Thursday, when at least all councillors have to show their faces for a formal photo, and the appointment of Lord Provost has to be made by the beginning of June in terms of the Standing Orders.

Cllr Cammy Day, leader of the Edinburgh Labour group, said on the eve of the election that the ban on coalitions did not then trouble him – and even now he is seeking a new way of working.

He said this weekend: “I still support the idea of a rainbow coalition using the talents of those who have been councillors for a while and those who are newly elected. The council must be a progressive one and use the talents of those elected.

“We all worked hard to get into power, we have a progressive manifesto and all of the Labour Group would be disappointed if we don’t get to do anything with that.”

On the question of reports from a Labour insider who said Day was “deflated” that a deal with the SNP did not appear possible, he commented: “I am hugely disappointed that someone in the Labour group would put any message like that out. It is both foolish and disrespectful to our group that someone is not working within the group rules.

“We are working with all parties to deliver a progressive Labour manifesto and hope to announce something positive as soon as possible.”

Cllr Day told The Edinburgh Reporter on 4 May: “I think what is important for us now is that every one of our 19 candidates is working tirelessly across the city. Even today – and also tomorrow they will be out on the doors encouraging voters to

go out and vote. Then we will have any discussions about working with other parties.

“I think people have seen our progressive manifesto for the city and we will listen to other parties who will help us deliver that.”

The other stumbling block for Labour councillors is what many regard as the underfunding of the council budget which begins in Holyrood with the SNP. Newly elected councillor for Sighthill/Gorgie, Ross McKenzie tweeted: “Being a junior coalition partner to the SNP requires participation in a cover-up of the extent to which that party is underfunding local government and outsourcing the services it provides.”

A party source explained that there is a belief that entering a coalition with the SNP to form the last administration has not done Labour any good in Edinburgh.



On the eve of the 2022 Local Elections Labour party politicians posed near Holyrood

Anas Sarwar told The Edinburgh Reporter during the photo call held near Holyrood just before the election, that with his “no coalition” policy he wanted to “maximise” Labour representation across Scotland.

He said that the idea is to “maximise Labour councillors who will stand up for you, your family and local community and let’s also use this election to send a clear message to Boris Johnson and the SNP that they have done simply not enough to help people with the cost of living crisis”.

In other areas of Scotland minority Labour administrations have “worked” and he did not accept the premise that we put to him that he was shutting Edinburgh Labour politicians out of attaining powerful positions in the council.

Mr Sarwar said: “I do not accept that, because there is no political party standing in Edinburgh that can win a majority. What we are saying is maximise Labour representation and then rather than formal coalitions, let’s change the way we do local democracy and run administrations, and on individual issues get individual agreement.”

## LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

The Liberal Democrats may be able to put forward their group leader Robert Aldridge as a candidate for Lord Provost even if they are not a big part of the administration. At this election the LibDem numbers swelled (mainly in the west of the city) to 2007 levels, when under the leadership of Jenny Dawe, they embarked upon a five year term which included the beginnings of the ill-fated tram project.

Afterwards, in 2012, mainly due to what was perceived by voters as their mismanagement of the new tramline, their numbers fell from double digits to just three LibDem councillors – including Robert Aldridge who has now been a councillor for almost 40 years, Paul Edie and Alastair Shields.

## EDINBURGH GREEN GROUP

While any “coalition” with the Greens might mirror the arrangement at Holyrood allowing both parties to explore their alignment in key areas, the addition of 19 SNP councillors to the 10 Greens would however only allow them to run a minority administration. While both parties’ manifestos have similar aims – including the possible congestion charge – they would need some assistance from other parties on individual issues.

We understand that there have not been any conclusive talks on the Greens becoming part of the administration for the first time, but any opposition from Liberal Democrats and Conservatives (whose manifestos are quite different from the other three parties in several areas) might not be sufficient to steer the council off course **IF** Labour councillors voted with the administration on most items.

Steve Burgess, Co-Convener of Edinburgh Greens, said: “Although the election results threw up various combinations of parties who could run the council, frustratingly some parties are now refusing to work with others which closes down the possibilities.

“The only two-party coalition that would have a majority to run the council has been ruled out by Labour refusing to work formally with the SNP and anyone else. The Lib Dems have also narrowed their options with their similar attitude to the SNP. With the first meeting of the new council on Thursday, everything seems to be up in the air. Greens are still willing to talk with all other parties to try to get the best possible outcome for the City.”

When asked if there had been three-way talks among SNP, Labour and the Greens (which would create a majority of 42 out of 63), Cllr Corbett confirmed that such a conversation had not taken place. He also said: “Looking at the manifestos some things are untenable – for example on Spaces for People or

Travelling Safely – the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives have different views from the other three political groups. At the moment we are in limbo.”

## CONSERVATIVES

This group has been reduced to half of its 2017 size losing some notable councillors such as Mark Brown in Drum Brae/Gyle who was considered an effective local representative, and Cameron Rose who had represented Southside/Newington for many years. The SNP have already discounted doing any kind of deal with the Tories. It would seem that the Conservatives’ time in opposition will continue, although as they have fewer councillors they will of course have less representation on any committees. Only the Liberal Democrats appear ready to work with the smallest party on the council.

## **SNP have most councillors in Scotland**

The SNP have more councillors now than any other single party in Scotland. Councillors from the party are involved in many discussions across the country to form council administrations to tackle the cost of living crisis and climate change.

Keith Brown MSP, Depute SNP leader and a former council leader, said: “Scotland went to the polls last week and people made clear what they wanted in how they voted. The SNP might have emerged as the largest party with the biggest number of councillors, but the voting system also delivered significant numbers of Labour councillors in most areas and it is important to respect that. This is going to be an incredibly challenging time for many people and having stability in decisions about the delivery of essential local services is crucial.

“The SNP is committed to delivering on its manifesto and we

recognise there are policies we can agree and support with Labour colleagues. There are progressive alliances to be formed in councils across the country and I hope Scottish Labour responds positively to our offer and to our innovations. That offer of ongoing dialogue extends to other parties where we share a progressive agenda and can find common cause.

“We need a comprehensive Scottish local government response to the twin crises of the cost of living and climate change, and I hope we can find a way to reflect the results and put people’s needs and interests first. By working together, we can move Scotland forward together.”

## **NO CONCLUSION – YET...**

We have been reminded that only the position of Lord Provost is fixed for the entire five year term. Any conveners and vice-conveners are only appointed for one year at a time, so the personalities in important positions can be changed annually, depending on their achievements and the support of their own political colleagues. Any party or individual councillor fighting for someone to take up a leadership position is really only achieving certainty for one year.

Today it remains a case of watch this space. We are watching.

And to remind you of the political position as it stands right now – without an administration formed and without a Lord Provost appointed – here is our chart.

# EDINBURGH COUNCIL ELECTIONS



- **Conservat...**  
9
- **Labour**  
13
- **SNP**  
19
- **Green**  
10
- **Independ...**  
0
- **Liberal De...**  
12

Final position of the parties in Edinburgh at the 2022 election