

Labour councillor to give up his seat in City Chambers after getting elected to the House of Commons

An Edinburgh Labour councillor has said he plans give up his seat in the City Chambers later this year after getting elected to the House of Commons – but said the “last thing” his constituents want is another election straight away.

New Edinburgh South West MP Scott Arthur said he will step down as a councillor and the convener of the authority's transport committee “after the summer time”.

It will trigger a council by-election in the Colinton/Fairmilehead ward, where Cllr Arthur received the most votes in 2022 and Labour stands a good chance of holding onto the seat.

A bigger headache for the council's 12-member administration however will be finding a replacement transport convener – a closely scrutinised role in Edinburgh where infrastructure projects often give rise to controversy.

“I get a lot of grief for stuff in terms of transport but most of the stuff I get grief for is things agreed before I was convener,” cllr Arthur said, “so I'm a wee bit disappointed

I'm leaving it before much of what we've agreed or progressed since I've been convener has been delivered."

A decision is yet to be made about who would take over, but he said whoever it is should be "willing to work cross-party".

He added: "I think there's people in the group who have those skills. I don't know what the other parties will be up to in terms of how they're looking at it. I would expect it to stay inside the Labour group. "

The newly-elected MP was speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service on his first day in parliament, after a mammoth 26.6 swing to Labour in Edinburgh South West put him more than 6,000 votes ahead of the SNP's Joanna Cherry.

"To be absolutely honest it's not really sunk in yet, today helped getting a tour around the House of Commons, getting to sit in the chamber. I think it will really get real tomorrow when we're all in the chamber electing the speaker," he said.

"I've still got quite a lot of work to clear as a councillor so I need to work through that, I also have to speak to the council leader and also I don't doubt others about the timing of that, but the expectation is I will have to stand down.

"There's no date yet... ultimately the last thing people in Colinton, Oxfords and Fairmilehead want is another election starting tomorrow so I think it would probably make sense to get the timing right so it's after the summer time."

He said outgoing constituency MP Joanna Cherry had been "entirely professional with me," adding: "We're going to meet soon to discuss issues in the constituency. I don't hold any bad feeling or anything like that toward her."

On the atmosphere around Westminster, where Arthur is just one of 411 Labour MPs elected in last week's landslide victory, he said: "Obviously people are really excited and I think people

are happy that it feels like things are starting to move.

“Personally when I seen the headline saying we’d ditched the Rwanda nonsense, I felt quite emotional because it’s quite a simple thing, the right thing to do, but it sends a strong signal. And the other emotional moment for me, to be honest, was seeing Ian Murray going into Dover House.

“It does feel like your first day at high school or university where you don’t know anybody, you don’t know where your going.”

He said at the heart of the party’s manifesto promise to deliver change was improving public services, which as a councillor he knows all too well are on their knees across the UK.

“Local authorities are absolutely on the front line in terms of delivering public services so I think everybody in the party would hope through what Rachel Reeves is talking about how we grow the economy that local services will benefit from that,” he said.

“In terms of the situation in Scotland it was pretty clear even before austerity and the financial crash the Scottish Government didn’t have much sympathy for local government and that’s just been turbo charged over the last few years. So again that has to be re-balanced as well.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



Cllr Scott Arthur making his acceptance speech at the Edinburgh count PHOTO ©2024 The Edinburgh Reporter