

Edinburgh Councillor blogs – Councillor Gavin Corbett



Cllr Gavin Corbett

Green councillor Councillor Gavin Corbett predicts a tight race in the battle for Lothian list votes on 5 May. 

As election day looms, I've been looking closely at some of the Lothian-specific data in the last couple of days. A couple of things are apparent. First of all, the SNP is well on track to win at least eight of the nine constituency seats in Lothian. The only doubtful one is Edinburgh Central where, Marco Biagi having stood down, the SNP does not have the advantage of incumbency.

Add to this Green MSP since 2011, Alison Johnstone, standing in the contest and the high-profile Ruth Davidson and the outcome here is harder to predict.

But even if the SNP does not win Edinburgh Central, the arithmetic of the list vote is such that SNP is out of the running for list MSPs. This was the case in 2011, when SNP won 8 of the 9 constituency seats and that meant no list MSPs. I'll have a wager with anyone that this will be repeated in 2016, meaning that any votes cast for SNP on the regional list in Lothian will go un-allocated, in that they won't elect an SNP regional MSP.

So the really key battle for list seats is for second place on the Lothian list. And that is currently too close to call between Labour, Tories and Greens. It is highly likely that these three parties will share the 7 regional list seats and any combination of 2-2-3 is possible, although it is just possible that the Lib Dems will sneak the 7th seat.

Could the Greens take second place on the Lothian list contest? Very possibly, judging by the data I am seeing. Could Labour be pushed into fourth place? Equally possible.

A lot depends on the movements on those voting SNP in the constituency ballot. If they follow the BothVotesSNP slogan, even though those list votes won't count, then the likely beneficiaries are Labour and the Tories. If they do, as many people are doing, and plump for Greens on the list, then radical land reformer Andy Wightman will join Alison Johnstone as a Green MSP. And I have yet to hear anyone who believes that there are better candidates to help Holyrood challenge the status quo.

Of course, people should vote for the party or parties which best reflect their values and aspirations. Do they want to see action to reduce inequality; to reap the job-rich rewards of a sustainable economy; to tackle fuel poverty and crippling housing costs; to invest in a renewable energy future (rather than fracking) and to honour carers as the bedrock of a civilised society? If yes, then the choice is clear.

If the polls are right – and let's face it, it is EVERY SINGLE poll, then the SNP is coasting to overall victory. So the choice is then who also sits in the parliament. More Tories, dragging the parliament rightwards? More Labour MSPs, increasingly bewildered about what Labour stands for? Or a record number of Greens, sharing with SNP a conviction on Scotland's constitutional future and on other issues like nuclear power, but also pushing towards a more radical road on public investment, care, affordable rents and fracking?

Party loyalists aside, most people see merits in more than one party. And that is what makes the race for Lothian list seats so intriguing.