



# The Highlands and Islands need change

Scotland's Highlands and Islands have huge potential, but after 20 years of SNP government too many people feel they are being held back.

## It's time for change.

Scottish Labour has a plan to fix the mess, get the basics right and build a better future for our Highlands and Islands.

## Making life more affordable

Scottish Labour will help people keep more of their own money in their pocket and keep everyday costs down by:

- ✔ **Committing to no income tax rate rises** for five years, with the ambition to lower taxes as we get the economy growing.
- ✔ **Widening eligibility for energy-efficiency grants**, so grants for rural homes are increased by £500 and 3,000 more older households can access funding for home upgrades.
- ✔ **Introducing breakfast clubs in all primary schools**, helping parents get to work on time and ensuring no child starts the day hungry.
- ✔ **Cutting childcare costs for working parents** with two weeks of summer holiday clubs and increasing the value of tax free childcare to £3,000 per child.
- ✔ **Keeping down the cost of public transport**, preventing a return to peak rail fares and maintaining free bus travel for under-22s and older people.
- ✔ **Reducing tax for first time buyers**, increasing the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax relief threshold to £200,000, saving first time buyers up to £1,100 off the cost of buying a home.
- ✔ **Preventing above inflation hikes to water bills** while Scottish Water generates multi-million pound surpluses.

- ✔ **Improving access to banking hubs**, working with the banking sector to help anyone who needs reliable access to cash and banking services.

## An NHS there when Scots need it

Scottish Labour will always defend the NHS and we will make sure it is delivering for the people living in the Highlands and Islands by:

- ✔ **Driving down NHS waiting lists**, with funding following the patient so that anyone who is willing to travel can be offered treatment wherever capacity is available.
- ✔ **Ending the 8am rush for a GP appointment** and bringing back the family doctor so everyone can get a GP appointment within 48 hours when they need one.
- ✔ **Launching an emergency mental health response service**, so that people in mental health crisis get specialist NHS care, not merely a police response.
- ✔ **Protecting services in underserved areas**, working with GPs to secure provision in rural practices and incentivising newly qualified dentists to work in under-served areas.
- ✔ **Delivering safe maternity services**, with a national plan to ensure that women can access quality maternity care no matter where they live.
- ✔ **Establish a virtual hospital** so patients can attend outpatient consultations and follow up appointments online, reducing the need to travel long distances to speak to a specialist.
- ✔ **Catching cancer earlier**, with national coverage of Rapid Cancer Diagnostic Services and investment in new AI-enabled scanners so that waiting times targets are finally met.

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- ✔ **Cracking down on poorly run care homes**, prioritising more regular inspections and improving transparency for residents and their families so quality services are easier to identify.
- ✔ **Ending the patchwork provision of palliative care**, working with the profession to improve clinical pathways and minimum standards of care for those at the end of life.

## Kickstarting the economy

If we want to reverse depopulation and protect Gaelic as a living language, we need to sustain rural livelihoods. A Scottish Labour government will unlock the huge economic potential of the Highlands and Islands by:

- ✔ **Prioritising rural-specific industries within our industrial strategy**, ensuring that government interventions are designed for both rural and urban areas from inception.
- ✔ **Abolishing the unfair business rates system**, replacing it with a new local business levy designed with business to incentivise local investment, tackle empty properties, and encourage entrepreneurship.
- ✔ **Modernising Scotland's agricultural support system** so that it is fit for purpose and fairer for all, supporting food production, biodiversity and maintaining thriving rural communities.
- ✔ **Supporting smaller farmers and crofters** by capping tier 1 payments to the largest businesses and redistributing to smaller enterprises. Any changes would be in line with our net zero ambitions and phased in so that no producers face cliff edges.
- ✔ **Commissioning a strategic review of local abattoirs and fish processing facilities**, to support local producers and maintain quality Scottish products, recognising food and drink as a key economic asset.
- ✔ **Reviewing crofting legislation**, ensuring it matches our wider ambitions for rural Scotland and keeps crofting accessible for the next generation.
- ✔ **Reforming fishing quota management**, supporting more local governance, incentivising more sustainable fishing practices, increasing the leasing of quotas, and protecting fisheries' workers.
- ✔ **Planning for the energy sector**, classifying grid build as a national planning priority, supporting the expansion of renewable energy including wind, pumped hydro, solar and tidal, and promoting Scotland's expertise in decommissioning.

## Developing skills and creating good jobs

Scottish Labour will transform the skills system so that it works for people and business by:

- ✔ **Guaranteeing an apprenticeship place for every qualified applicant**, with the creation of 9,000 additional apprenticeships across Scotland.

- ✔ **Maintaining free tuition for Scotland's undergraduates**, ensuring that attending university can still be an aspiration for all.
- ✔ **Creating at least one Apprenticeship Centre of Excellence in the Highlands and Islands** so growing industries have the pipeline of cutting-edge skills they need.
- ✔ **Creating a Digital Skills Passport** helping people to move between jobs and careers.
- ✔ **Launching regional employability hubs**, to deliver a single front door into the skills system for anyone who wants to find work or retrain to boost their earnings.
- ✔ **Developing short reskilling courses**, tailored to skills gaps in the local economy and delivered by local colleges.
- ✔ **Protecting workers from assault**, bringing in stronger sentences for those who attack people in the course of their work.

## Setting our young people up to succeed

Scottish Labour will restore excellence and equity in our education system once again by:

- ✔ **Banning mobile phones in classrooms** so that schools are safe and calm places for learning once again.
- ✔ **Giving pupils in the Highlands and Islands more 1:1 support**, as part of plans to recruit 1,500 more classroom assistants across the country.
- ✔ **Implementing an education recovery programme**, with specialist literacy and numeracy teachers to help children who have fallen the furthest behind.
- ✔ **Guaranteeing industry work placements for every secondary school pupil** with local employers, public services, and in growing industries.
- ✔ **Creating new Skills for Schools programme** which demonstrates the range of career possibilities in industry.
- ✔ **Providing jobs for teachers**, providing greater certainty with permanent contracts and jobs.

## Stronger communities

Scottish Labour will work with local people to improve local services and make our Highlands and Islands great places to live by:

- ✔ **Fixing the state of the roads and filling in the potholes**, with a national £350m pothole fund.
- ✔ **Dualling the A9 by 2035**, creating a new National Roads Plan to prioritise road upgrades based on economic need, public safety, and local connectivity.
- ✔ **Delivering fair funding for local services**, agreeing a new funding formula for local government in Highland, the Orkney Islands, the Shetland Islands, Na h-Eileanan an Iar, and Argyll and Bute.

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- ✔ **Working to deliver reliable postal services**, so everyone in Scotland can access the affordable delivery services they need.
- ✔ **Giving local people a say over service closures**, requiring councils to consult whenever they plan to shut local libraries, sports and leisure facilities.
- ✔ **Delivering reliable ferry services**, merging CMAL and CalMac into a single public ferry agency with local representation on the board and a long-term procurement plan to upgrade Scotland's aging ferry fleet.
- ✔ **Supporting vibrant high streets and town centres**, ensuring online retailers and large distribution warehouses pay their fair share of business rates and levies.
- ✔ **Accelerating internet connectivity**, prioritising the deployment of full-fibre broadband and working with the mobile network operators to roll-out 5G in underserved areas.
- ✔ **Simplifying Community Right to Buy**, making the legal process easier for local people to buy and own local land and assets for the benefit of communities.
- ✔ **Redefining community benefit**, so funds derived from local energy projects deliver tangible, long-term results for communities, and mandating contributions in future consenting of offshore wind projects.
- ✔ **Ensure 10 per cent of new homes are built in genuinely rural areas**, reviewing the classification of rural housebuilding so rural housing data and targets are adequately capturing the reality in rural areas.
- ✔ **Consolidate rural housing funds**, to maximise impact. We will explore options to expand eligibility, to increase uptake, and support employer-led initiatives to deliver rural homes where they are needed.
- ✔ **Help renters to save for a deposit**, with a quarter of new mid-market rent houses set aside for working families who are saving to buy their own home.
- ✔ **Review the Croft House Grant Scheme**, ensuring it supports delivery of the quality homes that crofting communities need.
- ✔ **Expand the use of rural housing burdens**, to allow communities to buy back homes when they come up for sale and protect rural housing stock by preventing homes being sold as second homes.
- ✔ **Tackle the scale of empty and second homes**, closing tax loopholes and supporting councils to buy neglected and empty properties that blight neighbourhoods.
- ✔ **Grant homeowners more control over factoring**, with higher penalties when factors breach their obligations and making it easier for residents to end contracts.

## A safer Scotland

Scottish Labour will restore security and make our neighbourhoods safe again by:

- ✔ **Returning police officers back to the front line** and giving every neighbourhood in the Highlands and Islands a named community and crime prevention officer.
- ✔ **Increasing the value of Antisocial Behaviour Fines**, meaning those who make communities feel less safe can face fines of up to £500.
- ✔ **Removing free bus passes from those who carry out antisocial behaviour**, punishing those who abuse transport staff and threaten community safety.
- ✔ **Restoring the Cashback for Communities Youth Work Fund**, with £1m dedicated to funding local approaches to youth work.
- ✔ **Funding 40 legal aid traineeships annually**, to improve access to legal aid solicitors, particularly in underserved areas across the country.

## Homes for all

As part of Scottish Labour's plans to build 125,000 homes and end the housing emergency, in the Highlands and Islands we will:

- ✔ **Fix the broken housing market**, with thousands of new affordable homes to drive down housing waiting lists and reduce rents.

## Protecting our natural environment

One of Scotland's greatest assets is our land and natural environment. Scottish Labour will take the action needed to make the Highlands and Islands a greener and healthier place to live by:

- ✔ **Creating a warm homes programme**, with one-stop centres in communities offering advice on new technologies, and installation of energy efficiency measures.
- ✔ **Introducing a new Marine Plan**, so there is clarity for all industries within Scottish waters and a commitment to develop 40GW in offshore wind by 2040.
- ✔ **Establishing a Marine Recovery Fund**, funded through developer contributions, to deliver strategic marine and nature recovery.
- ✔ **Working in partnership to deliver sustainable deer management**, continuing incentive pilots and supporting community initiatives to supply venison to local markets.
- ✔ **Increasing monitoring of sewage overflows**, boosting coverage to match levels elsewhere in the UK.
- ✔ **Tackling littering and waste from drinks' containers**, rolling out the deposit return scheme.
- ✔ **Working in partnership with farmers to improve animal welfare**, with a strategy to target rural veterinary shortages and phase out the use of farrowing crates.

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## A government that works for you

Scottish Labour will end the culture of secrecy and restore respect for taxpayers' money by:

- ✓ **Ending government waste by cutting a third of quangos** to improve delivery and value for public money.
- ✓ **Publishing all government files relating to the Ferguson Marine ferries** and other recent SNP scandals.
- ✓ **Implementing the right of recall**, so people in the Highlands and Islands have the right to replace MSPs who do not uphold public standards.
- ✓ **Passing a Local Democracy Act**, to push power out of Holyrood and give people in the Highlands and Islands more control over public services and the right to elect a regional mayor.

## An outward looking country

Scottish Labour will promote Brand Scotland and all the Highlands and Islands have to offer around the world by:

- ✓ **Establishing a Major Events Bureau**, positioning Scotland as a leading destination for worldclass sport, culture, and international conferences.
- ✓ **Marketing Scotland as a premium food and drink destination**, leveraging the strength of whisky and salmon while treating the wider food and drink sector as a strategic economic asset.
- ✓ **Championing the development of specialist hospitality qualifications**, working with business schools and colleges to build clear, respected career pathways across the industry.
- ✓ **Protecting Scotland's historic assets**, reforming Historic Environment Scotland so it is fit for purpose and ensuring funding is properly used to maintain our Scottish sites.

**This election is a straight choice between more of the same with the SNP or a government ready to build a better future with Scottish Labour.**

The SNP has had 20 years in charge; they don't deserve another five.

**On May 7, vote Scottish Labour on both votes for the change Scotland needs.**