

Homelessness “one of the biggest issues” says Douglas Ross

The leader of the Scottish Conservatives has said his party will “absolutely” cut the number of homeless people in Edinburgh if it wins the election.

Douglas Ross said homelessness was “one of the biggest issues” – despite not mentioning it in his speech unveiling the Scottish Tory manifesto in Edinburgh on Monday, June 24.

Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service after the launch he said it was a “blight” in the capital, where there are now a record 5,000 households registered as homeless, “and indeed many other parts of the country.”

While the number of people in the city without a permanent residence has soared by more than 50 per cent under successive UK Conservative governments since 2010, the manifesto lays the blame firmly at the door of the party which has held power at Holyrood even longer.

“Scotland is facing a housing emergency caused by the SNP,” it says, citing the Scottish Government’s rent cap “backfiring just like we warned it would”, and a failure to build enough

affordable homes.

So after almost a decade and a half in power what would the Tories do in the next parliament to end homelessness once and for all in Edinburgh?

Mr Ross said the key was to strengthen links between the government and local councils "to make sure there are properties available for people to get into housing and to get out of homelessness".

He said: "One of the things we've seen is people who are continually becoming homeless don't get the support they need from every local authority across Scotland."

In terms of concrete steps, the manifesto proposes setting up a "Scottish Housing Delivery Agency to increase builds of all types, especially affordable homes".

It includes a promise to "build more homes, while ensuring the Green Belt is protected".

However construction would only take place "where there is clear community consent" – a position which critics argue would prevent the level of housebuilding needed to be progressed.

The party also wants to set up a "national Housing First programme" which it says could work to "end homelessness in Scotland".

Mr Ross said: "What we've got in the manifesto is a commitment to roll-out that scheme across all 32 local authorities to tackle homelessness because it's not just the individuals themselves but it's the families that are affected."

Asked if he could guarantee a vote for the Scottish Conservatives would bring homelessness down in Edinburgh, Mr Ross replied: "Yes, absolutely, we've got to focus on this issue. It's a blight here in Edinburgh and indeed many other

parts of the country.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter