

# Edinburgh Reporter chats – Mike Pringle MSP



Sitting in a comfortable chair in his Edinburgh South constituency office, [Mike Pringle MSP](#) with his grey hair and casual jumper looks rather like a favourite uncle. He exudes the kind of warm friendliness that the Liberal Democrats used to thrive on. That, of course, was in the days before protesters were burning effigies of Nick Clegg.

Pringle himself is acutely aware that events in Westminster could make May's [Holyrood](#) elections tough for his party and said:-" There is no question we are getting a lot of kickback from what is happening down south and all the associated issues. While this is Scotland, and we will be concentrating on Scottish issues that affect people in Edinburgh South, I can't deny that the national issues may have an impact."

Certainly Pringle is at pains to highlight differences in policy between the Scottish Lib Dems and their Westminster counterparts and pointed out:-"One of the big issues is the imposition of tuition fees. The situation of course is completely different in Scotland. Indeed, recently, I received a letter from Liam Burns of the [National Union of Students](#) congratulating the Lib Dems in Scotland on our role in amending the recent Scottish budget to secure greater funding for students."

Born in Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, Pringle moved to Edinburgh as a thirteen year old in 1958. Save a few years working in London, he has lived in the capital ever since and hopes that the voters will concentrate on the local issues he has been championing since being elected to Holyrood in 2003.

One of the main areas Pringle plans to campaign on locally is education, where he says he has been fighting hard on behalf of Edinburgh South. He said:-“I have campaigned hard for increased funding for [Boroughmuir High School](#) having already secured government funding for a complete rebuild of [James Gillespie's High School](#).”

Supporting local businesses is another major theme of Pringle's campaign. One innovative scheme he plans to launch, if re-elected, is the 'Edinburgh South pound'. Based on a successful scheme in [Totnes](#), Devon the plan would offer discounts to local businesses involved, thus encouraging economic growth in the area. Pringle said:- " Similar schemes have been run successfully elsewhere and helped local businesses. I think it is something that, if we could launch it, would benefit Edinburgh South greatly. I have approached local businesses who are prepared to back the scheme.”

Pringle has always been a keen supporter of environmental matters and sees the environment as a key Lib-Dem issue. He is a supporter of a Green Bank and hopes that it could be based in Edinburgh:-“I recently met Environment Secretary, Chris Huhne, to discuss the setting up of a Green Bank. I was representing the whole of Edinburgh in making a case for the proposed Green Bank to come to Scotland, but specifically Edinburgh. It would bring a huge amount of jobs to the city. Even though the decision on location has not yet been made, I am relatively hopeful that it will come to Edinburgh.”

Elected in 2003 with a wafer thin majority of 158, Pringle has proved a popular constituency MSP, increasing his majority to 1,929 in 2007. He sees his constituency work as vital:-“As a local constituency MSP, I have always looked on my primary responsibility as standing up for the people. My work is defending my constituents against Local Authority planning decisions and on council tax issues, but probably the biggest area is constituents problems with NHS Lothian which I try to help them resolve.”

Asked to pick out a personal highlight from his time in Parliament, Pringle chooses an issue he is passionate about:- "Meeting the Dalia Lama twice was a personal highlight. I have always been a very strong supporter of Tibet and the campaign to [free Tibet](#) from the yoke of China."

Looking to the future, Pringle feels that a majority government whether one party with an overall majority, or a coalition, is better for Scotland than a minority administration. He says: " As far as the parliament in general is concerned I hope we have a strong parliament. I have to say that I think over the past four years it has lacked something, because there has been a minority administration. That is not the fault of the SNP, but because they did not have an overall majority, they could not introduce the radical policies a majority administration can."

Of his own party's role in the new Parliament Pringle said:- " The Lib Dems' aim is to be back in coalition and to be able to influence things as we did from 1999 to 2007. As our colleagues in Westminster have discovered, you can only influence policy from a position of power."

Affable as he may be, Mike Pringle is a hardened campaigner who wrestled Edinburgh South from Labour, and increased his majority. Given the Lib-Dems' current woes, this promises to be his toughest campaign yet. Pringle will be hoping that his local record and personal popularity will see him re-elected, and not spending too much time fishing, or in the stands of his beloved Tynecastle come May.