



**Scottish Policy Forum**

Focus on the future

# Foreword

## Scottish Labour Leader, ANAS SARWAR

The next Scottish Parliament election is under a year and a half away. The election is our chance to turn the page on almost two decades of SNP failure, to chart a new direction for Scotland and to deliver the government that Scotland needs.

The importance of the election cannot be overstated – nor can the potential that the election holds to transform our country. But to deliver the new direction Scotland needs, Scottish Labour has a duty to develop a policy platform that is grounded in our values, ready to meet the challenges before us and focused relentlessly on the future.

Because after 17 years of SNP failure and incompetence, every sector of our society is worse off. Our NHS is on its knees with one in six Scots stuck on a waiting list. We are in the midst of a housing crisis with low housebuilding and a homelessness epidemic. Standards have fallen in Scotland's schools that were once the envy of the world. And our economy has flatlined with sluggish growth and thousands of green jobs sent overseas. But the fact is that Scotland is a nation full of potential that is ready to be unlocked.

The task before us is great. But if we get this right then we can make Scotland the thriving, more dynamic and more equal country we all want it to be. That's why we have the Scottish Policy Forum so that the members of our party, trade unions and affiliates have the opportunity to shape the platform we take into the election in 2026. But we also want to give all Scots the opportunity to respond to this first stage consultation paper because we want to tap into the wealth of talent, experience and ideas that Scotland's businesses, third sector, public sector and individuals have.

Our call for ideas and submissions are based on four commissions that reflect our key policy priorities. Our commissions will focus on our key policy areas of the economy, NHS and social care, support for young people and making our communities more equal and safer. These key commissions will help ensure we have a policy platform that is ready to reignite our economy, reform our NHS and get it back on track, support young Scots and deliver the safer and thriving communities we want to see.

To deliver a new direction for Scotland, we need your help and ideas. Every idea submitted will be considered and every idea will play its part in shaping our policy platform. We need to tap into the expertise and experience of the people of Scotland if we are to develop a transformative manifesto that is up to the challenge before us and ready to deliver for Scots.

Scotland's best days lie ahead – so join us on that journey as we chart the new direction for Scotland together.



# Introduction

## Scottish Policy Forum Chair, KAREN WHITEFIELD

Scotland is a nation rich in potential, with the talent, creativity, and resilience needed to thrive in the years ahead. To realise that potential, we must work together to create a vision for a stronger, fairer, and more prosperous country. The upcoming Scottish Parliament election is a crucial moment to define Scotland's future, and we believe that future must be shaped by ideas from across our communities and civic society.

That's why Scottish Labour is launching the Scottish Policy Forum (SPF) – a process designed to bring together perspectives from our members and the wider public to help us build the bold and transformative platform Scotland needs. This isn't about political leadership alone; it's about collective input, collaboration, and harnessing ideas from every corner of our society.

We've identified four key commissions to guide our work and focus on the areas where transformative change can make the greatest impact. These commissions represent a framework for delivering the Scotland we all want to see – a Scotland that thrives economically, supports its people, invests in its young, and ensures everyone feels safe and valued.



## **OUR FOUR COMMISSIONS**

### **Becoming an Economic Powerhouse to Improve Lives**

Scotland's economy has incredible untapped potential. We want to create a thriving, dynamic economy that works for everyone. By fostering innovation, building green industries, and creating high-quality, sustainable jobs, we can ensure that economic success translates into better opportunities and improved living standards for all.

### **A Modern NHS and Social Care System That Puts People at the Centre**

Everyone deserves access to healthcare and support that is compassionate, timely, and effective. Scotland's NHS and social care systems must rise to the challenges of today while preparing for the demands of tomorrow. From improving waiting times to investing in preventative care, this commission will focus on how we build a system that truly prioritises people's needs.

### **From Cradle to Career: Giving Young People the Best Start in Life**

The path from early childhood to a fulfilling career should be filled with opportunities, not obstacles. This commission will explore how we can improve education, support young people, and create pathways to rewarding careers, ensuring that every child in Scotland can achieve their potential and contribute to our collective success.

### **More Equal and Safer Communities Where We Can All Thrive**

Scotland should be a country where no one is left behind. Whether addressing inequality, improving public safety, or fostering stronger local communities, we want to create a society where everyone can thrive. This commission will focus on building a Scotland that is inclusive, equal, and safe for everyone.

## **YOUR VOICE MATTERS**

These commissions are just the starting point. To create the platform Scotland needs, we want to hear from you. Whether you're a Labour member, part of a civic organisation, or simply someone with ideas about how to improve our country, your voice is vital to this process.

Every submission matters. Your ideas will help shape our policy platform and ensure that it reflects the ambition and values of the people we serve.

Scotland's best days are still to come, but building that brighter future will require effort, creativity, and collaboration. Together, we can unlock Scotland's potential and create a nation where everyone has the chance to succeed.

Now is the time to act. Share your vision, join the conversation, and help us shape a better Scotland – together.

# Contents

Submission information, [page 5](#)

**Commission 1:** Becoming an economic powerhouse to improve lives, [page 6](#)

**Commission 2:** A modern NHS and social care system that puts people at the centre, [page 12](#)

**Commission 3:** From cradle to career to give young people best start in life, [page 20](#)

**Commission 4:** More equal and safer communities so we can all thrive, [page 32](#)

# Submission Information

The Scottish Policy Forum is made up of Scottish Labour Party members, trade unions and affiliates and elected representatives. Its role is to help shape Scottish Labour's policy agenda and as part of that it draws up policy documents for consultation. The issues discussed in this paper are not a statement of Scottish Labour policy but part of our consultation process.

Not only is Scottish Labour's Scottish Policy Forum the opportunity for the labour movement to develop ideas that will go on to shape the election platform for Scottish Labour in 2026, it is a vehicle that allows wider civic society to feed into our policy process. This is unusual amongst political parties, but as an outward-looking party that wants to make Scotland the best country in the world to live, learn, work and do business in, we want to draw on the experience and knowledge of all of Scotland.

So many current Scottish Government policies exist to fix the problems of the past but they are no longer fit for purpose and do not address the needs of today, far less the future. The SNP's answer after 17 years in government is to keep throwing more money at a broken system to just get the same outcomes and to continue with the managed decline of our economy and public services.

We are not interested in only limited improvement in some areas. The Scottish Labour Party wants to grow our economy, renew our public services and improve the lives of all Scots. This is why we are encouraging everyone who makes submissions to think boldly and to think about reforms that pay off over the longer term, including capital spending.

We want submissions to focus on the future. We know that Scotland has an ageing population, that we face a climate emergency, that technology is going to play an even greater role in society, and we know that rural and urban Scotland continue to face different challenges. **We would ask that all submissions take these factors into account** because Scotland needs transformative policies that meet our challenges and opportunities.

Whether you are a constituency Labour Party, trade union and affiliate, a third sector organisation, business or even an individual we encourage you to make a submission. Some people submitting to the consultation will already be engaged in the policy, others will be new to it. This document is drafted to capture as wide a range of views as possible.

We would also urge you to focus on solutions and outcomes, and not just the problems. We are all too aware that the SNP government has run out of energy and vision and the challenges this has created across the country. What is important now is where our country is going and Scottish Labour wants to focus on the future so we can make Scotland a fairer, more prosperous place for everybody. We believe that Scotland's best days lie ahead of us.

The Scottish Policy Forum has met and discussed a wide range of issues to inform this **initial consultation paper**. **The paper draws out areas that we want to seek specific evidence and opinions on in this first stage of work. We hope to encourage submissions that focus on these questions.** The questions are there as a guide to stimulate thinking – you do not need to answer every question!

We welcome submissions on all devolved topics, including those not raised explicitly in the paper.

Please give your name, organisation name (if relevant) and a contact email address in your submission.

**Please send all submissions to [scottishpolicyforum@labour.org.uk](mailto:scottishpolicyforum@labour.org.uk) by Saturday 25th January 2025.**

# Scottish Policy Forum: Focus on the future

## Commission 1: Becoming an economic powerhouse to improve lives

### INTRODUCTION

Sustained economic growth is a route to improving the prosperity of our country and the living standards of working people. It is also key to repairing our vital public services which are in a state of managed decline after a decade and a half of austerity. We believe that the proceeds of growth must be equitably shared across Scottish society, with wealth retained in our communities.

In a devolved context the fiscal framework delivers more money for the Scottish budget if we improve our performance relative to the rest of the UK. This is why we want to see a Scottish Labour government focussing on what it could do, using the significant powers of the Parliament, to foster growth and innovation to strengthen our economy for the people of Scotland. Sustainable growth requires government to work in partnership with business, unions, civic organisations and the public sector.

Scotland has huge opportunities in the green economy, food and drink sector and our creative industries, as well as the existing strengths we have in life sciences and financial and professional services.

In addition, the election of a new UK Labour Government presents the opportunity to work together to grow Scotland's economy.

We believe that a modern industrial strategy should include the public sector and the everyday economy, where half the population works, because sectors like social care, retail and education are a vital part of the economy and our communities.

### SKILLS

We want to create a skills system that is effective at up-skilling and reskilling the workforce, so that we can meet any skills gaps and to enable people to get good jobs when the economy changes. We want to help people re-train to get back into work, such as women returning after maternity leave. We also want to see employers train the right people at the right time to be part of a clear workforce strategy.

We know that rapid technological advancement, climate change and Scotland's ageing population present the Scottish economy with distinct labour market challenges. Labour shortages are likely to be compounded by technology change and slowing global population growth. We can plan for this now and should do so working in collaboration with our schools, colleges and universities, as well as employers.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How can we plan for a Just Transition by delivering improved re-training options for those affected by decarbonisation of the economy?
2. How can we boost on-the-job training by incentivising employers to invest in workforce development?
3. How can we re-train and up-skill people so that they can return to the workplace, such as women returning after maternity leave, or stay in work, such as older people?
4. Is the architecture of the skills system – including Skills Development Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council and our colleges and universities – set up to deliver the workforce of the future?
5. How can we ensure those who are thinking of doing a Modern Apprenticeship are prepared and is the Foundation Apprenticeship working?
6. How do we reform and strengthen the Modern Apprenticeship system to deliver more apprentices across the economy, both in new innovative sectors and the everyday economy, such as retail?
7. In what ways can we drive growth and uptake of Graduate Apprentices, for those at all stages in their careers? How can we ensure that money available from the Growth and Skills Levy is utilised to deliver effective, relevant and appropriate training to workers, focusing on those in typically disadvantaged groups?

## NET ZERO & JUST TRANSITION

There is an urgent need to decarbonise our economy. We need to look ahead to the electrification of domestic heating and transport. This transition to a new green economy must be planned in a way which is fair and inclusive and maximises opportunities for workers, whilst ensuring no one is left behind.

Scotland's North Sea energy sector has been and still is a source of economic strength, engineering and technical skills. Oil and gas will continue to play a part of our energy mix for decades to come and so we must transition to Net Zero in a way that seeks to protect our energy security and to leverage these capabilities to develop and deploy renewable technology and energy generation.

Scotland's unique geography and climate mean we are ideally placed to be a world leader in wind and tidal renewable energy. We now need to plan for the infrastructure, such as ports, and the supply chains needed, to take advantage of the new green economy.





## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What reforms are required to planning and consent to ensure planning is not inhibiting renewables projects, whilst at the same time ensuring communities and local authorities are at the heart of decision making?
2. How can Scotland take advantage of renewables supply chain opportunities and ensure onshoring of jobs?
3. What infrastructure upgrades are required to ensure we can deploy renewables at the pace and scale required? E.g. housing, ports, roads and rail.
4. What role should nuclear energy play in our energy mix and what measures can we take to ensure investment?
5. What steps must be taken to secure a Just Transition, protecting and improving wages and conditions, and ensuring the skills and expertise of those working in the hydrocarbon economy can be redeployed over time?
6. How do we ensure that industries with high energy usage are not left behind?
7. What changes need to take place to enable the retrofit of homes to be undertaken at the pace required, ensuring those on lower incomes are not left behind?
8. How can we ensure rural communities can secure increased jobs and wages as we move to Net Zero and reduce depopulation?
9. What are the challenges and opportunities for rural sectors such as forestry, fishing and agriculture?

## MODELS OF OWNERSHIP

Economies have undergone a series of shocks in recent years, from the Covid pandemic to the war in Ukraine. We have also experienced the subsequent cost of living crisis and the squeeze it has placed on our standards of living, with the 2019-2024 UK Parliament overseeing the lowest growth in living standards on record.

The structure of our economy can exacerbate these problems. Scottish Labour's approach to growth must embrace all ownership types including co-operative, worker owned, mutual, community, municipal and public, as well as private.

Private ownership is important and can help to drive innovation and entrepreneurship, but alternative models can help to produce fairer, more productive, more democratic outcomes. We want to look at substantially increasing the quantity of alternatively-owned businesses as they can provide a mechanism for delivering inclusive and equitable growth.

Labour's historic 2003 Land Reform Act set the scene for growth in community-owned land. This was part of Labour's historic mission to diversify Scotland's highly concentrated patterns of landownership and within which community ownership could be a cornerstone. Over 25 years of experience shows that community ownership of land can transform local economies, acting as an agency of economic, social, cultural, and environmental development.

Many deliver renewable energy, provide housing, create workspaces and jobs, enhance access to the local environment, contribute to cultural enrichment, retain and grow the population, and provide an environment for private businesses to thrive. In the last decade under the SNP this progress has slowed and the diversification of landownership has stalled. Soaring land prices reward existing owners but exclude communities.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How can we encourage increased entrepreneurship and scaling up of productive businesses?
2. The Scottish Government owns several economic assets, including Prestwick Airport and Ferguson Marine. What should a Scottish Labour approach to state-owned industries look like?
3. How can we expand municipal transport ownership models, such as the successful Lothian Buses in Edinburgh? Are there lessons to learn from combined authorities in England?
4. How do we maximise the capacity of Co-operative Development Scotland to increase the number of Co-ops in Scotland as we seek to match the new UK Labour Government ambition to double Co-op numbers?
5. How should we view Community Wealth Building and is the framework in Scotland suited to driving inclusive ownership?
6. How can we support municipal and community-owned energy through GB Energy?
7. How can we deliver renewed action on land, to update laws that no longer work, to empower more communities to deliver more economic transformation and to grow community wealth?
8. As well as land ownership, how can community ownership of facilities and businesses, such as pubs, shop and football teams, be enabled to protect jobs and services?

## INFRASTRUCTURE & INVESTMENT

To achieve the goals of long-term economic growth and Net Zero we need to ensure that we have the infrastructure, including transport and digital connectivity, in place that will drive our economy forward. The Communities Commission is considering both housing and town centre regeneration, but we also note the importance of both here in terms of their economic impact.

We need to deliver an efficient and modern transport infrastructure that meets Scotland's future needs and rivals that of other European countries. We need to better connect our coastal communities and rural areas, which produce the food and energy we all need, to the central belt and beyond. Our roads, railways, ferries and airports are essential to the Scottish economy and we want to work towards an integrated and affordable transport system that is publicly controlled and run in the public interest. An enhanced railway network is essential to achieve our Net Zero targets.

Fast and reliable broadband is also key to a green and growing economy and is vital to all of us, for work, healthcare, education and leisure. We want to see better connectivity across Scotland.

Postal services are still an intrinsic part of the social infrastructure that Scotland relies on, especially in our more remote and rural parts of the country where they are quite literally a lifeline.

Compared to other OECD members, the UK and Scotland has relatively low levels of both government and business investment.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do we use public and private investment to drive and scale up infrastructure delivery? Are there international models for infrastructure delivery we can look at?
2. What specific climate change adaptations will be required and how can we ensure they are planned for?
3. How do we ensure the planning process makes faster decisions to encourage investment but also takes into account the views of local communities?
4. How do we connect employers and communities across Scotland with better broadband?
5. What changes can we make to our transport infrastructure and how it operates to enable economic growth?
6. How will we deliver the required social infrastructure and urban regeneration (including town centres) to support economic growth and build strong communities?
7. Recognising the value of postal workers and the services that they provide in our communities, how can their roles be further developed/diversified and how can they be supported to do that?

## WORKFORCE

Scotland has a very educated workforce and going forward we need to ensure that we have the skills that employers need, which is as much about reskilling the workforce as it is about equipping young people. The rise of AI and related technologies marks a rapid shift in the workplace and we need to respond to the opportunities and threats of AI. We also know that Scotland faces demographic challenges and that Scotland's working-age population will increasingly need to support an ageing population which will be more reliant on public services.

We want to see a commitment to equality of opportunity, an extension of union recognition and sectoral bargaining, and equality of pay.



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How can we utilise emerging technologies to increase productivity, whilst ensuring those whose jobs are at risk of automation are given the opportunity to up-skill and be redeployed?
2. How do we ensure workers in Scotland are equipped to deal with the challenges and opportunities of AI?
3. Fifty years after Barbara Castle's Equal Pay Act and 14 years after Harriet Harman's Equality Act, women are still fighting for equality in the workplace. What devolved measures can be taken to help close the gender pay gap and ensure women have opportunities across the employment sector?
4. How do we encourage young people into traditional industries, and how do we ensure they are trained and have the ability to enter these industries?
5. There are significant barriers to disabled people and those from BAME backgrounds. How can we reduce those barriers and close pay gaps for those in employment? How can we ensure employers recognise and support people with disabilities, neurodiverse conditions and hidden disabilities?
6. Can we better use employability programmes and re-training to get people who are economically inactive back into the workforce?
7. How do we build on the new UK Labour Government's Employment Rights Bill and what changes are required to the Scottish Government Fair Work agenda to ensure more people are better protected at work?
8. Are there measures we can take to reverse demographic changes such as youth drain and rural depopulation?



## Commission 2: A modern NHS and social care system that puts people at the centre

### INTRODUCTION

Labour is the party of the NHS. We steadfastly hold true to Bevan's original vision of the NHS being a universal, high-quality service that is free at the point of delivery. The NHS and Social Care Commission believes that social care should be given parity with the NHS because supporting people to live independently in their own communities is crucial to dignity, empowerment, and allowing everyone to fulfil their potential. This is why it grieves us to see both the NHS and social care – despite the commitment and hard work of staff – in such a critical condition. The problems are extensive and well-documented, and the SNP seem unable or incapable of turning things around. No matter what action the government takes, improvements have been marginal.

In opposition Scottish Labour has held the Scottish Government's feet to the fire on the crisis engulfing both the NHS and the social care sector. Socio-economic inequalities at birth still have too much of an influence on life expectancy and life chances. We believe that the NHS and social care would be an immediate priority of any future Scottish Labour government. We want everyone to have confidence that an ambulance will come quickly when they need it, that they get the operation that will transform their lives within weeks and that dental treatment is accessible and available to all. We aspire to an effective social care sector so that all people whatever their age or circumstance can lead fulfilling lives in their communities, with consistent and skilled support.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. The Scottish Government has taken lots of one-off steps but what would a longer-term plan for health and social care look like?
2. What immediate priorities within the NHS do you think a Scottish Labour Government should focus on when it first enters government?
3. How can a modern NHS make the most of new technologies and artificial intelligence? Are there risks that need to be planned for?
4. What would be the key outcomes for service users that health and social care policy should focus on improving?
5. What reforms need to take place so that spending money on the NHS does not result in the same poor outcomes?
6. How can we shift the focus of health and care services from acute and hospital-based services, towards community-based services?

## **PREVENTION**

We want the health service to be about more than treating illness. We want to support people to live healthy lives and avoid the risk of poor health, illness and early death. Health inequalities remain stubbornly embedded in communities.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. What would a greater focus on prevention look like and require to make it a reality?
2. What would that mean for funding or meeting current NHS targets?
3. How should we tackle the social determinants of health through preventative spending?
4. What are the best ways to prevent obesity, drug and alcohol addictions, and what is the best way to support people who are already obese or have addictions?
5. Screening is a form of prevention – at what age should screening take place and are there ways it could be expanded?
6. The third sector plays a significant role in enabling prevention. Can you share good practice of this?

## **SOCIAL CARE**

Social care is a specialist and diverse sector, supporting those with long-term needs, as well as older people, to lead healthy and fulfilling lives in their communities. Yet social care rarely enjoys parity of esteem with other public services. Work in the sector is undervalued, wage rises have not kept pace with colleagues, and recruitment and retention are at crisis point. All of these factors affect the ability of providers to provide consistent and quality care, despite the dedication of social care practitioners. Few would argue that Health and Social Care Partnerships are a successful model of cross-sector working, yet SNP plans for a National Care Service amount to little more than a power grab and re-brand of the status quo, which will do nothing for those in need of support.



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How can the immediate problem of recruiting and retaining staff in social care be solved – in urban areas and in rural areas?
2. The Scottish Government's National Care Service has been widely discredited and is not real reform: what do you believe is the best way of delivering social care in the future?
3. How might we value the diversity of the care sector, while supporting equity of reward across the workforce and ensuring consistent quality?
4. How can the training, conditions and support for staff in social care be improved?
5. Is Fair Work in Scotland delivering for workers? How will the UK Employment Rights Bill and proposals around the adult social care negotiating body affect Fair Work and planned sectoral bargaining in Scotland?
6. How can the system of Scottish Social Services Council registration fees be improved to relieve the cost burden from the lowest-paid care workers?
7. Funding social care is expensive (although not as expensive as keeping people in hospital), how do we make it sustainable in the longer term with a larger older population?
8. Unpaid carers often end up burnt out and unable to continue – what would better support look like to ensure unpaid care is sustainable and valued?

## WAITING TIMES

Almost 1 in 6 Scots are on NHS waiting lists for tests and treatment, with many left languishing for months and even years for a hospital appointment. Scotland's NHS has a series of treatment targets that have effectively become meaningless, as patients are forced to accept the unacceptable. As people live longer and with multiple long-term conditions, we need to ensure that acute and elective care services are resourced and equipped to meet need. As such, the next Scottish Labour government not only needs to set out a credible plan for bringing down the waiting list backlog, but also futureproofs elective care pathways, ensuring that seasonal pressures or unexpected demands on services do not disrupt planned services.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Putting waiting times on a sustainable footing is a longer-term process, but in the short term what can be done to clear the current backlog?
2. What should be done about waiting time targets? Are there ways to better prioritise these so that they are more meaningful?
3. There is concern that when people phone for an ambulance it might not come or come quickly enough, so how can we improve waiting times for ambulances and ensure that ambulances are only called when appropriate?

## **DENTISTRY**

As everyone knows NHS dentistry is a matter of real urgency in Scotland and it can be hard to access an NHS dentist. In particular, patients in Scotland's poorest communities are paying the biggest price for the current crisis, and the gap between the most and least deprived areas in Scotland continues to grow. Scottish Labour wants to end the postcode lottery and will develop incentives for newly-qualified dentists to work in the NHS in areas where they are most needed.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. What reforms do you think are required to make NHS dentistry sustainable in the longer term in Scotland?
2. Those in the lowest income areas are less likely to have access to an NHS dentist. What can be done to incentivise dentists to work in these areas and to ensure that Scots can get regular appointments with an NHS dentist, regardless of where they live?
3. What is needed to ensure that we have enough NHS dentists going forward?
4. New guidance for NHS dentists says that check-ups should now be annually – is this enough or is it reasonable if it means everyone is guaranteed to be seen annually?

## **FUNDING**

Our starting point is that under Scottish Labour the NHS will always be publicly owned and publicly funded. Under the SNP, Scotland now has a two-tier system where those who have the money can bypass long waiting times and get private treatment.

Our goal is to return to the vision of a universal service which provides high quality treatment to everyone, is free at the point of delivery and is fit for the 21st Century. This will require real reforms.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. What would longer-term financial planning look like in the NHS and social care?
2. How do we put the NHS and social care on a sustainable financial footing?
3. How do we ensure that outcomes and public spending are linked?
4. How do we make sure the NHS estate is modern (buildings, equipment and IT), energy efficient and fit for the future?
5. Hospices are at the heart of palliative care, but often rely on donations and fundraising – how can they be funded sustainably?



## **PRIMARY CARE**

Primary care services are under strain. The number of full-time, fully-qualified GPs is decreasing at the same time as the number of patients continues to rise, meaning that patients struggle to get a GP appointment when they want one. Modern primary care provides a range of services, delivered by multidisciplinary teams including mental health workers, physiotherapists, pharmacists and nurses. These allied health professionals are also under sustained pressure.

We know that the local health centre is the first port of call when a health problem starts, and excellent primary care is the key to earlier diagnosis.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. How can we modernise primary care and improve access for patients so they can get the care they need in a primary care setting and in a timely manner?
2. How do we attract and retain more doctors to become GPs, and more allied health professionals into primary care?
3. What are the most successful models for integrating multiple disciplines into GP practices and what do they provide in terms of a broader service?
4. How do we ensure every patient has access to multidisciplinary teams (e.g. nurse practitioners, physiotherapists, mental health workers and other allied health professionals) in primary care, particularly in the lowest income areas?
5. What role do GPs have to play in promoting preventative healthcare?

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

Access to mental health services is also a postcode lottery across Scotland. People affected by mental ill health deserve to live with dignity and respect, and to receive support when they face a crisis, yet too many vulnerable adults and young people are being let down, especially as demand increases for these services. The proportion of health funding dedicated to mental health in Scotland lags behind other UK nations.

For those who find themselves in crisis, it is crucial that services are available but for those who are not in crisis there needs to be more support. Scottish Labour has committed to ensuring that there is a mental health professional available in every GP surgery. (Children and young people's mental health is considered in the Young Person's Commission paper.)



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How can we improve the mental health of the population?
2. How can we improve preventative, critical and crisis mental health support?
3. How can we ensure that our young people get prompt access to CAMHS when they need it most? How can families be better supported in the lead up to and following the diagnosis of a neurodivergence such as ADHD, OCD or autism?
4. How do we end the postcode lottery of mental health provision so that referrals and appointments are based on needs and not on funding?
5. Has Scotland got the treatment and support of people experiencing mental ill health right? How do we ensure people are accessing the appropriate treatment and care when they need it?
6. Does there need to be more regulation in the private mental health sector?
7. Does the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 need to be reviewed?

## SOCIAL WORK

Social work is facing very challenging circumstances due to the lack of resources in local government and cuts to the third sector. At the same time, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis has pushed more people into poverty and increased disadvantage. Social workers are faced with higher caseloads, unfilled vacancies and stress is at an all-time high.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Social work has been devalued in recent years, how can this be changed so it is on more of an equal footing within the health and social care sector?
2. How do we structure routes into social work, as well as ensuring a clear and consistent career structure?
3. How can time be made for preventative, relationship-based cases alongside crisis work?
4. How can we recruit and retain more people to be social workers?

## RURAL SCOTLAND

Many of the challenges within the NHS and social care are exacerbated within rural and remote Scotland such as the recruitment and retention of staff, and our ageing population. With depopulation it can also be harder to deliver community-based health and social care services. More also needs to be done to improve digital access to healthcare services (which is particularly important in rural areas but relevant for all of Scotland).

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What extra measures can be taken to attract more staff to rural and remote parts of Scotland?
2. How can technology, new and old, be used to give everyone, but particularly people in rural areas, better access to health care? How do we ensure that the move to new technologies does not exclude people without access to them?

## STRUCTURES

The current structures of the NHS need to be improved and made more accountable. We want to see the NHS of the future rooted in local communities to allow people to conveniently access the healthcare services they need, to have a bigger say over their care, decentralise decision-making and deliver services closer to communities.

Scottish Labour has proposed reducing the number of NHS territorial boards from 14 to three, and will take account of the special circumstances of the islands.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. We plan to reduce the number of health boards, what more can we do to remodel structures of working?
2. How can public procurement practices better serve the NHS and social care?
3. What reforms can take place to create more capacity within the NHS?
4. How can health boards be made more accountable? Both in terms of appointments and decision-making?
5. Do you think that Integrated Joint Boards work well or what would you do differently?

## WORKFORCE

The NHS and social care in Scotland would be nothing without its dedicated and hardworking staff. It is crucial that staff feel valued and empowered to deliver the best care possible.

Scotland needs a proper workforce plan. Scottish Labour has said it would ensure that Scotland's NHS has a 10-year workforce plan that forecasts service demands and meets the needs of future generations. The party has committed to establishing a National Clinical Council of healthcare professionals who can directly advise on this and inform government planning on service delivery, workforce planning, and patient safety.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. There continues to be staffing pressures across the NHS: what skills need to be planned for now and for the next ten years?
2. How do we train, recruit and retain the staff that our NHS and social care requires?
3. How can rural areas attract and retain GPs, consultants and other medical staff?
4. How can workforce planning support the growth of multidisciplinary teams of allied health professionals?

## LIFE SCIENCES

Scotland has a world-leading life sciences sector and we believe that the revolution taking place in data and life sciences has the potential to transform our nation's healthcare. We also note that the life sciences sector needs to be properly resourced to continue to compete on the world stage.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do we utilise the exciting and innovative research taking place in Scotland's universities to improve the patient experience?
2. Should the Scottish Government be doing more to work with both academia and industry to improve health outcomes?
3. Patients and staff tell us that they want greater access to clinical trials. How do we make this a reality?



## Commission 3: From cradle to career to give young people best start in life

### INTRODUCTION

From the Young People Commission's discussions it has become clear that a variety of challenges are impacting negatively on children and young people's lives in Scotland today. Despite the care and hard work given by staff to support our children's learning, our education system is not where it needs to be. The gap in attainment between the richest and poorest pupils is widening. We want to see excellence for all but currently our educators are trying to solve wider societal problems, as well as educating our young people.

These issues are not just confined to school but are part of some young people's lives from cradle to career, as we have seen from the recent spotlight on the number of young people who are not in education, training or work. We need to understand what is behind the rise in absenteeism, disruptive and violent behaviour and the significant rise in the number of children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN). What is clear is that our children and their families need more support than ever.

We want our children and young people to get that support and be prepared for the future, to enjoy and even create, the opportunities Scotland can offer, including in the world of work. We want them to grow up with broad horizons, knowing they can smash all ceilings in the way of opportunity, and that we will help them by building a joined-up early years and education system that is both engaging and achieves high standards for all.

### EARLY YEARS

We want child development to be high on the political agenda. Teachers report that the attainment gap is in place by the time a child starts P.1 and action is needed to address it long before they start school. We need to look at how parents, particularly mothers, can be supported, including pre-natal, with early attachment, promoting children's health and wellbeing, encouraging play and improving language skills and how we can help parents access support for any additional needs their child may have.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. How important is early years in tackling child and family poverty?
2. What early years interventions have proven to have a long-term benefit?
3. Is there anything that can be learned from Sure Start Centres in England? Are there international models we can learn from?
4. What is the role of play in emotional, social and physical development in the early years and education more widely?

## **CHILDCARE**

More value needs to be placed on childcare as it is one of the most important roles in society. The importance of childcare should not be underestimated because of the benefits it brings to children's social and learning development and the economic benefits of allowing parents to go to work.

In Scotland, current childcare provision is inaccessible for many and does not wrap around real-life jobs. It leaves out too many families, especially lone parent families, families with children under 3 years old, families with twins and multiples, families from the poorest backgrounds, and families working shifts.

There is a postcode lottery when it comes to the availability of childcare, particularly in rural areas or for children with additional needs. This is also true with regards to afterschool provision and holiday childcare.

**We believe that there is a need for a fundamental review and reform of childcare.**

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. What is the purpose of childcare: is it about the development of the child, or about education, or about allowing parents to go to work – or all/a combination of those things?
2. What would the remit of a review of childcare provision in Scotland need to include?
3. What more can be done in childcare provision and in early years to support those on the lowest incomes and to ensure opportunity for all in the future?
4. How are young people with ASN supported in early learning and childcare provision?
5. How can we support the childcare workforce, ensuring they are properly rewarded with good wages and terms and conditions, extend union recognition and collective bargaining in the sector, and attract more people to work in childcare?



## **SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

The Curriculum for Excellence was meant to be more holistic, rather than a knowledge-based curriculum, but the original concept has been poorly implemented by the current Scottish Government and literacy and numeracy outcomes are not what they should be. We want to see an increased focus on the core skills of literacy and numeracy and digital skills, alongside wider access to creative subjects.

Access to a broad curriculum, including extra-curricular activities and youth work, is strongly dependent on opportunities afforded by the local community and parents. This means that schools in lower-income areas have fewer opportunities to develop broader skills. Schemes and programmes that support entrepreneurial activity and life skills, such as group work and problem solving, are of huge benefit and but are limited in some areas and should be made more widely available. We are concerned about the narrowing of the curriculum.

We know that educational attainment is affected by poverty and access to nutritional food, including free school meals. Tackling economic insecurity is a thread that runs through all of Labour's work.

We believe that there is a need to have a greater alignment between assessment and the curriculum, as well as ensuring pupils in their senior phase of school education have a more holistic and flexible period of learning supporting learners into further education, training or employment.

The Hayward Review (the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment) was developed to do this. It set out a pathway for pupils in their senior phase of school education and envisioned a suite of assessment which was led by curriculum aspirations, rather than qualifications dictating the structure of curriculum. The Scottish Government has rejected much of the Hayward Review and put it on the back burner.

The current exam structure doesn't always allow young people to show their best skills, or test what employers need.

Many school-college partnerships have proved effective in introducing learners to technical and vocational education prior to leaving school, and supporting young people to progress with confidence to college courses and apprenticeships. The Commission supports such partnerships and wants to see more of them, along with more links between schools and employers.

There are many existing reports and reviews within the education sector and our work will take account of these and build on them.



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Given concerns around implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, what changes would you want to see?
2. What measures can be taken (both inside and outside of school) to support children living in poverty and to help them attend and learn in school?
3. What recommendations from the Hayward Review do you think should be taken forward?
4. How do we ensure assessment prepares young people for the future?
5. Are there clear pathways and transitions post-school for young people?
6. What is the role of employers in supporting schools to help young people see opportunities in their area?
7. How can we maximise the role of colleges within the senior phase of school?
8. As well as measuring attainment, achievement also needs to be measured – what is the best way of doing that?
9. What do schools need to deliver high and rising standards?
10. What is the role of national government in supporting delivery of the curriculum?

## ACCESS TO CULTURE, MUSIC AND SPORTS

We believe that every child should have the opportunity to experience culture, music and sports and all the benefits that these have to offer them. We know that there have been examples of successful schemes over many years but that they have come under pressure as public funding is stretched. Too often these are seen as a dispensable luxuries as opposed to a core entitlement.

We need to change how culture, sport and music are seen and valued. Such pursuits have a positive impact on mental health and on school attendance. Our children and young people should all be able to engage with key cultural assets while having the opportunity to discover lifelong passions and potential career paths in these sectors.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How can we change how the culture, music and sport are valued in education and seen as assets to future employers?
2. Are there examples of how the culture, music and sport have made a difference to a child's attendance and engagement at school?
3. Can you share examples of good case studies and programmes that deliver cultural opportunities for young people?
4. What needs to happen to broaden access to culture, music and sport? What examples can you provide of current provision and access?
5. What is the role of the third sector?



## **ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS**

The rising number of pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN) and the lack of support to meet their needs is of ever-growing concern. The current support system is seen as under-resourced and inadequate and has been described as intolerable. There is a need for more support staff in the classroom. We want to see an improvement in how support is provided for pupils with ASN, which includes young carers, and for teachers and support staff.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. How does Scotland compare to other countries in terms of numbers of pupils with Additional Support Needs and how they are supported?
2. What is behind the increase in children with ASN?
3. What is your view on the definition of ASN?
4. How can schools be supported to teach children with ASN? What staffing changes are needed to support pupils with additional support needs?
5. What is the role of school and what is the role of other services, like CAMHS, speech and language therapy? Are services co-ordinated and working together?
6. How accessible are services for children, young people and parents? What do parents need to help them?
7. What is the role of the third sector? Are there any examples of good practice of supporting young people with ASN across the public, private and third sectors?
8. Given the rise of ASN and the impact on staff, how should initial teacher training be improved to take account of this?
9. How can ASN students be better prepared for the world of work?

## **DISENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOL**

There are increasing levels of classroom disruption and violence, absenteeism and school refusers and “internal truancy” (where students come to school to see their friends but skip their classes). It is students from the lowest-income families that are most likely to be part of these statistics. This takes us back to the need for earlier support and intervention. In many parts of the country, our schools are faced with staff shortages as well as the widening attainment gap which has left many children behind.



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why are absenteeism and disengagement with education on the rise, especially amongst students from lower-income backgrounds?
2. How do we address the issues that lead to disruptive behaviour and violence in schools? What support do families need to do this? And how do we support staff in schools?
3. How can schools better engage these pupils in education and learning?
4. What is your view on the use of mobile phones in school?
5. What support do families need to help their child to attend school and to engage in it whilst they are there?
6. Are there examples of initiatives that can improve attendance?
7. Are there costs associated with attending school that are barriers to attending?

## DATA

The scale of the problems in education are not fully known because we don't collect enough data or the right data. Over time since the SNP has been in power the amount of data tracking pupils through school has reduced and parents are often kept in the dark about their children. More transparency and data is needed so we have an accurate picture of what is happening within our schools, but data collection should not be an onerous additional burden on staff time.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What data do we need to tell us the state of education in Scotland?
2. What is the role of inspection?
3. What arrangements should be in place to share data?
4. How could we improve data on attainment and achievement?
5. Is there data we should collect on the workforce that we don't currently?
6. How can we get good data collection without it becoming an onerous additional administrative burden that impacts on staff time?

## **STAFFING**

Staff, including those working in the crucial school support roles, are tired and over-worked. Teaching has become a precarious job with record numbers of teachers on temporary contracts and staff leaving the system. Staff workload, working conditions and wellbeing have to be addressed. The burden of administrative tasks that are not classroom teaching has become excessive, large class sizes, and the increasing responsibility for support that is not directly related to education all contribute to the high levels of stress and burnout. Pastoral care has become an increasing burden on staff time.

Headteachers are overloaded. They may be the only person in the school that are not class committed and therefore are the ones dealing with the majority of administrative tasks, leaving them with less time to focus on the pastoral welfare of their pupils and staff, as well as curriculum delivery.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. How do we ensure appropriate staffing levels across schools now and in ten years' time, so that we have the correct staff in the correct places? How do we ensure that rural areas are able to attract enough staff?
2. How do we attract and retain staff in education, particularly in key subject areas?
3. How can we constructively engage with the education unions and ensure that staff, teaching and non-teaching, are properly rewarded?
4. Does there need to be a review of initial teacher education?
5. Is the supply system for teachers working?
6. What is the role of pastoral care staff? What is the balance between the need for staff in schools, and the need for staff in other connected agencies e.g. CAMHS?
7. Is there a gap between frontline teaching and those who decide what should be taught in the classroom?
8. What should the role of headteachers be in helping to manage and improve their schools?
9. Should schools have more autonomy so that they are empowered to take actions like develop partnerships with other schools?
10. What bureaucracy can be reduced for teachers?

## **COLLEGES**

Colleges deliver essential training and skills development, particularly for people from disadvantaged backgrounds of all ages, and for people who need or want to re-train or up-skill. They play a key civic role in their communities and are an important pathway for people into good, well-paid careers, including women and disabled people, and are vital to tackling social inequalities.

Colleges are struggling to make ends meet and at the same time, they are seeing the needs of their students rise, particularly in relation to mental health, while student support budgets have been slashed. We want to see colleges restored to their full potential.

The SNP has allowed industrial relations to sour as a consequence of budget cuts. Industrial relations need to be improved which will require political leadership. We want our colleges to have a professional, valued and motivated workforce now and in the future.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. How can we enhance the role of colleges in widening access to the workplace and/or to higher education?
2. How could we support parity of esteem between vocational and other routes post-school?
3. How can we ensure that all elements of education in Scotland prepare young people for the future world of work?
4. What support do colleges need to fill the skills gap, to train students for priority growth sectors like the green economy and digital technology, and for key public services such as health and social care, and education?
5. What are the role of colleges in apprenticeships? How might we enhance a regional approach to skills provision and planning?
6. How well are current employability programmes integrated into the school, college and university system?
7. How could we develop a stronger voice for trade unions and employers (public, private and third sectors) in the college system?
8. What does the college workforce of the future look like, how do we plan for this?
9. What support do students need to get the most out of college?

## **UNIVERSITIES**

We support the aspiration of everyone who wants to go to university and we want to see a renewed impetus to widen access. Scottish Labour is committed to free tuition for Scottish students attending Scottish universities.

University-college partnerships have largely proven to be an effective means of widening access for those from a disadvantaged background. Colleges have provided an essential stepping stone for advanced study at university for many students. Such pathways help us to nurture our homegrown talent. We would actively encourage and support the further development of these pathways and partnerships.

Scotland's universities are among the best in the world. They are home to groundbreaking research of global significance. They are also large employers and make a huge contribution to our local and national economies.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. How can we widen access to university?
2. What is the role of universities in local areas and communities?
3. How can we create a sustainable funding model for universities?
4. What do universities need to support innovation and economic growth, across all key sectors?
5. Are the support mechanisms for student well-being sufficiently in place at universities?
6. How can universities be supported to be world leading in their research work?
7. What are the financial barriers to students from Scotland accessing university in Scotland and what can be done to overcome them?
8. How can we modernise course delivery to widen access? Does support for students and universities reflect modern learning and delivery (for example distance learning)?



## **CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN**

There continues to be large gaps in many areas between care experienced children and their non-care experienced peers. Post pandemic, there is a concern that some of those gaps are widening and care experienced children are far more likely to be excluded from school than their peers. Significant numbers of care experienced children struggle at school, but this has as much to do with factors that are outwith their education, as it does within. This group of children and young people need more support.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. What kind of support do care experienced children and young people need in order to access the same opportunities that education offers young people who are not care experienced?
2. What specific measures would help care experienced children get into work?
3. What is needed to keep The Promise made to children and young people? How do we improve the provision for care experienced children?
4. Is the knowledge and insights of care experienced children and their carers sufficiently fed into policy?

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

The mental health of our children and young people has suffered in recent years, not least as a result of the pandemic. Young people are now more likely to report a mental health condition than older age groups. But as demand has increased, there has been a gradual degradation of support around children and young people from agencies like CAMHS and many children and young people in Scotland don't receive the necessary help for their mental health issues. Some do not get the help they need until they are in severe crisis. Acute services are vital, but our young people should be able to access treatment that plugs the gap from the limited support available in school to receiving treatment from CAMHS specialists.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. How does poverty impact the mental health of children and young people?
2. Do you have examples of effective community based mental health services that young people can access before they reach crisis point?
3. Is counselling readily available in schools, colleges and universities in Scotland?
4. How does social media and technology impact the mental health of children and young people?
5. How can we better educate our young people about the dangers of social media and technology, such as issues like sextortion?
6. Can you share examples of best practice in the third sector that support young people's mental health?
7. Are there activities e.g. youth work, outdoor experiences, music etc, that would help improve the mental health of our young people and act as preventative measures?

## **YOUTH WORK / ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

Cuts to local authority budgets have meant a reduction of opportunities for young people outside school. This should be addressed to ensure opportunities for all and to provide wraparound support for families that need it.

Post pandemic there is a sense that there has been a rise in anti-social behaviour. For example, there has been an increase in anti-social behaviour on buses, where some young people use the buses all day to access the wifi and cause trouble. More needs to be done to engage young people and we believe that this is a key role for the third sector.

Youth work is seen as particularly valuable because it allows young people to build relationships away from the pressures they may have in their lives. The young people learn a sense of identity, learn new skills and get to be themselves. It is important preventative work, yet as with so many things youth work has been cut right back due to the lack of local government funding.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. How can the link between schools and third sector organisations be improved so that beneficial services and interventions can be provided to children and young people?
2. What support does the youth work sector need?
3. Should more emphasis be placed on youth work?
4. What activities and opportunities should be available to young people? How can parents be supported?

### **SUPPORT INTO WORK**

We want to see our young people better supported into the world of work. Not all young people want to go onto higher or further education and there needs to be more help to get them into work or apprenticeships. This includes helping young people identify what the right option is for them, and to know what skills they need to do get the job they want. (The Economy Commission considers skills in more detail). We would like to see more work experience opportunities for young people, particularly those from care experienced backgrounds and the lowest incomes.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. What kind of support do young people receive to help them into work? What works well? What needs to change?
2. Are young people getting enough good quality work experience while they are still in education?
3. Are young people learning the skills they need for the world of work at school?
4. What can employers do?

## **HAVING A HOME**

The Communities Commission is looking at the housing emergency more broadly, but having a place to live is undoubtedly a huge issue for young people. Whether it is a care experienced young person learning to support themselves in a flat or a student trying to access affordable student accommodation, finding and maintaining a home is difficult. Many young people and students in Scotland are entering the rental market and are faced with a range of issues such as high rents, the need for a guarantor, differing renters' rights, bad landlords, and poor maintenance.

Many students do not wish to live in Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) which can have high rents, and it is common for local residents to oppose the building of more PBSA in Scotland's cities. Mortgage rates have risen far faster than average wages and a lack of available homes (especially in rural communities) means that for many young people, home ownership is but a distant dream.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. What can be done to assist young people accessing their own home?
2. Are there some groups of young people more at risk of homelessness than others? What should we do to support them?
3. Student accommodation adds to the pressure on accommodation and prices in university towns, but students need affordable housing which has become scarce in some places: how can a balance be struck?
4. What reforms can be made to protect young people and students from exploitative practices in the rental market?





## Commission 4: More equal and safer communities so we can all thrive

We want Scots to live in thriving and safe communities. We believe that local councils are at the heart of strong communities, that everyone should have a home that is safe, secure and affordable and we want to restore confidence in our policing and justice system. We also believe that social justice is the foundation of a prosperous community.

### HOUSING

Having a home where you feel safe, at peace and have dignity should be a basic right we all enjoy. But in Scotland we have a housing emergency (in May 2024 the Scottish Parliament declared a housing emergency and to date thirteen local authorities have also done so). Record levels of children are in temporary accommodation, hundreds of thousands of people are in some form of housing need and some councils are struggling to deliver homelessness services.

There are a number of contributory factors which have led to this housing crisis but key to this is the collapse of housebuilding, with over 5,000 fewer houses built on average every year under the SNP compared to under the previous Labour-led administration. The lack of affordable housing has been exacerbated by the Scottish Government choosing to slash the affordable housing budget by £200m (around 26%) in December 2023. Private rents and mortgage rates have also risen significantly.

Yet the Scottish Government has failed to show any leadership in halting the decline of Scotland's housing supply and the consequences for families across Scotland are devastating. The impact on the economy is also significant, and attracting and retaining key workers in rural where housing is scarce has become problematic. The housing system is broken on many levels and clear and decisive action is needed.

(The Young People's Commission considers housing in relation to young people and students.)



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Business as usual is not an option, what should a Scottish Labour government do across all government portfolios to tackle the housing emergency?
2. What action is needed to boost the housing supply in Scotland across all tenures, particularly social housing?
3. What can be done to ensure mixed tenure of housing in developments to promote greater inclusion?
4. What measures are needed to ensure that local authorities, as well as Registered Social Landlords, have the support they need to help people in housing need, including the increased numbers of asylum seekers seeking accommodation?
5. Housing in rural areas is a particular problem, with young people and key workers unable to get homes, what particular actions are needed when it comes to rural and remote Scotland?
6. How could a Scottish Labour government reform each level of the housing system, from easing pressure in the planning system, to working with construction companies, in order to build the homes we need?
7. In what ways can the rented sector be improved – including ensuring affordable rents, good housing standards and access to good repairs and maintenance – whilst ensuring that it doesn't push good landlords out of the system?
8. What can be done to prevent people becoming homeless?

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The places where we live, learn, shop, play and work are the glue that holds our society together. We all deserve to come home to clean and safe communities. Children should be able to learn and play in high-quality facilities and we should all be confident that we will be able to access the care we might need.

Our local authorities, when they are given adequate support from central government, have the expertise and democratic mandate to deliver the thriving communities we all want to see. Strong local government benefits everyone, but for vulnerable groups, and those in poverty, the services provided by their local councils are vital. Women are especially impacted by the health of our local authorities, as they are more likely to be employed in councils, schools and social care than men, whilst also more likely to rely on local government services and more likely to take on increased unpaid work to cover the gaps created by the closure of services.

We know the transformational potential of a thriving local government, but under the SNP, we've seen that potential ground down and worn away. A decade of cumulative cuts totalling more than £6bn has hollowed out the core budgets of councils across Scotland, leaving them as administrators of decline rather than engines of growth. The centralising agenda of the SNP means that it breaks promises to local government as soon as the ink has dried. We all deserve better than this.

Local government provides the foundation of our economy, the preventative health services we rely on, access to learning, culture and nature and protection of the environment. Our local councils are held accountable to local people through elections. The role of councils and their democratic mandate should mean that they are sustainably funded and supported.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How can a Scottish Labour government ensure a fair and stable funding mechanism for local authorities?
2. What policy levers exist to allow local government to generate more revenue?
3. In what ways can an incoming Scottish Labour government use the decentralisation of power to build communities, tackle poverty and grow the economy? Should the level of ring-fenced funding from the Scottish Government to local government be reduced?
4. Should consideration be given to the services local government is required to provide?
5. How can we support the local government workforce and their trade unions to get good pay, conditions and job security?
6. How can we regenerate urban areas for the benefit of their communities? How can we also regenerate our town centres, increase retail, hospitality and the night-time economy?
7. How can the Scottish Government support local government support to sustain essential services in remote and rural areas?
8. How can local government best support asylum seekers and refugees and ensure services for all in their local areas?

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Labour Party is, and always will be, a party for equality, social justice and compassion. As a movement we will always stand up for those who face injustice and who are marginalised.

While there is a particular focus on child poverty in the Young People's Commission, tackling poverty is a far-reaching theme that runs through all sections of this consultation document, because we believe that lifting people out of poverty and helping them to tackle the cost-of-living crisis must be a cross-government mission, encompassing all portfolios. With a designated Cabinet Secretary leading cross-cutting work, Scottish Labour wants to see people's life chances transformed through a proper plan to drive down poverty.

Fuel poverty remains a major challenge in Scotland, particularly in rural and remote areas, due to the energy efficiency performance of Scottish homes and rising energy costs. We want fuel poverty to be tackled and to look at how vulnerable Scots on the lowest incomes can be best supported, particularly pensioners and those who live off the gas grid.

We want to see a Scotland which is inclusive and free from discrimination. We believe that no-one should be denied their rights or opportunities because of characteristics such as age, disability, sexual orientation, race, gender, sex and religion. We want to make Scotland a fairer place and works towards the removal of the inequalities, injustice and discrimination that are still too common here. A Scottish Labour government would seek to work in partnership with others to make change happen.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What immediate devolved actions could a new Labour Scottish government do to reduce poverty and tackle the cost-of-living crisis in Scotland?
2. What is the best way of tackling fuel poverty in rural and remote areas and for those on the lowest incomes within devolved powers?
3. How can the Scottish Government measure equality outcomes?
4. People living in poverty have worse health and educational outcomes, what more can be done to reverse these on-going trends?
5. Marginalised women, including women of colour, disabled women, unpaid carers, LGBTI+ women, younger and older women, and migrant women, experience wide disparities in health outcomes – how can that be addressed?
6. The third sector delivers essential services across a range of social justice priorities, how can the Scottish Government work better with the third sector to help deliver effective services?
7. Scottish Labour has recently announced its intention to restore Winter Fuel Payments to pensioners, with welfare powers being used to taper the level of support given to the wealthiest households. How can we best use this proposed taper to ensure all those who need the payments receive them?
8. Increasing parental employment is a key driver for tackling child poverty, giving families more opportunities into secure, flexible work to support themselves and their children. How can the Scottish Government better work with local communities and employers to increase parental employment and reduce child poverty?

## SOCIAL SECURITY

We believe that people should have a safety net when they need it because everyone has the right to a decent quality of life. Social security is necessary to tackle poverty, maintain or replace income and to help meet additional costs e.g. due to disability. For some people that safety net can also be a springboard into work and economic participation, and we want to make sure that as many opportunities as possible are created for those in that position. We want to see everyone getting access to the advice and support that they need.

After the implementation of the Scotland Act 2016, a number of areas of social security were devolved to the Scottish Parliament, including disability benefits, benefits for heating expenses, discretionary housing benefits as well as the powers to top up any benefit or to create other new social security benefits.

The Scottish Government planned on spending over £6 billion out of its budget of around £60 billion in social security benefits in 2024-25. The Scottish Fiscal Commission has said that spending on social protection is the only category of Scottish Government spending that has seen rapid growth, increasing in real terms by 28% between 2022-23 and 2024-25. Social security spending is forecasted to increase significantly as time goes on.

As Social Security Scotland has only been operational for five years, evidence regarding the impacts of the Scottish social security benefits are still to be established.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is there anything you would change about the current social security system in Scotland?
2. What is working well about the social security system in Scotland?
3. How do we improve access and advice to financial support to people when they are in financial crisis? What examples are there of successful community and third sector examples?
4. What evidence does the Scottish Government need to collect to show the impacts of its social security spend?
5. The bill for social security is on an upward trajectory, how can we ensure that we provide the safety net for those who need it, whilst ensuring that it remains affordable to taxpayers?
6. Social Security Scotland has been accused in the past of being inflexible and inefficient. Are there more efficient ways to deliver benefits, such as through local authorities?
7. What more can we do to support people stuck in a cycle of debt?

## JUSTICE

We want to see a Scotland where, if you call the police, they come. A Scotland where, if you report a crime, it will be looked into no matter who you are or where you live. And we want to see police enjoying the trust of communities. If you are a victim, you should have faith that justice will be delivered and that criminals will be punished. Security is the bedrock on which opportunities are built, communities can thrive, and local economies can prosper.

## COMMUNITY POLICING

Scottish Labour is committed to seeing community policing numbers restored, so that police officers are more visible and more responsive. We also want to see communities playing a greater role in working with the police to ensure local priorities are the police's priorities.

We want to see more done to tackle anti-social behaviour, whether it is people in their homes enduring on-going anti-social behaviour in their neighbourhood, or the fear of travelling in the evening into Scotland's high streets. We know that workers also want more protection as retail staff report rising cases of assault and shoplifting, and postal workers are subject to dog attacks due to irresponsible dog owners. The Young People's Commission has also flagged up the anti-social behaviour on public transport due to a minority of young people creating risk to drivers and passengers.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do you feel safe where you live, work, shop and socialise and if you don't, why not?
2. Would a greater police presence on our streets make you feel safer and would more police in our communities be a good use of police resources when Police Scotland's budget is stretched?
3. Should it be the police that deals with anti-social behaviour in our communities or could this be dealt with in another way?
4. Should there be a re-invigoration of community safety plans that utilise civilian expertise in reducing anti-social behaviour?
5. What actions can be taken to protect frontline workers? For instance, how can we hold owners more accountable when their dogs have been involved in attacks on postal workers?
6. How can our workers such as those who work in retail or on public transport be better protected from assault and aggression?
7. How can the police work with local authorities to ensure local concerns play a key part in their role within the community?
8. What more can be done to hold the police more accountable to local communities?
9. What can be done to engage our young people in their local communities to prevent them from getting involved in anti-social behaviour and crime?



**POLICE**

## **SENTENCING & REDUCING RE-OFFENDING**

With our prisons at breaking point, Scotland needs urgent action to reduce reoffending, to break the cycle of crime and prevent further prison overcrowding. In the longer term, we believe that the best solution is a cross-government approach to prevent offending and to tackle the multi-generational, deep-rooted issues that many offenders have. A disproportionate number of offenders are from our most deprived communities, have been in and out of care and many have suffered abuse.

In the shorter term, reducing re-offending is likely to be the most effective option. But that requires prison staff to have the time and resources to spend with prisoners to do the work that is needed. We also know that mental health is a huge issue in the prison/justice system. However, as our prisons are so full (to the extent the Scottish Government is releasing more prisoners early to ease capacity in the system), rehabilitation work with offenders is much more difficult. In the meantime, drug use continues to run rife in our prisons contributing to unpredictable behaviour and so Scotland's high re-offending rates continues, keeping our prisons full and causing more harm to the public.

Scottish Labour has called for a harm prevention plan for everyone who leaves prison, with a safe place to live, registration with a doctor, and other support. Labour mayors elsewhere in the UK are already pioneering this approach.

We want sheriffs, who make sentencing decisions, to have confidence that the community sentences that are available to them are reliable and effective. This includes modernising Scotland's outdated electronic tagging system, as well as using new tech to track individuals at all times when they are out on bail. Vital changes are also needed to fix the failures of the victims' notification scheme and we want to see an improvement in the communication with local communities about the community work completed by offenders.

For more serious crimes, including domestic abuse and sexual crimes, Scottish Labour is clear that sentences should reflect the crime and that victim safety is paramount, which is why the party has called for a review of the sentencing guidelines for under-25s to ensure there is clarity and consistency in sentencing.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What can the Scottish Government do to reduce the number of offences in the future? What more needs to be done on early intervention and public protection referrals?
2. How do we better support those who are affected by mental ill health from being criminalised?
3. What are your views on alternatives to custody and non-custodial sentences? Do you know of any that highlight best practice?
4. Alternatives to custodial sentencing require investment and need to have the confidence of those passing sentence – what has been found to work in the UK and beyond?
5. What needs to be done to improve rehabilitation and education of offenders serving custodial and non-custodial sentences?
6. What can be done to ensure that discrimination based on race, religion etc is eliminated when it comes to sentencing?
7. On release, how can offenders be better supported to live well outside of prison?





## **COURT BACKLOGS**

Court delays have a huge impact on victims who often feel that their life is put on hold until their case comes to court. If a delay runs into years some victims may feel that they cannot live in unlimited suspense and withdraw their evidence, which means that justice may then be denied.

Court backlogs have also contributed to Scotland's exceptionally high remand rate. The build up during Covid meant that the remand population was at an all-time high and the courts are still recovering.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. Is there anything else that the courts can do to reduce the backlog of cases?
2. How can victims be best supported whilst they wait for their cases to be heard? Particularly victims of violent or sexual abuse?
3. Should victims of serious sexual crimes have legal representation pre-trial to improve the experience of victims in the process?
4. Are there any alternatives to custody that should be considered for prisoners on remand, to ease pressures on prisons and courts?
5. What plans should Scottish Labour have to make sure legal aid is fit for purpose?

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS**

Violence against women and girls should not be tolerated. In Scotland today, at least one in five women will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime, while both violent and sexual crime have increased in recent years and misogynist hate has been allowed to proliferate unchecked online. Yet the justice system too often fails women and girls.

As well as legislation, we believe that a big cultural shift needs to take place to change this situation, from education at a young age to embedding trauma-informed practices in our courts and justice system. We believe that misogyny is the root cause and want to see sexism challenged from a young age to end gender-based violence.



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do we address the root causes of abuse and violence?
2. There is an issue about gender-based disaffection and disengagement amongst young males leading to misogyny, as well as racism and homophobia – what are the causes and possible solutions?
3. Should a Scottish Labour government commit to a wider programme in schools which engages in an age-appropriate way with children in primary school?
4. How can we educate our young people about the dangers of consenting to nude images? What tougher actions need to be taken on image-based abuse?
5. How can the work of the Scottish Government's education and justice departments work together to tackle attitudes towards women and girls?
6. Do you have any thoughts on the establishment of single points of contact for victims of rape and serious sexual assault?

## LEGAL AID

We want everyone to have access to justice regardless of income and therefore we are concerned at the sharp drop in the availability of legal aid which has been in crisis for years. There are not enough solicitors entering legal aid and many have left due to the lack of funding and the low fees. The crisis is set to deepen even further due to the number of existing legal aid lawyers that are soon to retire.

This is having all kinds of devastating impacts. For instance, it means that women who have been subject to domestic abuse and stalking can no longer get access to the legal protection they need if their former partner still has control of their finances. Legal aid is meant to allow any person who wants to enforce or protect a legal right access to legal assistance if they are unable to pay for it.

Getting justice cannot just be the preserve of those who can afford it.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How can 'advice deserts', in which people in Scotland are unable to access legal advice due to where they live, be avoided to ensure access to justice stretches across all areas of Scotland?
2. Is the current criteria for those able to access legal aid suitable and fair?
3. Should the Scottish Government do more to help families who have lost a loved one abroad in tragic circumstances in the absence of legal aid?

## **CULTURE, MUSIC & SPORT**

Scotland has a rich cultural heritage and we punch well above our weight in this sector. Our culture reflects us as a nation and it plays a fundamental part in shaping how we live within Scotland today. However, as with so much in Scotland today the culture sector is in crisis and needs reform.

The Young People's Commission has already flagged up how we want every child to have the opportunity to experience culture, music and sport and all the benefits that these have to offer. It is important that we give our children and young people access at an early stage to these cultural experiences so they have the opportunity to discover lifelong passions and potential careers in these sectors, as well as helping to gain confidence and a positive impact on mental health.

It is not just our young people that we want to see benefit. We want everyone, regardless of income, ethnicity or disability, to get equitable access to culture, music and sport. We want to find a way to make this happen and to do so for the long-term, whilst acknowledging that improving access is something that has been part of culture strategies for years but continues to remain a stubborn problem.

We look forward to Glasgow hosting the Commonwealth Games and the men's UEFA European Football Championship in 2028 and the enthusiasm for sport that will bring, because we believe that it is important for sport to be made available to all.

Scotland's culture, music and sport also contribute to our economy and our creative industries are attractive to international investors and we want to see this economic performance grow. But we also recognise that the creative industries sector is dominated by freelance work and exploitative contracts, often coupled with low-paid work, making it challenging for many professionals to secure stable and fair employment. This trend is driven by the industry's reliance on short-term projects and the gig economy, which allows employers to offer minimal levels of payment and avoid long-term commitments. As a result, many creative workers face financial insecurity and lack access to the benefits and protections typically associated with full-time employment, exacerbating inequality within the sector. We want to see fair work principles promoted and implemented in this sector.



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Given that it has been the aspiration of many governments to widen access to culture, how can a future Scottish Labour government change this in the long-term?
2. Does there need to be reform of how funding is distributed?
3. How can culture, music and sport be supported in local communities e.g. how do we ensure live music venues remain open etc?
4. How can we ensure that our people get the skills they need for creative industries and support a pipeline of talent? How can this be done while taking into account the impact of AI and technology on these industries?
5. What lessons can we learn from other sectors and countries when it comes to supporting our creative industries?
6. How can fair work principles be better integrated and enforced within the creative industries to ensure that freelance and contract workers receive equitable pay, job security, access to union representation and recognition and access to essential benefits?
7. How do we meaningfully build on hosting big sporting events such as the men's UEFA European Football Championship and the Commonwealth Games in terms of sporting legacy and economic opportunities?

## NATURE, PHYSICAL & MARINE ENVIRONMENT

Scotland's natural and marine environments are incredibly important national resources that we wish to protect and sustain. We want to see improvements in access to nature, the promotion of biodiversity, and the protection of our landscapes and wildlife. We want to see the nature emergency tackled alongside the climate crisis. (The Net Zero section of the Economy Commission also looks at related issues.) Scotland's peatlands, forests and natural habitat play an essential role in doing that. We recognise that the decisions the government makes are crucial when it comes to the health of our environment and that we must take into account future generations in those decisions. The carbon-holding capacity of our land and seabed has been degraded by historic and some current management practices. The current Scottish Government has good ambitions in this area, but as with so many other things has failed to follow through with sufficient actions.

We also respect the huge cultural and economic importance that the land and sea have, particularly in rural communities who have worked the land and sea for generations. Scottish Labour is committed to representing those rural areas and ensuring that their voices are amplified.

As well as tackling the climate and nature emergencies, we also need to adapt to the changes that we are already witnessing in Scotland's environment. Too little effective action has taken place around adaptation and without action, further flooding and coastal erosion will pose an even bigger and more dangerous risk. We need to see improvements in resilience and preparation, and closer collaboration between the UK and Scottish governments, working closely with local authorities, local communities, and the emergency services, including Fire and Rescue.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How can the Scottish Government implement a greater commitment to habitat and species recovery?
2. How should a future Scottish Labour government prioritise and monitor the environment better?
3. How can those who have worked the land and sea for generations be part of tackling the nature emergency whilst also ensuring that their cultures and traditions are respected and their livelihoods promoted?
4. How can the carbon-holding capacity of Scotland's land and seabed be increased, while also producing sustainable food, timber and other products?
5. What more needs to be done to protect communities from the impact of climate change and what can we learn from how current infrastructure has coped with recent storms and flooding?
6. How can better monitoring of Scottish waterways be introduced to improve the health of our coasts, rivers and lochs?
7. What else can be done to strengthen animal welfare and wildlife protection law in Scotland?

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We are committed to the idea of Scotland being a good global citizen and we want to see our international development approach based on genuine respect and partnership with the global South to support our common interests.

Although international development is reserved, in March 2005, Scottish Labour First Minister Jack McConnell launched a new International Development Policy because Scottish Labour believed that the Scottish Parliament had a role within the international community, and could do work that was complimentary to the UK Government's work.

This has been a policy area that every Scottish Government has pursued since and there has generally been political consensus within the Scottish Parliament on this work. Currently, the Scottish Government has four partner countries: Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia and Pakistan.

We believe that the Scottish Government needs to consult more with civic society in these partner countries, and not just with the governments of the partner countries. The Scottish Government currently focuses its international development funding on health and education but these areas quickly use up funding. This means that worthwhile projects that used to be funded, like sustainable agriculture have been stopped. This is despite such projects having excellent results and the potential to be upscaled.

In recent years the Scottish Government has also given money to favoured projects directly and not carried out open calls for funding, resulting in a lack of accountability. It has also moved to put more of its international development funding into big contracts which can squeeze out smaller organisations. We note also that some of those contracts have gone to for-profit organisations.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What values and objectives should drive our international development strategy?
2. What can be done to boost awareness amongst young people about international development?
3. Should the Scottish Government's international development funding be restricted to non-profit organisations?
4. How can we maximise the value of our international development strategy, and what can be done to improve the transparency and accountability of funding?
5. Should Scottish Government money be reserved to support small scale initiatives that can be implemented at a grassroots level?
6. How can diaspora groups be more involved in the Scottish Government's international development strategy?
7. How do we build on Scotland's status as a Fairtrade Nation to grow Fairtrade practices and support Fairtrade producers?



**Promoted by Kate Watson, Scottish General Secretary,  
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