

Edinburgh's Liberal Democrats criticised for "fake newspapers" during election campaign

Edinburgh's Liberal Democrats have been slammed for handing out "fake newspapers" during their campaign for the upcoming general election.

The party has come under fire after voters in Edinburgh West received a newspaper-style leaflet titled the 'Edinburgh West Herald'.

A headline said the choice was between the Lib Dem's Christine Jardine, who has been the constituency's MP since 2017, or "more failure with the SNP".

SNP's Edinburgh West candidate Euan Hyslop described it as "misleading propaganda disguised as journalism" and said there were already "enough bad faith actors in our public realm spreading opinion as fact".

However a Scottish Lib Dem spokesperson argued that "all political parties use this form of communication".

They said the party was "proposing and rolling out guidelines for these campaign leaflets which will see all of them clearly identified as being from and paid for by the Liberal Democrats on the front page".

They added: "This goes further than political parties' legal

requirements which only state that a tiny imprint is needed. It's crucial that this campaigning literature states clearly it comes from a political party.

Hyslop, who is also a city councillor for Drum Brae/Gyle, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: "It's an ongoing issue that we have to deal with in west Edinburgh.

"However, I know that many local people have complained in the past and nothing has been done to prevent it and nothing will change when they receive complaints this time either.

"I feel sorry for the volunteers who deliver them, many of whom I know as good local people that care about their community. In conversation with them many believe that they're doing a local service, delivering a local update with local information about the community."

The paper in question's front page features a photo of Jardine, urging readers to "re-elect a strong voice as our MP".

The party has previously faced criticism for distributing campaign material which have the appearances of newspapers, including in Edinburgh during the 2021 Holyrood election.

Earlier this year the Society of Editors vowed to "name and shame those who continue to attempt to pull the wool over voters' eyes" by disguising leaflets as newspapers.

It said: "Not only does this absurd practice damage democracy and undermine public trust in both politics and the news media, it is also insulting to the electorate who are not stupid and expect officials and candidates to communicate with them in an open and transparent manner."

Mr Hyslop said: "We know the Lib Dems won't change tack on this, so we are focused on running our own positive campaign

and speaking to residents on doorsteps across west Edinburgh.

“From the conversations I’ve had, many former Lib Dem voters here are switching to Labour and the SNP because they want change here in west Edinburgh.

“Handing out fake newspapers is one thing, actually fighting to improve services is another entirely. At the minute, Edinburgh West residents only get one of those from their local MP.”

A Scottish Lib Dem spokesperson said: “The Lib Dems are the only party with a clear plan to save and protect local journalism from the existential threat they face from big tech companies, social media and the shift towards online news. We’re calling for a levy on very large social media companies to provide financial support for local journalism. We have a duty to lead by example and promote a diverse and high-quality news ecosystem.”

The candidates standing in Edinburgh West so far are as follows:

- Christine Jardine – Scottish Liberal Democrats
- Euan Hyslop – Scottish National Party
- Michael Davidson – Scottish Labour
- James Puchowski – Scottish Greens
- Michael Banks – Reform UK
- Tam Laird – Scottish Libertarian Party

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter