

Councillors remember former colleague Alex Bennett

A minute's silence was held in memory of former Midlothian councillor and campaigner for miners rights Alex Bennett ahead of a council meeting this week.

Tributes were paid by former colleagues who described Mr Bennett as an 'inspiration' to those who followed in his footsteps.

The ex Labour councillor, who served the people of Dalkeith between 2007 and 2017, died suddenly last month and his funeral was held at Mortonhall Crematorium, Edinburgh, on Monday.

Council leader Kelly Parry led tributes as elected members met for a full council meeting on Tuesday in Dalkeith.

She told the meeting : "I am one of the few councillors in the chamber today who had the pleasure of serving alongside Alex and my work as a councillor is all the better for his guidance and many eye rolls from him across the chamber.

"My very first cross party motion in this chamber was a motion for pardons for striking miners. Coming from a mining family myself it was an issue close to my heart and I am so proud of the work we did together.

"Alex was an exceptional councillor for Midlothian and all of us should celebrate his work in this chamber for his community and all the work he did to help people. He is an inspiration

to us all.”

Labour group leader Councillor Derek Milligan who stood alongside Mr Bennett in the council chambers and the mines, said his funeral had been packed with people wanting to pay their respects with many having to stand outside to join the service.

He said: “Alex was a real inspiration to people, he was a person who really cared and came here caring.

“He always put people before profit and it was a pleasure to call Alex a friend, a colleague, and a comrade.”

Councillor Margot Russell said Mr Bennett worked ‘tirelessly’ for people in his community and the mining communities.

She said: “He will be sadly missed not just by his family but by mining communities across the UK. He was a people’s person and a people’s champion.”

And Councillor Stephen Curran said Mr Bennett who worked at Monktonhall Colliery and was the National Union of Miners representative, helped hundreds of people make claims for industrial injuries, in particular respiratory disease.

He said: “Not only did Alex help people with their applications and assist with advocates, he would attend tribunals and he would fight their cases with them.

“If it wasn’t for Alex I wouldn’t be sitting here as a councillor, he encouraged me to stand. He was not only a friend but a mentor.

“The one thing Alex said to me when I stood was put your constituents first. He leaves a huge hole in the community and I know his family are very proud of him.”

Mr Bennett leaves behind his wife Betty and children Lynn and Stuart.

by Marie Sharp *Local Democracy Reporter*.

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Alex Bennett