

General Election 2024 – Midlothian candidates to face each other at a public hustings

**Candidates fighting to represent
Midlothian at Westminster following
next month's general election will
face each other at a public
hustings this week.**

The cost of living crisis, immigration and education are all expected to be high on the agenda as the nominees are quizzed by members of the public at the event in Dalkeith on Thursday evening.









Midlothian has been represented by Owen Thompson, SNP, since he won back his seat in 2019 after losing it by a narrow margin two years earlier to Scottish Labour's Danielle

Rowley.

Mr Thompson is standing for his party again at the July 4 election hoping voted will return him to the House of Commons.

Originally from Loanhead, Owen served as a councillor in Midlothian for ten years, the last two as council leader, before he was first elected as the county's MP in 2015.

He is a vocal supporter of independence and says his campaign is based on standing up for the people of Midlothian during the cost of living crisis caused by the 'abject failure' of the UK Conservative Government.

Speaking as he launched his campaign, he said: "The people of Scotland deserve better than the indifference shown by unionist parties. This upcoming election is a pivotal moment for Scotland to choose independence, reject the years of Brexit-induced hardship, austerity, and economic chaos, and ensure that our priorities are no longer sidelined."

"I will be focusing on investing in education, mental health support, and creating opportunities that empower our youth to thrive."

Midlothian was a Scottish Labour stronghold for decades before losing the Westminster seat to Thompson in 2015.

In 2017, they regained the seat in a fierce battle by just 895 votes, before losing it back to the SNP two years later who won with more than 5,700 votes.

Charity boss Kirsty McNeill is the candidate for Scottish Labour this time around and was a political adviser to former Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

Her priorities include tackling poverty and she has pledged to fight to ensure Midlothian receives a fair share of funding from national government as well as tackling NHS waiting lists.

Kirsty said: "I passionately believe we can create a poverty-free Scotland and give everyone the ability to get on and not just get by. If elected my number one priority will be putting money back in people's pockets, through new high-quality jobs for local people, support for local businesses and high streets and a relentless focus on what works for family finances."

Scottish Conservative candidate Keith Cockburn is also vocal about the lack of funding Midlothian receives as one of the fastest growing communities in Scotland.

He has pointed to the state of the county's roads as an example of failure by the Scottish Government to recognise the need for a cash injection in Midlothian.

And his campaign was boosted earlier this month after the Prime Minister included Mayfield, in the county, among 30 towns he pledged will receive £20million investment from a UK Conservative Government.

He said: "The £20 million worth of funding from the UK Government would be a major boost for the local economy and help to deliver on the priorities facing people in Mayfield.

"It is welcome that the money would be delivered directly to Midlothian Council who are best placed to decide how this £20 million will be spent in our communities.

"That direct investment is in sharp contrast to the SNP who have imposed savage and sustained cuts on Mayfield for years."

Liberal Democrat candidate Ross Laird is no stranger to standing in elections and was the party's candidate in 2017 when he came fourth and in 2010 when he fared better than coming in third behind Labour and the SNP.

He believes people in Midlothian are ready for change, both at

Westminster and Holyrood,

He said: "People in Midlothian and across the UK deserve high quality health and education services. I am passionate about giving young people the best possible start in life, prioritising health and social care, growing our economy and addressing climate change.

"Now is the time for change. If elected I will be a hard-working champion and a fresh voice for Midlothian."

Reform UK's candidate Stefan Garbowski is a joiner who moved to Scotland from Poland nearly 20 years ago and has British citizenship.

He said: "I have become increasingly concerned about the pressure of illegal immigrants on our housing, jobs, NHS and other services whilst British people are being put at the back of the queue. I am also extremely concerned about indoctrination of school children and the constant sexualisation of them.

"I would support the banning of transgender ideology and critical race theory in primary and secondary schools. British values, including freedom of speech are being lost. I would like to see a return to personal liberty and free speech for all. "

Daniel Fraser, Scottish Libertarian Party candidate is a former music teacher who now works as a self-employed window cleaner as well as being a stay at home dad.

He is critical of the damage he says lockdown did to the economy describing the 'cost of living crisis' as a 'cost of state' crisis.

He said: "Many constituents in midlothian seem to be disenchanted with the political system at large as of late. The cost of living crisis, NHS waiting times and uncontrolled,

illegal immigration seem to be at the top of the list of concerns for most.

“The UK government shut down enormous sections of the economy and handed out stimulus pay by simply creating money out of thin air, and this is the reason prices are rising so rapidly. The state shouldn’t have the power to confine people to their homes or type whatever they want into their own bank accounts.”

All six candidates have been invited to the hustings, which is being hosted by Midlothian View at One Dalkeith, Eskdail Court, Dalkeith at 7.30pm.

So far five candidates have confirmed plans to attend with the Reform UK candidate still unconfirmed.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter