

By-election – Neil Cuthbert Conservative candidate

Neil Cuthbert is standing in the 2024 by-election in Colinton/Fairmilehead as Scottish Conservative candidate.

As a chartered PR practitioner, he has been involved in public affairs and public policy for around 25 years, and previously he worked in the civil service and the Food and Drink Federation. In 2013 he co-founded a business called PA Cooperative Ltd and both established and grew the organisation.

Asked why he stood at the last local government election he was frank and said: “I stood in the election in 2022 because I felt it was the right time to do so in terms of making a contribution to the area and paying back to the city. And I think that in 2022 we had a positive message in Colinton/Fairmilehead. We already have a Conservative councillor, Jason Rust, who’s been here for a long time.

“What I find going round the doorsteps, is that there’s a strong recognition for that, and there’s a feeling that if we have more conservative councillors representing not just this area, but the whole city and the council, then we can have more of an impact.”

In this ward where Labour’s Scott Arthur stood down as a councillor on his election to Westminster, Mr Cuthbert feels the issues are much the same as in 2022 when the Conservatives attracted almost 10% of the first preference votes.

Mr Cuthbert continued: "Roads and pavements come up all the time, something that is almost a constant when we speak to people. But one of the changes from 2022 is that there has been some money spent, and people are able to see the difference it makes. So I think they want, they want to see more of it."

"I think there is a recognition that the council priorities have changed, and part of that is because of there has been a change of administration, and I think a greater voice for the Conservatives, but people want to see more."

Challenged on this as the Conservative group became smaller in 2022 than previously he explained that "it is all about influencing".

He said: "That's the way politics works. it's all about what goes on at the City Chambers. And Edinburgh has got a reasonably unique situation in that we've got a minority administration, but it relies on support of other parties. So the other parties have a voice, and they're able to put forward their priorities."

As for his personal background and why he would make a good councillor he stressed his local connections. He said: "I've lived in Edinburgh since 1997 and I've always actually lived in South Edinburgh. I've always lived in the EH10 postcode."

"I wanted to get involved, because I think you get to the stage where you don't want to complain about things that are happening, you want to make a positive difference. And I can see how, how the council has certain priorities. I don't think the priorities necessarily reflect the people of this area adequately. So I'd like to see more of that."

Mr Cuthbert raised the matter of VAT being imposed on school fees which is being introduced in January 2025 by the UK Government. While there is enough headroom for any additional pupils who move from private schools to those run by the

council, he is adamant that the effects will be felt in Edinburgh where a fifth of pupils attend independent schools.

He said: "I think there's a feeling that it might mean that fewer pupils go to private schools, that would put pressure on the existing local authority schools. And as I say, these are concerns that are expressed on the doorstep.

"And I can appreciate where people are coming from. I live locally. You know, I live in fair mile head. I think I might be so far, and I've not seen all the candidates, but I think I might be the only candidate who's actually in farewellhead. And, you know, I do have that experience of knowing what it's like. I mean, this area is, you know, "

"Edinburgh is a very diverse city, and we've got areas of the city like Cramond which are at sea level, and we've got areas here which are quite high up. So in the winter, we tend to get a lot more snow than other areas. We need to prioritise the different areas of the city for the needs that they have. And I think since I've moved here, I found that it's not necessarily reflecting the lived experience in this area."

There are 12 candidates standing in the by-election which will be held on 14 November. [Their names are published here.](#)



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