# Scottish Labour candidate Davy Russell faces backlash over media silence in key by-election



The selection of Davy Russell as the Scottish Labour candidate for the upcoming Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse by-election has sparked significant criticism within the party. Some insiders have disparagingly branded him a "donkey" due to his apparent reluctance to engage with media opportunities that could bolster his campaign. As the by-election looms, triggered by the untimely passing of SNP MSP Christina McKelvie, the internal strife within Labour raises questions about its strategy and readiness to confront both the SNP and the emerging challenge from Reform UK.

Russell, a former business associate of Rangers boss Barry Ferguson, has been publicly supported by Labour's leadership. A spokesperson stated that he is "standing up for his community and working tirelessly" to ensure a Labour victory. However, party sources have expressed discontent, suggesting that his absence from pivotal broadcasting opportunities demonstrates a lack of confidence and strategy. One senior figure articulated a concern that Russell's failure to engage effectively with the media could lead Labour to a disappointing third place in the election, a consideration underscored by the growing momentum of Reform UK.

This critical situation has not gone unnoticed by political opponents. SNP's candidate, Katy Loudon, remarked on Labour's apparent invisibility in the campaign and asserted that only the SNP has been willing to take a stand against figures like Nigel Farage. The criticism was echoed by former Labour MSP Neil Findlay, who lamented Russell's "Trappist monk approach" to campaigning. He emphasized that effective communication with voters is essential in a high-profile by-election, highlighting the risks of Labour falling behind both the SNP and rival parties.

Compounding Labour's woes is the strategic backdrop of the by-election itself. John Swinney, Scotland’s First Minister, seized the opportunity to frame this election as a potential wake-up call for Labour, urging the party to reflect candidly on its performance and policies. Such sentiments indicate a wider concern about Labour's standing in Scottish politics, particularly amidst a landscape where the SNP remains a dominant force but must be vigilant against the rising tide of Reform UK, which seeks to capitalise on Labour's internal issues.

Despite the challenges, Russell has defended his candidacy by focusing on grassroots campaigning, stating his preference for "chapping doors" and directly engaging with constituents rather than participating in televised debates. This grass-roots approach, however, could be undermining his visibility and, by extension, Labour's competitiveness in the race. The decision to forego the media spotlight during a critical campaign phase, such as the debate hosted by STV, has raised eyebrows and prompted further criticism from within the party.

As Labour heads toward the polls on June 5th, the stakes are high not only for Russell’s candidacy but for the party’s future in Scotland. The party's performance in this by-election could signal a broader reckoning, igniting discussions about its relevance and appeal in a rapidly evolving political landscape. Anas Sarwar, the Scottish Labour leader, has stated that the outcome could set the stage for a substantial challenge to SNP dominance, viewing the by-election as a pivotal moment for the party.

With both internal and external pressures mounting, the narrative of this campaign will be closely watched, as it could redefine the dynamics of Scottish politics and the role of Labour therein.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/scottish-labour-election-candidate-branded-35301244), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-67012345)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/scottish-labour-election-candidate-branded-35301244), [[3]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/hamilton-by-election-opportunity-to-give-labour-wake-up-call-says-swinney-131759)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2025/04/17/labour-and-the-larkhall-blues/), [[5]](https://www.ireland-live.ie/news/scotland/1786341/scottish-labour-demands-apology-from-snp-by-election-candidate.html), [[6]](https://www.grampianonline.co.uk/news/national/sarwar-wants-by-election-to-be-launchpad-to-boot-out-snp-at-holyrood-132165/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/scottish-labour-election-candidate-branded-35301244), [[7]](https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2023/10/06/labour-win-rutherglen-and-hamilton-west-byelection/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/scottish-labour-election-candidate-branded-35301244> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-67012345> - The BBC reports on the selection of Davy Russell as the Scottish Labour candidate for the Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse by-election. Russell, a former business associate of Rangers boss Barry Ferguson, was chosen by local members to contest the snap poll. He expressed his commitment to representing his community and addressing local issues. The by-election was triggered by the death of SNP MSP Christina McKelvie, and Russell's selection has been met with both support and criticism within the party.
3. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/hamilton-by-election-opportunity-to-give-labour-wake-up-call-says-swinney-131759> - The Scotsman covers comments by John Swinney, Scotland's First Minister, regarding the upcoming Hamilton by-election. Swinney views the election as an opportunity to challenge Labour's position and calls for a 'wake-up call' for the party. He emphasizes the importance of the by-election in the context of Scottish politics and the need for Labour to reflect on its performance and policies.
4. <https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2025/04/17/labour-and-the-larkhall-blues/> - Bella Caledonia provides an analysis of David Russell's candidacy in the Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse by-election. The article delves into Russell's background, including his appointment as Deputy Lieutenant of Lanarkshire and his previous business associations. It also discusses the political dynamics of the area and the implications of his candidacy for Scottish Labour, highlighting concerns about party connections and the need for a fresh approach.
5. <https://www.ireland-live.ie/news/scotland/1786341/scottish-labour-demands-apology-from-snp-by-election-candidate.html> - Ireland Live reports on the Scottish Labour Party's demand for an apology from SNP by-election candidate Katy Loudon. The article details the exchange between the candidates, with Russell criticizing the SNP's record on public services and Loudon responding by questioning Labour's promises and highlighting the party's tenure in local government. The piece provides insights into the political tensions and campaign strategies of both parties.
6. <https://www.grampianonline.co.uk/news/national/sarwar-wants-by-election-to-be-launchpad-to-boot-out-snp-at-holyrood-132165/> - Grampian Online reports on Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar's campaign launch for the Hamilton by-election. Sarwar views the by-election as a potential 'launchpad' to challenge the SNP's dominance in Scottish politics. He emphasizes the importance of winning the seat to set the stage for future elections and criticizes the SNP's governance, advocating for a change in direction for Scotland.
7. <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2023/10/06/labour-win-rutherglen-and-hamilton-west-byelection/> - The Express & Star reports on Labour's victory in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election. Michael Shanks was declared the new MP after defeating the SNP's Katy Loudon. The article provides details on the election results, voter turnout, and the implications of the win for Scottish politics, highlighting the challenges faced by the SNP in maintaining its position.