



Scottish Conservative by-election win

May I begin this newsletter by extending my warmest congratulations to our new councillor in Clackmannanshire East, Denis Coyne. Denis won on first preferences with no need for any “transfer” calculations that often have to happen under the single transferable vote system and he increased the Scottish Conservative vote by just under 10%.

Denis and his wife Isobel have lived in Dollar for many years and during that time they have established a very high profile within so many different local groups and it was clear that they were very highly respected.

The by-election was supposed to happen last March (when the photograph below was taken) but it was cancelled at the last minute. Denis however, and the team led by Alexander Stewart MSP, never stopped campaigning on local issues right throughout 2020 and he fully deserves his win. He will make an excellent councillor and I wish him every success.



Perth City South and Perth City North

Members will see below the results of both the Perth City South and Perth City North by-elections held last Thursday. We did not win in either case but both of our excellent candidates, Andy Chan and Aziz Rehman returned very credible results and I want to thank them both for the outstanding work they put in over a long campaign. I also want to thank Caroline Shiers and James Tweedie.

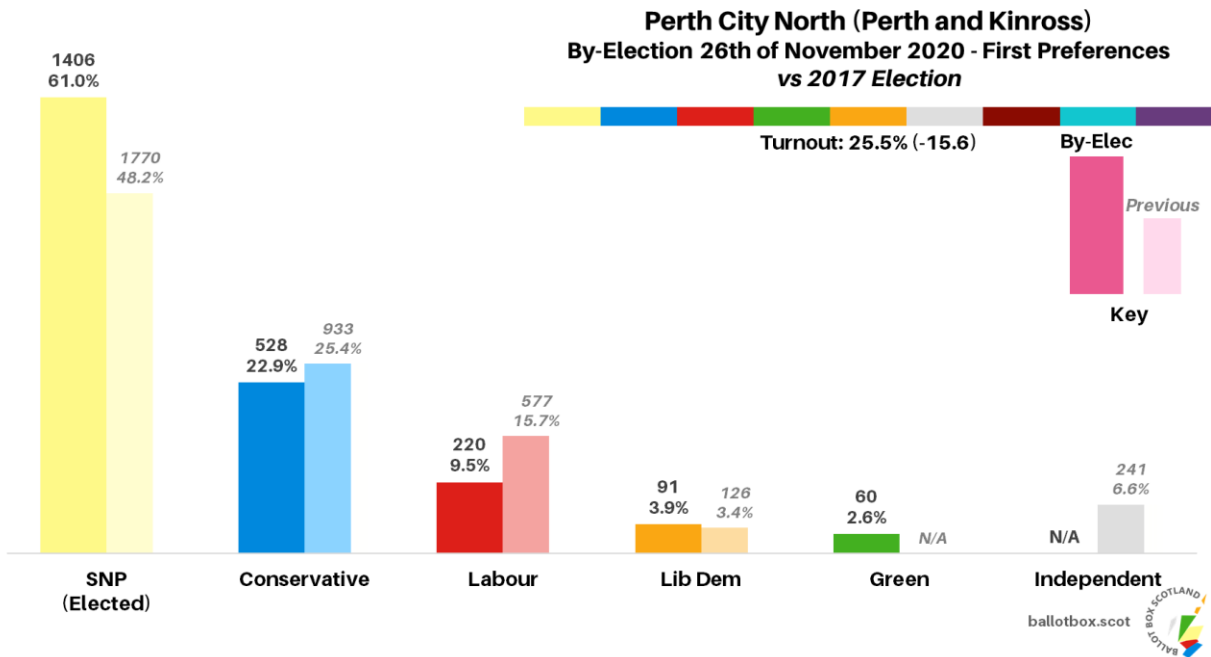
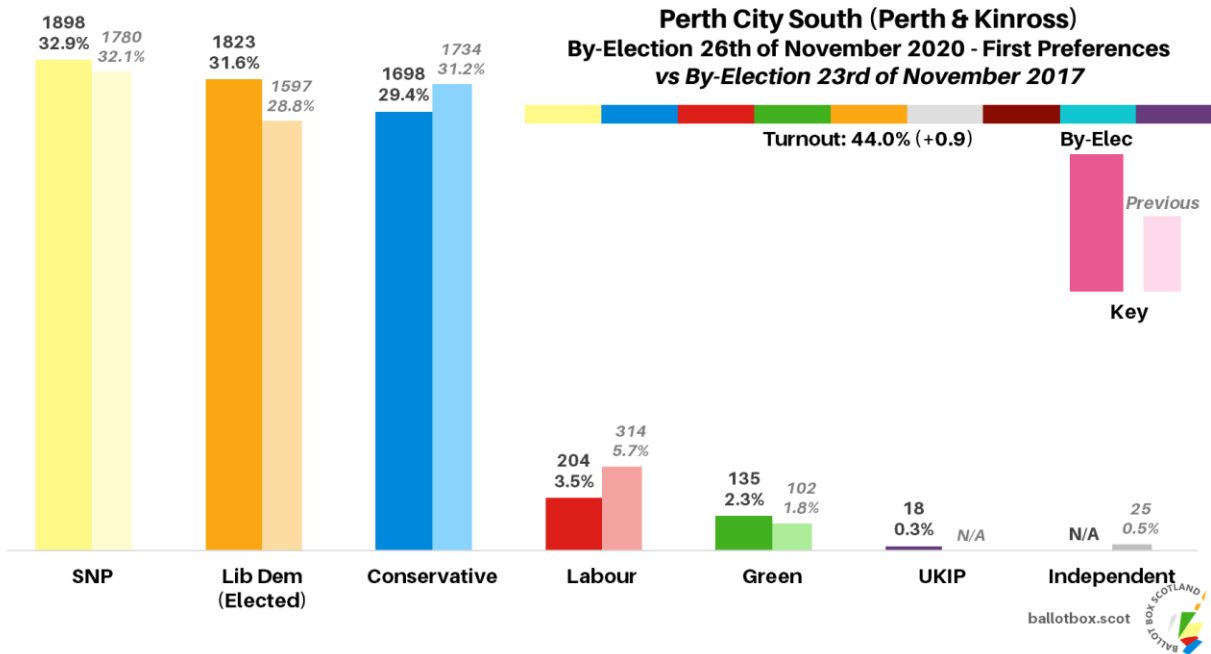
The Liberals took the Perth City South seat from the SNP (very good news for the Unionist vote!) and the SNP held Perth City North as expected.

It was not an easy national backdrop against which to fight by-elections especially as we could not undertake any door to door canvassing as we usually do but our vote held up extremely well. That is due, in no small measure, to the very loyal and committed team who helped deliver our leaflets and undertake the telephoning. I am extremely grateful to them all.

There is little time to waste before starting the Holyrood campaign and I am keen we can build our team around the efforts of both Andy and Aziz.

Never forget, the target is the SNP and I will be doing everything in my power to win Perthshire South and Kinross-shire first past the post. In 2016, we were only 1,400 votes behind!





Rishi Sunak's 2020 Spending Review

The Chancellor Rishi Sunak has just delivered the Spending Review 2020

Please find the key points which apply to Scotland below.

Throughout the pandemic, the UK Government has taken decisive action to protect nearly a million jobs and tens of thousands of businesses across Scotland.

Now Rishi Sunak is going further, confirming the Scottish budget will increase by a total of

£9.5 billion across two years to tackle COVID-19 and boosting funding to rebuild Scotland's communities.

The UK Government has again proved that we stand together. The SNP Government must now stop hoarding money at Holyrood and use funding to protect jobs and support businesses in every part of Scotland.

More funding for the Scottish budget

- The UK Government is providing £9.5 billion for the SNP government spend tackling COVID-19. Throughout 2020-21 the UK Government has boosted the Scottish budget by £8.2 billion and now the Chancellor has announced a further £1.3 billion in COVID-19 funding will flow to the Scottish budget in 2021-22.
- In addition, the Scottish budget will receive an extra £1.1 billion next year thanks to the UK Government's spending plans. Excluding COVID-19 measures, Rishi Sunak's Spending Review will result in an extra £1.1 billion for the Scottish budget in 2021-22.

Supporting jobs across Scotland

- The UK Government will accelerate four City and Growth Deals in Scotland – helping Moray, Tay Cities, Borderlands and the Scottish Islands create jobs and prosperity in their areas. The UK Government is accelerating these deals from 15 to 10 years, driving forward local economic priorities.
- The UK Government is investing in a Global Underwater Hub in the North East. This hub will establish a physical presence in the existing underwater engineering cluster in North East Scotland, alongside satellite offices in North East England and South England. The Hub will harness the expertise of the UK's oil and gas sector, supporting the industry to diversify and encouraging innovation towards clean growth.
- The UK Government has already committed to provide £1.5 billion for City and Growth Deals across Scotland. This includes £500 million for Glasgow, £125 million for Aberdeen, £53.1 million in Inverness, £300 million in Edinburgh, £150 million in Tay Cities, £103 million in Ayrshire, £32.5 million in Moray, £25 million in Argyll and Bute, £65 million in the Borderlands, £50 million in the Scottish Islands, £40 million in Falkirk, and £45.1 million in Stirling.
- The UK Government has announced a new £2.9 billion 3-year Restart programme to provide intensive and tailored support to over a million unemployed people to help them find work.

Increasing spending in every part of the UK

- The Spending Review takes advantages of our departure from the EU to benefit the whole of the UK. Total domestic UK-wide funding will at least match EU receipts, on average reaching around £1.5 billion a year. In addition, to help local areas prepare over 2021-22 for introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the UK Government will provide additional UK funding to support our communities to pilot programmes and new approaches.
- The UK Government is delivering on our manifesto commitments to Scotland's farmers and fishermen. The UK Government has committed to providing £570 million for Scottish farming and £14 million for Scotland's fisheries.
- The UK Government is improving digital infrastructure in Scotland. The £5 billion UK Gigabit Programme will improve digital connectivity between nations and ensure that a rural location doesn't mean slower broadband. The UK Government are also delivering a Shared Rural Network to extend 4G mobile coverage to 95 per cent of the UK.

Increasing the National Living Wage

- The UK Government is increasing the national living wage to £8.91 per hour, accepting in full the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission to increase the National Living Wage by 2.2 per cent, to extend this rate to those aged 23 or over, and to increase the National Minimum Wage as well. These increases will benefit around 2 million people – a full-time worker on the National Living Wage will see their pay rise by £345 next year, an effective increase of over £4,000 since the policy was introduced in 2016.

Q&A

Q: Cutting public sector pay?

Public sector pay is devolved and the responsibility of the SNP Government, but we are pleased that nurses, doctors and other NHS staff in England will receive a pay rise from the UK Government.

Q: Shared prosperity fund is a power grab?

The UK Government are delivering on their promise to replace EU structural funds. This is vital investment in Scotland's communities that will create jobs and improve infrastructure – we don't see why the SNP would turn it down.

Q: Cutting international aid?

It is right at this extraordinary time that the UK Government puts rebuilding our country and

protecting jobs first – but we are pleased that we will still be the second biggest contributor to development in the G7, and that we will return to our 0.7 per cent commitment in the near future.

Q: The SNP say they need borrowing powers?

The SNP Government already have borrowing powers and they have underspent their ‘Growth Scheme’ by over 200 million pounds. There has been no shortage of cash for the Scottish budget from the UK Government with an extra £8.2 billion since the start of the pandemic. It’s time the SNP used this money to support jobs.

Q: This is less money than the SNP say they need?

Only yesterday the respected Fraser of Allander Institute said the SNP were hoarding a billion pounds that was passed to them by the UK Government. It’s time the SNP started using that cash to protect jobs.

Q; National Living Wage is still short of real living wage?

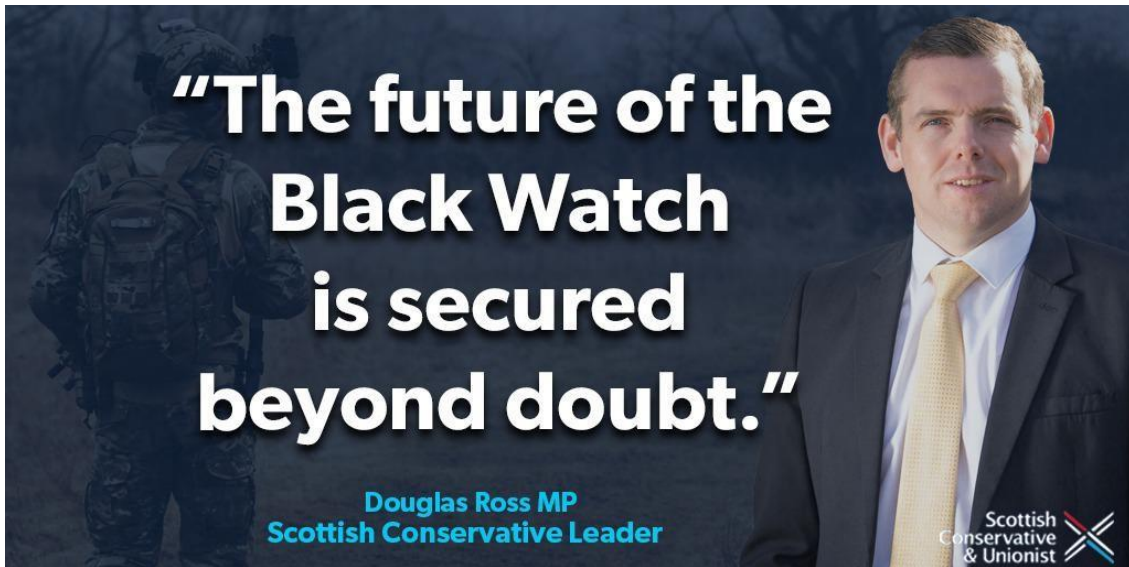
The UK Government have accepted the recommendations of the low pay commission in full and increased the National Living Wage by 2.2 per cent to £8.91.

Conference

The Party’s annual conference had to take place virtually this year for obvious reasons and the central office team deserve credit for ensuring that all the technology worked well allowing many people to contribute. It was very good to see Cllr Roz McCall introducing the Prime Minister!

Two very popular Conference announcements related to defence and justice issues.

Regarding the former, it was very good to see Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace fighting so hard to achieve such a boost to defence spending, most especially to address the growing threat of cyber-terrorism which, as virtually every defence expert says, is the biggest current threat to Britain’s national security. It was also good to see the news about the naval orders for Rosyth and the Clyde and, in Perth, to have confirmation that the historic Black Watch is staying put despite all the rumours to the contrary.



The second very popular announcement was from Douglas Ross stating that any criminals guilty of attacking emergency workers would face a double jail time. This is something which has gone down very well with the police and ambulance workers to whom I have been speaking this week.



The Continuity Bill

Just as was the case when MSPs debated the UK Internal Market bill a few weeks ago, the Scottish Parliament's main purpose with regard to the end of the transition period is to ensure that all the post Brexit structures which will be put in place will be in the best interests of Scotland, her relationships with the rest of the UK and, of course, with the international community, most especially those which protect the internal market and Scotland's ability to be a thriving nation in the future. To this end, the Scottish Conservatives have been arguing that Scotland's governments should work together without seeking to create division.

So the SNP's Continuity Bill (which we opposed at Stage 1) has to be judged against these criteria. For example, it is essential that Scotland does not lose crucial environmental safeguards as the UK exits the EU.

However, the SNP are intent on pursuing other agendas. They want to introduce the controversial principle about "keeping pace" meaning that in Scotland we will be aligned with EU regulations. We cannot support this because it means keeping pace with standards and laws, over which we would have no say!

But there is another aspect to this too, namely because any keeping pace decision would become a matter of political choice for ministers rather than be a legally binding commitment as was the case when we were in the EU. Potentially, that invests significant powers in ministers and raises questions over scrutiny of some key policies.

The Scottish Conservatives will be voting against this bill at Stage 3.



Mobile Bank Vans

Having secured a delayed closure of the Kinross Bank of Scotland branch (now March 2021) because of the pressures of the pandemic, it was very disappointing to receive more bad banking news, this time from the Royal Bank of Scotland who decided, at very short notice to stop any mobile van facilities operating in tiers 3 and 4. Whilst I can understand the latter, I cannot understand why the vans cannot travel within tier 3 given that they start out in a tier 3 area (Edinburgh) and are deemed an essential service. Not surprisingly, this has been a deeply unpopular move and is causing considerable inconvenience to local people. I have asked RBS to re-consider.



Visit to Polish Saturday School

It was my pleasure to visit the headteacher of the Polish Saturday School which operates out of St John's Academy. Mrs Wioletta Hass-Lipinska told me about the work that she has been

undertaking during the pandemic to ensure the school can continue teaching and also about the community project she has organised to help families receive some Christmas gifts. I was most impressed with her dedication.



The long awaited Scottish Government response to the Werritty Review

After months of delay from the Scottish Government, ministers finally issued their response to the Werritty Review about grouse moor management on Thursday last week. That response has since caused uproar in the rural communities and for good reason:

Professor Werritty specifically recommended the following; *“ we unanimously recommend that a licensing scheme be introduced for the shooting of grouse if, within five years from the Scottish Government publishing this report, there is no marked improvement in the ecological sustainability of grouse moor management, as evidenced by the populations of breeding golden eagles, hen harriers and peregrines on or within the vicinity of grouse moors being in favourable condition.”*

So what does the Scottish Government do? It says it will introduce a licensing scheme now, thereby completely ignoring the advice despite stating on several recent occasions that their environment policies will be “built around scientific evidence”.

The SNP are pandering to the Greens’ populist agenda and ignoring the reality of the countryside. The Scottish Conservatives will fight them all the way.



Scots grouse shooting estates face tough new licensing regime

Grouse shooting: Campaigners say there is "nothing to fear" from licensing

The Herald



Grouse shooting licence move sparks 'dismay'

"another SNP attack on rural Scotland which will have deeply damaging and long-lasting consequences"

- Liz Smith MSP

Grouse shooting to be licensed in Scotland



Concerns raised over plans to license Scottish grouse shooting

Alex Salmond Committee Update:

Last Wednesday, we used our parliamentary debating time again to try to force the release of the legal papers which the Scottish Government has been withholding from the Holyrood Committee investigating the handling of the harassment allegations relating to Alex Salmond. And again, we won the vote, just like we did earlier in the month, and again we were met with the usual stonewalling from the Scottish Government, John Swinney in particular.

This situation is not only very disturbing about the Scottish Government's whole approach but further undermining the integrity of the parliamentary system. It makes a mockery of democratic scrutiny which should be part and parcel of the parliament's work.

Here is the Scottish Conservative motion and the amendment from the SNP:

S5M-23445 Murdo Fraser: Legal Advice—That the Parliament recalls the vote on motion S5M23218 on 4 November 2020, in which it called on the Scottish Government to publish the legal advice it received regarding the judicial review into the handling of harassment complaints against the former First Minister, Alex Salmond; notes that the legal advice sought has not yet been published, despite the Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints requesting this by 13 November 2020, and calls on the Scottish Government to respect the will of the Parliament by providing the legal advice without any further delay.

S5M-23445.2 John Swinney: Legal Advice As an amendment to motion S5M-23445 in the

name of Murdo Fraser (Legal Advice), leave out from "notes that the legal advice" to end and insert "acknowledges that this complex matter is being actively considered by Ministers; notes that the right of private access to legal advice is a fundamental right under Scots Law, and recognises that, since that vote of the Parliament, the Lord Advocate has shared extensive detail of the Scottish Government's legal position with the Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints at its meeting on 17 November 2020, will be writing further to the Committee following that meeting, and stands ready to provide additional information as the Committee requires."

My colleague Donald Cameron's excellent summing up speech expresses so clearly why the Scottish Government has got this so badly wrong, and I strongly urge you to watch it.

Youth Theatre

Despite all the other debates and committee work in which I have been involved since the last e-letter, there has been lots of case-work too, much of it on the back of questions constituents are asking about Covid19 rules and some of the perceived inconsistencies. One such question related to why Perth Youth Theatre couldn't continue when other indoor activities for under 18s can continue, such as dance classes, Cubs and Brownies.

And a final reminder...

If any was needed about SNP duplicity when it comes to the public finances....

**The Fraser of Allander Institute
have confirmed that
the SNP are hoarding
around £1 billion
of funding from the
UK Government**

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