

Labour councillor excluded from party for second time

An Edinburgh councillor suspended from the Labour group has launched an attack on colleagues, accusing the local party of using “Tory votes” to prop up an administration that was “avoiding accountability”.

Cllr Ross McKenzie lost the party whip for the second time since being elected in May, after he broke ranks last month to vote with the SNP and Greens on a bid to speed up a review of the council’s controversial strip club ban.

After his suspension Cllr McKenzie claimed Edinburgh Labour group leaders were shutting out members who are ‘not favoured’ and making decisions with a ‘small inner circle’.

He accused his Labour colleagues of going to “great lengths to avoid discussion and accountability” and using “Tory votes” to prop up the minority administration. And, he warned they were failing to address next year’s difficult budget, claiming the group had yet to hold any talks on how they will tackle a £76 million funding gap.

Responding to the allegations, leader of the council and the Labour group Cammy Day said meetings are held weekly where all members are entitled to bring forward proposals, but added Cllr McKenzie “has failed to do so”.

A four-month suspension for the Sighthill/Gorgie councillor was confirmed following a meeting on Thursday 17 November.

This means he will sit as an independent member until March and be excluded from group meetings.

Speaking afterwards Cllr McKenzie said such situations “are inevitable while the Edinburgh Labour Group continues to operate as it does”.

He attacked the group’s leadership for making important decisions “with a small inner circle who go to great lengths to avoid discussion and accountability”.

“This culture goes beyond City Chambers, and sees campaign groups, constituents and Party structures routinely ignored,” he added.

“Labour councillors who don’t have the leadership’s favour are not included in policy discussions and often only discover Labour policy at the point at which we are being told how to vote.”

His latest suspension from the group was in response to rebelling against the party whip at a full council meeting on 27 October when he backed an SNP-Green amendment during a debate on the ‘nil cap’ on sexual entertainment licences in Edinburgh, voted for by the regulatory committee earlier this year, which will effectively ban strip clubs from April 2023.

Whilst Labour supported a Lib Dem motion to review the controversial decision in March, Cllr McKenzie voted with opposition councillors who called for the review to take place urgently – ahead of a legal challenge brought against the council by a group of sex workers which is due to be heard in court at the start of next month.



Ross McKenzie, Labour. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam
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Explaining his decision to break ranks, Cllr McKenzie said a “strong expression of solidarity with the workers was required”.

He added this week that whilst other parties are planning for the February’s annual budget setting meeting – which will need to address the £76 million funding gap in the council’s £1 billion plus revenue budget – the Labour group “has had no discussions about the budget to this point”.

“I can only assume that the leadership is focused on getting the Tory votes required to allow the administration to continue beyond February, while taking our votes for granted,” he added.

“Labour councillors shouldn’t be expected to vote for £76 million of cuts containing Tory priorities.”

Cllr McKenzie previously faced an eight week suspension

alongside fellow Labour councillor Katrina Faccenda after the pair refused to vote their party into power by forming a minority administration – a move supported by members on the Conservative and Lib Dem benches.

Labour council leader Cllr Cammy Day said: “I’m disappointed that Cllr McKenzie has decided to take what was a private discussion to the media.

“There was a private group discussion in line with our disciplinary policy and that was dealt with fairly and appropriately.

“The Labour group meets on a schedule of meetings every week, be that as an executive or group meeting, and any member is entitled to bring a motion or a proposal forward to that group and Cllr McKenzie has failed to do so.

“He has failed to raise any of these issues with me as group leader, he’s failed to raise any of these issues with any other of the lead conveners or office bearers in the group, and it is disappointing that rather than raise this in the Labour group he chose to take this up with the Edinburgh media.

“Conveners are in active discussions about budgets, and once we have proposals they will be brought to the group as per the norm.”

“I look forward to Cllr McKenzie returning to the Labour group and playing a full and active role as a Labour member and Labour councillor.”

by Donald Turvill

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