

Edinburgh East and Musselburgh candidates' pitch to voters

Edinburgh East and Musselburgh was previously a Labour safe seat for 80 years before it switched to the SNP in 2015.

But it is once again a key Labour target at this election – with polls suggesting it could be set to turn red.

Tommy Sheppard has been the area's MP for nine years and is asking voters to send him back to Westminster – arguing Labour's landslide victory is guaranteed and the House of Commons will need SNP members to hold it to account.





His main challenger, Labour's Chris Murray says it's time for a change for the area, promising a Keir Starmer government would do "lots" to "see this community prosper and thrive."

The Local Democracy Reporting Service visited Portobello in the heart of the constituency to ask candidates why voters should back them.

Mr Sheppard said: "I have never in my life, and I've been involved in a lot of elections, known a situation where the distance between the outgoing government and the incoming government position is so narrow," Mr Sheppard told the Local Democracy Reporting Service.

"They seem to agree on an awful lot of stuff; the economic framework, Brexit, keeping the caps on subsistence payments for the poor, not taxing the rich, renewing a new generation of trident submarines, a new nuclear power programme.

"So my message to voters is given that's going to change

anyway and they don't need your vote for that to happen, you need to think about putting somebody into the new parliament who will stand up to the new government and represent Scotland's interests, represent Edinburgh's interests and try and push them to be a bit more ambitious than what they're saying they're going to be at the minute."

He said: "The biggest buzz I get in this job is working locally with local people, this is an incredibly vibrant area.

"It's great to have such a vibrant, active, engaged community and I've enjoyed working with them both on campaigning stuff you may consider political but also the community initiatives like getting the Bellfield Community Centre going, Portobello Town Hall re-opened. Now we're working on the George Cinema in Bath Street trying to get something done about that."

Mr Murray said: "This is an amazing area, I've lived in Edinburgh for about eight years and there's so much going for it.

"There's just some really basic stuff holding us back. People are really struggling with the cost of living, even middle class people.

"The NHS is on its knees and needs real help. We all talk a lot about how we want to fix climate change and do something about it but we've got loads of warm words and zero action.

"There's also a real opportunity for a local voice both speaking out on key issues like the sewage crisis of just pumping sewage into the water."

Murray said after working in various public sector jobs over the last 15 years he's "just watched things get worse and worse and worse on a whole host of different issues."

He said: "You hear all the time about community groups trying to make their way through it or people attempting these new ways to bring the community together and they don't have the government at their back.

"We've just seen the biggest rent increases in Europe, there's not enough houses, the population is going up and we're not accommodating that. The cultural sector really needs support and the climate – there's no shortage of people here who think we should do something about that.

"There is an incredibly strong desire to see the Tories out and people are willing to do what it takes this time to make sure that happens. People really felt the interest rate rise under Liz Truss and people are really struggling with the cost of living."

Conservative Edinburgh councillor and general election candidate Marie Clair-Munro said many living in the constituency she had spoken to were worried about tax.

"They're worried about taxes and what Labour will bring in and how it's going to affect their monthly income," she said.

"They are concerned they have worked hard for their house and put a wee bit of money away and that is going to be taken away from them – that is worrying."

She said another hot topic on the doorstep was Labour's plan to start taxing private schools at 20 per cent and the pressure this could place on state education.

"It's those children who are in good state schools like Towerbank, Duddingston, Holyrood and Portobello and parents say to me 'what happens when our classes increase, where does my child fit?'," she said.

"They're worried about the pressure on state schools and pressure on Edinburgh City Council.

"It's a real conversation – this is happening."

She added: "There's no other candidate that was born here, brought up here, state educated here.

"I know what's going on in this area. I know when the grass needs cut, I know when a lightbulb is out, I know when there's a pothole. I am part of this community."

Jane Gould, who is standing with the newly-formed Edinburgh People – but will appear as an independent on the ballot paper due to the party not having enough time to register with the electoral commission – urged voters not to give their support to "career politicians" at this election.

She said: "I am a person that has lived in Edinburgh all my life, I've never been involved in politics before but like a lot of people I'm fed up with the whole political system.

"I know I've had issues and I've tried contacting my own politicians and filling in surveys and petitions and you just never seem to get a proper answer or make any difference.

"What we won't be is career politicians and what we won't be is just people who've been in a political job all their life and have no real experience of life.

"We are people who have lived in the community, who have jobs, we've been parents."

"At the moment we're a small number of people so we can't stand on the doorstep and say 'this is our policy on this, that and the other' because we have a few policies that have been voted on."

Pressed on what Edinburgh People's policies are, she said: "We want to stand up for women's rights, we see it's a bad thing the NHS being privatised and we want to look at reversing that.

"My personal opinion is there's far too much corporate money and corporate influence that comes into politics and that's really what's disrupting the system so we want to tackle that as a key issue."

Scottish Greens' Amanda Grimm said the climate and housing emergencies were high up on people's priorities at this election.

"People are really struggling to afford rent, so one thing the Greens are pushing for, which we're about to bring in in Scotland, is rent controls so people can actually afford to rent a place in the city centre and more social housing as well," she said.

"We know Labour is going to get in by a landslide nationally, so they don't need your vote.

"But we're saying the climate needs your vote. We have five years left, scientists say, to keep global temperatures from breaching safe levels for humanity. So Labour is going to the government during that time and if we don't show them people want stronger action on climate they won't do it.

"Climate change really will affect us all – we're in Portobello right now, the sea level is rising and people are afraid they're going to have to move away from their homes on the coast."

She added: "One thing that really needs to happen is much better investment in our sewage system in Scotland because it's from the Victorian era – it's not fit for purpose with the growing population and increasing rainfall and storms.

"So the Greens through out transformative economic policies would raise the money to invest in our sewage system so that people can swim in the sea, take their dog for a paddle, take their kids out, kayak; whatever they want to do without worrying they're going to get sick.

“People are feeling really disillusioned, disempowered. unfortunately, that plays into the hands of Conservatives and the status quo. Please don’t lose faith, use your vote positively.”

Reform UK and Liberal Democrat candidates were unavailable for interviews.

All candidates standing in Edinburgh East and Musselburgh:

- Scottish Liberal Democrats – DUNDAS, Charles
- Independent – GOULD, Jane Mackenzie
- Scottish Greens – GRIMM, Amanda Faye
- Scottish Conservative and Unionist – MUNRO, Marie-Clair
- Scottish Labour Party – MURRAY, Chris
- Scottish National Party (SNP) – SHEPPARD, Tommy
- Reform UK – WINTON, Derek Steven

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter