

#SP16 Alex Cole-Hamilton LibDem candidate for Edinburgh Western



Alex Cole-Hamilton has taken over the office of the former MP Mike Crockart on St John's Road. I had interviewed Mr Crockart there just ahead of the General Election so I had a sense of déjà vu, but there were not just as many staff in the office this time round.

This is a feet on the ground lean campaign which is being run by the Liberal Democrats, who are getting round the doors as much as they can.

And their Edinburgh Western candidate thinks it is working.

[The Edinburgh Reporter #SP16 Alex Cole-Hamilton Edinburgh Western](#) from [Phyllis Stephen](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Cole-Hamilton works with children's charity, Aberlour, and he has been a candidate in the past, but the LibDems are in the doldrums at this point in the election campaign. All the polls suggest that there will be an SNP whitewash in this seat despite any fallout from the faint scandal which still surrounds the Westminster representative Michelle Thomson, who has been suspended from the party amid allegations about her property dealings.

It was Thomson who established the SNP office right next door to this one, but it is Tony Giugliano who is occupying it at the moment, and running a fierce campaign to retain the seat for the SNP. Giuliano is the SNP candidate in place of former MSP, Colin Keir who left Holyrood in March 2016.

Cole-Hamilton has worked for the last 15 years in the children's charity sector, working with some of the most vulnerable children and families in Scottish society. He says that he sees day in and day out the kind of social problems that the Scottish Parliament has still failed to adequately deal with in his view. He assured The Edinburgh Reporter that as an MSP he would be up to the job: "I see the potential solutions and think that if all of us just come together to take tough decisions it would actually change the lives of hundreds of thousands of Scots who are still living in poverty, without affordable housing and really struggling with a range of social issues."

At the last Scottish Parliamentary election he stood in the Central constituency. He explained: "This is the constituency where my three small children will grow up. I've been living here for the best part of five years now and we've settled here in the community of Blackhall. It's home to me and I have a lot of love for this constituency. I had my first job here, so I know what makes it tick. I see the problems that local residents have to deal with, because I have to deal with them every day. That gives me the motivation to really want to represent Edinburgh Western in the Scottish Parliament.

"There are a range of problems here. For example due to the ever-expanding nature of the city, there are constantly new planning applications for housing developments in the western expansion of the city. This puts unnecessary pressure and burden both on congestion, on local amenities like schools and doctors' surgeries. We have just recently learned that two of Edinburgh's arterial routes, Queensferry Road and St John's Road, are two of Scotland's most polluted streets in the country.

"These are all issues that exercise the minds of local residents and will form priorities that I will bring to the fore if I am elected to the Scottish Parliament.

"I have launched a five point action plan to tackle pollution in the city, particularly in St John's Road. That means weekly spot checks on emissions to find any vehicles operating outwith legal limits, a complete moratorium on house building in the west of the city so that no additional pressure is put on these arterial routes.

"I want to see a massive investment in active travel, in the cycle path network and encouraging people out of cars. I want to see a faster roll-out of electric buses, and I would like to encourage a much greener approach to travel in the city.

And the fifth point would be to reduce congestion in St John's Road by introducing an airport bus lane along the A90 corridor. This would kill two problems at once. There is still a problem in Corstorphine with car dumping by commuters and holidaymakers who leave their cars this side of the city to take advantage of the Aircoach on St John's Road. It would also reduce congestion as people would be using the alternative route to the airport along Queensferry Road.

" The Lib Dems have announced a flagship policy of an extra 1p on all tax bands to reverse the swingeing cuts on education that we have seen under this SNP government. We recognise that education makes a country great. It's a great leveller, and is the silver bullet. We are prepared to say that everybody should make that little contribution to put Scottish education right up in the highest echelons of global success. We believe the successes of the LibDems at Westminster in terms of increasing the income tax threshold have made it a more progressive proposition than it would have been. We would not have done this ten years ago, but because the poorest families are not paying income tax at all now we can afford to do this and it makes it a far more progressive policy."

When asked about the legacy of the Conservative/LibDem coalition and also the legacy of a poor result in the General Election 2015, Cole-Hamilton was nonetheless pretty positive.

“People recognise the damage that we have suffered as a result of being in coalition, but there is definitely a sense that people have got past that. People are a little surprised but very happy to see a Liberal Democrat candidate at their doors, but it reminds them that this is the kind of local service we stand for. Night after night I get people who did not vote LibDem at the General Election, but are reminded through the fact that we have delivered fourteen leaflets across the constituency with local news, local issues and taking action on the issues that matter to them, that in us they get a local champion.

“Things are changing and the mood has definitely improved. It gives us great heart and great encouragement for a really strong result here.”

Expanding on this Cole-Hamilton explained that two things point to that being more than a possibility:

“The fact that I get actual case work every day shows that people are already turning to me as if I am their elected representative and can help them. The second thing is the belief on the doorstep which makes me think I have a really good chance of taking this seat back for the Liberal Democrats.”