

Liberal Democrats asked to foot the bill for the Colinton/Fairmilehead by-election

The Conservative group at The City of Edinburgh Council has asked the Liberal Democrats to pay the costs of holding the November by-election in Colinton/Fairmilehead, estimated to be around £80,000.

The one remaining councillor in the ward where there have been three resignations in the last six months, Conservative councillor Jason Rust, has written to the leader of the Liberal Democrat group on the council, Cllr Kevin Lang, asking if his group will pay even a contribution towards the expenses. The costs include printing and posting a poll card to every voter in a ward with 19,000 voters, the cost of printing and posting postal votes for around 4,500 postal voters, payment for venue hire for all polling places, the staff costs for polling, and the costs of staging the electronic count.

The by-election resulted in a resounding [win for the Liberal Democrat](#) candidate, Louise Spence, who then resigned within just seven days. The reason stated was a change in her “personal circumstances”. Ms Spence’s home in Colinton is on the market for sale, and it is understood she will be moving to Dubai with her family. It is also understood that when she

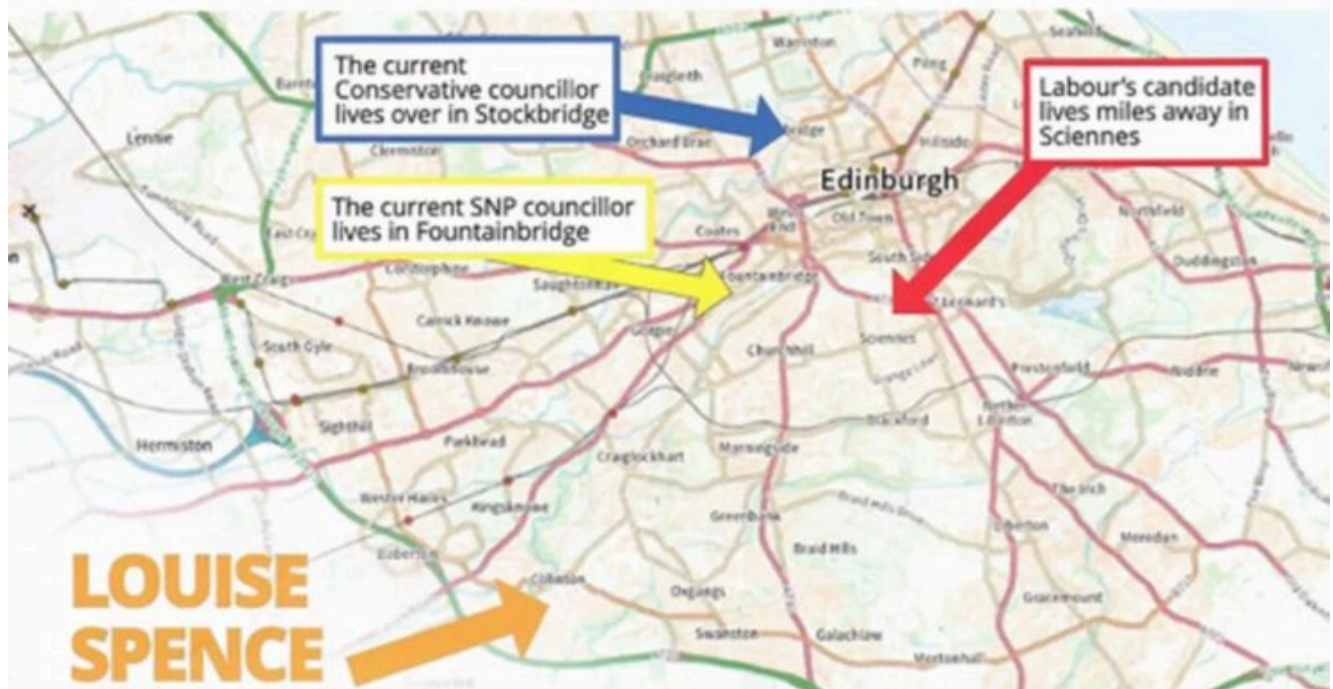
requested of her party that she could work remotely they suspended her – and then she resigned.

We have been advised that Ms Spence has not claimed any salary or expenses for the six days she served as a councillor.

In addition however the Conservative group say that the same property was advertised for let at £3,000 per month for a period between the local government elections in 2022 and the recent by-election, putting the candidate's claim as the local candidate who lived in the ward in some doubt.

The by-election was triggered first of all by the resignation of Scott Arthur who was elected to Westminster in July. And then last week the SNP councillor in the same ward, Marco Biagi, resigned to take up a position as Special Adviser in The Scottish Government. A new by-election date of [23 January 2025](#) had just been announced when Ms Spence resigned.

COLINTON / FAIRMILEHEAD DESERVES A COUNCILLOR WHO LIVES HERE...



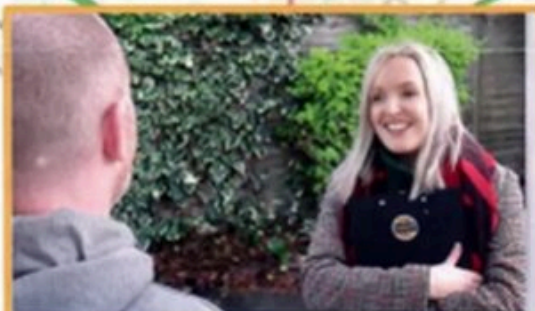
**LOUISE
SPENCE
LIVES HERE IN
OUR COMMUNITY**

***A real local
champion
for Colinton /
Fairmilehead***

***Will always
listen and
put our local
area first***

Louise's local priorities

- ✓ Action to fix our broken roads, pavements and paths.
- ✓ Stopping cuts to local schools.
- ✓ Protecting our precious local greenbelt from development



Local Lib Dem, Louise Spence lives here in the Colinton / Fairmilehead ward with her family. She understands local problems because she lives with them too.

By voting for Louise Spence, you can make sure we have a local councillor who lives here.

She can be the strong local voice we need for our area on Edinburgh Council and a local councillor who gets things done.

Louise Spence - for a new LOCAL councillor who lives here

LETTER

Cllr Rust has also asked about whether the Liberal Democrats will improve their vetting processes in future, and whether it is appropriate for the Liberal Democrat group to publish the home addresses of councillors and candidates in view of the threats and attacks on politicians. He has also questioned Cllr Lang as to his own representation of his constituents since Cllr Lang does not live in the ward he represents. The recent by-election leaflets were peppered with references to the local candidate being the best option.

At the end of last week Council group leader Kevin Lang said: "As a council group, we are feeling a lot of hurt right now. We all worked hard on Louise's campaign and did so in good faith.

"Louise's news was shared with the group for the first time on Thursday and once her changed circumstances were clear, we were in agreement that she had to resign immediately.

"We make no apology for setting ourselves high standards as Liberal Democrat councillors. All of us work hard for our local communities and serve our constituents to the best of our ability."

We are told that Scottish Liberal Democrat leader, Alex Cole Hamilton, supports his statement and has confirmed he was only aware of the circumstances a week after the by-election – the same day as the LibDem group on the council.

A copy of the letter is below:

Jason Rust

Scottish Conservative and Unionist Councillor
for Colinton/Fairmilehead

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Cllr Kevin Lang
Edinburgh Liberal Democrats
c/o 4 Clifton Terrace
Edinburgh EH12 5DR

25 November 2024

Dear Kevin,

Colinton/ Fairmilehead Ward by-election 14th November 2024 ("the by-election")

On behalf of Edinburgh Council Conservative Group I am writing to you in connection with the by-election. We would be grateful for a response on the following points:

When did you and your group first become aware that your local candidate in the by-election was in fact moving from the council ward?

Where was your local candidate in the by-election residing when her property was let out for a period between the 2022 local elections and the by-election?

<https://www.citylets.co.uk/property-rent/colinton-westgarth-avenue-eh13-548244/>

If you and your party were unaware of your candidate's situation, what steps are you taking to improve Liberal Democrat vetting processes so that the electorate can have confidence in whom they are voting?

Have you obtained the costs of the by-election from the Council in terms of hire of polling stations, production of ballot papers, staff time and all other ancillary costs and if so, please could you confirm the total sum?

Will Edinburgh Liberal Democrats make a contribution to meeting that cost?

We are all aware of the threats and attacks on politicians. Given privacy and safety/ security concerns, do you think it was appropriate for your party to specify the addresses/areas of residence of sitting councillors or candidates in the by-election?

Given that you do not reside in the Council ward you were elected to serve, do you feel you can adequately represent your constituents, given the content of your party's literature in the by-election?

Yours sincerely,



Jason Rust
Scottish Conservative and Unionist Councillor for Colinton/Fairmilehead