

# Edinburgh councillors remember late colleague

**The late councillor Val Walker has been remembered as a “gentle, yet fierce and loyal” champion for her city and community by her colleagues.**

Councillor Walker died unexpectedly during the council’s Easter recess last month, leaving behind a son Nigel, who lives in Shanghai with his family.

Lord Provost Robert Aldridge told Thursday’s full council meeting: “The most painful for us all here in this chamber was the sudden and unexpected death of our friend and colleague, councillor Val Walker.

“Unusually in this place, I’ve heard nothing about her but positive words. She was passionate about her role as Culture and Communities convener.

“I know messages from across the city that she is sadly missed, not only by us all here, and by her family, but by the range of organisations with which she worked and extended her attention.

Labour councillor Walker was elected in May 2022 in the Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart ward, which she represented alongside the SNP’s David Key and the Conservatives’ Christopher Cowdy.

Council leader and Labour councillor Jane Meagher said: “When the news came that our dear friend and colleague Val,

councillor Walker had died, we were all terribly shocked.

“But no-one more so than her precious family, who are left grieving her loss. Our hearts go out to them.”

“One of the most heartwarming things that happened was the sheer number and sincerity of the messages and personal expressions of sympathy that came pouring in from colleagues past and present.

“From officers, from Labour Party members, from trade unions, and even from people who stop me on the street with unexpected connections to Val.

“Of course, this includes many people in this chamber, from all political groups. We have more that unites us than what divides us.”

Cllr Walker was involved in the trade union movement for many years, and continued this in her time as a councillor, chairing the city’s body that consults with unions.

Before becoming a councillor, she was a long time librarian in the city’s libraries, where she was active in the Unison branch covering city staff.

Cllr Meagher continued, while beginning to fight tears: “Since she was elected in 2022, Val gained a reputation as a determined and loyal champion for local residents.

“She was sometimes frustrated by the delays and the complexity of resolving issues. She was tireless and genuine in her efforts.

“She will never know how valued she was, but the messages being received, including social media posts, tell us that her commitment was recognised, and appreciated, and valued by many.

“As convener of the Culture and Communities Committee, she had

remit across theatre, cinema, festival, arts and public spaces, cemeteries, community halls and libraries, and much more.

“We sometimes joked that, as a retired librarian, this role was her natural role.

“She was particularly proud of the fact that Edinburgh had managed to keep all our libraries open despite severe funding cuts.

“In all these areas, Val worked across all parties with honesty, and respect, and integrity. I can’t tell you how delighted she would have been to learn that both Filmhouse and the King’s Theatre will, at last, be reopened.

“Val, you will be sorely missed.”

Flags at the City Chambers were drawn to half mast after her passing in her memory.

Cllr Walker served on the board of several city organisations, such as the Edinburgh Science Festival and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

SNP group leader councillor Simita Kumar said: “It is incredibly difficult to be in this place. Our thoughts and prayers go out to councillor Walker’s family.

“I’m sure we’ll all have our own opportunities to share our memories of her. For me, it was the fact she was a fashionista. I always found her incredibly stylish, with fabulous earrings and a pop of colour.

“I hope when we remember her, we think of bright colours.”

Councillor Ed Thornley, leader of the Lib Dem group, said: “In the Lib Dem group, we were deeply saddened and shocked to hear that she had passed.

"We worked with her extensively these past two years, and it was always a pleasure to do.

"She was someone who sought consensus, even when the rest of us might not have wanted it. She was a determined champion for our city, and equally, for the libraries she loved so much.

"She also had a truly wicked sense of humour. I miss her, I know we all miss her."

Conservative group leader councillor Iain Whyte said: "I always thought of her as a very engaging, humorous person who was interested in other people.

"At the last meeting of the Culture and Communities Committee, I understand there was an issue where all sorts of people were concerned about something and wanted something resolved.

"They couldn't resolve it in committee, but Val took it away, and brought everyone together. She didn't take charge of the issue, she didn't take sides, but she allowed everyone to have their say.

"She found a way of resolving it so that they could work across all parties to find a solution.

"We share our condolences with Val's family, friends and everyone else who knew her."

Councillor Susan Rae, co-convener of the Green group, said: "She was a devoted friend and colleague, a very dedicated ward councillor, and a very diligent convener.

"She was very gentle yet fierce and loyal to her community, and her city."

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter