

# **Council elections 2022 – Conservatives publish a manifesto for their 20 candidates**

**A ‘spring clean’ of the city’s streets and scrapping most Spaces for People measures are among the plans unveiled by the Edinburgh Conservatives as they launched their election manifesto.**

Tory candidates gathered outside the City Chambers on Friday (April 8) to officially launch the party’s 2022 Edinburgh Council manifesto.



17 of the 20 Conservative candidates for the 2022 election with a few MSPs for support Photo ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter Group leader Iain Whyte, who is standing for re-election in Craigentinny/Duddingston after serving as a councillor in Inverleith since 2007, described it as “a continuation of things we have been calling for throughout the council term”.

“Things like cleaning up our streets, that’s one of our main themes,” he said.

“We want to do a spring clean immediately after the election, we’d then make sure we’d enforce all the rules about litter, about dumping, about dog fouling and make sure that things stay clean after that and then look at improving our bin service.”

Detailing proposals for changes to public services, transport, education, council culture and housing, the manifesto contains over 80 individual pledges which the Tories say will ‘Clean Up’ Edinburgh.

A key promise contained in the 20-page booklet is a commitment to remove most of the Spaces for People (SfP) active travel routes, which were introduced during the pandemic and have since re-branded as Travelling Safely.

Mr Whyte said the move would “restore the roads to the way they were before”.

However, he added where there has been vocal support from communities, bike lanes and extended pavements will be retained.

“In a few, like outside schools, it’s been very clear that the public support those so we would retain them but I’d like them to be done with permanent infrastructure that looks good rather than some of the cobbled together stuff we have at the moment,” he said.

“We’ve got a very simple promise right at the top; we will not make changes to your roads or traffic unless it’s supported by the people here in Edinburgh.”

Also included in the manifesto are pledges to set up a ‘grafitti taskforce’, put communal bins underground where possible, oppose more parking fees and scrap plans for a workplace parking levy.

In addition, the party wants to review the recently-agreed Low Emission Zone, arguing that if the Scottish Government “insists” on Edinburgh having one then it should cover only Princes Street “as this would remove any remaining polluting buses and be far cheaper to enforce”.

Mr Whyte continued: “Civic pride has dropped away over a long period but it’s really noticeable in the last five years of SNP/Labour rule but it has dropped dramatically.

“You can see that in the state of repair of the public areas of the city, you can see it in the state of the cleanliness of

the city and I don't think it's that much of a challenge to sort that out.

"There is money available, we had a budget this year that showed that over two or three years you could save £12 million within the council's current budget envelope. We would reinvest that in that civic pride and that's what it's about and that's how it's achievable."



New Conservative candidates for 2022 – Neil Cuthbert, Emma Gilchrist, Hugh Findlay, Stuart Herring, James Hill, Christopher Cowdy, Marie Clari Munro, Teresa Perchard and Tim Jones PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

With 20 candidates standing across the city's 17 wards and 32 elected councillors required for a majority in the chamber, co-operation will be essential if the Tories are to claim victory – but the group leader remained tight-lipped on the subject of which party he'd prefer to work alongside in the next administration.

He said: "Right now it's to tell where that would go. All of

these things are much more for the day after the election and onwards, what we're doing today is setting out what we want to change in the city, I think the public will support that and if we get a strong vote then that absolutely puts us in a good place to talk to other people about implementing it."

The manifesto also calls for "new leadership at both political and organisation levels", although Mr Whyte stopped short of calling for the resignation of the council's Chief Executive, Andrew Kerr, despite tabling a motion of no confidence in him at a council meeting last month.

"I would ask him to think about it," he said. "From our point of view he's given us persistent reassurance that everything is okay and that the culture has changed, but the evidence we keep seeing from different enquiries is the same issues keep coming up; people are afraid to bring things forward in case they're victimised, clients in some cases can't get things put forward and we even see cases where people have been disciplined but not thrown out of the council's employment even though they've had multiple occasions of misdeeds."





James Hill Conservative candidate for Almond PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

Meanwhile, candidate for Almond, James Hill, said at the manifesto launch: "I live in the Muirhouse area which has its own unique set of issues and I've seen what the current administration has done, or hasn't done, and I just felt it was time that I needed to make a stand for everybody who lives in the whole of Almond and that's what got me into this process."

Mr Hill, who works for Openreach and is running for public office for the first time, added: "The people I've spoken to in the ward they do have their local issues along the lines of the closure of libraries, bus reductions and the building of estates around the greenbelt and the greenspaces being eroded.

"A Tory-led council will consider everything that is being said to us and we'll make good on the promises that we make."



Emma Gilchrist Conservative candidate for Pentland Hills PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

In the neighbouring Pentland Hills ward, self-employed chartered surveyor Emma Gilchrist is standing to fill the seat of departing Conservative councillor Sue Webber, who was elected as a Lothian MSP last year.

She explained her job requires expertise on many of the same subjects councillors tackle from day-to-day: "Buildings, roads, street lights, refuse and sewage."

"I've always worked in the private sector," she added. "I've never worked in the public sector before and I'm quite shocked by the wastage. There seems to be a lot of money spent and it's our council tax money and I would like there to be an open book policy."

And the candidate stressed voters she's spoken with in Pentland Hills want "a really good public transport system", adding the current system in place in Edinburgh has been "hacked away at".

She said: “The bus system’s been reduced and voters don’t see the point in putting in trams or cycle routes when you’re reducing a bus route that worked.”

## **by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter**

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