

Colinton/Fairmilehead by election – questions over costs

It cost the council almost £80,000 to hold a by-election in November, and will cost a similar amount to hold a second by-election next month.

After the November by-election in Colinton/Fairmilehead the newly elected councillor, Liberal Democrat Louise Spence, resigned after just six days in office. It emerged that she was moving to Dubai and a property she owned was on the market. Previously it had been available for rent, although neither Ms Spence or her husband appear to be registered landlords.

Despite several attempts to contact Ms Spence we have had no response to requests for comment. The party suspended her claiming not to have known about her plans to move abroad, but still represent the area remotely.

This sparked fury among the other political groups on the council. One of the criticisms was the matter of cost and apparent waste of public funds. The Edinburgh Reporter asked similar questions just after the by election but the council was not able to quantify more than an estimate of around £80,000 at that time.

Cllr Jason Rust the Conservative councillor in Colinton/Fairmilehead, and the only elected member for the

ward until the January by-election, lodged a formal question over the costs of the November by-election.

He asked that the costs were broken down under the following headings and the Finance Convener supplied some figures as follows:

- (a) hire of polling stations – £3,427.73
- (b) payments to polling station staff – £10,203.05
- (c) payments to election count staff – £406.50
- (d) production of ballot papers – £14,050.35
- (e) publication of notice of poll and all advertising – £468.00
- (f) council staff time – £1,977.33
- (g) any other third-party payments
- (g) all other costs – £46,225.91 for third party and all other costs

The bulk of the costs are therefore unaccounted for in any detail.

The by-election had been triggered by the resignation of former councillor Scott Arthur who was elected to Westminster in July. Following the November count Louise Spence, a candidate who had stood on previous occasions, and most recently at the July General Election, was returned with the largest share of the first preference votes.

It was the first time a Liberal Democrat had been elected in the area, and the party's leader, Alex Cole-Hamilton declared that his party (with four MSPs) was "surging ahead".

Following the November by-election SNP councillor Marco Biagi announced his resignation in the same ward on taking up a job as a special adviser to the government. Mr Biagi is a former MSP and government minister. This means there are two empty spaces on the council to be filled at the January by-election and the candidates have now been declared. [Read the full list here.](#)



The Scottish Liberal Democrats celebrated the win in the Colinton/Fairmilehead by election on 15 November – and their candidate resigned six days afterwards