

Labour's minority administration clings on to power after a two-hour debate

Labour's minority administration has clung on to power after a two-hour debate in the city Chambers.

The party, which has been propped up by Conservatives and Liberal Democrats since 2022, faced a challenge following the resignation earlier this month of leader Cammy Day following allegations.

The SNP and Green Party had put forward coalition plans to take over the council claiming that a continued Labour "super minority" administration would be disastrous.

But they were defeated, with Labour winning by 32 votes to 28 after a roll call vote – the first in this council where each councillor had to state their position.

Portobello and Craigmillar Labour councillor Jane Meagher is now the new council leader.

She joined the meeting remotely, insisting she would look together basis services like waste, cleansing and transport right and invest in a green stable future.

Many councillors spoke of personal conflict before the vote and some Conservatives had proposed delaying the vote until the New Year.

Another Conservative Phil Daggert described the vote, including an amendment proposed joint SNP Green administration

as voting to 'defend the indefensible'.

"I look around the room and I see members across all parties who have the capabilities to run committees in a collaborative way... who I have worked with to achieve good outcomes," he said.

'If I support the status quo, I am defending the indefensible...'

He voted to support the motion backing the administration.

The former council leader Cammy Day resigned from his role earlier this month following accusations of bombarding Ukrainian refugees on social media with sexual messages.

He is also facing another unrelated council probe into whether he is renting out homes under his ownership.

Councillor Day attended the meeting remotely, but without the camera switched on. He spoke only to vote for the motion.

There were some councillors calling for Cllr Day to remove himself from the meeting, while Green councillor Alys Mumford said it was 'incredibly offensive' that Cllr Day's name on the meeting screens was still displayed as 'council leader'.

Tory leader Iain Whyte admitted making the decision now would be difficult for his party, and said: 'If we do have to come to a decision that is a difficult decision for us to make I am very conscious the allegations against Cllr Day are still being investigated'

And he said if the vote went ahead his group would support the Labour 'superminority' administration continuing.

Labour Councillor Margaret Graham said she would support a delay on the vote, put forward by Conservative Max Mitchell.

She told the meeting herself uncomfortable with some of the decisions she's had to support over last few years but added:

“‘You do not make the best decision when you are in a situation of turmoil and for some of us trauma’

Labour’s Katrina Faccenda won cheers in the chamber when she abstained during roll call.

The meeting saw a number of heated exchanges and councillors debated who should be the new leader,

Independent councillor Ross McKenzie – who resigned from the Labour group last year – had put forward a motion to stand for council leader but withdrew it at the meeting as he slammed his former party for their running of the city, and said Cllr Day had ‘none of the skills you would want from an elected representative’.

Some councillors including Councillor Mitchell argued that the decision on a new leader should be put off until the new year, when a number of by-elections are set to be held.

Councillor Mandy Watt the deputy Labour group leader summed up the debate by saying councillors should look to the experience of the failed Bute House agreement, a former alliance between the two in Holyrood when considering the SNP/ Green amendment.

She added that a decision had to be made before Christmas recess adding “we don’t want to go away without knowing where we stand.”

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter