

# Labour candidate says all levels of government must recognise the real housing crisis in the capital

Ross McKenzie is the Labour candidate in Sighthill/Gorgie in 2022. Here he writes about housing in the city, one of the main policies he is campaigning about.

“There is a housing crisis in Edinburgh and more state intervention is required to meet the housing needs of the city’s residents. This has become a truism, agreed on across the political spectrum, and yet the political will and imagination to go beyond scratching the surface of the crisis remain absent – at Westminster, at Holyrood and at the City Chambers.

The statistics are familiar, the story is getting old.

Here are some recent tales:

The average Edinburgh house price is almost 7 times the average gross annual earnings in the city, making it the [least affordable city in Scotland](#) to buy a home. This leaves many residents trapped in a private rental market that is out of control. The average advertised monthly private rent in Edinburgh was [over £1,100](#) in the second quarter of 2021. A recent study showed the average private rent for a one bed property in Lothian has risen by over 40% in the past decade –

the Edinburgh-specific figure is not available but is certain to be higher. Many Edinburgh residents have seen their rent double during a decade of unprecedented wage stagnation.

Why are these numbers not enough to wake up our political class? Perhaps too many of them haven't directly experienced the effects of a crisis that disproportionately affects younger people. Worse, perhaps too many are directly benefitting from it as landlords.

Comments made by SNP councillor, Denis Dixon, at Gorgie/Dalry Community Council last September illustrate how politicians fail to understand the needs of the people they are supposed to represent. He said then: *"Gorgie Dalry is mainly made up of affordable and social housing provision. I disagree that the area is desperately in need of more social housing."*

It's a short quote, but still manages to contain two astonishing falsehoods. Gorgie and Dalry is not *"mainly made up of affordable and social housing"*. Around half of the households in the area are private lets where rents continue to rise much faster than wages, with social rents comprising around 15% of the [housing stock compared with](#) a Scottish average of 23%. The *desperate need for more social housing* in Gorgie Dalry and across Edinburgh is clear – last year, around 200 households applied for each social rented home that became available for let.

The City Plan 2030 identifies a couple of decent sized brownfield sites in Gorgie Dalry that are suitable for housing developments. If I am elected in May, I'll be campaigning to ensure that these sites are used for ambitious developments of high quality, high density council housing containing communal space and amenities. I appreciate that such projects are not necessarily in the gift of The City of Edinburgh Council, which depends largely on grant funding from Holyrood, which itself is hampered by dependence on funding streams from Westminster.

At Holyrood, legislation to regulate short term lets and allow the introduction of rent controls is welcome, though long overdue, and Edinburgh Labour is committed to using such powers as soon as The Scottish Government allows it. However, as industry lobbying has already resulted in a weakening of the short term lets legislation, can we trust the current SNP/Green government on rent controls once the landlords have had their say?

Until all levels of government recognise the scale of the housing crisis and campaign for the state intervention required to address it, we'll continue failing to deliver this most basic of needs. The great council house building programmes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century arose from a recognition that the state has a duty to house its people, particularly when the market proves unable or unwilling to do so. The state has retreated from that role in recent decades, and in Edinburgh we can see the consequences. Left to its own devices, the market has concluded that there is more profit to be made from purpose built student housing and short-term lets than from providing decent homes to its citizens. This reminds us of the need for the state to have an active role in housing.

We need the state to regulate and protect us from commercially driven agendas which value profit over people. We need its investment to provide safe, secure and affordable housing for all. And we need its idealism – that aspiration to treat all its citizens equitably and decently which lay at the very heart of the council house building programmes which improved the lives of many millions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”



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