

Midlothian MP pledges to fight for fair council funding

Midlothian's new MP has pledge to fight for fairer funding for local services as she marks her first month in the post.

Kirsty McNeill was elected with nearly 50 per cent of all votes to be the new Labour MP for the county at the UK General Election.

And she has vowed to repay the faith voters showed in her at the ballot box by making Midlothian her priority.

A former political adviser to Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown during his time in office, the new MP will juggle constituency work with a ministerial role at the Scotland Office as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State.

But she said her thoughts in her first month were focused on establishing an office in Midlothian so she can carry on working closely with residents who she met during her campaign.

She said: "I know that many folk took a leap of faith when they cast their vote for me because they were ready for change and ready to have a Labour MP in the heart of a Labour Government.

"I don't take that responsibility lightly so the thing I felt most pressing was the need to set up a brilliant constituency

office to ensure people get support.”

Ms McNeil said speaking to people on the streets concern about funding for local services was at the forefront of conversations.

Midlothian Council has said it has a budget gap of over £13million which is expected to rise to over £25million in the next four years.

The MP said that Midlothian is the fastest growing council in Scotland, but required greater investment, adding: “This means our infrastructure isn’t keeping up with all the demands on it – something so many people across Midlothian said was their number one issue.”

The new MP has sat on the boards for a children’s charity and a climate change project, but has stepped down from those roles.

She said: “As much as I loved my work at Save the Children UK I’ve resigned from that and from the other charity and non-profit organisations I was on the boards of so I could focus solely on my roles as Midlothian’s MP and as a Scotland Office minister.

“I’ll continue to champion their brilliant work and all the other community organisations I’ve been involved with over the years. ”

And she said her work in those fields had given her an insight into the hard work ahead.

She said: “What I have learned during my twenty plus years working to tackle child poverty and climate change is that we need to work collaboratively across sectors and backgrounds if we’re to make a dent in some of our greatest challenges.

“No single person or entity is going to have the solution – that is why we need to approach every conversation with an

open mind so we can truly understand each other's challenges and collaborate to trial innovative solutions."

The new MP believes the Labour Government will make a difference to lives of people in Midlothian with its planned changes and projects including the Great British Energy plans which she says will "bring down bills, create good new jobs and help tackle climate change".

But she warned change will not happen overnight.

She said: "We have brought forward transformational proposals on rights for workers, including a genuine living wage delivering a pay rise for tens of thousands of Scots, a ban on exploitative zero-hour contracts and the end of fire and rehire.

"And with the PM and Secretary of State prioritising a 'resetting of relationships' with the Scottish Government there is lots of potential for proper joint working on issues like limiting young people's access to addictive vapes.

"Of course things will take time – there are real long-term consequences of having 14 years of Conservative government. I can't promise everything will improve overnight. But what I can promise is that my colleagues and I will work tirelessly to deliver the change that both Midlothian and Scotland as a whole voted for."

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter