

Colinton/Fairmilehead by-election candidates set out stalls

Candidates vying to become Edinburgh's newest councillor have set out their stalls ahead of a by-election next week.

Voters living in the Colinton/Fairmilehead ward will head to the polls on Thursday, November 14, to elect one of 12 hopefuls to represent them in the City Chambers.

The contest was triggered after Scott Arthur, a Labour councillor since 2017 who also served as the city's transport convener, stepped down after becoming the new MP for Edinburgh South West in July





As the campaign enters its final days, the Local Democracy Reporting Service has been speaking to candidates about the local issues they are focusing on and what their priorities would be if elected.

We also asked each candidate to state a policy they'd introduce on day one if they had the power to do so.

David Henry, Independent

Independent candidate David Henry is an entrepreneur who grew up in Colinton. His first business, opened in 1985, was a Laser Disc shop in Tollcross. More recently he ran a pub in Longstone and now produces a retro music TV show 'Blast From The Past' which he creates on his laptop at home.

After voting Labour most of his life he joined the SNP in 2014 and was a local branch secretary for seven years before ending his membership in 2021 "after discovering there were missing funds". He subsequently became one of the first people to join the Alba Party but left it in May this year "after a number of women were badly treated by the party".

He wants to see roads in the area fully resurfaced "and not patched every few months" due to "serious injuries for cyclists because of the potholes".

He said: "Roads have been left to crumble thanks to the last Labour Transport Convener Dr Scott Arthur. Cycle lanes were created on the cheap but the potholes and roads were not resurfaced first.

"Housing is an issue across Edinburgh and there are thousands of empty council homes, I have found some in the ward. The council is paying millions to house 5,500 homeless in temporary accommodation while they have empty council properties. I want this to be reversed.

"Social care is under threat and I will be fighting against any attempts to cut the funding as that would cost more elsewhere.

"The council has for years been making short term decisions to

cut budgets. Not only is this foolish as short term cuts can actually cost you more over the long term. This is why the council has made the budget issues worse.”

If elected and you could introduce one policy of your choosing on day one what would it be?

“I would be proposing a motion that the council must focus on delivering its essential services and not waste funds on non-essential services and projects.”

Mairianna Clyde, Scottish National Party

SNP candidate Mairianna Clyde is a recently-retired academic with a doctorate in history, latterly teaching a module on the history of empires with the Open University where she worked for over 20 years. A strong believer in lifelong learning, she is currently studying for a degree in economics.

She said her three priorities for Colinton/Fairmilehead are “housing, roads, services especially schools”.

She said: “I’m interested on the nitty gritty of finance and would want to look at this very closely. Procurement, for instance. Or the council’s borrowing and investing powers.

“As a historian I was interested in ‘municipal socialism’ – an era before WW1 when municipal governments ran things like gas, buses, electricity and generated income from this. This all seemed to die away in the 1920s but in Edinburgh we’re still left with Lothian buses.

“Councils used to be able to issue bonds and even mortgages. I wonder if these powers still exist and why it died away.”

She added: “I am concerned about the number of frail elderly

people living alone who may require social care and the cuts to budgets for this.

“Perhaps this is because they’re the only people that answer their doors to me when I’m out canvassing.

“The first step would be to identify these residents who may not be known to social services and find out their needs. The council runs a welfare and debts service but most who need it have never heard of it.”

If elected and you could introduce one policy of your choosing on day one what would it be?

“I’d like to investigate how the council could generate more revenue from enterprises using its borrowing powers to invest in ventures like energy generation even if it was only for its own uses.

“For instance solar panels being put on the flat roofs of council buildings such as schools. In general I would like to move to a situation where more of the council’s budget was generated locally and it had more autonomy in terms of the income it could realise and was less reliant on grants from central government.”

Bonnie Prince Bob, Independent

Independent candidate Bonnie Prince Bob is an artist, producer and film maker, who previously stood for election to the council in 2022. He hosts a show on X, formerly Twitter, which discusses issues facing the city and critiques the response of the local authority to these.

He said he’s standing in the by-election “because I’m disgusted by the corruption that’s allowed our city to be sold

off to corporate interests and private developers”.

He said: “The Capital’s party political class have turned their back on our communities, cutting essential services and prioritising tourists over the very people who live here.

“I’m opposed to the neoliberal doctrine that prioritises profit above people. Whether at a local or national level, Neoliberal party-politics has failed society.

“Our current Labour government refuses to end arms sales to Israel thus making them complicit in the genocide of the Palestinians. The city council is run by a Labour administration, the labour Party’s position on Gaza is reprehensible. As far as I am concerned, a vote for Labour is a vote for genocide.”

Bonnie Prince Bob said there is a “disconnect between the council and the citizens of Edinburgh,” evidenced by “alterations to the Capital’s landscape, the proliferation of student accommodation, outrageously expensive and unnecessary cycling infrastructure and a downright contempt for our working class communities, the recent closure of ‘The People’s Story’ museum – without consultation – being a prime example”.

If elected and you could introduce one policy of your choosing on day one what would it be?

“If I were elected I would make three key demands: 1) That the council open their books. Let’s allow residents groups and trade unions to scrutinise who is getting paid, where the money is going and how much money there is. 2) An audit of all the buildings and land currently held in the common good and a policy that any profits received from land and buildings held in the common good, are returned to the common good fund, to be reinvested in communities. 3) That any funds raised from the tourist tax is also returned to the common good fund to be reinvested in our local communities, social housing and services. The kids need youth groups and activities, we don’t

need any more cycle paths for middle class people and their ten grand tricycles.”

Sheila Gilmore, Scottish Labour

Labour candidate Sheila Gilmore previously served as an Edinburgh city councillor from 1991 to 2007, including eight years as the authority’s housing convener, and was the MP for Edinburgh East from 2010 to 2015. She also has 20 years experience working in family law, mainly providing a legal aid service and often representing women who had experienced domestic violence, and was a founding member of Edinburgh Rape Crisis.

Ms Gilmore said she wants to return to elected politics as local services are “central to all our daily lives”. She said: “I felt that I can make a real contribution based on my experience to help improve those services and involve communities in those services.

She said her top priorities for Colinton/Fairmilehead are making walking safer by prioritising pavement repairs, more and safer pedestrian crossings and good street lighting; working with local communities to make sure they are fully involved in the planning of traffic calming and traffic management schemes; and protecting and improving our green spaces.

“I see the task of a councillor to push for the best use of the funds available,” she said. “When I see a problem, a blockage or am faced with poor implementation I try to get down to the detail , finding out what has gone wrong with the process and what needs changed.”

She added: “We need some action that can reduce the numbers of

households reliant on temporary accommodation.

“I would ‘spend to save’ by buying existing properties and using part of the grant funding for affordable housing to do this and make rents the same as existing council housing. Why? It is quicker than building new (getting planning permission as well as actual build) and it is environmentally sensible too.”

If elected and you could introduce one policy of your choosing on day one what would it be?

“Assuming this is the magic wand question ie money not a problem, I would increase funding for unpaid carers to get regular respite care.”

Neil Cuthbert, Scottish Conservatives

Conservative candidate Neil Cuthbert lives in Fairmilehead and has run a small public relations business for the last 10 years. As a dad he has worked with other parents to improve facilities at a local primary school and campaigned against its use as a polling place for elections.

He said: “Living locally in the area I know it’s a great place to live and bring up a family. But there are also problems and things that can be done to improve Edinburgh Council services in Colinton and Fairmilehead. I want to try to make a difference and help get things done to make our part of Edinburgh even better.”

He said if elected he’d focus on fixing potholes in roads and making pavements safer; preserving and improving the green spaces; and “ensuring residents’ views on bus and cycle lanes and bin hubs are heard by the council”.

He said: "Over the last few weeks I have spoken with hundreds of local residents and have been struck by how many people are concerned about the state of our roads.

"I am very concerned that the SNP-Greens in government have cut City of Edinburgh Council's funding by more than £100 million in real terms over the last 13 years.

"I will work with colleagues and argue for a fairer deal for residents of the city. Edinburgh has a growing population and this will bring additional pressure on local public services.

"With two Conservative councillors representing Colinton/Fairmilehead I know we can achieve much more and make sure this area is not neglected by Edinburgh Council."

If elected and you could introduce one policy of your choosing on day one what would it be?

"One policy I would like to introduce on day one would be to ensure Edinburgh Council concentrates its focus on issues within its statutory obligations and local remit, concentrating on matters on which it has clear responsibility. I would end unnecessary and self serving discussions on international affairs which are better dealt with elsewhere."

Louise Spence, Scottish Liberal Democrats

Lib Dem by-election candidate Louise Spence lives within the ward with her family and has a background in finance. She previously ran her own business and is now a finance director for a company in the food industry. A mum of two young children, she was formerly a school parent council chair and says she's "passionate about education and making sure children get the best start in life".

She said: "I think our area needs a local councillor who lives in the area and who really understands local problems.

"The issue raised with me most by local residents is the state of local roads and pavements. So many are in a damaged and dangerous state. So, this would be key for me.

"Protecting local schools from cuts to their budgets and protecting our precious south Edinburgh greenbelt would also be key priorities.

"As a councillor, you get access to information and access to decision making in a way others cannot. I'm really excited about what I could possibly do, especially as a new councillor who has just been elected.

"I think the biggest challenge is that people are paying more and more in council tax but not seeing improvements in services. A lot of that is because of the terrible cuts being made to the council's budget by the Scottish Government.

"When budgets are so tight, we need to make sure every penny of public money is being spent wisely and efficiently. My professional experience as an accountant and finance director means I would work to make sure the council is getting value for money."

If elected and you could introduce one policy of your choosing on day one what would it be?

"I'd like the council to take tougher action on companies which take too long to carry out works on roads and pavements. In a place like Colinton/Fairmilehead, even minor roadworks can cause major disruption, especially given how close we are to the city bypass. Yet too often, companies put in place closures and restrictions and then don't do any work for days."

Grant Lidster, Reform UK

Reform's candidate Grant Lidster lives in Gorgie. Before retiring he worked in pensions management for Diageo, followed by a period running his own property management business. Recently he led a campaign against new parking restrictions in Gorgie which he said had caused chaos on his street.

He said in doing so he was "disappointed at the way the council has operated and want to play my part in making it more efficient and responsive to people".

He added: "Two grown up children and two grandchildren make me want to do all I can for the future of our country. I believe Reform UK policies are good for our country, good for Edinburgh and good for both the current and next generation.

"I will focus on improving roads and pavements for everyone. I believe schools are for learning, not woke ideologies. I will push to scrap the costly net zero policies the council has adopted over and above government mandates. And I will challenge the diversity and inclusion bureaucracies.

"I aim to be a listening councillor who stands up for local people to give our community a better deal from Edinburgh Council."

Marc Wilkinson, Independent

Edinburgh-based businessman Marc Wilkinson runs Pure Pizza in Morningside and is the founder of the Edinburgh People. Last year he launched an initiative offering everyone in Edinburgh a free pizza to help with the cost-of-living crisis. In total 8,500 were handed out, earning him a local hero award from MP Ian Murray.

He said: "For every vote in the City Chambers I will take

instruction on how I should vote from the majority of the Fairmilehead and Colinton ward members of Edinburgh People. I will be your true representative in the City Chambers free from the whip of a national party.

“I am applying to you to give me a job. The job of working for you as *your* councillor in the City Chambers and representing the residents of the Fairmilehead and Colinton ward.

“In 2023 I launched People to People to campaign on issues affecting the local Edinburgh Community. One of these issues included how local people were not sufficiently consulted regarding planning applications for 5G Telecom Masts and that their objections were being ignored.

“So, I put in place a neighbourhood notification service informing the 1,000 nearest addresses to proposed masts. The Edinburgh Council was only informing immediate neighbours within 20 meters as per the rules that also apply to a garden shed.

“I will hold twice weekly surgeries. I will take on cases from throughout the city as many people do not receive the support they deserve from their own ward councillors.”

Mr Wilkinson said if elected his priorities would include increasing the roads budget, reducing the number of 4-way traffic lights, reinstating public toilets and allowing non-compliant vehicles to drive into the city’s Low Emission Zone once a week.

Richard Lucas, Scottish Family Party

Scottish Family Party candidate Richard Lucas has lived in Colinton since 2002 was a teacher at Merchiston Castle School between 1995 and 2018. He founded the Scottish Family Party

“to promote socially conservative values”.

He said: “The Scottish Family Party is small, but we have original and creative policies to improve the lives of Scots. In many areas we can see what’s wrong and how to fix it. So, we take any opportunity to remind people that we’re here and to invite them to investigate our ideas.”

Mr Lucas said as a local councillor his priorities would be improving the quality of housing, preserving the environment and strengthening communities. “Existing local hubs and activities should be encouraged and facilitated to expand their activities,” he said.

Asked what he thought were the biggest challenges facing the city, he said: “Social dysfunction, and the resulting crime, mental health issues and addiction.”

He added: “Money is not always the answer – culture change is also crucial. Responsibility, neighbourliness and faithfulness must be nurtured.”

And on how to address Edinburgh’s housing crisis, he said: “Market forces are part of the solution, diverting people who can’t afford Edinburgh to other areas. The massive immigration into Edinburgh could be shared across other areas. Enhanced family stability reduces the demand for individual housing units. Building on non-green areas within the city boundaries, including as part of wider local regeneration projects, must be expedited.”

If elected and you could introduce one policy of your choosing on day one what would it be?

“I would reform education policy dramatically to bring in stronger discipline and higher academic expectations, and to eliminate political indoctrination and therapeutic culture.”

- The LDRS reached out to the other three candidates,

Daniel Milligan, Mev Brown and Tam Laird, and is awaiting a response.

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter