

The secret / undemocratic world of ERC

Posted by Newsline - 06 Aug 2019 13:17

Were you aware that ERC have been conducting 'SECRET' meetings for years.

Neither were we, but we can now reveal the details.

As a result of Freedom of Information requests (FOI) we are now in possession of information that the public of East Renfrewshire have never been aware of.

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Re: The secret / undemocratic world of ERC

Posted by Newsline - 14 Aug 2019 15:48

This investigation commenced with looking at why Cllr Barbara Grant was claiming expenses for travelling to Pre Audit & Scrutiny (A&S) Meetings at the Council Headquarters.

Via FOI and subsequent enquiries with the chair of A&S Cllr Stewart Miller, it was established that these PRE meetings have been a regular occurrence, and indeed many other committees also held these PRE meetings.

However, NOT ONE of these meetings had an agenda, was minuted or was open to the public.

More to follow.....

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Re: The secret / undemocratic world of ERC

Posted by Newsline - 15 Aug 2019 07:33

The position in respect of the meetings you have referred to in your request is as follows:-

Planning Applications Committee – a pre-meeting is held with the Chair and Vice-Chair; and Planning and Democratic Services staff; to brief the Chair and Vice-Chair on the reports that will be considered by the committee. The agenda and reports are available on the Council's website. There is no other recorded information in respect of these meetings.

Cabinet – no pre-meetings are held.

Cabinet (Police and Fire) – no pre-meetings are held.

Civic Hospitality Committee – no pre-meetings are held.

Education Committee – a pre-meeting is held between Education staff and the Chair immediately prior to the meeting to brief him on the reports that are being considered by the committee. The agenda and all non-exempt reports are available on the Council's website. There is no other recorded information in respect of these meetings.

Licensing Committee – a pre-meeting is held between members of the committee and Legal Services and Democratic Services staff immediately prior to the meeting to brief members on the reports that are being considered by the committee. The agenda and all non-exempt reports are available on the Council's website. There is no other recorded information in respect of these meetings.

Joint Consultative Committee – A pre-meeting is held between the Chair and Corporate and Community Services staff prior to the meeting to brief him on reports that are being considered by the committee. As this committee is an operational committee with no executive powers and not one established in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, papers for the JCC meeting are not published on the Council's website. Minutes of meetings of the committee are submitted to the Cabinet and are available on the Council's website. There is no other recorded information in respect of these meetings.

Council – a pre-meeting is held between the Provost, Leader and Deputy Leader and Chief Executive's and Democratic Services staff on the afternoon of the Council meeting to discuss the agenda and to brief the Members on the papers that are being considered by the Council. The agenda and all non-exempt reports are available on the Council's website. There is no other recorded information in respect of these meetings.

Sections 17 and 25 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 provide absolute exemptions for information not held and for information otherwise available.

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Re: The secret / undemocratic world of ERC

Posted by Newsline - 15 Aug 2019 07:40

So lots of PRE meeting meetings.

Not published that they are held.

Not open to the public.

Not minuted.

Democracy in operation in East Renfrewshire Council.

Secret meetings.....

The chair of Audit & Scrutiny said that his PRE meetings were in order that the clerk to the committee could inform him what members of council staff would be attending the committee meeting to speak to items on the agenda.

Do they not have email?

Why does Barbara Grant require to attend and claim mileage for doing so?

Next to follow, Committee Agenda's

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Re: The secret / undemocratic world of ERC

Posted by Newsline - 16 Aug 2019 17:11

We have also established that the agenda's of all council meetings are considered and prepared by council staff.

Elected members (Councillors) have no say in the format or content of the agendas, that they discuss at committee meetings, or indeed full council.

Source - Democratic Services manager, Chief Solicitor to the council and the chair of A & S.

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Re: The secret / undemocratic world of ERC

Posted by RM64 - 18 Aug 2019 10:50

The Director of Education is also involved with these secret meetings in regard to the Leisure Trust board.

From Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting, Thursday, 16 August 2018

Report by Clerk - NATIONAL EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT - COUNCILS USE OF ARMS-LENGTH ORGANISATIONS

In this report it states -

'Also to be introduced in 2018-19 are briefing meetings with the Director of Education prior to each Trust Board meeting which will advise and guide elected members on specifics related to the agenda. '

At present the Councillors on the Trust Board are - Cllrs Fletcher, Grant, Merrick and O'Kane.

The Director of Education has been asked -

'Again, why can't they just say regarding the Leisure Trust Board meetings 4 December 2018 and 26

February 2019 -

Yes - The Director of Education prior to these Trust Board meetings did hold a briefing meeting with elected members to advise and guide them on specifics related to the agenda

or

No - The Director of Education prior to these Trust Board meetings did not hold a briefing meeting with elected members to advise and guide them on specifics related to the agenda'

In part reply to a complaint Gerry Mahon, the Chief Officer - Legal & Procurement has stated -

'As regards prior briefing meetings I have confirmed that there is no record of such meetings taking place and as such the response is accurate.

The Director has advised that briefing meetings if held would not be minuted or recorded and would generally run through the items on any given Board agenda.

Given that no record is taken she is unable to supply any further detail of particular meetings. '

The Director of Education was not asked for recorded information.

The Director of Education was asked to confirm if any of these briefing meetings had taken place.

They appear to refuse to do so.

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