

# South of Scotland Recovery Plan



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**The South of Scotland has been neglected for too long. To the SNP in Edinburgh and the Tories in London, we are the forgotten land.**

We can see the consequences of that neglect in economic dislocation, underfunded public services, poor public transport and fragile communities that deserve our support. The pandemic has cruelly highlighted this neglect and created new challenges that need to be urgently addressed.

Scottish Labour will end this neglect. Our National Recovery Plan will focus on economic recovery and reinvigorating our public services and communities after the devastating impact of Covid-19. Healing the divisions in our country, making the South of Scotland a better place to live and work. As we come out of this pandemic, we must focus on solutions which will deliver a fairer recovery and a stronger Scotland. Instead of a task force on independence aimed at building barriers at the border, Scottish Labour will task all parts of government to help the nation recover from the pandemic. We will empower communities, devolving power from Edinburgh to the people who understand our area best.

**Scottish Labour MSPs will be a strong voice for the South of Scotland, focused on the people's priorities:**

## **Jobs recovery:**

Keeping people in work, helping people to retrain and sustaining businesses. Guaranteeing every young person a job, allowing them to stay in their community.

## **NHS recovery:**

tackling the waiting list backlog, improving mental health and building a social care system fit for purpose.



## **Education recovery:**

A comeback plan which invests in our schools and colleges, with IT support and a Minimum Student Income plan.

## **Climate recovery:**

investing in green jobs, tackling fuel poverty, and protecting our environment.

## **Community recovery:**

Investing in local areas, building houses for local people, improving transport links, and bringing decision-making back to our councils and communities.

This is our promise to the people of the South of Scotland. Jobs, health, education, climate and community will always come first with Scottish Labour.



# Challenges facing the South of Scotland

The South of Scotland is a beautiful and valuable part of the country. It has land and energy resources, which could generate sustainable growth and jobs.

We also have an attractive natural landscape populated by active communities with a rich cultural heritage. An economically successful Scotland needs strong economies in rural areas. However, the South of Scotland has significant challenges, exacerbated by the pandemic.

The South of Scotland is home to more than 5% of Scotland's population and more than 15% of the land, including over 1,000km of coastline. This is a predominately rural area with only four towns over 10,000 people. Nearly 90% of the population live and work here. There are more than 12,000 businesses, 91% of which employ fewer than ten employees. The largest employment sector is health and care, followed by agriculture, forestry and fishing. Every community across the South of Scotland, urban, rural, or coastal, is unique, taking pride in their difference while facing some common challenges.

Our main employment sectors traditionally offer low wages and few high skilled jobs. Too many jobs are insecure, without guaranteed hours or income. That insecurity then flows through our economy, holding it back – from the stress it puts on working families to the pressure it puts on local traders.

Business start-ups are lower than in the rest of Scotland, and there is less investment in research and development. Brexit creates particular challenges for small businesses, and rural areas will lose EU funding for economic, environmental and social measures. Public procurement is unfairly focused on large companies outwith the region. Population projections show some of the largest reductions in the working-age population are in the South of Scotland. Our young people have too few opportunities to stay in their communities for work or study.

We have an ageing population, strengthening our communities while also placing demands on our struggling health and social care services. Council services are stretched due to SNP cuts to our councils – passing on Tory austerity and more to our communities. The region has lost local services due to the SNP centralisation of power and services to Edinburgh. Access to further and higher education opportunity is generally inadequate.

We have fragile communities in need of regeneration, including former coalfield communities, and the challenges a rural and sparsely populated area can bring. Limited public transport links exacerbate this,

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and digital connectivity is weak. The pandemic has highlighted these issues and caused a greater sense of isolation in rural areas.

There are insufficient affordable, quality houses to meet local need. More than a third of households are in fuel poverty, higher in rural areas due to less energy-efficient housing, weather and temperature differences – as well as relying on means other than mains gas to heat their homes. There is a damaging concentration of land ownership and wealth and insufficient protection for our natural environment. Flooding continues to undermine communities across the region.

All of these challenges existed before the pandemic struck. The pandemic has disproportionately hit the rural nature of our economy and the sectors we rely on. We must now focus all of our efforts on recovery. While the SNP grandstand at Westminster and the Scottish Tories at Holyrood, both are betraying the region's priorities. Only Scottish Labour prioritises jobs, health, public services, climate change and a plan for prosperity for all. Our manifesto for these elections will set out a National Recovery Plan for Scotland. A range of measures will help the South of Scotland recover from the pandemic's impact.



# A Jobs Recovery

**We must ensure our local economies can recover from the coronavirus storm.**

This needs the Scottish Government, businesses and trade unions working together to rebuild and grow a sustainable economy, with a green recovery and a just transition at its heart. We will guarantee a job for everyone aged under 25 who does not have a job, the long-term unemployed and every disabled person without a job, who are not already benefiting from other job schemes

Scottish Labour will build community wealth that stays local, working together for the common good. That includes supporting small and medium-sized businesses, which are the local economy's lifeblood. They have demonstrated tremendous flexibility in sustaining communities during the pandemic. We must ensure they are supported to help the economy recover. Scottish Labour's Business Restart Fund will give businesses the support and investment they need and ensure public procurement is used to reinforce local firms. This includes the growing number of women who are starting new enterprises. We will also nourish co-operatives across all sectors, including credit unions, to boost financial inclusion.

Town centres are crucial hubs in our communities. Scottish Labour's approach to our high streets and town centres will allow communities to build locally based on individual strengths. This requires effective local partnerships between communities,



**My village has no public transport. It's high time we had a government that invested in rural transport that works for everyone.**

Lesli, Scottish Borders

business, trade unions, and the local authority to develop long-term plans with measurable objectives, which are adequately funded. As the pandemic has highlighted, we must speed up the infrastructure of, and access to, full-fibre broadband to support SME's and encourage flexible working options, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas.

While we welcomed the establishment of South of Scotland Enterprise, Labour will ensure it is locally accountable and focused on tackling the region's economic needs. The South of Scotland has particular challenges with Edinburgh's push-pull to the north and the developing towns and cities over the border to the south. More needs to be done to bring higher value jobs in sectors like science, technology and industry to the region and ensure Good Work principles are fully applied. The Borderlands Growth Deal is a welcome source of additional funding, but it needs to be on a much larger scale to tackle our deep-seated problems.

The Tourism industry is essential to the South of Scotland economy, with 4.6million annual visitors spending £609m supporting around 12,000 jobs. The industry was growing before the pandemic. Scottish Labour will do everything it can to safeguard businesses, jobs and secure a vibrant future for this sector. This includes the Great Scottish Staycation 2021, which would offer a '3rd Night Free' Scottish Government funded subsidy of holiday accommodation. Public investment will also require improvement in the quality of jobs by raising employment standards, providing training opportunities, and strengthening the quality of life, particularly in rural areas.

The South of Scotland's public transport system is a grossly inadequate patchwork of services that fail

to join up communities across the region. Scottish Labour is committed to tackling the gap between urban and rural transport, investing in rural public transport, improving frequency and reducing fares. We support the delivery of traffic-free greenways for walking and cycling, connecting key rural communities separated by short distances. Scottish Labour will support an extension of the Borders Railway to Hawick and Carlisle and additional stations when justified. We will extend free bus travel to the under 25s, with a goal of universal free bus travel. We will champion community shared transport with sustainable funding that prioritises decarbonisation.

In our towns, we aim to create neighbourhoods where people can access all the services they need within a 20-minute walk by investment in active travel. There will need to be an expansion of public charging points for electric vehicles and interest free loans to help more low and middle-income households make the transition. to support the transition. This recognises the greater reliance on private cars in rural areas and the longer distances that often need to be travelled. Key arterial road routes fail to meet trunk road standards, and funding levels do not recognise the maintenance needs of local roads and the significant routes they serve in our region. There should be more space for cycles on rural bus services and on the rail network – to

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make cycling a part of everyday journeys and days out and reduce car dependency. Local travel hubs in rural communities must connect shared transport, cycle hire, e-bike charging, safe walking routes, and transport information.

Scottish Labour’s Good Work Plan will not merely encourage good work and extend collective bargaining but will require compliance. We will use government procurement and incentives to raise wages and provide more secure employment, focusing on the low-paid sectors of the South of Scotland economy. We will retain and strengthen the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board and recognise and value the skills of countryside workers. Flexible working options such as home working and community hubs could create new opportunities in the South of Scotland with appropriate safeguards. They are a practical solution for more organisations and better for the environment and wellbeing of workers. If we want to keep our communities vibrant, they need to attract and retain working-age people into our communities.

Scottish Labour will end the creeping privatisation of water and wastewater services, which has centralised services and undermined local suppliers. We will end the market systems and replace it with a Scottish Water Plan driven by citizens’ views.



# NHS Recovery

**The pandemic has reinforced the importance of our health and care systems and those who deliver them.**

The South of Scotland faces the twin challenges of recovering from the very immediate crisis created by Covid-19, but also recovering our NHS from a decade of mounting problems.

Scottish Labour will restart our NHS after the pandemic by investing in the facilities and staff needed to tackle the waiting list backlog and strengthen services for the longer-term. We recognise the challenges of recruiting and retaining health and care staff in rural areas and patients' transport needs to access services outwith the region. For example, rural cancer patients have higher mortality on average than urban patients and often have to make long journeys to receive treatment. We support the Scottish Rural Health Partnership calls for more evidence-based research and other healthcare innovations to help rural areas. We agree that the appointment of a Rural Health Commissioner would improve accountability.

The growing mental health crisis requires better NHS services and preventative action by ending austerity, poverty, and by earlier interventions. NHS services also require investment, particularly for dementia and for children and young people who are waiting too long for treatment. Scotland still has the highest

rate of suicide in the UK, and more needs to be done to support suicide prevention programmes with a particular focus on the high suicide rates in rural areas. Twenty-one farmers in Scotland took their lives in 2019, which shows the woefully inadequate levels of support available to rural workers struggling with mental health issues. We recognise the need to develop more robust mental wellbeing precrisis support, working with the third sector in remote rural areas, including the rural umbrella group, Support in Mind. We will further explore the opportunities created by social prescribing to support those whose mental wellbeing is fragile to help tackle loneliness and rural isolation.

More than any other service, the pandemic has highlighted the crisis in social care. We will create a National Care Service to promote greater consistency in care and raise minimum standards. The proper funding of care will become a national priority, while the design and delivery of care remains informed by local expertise, accountability, and community input. We will introduce a new minimum wage for care workers of £12, rising to £15 per hour and raise employment standards across the sector. We will introduce a comprehensive support strategy for unpaid carers, including increased investment and entitlement to short breaks, access to leisure and

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wellbeing services, occupational health support and the provision of independent advocacy for carers of all ages.

Scottish Labour aims to eliminate the persistent scourge of inequalities across the South of Scotland by investing in services that determine our health. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the social security safety net, with many more people having to rely on the system. Poverty is both a symptom and a cause of ill-health. Scottish Labour will focus on the social security system's ability to respond and support people's health and reinforce the safety net. In particular, we will start to end child poverty by doubling the Scottish Child Payment to £20 per week.



# Education Recovery

**The COVID-19 pandemic has severely disrupted most parts of the education system. Scottish Labour has set out a comeback plan to challenge the attainment gap widened by the shutdown.**

This includes personal tutoring programmes and a Personal Comeback Plan for every pupil. We will deliver a strategic skills plan for the region to develop the initial and transferable skills needed for future jobs.

Scottish Labour supports a flexible, all-age, all-year, wrap-around affordable early years service centred on the child's needs. Studies have shown that a later start to formal education better prepares children for adolescence and adulthood. Therefore, we would move towards a more blended provision from Early Learning to formal schooling from the age of 6 or 7 while retaining the current compulsory starting age in public sector provision. We should recognise the challenges faced in accessing childcare and support in rural communities and will work with others to overcome them.

Our schools have fewer teachers and support staff, which has implications for educational experience quality. The figures show attainment falling and the attainment gap widening, not narrowing. Our comeback plan will enhance digital training for staff with digital devices for all pupils. We will support



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the continuation of residential outdoor education centres. This opportunity should be available to every child with an introduction to the countryside and its code.

Scottish Labour will reinvest in Further Education and give it equality of status with other education routes. This includes those studying part-time, by distance learning, those with additional support needs and those living in rural areas. We must develop the skills needed in the local labour market, including green jobs for the future. Our Minimum Student Income Plan will support full-time students, recognising the cost of living is greater for students from rural areas who cannot live at home. The new Scottish Skills Benefit will offer everyone who is unemployed, along with those currently on furlough, a £500 grant for retraining. We will strengthen local delivery to improve access in rural areas. We will reform the apprenticeship system to provide quality training opportunities. These commitments will help enable those young people who choose to stay in the communities in which they grew up to do so.

Scottish Labour will reinvest in community learning and development to support democratic engagement. We will ensure Youth Work is funded to ensure all young people have the personal development support they need to succeed in education, training and employment.



# Climate Recovery

**Scottish Labour has declared both climate and nature emergencies. We will support creating new skilled green jobs across the region as part of our plans for a Green New Deal.**

These will include housebuilding, retrofitting homes, peatland restoration, tree planting, creating community green spaces and food growing and more – all in the context of the climate and nature emergencies. Scottish Labour will invest in coastal protections and better flood management. We will prioritise the development of full-fibre broadband and 4G/5G extensions to underpin rural small businesses' future success.

The South of Scotland has played an essential role in developing renewable energy, which will help meet our climate change targets. However, the economic benefits have not always been retained in our communities. We will support community and co-operative owned energy models. We will ensure that every contract delivers a minimum share of work to local suppliers and commits to the training of local apprentices.

Labour will also provide new investment in energy efficiency, including a commitment to eradicating fuel poverty by 2032. There will be stricter interim targets, which will deliver emissions reductions and jobs in the supply chain. A new definition of fuel poverty will



**By putting skilled green jobs at the heart of the national recovery, we can deliver a positive future for young people and tackle the climate emergency.**

Coll, Clydesdale

include an uplift for rural communities. We support a rural homes just transition package for homeowners, landlords and the supply chain in off-gas areas.

A healthy environment is a basic right that we are all entitled to and should defend. Scottish Labour will give individuals and environmental organisations the right to challenge decisions that will severely impact our environment. This includes introducing carbon impact assessments into all policy processes. We will also develop a coherent Biodiversity Action Plan for post-2020 for land, air and sea, with adequate funding. There will be a plan for ocean recovery, where at least 30% of Scotland's seas are highly protected by 2030 and protect sustainable coastal fisheries. Scottish Labour will instigate a moratorium and a review of what place large scale incineration has in our zero waste plans for the future.

Scottish Labour's believes we should kickstart our economy with a plan to upgrade all homes across Scotland to at least energy efficiency rating C by 2030. Not only would this create thousands of training opportunities and jobs across the country, but it would also reduce rural fuel poverty.



# Community Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of communities, which have responded magnificently to the crisis.

This local coming together has been a vital support to many during the pandemic. Scottish Labour will invest in local areas and make our communities safer and stronger.

Councils in the South of Scotland deliver public services differently, which should be reflected in funding allocation mechanisms. We will introduce a 'rural proofing' process so that all our laws, policies and programmes consider their impact on rural communities. Scottish Labour supports the principle of subsidiarity – allocating functions at the lowest possible practical level. We will rebuild communities devastated by austerity by developing a universal basic services framework – strengthening the social infrastructure that minimises social isolation and builds stronger communities.

The creation of national police and fire services has led to a centralisation of power. Scottish Labour will place local accountability at the heart of modern, responsive services with a statutory role for local government in local policing plans and budgetary allocations.

A key Labour ambition will be to build 120,000 zero-carbon social homes over ten years in Scotland

and establish the crucial link between rents and people's ability to afford them. We aim to deliver more social housing in rural areas through a flexible grant that recognises the increased costs of smaller development. This includes housing and other support for the many armed forces veterans living in our communities. We will develop support measures to address the particular challenges faced by women and children from domestic abuse in rural areas.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of a strong third sector in tackling social justice. Our vision for civil society sits alongside our plans to decentralise powers and democratise the economy. A fairer Scotland where we care about each other, where people can pool their resources, demand accountability, tackle discrimination, build institutions and influence the decisions that affect them.

Our Good Food Nation plan will support rural communities, encourage local food production and reform agricultural support on the public support for the public good principle. We will ensure that future agricultural payments support sustainable integrated land use and strengthen rural communities.

Farmers and crofters need clarity on what they can expect in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement and beyond as a new agriculture support system is developed to help tackle the climate and nature emergencies. We will support a more robust agricultural advisory service to aid farmers in transitioning to the new arrangements. A Right

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to Food will begin to address the scandal of food poverty in our communities and abolish the need for foodbanks forever.

Scottish Labour will support the comprehensive licensing of grouse moors as soon as possible and promote the sustainable development of our uplands, including deer management, in everyone's interests. We support the call for a comprehensive ban on fox hunting. Woodlands have a key role in tackling climate change but also have wider environmental and social benefits. At least 50% of all woodland expansion should be with native species and at least 10% delivered through natural regeneration. Overgrazing by deer can damage our native woodlands, and we support modernising deer legislation. We will designate more National Parks, including the proposed Galloway National Park and Scottish Borders National Park.

Scottish Labour will ensure more land is in the hands of local communities to help create a fairer, sustainable Scotland. We will legislate to ensure that no one individual can acquire large swathes of Scotland's land and prevent land ownership via offshore tax-havens. We will increase funding for the Scottish Land Fund, using the revenue from seabed licensing, and intervening when land is not used in ways that serve the public interest. Public sector agencies should be enabled to participate in land markets with the aim of transferring the land into local vehicles of sustainable local ownership as a



basis for local wealth building and income retention. This will empower local communities and repopulate our rural places to help them thrive.

Scottish Labour believes that sport has not had the attention and support it deserves and that it must be run and made more accessible in the interests of those who participate in it and love it. We recognise the important social role of and will support, open, community-run sports groups. We will develop a new Active Scotland Plan, enabling councils to reintegrate local services – tackling high access charges and crumbling maintenance budgets. A thriving

culture sector, together with a properly-resourced and independent media sector, is a necessary prerequisite for democracy to flourish and allow people to develop and fulfil their creative potential. The pandemic will impact the creative industries for many years. We will ensure that support structures are put in place to ensure the survival of theatres, creative organisations and the protection of jobs. We will also protect and develop the essential cultural and social infrastructure of our communities, not least by supporting voluntary based activities, which add so much to the strength and distinctiveness of our individual towns and villages.

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