

Anger at councillor's £6k raise to act as vice-convenor of a planning committee

The creation of a new £32k per year role as the vice-leader of an Edinburgh Council committee has been slammed as a “an outrageous misuse of public funds”.

The new role of vice-convenor of the Development Management Sub-Committee – a “quasi-judicial” committee that handles planning matters – was approved at the city's full council meeting on Thursday.

And the council leader told a full committee meeting that those disagreeing with the decision should “look at the facts”.

The office holder will be expected to substitute for the convenor if they are not present.

Conservative councillor Max Mitchell will take up the new role, with Liberal Democrat councillor Hal Osler continuing to convene the committee.

And the new role will give Mr Mitchell a £6k pay boost – something which prompted criticism from other elected members in the chamber.

Councillor Alys Mumford, the planning spokesperson for the Green group, said: “The creation of a new, unnecessary position by the council administration is an outrageous misuse

of public funds.

“It is absolutely right that there are paid positions leading the council’s work to tackle some of the huge issues facing our residents, but to see this system treated with such disdain by the Labour Party to give jobs to their allies and shore up votes should shock the people of Edinburgh.

“Green councillors have some serious questions for the Labour Party about how they can justify spending public money in this way, and will be keeping a very close eye on this new position to see if there is any benefit at all for the people we have been elected to serve.”

There were also accusations that the new role was effectively a way for the Labour administration to “buy” support from opposition councillors.

Councillor Simita Kumar, the leader of the SNP group, said: “We knew that Labour was buying support from the Tories for staying in power.

“But creating yet another fake job for a Conservative is a slap in the face. It’s clear that Labour councillors will do any deal with the Tories, no matter how grubby, to cling onto administration. Edinburgh deserves better.”

But council leader and Labour councillor Jane Meagher told councillors yesterday: “I quickly want to knock on the head this myth that’s constantly being perpetuated that there’s some sort of a formal arrangement. There isn’t.

“However, we know that the sheer arithmetic of this chamber means that three parties have to support an administration.

“And it’s about who can maintain the confidence of sufficient numbers of the whole chamber. Ignore your flaunted opinions, look at the facts.”

In the report issued by officers before the meeting it states

that “the Council currently has 19 senior councillors (maximum 24) and spends £733,826 of the £955,455 allowance”.

Several councillors told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that they believed that the Development Management Sub-Committee, and other quasi-judicial committees, do not need a vice convener – but that several of the larger “policy” committees do need them.

And independent councillor Ross McKenzie saying: “Labour bosses dictated after the 2022 council elections that Labour should not be allowed to enter any coalitions.

“They were allowed to offer quasi-judicial roles to other parties, and the provost, but they weren’t allowed to offer convenerships on any policy positions.

“So that’s why they have to carve it up. The only way to be in power is to pay off some people to vote for you by giving them [Development Management Sub-Committee] jobs. And that’s essentially what they do. It’s nakedly self-serving.”

Cllr Mitchell represents Inverleith ward, and was returned at the 2022 Edinburgh Council elections.

Cllr McKenzie, who was a Labour councillor until he left the party in the middle of a budget meeting in 2023, suggested current Labour councillor Katrina Faccenda would have been a good fit for the role instead.

He said: “She has the potential to be a really good convener, and she’s clearly one of the most competent councillors in the group.

“She’s the one person they won’t give [such a role] to. But they’re happy to give another one to the Tories.”

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter