

# Tory voice in wilderness

By Peter Young, The Evening Chronicle

Shadow minister Alan Duncan, who has the job of reviving Conservative fortunes on Tyneside admitted today there will be no quick fix.

He voiced disappointment at the party's failure to field candidates in seven of the 26 wards in Newcastle at the last local elections, following a mix-up over nominations and promised they will do better in future.

"I'm not too proud of our performance," said Mr Duncan, who was appointed Tory spokesman for Tyneside by leader David Cameron in June, and was visiting Newcastle today.

"I don't want that to happen again. We must always give people the choice to vote Conservative. I don't like it when people go into the polling booth and find there is no Conservative candidate to vote for."

Mr Duncan said they will be battling to break the Labour-Lib Dem stranglehold by winning council and Parliamentary seats - but stopped short of making predictions.

He was speaking in advance of visits to local businesses, foster care and home heating projects, and a meeting with Northumbria University chiefs.

As Shadow Trade and Industry Secretary, he says an important part of his job is to listen to the needs of businesses and workers on Tyneside.

He intends to test Conservative policies in the context of what they could do to assist people on Tyneside, such as school leavers and entrepreneurs setting up in business.

"We need to look at how we can build up commercial and industrial activity in terms of jobs," he said. "We need to look at the big economic questions and put them to the test on Tyneside."

Mr Duncan, who is MP for Rutland & Melton, a rural constituency in Leicestershire, is hoping the Tories will make their long-awaited breakthrough in Newcastle at May's local elections by winning their first seats on the city council, now controlled by the Lib Dems, for 10 years.

"I'm not pretending we can take the place by storm," he said. "It has to be a continuing process. In May we will be doing our best, but ours is a long-term goal."