

# **Councillors urged to keep webcams on and be respectful in debates**

**Edinburgh's councillors have been reminded to keep their webcams on and be respectful to each other during debates.**

Council members and officers have had the option to join meetings remotely since the start of the pandemic in 2020, but concerns have been raised about some not being fully present during the decision-making process.

New guidance states councillors are “encouraged to have their device cameras switched on and be clearly seen when they are addressing the meeting”.

Speaking as it was agreed at a meeting in the City Chambers, Depute Lord Provost Lezley Marion Cameron said: “I just took particular notice of the vote immediately before this item and three colleagues voted without having their cameras on.

“Of course technical problems can arise, of course people may not feel well enough or have other reasons for not having their camera on. But we would hope we want to see more of each other, officers and elected members as we take forward this city.”

Jo Mowat, Conservative city councillor, added: “I think the very least we can expect is the courtesy of cameras on when people are addressing the meeting and when they are taking part in a vote to ensure that the officers who are counting

the vote can be very clear about who has done what.”

She added: “If you are in a council committee meeting you should be physically present . . . whether online or in the room, because you are taking part in a committee meeting and representing your constituents by doing that.”

Cllr Mowat said prior to the introduction of virtual meetings the procedure was that councillors would stand in for each other if for any reason one was unable to attend.

“The point was if you are in that meeting you should be taking part and able to take part.

“I am slightly uncomfortable about saying there’s lots of reasons why people should be in a meeting but not actually really being present and concentrating on that meeting.”

However the SNP’s Kate Campbell took issue with “individual members being called out for not appearing on camera for voting”.

She said: “I think we should all strive to be present as much as we can and to be available. But we also want this council to be more accessible.

“There may be very good reasons, there could be physical health reasons, caring responsibilities, mental health reasons why people feel they cannot put their camera at that point in time and I think we should be very mindful of that and not use this as an opportunity to call each other out.”

The guidance adds political groups would have “opposing and disparate views and opinions on a wide range of subjects” giving rise to “passionate exchanges of views as part of debate at committee meetings,” but stresses that “anything you say or do is done so respectfully”.

The updated document was approved unanimously by councillors at a full council meeting on Thursday, August 29.

A report said: "The Guide is presented for use by multiple audiences. Firstly, for existing elected members as an aide memoire on how the democratic decision-making process operates.

"Secondly, it will be used for new and prospective councillors as part of their induction programme to enable them to understand, at an early point, how committees and the decision-making process works.

"Thirdly, the Guide is intended to aid understanding by members of the public and anyone else not immersed in how the Council operates and makes its decisions."

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter