

#SP16 Lee Chalmers Lothians List candidate for the Women's Equality Party

Lee Chalmers is the Lothians List candidate for the Women's Equality Party. She is engaging and bright, and is delighted to have been the first candidate chosen for this sparkly new political party : that is, the first candidate who has ever stood for the party in any election – anywhere!



She explained how the party came into being: “The Women's Equality Party started a year ago around the time of the UK General Election when a bunch of women realised that all the parties speak about gender equality but they are not able to do enough.

“They had all these other competing commitments. Also when a party is mainly made up of men they don't necessarily have it at the top of their agenda.

“So women just got to the point where they were so fed up with this that they said ‘We need to start a party that focuses on gender equality, that focuses on women's equality so that the parties can't ignore us’.

“There are two things we want to do – we want to get elected or we want other parties to take on our policies in our six key areas: equal pay, equal representation, equal parenting and caregiving, equal education, equal media treatment and an end to violence against women and girls.

“Women don't have it easy. We are attacked on the street, online, we don't get paid the same as men, we bear the brunt of childcaring which doesn't pay much. The economy is skewed

towards men to work. We are not in equal numbers in politics, in parliament, in local government.

“Everywhere you look we don’t have equal treatment, so that is what we’re calling for. If we have to take seats off political parties to achieve this then that is what we will do, but if they want to take on our policies then we are happy with that too.

“We raise money for our campaign purely from donations from the general public. We ran a crowdsourcing campaign and raised £50,000 before 14 February this year.

“Not all of our supporters are women. We have men on our committee, many men donate and many are members. My husband is a member. After all gender policy is not just for women. The reason that this party is called the Women’s Equality Party rather than the Gender Equality Party is that there is a gendered hierarchy with women at the bottom. But equality is not just better for women, it is better for everybody.

The Edinburgh Reporter asked Lee how she came to be involved in politics:

“I’m 44, I originally come from Ayr and I recently moved to Edinburgh. I’m self-employed and have run my own business for 12 years. I’ve been involved in politics for a while. I was a member of the LibDems for a while. I ended up leaving them as I did not see them doing anything to help with gender equality. I’m also doing a part-time PhD at the University of Edinburgh on online abuse, particularly on the sexist abuse that women get online. I believe that feeds into why we don’t necessarily put ourselves forward for election, why women don’t necessarily work on TV or become active in the media.

“I think that if women put their head above the parapet they feel more open to online attack and there is research to back that up. There are a lot of sexualised violent attacks.

“My good friend Caroline Criado-Perez ran a campaign to get a woman onto banknotes in London. She ended up with about 50 nasty rape and death threats a minute. I don’t have the answers yet as I’m only at the beginning of a five year study into this – so ask me in five years!

“We did a survey of our members in Edinburgh and the thing that came to the top was equal pay and violence against women and our Youth Wing is looking at the violence question. They are focusing on things like street harassment and harassment at gigs.

“We are out now speaking to voters to help them understand what kind of things we will focus on if and when we get elected.

“I get asked a lot about whether Scotland doesn’t have more gender equality than other parts of the UK. We have three female party political leaders for example. People ask if that means there is no need for the Women’s Equality Party.

“I think the high level of gender equality in politics and the environment in Scotland after the Independence referendum all mean that there is a greater demand for gender equality.

[tweet_box design="default"]“Lots of people spoke about the Scandinavian model that they wanted in Scotland and gender equality is a core part of that.[/tweet_box]

“It is time now to say the Referendum is over, the No campaign won but that does not mean that we have to give up on our dreams of gender equality. That is where the Women’s Equality Party comes in.”