

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES



FOREWORD

This is the third in a series of papers that demonstrate how Scottish Labour believe our institutions need to change to deliver a stronger Scotland in a changing and modernising UK.

Labour has always been a party that believes in transformative change, not for its own sake, but to deliver more opportunities for the people of Scotland.

The case for that change is perhaps nowhere stronger than in the relationship between local and central government.

Under the SNP, Scotland's councils have been cut to the bone and callously sidelined. Rather than councillors being treated as champions for their local areas, they are ignored.

Worst of all, too often SNP councillors put loyalty to party before their communities. Defending the indefensible out of perverse loyalty to an obsession with division.

Just the latest cuts from Holyrood to council chambers mean that since 2013/14 the SNP have slashed local government's non-ringfenced funding by 12 per cent – despite their own funding rising by 8 per cent.

In far too many parts of Scotland, libraries are closing, roads are crumbling and bins are overflowing. The SNP are selling children short too, with schools and social work being cut to the bone.

We must empower communities to not just change their local areas – but stand up to ministers riding roughshod over their interests. It means championing local institutions – and voices – as a necessary counterweight to national pressure. That also means empowering individuals to stand up to all public institutions who fail them and try to cover it up.

The Scottish Parliament and its Government were supposed to be examples of transparency to build public trust in politics. But their approach to local government has been to hollow out its funding – leaving it with less to deliver its vital services. The disregard that local government has been held in is not without consequences.

As the cost of living crisis becomes a national emergency on the scale of the pandemic, I have repeatedly said that every layer of government must move quickly and decisively. Our councils are the closest authority to the frontline of this crisis – and are best placed to respond.

You can see that with the work of Labour-run local authorities like West Dunbartonshire where vital measures have been implemented to do everything we can to help people make ends meet. But every council goes into this national emergency with one arm behind its back.

After 15 years of SNP austerity, with council budgets slashed to fund ministerial vanity projects, council funds were already stripped to the bone before the crisis hit. Many are left with impossible choices now as they try to do the right thing for their area with no meaningful extra help. That must end. But that does not mean local government must not change, far from it.

Scottish Labour wants to give communities the chance to reform their arrangements so that it works

for them. And all of Scotland's local authorities must embrace change - from the jobs-first transition to net zero, or the digital transformation that will improve services and jump-start the chance for better paid jobs for people across Scotland.

We must build a better Scotland - in a renewed United Kingdom. That change must start from empowering communities.

That is the future Scottish Labour will seek to build.



ANAS SARWAR MSP,
SCOTTISH LABOUR LEADER



FOREWORD

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SHADOW CABINET SECRETARY FOR HOUSING & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

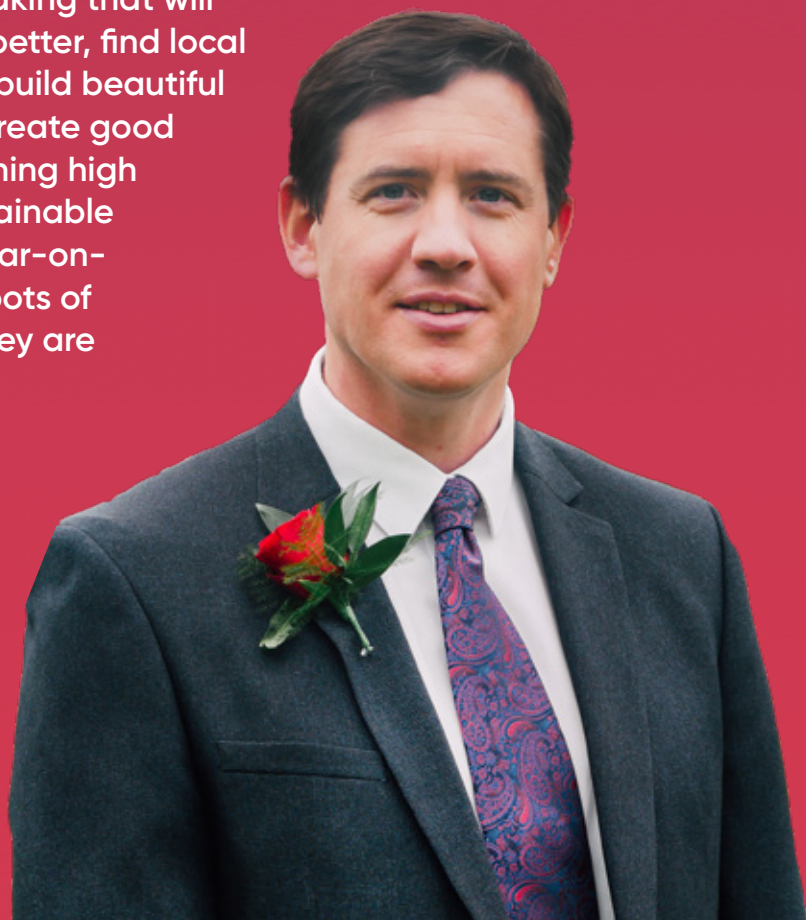
I have spent this summer travelling around Scotland and speaking to members of the public about their experiences of local government. Many people told me they are worried about local councils' ability to deliver basic services – refuse collection; maintaining our streets, buildings and green spaces; and keeping our libraries and leisure centres running. We cannot underestimate the importance of these services in building strong and supportive communities. But as long as the SNP seek to centralise powers and funding, and deprioritise local government, these services will be undervalued and put at risk.

It is time we placed our trust in local people to have more say in how their services are designed and delivered and in the shared spaces we choose to build and run. This is the best route to delivering the high quality and reliable services that people want to see in their local areas and that improve all our lives.

It is also the only way to develop innovative solutions that are tailored to local issues and needs. The SNP may continue to treat Scotland like one monolithic whole but Scottish Labour understand that it is a series of unique and diverse communities.

Of course, all of this will only be possible if local government is well funded. Services must be efficient and good value for money. But the people I spoke to don't want to be consulted only on what services to cut. They want to be involved in long-term decision making that will transform their communities for the better, find local solutions to the climate emergency, build beautiful and functional community spaces, create good jobs and homes, and support flourishing high streets. This requires long-term, sustainable funding for local government, not year-on-year cuts, uncertainty, and one-off pots of money with little flexibility on how they are spent.

There are some fantastic examples of local innovation and delivery happening. It is time to empower local government to make this possible across Scotland and fulfil local communities' potential to improve and transform lives across Scotland for the better.





INTRODUCTION

Scottish Labour has long championed the rights of communities and local people to have more power. It was the belief that decisions are best made as locally as possible that drove our support for Scottish devolution. Then, once the Parliament was established, Scottish Labour used this new authority to reset the balance of power in our communities, ending feudalism and introducing the Community Right to Buy.

When considering how to strengthen our communities it is important to recognise the immense potential of local government. It can improve the quality of our lives through better transport, affordable local leisure services, support for local businesses, quality social care, and improving the environment we live in by collecting our bins and maintaining local parks. It also has the power to transform and change lives with good housing, schools, libraries and social work. Local government also helps to build communities with its responsibility for creating and maintaining our shared spaces, services and local democracy. Effective delivery of local services is also key to national priorities, such as improving our health, education, the economy, and tackling climate change.

Local government can only do all of this because it is connected and embedded within the communities it serves, giving it a capacity to understand what local communities need. Its responsibility is to deliver at a local level and it is directly accountable to local people.

Never has this been clearer than in the two national emergencies that Scotland has faced in the last three years. During the pandemic, and the current cost of living crisis, it has been local government which has been on the frontline. Local support for vulnerable people and families reduces poverty in Scotland and local government has a key role to play in tackling the cost of living crisis. As Scottish Labour demonstrated throughout our campaign during this year's local elections, empowered councils could be transformative in supporting people during this crisis. But despite proximity to the problems, and the local expertise to fight them, councils have been forced to do so with one arm tied behind their backs.

Over the last 15 years local government and local communities have been deprioritised and disempowered. They have been stripped of the decision-making powers and funding they need to improve and transform lives. This is not only undemocratic but also short-sighted. As well as enriching our lives, local government services represent long-term investment. Good housing and planning, transport, and leisure services all create a healthier, happier Scotland. Support for local businesses, local job creation, and capital projects all grow Scotland's economy, and local communities have huge capacity to play a leading role in tackling the climate emergency.

The current SNP Government's desire to direct local government from the centre and cut its funding has also undermined communities, elected representatives, and local democracy. The SNP fails to recognise that Scotland is a series of diverse communities with distinct local identities and geographies. The pandemic highlighted the importance of these communities as we supported and looked out for each other. The experience of lockdowns and pandemic restrictions also reinforced how crucial the places in which we live are for our social, cultural, and economic flourishing.

Scottish Labour believe the Scottish Government must urgently start to value our diverse communities and local democracy. The relationship between the Scottish Government and local government must therefore become one of two equal partners. **Under a Scottish Labour Government, it will be.**



INTRODUCTION

We have already set out the case for constitutional change that would transform Scotland's relationship with the UK for the better. However, change cannot stop there. Recent constitutional debate has operated on a national level but we also need to think about how constitutional change within Scotland could empower people from across our country and help our distinct local areas to thrive.

As with all Scottish Labour's work on constitutional reform, our proposals in this area are driven in Scottish Labour's core beliefs and values, underpinned by six key principles:

1. The Scottish people are sovereign and have the right to determine the best form of government suited to our needs.
2. The UK should be a union of equal nations.
3. Power should lie with the people; the best forms of government empower local communities and do not hoard power in our parliaments and governments.
4. The UK is a redistributive union where wealth and opportunities are shared, and our nations and regions should work together to realise its benefits.
5. The primary function of the Scottish Parliament is to represent the Scottish people, hold the Scottish Government to account, and scrutinise the operation of our public services.
6. The Scottish Government and Scottish Ministers' priority should be taking decisions in the best interests of the people of Scotland. They should manage our public services effectively and work cooperatively and transparently with other UK governments and local government.

Applying these principles, Scottish Labour believe there are a series of reforms that would strengthen local democracy and ensure local government has the resources it needs to deliver on its potential and grow local economies. In this paper we also set out changes that would empower local government and communities to design and deliver the services needed in their areas to transform individuals' opportunities and enhance the quality of life for everyone across Scotland.



THE CASE FOR PUSHING POWER OUT

Social infrastructure relates to our surroundings and is crucial for ensuring that our social interactions and communities can flourish. When social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends and neighbours. When degraded, it inhibits social activity, leaving families and individuals to fend for themselves.

There are numerous examples across Scotland of how giving local people power and control over their local resources can help create stronger and more resilient communities. In Dumfries, the Midsteeple Quarter project is bringing eight underused high street properties under community control and refurbishing them as living, working, socialising, learning and enterprising spaces. The project is underpinned by the idea that community ownership and control is the best route towards a sustainable prosperity that is shared fairly amongst everyone.

Civil society plays a key role in building social infrastructure and tackling social justice. Community organisations do vital work, raising awareness of local issues. Run largely by volunteers, they fill important gaps left by the public and private sectors, addressing specific local concerns, supporting and empowering individuals and enabling community voices to be heard.

Local Government is also central to maintaining positive social infrastructure. This includes the deliver of good housing for people, not profit, and Scottish Labour believe that everyone should have access to community facilities like libraries and sports and cultural venues. These places provide community focus and deliver physical and mental health benefits so the accessibility of these places from people's homes is particularly important for disabled people, women, and children. Face-to-face connections strengthen a sense of community and minimise isolation and loneliness. The recent community-led campaign to save Maryhill Library is a testament to the value of libraries to local communities.

When local government and local communities are empowered with funding and flexibility they can also plan for the long-term. Scotland has ambitious targets to tackle climate change but to achieve these targets we now need equally ambitious local action and communities to be at the heart. Stronger communities must be sustainable communities, based on more local production, community energy, developing a sharing economy, better public transport, and support for active travel. In North Ayrshire, Scottish Labour invested in solar PV farms using council-owned land and assets to reduce fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions. In North Lanarkshire, Scottish Labour campaigned to create new woodlands in country parks, planting 20,000 native trees at Strathclyde Park in Motherwell and Palacerigg in Cumbernauld, with a further 20,000 at sites at Low Wood, Cumbernauld, and Calderbank, near Airdrie.

Local support for vulnerable people and families reduces poverty in Scotland and local government has a key role to play in tackling the cost of living crisis. Earlier in the year, Scottish Labour-led West Dunbartonshire council developed a £5m plan to help residents with the cost of living crisis including plans to create a household energy partnership and abolish residential care charges.

Local government has also been at the heart of successful community wealth-building by supporting good local businesses and local job creation, as well as bringing in capital investment to local projects. Through Scottish Labour's community wealth building work in North Ayrshire, local businesses were supported to access procurement opportunities and build tendering skills, and the Lochshore development was created to deliver a tourism and leisure destination within the Garnock Valley. Under Scottish Labour, the council also supported youth employment, recruiting 50 Modern Apprentices and developing one of the largest Kickstart programmes in the country to support young people into paid work placements.

Pushing power out of our national Parliament and down to a more local level can evidently bring great benefits. When local people have control over spending decisions, ownership of shared community assets, and the ability to tailor services to the needs of local areas, our towns, villages and communities can thrive.

THE CHALLENGES FACING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Despite examples of positive local innovation across Scotland, developing a unique approach can face several barriers. Too often Scottish Government policy means local government and communities do not have the tools and resources they need.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Under the SNP, Scotland has become one of the most centralised countries in Europe. Public services have been stripped from local democratic control and reorganised to sit with Ministers in Edinburgh. Decisions over police, fire, planning, aspects of education, and now parts of our social care services have been taken away from local people who best understand the needs of their communities. In recent weeks the SNP have also published proposals for a centralising power grab to social care services and the removal of social work from local authorities, in the process killing any hope for a joined up, locally accountable service for local communities.

FAIR FUNDING FOR SERVICES

Tory austerity has increased inequality across the UK but the SNP have disproportionately passed these cuts onto local government, with a total of £6 billion stripped out of core local government budgets since 2013/14. Increasing the amount of local government funding tied to central government priorities has also given local representatives less scope to make their own decisions on how to allocate funding.

Cuts to local government funding lead to diminished services and sense of community for all of us. We cannot underestimate the importance of well-maintained shared spaces and streets in underpinning strong communities. However, poorer households are particularly vulnerable to the cumulative impact of multiple small cuts. Lower income households are often more reliant on a range of services and changes to their provision, such as increased charges or shorter library and leisure centre opening hours, can prevent individuals from accessing some services entirely.

TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

A healthy retail environment is important for our town centres, but they are much more than somewhere to shop. They are where we live, work and socialise, and where we access public services or spend our leisure time. Local government driven regeneration programmes can give our high streets new purpose, turning redundant retail spaces and car parks into homes, workplaces, community hubs, and social spaces, but this requires capital to invest. Maintaining the balance within our town centres between shopping, working and leisure is also a key responsibility of for local government regulation but Scotland's high streets and town centres were struggling even before the pandemic. Small pots of targeted cash from Government in Holyrood are of limited value when the wider core services that a flourishing high street depend on, such as transport, maintenance and planning, are cut year after year.

Planning will play an important role in pulling many of these initiatives into a coherent strategy. As the post-pandemic debate shifts towards economic recovery and tackling the cost of living crisis, there will be a pressing need for a strong, well-resourced, and strategic plan-led system to provide confidence to local people, investors and businesses, and increase the resilience of places and communities. This requires a renewed emphasis on planning for public health, infrastructure, affordable high-quality housing, active travel, access to services and green space, capturing the benefits of technology and continued action to mitigate against the risks of climate change. Planning and local planning departments will also play a critical role in enabling investment in adaptation measures, for example, to address flooding as well as identifying opportunities for community heat networks and an expansion of community renewables. Local authorities also have a key role to address the climate and nature emergencies for example in relation to investment in local parks and community gardens, as well as council-owned bus services and active travel investment. Local communities' views and needs must be at the heart of our planning system.



BUILDING POWERFUL COMMUNITIES

Asking questions about where decisions and powers can be best exercised means that we need to think beyond just the powers and accountability of Scotland's Parliament. We also need to consider how to improve its relationship with local people and government within Scotland.

Scottish Labour believe we need to enable communities to prevent problems at source rather than trying to manage them once they have happened. Achieving this will require more than simply devolving services. It needs measures to revitalise local democracy, promote greater community engagement, and empower local councils financially.

Yet, this is not simply a call for localism. We cannot justify duplication and difference for the sake of it. Local councillors should be able to decide to share their sovereignty and work on services collectively where that is the most effective way of achieving the best outcomes for their communities.

Central government also has a role in setting strategic direction based on outcomes rather than trying to direct services from Edinburgh. The Scottish Government should support communities through national frameworks and objectives that enable local democracy to focus on what matters locally.

Change must be rooted in improving outcomes for local people and delivering world-class local services. For this reason, our proposals to strengthen communities and reset the relationship between national and local government are focused on achieving the following outcomes:

1. Democratic accountability: This is crucial not just at elections but also through broader engagement where citizens have meaningful opportunities to influence decisions.

2. Subsidiarity: Decisions should be taken at the lowest practical level. While national standards and guidance are essential, these should not be used to stifle local innovation or local differences. Instead, services should be designed with and for people.

3. Transparency: Part of being able to participate in the democratic processes requires access to the information necessary to make judgements and hold decision-makers accountable. It should be clear to voters where accountability for different decisions sits.

4. Equality: Public services should be focused on reducing inequalities. This includes preventative spending to reduce demand and tackling the underlying causes of intergenerational deprivation. Services should be funded through progressive taxation which ensures those most able to pay contribute the most. It also means that we should ensure that the less powerful have an equal voice in service design and equal access to services.

5. Effectiveness: All public service organisations should ensure they are making the best use of resources. This includes both spending, the skills of staff, and appropriate equipment and facilities.

6. Public service ethos: A common ethos for all public services and those who deliver them. It is the collective nature of social responsibility that is a defining characteristic of our country. Building on the Nolan Principles, this ethos should be based on enabling, empowering, and improving the lives of people and communities and the traditional values of integrity and openness.

7. Good work: People deliver public services. Therefore, we should aim to recruit and retain the best people, always ensuring that the workforce reflects the diversity of our communities. This requires fair pay and conditions, secure employment, and genuine engagement of trade unions and workers in decision-making. Workforce development, including a common competency framework, should be a feature of good public sector work.

8. Integration: While there will always be boundaries between public bodies, these should not be a barrier to cooperation. There should be a common set of powers and duties, ensuring that the piecemeal development of statutory duties and lines of accountability do not hinder cooperation. A single public service worker concept with an ethos and training that is shared across the country would help break down organisational and professional silos.

9. A results-focus: While public services should recognise that services need the correct inputs and that effective processes matter, they should be focused on achieving positive results for people. They should take a long-term view that should not be disrupted by the short-termism of the political cycle.

PROPOSAL - CHAMPIONING COMMUNITIES & REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Today's unitary council areas were created 25 years ago, and subsequent reform to police and fire, and health services has been led from Holyrood. Going forward, reform must be led by local people and communities, it cannot be dictated to local government by the Scottish Government.

The starting point should be the principle of local self-government set out in the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which has the support of all political parties in Scotland. The Charter commits signatories to a set of basic rules which seek to uphold the political, administrative and financial independence of local authorities through legislation and, where applicable, constitution. Building on this approach we propose that local communities should be able to structure local governance to best suit the needs of their area, recognising that this does not have to be the same across Scotland. Within local government areas that are geographically large and diverse, more local delivery can be more responsive to people's needs and improve accountability. On the other hand, the opportunities for economic development or people's patterns of travel, work and socialising do not always respect council boundaries. In short, what might work in our towns and cities might not work in our island and rural areas.

Where cooperation between local areas can help drive local economic development or find solutions to climate change, we must support local government to work together. When joint working can deliver better and more efficient public services, we must encourage a collective approach. There are already examples of this happening, such as Lothian buses, the municipal bus company owned by Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian councils, or the Ayrshire Shared Services Joint Committee which currently makes decisions on tourism, roads and civil contingencies for the region. Waste management is coordinated across all of Lanarkshire and the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport is responsible for transport planning in the West of Scotland. Elsewhere in the UK, such as in Manchester, London, and West Yorkshire, the creation of metropolitan and combined authority mayors has helped to strengthen regional identities, deliver integrated services and unlock new economic opportunities.

Championing local identity can deliver powerful change – empowered mayors in England have demonstrated how you can use policy innovation to deliver progressive social outcomes and stand up for their communities in the face of overbearing central government.

In Manchester, Andy Burnham has used the authority, resources and platform afforded to the Mayor to battle homelessness, champion transport integration, and memorably challenge ministers biases at the height of the pandemic.

Meanwhile in Scotland, cities like Glasgow had decisions imposed on them by central government authorities with little or no regard paid to community concerns, regional variations in Covid rates, or business fears. That cannot be allowed to happen again.

A LOCAL DEMOCRACY BILL

To reflect this, Scottish Labour would introduce a **Local Democracy Bill** that would facilitate locally-driven change. This legislation would set out a process by which local government can itself trigger reform and establish structures that suit the needs of its local areas, be they more locally designed services or more regional governance such as mayors.

The legislation would remove current barriers to change, guaranteeing central government support and resource to help a restructure, as well as including a mechanism through which local authorities can make the case for further powers. The changes the new legislation might facilitate include:

1. The delivery of services on a level more closely related to recognisable communities.
2. Establishing more robust regional cooperation to drive economic development, where services, such as council owned bus networks, are best delivered on a larger scale or can be delivered more effectively and efficiently across local government boundaries.
3. The creation of new regional governance ranging from joint boards to mayors who, along with local authorities, could make the case for taking on further powers such as aspects of public health policy.
4. Delivering more effective community engagement. Surveys show that people are more likely to get involved in their community if it is easier to participate in the decisions that matter. Many initiatives have been piloted in recent years, from participatory budgeting to citizen juries. Still, most have struggled to overcome inequalities in power and influence. We need a variety of different approaches tailored to the needs of specific communities.

Any restructure, such as creating more local decision-making roles or establishing a regional mayor, would require the consent of the areas affected. Local authorities would be required to engage in community consultation before structural change and the bill would also enshrine a Right to Space in law, to ensure communities have places to meet and capacity to participate as active citizens.

PROPOSAL – FAIRER FUNDING FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Reform of governance structures alone will not be sufficient to empower local communities; they need adequate funding, greater financial certainty and powers to raise their own funds to innovate and respond to local needs. It is time to end the ability of central government to cut council budgets and undermine local government mandates for the sake of their own agenda.

A NEW INDEPENDENT CALCULATION TO DELIVER FAIR FUNDING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Scottish Labour believe we must remove local government from the current cycle of SNP de-prioritisation, cuts, and unpredictable pots of money, and make local government an equal tier of government. To do this we need a transparent assessment of the services that local government deliver and the corresponding proportion of the Scottish budget assigned to local government, similar to the concept of the Barnett Formula. Successive years of unsustainable cuts also means that the current financial settlement for local government cannot provide a baseline for this work.

Given past experience of the Scottish Government's approach to budget-setting for local government, Scottish Labour believe this process must be done independently. This could be achieved either through a new Local Government Fiscal Commission or new responsibilities and authority for the existing Scottish Fiscal Commission in relation to local government finance. Once established, the independent process would set local government budgets for a three-year period, with the necessary room for forecasting errors and UK budget changes. The formula used by either commission would build in the current equalisation process and tax raising powers, ensuring that there is a no detriment relationship between council tax and business rates income, and central government funding.

LOCAL TAX REFORM

Instead of delivering on their commitment to scrap the Council Tax, the SNP chose to freeze it without fully reimbursing local authorities. This has further disempowered local government and left huge funding gaps for the kinds of key services and initiatives laid out above, which local authorities are increasingly having to rely on their cash reserves to fill. This is a patently unsustainable method of funding. We need to end the regressive nature of council tax, where those on the lowest incomes pay the highest proportion of their income. Scottish Labour remain committed to abolishing the council tax and replacing it with a fairer alternative based on property values and ability to pay.

A new local government public centre for excellence, detailed below, would also play a role in supporting local government to explore and implement new forms of taxation, broadening the tax base, including the tourist tax and land value capture.

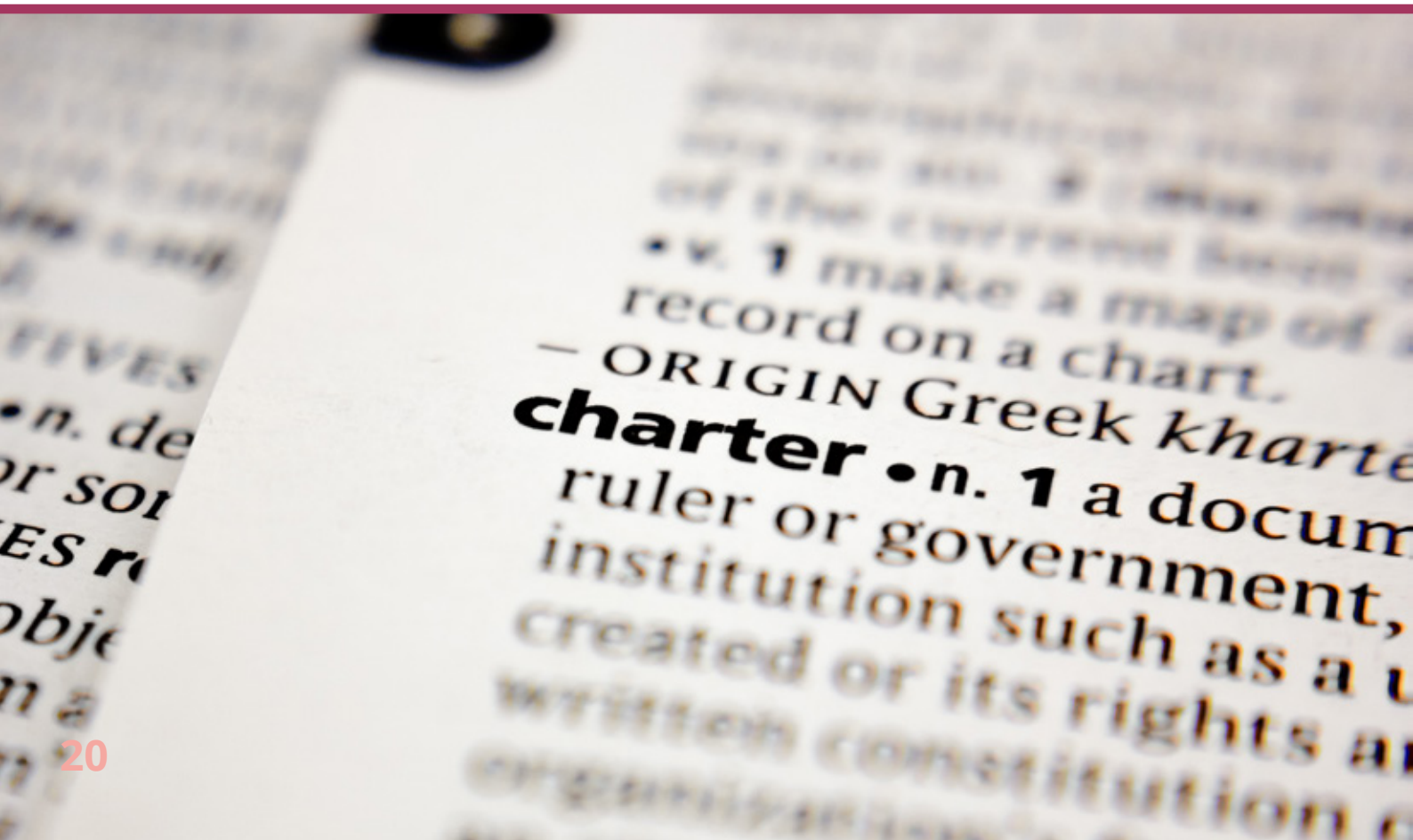
PROPOSAL - RESETTING THE BALANCE IN FAVOUR OF PEOPLE

Beyond financial security there is a need to empower local people through transparency and respect. Too many people in Scotland have struggled to get justice for themselves or their loved ones when they have been harmed or bereaved due to the actions or negligence of public bodies. The scandals at, and current inquiry into, the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital are just one example of the battle families can face simply to get answers about what has happened.



To address this imbalance, Scottish Labour have proposed changes to the law to make the delivery of justice a reality rather than a soundbite. Our proposals for Milly's Law, named after Milly Main and based on the model proposed for the Hillsborough Law, would reset the balance between families and powerful public bodies, ensuring that bereaved families are collectively at the heart of the response to disasters and public scandals. It would deliver:

1. The establishment of an independent public advocate who can act on behalf of families of the deceased.
2. A Charter for families bereaved through public tragedy which would be binding on all public bodies.
3. Improved accessibility to legal advice and representation for bereaved families so they can fully participate at public inquiries.
4. A requirement for the evidence and findings of major public inquiries to be taken fully into account at any subsequent criminal trials.
5. An extension of the duty of candour to other public bodies in the course of public inquiries, such as the police, and a strengthening of the remedies which bereaved families can seek, should the duty be breached.



PROPOSAL – BETTER SERVICES FOR SCOTLAND

SHARING BEST PRACTICE

To help foster innovation and undo the damage caused by cuts and centralisation, we need to be able to better share learning and best practice across our local authorities. To aid this work, Scottish Labour is proposing that the Improvement Service and What Works Scotland are replaced with a new organisation that is focussed specifically on local government delivery, improving outcomes, and replicating successful policy programmes across Scotland. It would build on the many successful ideas championed by Labour when in administration:

1. North Lanarkshire's Club 365 programme was the first example of primary school pupils entitled to free school meals, receiving them during school holidays and weekends, all the while keeping them involved in activities.
2. North Ayrshire Council launched Scotland's first Community Wealth Building strategy.
3. Scottish Labour councillors across the West of Scotland are committed to working together to create a new publicly-controlled bus service run in the interest of the people, not profit.
4. Edinburgh Council worked to establish the Edinburgh Solar Cooperative and provided long standing support for Lothian Buses, involving all Lothian's councils and providing a dividend that benefits local communities.



BUILDING POWERFUL COMMUNITIES

Support from this new organisation would be wide-ranging and practical, driven by locally and nationally-desired outcomes. For example, it would look at Edinburgh's experience of creating the Solar Cooperative and provide a clear blueprint, support, and consultation for local authorities that wanted to establish similar initiatives. The same could be done across a range of examples, such as heat networks, public sector-led housing development, and equalities approaches to planning.

PUBLIC SERVICE CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE

Our public services deserve the best people to work in them. Scottish Labour would strengthen the training of public service staff through a new public service centre for excellence, and rebuild public service leadership training and research across our universities and colleges. The aim would be to build a network that provided momentum for change and consensus, bringing together university and college research with local authorities, and promoting the idea of the single public service worker. This latter concept need not be limited to those directly employed in the public sector, but could include all those who can adopt a public service ethos.



CONCLUSION

Our proposals for reform across the UK, Scotland, and local government are rooted in the idea that the best forms of government empower local communities and do not hoard power in our parliaments and governments. Strong local communities, excellent and accessible local services, and the ability to determine how these services are designed and delivered can improve all our lives and transform the lives of the most vulnerable for the better. This is only possible if we enable local government to work efficiently and represent communities through delivery on a level that is transparent, makes sense, and encourages local democracy. Local government must have the financial freedom to deliver services and distinct local solutions rooted in community needs and demands – from keeping our local streets clean and collecting our waste, to creating good jobs and homes and empowering local people to build their own community spaces.

Our vision for local government is part of wider set of proposals to invest in Scotland and its communities, as well as empower local government and the Scottish Government to shift to a more long-term and preventative way of spending. We have a plan to develop skills and create jobs, tackle the root causes of inequality, grow Scotland's economy, and tackle the climate emergency. The role of local government and strong local government is key. It is time to finally end the centralisation of the SNP and empower our local communities to improve lives for the better.



