

[Scottish Conservatives triumph in Perthshire by-election](#)

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
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The Scottish Conservatives have won a vital council by-election in Perth and Kinross, with the candidate securing nearly 50 per cent of the vote.

John Duff saw off the SNP comfortably in the fight for the area's Highland ward.

Of the 4086 voters cast, Labour, the Lib Dems and the Greens scraped just 421 between them.

The triumph follows a direct plea by SNP deputy leader John Swinney, who wrote to constituents begging them not to vote for the Scottish Conservatives.

He conceded the vote would be a straight fight between the two parties, and senior SNP MP Pete Wishart also campaigned hard.

Despite that, Cllr Duff won the ballot by a clear margin, reinforcing the Scottish Conservatives' position as the largest party on the council.

The by-election was called following the death of Perth and Kinross Council leader Ian Campbell.

Scottish Conservative Mid Scotland and Fife MSP Murdo Fraser said:

"This by-election reinforced the fact that, not only are the Scottish Conservatives the sole challengers to the SNP, but we can beat them too.

"The second most important figure in the SNP personally wrote to constituents begging them to vote for his party.

"This result is a snub to John Swinney, and a snub to the nationalists whose bid to break up Britain has alienated and ignored voters.

"The outcome also confirms every other party in Scottish politics to be little more than a total irrelevance."

Cllr John Duff said:

"It is a huge honour to have been elected to represent my home area on Perth

and Kinross Council.

“I would like to thank all those who voted for me in the election, and all those who helped me campaign.

“I now pledge myself to work for all the residents of the Highland ward, whether they voted for me or not.

“I set out in the campaign how I would make myself available to constituents, and I fully intend to live up to these promises.”