

Profile of Cllr Ross McKenzie – Sighthill/Gorgie Ward

The Edinburgh Reporter has invited all councillors who were newly elected in 2022 to tell us a little about themselves.

This profile features Cllr Ross McKenzie who was first elected as a member of the Labour minority administration in May. Here he tells us about his career path to becoming an elected councillor.

Cllr McKenzie said: “I started working as a carer after leaving school 22 years ago and have been a registered nurse since 2011. Two decades working in care homes and medicine of the elderly wards took their toll on my back and I’m now working in the community as a Specialist Community Public Health Nurse in schools. Throughout my career I’ve always enjoyed working together with people who need a hand. I think that the skills learned along the way transfer quite neatly to those required from a ward councillor. “

Weekends are meant for relaxing and Ross says that he starts the day on Sundays by dipping into the BBC’s politics shows only to immediately regret it. He explains: “Whether it’s Marr, Kuenssberg or Geissler, breakfast gets ruined and the tv gets turned off prematurely. I really should just stick to Steve Wright’s Sunday Love Songs. I try to take a thorough cycle round the ward at least once a week and this often takes place on a Sunday. Sighthill/Gorgie is comprised of a vast area – from Haymarket to Hermiston Gait – and many of the areas within it don’t get the attention from the council that

they should be getting so I need to make an extra effort to engage with every nook and cranny.”

His cultural taste includes Oasis “which set me on a path with the release of Definitely Maybe in 1994 – a path back through The Beatles to 60’s pop, folk and psychedelia, through the 70’s with Dylan, Bowie and Young, and back to the 90s via Orange Juice, Primal Scream and The Stone Roses. Noel Gallagher is an odious little man, but I am eternally grateful to him for sending me on that journey”.

The Edinburgh Reporter asked what he likes about the ward and what he might like to address as the elected member.

Cllr McKenzie explained: “Sighthill/Gorgie doesn’t mean anything to most people in the ward. People identify with smaller geographic units which is why I say I’m the councillor for Dalry, Gorgie, Whitson, Stenhouse, Saughton Mains, Broomhouse, Sighthill, Parkhead, Longstone, Redhall and a wee bit of Kingsknowe.

“The issues differ according to the area – the housing stock in Gorgie/Dalry is dominated by private landlords and many renters are being treated horrendously, through unaffordable rent rises and a failure to repair and maintain properties and communal areas. Fortunately, we have a strong and growing Living Rent branch in the area, but all layers of government need to act urgently to protect tenants in the short term, and build social housing for the future. Gorgie/Dalry also has issues with waste and street cleanliness – the public realm in general doesn’t seem to get the attention given to other parts of the city. Stenhouse and Whitson are the best looking areas in my ward – when you look at some of the excellent housing that the council built there you realise what is possible when the state decides to prioritise the welfare of its residents.

“In Sighthill, Parkhead and Broomhouse there is a lack of amenities and some badly neglected public space. The council

needs to take a serious look here at sizeable areas that don't seem to feature in any development plans – from pavements and roads, to parks and community centres, we are failing people here in a way that wouldn't happen in other parts of the city. In Longstone/Redhall there is a very specific issue in that it is cut off from the rest of the city and the council isn't doing enough to connect it for pedestrians and cyclists. So there's plenty to be getting on with."

Referring to his abstention from the first vote to get Labour into power (which resulted in him losing the whip for eight weeks) Ross said: "I am not a member of any committees at the time of writing. That's a story for another time, but in the coming years, I hope to be able to influence council policy towards insourcing of jobs and direct provision of services, particularly in relation to housing and care. Edinburgh is an extraordinarily wealthy city and we don't do enough to harness that wealth for the benefit of residents."

He explained his reasons for getting into politics and said: "Politics opened up to likes of me during the past decade. The consequences of the 2008 financial crash and the movements that followed it took a few years to feed into the political system but the effects are still being felt. Indyref, Corbyn and Brexit weren't random, unrelated events, but symptoms of an economic system that was struggling to convince the majority of the population that it is able to serve their needs.

"I'm 40-years-old, I don't own property and I only recently enrolled in a pension scheme, and there's a whole generation of people coming behind me who are in the same boat. We won't be voting for the status quo any time soon because the system isn't delivering for us – it's just steadily eating away at our living standards. I joined the Labour Party and Momentum at a time when the Party leadership inspired hope for real change. Labour doesn't seem to be offering that anymore, but the economic conditions that led 40% of the UK population to

vote for a radical socialist government in 2017 have not gone away. Those of us who became politically active in 2010s haven't gone away either. Whether we came through the labour movement, the yes movement, or the climate movement, a new generation of politicians and activists is here and ready to build a fairer society. Anyone who got into politics for a career or for status needs to get out of the way. There's a lot of serious work to be done."

Contact Cllr McKenzie [here](#).

The other three councillors who also represent the Sighthill/Gorgie ward are Cllr Denis Dixon (SNP), Cllr Catherine Fullerton (SNP) and Cllr Dan Heap of the Scottish Green Party.



Ross McKenzie, Labour. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam
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