

Council elections 2022 – Simita Kumar – Southside/Newington Ward

Name Simita Kumar

Political Party SNP

Ward Southside / Newington

What is your story?

This is my first time running for council – I'm excited to represent such a diverse ward like Southside/Newington. I was previously based at the old Sick Kids at Sciennes working in Oncology and Haematology before going on to deliver workshops for children and young people with long term health conditions.

I studied Psychology with Criminology and have a Masters in health research. I've worked in the NHS since 2015 on a range of public health topics and am currently working in Screening and Immunisation.

My background working in health and social care makes me well-placed not only to help people using these services, but also to help drive change. I hope my experiences working in and with the community will help me become a good councillor to advocate for my constituents.

What are the main issues you will

campaign on – both as a party and personally?

My campaign will focus on three key areas: families, communities, and inequalities; legislating short term lets; and improving and maintaining our parks, roads, pavements – making sure everyone can get around our community safely.

Personally, my passion is working with children, families, and helping anyone impacted by inequalities, whether as a result of income, gender or any other factor. I am a woman of colour and come from a working-class family, so I deeply understand the need to reduce inequalities and achieve a level playing field for all.

Currently, there is a 20-year gap in life expectancy between people from the least and most deprived areas. I worry about the impact of rising energy costs and the overall cost of living has on families and communities who need the most help. It will have a domino effect on a person's health and wellbeing – both physically and psychologically. We can counteract the harmful policies of the Tory UK Government, and with the help of the SNP led Scottish Government, we can close the gaps in life expectancy, poverty-related attainment, and other inequalities in our Ward.

Another priority area is the legislation of short term lets. Edinburgh alone has around one third of all short term lets in Scotland. There is a need to ensure that we have more properties available for use by local residents who are experiencing rising rental costs and a shortage of genuinely-affordable homes. We also need to continue to build more Council and energy efficient homes to ensure we're tackling current housing issues.

I've also heard from people in the Ward already of the need to invest in our everyday services: our roads, waste and street

cleaning, libraries, and parks. We will be setting out ambitious plans in the coming weeks of the campaign to show the further improvements we can deliver in the next term.

What do you consider to be your or your party's achievements or legacy during the last council session?

The SNP administration in coalition with Labour has achieved a lot despite Brexit, COVID, and the opposition!

We have paid out more than £16m in support to individuals and families who needed it most through COVID. There have been major regeneration projects despite shortage of materials and labour due to a hard Brexit. We've also established a Poverty Commission to hear the lived experience of poverty in Edinburgh and outline the actions needed to end poverty in Edinburgh even as we support 68,000 school meal payments and deliver 14,000 food boxes to families who needed them.

We know how important housing is to enabling people to take advantage of the opportunities in Edinburgh, a programme of building 20,000 affordable homes, hitting the 2020 carbon target to safeguard our environment and making Edinburgh a greener place to live in with even more green flag parks with more allotments, more community growing spaces, more wee forests with 50,000 more trees. There is a lot to be truly proud of.

But we're also learning and evolving and focusing on progress we still need to make. I'm enthusiastic about the future! Our list of candidates is truly a representation of a diverse Edinburgh: gender-balanced, with our range of ages, backgrounds, diverse work experiences and ethnicities. We have parents, young people, new Scots, and old Scots, to name a few – it's exciting!

What is the thing that few people would know about you?

I'm originally from Fiji Islands and moved to Scotland when I was 17. So that should explain my 'accent'. I apparently have a Scottish twang which is a mix of everything I've picked up growing up. Fiji has given me my love for all things rugby (especially 7s rugby!). I also took up wild swimming with friends in the past year – not as tropical as the South Pacific but the North Sea sure does wake you up!

I'm also a strong advocate for achieving action around climate change. For many island nations, climate change is not theoretical, it's not something that might impact future generations. It's already here and it's devastating to think that many islands will disappear in our lifetime. It also makes me proud that Scotland is leading the way on climate change, and I hope I get to be part of the SNP administration to help us achieve this further.

