

East Lothian Council – council leader wants to remain friends

Returning East Lothian Council leader Norman Hampshire vowed to ‘remain friends’ with opposition councillors as they face tough decisions moving forward.

After weeks of meetings between the parties represented following the council elections earlier this month, it was clear agreement had been reached to allow the Labour group to continue in its leadership roles.

At the first meeting of the local authority’s newly-elected councillors Councillor Hampshire was appointed council leader for a second term without a challenge.

Provost Councillor John McMillan and Depute Provost Councillor Andrew Forrest to their roles without an opposition challenge.

And Councillor Shamin Akhtar, fellow member of the minority Labour administration was appointed deputy leader of the council, again unchallenged.

However concessions had been made, with a challenge to its ability to take decisions without opposition backing getting unanimous approval.

Newly appointed opposition leader, SNP group leader Lynn Jardine, brought forward a motion opposing a proposal to reduce the number of members on the council’s education and

planning committees saying it would mean a disproportionate number of administration members.

She was backed by East Lothian's first Scottish Greens councillor Shona McIntosh.

And there was a call for an overhaul of Standing Orders to ensure they represented to wider electorate.

The council had already agreed to investigate introducing changes to allow opposition councillors to 'call in' any paper due to be decided by the administration's cabinet for full council decisions.

The Standing Orders review was proposed by Councillor Jardine with the support of Conservative group leader Councillor Lachlan Bruce.

The Labour administration supported the opposition amendments.

Councillor Hampshire said he was privileged to be returned as council leader – a role he took on last year following the sudden death of his predecessor Councillor Willie Innes.

He said: "Councillor Innes role was always to be the leader of the council and work with all councillors to do the best for the people of East Lothian and that is what I will try and do.

"There will be times when we disagree but we should always remain friends. We have some big challenges in front of us and opportunities as well ."

New Opposition Leader Councillor Jardine also welcomed cross party working saying all councillors had a responsibility to represent the people who elected them.

She added: "I am looking forward to getting stuck in."

Following the recent elections the council is made up of 10 Labour councillors, seven SNP councillors, 4 Conservative

councillors and one Scottish Green councillor.

Councillors also approved salaries for the coming year for the council leader of £32,622, a salary of £24,467 for the Provost and five senior councillors (depute leader, Deputy Provost, cabinet spokespersons and Leader of the Opposition) and a salary of £19,571 for the remaining 15 councillors.

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter

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Cllr Norman Hampshire