



Scottish   
Liberal Democrats

# Change with Fairness at its Heart

Manifesto 2026

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# 1 Foreword: Scotland Deserves Better

Scotland has so much going for it.

But right now, it feels like our country simply isn't working.

Household bills are soaring. There are long waits to see your GP. The ferries fiasco is a national embarrassment and Scottish education just isn't what it used to be.

We know you feel let down by the other parties. The Scottish Liberal Democrats believe Scotland deserves better than this. But it needs to be change with fairness at its heart.

We believe in fairness for everyone, no matter who you are or where you come from. That's why we have a realistic plan to get things done:

- Delivering first-rate health care – so you can see your GP, dentist or mental health professional when you need them.
- Helping you with the cost of living – insulating cold homes and using Scottish renewable energy to drive down household bills.
- Getting Scotland moving again - by fixing our roads, our ferries and our public transport.
- Getting Scottish education back to its best – expanding pupil support in every school and giving every child the best start in life.

Liberal Democrats are winning again, with more councillors, a record number of MPs and more to come.

Let me be straight with you. You have two votes. In many constituencies we are on the verge of winning against the SNP but wherever you are, every vote for the Scottish Liberal Democrats on the second peach ballot paper will deliver change with fairness at its heart.

Scotland deserves better. With the Scottish Liberal Democrats, you can vote for it.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton**  
**Leader – Scottish Liberal Democrats**



# 2 Change with Fairness at its Heart

Too often politics is dominated by parties that oppose everything and deliver little.

There is another way of doing things. Scottish Liberal Democrats get stuff done.

Budget by budget, bill by bill, case by case, we use our leverage as MSPs to deliver change with fairness at its heart.

Scottish Liberal Democrats have shown that we are serious about getting you the fair deal you deserve.

There is a long list of changes that we have secured for our constituents and for Scotland.

- ✓ Fresh support for high street businesses struggling with the cost of living
- ✓ A 10% increase in the college budget to produce the skills our economy and public services need
- ✓ Investment to speed up autism and ADHD assessments
- ✓ Millions of pounds for hospices so they can attract and retain staff
- ✓ Young entrepreneurs backed to take their ideas to the next level
- ✓ Facilities to help new mums and babies born addicted to drugs
- ✓ Cash for flood-stricken families and businesses in Fife when the government initially turned its back
- ✓ More money for ferries in the Northern Isles
- ✓ Suzanne's Law and Michelle's Law, strengthening the rights of victims and their families
- ✓ Specialist support for long Covid, ME and chronic fatigue
- ✓ Money restored to the housing budget after it was cut by the Greens and SNP
- ✓ The right for family carers to earn more without being penalised
- ✓ Work restarted on Edinburgh's Eye Hospital and the Belford in Fort William
- ✓ A future for Corseford College for young people with complex needs

The more MSPs we have, the more we can get done. This election is your chance to elect local champions and win the change our country desperately needs.

Wherever you are, you can have an MSP who will get stuff done by backing the Scottish Liberal Democrats on the second peach regional ballot paper.

Ours is a realistic plan to get things done.

## Helping you with the cost of living

We will bring down energy bills and protect you from volatile fossil fuel prices through an **emergency insulation programme** and by accelerating the rollout of smart **climate-friendly heating and solar panels**. We will use cheaper, cleaner energy to power Scotland securely. That will go hand-in-hand with **re-writing community benefit rules** so local people get much more of the money companies make from generating renewable energy near them.

We will make it easier to do business and stop sudden tax hikes threatening successful employers by **reforming business rates**. We will help people upskill and improve their earnings potential through new **Job Transition Loans** worth up to £5,000, and improve **early learning and childcare for working families** meaning extra help with the challenges and costs of juggling work and family.

We will tackle the chronic housing shortage by returning housebuilding to a level that gets **25,000 new homes** built annually, and create new **key worker housing** so that finding a home isn't a barrier to taking up a job when somewhere is crying out for your skills.

We know that **fixing our relationship with Europe**, including through a new bespoke customs union between the UK and EU, is the single biggest change that could be made to fix trade, boost growth, help with the cost of living and improve government finances.

## Delivering first-rate health care

We'll get you **faster access to GPs** and more local staff, driving early diagnosis and bringing down waits, and getting people back to work. It will be the equivalent of giving every GP practice the benefit of an additional member of clinical staff.

We will rejuvenate **local healthcare facilities** and introduce a new **Fair Deal for Rural Healthcare**. We will roll out a national **lung cancer screening programme**, recruit and retain **more NHS dentists**, create **walk-in mental health services**, and our **10-year workforce plan for the NHS and care** will take the pressure off overwhelmed services and get the right staff in the right place.

You can't fix the NHS unless you fix care - not with 2,000 people a night stuck in hospital when they don't need or want to be there, costing the NHS over a million pounds a day. That's why we will **reward care workers** with a new career ladder and make sense of spending by halving the problem of delayed discharge before the end of the decade. We will **increase Carer Support Payment by £400 a year for unpaid carers**, and **give every young carer someone who they can turn to** for help balancing learning, life and caring for their loved one.

## Getting Scotland moving again

We will **pass a Ferries Bill to end the SNP's fiasco** for good and give islanders and coastal communities the fair deal they deserve.

We will improve core connections, driving progress on major projects such as **dualling the A9** and **tunnels for Shetland**.

We will give local authorities the fair funding they need to **fix more potholes**. We will help you switch to an EV, revamp ailing bus services by fitting them around your needs, and make the most of government-run ScotRail with more **late night services**, **new stations** and a commuter-friendly guarantee.

## Getting Scottish education back to its best

We will invest in **pupil support assistants and specialist support** such as speech and language therapists, legislate to make **schools smartphone-free environments**, and fix the mess the SNP have made of teacher recruitment and retention, ending the excessive use of teachers on zero hours and temporary contracts.

We will help children get off to a good start by using **play-based learning** until the age of 7, **help neurodivergent children** and their families receive the right help at the right time, and bring forward a **Youth Work Bill** to reach young people who are not engaged successfully in formal education.

We will inspire people to launch their careers through apprenticeships, restore colleges to a powerful role in local economic development and get parties around the table to safeguard the future of our world-leading universities.

# 3 The Economy

Scottish Liberal Democrats will build a strong, fair economy that benefits everyone.

After two decades in power, the SNP have left our economy without direction. Growth has stalled, productivity is weak and Scotland's public finances are broken. Despite record UK funding and higher taxes in Scotland, the SNP aren't capable of delivering high quality public services in return.

Meanwhile, the botched Brexit deal - pushed by Nigel Farage and delivered by the Conservatives - is making us all worse off and Labour don't have a plan.

We believe fair economic growth is the only credible way out of the cost of living crisis. That means backing business, helping people into better-paid work, growing the tax base and making long-term investments - not erecting new trade barriers. It means addressing the drag on our economy caused by poor policy in planning, skills and housing. We can do this while protecting our environment, upholding workers' rights and ensuring support is there when people need it.

Taxpayers deserve value for money and confidence that their taxes are being spent wisely. Right now, that trust has been lost. We will rebuild that trust and restore the social contract.

We'll work hard to bring bills down, and our realistic plan will bring wages up by getting people into better paid jobs.

## **We will:**

- **On day one, build on the measures in this manifesto by inviting leading figures from Scottish business and other key stakeholders to work with us. Together we will quickly form the industrial strategy that will underpin the Programme for Government and Scottish Budget.**
- **Fund capital investment in key infrastructure that will drive growth, accelerating progress on major projects such as tunnels for Shetland.**

- **Put an end to SNP waste and give taxpayers real value for money, linking pay and bonuses at the top of the public sector to success, not rewarding failure.**
- **Publish a holistic new financial strategy and a plan for getting Scotland building again, before the end of the year, so every taxpayer can see exactly how their money is being invested responsibly in our future.**
- **Prioritise getting Scotland's finances in shape so we can cut taxes in the future. We won't make reckless unaffordable promises and we don't think people can pay more amidst the cost of living crisis.**
- **Make it official Scottish Government policy to support a new bespoke customs union between the UK and EU – the single biggest change that could be made to fix trade, boost growth, help with the cost of living and improve government finances.**

In addition, we will:

- Help with the cost of living by:
  - Supporting those who want to upskill or change their career to improve their earnings potential, as set out in chapter 4.
  - Not letting sudden steep rate hikes threaten the survival of successful businesses, as set out in chapter 4, building on the £178 million in rates relief won by Scottish Liberal Democrats in the 2026/27 Scottish Budget.
  - Giving unpaid carers a fair deal so they get the support they so desperately need, including an uplift to Carer Support Payment, as set out in chapter 6.
  - Helping working families with the cost of childcare, as set out in chapter 8.
  - Building more homes that people can afford, as set out in chapter 9.
  - Making it cheaper and easier for drivers to switch to electric vehicles, as set out in chapter 11.
  - Cutting energy bills by insulating cold homes and using Scottish renewable energy to drive down household bills, as set out in chapter 12.
- Put growth at the heart of the Scottish Government's agenda by:
  - Developing new industrial and skills strategies, as set out in chapter 4.



- Returning housebuilding to a level that will get an average of 25,000 homes built each year, as set out in chapter 9.
  - Tackling regional inequality, giving every part of Scotland the power to play to its strengths, as set out in chapter 10.
  - Modernising the planning system, as set out in chapter 10.
  - Making it easier to do business in the rural economy, as set out in chapter 14.
  - Providing policy certainty and stability, improving collaboration between the Scottish, UK and local government, as set out in chapter 16.
- Support people who are economically inactive, underemployed, in need of help to move into better paid employment, or who face barriers that mean their talent is being passed over, including:
    - Bringing down NHS waiting lists, helping those struggling to work because of physical or mental ill health and enabling people to spend more years of their life in good health and being economically active, as set out in chapter 5.
    - Repairing colleges and the vocational skills system, as set out in chapter 7, to offer more routes into employment and high-wage high-skill jobs including for people fitting learning around work, family or caring.
    - Prioritising those juggling work and family in the enhancement of funded early learning and childcare, helping parents return to work, as set out in chapter 8.
    - Using youth work to reach young people disengaged from education and skills training, as set out in chapter 8.
    - Addressing the housing constraints on employers' ability to recruit and making it easier to move to take better job opportunities, including through a new programme of key worker housing, as set out in chapter 9.
    - Reducing reoffending to help people get on in life, as set out in chapter 10.
    - Improving transport to open up new opportunities for employment, as set out in chapter 11.
    - Ending long waits for diagnosis, support and adjustments for people with neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD and autism, as set out in chapter 15.
    - Accelerating progress towards the target of halving the disability employment gap by 2038, as set out in chapter 15.
  - Revise the infrastructure investment pipeline to incorporate our priorities.

- Work with the UK Government on a new model to support forgotten communities, as the next step after city and regional deals.
- Invest in green infrastructure, innovation and skills to boost economic growth, tackle the climate crisis and create good jobs in every part of Scotland.
- Reduce costs and encourage innovation within government by:
  - Cracking down on SNP waste by halving the amount the Scottish Government and agencies spend on private consultancy.
  - Reviewing the cluttered quango landscape to ensure best value for money, cut bureaucracy and reduce duplication.
  - Rebooting the civil service, as set out in chapter 16.
- Appoint a Minister for Digital and Emerging Technologies, responsible for modernising technology across the public sector and helping companies leverage emerging technologies to grow, compete globally, create high-quality jobs and protect themselves against cyber attacks.
- Provide careful management of Scotland's natural assets and ensure that taxpayers receive value for money when they are utilised, including re-writing the rules on community benefit and future ScotWind-style sales, as set out in chapter 12.
- We will develop and make use of social impact investments – a new partnership model where payments are based on the results they achieve and shifting resources from crisis response to prevention.
- Support fair taxation to fund the public services we all rely on, recognising the cost of living crisis, and the impact tax rises have on individuals and businesses. It means:
  - Where funds are available, our priorities will be to lift tax thresholds in line with inflation and begin to close the tax differential with England in a balanced way that protects public services.
  - Taking up the offer from the Hunter Foundation to fund a specialist team to investigate both the impacts of the current system and to develop a new system that will increase the tax take.
  - Fairer business rates, as set out in chapter 4

- Conducting an assessment of how Land and Buildings Transaction Tax reform could help free up housing stock and encourage use of difficult brownfield sites.
- Reforming council tax and giving councils the powers to introduce a point of entry levy, as set out in chapter 10.
- Implementing Air Departure Tax and introducing a private jet tax, as set out in chapter 11.
- At a UK level, backing Liberal Democrat proposals to increase the Digital Services Tax paid by the tech giants, introduce a targeted windfall tax on the big banks, scrap the hike to employer's National Insurance and the family farm tax, and replace the Energy Profits Levy as soon as possible with a stable, fair and proportional system.

# 4 Business and Jobs

Business is the beating heart of Scotland. Whether you're a sole trader or you employ thousands of people across multiple sites, we're on your side.

The SNP Government doesn't get business and their track record proves they don't care about it. High streets are struggling to survive. Small businesses feel hard done by and big business is put off by red tape and an anti-business agenda in government. All of this must stop, and it will stop with us.

Scotland has success stories, but these are despite government, not because of it. There isn't a proper industrial strategy.

As Scottish Liberal Democrats we're not ashamed to roll up our sleeves and get things done for the Scottish business community. We will support it by creating a stable business environment with smart regulation and by investing in skills, infrastructure, research and innovation. In return, we expect businesses to treat their workers fairly, upskill people, demonstrate good governance and sustain their local communities.

We will create conditions where businesses have the confidence to grow and thrive. We will create an economy where Scots can found and build businesses and which will attract investors, both homegrown and global, to back them. We will champion what Scotland does well and look towards what we should be taking to the next level.

Good work helps you get on in life and lifts people out of poverty. If you are willing to put yourself out there so that you can earn more, then Scottish Liberal Democrats will have your back.

## **We will:**

- **Create a new industrial strategy that focuses on what we're really good at and what we can be good at. We will throw the weight and levers of government behind businesses that can help us achieve greater success in life sciences, energy, food and drink, fintech and financial services, defence and more.**



- **Establish a new skills strategy, mapping where the gaps are and will be, and fitting training and education systems around it, so that the country secures the skills it needs in everything from social care, nursing and teaching to engineering and construction.**
- **Create a competitive and fair business tax regime that supports growth and employment, providing a level playing field, not letting sudden steep rate hikes threaten the survival of successful businesses.**
- **Remove barriers and incentivise people to live, work and come together on our high streets again, returning them to their place at the heart of our communities.**

In addition, we will:

- Launch a new Job Transition Loan to stand behind people looking to increase their income by making the move into self-employment or requalifying for a new better-paid career, helping meet the costs of courses, training and accreditation.
- Work with the King's Fund to help young entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds launch businesses, building on the £2.5 million secured by Scottish Liberal Democrats in the 2026/27 Scottish Budget.
- Support people who are economically inactive, underemployed, in need of help to move into better paid employment, or who face barriers that mean their talent is being passed over, as set out in chapter 3.
- Inspire people to do apprenticeships as a route to high-wage high-skill jobs by:
  - Ensuring pupils can do structured work experience, summer placements or foundation apprenticeships towards the end of school.
  - Backing apprenticeships through school and early careers advice, treating them on a par with college and university and highlighting the opportunities for prestigious industry experience, degree-level qualifications, and financial advantages including earn-while-you-learn and avoiding student debt.
  - Reorganising apprenticeship funding to address the financial cliff edges that deter training providers and employers from taking on apprentices in their early twenties and older, supporting lifelong learning and reflecting the realities of modern career pathways.

- Matching apprenticeships to labour market demand and local economic priorities through our Skills Strategy, collaborating with employers and industry bodies, and getting more public sector employers using them too.
- Restore colleges to a powerful role in local economic development, as set out in chapter 7.
- Reform business rates by:
  - Ensuring revaluations don't produce unfair bills that condemn otherwise viable businesses.
  - Building on the £178m of relief won by the Scottish Liberal Democrats in the 2026/27 Budget which is providing a 3-year package to help licensed pubs, restaurants, hotels, music venues, licensed clubs and night clubs – linchpins of the high street.
  - Revising the rental-only value methodology for self-catering businesses, building on the £4m secured by the Scottish Liberal Democrats to cap their increases and provide a bridge to the next revaluation in 2029.
  - Reviewing the functions of the assessors.
  - Working towards a new system of business rates with a land value element. This would avoid penalising businesses which refurbish properties or install renewables. It would reduce long-term vacant sites by raising more from under-used units and land banked by developers, and help high streets develop and compete with online retailers using large warehouses in cheaper locations.
  - Giving local authorities levers to encourage innovation, support business development and foster new partnerships between councils and local business.
- Make high streets welcoming, a source of local pride and economically successful by:
  - Making high streets safer by strengthening the Retail Crime Taskforce, as set out in chapter 10.
  - Exempting the last bank in town from business rates and pressing for shared banking services to open before customers and businesses are left without.
  - Reviewing the safety of vape shops on high streets and the risk they could pose to their neighbours and critical local infrastructure.

- Improving public transport to drive footfall and help staff get safely to and from work, with a special focus on the nighttime economy, including more late night rail services, as set out in chapter 11.
  - Supporting the Liberal Democrat calls for a UK-wide emergency hospitality VAT cut of 5%, and improved access to competitive energy deals.
  - Overhauling outdated Business Improvement District legislation so those who pay get a proper say.
  - Encouraging homes above shops.
- Back Scottish science, engineering and manufacturing by:
    - Making defence a pillar of our industrial strategy, ensuring Scottish firms are well positioned to win a fair share of the increasing UK Government defence spending, as well as contracts from our allies, and supporting Liberal Democrat calls for new defence bonds to accelerate defence spending.
    - Using our new Skills Strategy to ensure Scottish shipbuilding has the workforce it needs, and directly awarding contracts to Ferguson Marine where appropriate and possible.
    - Putting Scotland at the heart of the development and export of clean technologies, as set out in chapter 12.
    - Supporting industry to cut emissions, delivering a just transition, valuing the knowledge and experience of everyone working in oil and gas, and taking special care of the regions heavily invested in fossil fuels, as set out in chapter 12.
    - Turning Scotland into Europe's leading destination for commercial space launches, anchoring high-skill and high-wage jobs in remote areas, and recognising the importance of sovereign launch capabilities for emerging technologies, science, communications, security and defence.
    - Using the imminent Scottish Enterprise review of lab space to stimulate private sector investment and create more capacity for emerging companies and ideas.
- Create thousands of jobs and fantastic business opportunities through our plans to get 25,000 new homes built per year, retrofitting existing homes with insulation and renewable technologies, and the rollout of new sustainable technologies, as set out in chapters 9 and 12.

- Promote creative industries and culture by:
  - Taking away the needless bureaucracy faced by those applying for funding through Creative Scotland and taking forward the recommendations of the Leitch Review.
  - Tackling the big city bias that exists in how culture money is distributed to nurture and promote talent in every corner of Scotland.
  - Supporting the Liberal Democrats' calls to tackle post-Brexit regulations that have made touring unviable for many artists and resulted in lost earnings.
  - Unlocking investment and growth in the games sector by creating a Games Innovation Centre alongside regional hubs, developing expertise and research, fair work, business skills and low-cost office space for start-up studios.
  - Standing up for the BBC, BBC Alba and Channel 4 as independent, publicly owned, public service broadcasters, and backing Liberal Democrat proposals for a permanent BBC charter ratified by the four nations.
  - Maintaining free access to national museums and galleries.
  - Supporting the creation of Dundee's Eden Project.
  
- Champion responsible and sustainable tourism, recognising it as a key industry and incorporate it into our industrial and skills strategies.
  
- Overhaul public sector procurement policies to ensure they support local suppliers and micro-bidders.
  
- Expect contractors and government-owned companies to sign up to the Fair Payment Code, supporting fair payment practices for their small suppliers especially.
  
- Unlock businesses' potential and make it easier to do business in Scotland by:
  - Opening a new arm of the Scottish National Investment Bank dedicated to funding business growth for SMEs.
  - Putting growth at the heart of the Scottish Government's agenda, as set out in chapter 3.
  - Addressing the housing constraints on employers' ability to recruit and making it easier to move to take better job opportunities, including through a new programme of key worker housing, as set out in chapter 9.
  - Modernising planning, as set out in chapter 10.

- Supporting Liberal Democrat proposals for a new bespoke customs union between the UK and EU and a new reciprocal youth mobility agreement for under 35s, as set out in chapters 3 and 8.
- Reducing sickness rates and economic inactivity by getting people faster access to NHS treatment, as set out in chapter 5.
- Helping working families with the cost of childcare, as set out in chapter 8.
- Tackling digital inequality, as set out in chapter 10.
- Removing logistical challenges to the movement of supplies and products by ending the ferries fiasco for good and improving roads, as part of our plan to get Scotland moving again as set out in chapter 11.
- Giving farmers, crofters and fishers a fair deal, as set out in chapter 14.



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# 5 Health

Good health gives people the freedom to live their lives as they choose. A thriving economy needs a healthy population. Universal high-quality healthcare, free at the point of use and accessible whenever and wherever it's needed, is therefore essential for both individual freedom and national prosperity.

Our NHS used to be the envy of the world. But now, too many people can't get the care they need and patient safety is being pushed into the danger zone. The equivalent of one in six Scots are waiting for treatment, GP and dentist appointments are scarce, and calling 999 doesn't guarantee an ambulance when one is needed. There are 2,000 people a night stuck in hospital when they don't need or want to be there. The brilliant frontline staff we rely on are exhausted and burnt out.

Scotland deserves better than this. That's why we have a realistic plan to get things done.

Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that people should get the care they need, when they need it, where they need it. Instead of firefighting crisis after crisis, we will act now to save taxpayers' money in the long run. We will strengthen local services, build a workforce for the future, support people locked out of work by conditions like long Covid and ME, and deploy technology that improves care and cuts costs.

Our plan tackles the crisis at both the front door and the back door of the NHS: strengthening public health and community services so fewer people need costly hospital treatment, and fixing social care so people aren't left stuck in hospital beds they no longer need. We know that saving the NHS means fixing social care.

## **Our priorities are to:**

- **Give you faster access to GPs and 900 more skilled staff locally, boosting early diagnosis and bringing down waits for help.**
- **Ensure everyone can register with and see an NHS dentist, ending 'dental deserts' by giving dentists a fair deal and cutting red tape.**

- **Deliver the world class mental health services Scotland needs, training and recruiting more mental health specialists for community settings near you.**
- **Reinvigorate local health facilities so you get the care you need close to home.**
- **Boost cancer survival rates by detecting and treating it early, including through a new lung cancer screening programme that will save hundreds of lives a year.**
- **Make life easier for staff and patients through new tech, AI and the nationwide rollout of a proper NHS App.**
- **Take pressure off the NHS by promoting preventative health.**
- **Fix social care to reduce delayed discharge and relieve pressure on hospitals and emergency care.**

In addition, we will:

- **Make it easier to see a GP and skilled staff locally by:**
  - Embedding 900 new multidisciplinary patient-facing staff in GP practices and neighbourhood health teams. This will be the equivalent of giving every GP practice an additional member of clinical staff, including nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, dieticians, phlebotomists, mental health professionals and counsellors. This will effectively manage patient need, reduce waits, reduce GP workloads and avoid costly hospital admissions.
  - Growing the GP workforce.
  - Saving GPs and patients time by empowering pharmacists to do more prescribing, making use of secure health records, especially for repeat prescriptions and long-term conditions.
  - Giving infants, everyone 70+ and everyone with long-term health conditions access to a named GP.
  - Enabling patients to use the NHS App to book, move and cancel appoints, ending the 8am rush for GP appointments.

- Increasing the share of the NHS budget that is spent on local surgeries and revising the GP contract, with the aim of enabling everyone to see a GP or the most appropriate practice staff member within five working days, or within 24 hours if there is an urgent need.
- Train, recruit and retain the doctors, nurses and other NHS staff we need by:
  - Establishing a rolling 10-year NHS Workforce Plan.
  - Creating a Health and Social Care Staff Assembly, putting the experience and expertise of those who know their services best at the heart of the Scottish Government's response to the crises they face.
  - Helping working families with the cost of childcare, as set out in chapter 8.
  - Boosting access to housing for health workers to enable them to take up posts, creating new dedicated key worker housing as set out in chapter 9.
  - Establishing a homecoming incentive scheme for people trained in Scotland who are currently working overseas, and explore options to retain more NHS staff that train here.
- Prioritise access to an NHS dentist and improve toothcare for everyone by:
  - Incorporating dentistry into our rolling 10-year NHS and care workforce plan, building on the extra training places delivered by Scottish Liberal Democrats in the 2025/26 Scottish Budget, and addressing the shortage of dental nurses and technicians.
  - Bringing dentists back to the NHS from the private sector, further reforming the NHS payments system and retaining dentists by creating more opportunities for career development including an expansion of Enhanced Skills Practitioners.
  - Creating a structured and supportive environment for overseas-qualified dentists to provide NHS dentistry in Scotland, following the UK Government's big expansion of their routes to registration.
  - Reinvigorating the schemes for people in vulnerable groups to ensure that they can always get the appointments and check-ups they need, with every care home getting regular visits from a dentist.
- Record and publish data on instances of corridor care.

- Enable patients to leave hospital when they no longer need to be there by:
  - Investing in social care and community care, as set out in Chapter 6, helping tackle delayed discharges, degrading corridor care, A&E waits and excessive handover delays for ambulances.
  - Launching a new campaign to establish welfare power of attorney for everyone over 50, preventing lengthy applications for guardianship orders for people stuck on delayed discharge, and make it free and easy to kickstart this using the NHS App.
  - Change to a 7-day discharge model so people aren't kept in hospital just because it is a weekend.
  - Use IT to link up in real-time the clinical teams making discharge decisions and the hospital pharmacy so that patients can leave sooner.
  
- Rejuvenate local healthcare facilities by:
  - Replacing the Edinburgh Eye Pavilion and the Belford Hospital in Fort William, after Scottish Liberal Democrats restarted both projects through the 2025/26 Scottish Budget.
  - Committing to replacing the Gilbert Bain Hospital in Shetland.
  - Restoring consultant-led maternity services at Caithness General Hospital.
  - Introducing 24/7 walk-in urgent care at Portree Hospital.
  - Opening a new health and care centre in East Dunbartonshire.
  - Conducting a feasibility study for the rebuilding or expansion of Raigmore Hospital.
  - Helping NHS boards deal with the dangerous concrete crisis through a new national fund, as set out in chapter 10.
  - Introducing a 'Fair Deal for Rural Healthcare', aimed at increasing the range of services, treatments and diagnoses available locally, and recognising that the current model of centralisation has left people in many parts of Scotland with longer journeys. We will do this by creating strong clinical networks to give peer support to professionals working in remote and rural communities and changing professional education to support this new decentralised, rural-proofed model.
  - Ensuring decisions about health services are taken as close as possible to the communities they affect and that any reform does not result in top-down centralisation.

- Harness the benefits of new technology and digital tools for staff and patients by:
  - Requiring all IT systems used by the NHS to work with each other.
  - Giving patients more information on when they could be seen and the length of the queue for treatment.
  - Publishing an AI action plan that will underpin its safe, smart and efficient deployment across the NHS.
  - Rolling out a comprehensive NHS App, making up for years of SNP delay and failure.
  
- Boost cancer survival rates by:
  - Rolling out a national lung cancer screening programme capable of saving hundreds of lives every year.
  - Replacing ageing equipment including radiotherapy machines and increase their number, reducing long journeys for treatment.
  - Creating a world-leading cancer research environment.
  - Welcoming US scientists fleeing the Trump administration's anti-science agenda, enabling them to continue their cancer research, as part of the Liberal Democrats' proposals for a UK-wide Cancer Research Fellowship Scheme.
  - Prioritising the science to increase genetic screening for cancer.
  - Ensure all cancer patients who require reconstructive surgery can receive this on the NHS, following treatment or pre-emption.
  
- Establish the world class mental health services Scotland needs and cut waiting times by:
  - Ensuring our rolling 10-year NHS workforce plan provides the staff necessary to increase access to clinically effective talking therapies and psychiatry.
  - Incorporating counsellors into NHS workforce planning so their skills can help more people.
  - Setting a new target for additional mental health professionals working alongside the police and prison staff.
  - Provide new walk-in services to meet the needs of people in mental health distress or crisis, working alongside and learning from SAMH's pioneering Nook network.

- Supporting businesses and public services that are losing hundreds of thousands of working days to mental ill health through the ramping up of training, so that every workplace can be offered the benefit of a mental health first aider.
  - Creating new dedicated mental health beds for children and young people north of Dundee, addressing the scandal of long journeys for treatment and people being separated from their support networks.
  - Abolishing so-called rejected referrals by integrating Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services into a new wider system of multi-disciplinary support, with safety nets and ladders so that families are never sent back to the start of the process of seeking help.
  - Using the recent eating disorder framework to improve access to treatment and support.
  - Transforming perinatal mental health support for those who are pregnant, new mothers and those who have experienced miscarriage or stillbirth, creating inpatient beds for new mothers north of Livingston and offering joined up support through family support hubs, as set out in chapter 8.
  - Ensure teachers are trained in trauma-informed practice, suicide prevention and undertake mental health first aider training.
  - Lowering suicide rates through a focus on community suicide prevention services.
  - Shortening mental health waiting times targets once they are consistently met because 18 weeks is too long to routinely wait for treatment to begin.
  - Guaranteeing year-on-year real terms increases to the mental health budget to deliver our plan and increase spending on suicide prevention.
  - Backing Liberal Democrat proposals for film-style age ratings for social media and properly taxing the social media giants who cause so much of the problem, as set out in chapters 3 and 8.
- Work with NHS Scotland and GPs to establish a protocol for shared care for ADHD diagnoses, including a portal of accredited private providers from which diagnosis and treatment plans will be accepted with commensurate resourcing for medicines.
  - Transform care for long Covid, ME, chronic fatigue and other similar conditions, using the £4.5 million of funding per year won by Scottish Liberal Democrats in the 2025/26 Budget, and ensure children and young people with long term conditions such as these are fully included in national policy and frameworks.

- Have a special focus on ending medical misogyny so women's symptoms aren't dismissed, prioritising research and training on conditions including endometriosis, the menopause, polycystic ovary syndrome, hyperemesis, ectopic and molar pregnancies.
- Establish and deliver dementia care pathway guarantees.
- Work with private providers where their services can bring down waiting times for patients, reduce costs and complement NHS services, but never compromising on our commitment to universal healthcare free at the point of use.
- Create new clinical pathways so audiology services are available on the high street at no cost to patients.
- Support faster access to new and novel medicines and medical devices by backing a comprehensive mutual recognition agreement between the UK and the European Medicines Agency, as called for by the Liberal Democrats.
- Create world-class drug services for Scotland by 2030 by:
  - Championing Mother and Child Recovery Houses for those affected by substance abuse and new intensive community-based perinatal services, using the funding secured by Scottish Liberal Democrats in the 2025/26 Scottish Budget.
  - Valuing the role of youth work and extra curricular activities in prevention, as set out in chapter 8, learning from the Icelandic Planet Youth model funded through the 2025/26 Scottish Budget by the Scottish Liberal Democrats.
  - Rolling out a Scotland-wide network of safer drugs consumption facilities, continually learning from Glasgow's experience while recognising the inherent risk to life elsewhere.
  - Introducing a multi-year funding model for all drugs and alcohol services, to give them the certainty they need to be able to invest in facilities, recruit staff, build up relationships with service users, boost access to care and open up new pathways to education and employment for people in recovery.
  - Working with Police Scotland and the Lord Advocate to allow pill checking.
  - Establishing a national network of lifestations by combining naloxone kits with public access defibrillators and bleed kits.

- Treating Scotland's drugs deaths crisis as a public health emergency, and working with the UK Government to devolve powers for tailored solutions where necessary.
- Treat abortion as a healthcare issue, and give MSPs the opportunity to vote on decriminalisation.
- Have a long-term focus on prevention and help people spend more years of their life in good health by:
  - Harnessing the breakthroughs in weight loss medication. Where GPs agree it is the best solution for weight loss, we will offer access to these on the NHS, using the bargaining power of the NHS and increasing competition from weight loss drugs in development.
  - Guaranteeing 24/7 access to thrombectomy in stroke services, delivering better long-term outcomes for patients.
  - Ensuring people are on the right medicines, lessening the harm done to patients by unnecessary prescriptions and tackling medicines waste.
  - Supporting the expansion of social prescribing and investment in community projects that bring people together to combat loneliness.
  - Making it easier to put affordable, healthy and nutritious food on the table, as set out in chapter 14.
  - Backing restrictions on the marketing of vapes to reflect their role as a tool for smoking cessation and limit their appeal to non-smokers and young people, removing flavourings and influencer promotions, introducing stricter rules for retailers, revamping public health campaigns, and backing further research into their health effects.
  - Supporting further restrictions on outdoor smoking, such as at school gates, playparks and common stairwells, building on the smoking ban in public places introduced by the Scottish Liberal Democrats.
  - Supporting Liberal Democrat proposals for a new UK-wide levy on tobacco company profits .
  - Protecting the free eye tests and dental checks introduced by the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

- Supporting wellbeing by making it easier for people to use active travel, as set out in chapter 11.
- Linking the minimum unit price of alcohol to inflation.
- Give people dignity at the end of life by:
  - Supporting hospices to provide essential palliative and end-of-life care, enabling them to pay doctors and nurses in line with NHS salaries and giving children’s hospice care a fair deal, building on the extra £14.4m delivered by Scottish Liberal Democrats across the last two Scottish budgets.
  - Giving people of all ages living with terminal illness a legal right to palliative care.
  - Helping people with terminal illness with energy bills amid the cost of living crisis, and giving them fast-track access to the emergency insulation programme set out in chapter 12.
- Help everyone enjoy the benefits of sport, tackling loneliness, improving mental health and helping people to live healthier lifestyles by:
  - Giving local authorities a fair deal, as set out in chapter 10, helping them invest in leisure centres, swimming pools, grassroots facilities and community clubs.
  - Establishing a taskforce on access to public swimming pools and require a consultation on every closure involving sportscotland and Scottish Swimming.
  - Protecting Scottish Government funding for sportscotland in real terms.
  - Promoting opportunities for local sports clubs to preserve threatened local facilities as community assets.
  - Supporting and encouraging campaigns to improve equality, diversity and inclusion at all levels of sport.



# 6 Care

Everyone deserves high-quality care when they need it. Scottish Liberal Democrats want everyone to be able to live independently and with dignity, and receive any care they need in their own home wherever possible.

Carers – paid and unpaid, young and old – do a remarkable and important job. They deserve far more support, but are too often forgotten and ignored.

Despite their dedication, social care services are in crisis. Thousands of people are waiting for care. Many are stranded in hospital beds because the care isn't in place for them to leave, putting even more strain on the NHS.

The SNP promised to eradicate delayed discharges, deliver fair work for staff, and that ministers would retain their WhatsApp messages for the public inquiries into their handling of the pandemic and the tragedy of Scotland's care homes. They have broken all these promises. Scotland deserves better.

Scottish Liberal Democrats are the party of care and Ed Davey has been a champion for carers. We introduced free personal care for older people, created a new pipeline for care workers through Scotland's colleges, forced the ill-fated centralisation of social care out of the budget after the SNP threw away £30 million, won the right for family carers to earn more without having support withdrawn, and passed the Carer's Leave Act giving new rights to 2.4 million carers across the UK.

We will empower care users, and support care workers and all the unpaid carers looking after loved ones. We will invest to save, recognising that providing care reduces demand on more expensive NHS services.

## **We will:**

- **Give unpaid carers a fair deal so they get the support they so desperately need, including raising the support they receive by £400 a year and new help for young carers balancing education and caring for their loved one.**

- **Reward care workers through national bargaining on pay and conditions, fair work and a career ladder that boosts their skills and respects their experience at every step.**
- **Create common national standards to support better care services.**

In addition, we will:

- Demand truly personalised care that empowers individuals by:
  - Implementing a new human rights-focused approach to social care to be provided through integrated and accountable local services.
  - Championing preventative approaches.
  - Giving all care users national standards and entitlements accompanied by effective complaint resolution for when they are not met.
  - Involving disabled people and other care users in the creation of national standards and local commissioning, ensuring these are informed by local experience of unmet need.
  - Allowing carers to build relationships and trust with care users, moving away from narrow, task-based contracts.
  - Making sure people can access the care they need close to home, working with authorities where there is a clear need for additional care homes and beds, as is the case in the Highlands.
- Make careers in social care more attractive and value experienced staff to improve retention by:
  - Improving the recruitment and retention of care workers through national bargaining and commit to funding the outcomes so that care workers get fair pay and better conditions as soon as possible.
  - Creating clear career pathways, enhanced representation for this skilled workforce, and ending the undervaluing of skills in the sector.
  - Boosting access to housing for care workers to enable them to take up posts, creating new dedicated key worker housing as set out in chapter 9.
  - Backing Liberal Democrat proposals for a new UK-wide national minimum wage for care that is at least £2 higher – the equivalent of a salary of at least £28,500 per year – helping people to leave hospital on time and relieving pressure on the NHS.

- Give unpaid carers a fair deal by:
  - Increasing support payments so that unpaid carers are at least £1000 per year better off than they would be under the old system of Carer's Allowance.
  - Developing an earnings taper to end the unfair cliff-edge and make the system more work-friendly.
  - Creating Young Carers' Leads across schools and colleges who can provide practical support to help young carers balance education and caring for their loved one, as set out in Chapter 7.
  - Supporting the Liberal Democrats' calls for the introduction across the UK of paid carer's leave, for caring to be made a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, and for employers to be required to make reasonable adjustments to enable employees with caring responsibilities to provide that care.
  - Ensuring carers are aware of and can access all the forms of support that are available to them, guaranteeing families are always told about their legal rights to assessments.
  - Swiftly deliver the new right to a break from caring for all unpaid carers, with young carers able to access person-centred respite either away from home or at home.

# 7 Education

Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that education is the best investment we can make in our children's potential and our country's future.

Scottish education just isn't what it used to be. We used to have one of the best education systems in the world, but under the SNP it is now just average. Pupils with additional support needs aren't having their needs met, too many pupils are frequently absent, and schools are more violent than ever before. The poverty-related attainment gap means the whole country misses out on the talents of thousands of people. University and college finances are under unprecedented pressure. The whole education system isn't producing the range and depth of skills that businesses and our economy need.

Our children deserve better. That's why we have a realistic plan to get Scottish education back to its best, expanding pupil support in every school and giving every child the best start in life.

Our plan will invest in education at every stage, starting from a young age and continuing throughout adulthood. We want every child to get the support and attention they need at school, so they leave with the skills, confidence and resilience to be happy and successful – whatever they choose to do next.

## **We will:**

- **Boost in-class support in every school by inflation-proofing Pupil Equity Funding, hiring 2,000 more pupil support assistants (PSAs) and rolling out more specialist support such as speech and language therapists.**
- **Enshrine the right of children to learn, and teachers to teach, by making every school a smartphone-free environment.**
- **Offer teachers proper stable contracts instead of short-term and zero hours work.**



**CERTIFICATE  
OF ENROLMENT**

THE BEARER OF THIS CERTIFICATE HAS  
OFTEN THE RECOMMENDATION OF THEIR  
PARENTS, HAS BEEN ENROLLED INTO THE

**GUILD OF ST CUTHBERT**

Having demonstrated a commitment to excellence in  
all we do in our parish, accept of this certificate  
as evidence of their membership of the St Cuthbert Cross  
wherever they serve at Holy Mass.

*John Leahy*

Head of St Cuthbert  
Catholic Primary School



- **Repair Scotland’s colleges and vocational skills system, and safeguard the future of our world-leading universities.**

In addition, we will:

- Help more children get off to a good start by:
  - Focusing on play-based learning until the age of 7 so children acquire important learning and social skills before formal schooling starts, starting this longer statutory Early Years Phase as a series of voluntary pilots.
  - Protecting children’s rights, developing family support hubs and enhancing funded early learning and childcare, as set out in chapter 8.
- Give pupils the support they need by:
  - Recruiting 2,000 new pupil support assistants to give more in-class support to children who need it, as part of a new School Workforce Strategy, to enhance and standardise the training, recruitment, retention and careers of PSAs.
  - Making sure young people with additional support needs get the support they require, recruiting more expert staff, including specialist behaviour support, ASN teachers, speech and language therapists, and educational psychologists.
  - Helping neurodivergent people and their families receive the right help at the right time, as set out in chapter 15.
  - Creating a Young Carers’ Lead in every school and college who can provide practical support to help young carers balance education and caring for their loved one, and tasking Education Scotland with improving the data on young carers in education and their access to the support and respite they deserve.
  - Using youth work as one of the means to reach more young people who are not engaged successfully in formal education, as set out in chapter 8.
  - Expanding the provision of extracurricular activities, such as music, sport, drama, debating and entrepreneurship, starting by piloting a new free entitlement for disadvantaged children, as set out in chapter 8.
  - Bringing into force the law on residential outdoor education.
  - Introducing a Service Pupil Premium so that armed forces families in Scotland get the same benefit as those in England, as part of the commitment to delivering the Armed Forces Covenant.
  - Inflation-proofing Pupil Equity Funding - a system pioneered by the Liberal Democrats – and legislating to make it a permanent feature to provide long-term strategic investments for children that will help reduce the poverty-

related attainment gap, fund supported study and tutoring, ensure hunger isn't a barrier to learning and give confidence to schools to recruit staff on fair contracts.

- End the excessive use of short-term and zero hours contracts for teachers and ensure pupils have the teachers and subject choice they deserve, by:
  - Creating a new School Workforce Strategy, developed and agreed with local authorities.
  - Prioritising the building of top-class leadership in our schools, developing support networks and career opportunities for teachers and pupil support assistants, encouraging specialist additional support needs training and addressing hard-to-fill teaching posts through three-year packages for probationer teachers for specific areas.
  - Helping teachers share learning resources between schools to alleviate workloads.
  - Creating a more attractive career path for STEM graduates within teaching by bringing back principal teachers for these subjects.
  - Revamping the bursaries for STEM and Gaelic and increasing the probation teacher preference waiver payment to boost uptake.
  - Extending the amount of teacher training that can be undertaken remotely, making it easier for people in remote, island and rural areas to train and carry out their placements locally.
  - Making Professional (Additional) Registration available and free to teachers on short-term and zero hours contracts, qualifying them to teach additional subjects or switch from primary to secondary, improving teachers' job prospects and giving pupils the excellent teachers they need.
  - Establishing a list of hard-to-fill posts suitable for a simplified process for teachers living in Scotland who qualified outside Scotland, allowing local authorities to fill posts that would otherwise lie empty while maintaining professional standards.
- Launch a review of the availability and quality of digital devices in schools.
- Revolutionise the school library experience through a new nationwide E-Library Service, delivering a step-change in access to books that will raise literacy standards and give every child the chance to develop a love of reading.

- Ask the Curriculum and Assessment board to provide leadership on enhancing all pupils' digital literacy and AI comprehension, financial skills and teamwork.
- Bring into force Calum's Law on the use of restraint and seclusion in schools and new GTCS systems checks to improve child protection and fitness to teach procedures.
- Report on the progress being made to get Scottish education back to its best by:
  - Developing a data-led evaluation approach to all new education initiatives and pilot programmes to ensure change leads to improvement.
  - Using the results of sample-based surveys and the long-overdue return to the TIMSS and PIRLS international assessments to understand and respond to Scotland's progress.
  - Abolishing the SNP's school league tables, based on nationalised testing, in favour of trusting teachers' judgement.
  - Protecting the independence of accreditation and quality assurance, separating these functions from Qualifications Scotland to avoid a repeat of the Higher History problems and the new awards body marking its own homework.
  - Adopting a new culture within the measurement of education that values equally the range of routes to high-wage high-skill jobs.
  - Reforming the Insight benchmarking system and the value and visibility it puts on different learner outcomes, reflecting the diverse range of achievements, promoting parity of esteem between academic and non-academic qualifications and awards, and giving schools the confidence to guide each pupil towards the best opportunities for them.
- Increase the uptake of apprenticeships, as set out in chapter 4.
- Repair the colleges and vocational skills system by:
  - Securely funding colleges, building on the extra £70m secured by Scottish Liberal Democrats in the 2026/27 Budget.
  - Aligning courses with the new skills strategy, as set out in chapter 4, delivering the skills businesses need, building on the funding Scottish Liberal Democrats secured in the 2025/26 Budget for new skills pipelines in care and offshore wind.

- Restoring colleges to a powerful role in local economic development, training people of all ages in the skills they need to start – or change – their careers.
  - Giving colleges further freedom from government to innovate, and to borrow and keep surpluses.
  - Review the credit funding system, basing it on future activity rather than historical activity, to encourage innovation, the creation of new courses and closer connections with employers.
  - Strengthening careers advice and links with employers in schools and colleges.
  - Securely funding Corseford College, Scotland's only complex needs college, building on the essential funding delivered by Scottish Liberal Democrats for 2025-27 through the Scottish Budget.
  - Securing the future of Scotland's agricultural colleges.
- Safeguard the future of our world-leading universities by:
    - Enabling Scottish universities to continue to punch above their weight in research, valuing public investment and creating the conditions for them to successfully compete for UK-wide research funding.
    - Making the most of the return to Erasmus Plus, as called for by the Liberal Democrats, and report international student flows separately to estimates of long-term migration.
    - Enabling US scientists who have had their cancer research cancelled by President Trump to finish their work here, as set out in chapter 5.
    - Encouraging Scottish universities to widen access by undertaking outreach work in schools in disadvantaged areas.
- Build on the progress Scottish Liberal Democrats have made in getting parties around the table by working towards a cross-party cross-sector consensus about the future funding of colleges and universities, responding to the underfunding of Scottish students, the need to protect against global shocks and exposure in a system that's reliant on the fees of international students, and the unprecedented financial challenges currently facing institutions.
- Ensure that universities, colleges and SAAS help students and apprentices with the cost of living crisis, including through bursaries, grants, special support loans and greater flexibility on student loan borrowing limits.

# 8 Families, Children and Young People

For the youngest voters in this election, the SNP has always been in charge. It's all they've ever known.

After nineteen years, too many children, young people and families find themselves living in temporary accommodation, or worried about violence at school, struggling with their mental health, or parked on a waiting list for neurodevelopmental condition assessments. The promise of real change for young people with experience of the care system has not been realised. The SNP Government has let each and every one of them down.

Every child deserves the best start in life and the chance to flourish, no matter their background or personal circumstances. They need opportunities to have fun, discover their talents and grow in confidence and ambition.

Parents need to know where to go when they need help. They should have real choice and flexibility over how to organise their lives and return to work if they want to.

Our aim is to make Scotland the best place to grow up or raise children by ensuring proper support is available whenever and wherever you need it.

## **We will:**

- **Use youth work to foster more opportunities for young people, including those at risk of falling behind, who are disengaged from education, or who need mentorship and fresh inspiration to learn new skills.**
- **End long waits for diagnosis, support and adjustments for people with neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD and autism, as set out in chapter 15.**



- **Revamp the reform of care to transform outcomes for care experienced people, nurturing loving relationships and the knowledge that help is always here.**
- **Develop family support hubs, open to everyone but targeted towards those communities in most need, providing early and holistic emotional, practical and financial support to families.**
- **Prioritise working parents and those entering work in the enhancement of funded early learning and childcare, to help with the challenges and costs of juggling work and family.**

In addition, we will:

- Protect and support the rights and wellbeing of every child by:
  - Addressing government neglect of children’s mental health services, as set out in chapter 5.
  - Getting Scottish education back to its best, as set out in chapter 7.
  - Giving extra support to young carers by ensuring they get the respite they need and creating a Young Carers’ Lead at their school or college who can provide practical support, as set out in chapters 6 and 7.
  - Ensuring every child has a warm and secure home, as set out in chapter 9.
  - Backing high-quality Bairns Hooses to reduce the trauma children can experience through the justice system, including specialist support for children who experience online crimes.
  - Creating a protocol to guarantee that bereaved children and young people are always offered specialist support following the death of a loved one through a new ‘duty to inform’ and regular training for relevant frontline professionals.
  - Supporting Liberal Democrat proposals to protect children online through film-style age ratings for social media platforms, restricting those that use addictive algorithmic feeds to users over 16 and rating 18+ those that host extreme content.
- Support Liberal Democrat proposals to give parents genuine flexibility and choice in the crucial early months by doubling Statutory Maternity and Shared Parental Pay.

- Ensure that parents can access early learning and childcare (ELC) that is flexible, affordable and fair by:
  - Providing the choice that parents were promised from the rollout of 1140 funded hours, introducing fairer rates for private, voluntary and independent providers to cover the actual costs of delivering high-quality ELC.
  - Increasing take-up of funded ELC among eligible two-year-olds.
  - Prioritising working families in the extension of ELC as funding allows, starting by shifting the 1140 funded hours to start on a child's third birthday, treating it as a critical part of our economic infrastructure, helping parents return to work, close the gender pay gap and raise additional tax revenues.
  - Bringing local authorities together to strike a partnership agreement that ensures parents who live in one council area but work in another have choice on where their child attends nursery, guaranteeing funding really does follow the child.
  - Introducing a new support package for childminders in rural and remote areas.
  - Extending the existing childcare provision that is available for students to cover their periods of independent study and vocational placements, encouraging parents to study and learn new skills.
  - Including ELC in the new skills strategy, as set out in chapter 4.
  
- Encourage universities and colleges to be more parent-friendly with parental leave, breastfeeding and changing areas, and sensible notice periods for timetable changes.
  
- Make everyday life easier for families by encouraging councils and public services to prioritise pram-friendly, safe and welcoming environments for children and their caregivers.
  
- Ensure families never feel alone with nowhere and no one to turn to, by:
  - Modelling the best ways to deliver new family support hubs that are close to home and capable of building a network of relationships for families.
  - Creating a new front door for families to immediately access a wide variety of stigma-free support, both online and over the phone.
  - Offering more advice and pre-diagnosis support to families on waiting lists.

- Embedding financial wellbeing checks into more settings to maximise family incomes, taking the opportunity to help people when they attend places such as their GP surgery.
- Expand the provision of extra curricular activities, such as music, sport, drama, debating and entrepreneurship, starting by piloting a new free entitlement for disadvantaged children.
- Bring forward a Youth Work Bill:
  - Boosting young people's educational, social and emotional development, ensuring everyone has access to services that can help them feel included, build life skills, resilience and confidence.
  - Directing young people towards services at key points in their lives
  - Introducing an entitlement to youth work for 11-25 year olds.
  - Introducing national and local strategies.
- Give young people a bigger role in shaping policies affecting them through the Youth Parliament.
- Supercharge the reform of care to transform outcomes for care experienced people, nurturing loving relationships and the knowledge that help is always here, by:
  - Establishing a comprehensive roadmap for the implementation of The Promise.
  - Introducing a new scheme that works with young people to identify jobs that would suit them, and pilot a public sector traineeship for everyone at the point that they leave care to assist with the transition, providing hands-on work experience and mentoring.
  - Adopting the principle that children should only be placed in institutional care for rehabilitative therapy that enables them to form and maintain lifelong relationships outwith that setting.
  - Valuing the importance of children being able to form and maintain loving relationships, with a stronger focus on this to minimise the time children spend in institutional care.
  - Ensuring the right to return to care is properly realised.

- Enabling a care experienced person, once they reach 18, to formally join a family to which they belong and form a lifelong bond with someone who loves them.
  - Improving data on the outcomes for care experienced people.
  - Calling on the UK Government to make care experience a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.
- Help young entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds launch businesses, as set out in chapter 4.
  - Work with the UK Government to fix the UK's broken relationship with the European Union that would open doors for study and work for young people through the return to the Erasmus Plus programme as an associated country and through a new reciprocal youth mobility agreement for under 35s.



# 9 Housing

Liberal Democrats know that a warm, safe, affordable place to live is the foundation on which people build their lives. Everyone deserves a place to call home.

However, homelessness has reached record levels. Thousands of children are stuck in temporary accommodation doing their homework in a single room, changing schools, losing friendships and falling behind. Affordable housebuilding has collapsed. Too many young professionals are finding that they have no choice but to live at home with their parents.

The situation has been worsened by skills shortages, Brexit, inflation, Liz Truss causing mortgage rates to soar, and the SNP and Greens together cutting £200 million from the affordable homes budget during a housing emergency. Only the Scottish Liberal Democrats both voted against that cut and put the money back in the budget the following year.

Now, we will ensure that everyone can access housing that meets their needs. We will help you live close to where you need to be, whether it's for work, family or because it's where you belong.

**We will tackle Scotland's housing emergency head-on by:**

- **Replacing the SNP Government's failing national housing strategy with a new holistic data-driven strategy, re-establishing social rent as a long-term option, prioritising the building of communities, and deploying innovative finance models that make it easier for people to buy and rent.**
- **Returning housebuilding to a level that will get an average of 25,000 homes built each year, supporting 87,000 high quality jobs.**
- **Launching a programme to deliver 10,000 homes dedicated for key workers in conjunction with the private sector and councils, with eligibility decided locally.**
- **Developing a new programme for Net Zero New Towns.**

- **Introducing a Help to Renovate loan scheme to bring neglected properties back into use.**
- **Reforming planning, as set out in chapter 10.**

In addition, we will:

- Build more homes that people can afford by:
  - Giving housebuilders a predictable environment in which they can grow and deliver the homes required, as set out in chapter 3.
  - Forecasting and delivering the skills the construction sector needs through a new Skills Strategy, as set out in chapter 4.
  - Re-establishing social renting as a long-term option, working in partnership with registered social landlords and housing associations, and providing grant rate certainty over multi-year periods so that they can plan, recruit and build with confidence.
  - Exploring the potential of innovative financing models, including the Lar Housing Trust loan-based model for building homes for mid-market rent, and a new Help to Build stewardship model that utilises pension funds to make buying more affordable, with the aim of bringing down upfront costs for both people searching for a home and small and medium-sized builders.
  - Collecting better data on housing trends, rental prices and demand, to inform decision-making, forecast and respond to need.
  - Developing a programme for a new generation of net zero new towns, prioritising from the outset features such as rail links, biodiversity, district heating, and the 20-minute neighbourhood.
  - Working with business and local authorities to develop a new programme for dedicated key worker housing, at mid-market rents, with each council deciding what workers it will be reserved for based on local needs, from carers and NHS staff to teachers or engineers.
  - Using the proceeds of Scottish renewable energy investment to fund local housing, overhauling the outdated guidance on community benefit as set out in chapter 12.
  - Supporting the model promoted by the Community Housing Trust with a rural burden to develop more homes in rural areas.
  - Publishing new guidance to rollout a recognised model of co-housing that can improve social cohesion and diverse housing needs, including those of older people.

- Conducting an assessment of publicly owned brownfield land and consult on a mechanism for selling such land on a plot-by-plot basis direct to communities for self-building.
  - Reforming planning to make it simpler to redevelop long-term derelict buildings.
  - Forcing the sale of derelict sites that blight communities to deliver more suitable land for housing.
  - Developing standardised models of homes that have the support of planners across the country in order to speed up the planning approval when applications are made.
  - Reforming NPF4 to ensure sufficient land is available for developers and to reduce the level of prep approval reports that are required especially for SME builders.
- Manage the housing stock more effectively and bring empty homes back into use by:
    - Creating a new Help to Renovate loan scheme to bring neglected properties back into use with a particular focus on helping first-time buyers onto the housing ladder and achieving low emission properties.
    - Acquiring more homes to house people on lower incomes, making use of the acquisitions budget for public housing stock which doubled after the Scottish Liberal Democrats delivered more money for housing through the 2025/26 Scottish Budget.
    - Making it more straightforward for local authorities to address the problem of disused dilapidated homes through compulsory purchase.
- Consult on how to introduce exemptions for Land and Building Transaction Tax for difficult to build on brownfield sites and for older people downsizing to encourage the freeing up of larger properties for families.
- Restore confidence in the private rented sector.
- Tackle homelessness by:
    - Replacing the SNP Government's failing national housing strategy to address the current challenges.
    - Introducing a Young Homeless Guarantee recognising the additional challenges for young homeless people, with special pathways to link suitable jobs and training to housing.

- Developing a system of aftercare to respond to the disadvantage experienced by children when their family is homeless or in temporary accommodation long-term.
- Prioritising prevention and enhancing support for those at risk of homelessness due to circumstances including mental ill health or drug misuse, care experience, imprisonment or domestic violence, as set out in chapters 5, 8, 10 and 15 respectively.
- Bring down energy bills, install more solar and heat pumps, and accelerate the rollout of insulation, as set out in chapter 12, and use this to tackle condensation and mould problems.
- Set a timescale and milestones to remove dangerous Grenfell-style cladding from all Scottish buildings and kickstart the failing remediation programme that has left thousands of people still living in potentially deadly buildings.

# 10 Communities and Local Government

Our country works best when decisions are taken as close as possible to those they affect. Right now, people don't feel like they are being listened to or that they have the means to roll up their sleeves, do things differently and change their area for the better.

Almost two decades of SNP centralisation has drained local communities of the ability to shape their own future. Local services and facilities that people relied on have shut. The viability of some rural and remote areas is being threatened by the lack of public transport, the ferries fiasco, the housing emergency and skills shortages. The planning system isn't working for anyone right now.

Meanwhile, far too many criminals are evading justice and thousands more have been released early from prison without help that could prevent their reoffending. Everyone deserves to feel safe in their homes and streets.

We know every community has its own character and priorities. We'll shift power out of Holyrood and into local hands, giving people real control and the resources to shape where they live, without waiting for say-so from Edinburgh. From city centres to remote islands, and everything in between, we'll make sure every area has the services and opportunities needed to live, work and raise a family.

By giving every part of Scotland the power to play to its strengths and fix what is broken, nowhere is left behind and change finally happens.

## **Our priorities are to:**

- **Renew local government by treating it as an equal partner and respecting its role in providing the essential services we all rely upon, giving councils multi-year funding deals, more powers over local taxation and new freedoms to innovate.**

- **Modernise the planning system, making it less arduous and delivering badly-needed infrastructure and economic growth, including by investing in digital tools that help speed up decision-making.**
- **Prevent crime through new initiatives to tackle challenges including shoplifting and violence against women and girls, and cut reoffending through the use of robust community sentences and by giving prisoners the education they need to succeed after release.**

We will:

- Give communities the powers and services that they need to thrive, be resilient and reverse local depopulation, by:
  - Working with the UK Government to ensure fast and reliable broadband through programmes including Project Gigabit, protect critical undersea infrastructure from foreign interference, and support local bespoke solutions so no community is left out.
  - Making high streets welcoming, a source of local pride and economically successful, as set out in chapter 4.
  - Rejuvenating local healthcare facilities and introducing a ‘Fair Deal for Rural Healthcare’, as set out in chapter 5.
  - Ensuring local schools have the staff they need and restoring colleges to a powerful role in local economic development, as set out in chapter 7.
  - Ensuring that parents can access early learning and childcare (ELC) that is flexible, affordable and fair, as set out in chapter 8.
  - Tackling the housing emergency so that you can live close to where you belong or need to be, as set out in chapter 9.
  - Getting Scotland moving again by fixing our roads, ferries and public transport, and transforming core connections, as set out in chapter 11.
  - Subjecting new policies and legislation to Rural Communities Impact Assessments to put the interests of rural and remote communities at the heart of decision-making.
- Take a holistic approach to supporting Gaelic, empowering Gaelic-speaking communities to make decisions about how to best sustain their language and culture.



- Give local authorities a fair deal and more powers by:
  - Guaranteeing fair funding for local authorities, building on the £1 billion uplift secured by Scottish Liberal Democrats in the 2025/26 Scottish Budget, with multi-year settlements to boost service transformation and innovation.
  - Re-writing the rules so local people and councils get much more of the money companies make from generating renewable energy near them, as set out in chapter 12.
  - Transferring ScotWind rental income to the nearby councils.
  - Granting local authorities a full power of general competence, meaning more power to innovate.
  - Reforming business rates with new levers for local authorities, as set out in chapter 4.
  - Giving councils the power to shut shops refusing to pay their business rates as a last resort, and change the law to allow for the pursuit of landlords who turn a blind eye.
  - Restarting the cross-party process to replace the council tax, proposing a switch to land value system which does not penalise homeowners for improving their properties, and exploring if the new system can include a valuation process in common with business rates to make it more efficient and cut costs for taxpayers.
  - Helping local authorities undertake social impact investments, as set out in chapter 3.
  - Amending the Visitor Levy Act to allow for point of entry charges, for instance for cruise ship passengers, and exempt those required to travel and stay in overnight accommodation for NHS appointments.
  - Offering local communities the opportunity to establish a burgh or island council to serve their area, established by a charter defining its functions, to give a truly local democratic focus to services.
  - Creating a mechanism for local authorities to formally request a review of their shape or size, giving due consideration to any proposals they present.
  
- Establish a fund aimed at helping public authorities deal with the dangerous concrete crisis.
  
- Give volunteering organisations the flexibility and certainty they need with longer term funding agreements.

- Modernise the planning system so it works hand-in-hand with economic objectives, communities and nature, by:
  - Piloting and launching a major project to integrate AI into all local authority planning departments to speed up decision-making and assist planners, saving staff time, undertaking modelling, automating data analysis, pre-screening and processing documents, analysing compliance, and identifying issues for planners to review and address.
  - Training and retaining more planners.
  - Requiring greater cohesion between local development plans and the bodies and utilities that have related activities and expenditure, such as Transport Scotland and Scottish Water, so that organisations are pulling in the same direction.
  - Recalibrating the planning system so that it incentivises development, innovation and economic growth.
  
- Make communities safer, prevent crime and tackle reoffending by:
  - Helping young people at risk of offending through early intervention and mentorship, including bringing forward a Youth Work Bill as set out in chapter 8.
  - Tackling misogyny and violence against women and girls, as set out in chapter 15.
  - Increasing investment in the Retail Crime Taskforce to underpin responsive community policing, with the ability to oversee the installation of measures that intelligence indicates will prevent or detect crime.
  - Tightening regulations on the sale of knives to prevent them being stolen from shops.
  - Assisting the police and prison staff by ensuring they have more specialist mental health staff working alongside them and delivering the world class mental health services Scotland needs, as set out in chapter 5.
  - Saving police officers time by cutting back their involvement in issuing court citations, improving trial scheduling and through their giving evidence remotely.
  - Working with Police Scotland to ensure officers and staff have the resources they need to be able to attend criminal incidents, solve problems early and gather intelligence.

- Legislating to inject local democracy back into Police Scotland, making sure local policing plans are approved by locally elected people and removing the sole right of ministers to appoint the Scottish Police Authority.
  - Preventing the demise of the Special Constabulary.
  - Supporting Liberal Democrat calls for improved cooperation with our European neighbours on tackling cross-border crime, including the restoration of real-time access to EU-wide data sharing systems to identify and arrest traffickers, terrorists and other international criminals.
  - Preventing the early release of individual prisoners where they have a history of assaulting the police.
  - Driving down the use of costly remand by ensuring it is only used where it is necessary for public safety.
  - Investing in robust community-based measures to ensure that there are credible punishments beyond imprisonment for lower-level offences.
  - Reducing reoffending by helping people get on in life, increasing the uptake of purposeful activity and accredited qualifications while people are on remand or in prison, ensuring they receive welfare, housing and healthcare checks within 48 hours of release, and working with justice partners to publish post-prison destinations such as education, employment or training alongside reconviction rates.
  - Completing the long-overdue replacement of integral parts of the prison estate.
  - Protecting the rights of victims of crime, as set out in chapter 15.
- End the era of cuts to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, aim to reduce response times for both the first responding appliance and specialist equipment, and assist with the costs of fixing RAAC in fire stations.

# 11 Transport

Scottish Liberal Democrats will get Scotland moving again. No matter where you live, we'll help you get around. No one and nowhere will be left behind.

We will help you get to work and use transport to give you new opportunities for employment. By opening up new ways to connect villages, towns and cities, we will make it more convenient and affordable to reach public services and get to appointments, travel for education and recreation, or bring up a family.

The SNP Government's ferries fiasco is a national embarrassment that has left islanders and coastal communities without the lifeline services they need. Over the last 19 years ministers have overseen the decimation of many local bus services. Roads are in a terrible state, with potholes everywhere and the dualling of crucial trunk roads miles behind schedule.

Scotland deserves better. Scottish Liberal Democrats have a realistic plan to get Scotland moving again by fixing our roads and our ferries. Public transport will better fit your needs because we'll give you a real say in deciding when and where services go. By improving core connections, driving progress on major projects such as dualling the A9 and tunnels for Shetland, we will boost regional development and rejuvenate our economy. And by investing to move all forms of transport away from fossil fuels, as well as encouraging walking and cycling, we will protect the environment and improve public health.

## **Our priorities are to:**

- **Pass a Ferries Bill that will end the ferries fiasco for good and give islanders and coastal communities a fair deal.**
- **Create a new data-driven Dangerous Roads Programme to ensure that where there is a dangerous road - no matter where you live - government can't ignore it.**
- **Introduce a Transport for London-like model that puts communities in charge of when and where their buses go, as part of a complete revamp of ailing local bus services.**

- **Make the most of government-run ScotRail by establishing a commuter-friendly guarantee, increasing late night services and opening up new stations.**
- **Initiate a nationwide tap-and-go transport system using only your phone or bank card and ensure passengers can easily switch between different types of transport at interchanges.**

In addition, we will:

- Bring forward a Ferries Bill to end the ferries fiasco for good, give islanders and coastal communities a fair deal and enable them to reap the rewards of a better service, through:
  - A new legal requirement for the Scottish Government to produce a rolling 30-year ferry and port infrastructure replacement strategy, renewed every five years and approved by Parliament.
  - New statutory duties to replace vessels and port infrastructure as required, replace ferries at the end of their shelf life and command government funding, ensuring no community is ever left without a viable lifeline service.
  - Listening to the needs and requirements of island and coastal communities, empowering them in the decision-making process, and giving them a real say on vessel types, service-level obligations, routes and contracts, with clear mechanisms to hold those in charge to account.
  - A complete restructuring of the current tripartite governance arrangements of maritime assets which includes community voices at its heart, sits independently of government and has statutory powers.
  - Expanding the compensation scheme for those affected by the SNP's ferries fiasco beyond businesses on a selection of islands, providing fair compensation for the disruption they've all suffered.
  - Restoring the seasonal link between Campbeltown and Ayrshire, and instituting a full assessment of the potential of a year-round ferry link to reduce the need to travel by road past the Rest and Be Thankful.



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- Make roads safer, fix dangerous potholes and help businesses get from A to B by:
  - Creating a new data-driven Dangerous Roads Programme to ensure that where there is a dangerous road - no matter where you live - the government will have to address the problem through a multi-agency approach, creating a nationwide coding system that is used to trigger interventions including the presence of road policing, cameras, adjustments to speed limits, resurfacing, better lighting, or even pave the way for bypasses or dualling.
  - Introducing speed awareness courses to re-educate speeding drivers and reduce re-offending.
  - Speeding up the long-overdue dualling of the A9 and making junctions safer.
  - Setting a timetable for the dualling of the A96 within the first 100 days of the new Parliament.
  - Delivering a programme for significant improvements to roads including the A83 and Rest and Be Thankful, A82 and A75 to make them fit-for-purpose.
  - Upgrading bridges to bring them up to an acceptable condition and overcome weight restrictions, especially where communities have been divided by their closure.
  - Helping local authorities fix potholes in their roads by guaranteeing them fair funding, as set out in chapter 10.
  - Examining international best practice on how to reliably fix potholes, make the most of new technologies and deploy data-driven lifecycle planning to forecast and address the deterioration of road surfaces.
  - Increasing the powers of the Scottish Road Works Commissioner to provide a more user-friendly data-driven central register of road works, clearer timetabling and lead-in times, new avenues for problems to be flagged and addressed, a stronger regime of fines where works run over, and more night and weekend working by companies to minimise disruption and congestion.
  
- Make it cheaper and easier for drivers to switch to electric vehicles by:
  - Rapidly rolling out far more charging points, including on-street points and ultra-fast chargers at service stations, recognising that the UK-wide targets for ending the sale of new petrol and diesel cars makes hassle-free charging even more important.
  - Requiring all charging points to be accessible with a bank card and without the inconvenience of downloading apps.

- Requiring new developments to include charging points and ensuring all households without off-street parking have nearby charging capabilities, such as integrating chargers into streetlights or other street furniture.
  - Establishing a presumption that every new vehicle purchased for the public sector will be low carbon, giving it a greater stake in keeping the charging network well-maintained.
  - Supporting Liberal Democrat calls for VAT on out-of-home charging to be urgently reduced to the same rate as home charging (5%).
- Revamp local bus services by introducing a Transport for London model that gives communities control of when and where their buses go, meaning services revolve around the needs of passengers rather than bus company owners, backed by stronger regional transport partnerships and an expansion of demand responsive transport.
  - Make the most of government-run ScotRail by re-designing services around users' needs, making rail a convenient, affordable and environmentally-friendly option by:
    - Establishing a commuter-friendly guarantee so that timetable changes don't scupper their means of getting to work, with new requirements to conduct consultations and impact assessments prior to changes.
    - Increasing the number of late-night services and exploring options for new night trains, supporting staff and consumers in the nighttime economy.
    - Introducing automatic compensation for rail delays and cancellations.
    - Connecting more communities to the rail network, opening new lines and stations.
    - Opening a station at Newburgh in Fife.
    - Building on the success of the Borders Railway, the route for which was paved by Scottish Liberal Democrats, by working with stakeholders such as the Campaign for Borders Rail on a potential extension of the route to Hawick and Carlisle.
    - Continuing to increase the number of passenger journeys covered by electric trains and electrify new rail lines as standard.
    - Reporting annually to the Scottish Parliament on progress on the measures being taken to lift passenger numbers and thereby revenue, and the phasing out of fossil fuels.

- Initiate a nationwide tap-and-go transport system, making it easy to tap on and off trains, buses, trams, the subway and ferries using your bank card, capped with a maximum daily spend.
- Make it easier for more people to choose walking, cycling and wheeling by:
  - Investing in active travel for the first and last mile, cutting car use, boosting health and connecting communities.
  - Planning so that every child has done their Bikeability training by the end of primary school, and every adult can undertake training if they want it.
  - Formalising a national approach to e-scooters, e-cargo bikes and similar light electric vehicles to promote safety.
- Subject new policies and legislation to Rural Communities Impact Assessments, as set out in Chapter 10, to guarantee local connectivity is at the heart of decision-making and reflecting our commitment to no one and nowhere left behind.
- Introduce a National Freight Strategy to move as much freight as possible from road to rail, examine the use of hydrogen, plan for the chargers long-distance trucks will require, explore the potential for new connections with Europe, and ensure consistency with developments in the rest of the UK and EU.
- Reduce the climate impact of flying by:
  - Delivering the devolution of Air Departure Tax, maintaining exemptions for Highlands and Islands connections.
  - Ensuring passengers on private jets pay rates that reflect the per-passenger impact of these flights on the environment.
  - Working with the UK Government to make sure Scotland gets a good share of the benefits of research and investment in the production of low-carbon sustainable aviation fuels and the development of zero-emission aircraft, and explore the potential for zero-carbon flight to establish new routes between communities through small-scale regional aviation.

- Improve connections for people in the Northern Isles by:
  - Supporting the replacement and modernisation of the Northern Isles' internal ferry fleets, building on the £28.6m in extra funding delivered by Scottish Liberal Democrats through the 2025/26 Scottish Budget.
  - Introducing Road Equivalent Tariff on Pentland Firth routes for locals.
  - Retaining the Air Discount Scheme and exploring options for reduced fares for friends and family.
  - Ensuring the new NorthLink ferry contract gives islanders a fair deal, reforming the booking system to get rid of cliff-edges that stop islanders being able to plan ahead, bringing back shared cabins, reinstating concession vouchers for use of a berth in a cabin, providing more spaces to lie flat on the overnight crossing, and retaining spaces for last minute travel by islanders who may need to travel for reasons including work, medical appointments and family commitments.
  - Working in partnership with Shetland Islands Council to progress investigations and groundwork for tunnels, and move this up the list of infrastructure priorities.



# 12 Climate Change and Energy

Families and businesses are being crushed by sky-high energy bills. Putin's invasion of Ukraine and Trump's reckless war with Iran has shown how dangerous it is to depend on imported fossil fuels and the importance of powering Scotland with our own cheaper cleaner energy.

Climate change is the defining challenge of our generation. Soaring temperatures are leading to more damaging wildfires, floods, droughts and rising sea levels.

The SNP Government has weakened Scotland's economic prospects by failing to act with anything close to the speed these challenges demand. They have missed target after target. People are living in cold homes and are missing out on the benefits of clean energy even when it's on their doorstep. Workers who were promised a just transition have been let down, with jobs vanishing and Scotland at risk of losing the very talent we need to build a greener future.

Delivering change with fairness at its heart means no one and nowhere can be left behind. Done right, Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that making progress towards net zero will make our bills cheaper, our economy stronger and protect the planet for future generations.

We have a realistic plan to get things done, to help you with the cost of living by insulating cold homes and using Scottish renewable energy to drive down household bills. We will reduce demand for fossil fuels. Together with innovative businesses, we will tackle climate change and create secure, well-paid green jobs. And we will get ahead of the curve instead of waiting to pick up the pieces, making the most of Scotland's homegrown skills, engineering supply chains and natural advantages.

## **We will:**

- **Make homes warmer and cheaper to heat with a new emergency insulation programme.**
- **Accelerate the rollout of smart climate-friendly heating systems, including heat pumps and district heating, backed by a Fairer Heating Bill.**

- **Re-write the rules so local people get much more of the money companies make from generating renewable energy near them.**

In addition, we will:

- Cut energy bills and emissions, and tackle fuel poverty, by:
  - Launching an emergency insulation programme with catch-up zones to give special attention to the areas furthest behind.
  - Ensuring new homes are as energy efficient as possible, including through renewables.
  - Bringing forward a Fairer Heating Bill, accelerating the rollout of smart climate-friendly heating systems, and taking a fabric first approach to retrofitting.
  - Investing in low-carbon heat networks, including the potential for connecting whole towns.
  - Making it easier for people in shared buildings to agree to upgrades and improvements, adopting the Scottish Law Commission's recent proposals for every tenement to have an owners' association, reserve fund for repairs and periodic building quality inspections.
  - Promoting alternative financial models for retrofitting and expanding the financial products available, working with sources of patient and reliable capital.
  - Working with colleges and industry to double the training and upskilling of heating engineers to become qualified installers of heat pumps and other renewable technologies, facilitating their rollout and futureproofing the industry for the shift away from gas boilers.
  - Demanding a price cap for heating oil.
  - Supporting the Liberal Democrats' calls to cut household energy bills across the UK through a social tariff to provide targeted energy discounts for vulnerable households, the decoupling of electricity prices from the wholesale gas price, eliminating unfair regional differences in domestic energy bills, moving older renewable projects off expensive Renewable Obligation Certificates and onto cheaper Contracts for Difference (CfD), extending the life of new CfD from 15 to 25 years, using new technologies to help people use energy more flexibly and at times when it is cheaper, and working with the EU to trade energy more efficiently.

- Unlock the potential of renewable power to strengthen our communities, deliver energy security and build a rich legacy by:
  - Overhauling the Scottish Government's outdated guidance on community benefit so local people get much more of the money companies make from generating, storing and transmitting renewable energy near them, funding short and long-term investments in local economic development, housing and cutting energy bills.
  - Transferring ScotWind rental income to the nearby councils, as set out in chapter 10.
  - Establishing new rules for running future ScotWind-style sales to protect the value of Scotland's assets and attract more investment, strengthen policy and regulation on the volume of local content, operate at a pace that nurtures and builds up supply chains, guarantee local communities benefit, and develop new options for public-private partnership such as the government exercising a stake in a project 'at cost' once it starts producing.
  - Exploring the use of publicly-owned land for publicly-owned renewables.
  - Quadrupling the amount of energy generated from solar in this Parliament, unlocking investment that will roll it out across rooftops, public buildings and car parks and bringing down bills.
  - Supporting investment and innovation in tidal and wave power.
  - Overseeing a new era of growth for pumped storage hydro.
  - Providing leadership on the development of green hydrogen, with a special focus on rolling it out within sectors that are proving hard to decarbonise.
  - Supporting the expansion of community and decentralised energy.
  - Paving the way for the modernisation of grid infrastructure as required, while giving full regard to local communities and the environment, establishing new good practice principles that create partnerships and rebuild trust, and upholding community councils' right to be heard through a new Energy Insight Fund.
  - Supporting the building of more electricity interconnectors between the UK and other countries to guarantee security of supply, located carefully to avoid disruption to local communities and minimise environmental damage.
  - Giving local authorities the General Power of Competence, as set out in chapter 10, making it easier for councils to further innovate around renewable energy.

- Oppose fracking and any attempt to open up a whole new front of shale gas fossil fuels in Scotland.
- Remove the Scottish Government's ideological opposition to nuclear to allow Scotland to explore the potential to host Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), potentially supporting up to 3,000 jobs per project at peak construction, and subjecting SMRs to the same tests we would apply to other forms of energy generation and emerging technologies, with a whole-life approach to risk, environmental impact, and cost from construction through to decommissioning and long-term legacy.
- Work closely with the UK Government to create a new carbon capture and storage industry, supporting around 15,000 jobs at its peak.
- Supporting industry to cut emissions and delivering a just transition by:
  - Recognising that the futures of the oil and gas industry and renewables are intertwined, avoiding polarising policies that will fail them both.
  - Valuing the knowledge and experience of everyone working in oil and gas, providing good opportunities for them in renewables, and taking special care of the communities most affected.
  - Supporting the replacement of the Energy Profits Levy as soon as possible with a stable, fair and proportional system, ensuring that the tax rate varies on a predictable and consistent basis when oil and gas prices rise and fall.
- Supporting the Liberal Democrats' calls to restore the UK's role as a global leader on climate change, including through international development and loss and damage finance.
- Take the action needed now for Scotland to achieve net zero by 2045, including:
  - Setting out a clear, detailed and stable roadmap to net zero, giving businesses the confidence to invest.
  - Expanding the market for climate-friendly products and services with steadily higher criteria in public procurement policy.
  - Putting tackling climate change and delivering a just transition at the heart of a new skills strategy, as set out in chapter 4, building on the Offshore Wind Skills Programme secured by the Scottish Liberal Democrats in the 2025/26 Budget.

- Moving all forms of transport away from fossil fuels, making it cheaper and easier to switch to electric vehicles, revamping local bus services, redesigning rail services around passengers' needs, reducing the climate impact of flying, and encouraging walking and cycling, as set out in chapter 11.
- Protecting and enhancing habitats, as set out in chapter 13.
- Treating farmers and fishers as partners in tackling climate change, as set out in chapter 14.

# 13 Natural Environment

Protecting our precious natural environment lies at the heart of the Scottish Liberal Democrat approach. Everyone should be able to enjoy local green spaces, clean rivers and the beauty of Scotland's wild places. Ecosystems support food provision and natural defences reduce flooding.

However, Scotland is facing a nature crisis. One in nine species are threatened with national extinction. Thousands of people die each year for reasons linked to air pollution, especially in more deprived areas. SNP ministers don't seem to care that the government-owned water company dumps millions of litres of sewage throughout our rivers, lochs and beaches.

The global climate and nature crises are inextricably linked. By protecting and enhancing habitats we will halt and begin to reverse the decline of nature, create green jobs and improve health. By enhancing the countryside, and reducing air and water pollution we will both tackle climate change and make Scotland more resilient in the face of its effects.

## **We will:**

- **Introduce a Clean Water Act to take the sewage scandal seriously, track down and report every sewage dump, and replace outdated standards with modern enforceable regulation.**
- **Expand woodlands using at least 50% native species, supporting diverse and resilient habitats, with a special focus on protecting Scotland's rainforest, connecting existing woodlands and increasing planting in towns and cities.**
- **Embrace the circular economy and reduce waste, learning the lessons of the Scottish Government's botched Deposit Return Scheme and fake landfill ban.**
- **Double the fixed penalty for littering and introduce a new restitution order to tackle flytipping by making offenders pay for the clean-up of dumped waste with fines that are reflective of the damage the polluter causes.**



In addition, we will:

- Tackle sewage dumping and introduce a Clean Water Act by:
  - Replacing outdated sewage standards, moving towards monitoring 100% of sewage overflows so every dump is monitored and recorded and setting long-term reduction targets.
  - Supporting means to rainproof communities and slow the flow of water through the landscape to reduce sewage and flooding, including through blue-green infrastructure, the use of permeable materials, pollinator-friendly living roofs and sustainable drainage systems for buildings.
  - Modernising outdated rules and monitoring for bathing waters so that they cover all users, all year round, and open a route for community groups to request monitoring prior to an event.
  - Bringing in the ban on the sale and supply of wet wipes containing plastic, and request that the UK Government improves labelling of other sanitary products to stop them entering the sewage system.
- Create river catchment plans in partnership with landowners and farmers, as set out in chapter 14, and review the Bellwin Scheme so it is fit for purpose when flooding occurs.
- Increase woodland cover by:
  - Using at least 50% native trees in the creation of new woodland.
  - Working with partners including land managers and environmental organisations to tackle damaging overgrazing by deer, enabling young trees to grow, supporting rural employment and boosting the low-carbon wild venison market.
  - Banning the sale of invasive and damaging rhododendron ponticum.
  - Working with architects and the construction and forestry industries to promote homegrown sustainable timber, supporting well-managed Scottish forestry and rural jobs.
- Tackle air pollution by electrifying transport and making public transport better fit your needs, as set out in chapter 11.

- Take the action needed for Scotland to achieve net zero, as set out in chapter 12.
- Treat farmers and fishers as partners in tackling climate change and the nature crisis, as set out in chapter 14.
- Protect our seas and oceans by:
  - Rejecting any repeat of the top-down Highly Protected Marine Areas proposals, instead ensuring that government always works in close partnership with the coastal, island and fishing communities who know their area best.
  - Working with stakeholders to deliver a national plan to cut whale and dolphin bycatch and reduce underwater noise.
- Cut down our throwaway culture, tackle plastic pollution and reduce waste by:
  - Wherever possible, phasing out the use of problematic non-recyclable non-essential single-use plastics and replacing them with affordable alternatives.
  - Supporting initiatives that both extend the life of products and help with the cost of living through repair, reuse and repurposing.
  - Introducing a charge on single-use coffee cups.
  - Working with the UK Government to introduce a deposit return scheme for food and drink bottles and containers, learning the lessons from the botched SNP/Green scheme.
  - Formally requesting that the National Crime Agency make serious waste crime a priority, helping tackle organised crime.
- Ensure Scotland has high environmental standards by recognising everyone's human right to a healthy environment, work closely with our European neighbours and avoid falling behind best practice.

# 14 Farming and Food

When it comes to food and drink, Scotland has got so much going for it. But nobody is getting a fair deal if people can't afford to buy healthy food and producers can't make a profit producing it.

Hardworking farmers and fishers have had to contend with the Conservatives' botched deal with the EU damaging their ability to export. It has ushered in barriers, red-tape and trade deals that pose a risk to our high standards. People feel let down by debacles including the SNP Government's Highly Protected Marine Areas and the Future Farming Investment Scheme that became a lottery for the farmers it was supposed to help. The costs of machinery and labour have soared.

Scottish Liberal Democrats will stand up for our farmers, crofters and fishers because we know they are the linchpins of our rural communities. We will help them provide the raw materials for Scotland's flagship food and drink exports through innovation, better infrastructure and a skilled workforce.

Caring for our countryside and seas means treating farmers and fishers as partners in tackling climate change and the nature crisis. Nature recovery and food production should be seen as mutually beneficial and not as competing interests.

Our plan will make it easier to put affordable, healthy and nutritious food on the table, produced to high welfare and environmental standards.

Caring about our country must include caring about how we feed our country. Homegrown food is in the national interest and essential for our security. International uncertainty and President Trump's destructive trade war should trigger a strategic increase in domestic food production. Our objective across the UK is to increase self-sufficiency by 10% to reduce our exposure to potential shocks and interruptions to the supply of food, and Scotland has an essential role to play.



**Our priorities are to:**

- **Champion the scrapping of the family farm tax altogether, protecting generational farming, rural livelihoods and food security.**
- **Declare the Scottish Government's support for Alistair Carmichael MP's Food Supply Chain Fairness Bill to get fairer prices for farmers and food producers across the UK, bringing new checks and balances on the power of the big supermarkets.**
- **Ringfence agriculture funding, protect support payments and move to 3-year funding deals to give farmers the confidence and certainty they need.**
- **Support a new bespoke UK-EU customs union, as set out in chapters 3 and 16, making it easier for businesses to export to key markets in the EU.**
- **Oppose any repeat of the top-down Highly Protected Marine Areas proposals, instead managing waters as locally as possible in partnership with those who know them best.**

In addition, we will:

- Give farmers and crofters a fair deal by:
  - Backing the Liberal Democrats' realistic plan to increase UK-wide investment in agriculture by £1 billion a year to support profitable, sustainable and nature-friendly farming across the UK, with money going to the Scottish Government to increase budgets.
  - Adopting the principles that financial support promotes active farming, environmental sustainability and biodiversity, profit and employment, the vibrancy of rural and remote communities, and critical mass in the supply chain to increase the processing of food within Scotland and reduce food miles.
  - Directing and targeting measures to reverse the decline of livestock numbers, involving farming organisations in co-design of future policy and maintaining support for production.

- Supporting farmers and growers to manage the impact of global instability on essential inputs like fertiliser and fuel so they can plan with confidence.
- Expanding and diversifying the Farm Advisory Service, helping with digital innovation, precision agriculture, skills development and to soak up the innovation from Scotland's world-leading rural research institutes and mainstream it among farmers.
- Allowing farmers to use gene editing technology, using science to bring down costs, improve resilience and protect Scotland's reputation for research.
- Making it easier for new and diverse talent to establish livelihoods by establishing a new NextGen scheme to attract young people into the sector, providing them with a clear career path and a salaried year of sustainable farming experience, training and skills.
- Championing a rapid and more comprehensive veterinary agreement and sanitary and phytosanitary agreement between the UK and EU which guarantees enhanced access for UK food and animal products to the single market, with minimal need for checks or documentation.
- Helping farmers diversify to generate additional income by removing barriers to on-farm renewable energy generation, agritourism, building change of use, and the delivery of small-scale housing for workers and locals.
- Launching a review and consultation on crofting within the first year of the Parliament, looking at how it can grow and help prevent depopulation.
- Croft-proof future agricultural support to make sure crofters are properly supported throughout schemes and initiatives.
- Valuing productive agricultural land that supports food production when considering how land should be made available for non-agricultural purposes.
- Creating river catchment plans in partnership with farmers and landowners, combining their knowledge of burns and rivers with the tools to help them manage them, improving drought and flooding planning.
- Working with Scottish institutions such as Scotland's Rural College to establish credible and reliable mechanisms for auditing the carbon cost of agriculture as part of whole farm plans.
- Restoring nature and protecting the pollinating insects that agriculture depends upon, as set out in chapter 13.

- Make it easier to do business in the rural economy by:
  - Co-designing with farming organisations and rural communities a scheme for support for small abattoirs across Scotland.
  - Using public procurement policy and helping producers and processors to navigate tendering to support the consumption of food produced to high standards of environmental and social sustainability, and which is nutritious, healthy and locally and seasonally sourced.
  - Measuring the proportion of homegrown food in public sector procurement in order to target increases.
  - Using the UK's extensive network of overseas missions to promote Scottish food and drink, as well as using Scottish enterprise agencies directly overseas.
  - Securely funding Scotland's agricultural and rural colleges, helping people join industries or upskill, as set out in chapter 7.
  - Rural-proofing new policies and legislation, as set out in chapter 10.
  - Removing logistical challenges to the movement of supplies, livestock and products by ending the ferries fiasco for good and improving roads, as part of our plan to get Scotland moving again as set out in chapter 11.
  - Reviewing the Scottish Outdoor Access Code to determine how it can better safeguard the natural environment and the rural businesses people come into contact with, while also protecting the fundamental right to responsible outdoor access.
  - Clamping down on flytipping, as set out in chapter 13.
  - Helping businesses get their products to market quickly and easily by fixing the UK's broken relationship with Europe, as set out in chapters 3 and 16.
  - Championing immigration policy that is sensitive to the skills needs of the agricultural, catching and processing sectors.
  
- Help fishermen to provide healthy high protein food, food security and sustainable management of the seas, by:
  - Continuing to demand the UK Government allocate Scotland its fair share of the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund, and distributing the Scottish portion of the funding proportionately to reflect where landings occur.
  - Ensuring the development of offshore wind farms is not at the expense of the fishing catching sector
  - Empowering Marine Scotland to tackle foreign fishing vessels that have been guilty of dangerous practices, learning from the experiences of authorities elsewhere, for example Ireland.

- Recognising aquaculture is a source of high-quality well-paid jobs in many of Scotland's most economically fragile communities. It must be held to high environmental standards and we will work with industry to promote the marketing of this valuable export commodity overseas.
  - Working towards ending the unsustainable practice of industrial-scale gill net fishing by foreign vessels which damages fish stocks and is a major source of plastic pollution in our seas, and in the meantime policing it more vigorously.
  - Ensuring that enforcement of fisheries regulations is targeted at least as effectively against foreign vessels as it is against Scottish ones.
  - Making policy with up-to-date scientific evidence and data, recognising that fishermen are custodians of the seas.
  - Addressing the impacts of spatial squeeze by striking a new settlement on space-based planning for Scotland's seas and creating cable corridors, involving communities in planning, respecting local knowledge, and ensuring the right activity happens in the right place.
  - Opposing any repeat of the top-down Highly Protected Marine Areas proposals, instead ensuring that government always works in close partnership with the coastal, island and fishing communities who know their area best.
  - Encouraging the use of regional marine plans, reviewing whether the Scottish Government's Marine Directorate is fit for purpose, and examining replacing it with decentralised, inclusive and locally appropriate decision-making to avoid one-size-fits-all approaches and manage waters as locally as possible.
- Continue to champion Scotland's world-class produce abroad and work with the UK Government to remove unnecessary barriers and tariffs on key Scottish exports like whisky.
  - Continue Scottish Government support for the National Rural Mental Health Forum.

# 15 Rights and Equalities

Liberal Democrats exist to build a free society where every person's rights and liberties are protected. Everyone should be able to live their lives as who they are; free to pursue their dreams and fulfil their potential.

However, the outlook is all the darker right now. People are fearing for their safety just for being who they are. Racism, transphobia and misogyny have the support of some of the most powerful people in the world. Toxic role models and social media barons have platforms for bullying, hatred and scapegoating. Victims can be left feeling vulnerable and powerless.

Our vision of the future is so much brighter. The kind of country we want to be is one where rich diversity and differences are strengths to be celebrated and reflected throughout public life. We believe in fairness for everyone, no matter who you are or where you come from. Scotland needs to benefit from the diverse talents of everyone to improve wellbeing and productivity.

Scottish Liberal Democrats will combat the prejudice, discrimination and stigma that prevents people living their lives to the full. We will defend hard-won rights and support equality for women, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people and neurodivergent people. We will stand up to bullies like Donald Trump and those that imitate him.

## **We will:**

- **Introduce a Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill to remove common barriers to participation, make public services more inclusive, and tackle gaps in the support available to people.**
- **Confront violence against women and girls and domestic abuse, making changes to the law that will give survivors greater choice and agency.**
- **Bring into force the right for all victims of crime to be notified of decisions not to prosecute, as secured by the Scottish Liberal Democrats, and building on the introduction of Suzanne's Law and Michelle's Law by Scottish Liberal Democrat MSP Jamie Greene.**



- **Give grieving families the swift answers they deserve and preserve other peoples' right to life by overhauling fatal accident inquiries.**
- **Supporting the Liberal Democrats' calls to declare the backlog of asylum claims a national emergency so that it can be cleared within six months.**
- **Champion human rights legislation and resist any attempts to weaken or repeal it.**

In addition, we will:

- Take a cross-government approach to tackling all aspects of discrimination faced by neurodivergent children and adults, helping them and their families receive the right help at the right time, by:
  - Publishing waiting times as part of our commitment to end long waits for diagnosis and support for people with neurodevelopmental conditions.
  - Working with NHS Scotland and GPs to establish a protocol for shared care for ADHD diagnoses, including a portal of accredited private providers from which diagnosis and titration will be accepted with commensurate resourcing for medicines, as set out in chapter 5.
  - Establishing national standards for assessments for neurodevelopmental conditions.
  - Creating a neurodiversity pathway for adults, replacing referral into general adult mental health pathways.
  - Speeding up autism and ADHD assessments using the additional £7.5m secured by Scottish Liberal Democrats in the 2026/27 Scottish Budget.
  - Hiring more pupil support assistants, as set out in chapter 7.
  - Producing national guidelines on working conditions and reasonable adjustments for schools, higher educational institutes and employers that can be applicable without a formal neurodivergence diagnosis.
  - Bringing forward a Youth Work Bill to foster more opportunities for young people, as set out in chapter 8.
  - Ensuring families never feel alone with nowhere and no one to turn to, as set out in chapter 8.
  - Providing additional support and advice to employers on neurodiversity in the workplace, helping economically inactive people into work and ensuring our economy gets the benefits of their talents.

- Creating a neurodiversity and learning disability employment plan for the public sector so that it can lead by example.
- Make it easier for disabled people to access public life, including the world of work, and accelerate progress towards the target of halving the disability employment gap by 2038 by:
  - Transforming care for long Covid, ME, chronic fatigue and other similar conditions, as set out in chapter 5.
  - Rolling out more pupil support assistants and speech and language therapists in education, as set out in chapter 8.
  - Supporting the Liberal Democrats' calls to give every disabled person the right to work from home if they want to unless there are significant business reasons why it is not possible, for 'Adjustment Passports' to record the adjustments, modifications and equipment a disabled person has received, and for Access to Work support and equipment to stay with the person if they change jobs.
  - Putting in place specialist employability programmes to enable more people with visual impairment to find work, including through new apprenticeship schemes for blind and partially sighted people.
  - Using transport to open up new opportunities, as set out in chapter 11.
  - Supporting the Liberal Democrats' calls for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to be incorporated into UK law.
  - Replacing the Edinburgh Eye Pavilion, after Scottish Liberal Democrats restarted the project through the 2025/26 Scottish Budget, as set out in chapter 5.
- Stop inappropriate and costly inpatient placements for people with learning disabilities and autism.
- Update guardianship and adults with incapacity legislation so that the focus is on increasing empowerment and supported decision making.
- Respect and defend the rights of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including trans and non-binary people, including:
  - Banning all forms of conversion therapies and practices, working in partnership with the UK Government to achieve this.

- Working towards a four nations consensus on addressing the shortcomings of the gender recognition process.
  - Restating our commitment to inclusive education around LGBT+ issues in schools.
- Work with communities to tackle antisemitism, Islamophobia and Hinduphobia.
  - Address structural barriers to observance of faith around burial and cremation.
  - Tackle violence against women and girls and domestic abuse by:
    - Commencing Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act to introduce protection notices and protection orders that enable urgent action not led by the person at risk.
    - Bringing in separate offences targeting prejudice and contempt for women as recommended by Baroness Kennedy's independent expert group, subject to a review of the effect of adding sex to the list of protected characteristics in the Hate Crime and Public Order Act 2021.
    - Working with COSLA, establish a single point of contact within a local authority, ensuring victims only have to tell their story once.
    - Introducing a duty on councils to ensure all housing and frontline staff are trained to detect and respond to domestic abuse and survivors of domestic abuse, with particular measures to assist young survivors who may have complex needs.
    - Protecting the 'fund to leave', advocated for by the Scottish Liberal Democrats, and ensure it takes into consideration circumstances such as whether a victim is located in a remote or rural area.
    - Updating the law to add a presumption that the perpetrator of domestic abuse will be the one required to leave the shared home.
    - Identifying any gaps in legislation that could enable a perpetrator of domestic abuse to exert control over a survivor by acting vexatiously in court proceedings.
    - Implementing the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic abuse, with protections for all survivors regardless of nationality or immigration status.
    - Implementing the provisions in the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2020, including new protection orders.

- Support the Liberal Democrats' calls for a UK Digital Bill of Rights to protect everyone's rights online, including the right to privacy, free expression, and participation without being subjected to harassment and abuse.
- Continue to resist the UK Government's digital ID system, mirroring our opposition to the SNP/Green Government's Covid ID cards that required private medical data to be provided to a stranger to access venues and services.
- Expose and confront stereotyping, demagoguery and hate speech in public life and the media that inflames hatred and leads to spikes in hate crimes.
- Back Liberal Democrat proposals to deal with the asylum backlog so people are not trapped in limbo:
  - Declaring the asylum backlog a national emergency and invoking the Civil Contingencies Act.
  - Setting up Nightingale processing centres and employing 2,000 more caseworkers to get to the bottom of people's claims, leading to the closure of asylum hotels.
  - Letting people contribute to the economy and support themselves by lifting the ban on asylum seekers working if they have been waiting for a decision for more than three months.
  - Helping people to learn English and exploring pathways for recognition of qualifications for those whose asylum claims are successful.
- Improve the experience of people in the justice system and legal proceedings by:
  - Creating an independent director of prosecutions, separating this role from the Lord Advocate's position as the Scottish Government's principal legal advisor.
  - Building a more restorative justice system so that victims, where they agree, can get the damage of crime repaired by the perpetrator.
  - Enabling people to exercise their rights whatever the challenge and wherever they live through consistent and funded provision of advocacy services, securely funded legal aid, mediation and arbitration.
  - Backing high-quality Bairns Hooses to reduce the trauma children can experience through the justice system, as set out in chapter 8.
  - Bringing the age of criminal responsibility in line with United Nations recommendations.

- Overhauling Fatal Accident Inquiries to stop re-traumatising families, ensure that they can begin within 12 months so lessons that can save lives are learned, and remove them from the remit of the Crown Office.
- Support armed forces personnel, veterans and their families by:
  - Ensuring the Scottish Government achieves the gold standard in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.
  - Introducing a Service Pupil Premium to give children extra support at school, as set out in chapter 7.
  - Explicitly recognising veterans as a population at heightened risk during the development of public health policies, services, and support addressing gambling harms.
  - Ensuring that social security staff and others providing financial or debt advice are veteran aware, and give veterans designated points of contact within Social Security Scotland.
  - Issuing guidance stating that all Armed Forces compensation, including awards under the War Pension Scheme, must be fully disregarded when calculating income for means-tested benefits.
- Reduce poverty and repair the broken safety net for those who need it by:
  - Supporting those who want to upskill or change their career to improve their earnings potential, as set out in chapter 4.
  - Bringing down NHS waiting lists, helping those struggling to work because of physical or mental ill health and enabling people to spend more years of their life in good health and being economically active, as set out in chapter 5.
  - Giving unpaid carers a fair deal so they get the support they so desperately need, including an uplift to Carer Support Payment, as set out in chapter 6.
  - Repairing colleges and the vocational skills system, as set out in chapter 7, to offer more routes into employment and high-wage high-skill jobs including for people fitting learning around work, family or caring.
  - Helping families through family support hubs, early learning and childcare, and youth work, as set out in chapter 8.
  - Building more homes that people can afford and creating key worker housing, as set out in chapter 9.

- Improving transport to open up new opportunities for employment, as set out in chapter 11.
- Cutting energy bills by insulating cold homes and using Scottish renewable energy to drive down household bills, as set out in chapter 12.
- Supporting the Liberal Democrats' calls to end deep poverty and ensure Universal Credit covers life's essentials, end the young parent penalty for under-25s by restoring the full rate of Universal Credit for all parents regardless of age, remove the benefit cap, scrap the bedroom tax, reverse the Conservatives' cut to support payments for parents whose partners have died, fix the broken statutory sick pay system, cease the pursuit of carers for old overpayments of Carer's Allowance, and for women born in the 1950s to finally be treated fairly and properly compensated.

# 16 Political Reform

We want to ensure that your voice is heard – and we want to transfer power back to the people.

Over 19 years the SNP have seized powers from local communities, neglected our public services and wasted public money. Scandal-hit ministers have taken people for granted and too often refused to take responsibility, which is why no SNP minister has ever resigned over the ferries fiasco.

We will reform our political system to put more power in people's hands, so that politics is made to work for you again. We will show that the Parliament can make a difference for the better. We will put decency, tolerance and respect back into public life. We will end the culture of secrecy and spin.

Statistics prove that our Scottish Liberal Democrat MSPs are among the hardest workers in Parliament. Back us and you get a local champion focused on the issues that really matter to you.

## **Our priorities are to:**

- **Introduce a new Accountability Act to clamp down on scandal and incompetence, driving up standards and performance in government.**
- **End the era of SNP centralisation and transfer powers away from the Scottish Government, moving them closer to you.**
- **Change the voting system for the Scottish Parliament to Single Transferable Vote, mirroring the change we made for local government elections.**
- **Back a written constitution for a federal United Kingdom.**
- **Repair our country's broken relationship with Europe.**

In addition, we will:

- Introduce an Accountability Act:
  - Enshrining the Scottish Ministerial Code in legislation to properly hold ministers to account in the event of scandals, such as the ferries fiasco, the deletion of Covid WhatsApps or use of false statistics by SNP ministers.
  - Ensuring that ministers receive annual training to prevent sleaze.
  - Introducing a new rule of Contempt of Parliament, so a minority government can't rule as though it had a majority, and that Parliament – not ministers – has the final say.
  - Introducing the right to recall your MSP in cases of proven misconduct.
  - Amending the Disclosure Act 2020 and Protection of Vulnerable Groups Act 2007 to apply safeguarding rules to politicians, introducing robust new procedures to protect children and vulnerable adults so politics catches up with the progress made in other professions.
  - Giving organisations that receive funding from the Scottish Government a new 'license to criticise', giving them a stronger voice and recognising through a new legal guarantee that the services we rely on are worse off if organisations are concerned that speaking out will have implications for their future funding and survival.
  - Ensuring people can scrutinise their government and hold organisations to account, applying Freedom of Information rules to companies insofar as they provide government services, and strengthening and expanding public rights to information that were first delivered by the Scottish Liberal Democrats.
  - Introducing a new 'duty to record' so that the public can access accounts of important ministerial meetings and decision-making processes.
  - Strengthening the role of the Public Audit Committee so that it can scrutinise business grants of more than £250,000 before they are paid, to satisfy themselves that the recipient company pays a fair level of UK tax, and also save us from the embarrassment of ministers signing agreements with dubious companies.

- Reboot the civil service by:
  - Refocusing government on delivery instead of announcements and presentation.
  - Re-establishing links between civil servants and their equivalents in the rest of the UK to share knowledge, expertise and evidence on what works.
  - Allowing public servants to innovate, test promising ideas and scale them up if successful.
  - Reviewing the cluttered quango landscape and halving the amount the Scottish Government spends on private consultancy, as set out in chapter 3.
  
- Reform the UK and strengthen our family of nations around the principles of federalism, working in cooperation and partnership, and advancing Liberal Democrat policies on:
  - Creating a UK Constitutional Convention, with the aim of drafting a new written Federal Constitution that sets out the powers of the government at each tier, founded on the principles of democratic engagement, liberal values and respect for diverse identities, underpinned by a fair distribution of resources based on respective needs.
  - Securing cooperation and agreement through common frameworks and a new dispute resolution process, sharing power, resolving differences maturely between administrations and delivering better governance.
  - Improving joint ministerial working on cross-cutting policies, such as industrial strategy.
  - Removing the ability for the UK Parliament to unilaterally change the powers of the devolved parliaments or pass laws in their areas of responsibility.
  - Retaining the Barnett Formula to adjust spending allocations across the UK and protect the individual nations' budgets from external shocks.
  
- Work in partnership with the UK Government to split up the role of the Lord Advocate, as set out in Chapter 15.
  
- Oppose the UK Government's digital ID system, as set out in Chapter 15.
  
- Establish national and local citizens assemblies to ensure that the public are fully engaged in finding solutions to the greatest challenges we face.



- Give young people a bigger role in shaping policies affecting them through the Youth Parliament, as set out in Chapter 8.
- Work with the UK Government to protect democratic processes from any threats or interference.
- Introduce public awareness campaigns about emerging threats and misinformation campaigns online.
- Work with our neighbours and allies by:
  - Valuing and deepening relations – not trashing them or putting up fresh barriers.
  - Resisting those that threaten us and robustly challenging our allies when necessary.
  - Standing up for the values of democracy, liberty, human rights, the rule of law and international development, both at home and abroad.
  - Standing with the people of Ukraine and providing them with the support they need in the face of Putin’s illegal invasion, urging the UK Government to use frozen Russian assets.
  - Avoiding being dragged into Trump and Netanyahu’s illegal war with Iran which has destabilised the Middle East and sent bills soaring.
  - Supporting a two-state solution based on 1967 borders with security and dignity for Israelis and Palestinians.
  - Backing the Liberal Democrats’ realistic plan to fix the UK’s broken relationship with Europe.
- Oppose independence and a second independence referendum.

