

Council elections 2022 – Colin Fox accuses council of ignoring issues of poverty and deprivation

**A former socialist MSP standing in
Edinburgh's local elections has
accused councillors of "turning a
blind eye" to poverty and
deprivation in the city.**

Colin Fox, Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) candidate in Liberton/Gilmerton, said The City of Edinburgh Council's Labour and SNP-led administrations of the last ten years had "forgotten the citizens" and described the trams as a "vanity project".

If elected on 5 May, he hopes to challenge the priorities of the council and work with members across the chamber to bring forward a set of radical policies including scrapping council tax and making public transport free for all.

The party's manifesto also calls for no cuts to council jobs, facilities, or services, £12-an-hour minimum wage for all workers over 16 and an end to fuel poverty.



Colin Fox joined the RMT Union protest about lack of action since COP26 by parading from Waverley to Bute House on 31 January 2022 ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

No stranger to politics, Mr Fox served as an MSP for the

Lothian region from 2003-2007 and has been SSP's co-spokesperson since 2005. During his time in Holyrood, he sat on the justice committee, introduced the bill that would go on to abolish NHS prescription charges in Scotland, and was ejected from the parliament chamber for refusing to swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen during his swearing in ceremony – instead choosing to sing Robert Burns' *A Man's a Man for A' That*.

As a candidate he has also stood in UK and European Union elections and has made three previous attempts at making it onto Edinburgh City Council in 2007, 2012 and in a 2010 by-election in Liberton/Gilmerton where he has lived for 25 years.

He said: "I've noticed a deterioration in the city certainly since the last time I stood. I think the city council is out of touch. It's vanity projects like the tram, everything's the city centre, even the Edinburgh Festival never comes outside EH1 any more and it seems to me the City Chambers and councillors in the city have forgotten areas like south Edinburgh.

"There's an awful lot of poverty here, there's an awful lot of people in Scotland's richest city toiling to make a living, toiling to get by.

"You see it not just in the economics with people's concerns about fuel poverty but you can see the deterioration in the environment here, the housing environment, the state of the area, it's not getting the attention it needs."

Describing Edinburgh as a "Jekyll and Hyde city", he said: "With enormous affluence, there's real need, there's real deprivation, there's real poverty here and to be honest the City Council leaders have turned a blind eye to that. They'd rather not see it. They'd rather celebrate Edinburgh on the international tourist circuit and conferences and celebrate

regional city economy status – they’ve forgotten the citizens.”

He added the council is more interested in following “a corporate agenda” than the everyday needs of people living in the capital.

“You’ve got a council that’s in hock to Baillie Gifford, in hock to **abrdn** and in hock to the big Canadian pension fund that built the big St James Quarter,” Mr Fox said, adding: “They’re not in any way consciously connecting to the needs of people for housing in this city which is in crisis and has been for a long time, the wealth inequalities, the needs of ordinary citizens.

“That’s what dictated politics in this city for probably the last decade, that’s where they’re going wrong.

“The trouble is they’re running the city against the interests of the citizens of the city and that’s certainly what I intend to challenge. I don’t intend to take the advice of officials presented at council meetings as read, as the last word on a subject.”

One of the key ambitions of SSP members is having council tax replaced with an income-based “Scottish Service Tax”.

He said: “Those who earn the least and whose income is at the lower level should pay a lower tax, that’s not the case with the council tax.

“If your income is under £15,000 a year you wouldn’t pay anything and then as it went up, the better-off in the city, of which there are plenty, would pay a damn sight more than they do just now.”

Whilst appreciating it wouldn’t be easy to achieve, he said his experience as a political minority in the Scottish Parliament “stands me in good stead for the council”.

He added: "I've seen what difference a socialist councillor makes; people can be forgiven, I understand the reasons for it, for forgetting what the Scottish Socialist Party achieved, but it was my bill to abolish NHS prescription charges that led to their disappearance in Scotland."

And he explained working with other parties will be imperative to bringing about change in Edinburgh.

"Being one socialist councillor when there's 56, 55 others that aren't socialist, that's a difficult job, that's a difficult journey and it's not for the faint hearted – you have to try and make coalitions when you can but often you'll be on your own."



Colin Fox with Kenny Macaskill MP outside Bute House at the RMT protest on 31 January 2022 PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

However, one of the greatest challenges of local election campaigning is mobilising voters, Mr Fox said.

He added: "Turnout in the local government elections is the

poorest of them all; last time the turnout was below 40 per cent. I think it'll be the same, possibly even less this time round.

“The trouble is it's the relevance issue, nobody in this ward knows who their councillor is, they know the council empties their bins, they don't know much more about it, they don't really engage with the council. So the idea of electing people to serve in the council is a bit remote.

“People in Inch, Gracemount, Gilmerton Dykes, Southhouse or Burdiehouse, when you tell them their ward is called Liberton/Gilmerton they live in neither of those areas – Liberton's considered quite a posh area in the Southside.”

All candidates standing in Liberton/Gilmerton are:

- Lezley Marion Cameron, Labour and Co-operative Party
- James Demare Christie, Scottish Family Party: Pro-Family, Pro-Marriage, Pro-Life
- Philip Daggart, Scottish Conservative and Unionist
- Colin Fox, Scottish Socialist Party
- Lesley MacInnes, Scottish National Party (SNP)
- Martha Mattos Coelho, Scottish National Party (SNP)
- Ishrat Measom, Labour and Co-operative Party
- Abu Meron, Alba Party for independence
- John Nichol, Scottish Green Party
- Madeleine Rani Frances Planche, Scottish Liberal Democrats

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news agency : funded by the BBC, provided by the local news sector, and used by qualifying partners. Local Democracy Reporters cover top-tier local authorities and other public

service organisations.