

Another councillor joins the ranks of the independents

A Labour councillor on the council's administration has been suspended by her political group.

Cllr Katrina Faccenda, who did not vote with her group in the appointment of a new council leader in December, faces a disciplinary investigation and has been suspended meantime.

Labour Group Whip, Cllr Stephen Jenkinson, said: "I can confirm that as a result of an internal disciplinary investigation Cllr Faccenda was suspended by the Edinburgh Labour Group on Monday the 27th of January for a period of three weeks."

At the December meeting of the full council when councillors convened to vote for the new leader of the Labour group, Jane Meagher, to become Council Leader, Cllr Faccenda railed against her own political group for accepting the political support of other groups such as Liberal Democrats and Conservatives (both of whom have Conveners in office as a result) before she refused to vote with Labour.

Cllr Faccenda said that councillors should remember the Nolan principles of public life – the first of which is selflessness. As the only member of the Labour group who is not a Convener or other office holder, and who therefore only receives the basic allowance for councillors and not any higher salary, Cllr Faccenda said she was the "only person who could have a dispassionate opinion".

She accused many councillors for having put their own vanity

and personal interests first before serving those who had put them there – the electorate. She said there are “people who have ambitions to be seen as kingmakers in positions of too much power”.

She continued: “I have heard, in the two and a half years since I have been a councillor within my group and in other parts of the council, repeated expressions and demonstrations of people who did not apply selflessness to the way in which they do their job.”

Saying that in her view the Labour group have failed in the last two and a half years to represent the people that “our party was founded to represent”, she alleged that Labour members have “turned a blind eye to someone who has stood up and told something that was not true in this chamber and you have put it down to politics”.

Labour were able to continue in the position of a minority administration when Councillor Meagher was appointed Council Leader.

Dissension

This is the second time the Leith councillor has been suspended by her group since being elected in 2022. She joined Cllr Ross McKenzie in abstaining at the very first vote to put the Labour party into power after the local government elections, also on the grounds of the group cosying up to opposition parties.

Both councillors rejoined Labour although Cllr McKenzie now sits as an Independent as he resigned from the Labour group during a budget meeting.

Cllr McKenzie also made a barnstorming speech at the December council meeting when he criticised the former leader of the council as “someone without a particular policy agenda” saying

he and others could not “get their heads round how this guy had become Edinburgh Labour’s most senior councillor” and explained this was partly why he and others, such as Cllr Faccenda, were backed by former Lord Provost Lesley Hinds in getting themselves elected onto the council.

The Sighthill/Gorgie councillor also said that “this administration increases officer power because it’s so weak and that every councillor in this chamber knows how weak it is and every councillor in here knows how incompetent it is”.

Cllr Faccenda said: “My loyalty is to the Labour movement and the Labour party is the voice of that movement.

“But I have had to make hard decisions and I do not believe the Labour Edinburgh Group have always been acting in the best interest for the people we represent.

“When they voted for the Lib Dem budget two years ago this opened a door potentially to things like cost cutting exercises which were not necessary. Also there are occasions where we have not taken as robust a decision as we should because of the reality of being in an informal arrangement and being reliant on the Lib Dem and Tory votes.

When I stood for council I was clear I was standing to defend public services and resist outsourcing and to progressively start insourcing. I’ve been against policies like the Free Port in Leith which I believe will be bad for my ward, for Edinburgh and Scotland. It will only be good for businesses who will potentially benefit from relaxed regulation.

“Labour is a broad church and there have always been different ideas under the same roof. As a trade unionist I take my guidance from this part of our movement in order to get things right. As far as the council is concerned, people in Leith ward who I meet on a daily basis, sometimes feel the way the council works can be an impediment to constituents being represented properly.

“I personally would like to see groups on the council work more closely on an issue by issue basis instead of worrying about who is leader. We have to deliver better on housing, roads, cleanliness and it should all be about how we deliver better for the people.

“I accept people can sometimes be unfair as we are at the tail end of the funding process. Cuts start in Westminster, go through Holyrood and then the council. The criticism can be harsh but equally and on many occasions, the council is not serving the people of Edinburgh.”

There are three independent councillors in Edinburgh – Cllr Faccenda, Cllr McKenzie and also Cllr Cammy Day the former Council leader who has been administratively suspended by the Scottish Labour Party pending investigations into alleged conduct involving inappropriate text messages.



Cllr Katrina Faccenda who represents the Leith ward