# Labour councils accused of suppressing democratic oversight amid cuts to community services



At this year's Annual General Meeting (AGM), Labour councillors made a brazen move to stifle democratic oversight by voting to strip councillors of the ability to call in cabinet decisions. This alarming procedural change has already started to show its damaging effects, as seen in the recent cabinet determination to curtail the opening hours of the Cefn Fforest swimming pool.

Now, the pool will operate only between 16:00 and 20:00 on weekdays, a shift that many residents feel will marginalize significant portions of the community. Councillor Nigel Dix voiced his strong opposition, relaying that local residents are increasingly frustrated by these decisions. He warns that curtailing public and councillor involvement in critical local services ultimately paves the way for poor decision-making. “Labour are acting like a dictatorship,” he asserted, particularly regarding how they manipulate procedures to silence debate.

This troubling trend isn't confined to Caerphilly County Borough. Throughout the UK, Labour-led councils are facing backlash for silencing opposition voices and, by extension, the public they represent. In Lancashire, for instance, council leader Geoff Driver has come under fire for banning non-cabinet members from cabinet meetings. Framed as a measure for order, this move is widely perceived as a direct assault on democratic principles.

Similar frustrations have emerged in Brighton and Hove, where the new cabinet has executed measures limiting access to information for opposition councillors, raising serious concerns over transparency and accountability. Such actions have been met with accusations of dictatorial governance, as vital decisions are made behind closed doors without sufficient public or opposition input.

The ramifications of this governance style extend beyond mere inconveniences; they threaten the very fabric of community services. In Caerphilly, the council is currently grappling with the future of multiple leisure facilities, including the Cefn Fforest swimming pool, amid mounting financial pressures. As plans emerge to close three leisure centres under a misguided recreation strategy, it appears the fundamental needs of the community are being overshadowed by fiscal cutbacks and administrative reshuffling.

The sentiment among children from local primary schools in Cefn Fforest, who are rallying against the possible closure of their leisure centre, illustrates the strong community ties to these facilities. Their heartfelt letters pleading to save the pool make it abundantly clear that these spaces are invaluable, serving as essential hubs for community interaction and well-being.

The patterns observed in Caerphilly are part of a worrying nationwide trend, as seen in Greenwich, where new restrictions have silenced residents in council meetings. This reflects a disturbing shift in local governance, where public scrutiny is increasingly stifled. Such narratives create a compelling case against the legitimacy of governance when both council members and the public are rendered voiceless.

As the situation in Caerphilly develops, it is vital that the community’s voices are amplified and taken into account in decision-making processes. The imperative for transparency and accountability in local governance has never been more critical, ensuring that all residents are empowered to participate meaningfully in the essential services that impact their lives.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25199959.letter-labour-closed-debate-swimming-pool-opening-times/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-43373328> - In Lancashire County Council, leader Geoff Driver has been accused of silencing councillors by banning non-cabinet members from speaking at cabinet meetings. This decision has sparked criticism from opposition leaders, who view it as an affront to democracy, while Driver defends the move as necessary to prevent meetings from becoming a 'circus'.
3. <https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2024/06/12/councils-new-cabinet-criticised-for-keeping-councillors-in-the-dark/> - Brighton and Hove City Council's new cabinet has faced criticism for limiting opposition councillors' access to information and restricting their ability to question decisions. The changes have raised concerns about transparency and accountability, with opposition members accusing the Labour-led council of imposing dictatorship-style restrictions.
4. <https://nation.cymru/news/leisure-centres-at-risk-of-closure-as-part-of-councils-recreation-strategy/> - Caerphilly County Borough Council is considering closing three leisure centres—Bedwas, Cefn Fforest, and New Tredegar—as part of its recreation strategy aimed at encouraging healthy lifestyles. The council faces significant financial challenges and plans to rationalise facilities to focus on four strategic leisure centres.
5. <https://caerphilly.observer/news/1047512/cefn-fforest-children-write-letters-calling-for-leisure-centre-to-be-saved/> - In Cefn Fforest, children from local primary schools have written letters urging the council to keep the local leisure centre open. The centre is one of three facing potential closure due to budget cuts, and the community is actively campaigning to save it.
6. <https://www.greenwichconservatives.com/news/labour-ignores-objections-and-votes-limit-public-criticism> - Greenwich Conservatives have condemned the local Labour Council for restricting residents' rights to ask questions at council meetings. Changes to the council's constitution allow the Labour Mayor to rule out questions deemed 'improper', raising concerns about limiting public scrutiny.
7. <https://www.caerphillyleisurelifestyle.co.uk/en/centre/cefn-fforest-leisure-centre/> - Cefn Fforest Leisure Centre offers a 25m swimming pool, learner pool, health suite, and fitness suite. The centre's opening times are Monday to Friday from 07:30 to 20:30, and weekends from 09:00 to 15:00, providing a range of facilities for the local community.