

General Election 2024: Midlothian candidates face public hustings

Trust was high on the agenda as Midlothian's candidates to become the county's next MP faced the public at a hustings in Dalkeith last night.

Five of the six nominees attended the event at One Dalkeith, in the town centre, with Reform UK candidate Stefan Garbowski unable to take part after his wife tested positive for Covid.

And they faced a grilling from a packed room who wanted to know why they should vote for them and their party.

Hosted by local advocate Malcolm McGregor KC, candidates faced questions from the audience as well as those submitted to organisers Midlothian View ahead of the event.

The first question set the tone as they were asked why the public should trust them to tackle the climate emergency after both Labour and the SNP had dialled back their original net zero targets.

Scottish Labour candidate Kirsty McNeill told the audience she sat on the board of Labour's Climate and Environment Forum and the Climate Coalition.

She said voters would "struggle to find a more ambitious climate policy" from any party other than Labour with a chance of being in government.

While the SNP's Owen Thompson, who is the most recent serving Midlothian MP, said it was important to have "achievable outcomes".

Scottish Liberal Democrat candidate Ross Laird held up his party's pledge to protect people's 'human right to clean air and clean water' with aims to boost green energy and cut the number of domestic flights.

And Conservative candidate Keith Cockburn said his party took climate change seriously but supported a 'sustainable' move away from oil and gas saying it would be 'foolish' not to accept the country relied on the energy sources for some time to come.

Scottish Libertarian Party candidate Daniel Fraser started the hustings by warning the audience they may not like what he had to say.

On climate change he told them: "For the sake of the argument lets say I take climate change seriously".

He then claimed a breakdown in stable families with children was 'bad for the environment' because youngsters needed two of everything and were transported back and forward between homes.

The candidates also faced questions on how they would tackle the housing crisis and raise funds to improve public services.

Faced with an audience of activists, some elected and former councillors and members of the public, the 90-minute hustings was largely good natured with candidates agreeing on what needed to be done to tackle problems but admitting their parties had different approaches on how to get there.

And they were united when confronted by one audience member who called for an end to spending on the war in Ukraine with

all candidates insisting support for the besieged country was vital from the United Kingdom – except Mr Fraser who did not support spending money on war.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter