

Council Conservative group leader loses faith in Prime Minister

The Conservative group leader for The City of Edinburgh Council has said Boris Johnson “can’t carry on as Prime Minister” after he admitted attending a drinks party at the height of lockdown.

Cllr Iain Whyte said he and many of his colleagues are “concerned about the impression that’s being given to the public” after a leaked email showed more than 100 people were invited to a ‘bring your own booze’ party in the Downing Street gardens in May 2020, when strict Covid curbs prevented any more than two people from meeting up outside.

On Wednesday the Prime Minister apologised for being present but said he thought it was “a work event”.

And shortly after, Scottish Tory leader Douglas Ross, both an MP and MSP, called for Mr Johnson’s resignation.



Prime Minister Boris Johnson at PMQs on Wednesday 12 January
PHOTO © UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor

Edinburgh Council's Tory group leader Mr Whyte said: "I know that Conservative councillors are concerned about the impression that's being given to the public in recent times and I think the majority are probably backing Douglas Ross here and his firm stand on the principle of the issue.

"The difficulty is when all of these stories become a distraction from what the government's doing then you have to sort that out and move on, or it's time to look for someone else to take over.

"My concern is that the whole thing has become a huge distraction from the work we're trying to do for the public. Certainly from my point of view trying to go into a council election this year which I think is very critical for the city to get some change, and getting that message across with other politics going on is not helpful.

"The cabinet have decided to support him, it's very difficult,

I don't know what's yet to come from the inquiry.

"This situation can't carry on and much as the Prime Minister made an apology yesterday, that hasn't resolved things, and there's still an awful lot out there where members of the public are very angry. Therefore he can't carry on as Prime Minister."

Fellow Conservative councillor John McLellan stopped short of calling for Boris Johnson's resignation but said if further evidence of rules being flouted emerges then it would be "game over".

He said: "The way things have shaken out this week pose serious questions for anybody in the party in Scotland and those will clearly need to be resolved and I'm not quite sure how they're going to be resolved at the moment without causing some problems.

"The party took place – the drinks gathering took place, the Prime Minister was at the gathering, he has admitted that. That is beyond all doubt. If there is another allegation that is distinct from that which requires further clarification that's where it would be game over. If there is something else to come out – and I don't know what it is – that would be the end."

Mr Ross' intervention promoted retaliation from Jacob Rees-Mogg and Michael Gove, who called the Scottish Tory leader a "lightweight" and mocked him for being "in Elgin" where he serves the constituency MP.

Cllr McLellan said party unity is "the most important thing", adding that the senior ministers' comments "have not been helpful in the extreme".

He said: "My main issue with this is the divisiveness in that the way the events have panned out have divided the Conservative party and we have to resolve that – there can be

no doubt about party unity and that has now become the biggest problem. At the moment it is not entirely clear how that will be resolved.”

by Donald Torvill Local Democracy Reporter

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Prime Minister Boris Johnson at PMQs on Wednesday 12 January
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