

East Renfrew Council called to ban church representatives from voting

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Reporter

Religious representatives have a say in decisions on how education is delivered in East Renfrewshire

Leaders of Scotland's humanist movement have called on East Renfrewshire Council to ban church representatives from voting on issues affecting schools.

At present, the Church of Scotland, Catholic Church and other religious groups are allowed up to three representatives on the council's education committee.

They also have the power to vote on motions before the committee, such as proposed school closures.

However, the non-religious Humanist Society Scotland says giving voting rights to unelected officials such as church elders is "undemocratic".

It claims that, on a "hung" council like East Renfrewshire, their vote could be a deciding factor in crucial education decisions.

Chief executive Fraser Sutherland told the Barrhead News: “Under Scotland’s proportional voting system, new and returning councillors in East Renfrewshire will know that every decision made will involve negotiations and close votes.

“What they won’t be considering is that any decisions they may take on education can be overturned on the say-so of unelected representatives from Scotland’s churches and religious institutions.

“East Renfrewshire councillors need to take action now so that only those voted in democratically will have a say on local schooling.

“We urge East Renfrewshire Council to bring forward new rules for non-elected church representatives to remove their voting rights.”

East Renfrewshire currently has Church of Scotland, Catholic and Jewish representatives on the education committee.

The council has six SNP members, while Labour and the Conservatives have five each.

Mr Smith said: “That situation where no party has an overall majority could mean church votes becoming a tiebreaker on crucial votes on education matters.

“East Renfrewshire councillors need to ensure religious groups do not get a privileged say over how schools are run against the wishes of the local electorate.”

A spokesperson for East Renfrewshire Council said: “Three members of the education committee are appointed to represent the views of their faiths, in relation to the education provision available in East Renfrewshire.

“It is a decision for councillors to determine the voting rights of religious representatives.”

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