

Liberal Democrats standing on education and the environment at the council elections

Edinburgh Liberal Democrat candidates say education and the environment will be at the heart of their local election campaign this year – as hopefuls tell voters to “demand better in your council”.

After the Liberal Democrat presence in the chamber doubled from three to six councillors in 2017 – five years after a catastrophic defeat which resulted in the loss of 14 members – Edinburgh’s fifth largest party are bidding to continue their comeback.

In the lead up to the 2022 council elections, candidates will focus their campaign on the recovery of Edinburgh’s schools in the wake of the pandemic and fighting climate change with local action – whilst hoping to replicate the recent success of the party in North Shropshire, where the Lib Dems’ Helen Morgan won the traditionally Conservative seat by nearly 6,000 votes.

And whilst remaining highly critical of the current SNP/Labour administration, incumbent Lib Dem councillor for Almond, Kevin Lang, refused to rule out forming a coalition with either party in May.



Cllr Kevin Lang

"I think it's impossible to know how the numbers are going to work out," he said. "I believe that we're going to have a big step forward in this election, I genuinely believe that. We've got a lot of good candidates standing in new places and I'm quite optimistic. It's really difficult to say this year.

"The next administration, whatever its colour, needs a different attitude and approach because what has been done over the last five years isn't working.

"Edinburgh council has never been as fragmented politically as it is now, I wouldn't rule out it being even more fragmented

after May.”

Cllr Lang – a public relations executive first elected in 2017, coming first place in Almond with 42.8 per cent of first preference votes – added he is knocking doors twice a week and telling people to “demand better in your council”.

“It is about a council that’s focused on getting the basics right, I think it is about a council that listens and takes into account what people tell us and I think it about a council that puts the environment at the heart of its decision making,” he said.

“But also a council that puts education first, particularly over Covid times, we’ve seen real pressure on our schools, one of the worst decisions of this entire term was the decision to cut school budgets at the height of the pandemic. I thought that was a terrible move when schools needed more money, not less.

“So we’re going to have a big focus on education and making sure that we’re giving kids the very best start in life.”

Throughout his first term, Cllr Lang has campaigned on a range of issues including protection of green belt land, reducing traffic and congestion in the city, improving the quality of social housing, and more recently, the implementation of a city-wide Low Emission Zone (LEZ).

Last week, the Transport and Environment Committee agreed to a LEZ in Edinburgh but only within the city centre, which did not receive support from Lib Dem councillors.

Cllr Lang said his first five years in local politics has been “half thoroughly rewarding and half at times very frustrating”.

He added one of his high points was uniting with Green and Conservative councillors to halt a rise in rent for council

tenants during the pandemic.

“We were talking about some of the most disadvantaged, deprived people in Edinburgh, all the issues that there were, still are, with Covid,” he said. “It was just unacceptable to me that we would look at increasing the amount that these people would have to pay and it still astonishes me that the administration thought that was the right thing to do.”



Sanne Dijkstra-Downie

Meanwhile, Sanne Dijkstra-Downie has been announced as the Lib Dem candidate standing in Forth, where in 2017 the party was just 500 votes short of gaining a seat.

A fundraiser for Edinburgh University with a focus on climate change, oceans and supporting students on scholarships, she has a deep interest in the environment and politics – and stood in the same ward in a 2008 by-election, losing out to current council depute leader, Cllr Cammy Day.

Originally from the Netherlands, she moved to Edinburgh 20 years ago as a student and “fell in love” with the city.

“If you love Edinburgh in January your love for the place is strong,” she joked.

Mrs Dijkstra-Downie added she was inspired to put herself forward as a candidate after seeing her community's response to the hardships of the pandemic.

"I genuinely care about this area, about the community and particularly after the pandemic where we've seen people really coming together as a community and looking after each other, sharing information and that has continued and that has made me want to step up and do something positive for this area," she said.

"Local action on the environment and climate is something I care about a lot and there are certain things that if I got selected I'd like to make a positive contribution to, like the way that we move around the city and the area in more environmentally-friendly ways."

However, she added it is "quite daunting" to "put leaflets through people's doors with your face on it".

"But I feel really strongly that we need more people in local government who are parents, who have young kids that understand the juggling and the struggle you have when you're trying to juggle a job with caring responsibilities, dropping off your children at nursery and school, going to work and doing the journey reverse and what that actually means if the buses don't go where you need them to go or you can't get to places in ways you might like to," she said.

"We're out every week just talking to people, asking their opinions about the proposed parking changes, the parks, how they feel about the current administration and that is how we are getting a real feel for how people are happy or unhappy about certain things.

"It's just been so much fun talking to people and people are so happy to engage, they genuinely are."

The Liberal Democrat candidates announced in Edinburgh so far

are:

- **Almond** – Kevin Lang (incumbent), Louise Young (incumbent)
- **City Centre** – Andy Foxhall
- **Colinton/Fairmilehead** – Louise Spence
- **Corstorphine/Murrayfield** – Alan Beal, Euan Davidson
- **Craigentinny/Duddingston** – Elaine Ford
- **Drum Brae/Gyle** – Robert Aldridge (incumbent), Ed Thornley
- **Forth** – Sanne Dijkstra-Downie
- **Inverleith** – Hal Osler (incumbent)
- **Leith Walk** – Jack Caldwell
- **Morningside** – Neil Ross (incumbent)
- **Pentland Hills** – Michael Chappell
- **Southside/Newington** – Pauline Flannery

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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