

Autumn Conference Bulletin

Perth: Saturday 16th November 2024

We're Celebrating!

We've had so much to celebrate since the 4th of July.



2 new MPs – Susan and Angus – who you will hear from this morning!

Council by-election VICTORIES and VOTE SHARE INCREASES in numerous council wards!!!



Today will give a sense to achievement but also an opportunity to plan for the future!

Speakers' cards and Question Cards

can be collected from the reception desk.

Mini Motions: Justice and Policing

MM1: Mentorship programs in every Scottish prison

Presented by: Adam Harley

Policy Suggestion:

We recommend the adoption of through-the-gate mentorship programs in every prison in Scotland.

Policy Benefits:

Reduced Reoffending Rates: Through-the-gate mentorship programs provide continuous support for individuals transitioning from prison back into society. This guidance helps address the root causes of criminal behaviour, reducing the likelihood of reoffending and contributing to lower recidivism rates

Preventing Prison Overcrowding: By lowering reoffending rates, mentorship programs help reduce the number of people cycling back into the prison system. This contributes to alleviating overcrowding in Scottish prisons, which can improve living conditions, safety, and the effectiveness of rehabilitation efforts within the prison environment.

Improved Rehabilitation and Reintegration: Mentors offer emotional support, practical advice, and life skills that aid in the rehabilitation process. By helping individuals find housing, employment, and education, these programs facilitate smoother reintegration, enabling former prisoners to lead productive lives.

Cost Savings for the Criminal Justice System: By reducing recidivism and promoting successful reintegration, mentorship programs decrease the long-term financial burden on the criminal justice system, lowering prison costs and the need for re-incarceration. This creates savings that can be reinvested in other community and rehabilitation services.

MM2: Reform for young offenders
Presented by: Duncan Dunlop

Early intervention is proven to be effective in reducing youth convictions and reducing imprisonment globally. It is the principle of this motion that by addressing youth offending and making reforms we can have the widest impact on justice and offending in adulthood.

We make the following proposals for discussion as part of the mini motion.

We believe there should be a national framework that prioritises diversion from the formal justice system. We want to see more emphasis on directing young people into support from Social services, education and mental health support. In the Netherlands this has reduced offending by tackling root causes of crime.

We also propose raising the criminal age of responsibility. It is currently 12 which still remains below international standards, such as the UN rights of the child. Initially we ask for it to be raised to 14, however we would like the policy committee to consider if this should be 16. This would be in line with what where we understand adult responsibilities begin.

We also suggest that for low-level non-violent crimes a Community Justice referral System this would allow cases to be dismissed in favour of more individual focused approaches such as rehabilitation and community interventions, this would mean that a young person does not have a criminal record and we give them a second chance.

At the heart of this proposal is a liberal approach to justice around young offenders. We can't always understand the circumstances around young people and criminal acts, what we seek to do is to provide every opportunity to divert young people away from crime and give every opportunity to succeed.

MM3: Mental Health Assessments

Presented by: Isobel Knights

Our party values mental health and making changes to improve Mental Health. We have led the way in call for change across society in better mental health.

We need to reflect this also in calling for changes in our prisons around attitudes to Mental health.

This we believe should start with mandatory mental health assessments for all offenders entering Scotland's criminal justice system. It is reported that many offenders have underlying mental health conditions, by providing early identification we can offer treatment and interventions. This would aim to provide support to reduce reoffending.

We also propose the use of Forensic Psychiatric facilities for those with with severe mental health disorders or addiction. This would differ from our current system that is implemented through the prison healthcare systems which often lacks capacity or through the use of high security or medium security psychiatric units, in combination with healthcare wings. These are reactive and focus on when a prisoners mental health deteriorates.

We would suggest consider a model such as Maßregelvollzug that is used in Germany. It provides a therapeutic and rehabilitative model from day 1. It is specifically designed around offenders with mental illness or addiction. The focus is towards long-term recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegrating into society.

MM4: Fixed Speed Camera Installation

Presented by: Lewis Younie

Policy suggestion:

We recommend the devolution of fixed speed camera installation and placement powers to councils so that they may choose to install cameras where communities consider it necessary, while preserving the police's leading role and existing powers.

Policy benefits:

Improved Safety: People should feel safe within their communities, not intimidated by those carelessly driving and using towns and villages as a racetrack.

Empowered Local Authorities: Giving local authorities the power to challenge and reduce anti-social driving through targeted measures recognises their local expertise and interest in improving road safety alongside the overstretched Police Scotland.

Conference Reports

Report on Youth Homelessness Initiatives

By Paul McGarry, Housing and Homelessness Spokesperson for the Scottish Liberal Democrats

As a party we have shown time and again our commitment to supporting those who are disadvantaged in our society. As a party we have on four occasions brought policy debates on the subject of homelessness. Today I am providing a report on two principle commitments that we are making specifically around youth homelessness. We are reaffirming a policy and also extending an existing policy our party has previously supported.

Reaffirming Our Policy: Tackling Youth Homelessness through access to support and opportunities.

Our party remains committed to tackling youth homelessness. We appreciate, there are many factors that can lead to a young person becoming homeless and we seek to provide policies that break the cycle of homelessness, and ensure that a level playing field is created providing necessary opportunities that create a foundation for a person to move on and have positive outcomes.

We will maintain a focus on mediation and reconciliation with families as a key strategy to prevent young people from experiencing homelessness. Where possible all agencies should support in keeping young people connected to their families where it is safe and possible. We want to create opportunities for young people experiencing homelessness and provide the chance to move on and achieve the skills and training they need to fulfil their potential. I reaffirm our commitment to having specialist centres throughout Scotland, including the extension of existing services. These will not only provide a safe place to stay but also provide access to advice, training and opportunities. Our goal is to ensure that any young person facing homelessness has the resource and support they need.

Extending Aftercare for Homeless Young People

In addition to our existing commitments, I am today announcing a policy that we have supported in principle for some time but we are now bringing formally to conference. We will call for the extension of Aftercare. This is a provision currently available to those who are care experienced until they reach 26. This is a provision we had a long history campaigning for before its introduction, and indeed was part of Alex's work before he became an MSP. We propose extending this to include any young person who has experienced homelessness. We recognise the disadvantage experienced by young people in families that are homeless or in temporary accommodation.

All young people who have faced the challenges of homelessness deserve continued support to ensure their long-term stability and success.

Addressing the Growing Need

We cannot overlook the severe disadvantages faced by young people who find themselves in temporary accommodation. Under the current government, the number of young people in such circumstances has regrettably increased. It is our duty as a party to act, providing these young people with better opportunities and striving for a level playing field.

It is a liberal principle to demand equality and provide an individual with every opportunity to succeed irrespective of their circumstances.

Our commitment to extending support and creating new centres is a step towards ensuring that no young person is left behind. By bringing these policies to conference, we seek to engage our members in this mission and make Scotland a place where every young person has a fair chance to thrive.

Policy Proposals

1. Reaffirmation of Youth Homelessness Mediation and Support

- Establish new centres across Scotland to provide supported accommodation, advice, and training for homeless young people.
- Focus on mediation and reconciliation with families, ensuring agencies work to keep young people connected with their families where safe and possible.

2. Extension of Aftercare Support

- Extend Aftercare, currently available to care-experienced individuals up to age 26, to any young person who has experienced homelessness for longer than 6 months and is assessed to have been disadvantaged.

Recognise the disadvantages faced by young people in temporary accommodation

I ask you to note by report and accept the policy proposals suggested.

Report on Rural Policy Working Group

By Claire McClaren, Agriculture, Remote & Rural Communities for the Scottish Liberal Democrats

As a party we are committed to food production through agriculture, crofting, and marine activities.

We recognise the importance these sectors have in continuing environmental custodianship, securing food security within Scotland and the further UK and their considerable contribution to rural economic activity. We further recognise the readiness of these sectors to adapt to new practices laid out in recent Scottish Government Legislation, such as The Agriculture & Rural Communities Bill 2024 and anticipated Land Reform Bill.

Rural communities are a crucial part of our social and environmental landscape, we further recognise the importance to secure and allow these communities opportunities to grow from the secure foundations generations have built.

Changes to Agriculture and Crofting support have not been clarified by Scottish Government, resulting in current industry uncertainty. This is threatening food security, environmental improvements, and rural economic progress.

It is necessary that the party's Scottish policy reflects the needs these sectors have and create a fit for purpose policy for a Scottish Parliamentary Election. We recognise it is necessary to form a Rural Policy Working Group as part of the Policy Committee.

My speech will further outline more reasoning and details to validate the importance of the above.

Fringes! 13:00 – 14:00

Scottish Environment LINK/RSPB

Location: Murray Suite

Panellists:

Deborah Long, Chief Officer of Scottish Environment LINK

Douglas Peedle, RSPB Head of Nature Positive Economy

Charles Dundas, Chair, Scottish Environment LINK

Jonny Wyatt, RSPB Scotland Programme Manager – Biodiversity Enhancement

The nature and climate crises are inextricably linked, with almost half of Scots having noticed declines in nature and two-thirds noticing warmer winters or increasingly extreme weather in their lifetime. We will discuss why we need a nature positive economy and how governments and the private sector can support bolder and more effective action for nature, climate and people.

National Deaf Children's Society

Location: Moncrieff Bar

Join Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP, the National Deaf Children's Society and Scottish Autism to hear about the difference specialist provision makes to children with additional support needs (ASN), including deaf and autistic children, and why Scotland needs more specialist ASN teachers.

Royal Society of Edinburgh

Location: Moncrieff Suite

Public good for public money? reforming financial support for tree planting and forestry.

Afforestation is seen as a key measure in the fight against climate change, with the capacity to deliver additional benefits for biodiversity and people. The RSE undertook an independent inquiry into public financial support for tree planting and forestry and concluded the current funding regime needs reform in order to maximise collective benefit, particularly at a time of exceptionally constrained public finances. This panel will examine the report's main recommendations and consider how Scotland can support truly multi-functional forests.