# Renfrewshire councillors abstain en masse in key policy board vote amid party tensions



### Unprecedented Abstention: A Closer Look at Renfrewshire Council's Recent Vote

In an unusual turn of events, thirty-two councillors in Renfrewshire abstained from a pivotal vote regarding membership on a key policy board last week, shifting the dynamics within the council's political landscape. The contest was between Conservative group leader Neill Graham and independent councillor John Hood for a seat on the infrastructure, land, and environment policy board during a full council meeting held on Thursday.

The abstentions, largely from SNP and Labour members, have been described as a "very unique situation" by an anonymous elected official. This absence of a decisive vote allowed Hood to secure the position with seven votes against Graham's four, signalling a notable disengagement from the major parties in this instance. The circumstances surrounding the vote emerged after the Conservative group put forward nominations to fill vacancies left by two councillors who switched allegiance to a party committed to common-sense governance earlier this year. Their departure reduced the Conservative presence in Renfrewshire Council to just three members.

The abstention underscores a growing tension within the council. While the SNP remains the largest party, holding twenty seats, and Labour follows with thirteen, the independents have now established themselves as the third-largest faction thanks to a strategic shift in party affiliations. This situation highlights a concerning trend: the major parties seem increasingly detached from the needs of the electorate, revealing a desperate need for a more responsive alternative that truly represents the interests of local communities.

The governance arrangements paper laid out the Conservative nominations to replace the defected members on various council boards. Notably, Councillor David McGonigle is set to join the leadership board, while Councillor James MacLaren will contribute to both the finance, resources and customer services policy board, as well as the communities and housing policy board. Councillor Graham is poised for inclusion on the education and children’s services policy board and the Fairer Renfrewshire sub-committee. Furthermore, independent Councillor Will Mylet will take a position on the audit, risk, and scrutiny board.

Amidst the abstention, the looming reality of significant financial challenges facing the council cannot be overlooked. Renfrewshire Council is grappling with a £50 million funding gap, necessitating a critical evaluation of its budgetary priorities. A recent budget announcement by the SNP administration outlined several commitments, including £5 million allocated for road maintenance and £800,000 earmarked for artificial playing surfaces. However, this fiscal strategy has drawn sharp criticism, with many concerned that these measures fall short of adequately addressing the genuine needs of the community and potential long-term repercussions.

As the political landscape continues to evolve, the implications of these recent developments will be closely monitored. With a backdrop of financial uncertainty and shifting allegiances, the lack of decisive leadership from the dominant parties has opened the door for alternative voices to emerge, calling for sensible solutions to the pressing issues at hand. The council's future decision-making will likely require new levels of cooperation and compromise among its members, but the electorate will undoubtedly be watching closely to ensure their interests are not overlooked.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/in-your-area/renfrewshire/thirty-two-councillors-abstain-vote-35179885> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/in-your-area/renfrewshire/thirty-two-councillors-abstain-vote-35179885> - An article from the Daily Record reports that 32 Renfrewshire councillors abstained from voting on a vacancy for the infrastructure, land, and environment policy board. Conservative leader Neill Graham and independent John Hood contested the position, with Hood ultimately securing the spot after receiving seven votes to Graham's four. An unnamed elected member described the situation as 'very unique,' noting that it was left to the independents and Conservatives to decide who would fill the board position, while other parties chose to abstain.
3. <https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/politics/who-running-local-council-full-26999180> - The Scottish Daily Express provides an overview of the political control in various Scottish councils following recent elections. In Renfrewshire, the Scottish National Party (SNP) secured 21 seats, while Labour obtained 15 seats. The SNP formed a minority administration, supported by the sole independent councillor. This configuration highlights the SNP's position as the largest party in Renfrewshire, with Labour in second place.
4. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/23937809.midlothian-conservative-councillors-abstain-gaza-ceasefire-vote/> - The National reports on a Midlothian council meeting where Conservative councillors abstained from voting on a motion calling for a ceasefire and humanitarian aid in Gaza. The motion, proposed by SNP councillor Connor McManus, was passed with two abstentions from Councillors Smaill and Winchester. The article highlights the Conservative councillors' decision to abstain from the vote on this international issue.
5. <https://www.the-gazette.co.uk/news/24154433.renfrewshire-council-announce-2024-25-budget/> - The Gazette reports that Renfrewshire Council, led by the SNP, announced its budget for the 2024/25 financial year. The budget includes key commitments such as £5 million for roads maintenance, £800,000 for artificial playing surfaces, and £130,000 for community hall refurbishments. The SNP's budget motion passed with the support of independent councillor Andy Doig and Liberal Democrat councillor Anne Hannigan, despite opposition from Labour.
6. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/in-your-area/renfrewshire/renfrewshire-council-urged-call-out-33686893> - An article from the Daily Record discusses Renfrewshire Council's response to proposed cuts to universal winter fuel payments. Councillors are urged to oppose the cuts, with concerns that they would negatively impact pensioners across Renfrewshire. The motion, set to be presented at a full council meeting, aims to send a strong message to both the UK and Scottish governments regarding the proposed changes to winter fuel payments.
7. <https://news.stv.tv/west-central/renfrewshire-council-faces-key-decisions-in-efforts-to-tackle-50m-funding-gap> - STV News reports that Renfrewshire Council is facing a £50 million funding gap and is considering key decisions to address this shortfall. The council is targeting £35 million in savings over the next three years and is exploring service reforms to align costs with available resources. The report emphasizes the urgency of decisive action to prevent the council from becoming financially unsustainable.