

**TIME  
TO DO  
SOMETHING  
ABOUT IT**

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Scottish  
Conservatives

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# INTRODUCTION



**BY  
DAVID McLETCHIE,  
LEADER OF  
THE SCOTTISH  
CONSERVATIVES**

I want the best for Scotland – for all of Scotland and its people. Every one of us deserves to live in a safe neighbourhood and community; to know that if we are ill, we will be treated speedily and effectively by our health service; to know that our children are being properly educated to give them the best possible start in life; and to have the opportunity to improve our standard of living and that of our family.

There is no disguising the disappointment felt by many people that, after four years of Labour and Liberal Democrat Government in Scotland and six years of Labour Government in the UK as a whole, these basic requirements are not being met. Despite all the higher taxes – 53 increases since 1997 – our public services are worse, not better, our economy is growing more slowly and no one could seriously claim that our society is safer or more cohesive.

This has happened because Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP all believe that greater government control, higher public spending and the increased taxes and regulations that follow are the answers to all our problems. They are wrong. The evidence of the last four years is of higher levels of spending, but poorer outcomes in areas such as

health and education. This tells me that there is something fundamentally wrong with the way we run our public services.

We must do something about it and the Scottish Conservatives will because not all parties are the same.

Our very different approach is based on trusting the Scottish people and empowering them. This starts with smaller government and the real devolution of decision making. We will cut taxes and red tape, so freeing entrepreneurs to build our economy. We will give parents and patients real choice in education and health. And we will trust our doctors, nurses, teachers and police officers, freeing them from endless political interference and bureaucracy so that they can improve our hospitals and schools and help to create safe, secure communities.

We will seek to build support for our policies within the Scottish Parliament on the basis of principled agreement. This is part of our commitment to make devolution work for Scotland within the United Kingdom. Scottish Conservatives believe that Scottish interests are best served within the United Kingdom. We are Scottish and British – proud to be both and proud of what our partnership has achieved in the past and confident of what it can achieve in the future.

**SCOTLAND NEEDS A GOVERNMENT THAT STOPS WASTING MONEY AND STARTS SPENDING IT WISELY ON OUR PUBLIC SERVICES.**

**A GOVERNMENT THAT BACKS UP OUR DOCTORS AND NURSES, TEACHERS AND POLICE OFFICERS.**

**A GOVERNMENT THAT TRUSTS THE SCOTTISH PEOPLE.**

**THAT'S WHAT I STAND FOR. THAT'S WHAT THE SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVES STAND FOR.**

**TOGETHER WE CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. IT IS TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David McLetchie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

An aerial photograph of a town with a large stadium under construction in the center. Several tall cranes are visible around the stadium. In the background, there are rolling green hills under a cloudy sky. The word 'FOLLY ROAD' is superimposed in large, white, block letters across the middle of the image.

# FOLLY ROAD

**VOTE SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVE.**

## CHAPTER 1

# BETTER GOVERNMENT FOR SCOTLAND

## DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT MEANS REFORMING THE WAY PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT IN SCOTLAND WORKS.

- **HALVE THE NUMBER OF SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE MINISTERS FROM 20 TO 10**
- **REDUCE THE NUMBER OF MSPS FROM 129 TO 108 AND STREAMLINE THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM**
- **CUT THE COSTS OF GOVERNMENT BACK TO 1997 LEVELS SAVING OVER £100 MILLION**
- **MAKE THE EXECUTIVE MORE ACCOUNTABLE TO PARLIAMENT**
- **STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE CONSTITUENT PARTS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM**

Scottish Conservatives are totally committed to making the Scottish Parliament work for Scotland within the United Kingdom. That means reforming the workings of the Scottish Parliament itself in order to win back the trust of the Scottish people and strengthening the relationships between the constituent parts of the United Kingdom to ensure that the new constitutional framework is a true partnership and works no matter which parties are in power.

Labour and the Liberal Democrats are responsible for the overriding public impression that over the first four years of the Scottish Parliament money has been wasted in unprecedented fashion. The new Parliament building at Holyrood – ‘Follyrood’ – is the symbol of this. The cost has soared from £40 million to £338 million and it is still not finished. This is a staggering increase of almost £300 million for which Labour and the Liberal Democrats are to blame. This is money which could have built 100 primary schools or 25 secondary schools or 3 new hospitals, instead of a palace for politicians.

On top of this, the running costs of government in Scotland have gone up by over £100 million a year since Labour came to power in 1997 – more taxpayers’ money spent on extra bureaucrats, spin doctors, ministerial cars, travel and advertising.

Labour has also given little thought to how the new devolved settlement would work with different parties in power in the Scottish Parliament and in Westminster. The House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution recommended that this should be done at an early date ‘so that the machinery of government relating to devolution can cope not just with intergovernmental

relations as they stand but as they are likely to become in the medium term.’

### **IT IS TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

Scottish Conservatives believe that Scotland benefits enormously from being a partner in the United Kingdom and we will work to strengthen that Union, whilst restoring confidence in devolution by cutting government down to size and making it more accountable to the Scottish people.

### **CUTTING GOVERNMENT DOWN TO SIZE**

Government exists to serve the people, not the other way round. The growth in the size and cost of government is totally unjustified, which is why we will cut it down to size. We will start with the Scottish Executive and the administrative costs of government. There are currently 20 Scottish Executive Ministers, plus 2 Law Officers as well as 2 Scotland Office Ministers and 1 Law Officer – a total of 25 in all. This compares with just 5 ministers and 2 Law Officers prior to 1999. We see no need for junior ministers and would have an Executive composed only of Cabinet Ministers. This would halve the number of ministers from 20 to 10.

The running costs of government have risen along with the increase in the number of ministers. Over £100 million is being spent on additional bureaucrats, spin doctors, ministerial cars, travel and advertising compared to 1997 when Labour came to power. This is money which could and should have been spent on employing additional doctors, nurses, teachers and police officers. We will reduce the costs of government in Scotland to 1997 levels saving over £100 million.

The Scottish Parliament should not be immune from this drive for leaner, fitter government. We will cut the number of MSPs, in line with the reduction in Scottish MPs at Westminster, by implementing the provisions of the Scotland Act. The Boundary Commission's proposals would reduce the number of Scottish MPs from 72 to 59 leading to a corresponding reduction in the size of the Scottish Parliament from 129 to 108. A reduction in the number of MSPs should be accompanied by a streamlining of the committee system. Reducing the number of committees from 17 to 13 coupled with a reduction in the number of ministers would in fact produce a more efficient Parliament which gave backbench MSPs more time to hold government to account.

This would restore faith by demonstrating a commitment to provide a value for money Parliament. Our reformed Parliament would be more focused on the issues of most concern to our people. By maintaining the same constituencies for Westminster and the Scottish Parliament life would be simpler for electors, political parties and those responsible for running the elections. As Unionists, we also recognise the advantage of MPs and MSPs working together in the interests of their constituents even if they are of different parties, as this emphasises the partnership between Scotland's two Parliaments and will strengthen the United Kingdom.

### **MORE ACCOUNTABLE POLITICIANS**

To improve accountability, we will introduce a new weekly session where individual cabinet ministers have to face

open questions on their departmental responsibilities and we will extend First Minister's Questions to 30 minutes to allow more time for backbench questioning.

Over 50 bills have been passed by the Scottish Parliament in the last session. Not enough time is being spent scrutinising these bills, so quality is being sacrificed for quantity. We need more debating time in the chamber, particularly at the 3rd stage of bills when final amendments are up for discussion. Committees should therefore meet on Monday afternoons if necessary to allow extra time on Tuesday afternoons or Wednesday mornings. This would improve the legislation coming out of the Parliament by subjecting it to greater scrutiny. The possibility of a second chamber to improve scrutiny of Scottish Parliament legislation has been raised. We are not against the idea in principle and it may be that this is a role for Scottish members of the House of Lords. We do not need more politicians, we need those we have to work more effectively.

There is a perception that the list system for electing additional MSPs to the Scottish Parliament gives too much power to the party machines and that this has an adverse effect on the quality of representation. To address this, we would introduce an open list system in which the voters as a whole would rank the candidates for each party, rather than the parties themselves through their internal rules. This would give voters a more direct say in the election of MSPs and strengthen public accountability.

### **A STRONGER UNITED KINGDOM**

Better relationships between the Scottish Parliament and Westminster, particularly when different political parties are involved, require effective liaison. We will retain the office of Secretary of State for Scotland to fulfil this crucial role and work with both the Executive and the Parliament and its committees. MSPs and Scottish MPs should also work together on issues such as transport which straddle devolved and reserved areas. The Secretary of

State could also be part of the UK delegation to the Council of Ministers and indeed lead it on issues of particular concern to Scotland whether devolved or reserved. However, all these questions, including the future financing of the Scottish Parliament, require a comprehensive review to ensure that they are operating in Scotland's best interests. We support the setting up of a UK-wide Royal Commission to examine these issues and determine the best way forward.

The British-Irish Council represents an opportunity to foster closer relations between the peoples of the British Isles and develop joint initiatives between the respective governments and administrations. We will continue to play a full part in it.

For the conduct of future relations between Westminster and the Scottish Parliament to work with different parties in power, clear ground rules are essential. We recognise the role of the Concordats and overarching Joint Ministerial Committee in this process. However, we will put them on a proper statutory basis to ensure a lasting settlement that sets out a clear working relationship and, as recommended by the House of Lords Committee on the Constitution, we will ensure there is far greater openness in the way the system operates. In particular, we endorse the recommendation that 'the UK Prime Minister should make a statement to the House of Commons after each annual plenary meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee regarding both that meeting and the conduct of intergovernmental relations within the United Kingdom generally over the previous 12 months.' However, we see no need for the specific Joint Ministerial Committees set up by Labour, which are an attempt to exercise undue influence over matters devolved to the Scottish Parliament and we would scrap them.



**DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

## CHAPTER 2

# SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS

**DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT MEANS TACKLING THE CRIME AND DISORDER WHICH BLIGHTS TOO MANY OF OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS.**

- **SUPPORT ZERO TOLERANCE POLICING**
- **PROVIDE A MORE VISIBLE CRIME FIGHTING PRESENCE ON OUR STREETS**
- **TAKE PERSISTENT YOUNG OFFENDERS OFF OUR STREETS**
- **ENSURE CRIMINALS SERVE THE SENTENCE GIVEN BY THE COURT**
- **FAST TRACK PROSECUTION AND STIFFER SENTENCES FOR DRUG DEALERS**

Scottish Conservatives believe that a neighbourly society, built on strong and supportive relationships within families, between neighbours and throughout the wider community, is ultimately our best defence against crime. It is essential that we achieve this because a safe and law abiding society is the foundation on which everything else is built.

Crime is rising in Scotland. Violent crime has risen by 24 per cent since 1997, whilst at the same time lower level disorder such as malicious mischief and vandalism is

up by 17 per cent over the same period. Whilst it affects all of us to a greater or lesser extent whether we live in urban or rural environments, it impacts disproportionately on some of the most vulnerable people in our society – the poor, older people, youngsters drawn into drug abuse and many within our ethnic communities.

### **IT IS TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

Scottish Conservatives will reduce crime and the fear of crime through effective neighbourhood policing, tougher sentencing for some crimes, honesty in sentencing for all crimes and sanctions which protect the public and reduce re-offending.

### **SECURE NEIGHBOURHOODS**

Scottish Conservatives will give clear and unequivocal support to a zero tolerance approach to crime because much crime is of an opportunistic nature. Everyone in our neighbourhoods has a responsibility to help to deter crime and we will extend community crime prevention schemes such as CCTV and Neighbourhood Watch.

We will tackle crime at its roots by challenging the graffiti, vandalism and yobbery which undermines communities, saps the human spirit and creates a culture

of crime. This approach means putting far more police officers on our streets. A visible police presence, not just to detect crime, but to deter it. HM Inspectors of Police have argued for more police on the beat because ‘policing is about enhancing the quality of life for everyone through providing reassurance and through acting as a deterrent to criminals.’ It also addresses one of the main weaknesses of our criminal justice system which is that we do not solve enough crimes.

The Scottish Executive is only committed to ‘maintaining the capacity of the police service.’ This is not good enough, particularly as the current administration continues to heap new burdens on the police, such as victim statements, extending the use of alternatives to custody, monitoring the growing number on the sex offenders register and changes in procedure arising from ECHR. We will set up a review along the lines of the Policing Bureaucracy taskforce in England and Wales to look at ways of cutting the red tape and bureaucracy affecting the police.

Police officers are also increasingly frustrated by short-term initiatives. As the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents has said: ‘Commanding Officers are

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being told repeatedly to take officers off normal duties for high-profile campaigns... These initiatives are often in the middle of town, which means people in the peripheries lose their beat patrol and there are fewer officers to respond to local needs.'

Extra police officers are urgently required because an enhanced police presence does cut crime. Between 1992 and 2000, police numbers in New York increased by nearly a half and crime fell by two thirds. That is why, as a first step, we will increase the resources available to our police forces by £25 million for general policing purposes, which could employ up to an additional 1,000 officers. This is in line with our commitment down south to increase the number of police officers in England and Wales by 40,000 over a ten-year period which will be reflected in an increase in Scotland's funding allocation through the Barnett formula.

We will also use the £20 million earmarked by the Scottish Executive for community wardens to set up a fund for Neighbourhood Protection Schemes. Police forces would be able to bid for this money by coming up with schemes which put more officers back on patrol, providing protection and reassurance for their neighbourhoods all year round.

Alternatively, local authorities could set up schemes for Neighbourhood Protection Units along the lines of the unit established in Middlesbrough by the former senior police officer and now elected Mayor Ray Mallon. Officers could issue fixed penalties for quality of life offences such as dog fouling or littering, monitor anti-social behaviour, supervise community service orders as well as generally deterring and reporting crime. These units would work alongside and in co-operation with the police.

But numbers alone are not enough. If we are to succeed, police forces must be more accountable to the communities they serve and focused on clear crime-fighting objectives. That is why we will require forces to draw up neighbourhood policing plans, to publish crime figures on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis and

to hold regular public meetings in local communities. We are determined to ensure that the public receives the police service they demand and deserve.

### **EFFICIENT COURTS**

However, there is no point in catching more criminals, if we are not capable of dealing with them. At present far too many cases are being shelved and it is taking longer and longer to bring accused persons to trial. This is taking on average nearly 3 weeks longer than in 1998/99. This is undermining public confidence in the criminal justice system.

We need to speed up the court system. We will do this by enhancing the prosecution service through an increase in the number of procurators fiscal and the greater use of stipendiary magistrates. We will also introduce weekend and evening courts to reduce the current backlog of cases.

### **TACKLING YOUTH CRIME**

If we are to tackle the problem of crime and disorder, then we must deal effectively with young offenders and particularly those who persistently offend.

This requires early intervention, identifying parents who may be struggling to cope and whose children are therefore most at risk of becoming involved in crime. This approach has been effective in the United States and has largely been undertaken by the voluntary sector whose innovation and flexibility is particularly valuable. We will work with the voluntary sector in Scotland to develop effective approaches to keeping young people on the straight and narrow.

We will increase places in secure accommodation so that persistent young offenders can be taken off the streets of the communities they terrorise. We will also introduce a wider range of disposals for under 16 year old offenders by diverting them to new youth courts. This will include weekend and evening detention, compulsory groundings, community service and supervised attendance orders. Dealing with these

offenders in youth courts will also free up more time for the 'at risk' children in the panel system. 16 and 17 year old offenders should continue to be prosecuted in mainstream courts and not go to the Children's Panel or Youth Courts as proposed by the Executive.

### **EFFECTIVE PUNISHMENT**

The number one priority of the criminal justice system must be the protection of the public. In this respect, there is no doubt that prison works. It protects the public and deters criminal behaviour. We will therefore ensure that there are enough prison places to meet the demands of justice. This is not to say that our prison service is perfect. We need to do more to prevent re-offending. However, research in the United States has shown that longer sentences and innovative approaches to rehabilitation, many of them delivered by the voluntary sector, are more successful in preventing re-offending. We will therefore follow this approach, which is in tune with our view that sentences for serious offences should be longer. We will ensure that any breach of bail is taken into account in sentencing and will restore honesty in sentencing to ensure that criminals serve the sentences they are given. Any remission should be strictly limited and would have to be earned and not granted automatically.

Alternatives to prison, such as community service or tagging, must not be a soft option. They must be properly supervised and the public must have confidence in them as punishments, as deterrents and as roads to rehabilitation and a way back into mainstream society. Where local authorities choose not to set up a Neighbourhood Protection Unit, we will encourage them to establish Community Service Departments, staffed for example by former police officers, to supervise community service, which must be done and seen to be done. Any breach of community service orders would lead to a spell in jail.

### **COMPASSION FOR THE VICTIMS OF CRIME**

We will make sure that the interests of victims are at the heart of our criminal justice system. If the prosecution decides that no proceedings should be taken victims should be informed and given a full explanation as to why. In serious sexual cases, everything should be done to make the legal process as painless as possible for the victim, including the use of specialist prosecutors wherever possible. We will also ensure that vulnerable victims and witnesses are protected from intimidation, harassment, threats and violence.

### **DEALING WITH DRUG ABUSE**

Scottish Conservatives will tackle the scourge of drugs which afflicts far too many of our communities. Drug crime is up by 14 per cent since 1999 and there is a dearth of rehabilitation programmes. The Scottish Executive has sent out conflicting signals on this subject, caught up as it is in arguments about whether particular drugs should be reclassified or legalised. In contrast, we have a clear aim – to reduce dependency on drugs of all kinds. This involves a complementary approach across the boundaries of law enforcement, health and education involving the police, schools, local authorities, local health services, voluntary organisations and rehabilitation centres.

We will introduce fast track prosecution of those charged with drug-related crimes and particularly those charged with dealing. At the same time, we would enable judges to set stiffer sentences for drug-related crime by ensuring that drug dealers were dealt with at least on indictment in the Sheriff Court. This would mean sentences of up to 3 years rather than the six-month maximum if these cases were dealt with in a summary procedure court.

We support the idea of drug courts in principle but they must not become a soft option. Offenders should be given a clear choice of rehabilitation or a spell in jail and this would include abusers of drugs such as heroin or crack cocaine. This would require extra funding for

rehabilitation and much stronger enforcement of Drug Treatment and Testing Orders to ensure that offenders turn up for appointments and there is a sanction for testing positive. We will also implement a strict zero tolerance approach to drugs in prisons.

As with youth crime, the best way to tackle drug abuse is by early intervention which prevents the problem in the first place. We will work with the voluntary sector to develop effective programmes to educate young people about the dangers of drug abuse drawing on the work of voluntary organisations such as D.A.R.E.

Of course, we don't deny that all this will cost money. We will increase the justice budget by £50 million using some of the money saved by reducing the costs of government in Scotland by over £100 million. It is a question of priorities. Choices have to be made and we are not afraid to make them because maintaining and enforcing justice is, and must be, the prime duty of any government.



**DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

## CHAPTER 3

# A HEALTHY NHS

## DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT MEANS REFORM OF THE NHS TO GUARANTEE THAT EVERYONE HAS READY ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY HEALTHCARE.

- **GIVE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS MORE SAY IN THE RUNNING OF THE SERVICE**
- **DEVOLVE POWER TO HOSPITALS AND GPs**
- **ENSURE PATIENTS HAVE REAL CHOICE**
- **CREATE A GENUINE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE NHS AND THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR**
- **UNIFY HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE WITHIN THE NHS**

Scottish Conservatives are committed to a health service which is universal in its reach and available to everyone wherever they live; available free at the point of need, regardless of ability to pay; of high quality, applying the highest professional standards and techniques based on the latest knowledge; and which puts the needs of patients first.

The current NHS is a centrally-run, monopoly provider of health care services and, despite the best efforts of staff, it is failing to deliver the standard of care people expect. Its failings are exemplified by long waiting lists and times.

It is not just about money. The Scottish Executive is spending more on the health service, but the people of Scotland have paid the extra taxes to finance this and they are entitled to a better service in return. However, the reality is that, despite all the extra money and the best efforts of frontline staff, the NHS is not delivering as it should and now lags far behind the healthcare enjoyed by all citizens in many other European countries. Spending may have risen significantly over the last 4 years but patients have to wait for longer on longer waiting lists – up by 19,000 patients or 20 per cent since 1999. There has been an increase in hospital acquired infections and

patients in some hospitals in Scotland are still in mixed sex wards despite an Executive pledge to end them. The acceptance that some patients may have to be sent overseas in order to receive the treatment they need in a reasonable time is a stark and sobering reminder of how far we have fallen and how far we have to go.

### **IT IS TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

Scottish Conservatives will improve our health service through a combination of investment and reform. We will stick to the Executive's spending plans, but ensure the funding goes further so that services such as audiology, dermatology, mental health and many others receive the funding they deserve but do not receive at present. And we will continue to support the use of private finance which has completed the new hospitals which we started when in office and which Labour has adopted to the benefit of patients. However, we will take politicians out of the day to day running of the NHS. We will give those working in the service a far greater say in how it is run, trusting them to make medical decisions based on their clinical judgement and put the needs and expectations of patients at the heart of the service by giving them real choice over the treatment they receive.

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## **REDUCING CENTRALISATION AND BUREAUCRACY**

Despite promising to reduce bureaucracy within the health service, there are now over 1,000 more administrators in the NHS than in 1997. This is the result of political centralisation. The obsession with targets has spawned more bureaucrats to administer them and distorted the clinical judgements of NHS professionals. That is one of the prime reasons why the extra money going into the NHS has not led to improvements in the service provided.

The answer is to depoliticise the NHS as the King's Fund report 'The Future of the NHS' made clear. It identified 'three immediate and inter-related problems that need to be tackled: over-politicisation of the NHS, excessive centralisation and a lack of responsiveness to individuals and local communities.' Its solution to these problems was 'enabling frontline staff, patients and the public to assert greater influence over how health care is managed and delivered' by 'establishing NHS hospitals as new types of not-for-profit organisations' and 'extending opportunities for patient choice.' We will therefore end central targets for the NHS and so reduce the bureaucracy needed to implement them. In its place we will introduce measures of quality and effectiveness based on clinical outcomes, giving doctors, nurses and managers the freedom to deliver this care to patients. This will put patient needs first.

## **DEVOLVE POWER TO GPs**

The key to our programme of reform is to devolve power to the local level within the health service, recognising the essential role of GPs and other members of the primary care team. Ninety per cent of contacts with the NHS begin and end in primary care and we wish to build on this. We will put GPs and their primary care teams back at the heart of the health service. GPs will be able to apply to their health board to manage their own budgets on behalf of their primary care team, either individually or as part of Local Health Care Co-operatives. This is what happened previously under the system of fundholding

and we will restore it and let it develop fully so that its benefits accrue to all patients in Scotland. Labour abolished this system, which was already leading to major benefits for patients, because it was an affront to their dogma and we recognise it will take some time for it to develop once again. Over time, we would give GPs the freedom to purchase all healthcare on behalf of their patients. This would be an informed choice based on accurate information about waiting times and would take into account the preferences of patients such as the desire to go to a local hospital so that it was easier for relatives to visit. This health care could be purchased from any provider whether in the public or independent sectors. Budgets would be allocated to GPs or Local Health Care Co-operatives based on the number of patients and a formula to take account of the health needs of differing parts of Scotland. Money would then follow the patient and would flow through this system from the bottom up rather than the top down.

## **A SMART NHS**

This process would be facilitated by the use of an electronic smart card, which would be given to every patient entitled to NHS care. This would provide information about the patient and act as a way of facilitating the process whereby GPs commission care from service providers. This will reduce the bureaucratic side effects of the old internal market and the paperwork with which health care professionals have to deal. The computerised network will carry funding authorisation, treatment availability and patient health records, so any capacity across Scotland can be instantly accessed. This integrated IT system will ensure that GPs are kept up to date about the services available and patient waiting list progress. This will reduce waiting times for patients by speeding up the system and ensure the efficient use of NHS resources.

These changes would mean GPs responding to the clinical needs of their patients rather than the centrally

imposed targets of the government. All of the health care capacity in Scotland will be utilised to best effect and new providers will be encouraged to add to that capacity, ending the virtual monopoly in the provision of health services currently enjoyed by the NHS.

## **GREATER AUTONOMY FOR HOSPITALS**

To complement the devolution of power to GPs, we would allow hospitals in Scotland, like their counterparts in England, to apply for foundation status. These hospitals would continue to be part of the NHS but would operate as not-for-profit companies with their own directors and far greater freedom to determine pay and conditions, borrow money and keep the proceeds of land sales. They will be funded by results and as money follows patients well-run hospitals will become well-funded hospitals.

The speed of this devolutionary process would vary in different parts of the country. As the process was evolving, there would be a continuing role for Health Boards in providing finance and setting the overall strategic health objectives in their areas, particularly in relation to public health and decisions they take in conjunction with trusts on capital planning and the provision of hospital services. As areas moved to a situation where GPs were purchasing all care and more hospitals were given the freedom to meet demand, the role of the Health Board would be reduced.

Greater independence for our hospitals will be particularly good news for district hospitals throughout Scotland, such as Stobhill or Perth Royal Infirmary threatened with closure or the loss of services such as A and E and maternity units. We will empower GPs, patients and local communities to support and save their local hospitals.

### **A BETTER DEAL FOR STAFF**

The Royal College of Nursing believes that Scotland will face a shortfall of 15,000 nurses over the next five years. This only underlines the need to ensure that nurses and other staff are retained within the NHS and new staff are recruited. We value the role of nurses and other staff and would back this up by involving them far more in the running of the service and making it a priority to ensure their safety at work. To this end, we will address the problem of attacks on NHS staff. We will ensure that anyone who physically abuses a member of staff is prosecuted and adopt the Unison idea of 'yellow and red cards' for those who abuse NHS staff.

We need a thorough review of nurse grading to ensure that nurses are paid to reflect their duties and responsibilities and so encourage more nurses to remain within the health service. The NHS also needs to be a more flexible employer to encourage more staff to return once they have started families. The ability of foundation hospitals to set their own pay and conditions will be particularly helpful in recruiting doctors, nurses and other NHS staff.

### **COMMUNITY CARE**

As control of budgets is progressively devolved to GPs they will become responsible for all their patients' care including health-related social services. This would bring control of the budget for health related social services within the health service under the control of the patient's GP. GPs would commission the most appropriate care for their patients from providers in either the public or independent sectors, helping to reduce the problem of delayed discharge and ensuring a level playing field between the two sectors as local authorities would not be able to discriminate in favour of their own services. We will also look at ways of encouraging those of working age to make greater provision for their own long term care.

### **PUBLIC HEALTH**

Although there is a role for national campaigns as run by the Health Education Board for Scotland, public health is best promoted at a local level. Health boards and increasingly GPs and local health care providers will take the lead in the promotion of good health and the prevention of disease through immunisation and screening programmes. One of the other advantages of GPs controlling their own budgets is that they would be able to prescribe innovative approaches to the treatment of drug and alcohol addiction.



**DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

## CHAPTER 4

# STANDARDS AND CHOICE IN EDUCATION

**DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT MEANS CREATING A DIVERSE EDUCATION SYSTEM WHICH EXTENDS OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL.**

- **EMPOWER HEAD TEACHERS TO EXCLUDE VIOLENT OR DISRUPTIVE PUPILS**
- **ENCOURAGE A GREATER CHOICE OF SPECIALIST SCHOOLS**
- **GIVE SCHOOLS GREATER FREEDOM TO SET THEIR OWN PRIORITIES**
- **ABOLISH THE GRADUATE TAX**
- **GUARANTEE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION SOLELY ON MERIT**

As Scots, we rightly take great pride in our tradition of learning. It is a passport for progress for individuals and for society. That is why the aim of Scottish Conservatives is to create an education system which caters for the needs of every individual child so that no child is left behind.

However, the reality of our one-size-fits-all comprehensive system, which was supposed to be about equality, is an enormous gulf between the best and worst performing schools. Far too many of our children are trapped in poor schools and overwhelmingly they are in our most deprived communities, which denies them the educational opportunities to advance in life. Standards of discipline are falling and attacks on teachers are rising. There are now seven times more attacks than there were in 1997 – 5,412 last year alone – one for every fifteen minutes of the working day in Scottish schools. Head teachers feel constrained by Labour's targets to reduce pupil exclusions and are powerless to remove violent and disruptive pupils from the classroom where they cause mayhem. This decline in levels of discipline has been accompanied by a decline in academic standards with a recent HMI study finding that two thirds of pupils in the

second year of Scottish secondary schools did not meet national standards for writing and more than a half didn't meet them for reading. Jack McConnell and his Scottish Executive may promise 'Excellence for all', but the reality is mediocrity, or worse, for far too many.

### **IT IS TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

Scottish Conservatives will match investment with real reform. We will work within the Scottish Executive's current spending plans on education and will continue to support the use of private finance in modernising school buildings. However, we believe that the key to improvement is to give parents real choice in the education of their children and to give schools and head teachers the freedom to provide these choices so that they can work with parents to prepare their children for life.

### **GREATER CHOICE AND DIVERSITY**

If there is one lesson we should have learned over the last 40 years, it is that trying to make all schools the same doesn't work. It simply means that your postcode determines your education – denying opportunity and perpetuating social division. So we will release young

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people from their catchment area prisons and give parents choice from a diverse range of schools. There are nearly 1,000 secondary schools in England specialising in business, engineering, maths, technology, languages, sport and the arts. This number is expected to double by 2006. In Scotland, we have a paltry 7, with no increase planned. We will end this poverty of ambition and extend choice through a major expansion in the number of specialist secondary schools. We will fund this by using the £78 million pledged by the Scottish Executive to extend the New Community Schools scheme across Scotland over the next four years.

We believe that denominational schools are an important part of that diversity. Catholic schools are popular in Scotland, not just because of their religious affiliation, but because of their strong emphasis on moral education and high standards of discipline. Clearly, they are doing something right because studies show that their pupils, and particularly those from less well off backgrounds, achieve better results than those at schools with comparable intakes. Yet still some politicians try to blame Catholic schools for sectarianism. It is entirely baseless and is a disgraceful slur. We strongly support Catholic and other denominational schools and will support their extension where there is a demand for this.

Where there is a demand, we will also allow parents, teachers and communities to set up their own schools with state funding as happens in Denmark and the Netherlands. This would foster the provision of other approaches to education such as Steiner Waldorf Schools and Gaelic medium education. We will amend guidance to give Scottish parents the same rights as parents in England to educate their children at home.

In nursery education, we will provide parents with a flexible voucher which will give them the power to choose the nursery education best suited to the needs of their child, regardless of whether the preferred provider is a local authority or an independent provider. Unlike the Executive's promise to provide part-time nursery provision

for all three and four year olds, which has not been met and is the subject of pending legal actions, our flexible voucher will guarantee either a full time place for a four year old or a part time place over a child's third and fourth years.

### **DEVOLVE POWER TO SCHOOLS**

If it is to be locally responsive, decision-making is best exercised at the lowest level possible. This is particularly true of schools. Spending on education in Scotland in 2002-03 was approximately £4,500 per pupil. However, over 30% of total school expenditure by the Scottish Executive and Local Authorities did not make its way down to schools. In addition, levels of devolved funding vary significantly across local authorities – a source of great discontent for many school heads. The Head Teachers' Association of Scotland recently highlighted figures showing that budgets of similar sized schools can vary by as much as £340,000 a year.

The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000 stated that 'an education authority shall have a scheme for delegating to the head teacher of a school managed by them.' These schemes do not go nearly far enough to ensure that head teachers have real control over their schools as over one billion pounds of education spending throughout Scotland is still left in the hands of local authorities.

We will use existing legislation to issue new guidelines on Devolved School Management (DSM), extending the scheme and ensuring that all schools, regardless of their geographical location, will have greater control of their own affairs. Quality will be maintained and enhanced through more regular quality checks by Her Majesty's Inspectorate and the General Teaching Council will have greater powers to maintain professional standards of teaching. As a first step towards this greater autonomy, we will issue guidance to ensure that all state schools have a community-based management cluster with a bursar to handle administration and finance.

Greater autonomy for our schools will ensure that schools respond to the wishes of parents, particularly in areas such as sex education. We will back this up with statutory rights for parents to remove their children from sex education lessons with which they are unhappy and for school boards to veto teaching materials.

We will build on this by extending the advantages of charitable status to the 96% of Scottish school pupils who are educated in the state sector. This is a source of considerable revenue for independent schools which use the money to benefit their pupils and wider community. Charitable status would provide an incentive for state schools to tap into the vast network of former pupils in order to raise funds for projects such as libraries and computers and sports kit for school teams.

As well as increasing the autonomy of all schools, we will continue to fund directly grant-aided special schools as national centres of excellence for Special Education Needs and add to the current provision by giving this status to the school for autism in Alloa. We will continue to maintain the Record of Needs, introducing a common standard, set nationally.

### **RAISING STANDARDS OF DISCIPLINE**

Scottish Conservatives recognise that good school discipline is absolutely vital to learning and attainment and do not accept that the disruptive few should be allowed to undermine the education of our children and young people. The Scottish Executive's targets to reduce exclusions have stripped head teachers of control of their school and have been a major factor in the serious breakdown in school discipline.

We will scrap these targets and restore to head teachers the ability to set their own discipline policies including expulsions, detention and uniforms as well as the positive incentives towards good behaviour which we believe are an important part of a balanced policy. This will enable them to exclude disruptive pupils and we will reinforce this by giving teachers the right to refuse to

teach pupils with a record of violence. Funding will be redirected to establish second chance learning centres whose aim would be to return excluded pupils to mainstream education.

One of the causes of the fall in standards of discipline is that our one-size-fits-all system leads to many pupils becoming disenchanted with school and disruptive. Many of these young people would respond far better to more technical, college-based training. Accordingly, we will increase flexibility in the system to offer all S3 and S4 pupils the chance to move between school and further education.

### **FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION**

We give a guarantee that admission to our universities and colleges will be entirely on the basis of merit and qualifications, not social background or class labels. Anything else is a betrayal of the Scottish traditions of excellence and opportunity for all. Moreover, Labour's social engineering will harm the very people it is intended to help, stigmatising them as the holders of third rate degrees from second rate universities. The answer to improving access is to raise standards in our schools, not to dumb down our universities by distorting their admissions criteria.

We will back this up by abolishing tuition fees in Scotland. The Liberal Democrats claim to have done it. However, all they and Labour have done is change a pay-as-you-go fee into a back-end tax, which students will have to start paying when they start to earn as little as £10,000 per annum. We will abolish this £2,000 graduate tax, which is simply tuition fees deferred, and prevent any institution in receipt of public funds from charging top up fees. We will replace the Graduate Tax with a Saltire Scholarship which will be given to every Scottish-domiciled student who has attained the minimum standard for university entrance to cover the full cost of tuition for the subject being studied. It will not be means tested and in the rest of the UK it will cover the cost of

tuition fees for Scottish students. It will mean that money follows the student so that their choices shape the provision of higher education and will give universities far greater freedom in how they respond to those choices.

We will back up our Saltire Scholarship with a generous package of student support. We will increase the value of the student loans to £5,000 per year and make them available to all full-time students on degree courses, regardless of parental income. The current Executive halved the minimum income requirement for paying back student loans, which burdens many students with crippling repayment terms. We will double the threshold from £10,000 to £20,000 to tackle this problem.

### **A THRIVING CULTURE**

Scotland's culture belongs to its people. It is a vital component of being Scottish and British. It is constantly evolving and developing and it requires an open pluralist society where the government helps it to blossom rather than forces it to flower. Our cultural institutions must become part of a more supportive and giving society with looser links to party political agendas or the State establishment.

By its manipulation of the Scottish Arts Council, through the direction of how it spends tranches of funding, the Scottish Executive has politicised that body. Its independence has been undermined and its creditability critically damaged in the process.

The Scottish Arts Council is worth maintaining, for it is crucial that we have an arms length body to administer public support of the arts. However, it will be far more effective if it is relieved of responsibility for the national companies, Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the nascent National Theatre Company. A smaller, more focused Scottish Arts Council can then direct its efforts towards regional and community arts and education programmes to build the cultural foundation of Scotland.

These national companies should be funded directly just as the National Museum, Galleries and Library are currently. Funding for the National Theatre Company can thus be assured and public accountability improved.

Labour has politicised the National Lottery, reduced lottery funding for the arts and other good causes and presided over a decline in sales. In contrast to Labour, we will seek to endow our cultural institutions from lottery funds to make them more self-sufficient and independent of the state.

Building on our record in Government, we will ensure that the Gaelic language and culture continues to receive a healthy level of funding and we will support it by putting the Gaelic Board on a statutory basis.

Sport is a significant component of Scottish culture and we believe the way to satisfy the nation's appetite, encourage greater participation and ensure more healthy lifestyles is to ensure regular PE lessons are provided in the primary school curriculum. We will ensure schools have enough funding to provide for specialist teachers that can deliver sport, dance and drama for all pupils as part of a wider strategy to improve the health of our young people.



**DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

## CHAPTER 5

# A DYNAMIC ECONOMY

## DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT MEANS CREATING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT FOR BUSINESSES TO CREATE WEALTH & JOBS.

- **CUT BUSINESS RATES FOR ALL BUSINESSES TO THE LEVEL IN ENGLAND**
- **REDUCE UNNECESSARY RED TAPE**
- **A MORE FOCUSED DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE**
- **SPEND AN EXTRA £100 MILLION A YEAR ON ROADS AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT**
- **ENCOURAGE YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS**

A dynamic and competitive economy is ultimately the only means of creating wealth and jobs, which are essential if we are to improve living standards and raise the quality of our public services.

Labour's return to tax and spend and its obsession with piling on new regulations threatens to impoverish us all. Business is struggling with the burden of an extra £15 billion worth of higher taxes and red tape since 1997 and it is the hard-pressed taxpayer who is funding the Chancellor's excessive spending spree which has blown a hole in the public finances of at least £20 billion. On top of the stealth taxes already imposed, in the coming year the average family in Scotland will be paying an extra

£445 a year following the rise in council tax, National Insurance Contributions and the freeze in tax allowances. All this extra tax and spending comes at the price of slower economic growth as we have seen in Scotland where our economy grew by a miserable 0.1 per cent last year, well below that of the UK as a whole. Against this background, is it any wonder that many people see no point in setting up their own business or are reluctant to take on extra employees.

### IT IS TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

Scottish Conservatives understand the fundamental truth that it is people who create wealth, not politicians, and the role of government is to create the framework of stable laws, low tax, light regulation and high quality infrastructure within which this can take place. This will benefit businesses all over Scotland.

### CUTTING TAX AND RED TAPE

The number of new businesses starting up in Scotland was down by 7 per cent in the last year. This is no surprise, considering the burden of tax and red tape which businesses in Scotland have to bear. We want to reduce these burdens as a matter of urgency. Before the

last Scottish Elections, we warned that our businesses should not be penalised by having to pay higher taxes than elsewhere in the UK as we had worked long and hard in government to establish a Uniform Business Rate throughout the UK – a level playing field for our businesses. One of the first acts of Jack McConnell as Finance Minister in the Labour and Liberal Democrat-run Scottish Executive was to abolish the uniform business rate poundage. Our businesses, large and small, now pay a rate poundage which is nine per cent higher than their competitors in England. So we will cut business rates in Scotland to restore a uniform poundage, ensuring that our businesses are not at a competitive disadvantage compared with their counterparts in England. Gordon Brown is putting up taxes on businesses and their employees this month with his National Insurance increases. By reducing business rates, we will bring taxes down to repair some of this damage.

Regulation is the new way Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians control the economy. It is deeply damaging because the costs to the economy are hidden and it substitutes the judgement of politicians and civil servants for that of owners and entrepreneurs. The Scottish Executive under Henry McLeish set up a unit to Improve Regulation In Scotland, called IRIS. After more than three years, this unit has not abolished a single regulation. We will replace IRIS with CURTIS – a determination to Cut Unnecessary Red Tape In Scotland. We will demand that every government department scour the statute book and bring forward to Parliament for repeal all laws and regulations of no proven worth or need. To ensure this is being done, we will publish an annual report specifying how we have reduced regulatory burdens on Scottish businesses and quantifying the total cost of new and existing regulations.

We recognise the importance of the whisky industry to the Scottish economy and will continue to argue that it should be treated fairly. We argued robustly and successfully against the threat of whisky tax stamps and

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believe the present tax discrimination against whisky should end with drinks taxed on the same basis according to their alcohol content. We will continue to oppose unjustifiable burdens on the industry such as the climate change levy.

### **ENCOURAGING ENTERPRISE**

We believe that a restructuring of the Department of Enterprise and Lifelong Learning would help to encourage enterprise in Scotland. We will create a Department of Enterprise with one Minister. Lifelong Learning will shift to the Department of Education and tourism will be brought into the new Enterprise Department, recognising the fact that it is one of the most significant industries in the Scottish economy.

Tourism benefits in the same way as other businesses from a reduction in tax and red tape and we will oppose any attempt to impose a tourist tax or additional burdens on the industry which would have an adverse effect on visitor numbers and employment. The industry must play a pivotal role in determining its own future, with VisitScotland focusing on the need to market Scotland better abroad and in the rest of the UK. However, we will keep Area Tourist Boards separate from VisitScotland, as they are best able to fulfil their functions as independent membership organisations.

We will combine this with redirecting a significant part of the enterprise budget. We will retain Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, but reduce their budgets and focus their energies on delivering advice and training services to all businesses in Scotland. We will maintain current government investment in skills and learning, particularly through the Modern Apprenticeship programme, and give school children a choice of continuing with traditional education at school or, from the age of 14, pursuing a technical education at a further education college.

This will provide almost £265 million to fund our policies to encourage enterprise. We will use up to £140

million to reinstate the Uniform Business Rate and £100 million to improve our transport infrastructure. This will focus spending on practical measures to help all businesses in Scotland, not just the favoured few.

However, we do recognise the need to encourage young entrepreneurs in Scotland as they are our future wealth creators. We will set up a Young Entrepreneur Business Development Fund of £5 million a year for 18 to 30 year olds. This will be directed to organisations in the private and charitable sectors providing advice and assistance on starting up a business. One of the best current models for this is the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust. We will also work with the voluntary sector on innovative schemes to promote entrepreneurial activity in schools, universities and economically deprived communities.

### **GETTING SCOTLAND MOVING**

A fast and efficient transport system is an essential ingredient of a thriving economy.

As the CBI has pointed out, 'Four years after the formation of the Scottish Parliament, only now has the Executive finally begun to address Scotland's transport needs after years of underinvestment'. However, this won't make up for the backlog caused by the Executive's years of inaction e.g. the freeze on the Conservative roads programme. Accordingly, we will invest in the road and rail improvements which are so essential to our export-oriented economy.

We welcome the fact that the Scottish Executive has finally committed itself to the M74, A8, A80 and building the Aberdeen Western Relief Road to dual carriageway standard, which we agree should be priorities. However, more needs to be done to catch up.

We will commit funding for further upgrading to the A75 and to the A8000, the A82, the A9, the A96 Keith Bypass and the new Kincardine Bridge. We will also look at upgrading other trunk roads through schemes identified as Route Action Plan priorities.

Although we will not ring-fence funding for local authorities, we would encourage councils to tackle the current deplorable state of many local roads and Conservative councillors are committed to doing so. To this end, we will set up a Roads Standards Inspectorate to identify those local and national roads which fall below minimum standards.

In order to improve road safety we will also invest more than £9 million a year in Blackspot Road Funding. This will identify those stretches of road that have recorded accident fatalities and put in place measures to make them safer.

On rail, we note that Labour has failed to build a single extra mile of railway track since 1997. We will support the redevelopment of Waverley Station which is the most important project for improving the railways in Scotland. We are also committed to the Borders rail link and the airport rail links for both Edinburgh and Glasgow.

We will not be able to make up the backlog overnight. However, our investment of an extra £100 million a year will accelerate many of these important projects. This extra investment in transport is only fair considering how much motorists currently pay in tax and how little is spent on transport in return. We do not believe that they should be forced to pay any more and will repeal the sections of the Transport Act which allow councils to levy road tolls to enter our towns and cities. We will also oppose any proposals, such as those in Labour and Liberal Democrats' proposed legislative programme for the second session of Parliament, to extend road user charging for example through the levying of motorway tolls.

## CHAPTER 6

# A FAIR DEAL FOR RURAL SCOTLAND

## DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT MEANS STANDING UP FOR OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES.

- **INVEST MORE IN LOCAL ROADS AND I.T.**
- **PROVIDE A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR OUR FARMERS, FISHERMEN AND FORESTERS**
- **GIVE CONTROL OF FISHERIES TO LOCAL FISHERMEN**
- **SUSTAIN POPULAR RURAL SCHOOLS**
- **ENSURE ACCESS TO VITAL LOCAL HEALTH SERVICES**

We recognise that diversity is one of our defining characteristics as a nation. That is why we will continue to champion the rights of Scotland's rural communities. We want to see a thriving countryside, which is an attractive place in which to live and work. Development of our rural communities requires a strong rural economy. This will continue to be underpinned by the traditional industries of farming and crofting, forestry, fishing and tourism, but needs to be given the opportunity to adapt and diversify. However, successful rural development means combining a strong economy with access to high quality local healthcare, schools and housing as well as improved transport and IT infrastructure.

Such development has not taken place under Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Labour is completely out of touch with the countryside and neither understands nor cares about the rural way of life or the rural economy. Labour has attempted to impose its urban values on everyone. The Liberal Democrats have been happy to push through this agenda on behalf of their political masters and the result has been the rapid decline of the farming industry, a failure to defend our interests in the European Union and a series of irrelevant and politically-correct measures, such as land reform and the banning of fur farming and fox hunting, which do not address the real problems facing rural people.

### **IT IS TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

Scottish Conservatives will empower people in our rural communities by giving them the ability to shape their own futures, whilst providing the strong foundation of a level economic playing field and high quality local public services on which they can build.

### **DEFENDING RURAL COMMUNITIES**

To underpin the rural economy and enable rural businesses to compete in global markets, we will invest

an extra £100 million per year from the Enterprise budget in improving our transport infrastructure. Furthermore, we will put £5 million per year over four years into our Rural Transport Fund, which will cover desperately needed funding for forestry roads in rural areas. A further £5 million per year over four years will go on extending the provision of broadband to small exchange areas ensuring it is available in rural areas and small towns across Scotland.

If they are to thrive then rural communities must have access to first class local services. Our decentralising proposals will enable this to happen. Since 1997, 38 rural schools in Scotland have been forced to close, often against the wishes of parents, teachers and pupils. In England, since 1998, there has been a "presumption against closure" of rural schools and a small schools fund which together have meant that only 13 rural schools have been closed in the last five years.

We will offer a Rural Schools Guarantee based on the English experience. We will ensure that parents throughout Scotland are guaranteed the same choice as those in England by introducing legislation that ensures a presumption against closing a rural school and establishing a rural schools fund to sustain popular

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and successful schools which are the heart of many small communities.

The devolution of power within the health service, which is at the heart of our policy, will be of particular benefit to those living in rural communities. GPs will be able to refer patients to more convenient local community hospitals and other local health service providers. As money will follow the patient, this will give them more money and enable them to expand the range of services they provide and so reduce the need for patients to travel miles for treatment. We will back this up with greater use of broadband within the health service to ensure GPs in remote areas have access to specialist help. We will also ensure that rural communities have access to essential services such as accident and emergency services and maternity units.

In order to increase the rural housing stock, we will relax planning guidelines to allow the building of affordable homes for sale and rent on the periphery of rural communities. This would be achieved through housing associations. Farmers could benefit from a capital injection at a difficult time for the rural economy and housing associations would be able to purchase land at a reasonable price, all of which will enhance the viability of rural communities.

Some of the land reform legislation passed in the first session of the Scottish Parliament has certainly not improved the viability of rural communities. It has made ownership of land less attractive to private individuals, which will lead to loss of investment and local job opportunities. For that reason, we will restore the balance between landowners, tenants, communities and those wishing to access land by repealing Parts Two and Three of the Land Reform legislation, whilst reviewing Part One and the tenant's right to buy in the Agricultural Holdings legislation in light of experience. As it is so widely resented in rural communities as an unwarranted attack on their way of life, we will also allow Parliamentary time for a debate on the repeal of the Wild Mammals Act.

## **A FAIR DEAL FOR FARMERS**

Farmers are the heart of most rural communities, yet the farming industry limps from one crisis to another. In 1996, Total Income From Farming (TIFF) was almost £520 million, with a net farm income of £20,564. By 2001, the TIFF had plummeted to £273 million with net farm income down to £6,011. Whilst incomes have fallen, the levels of bureaucracy have rapidly increased with more and more regulations.

There is no doubt that the Common Agricultural Policy is unsustainable. It costs this country billions of pounds in taxes and higher food prices, yet it is failing to give our farmers a decent living and harms the developing world and our environment. We cannot on the one hand proclaim our commitment to help the developing world while, on the other, defending a system of agricultural support that not only stops poor countries from selling their produce freely, but also subsidises European exports that undercut third world producers.

The best future for farming must lie in moving from a system in which farmers follow signals from government to one in which farmers are able to run their businesses to deliver what their customers want. In principle, we agree with the European Commission's proposals to shift support from production subsidies to environmental payments. However, some of the detail in the proposals would be deeply damaging to Scottish farmers. As presently envisaged the decoupling of payments would penalise larger farms in this country and favour smaller farms elsewhere in the EU. There is also a proposal to distribute modulated money according to EU criteria. This is wrong as any money taken away from farmers in this country should be ring-fenced for distribution within the UK. In an expanding EU, we need less centralisation, not more. As the negotiations on these issues continues, we will continue to stand up for Scotland's farmers and argue for a reform process which takes into account their interests.

At the same time, we will take action to help Scottish farmers compete in the marketplace. Farmers and other rural businesses spend too much time on form-filling and red tape and we will instigate a thorough review of regulations affecting the industry with a view to removing unnecessary burdens such as the 13 day rule and the proposed sheep tagging regime. We will ensure that rural public bodies, such as Scottish Natural Heritage, serve rural communities better by improving their level of practical knowledge and increasing local communication.

Within the planned rural budget, we will work with the farming industry to focus on encouraging regional processing, branding and marketing initiatives and co-operative ventures to improve economic stability in farming communities. We will press the UK Government to look at the competition rules governing farming co-operatives in the light of global rather than domestic competition. We will also maintain a high quality science base for agriculture by preserving the veterinary laboratory network and ensuring that agricultural education is continued by the Scottish Agricultural College in a rural setting.

We will ensure that shoppers can have confidence in the food they are buying by introducing a labelling scheme which tells them the country of origin and method of production so that they know whether it meets our standards of hygiene and animal welfare. We will also press the UK Government to stop food which falls below domestic quality standards from entering this country.

## **SUPPORTING OUR FISHERMEN**

The Common Fisheries Policy is well past its sell by date. It has failed our fishing communities and it has failed to conserve fish stocks. The decision by the European Union to drastically reduce the quotas for haddock, cod and whiting, in response to scientific advice that these were necessary to conserve cod stocks, was a hammer blow to the fishing industry in Scotland. This was particularly

so as it came after a succession of measures taken to conserve stocks such as closed areas, bigger mesh sizes and decommissioning. Yet the Scottish Executive and the Labour Government at Westminster have failed to stand up for the industry and the 44,000 Scottish jobs which are reliant on it. Instead, Scottish fishermen have been presented with a £50 million package, £40 million of which is going on decommissioning and only £10 million on transitional funding. This is effectively a redundancy package, as there is no future for the industry if there are no boats left to fish.

We have argued that more should be put into transitional funding, so that when the industry recovers, we can take advantage of that recovery. However, if the fishing industry is to have any sort of viable future, the CFP must be renegotiated and control passed back to national governments so that we can return the management of fisheries to our local fishermen. They are in the best position to ensure the industry is sustainable because they want to preserve it for future generations.

Aquaculture is also extremely important to the rural economy. As an industry it is particularly burdened with regulation, as no less than eight bodies currently oversee it. We will cut through this bureaucracy and review the whole regulatory regime affecting the industry. We will also promote the growing of shellfish which is an exciting and non-polluting new industry.

Scotland's freshwater fisheries, including coarse, game and sea angling, are equally important to the rural and Scottish economy. Part Three of the Executive's Land Reform Act will have a detrimental effect on investment in our rivers and we will repeal this section of the Act.

## CHAPTER 7

# STRONGER LOCAL COMMUNITIES

## DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT MEANS DEVOLVING POWER TO INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

- **STRONGER, MORE ACCOUNTABLE LOCAL COUNCILS**
- **REDUCE RING-FENCING OF COUNCIL GRANTS**
- **FACILITATE A REAL TERMS FREEZE IN COUNCIL TAX OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS**
- **LOCAL SOLUTIONS TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS**
- **TRANSFER THE REMAINING COUNCIL HOUSES TO COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP**

We wish to see decisions in our society being taken as close to those affected as possible. A strong sense of community is deeply ingrained in the Scottish psyche and we believe that this can be tapped to revitalise civic society in Scotland. However, this will only happen if we liberate our communities from excessive intervention and free the Scottish people to fulfil their potential.

This is not happening at present because all the other parties in Scotland believe that the state and society are one and the same. So they equate a strengthening of the

central state with a strengthening of society. They think that a strong, cohesive society can be decreed from on high. Although we do not doubt their good intentions, we can see for ourselves that this approach is not working as the evidence of social decay is all around us.

### **IT IS TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

Scottish Conservatives respect the diversity that is both the hallmark of a free society and the basis of strong local communities. That is why we will devolve power to people, neighbourhoods, voluntary organisations and councils to enable them to work together to regenerate their communities.

### **REVITALISING LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Too many councils in Scotland are letting down their local communities by failing to deliver good local services or provide value for money. Nothing has done more to undermine public confidence in our local authorities than the fact that the average Council Tax in Scotland has gone up by 42 per cent since Labour came to power with little to show in the way of better local services. It is vitally important to restore public confidence as councils have a vital role to play in rejuvenating our local communities. We

will therefore work with Conservative councillors to reduce the burden of Council Tax. We will encourage them to improve their collection rates, which are well below those in England and will facilitate a three year real terms freeze in Council Tax. All councils in Scotland will have extra resources at their disposal following the transfer of responsibility for health-related social services to the NHS. We will substantially reduce the ring-fencing and strings attached by central government to grant allocation, which forces councils to spend money on the Executive's centrally-imposed priorities and not as they see fit.

This removal of ring-fencing has the added bonus of making councils far more accountable to their local electorate, which, in the longer term, is the key to regaining public trust in our councils. They are in the best position to determine the needs of their local electorate and in turn it should be local people who decide if they are meeting these needs or not. To that end, we will retain the first-past-the-post voting system, which is the best way of ensuring accountable local government. It provides a direct link between a councillor and the ward he or she represents.

We also want councils to raise more of the money they spend. Transferring responsibility for health-related social services will help in this respect, as will management-led buy outs of DLOs and DSOs, which we will encourage and which will give employees a real stake in their own companies. This will give councils far greater autonomy and freedom in the areas for which they are responsible.

Further local accountability could be achieved by the introduction of directly elected Provosts where there is a local demand.

To reinforce the separate identity and importance of local government, we will move the local elections to the mid-point of each Scottish Parliamentary term as recommended by the McIntosh Committee. To encourage more people to become involved in their local council we support a self-financing increase in councillors'

allowances to £12,000 in line with the recommendations of the Kerley Committee, financed through a reduction in the number of councillors.

## **OUR ENVIRONMENT**

Ensuring a clean, healthy environment is an essential part of rebuilding communities. It is a responsibility we all share as we should not limit the ability of future generations to meet their own needs or pass heavy environmental costs on to them. As so much debate focuses on climate change, it is easy to forget that good environmental practice starts at the local level. We will encourage people to tackle the problems in their local area through the promotion of 'civic pride'. Local people will work with local authorities and the police to reduce the crime, vandalism and graffiti that disfigures their areas.

We will also encourage innovative local schemes to promote recycling and help local authorities to learn from other countries and adopt the best practice in dealing with waste. In doing this, we will seek to minimise the costs to businesses and homes as we recognise that economic growth is necessary to pay for 'green' measures.

We will promote energy efficiency and continue to support measures that harness the diverse sources of energy that we have in Scotland. This would involve a balanced energy policy with the preservation of our nuclear capacity and the complementary role played by renewable sources of energy. We will encourage our entrepreneurs to develop the next generation of renewable sources of energy such as wave and tidal power.

We are concerned about the efficiency of the water industry in Scotland. The Water Industry Commissioner has recently reported that the average household in Scotland paid £86 more last year than should have been necessary and our bills are higher than in England. We believe that Scottish Water could function more effectively as a mutual company, so that it is run by and in the interests of Scottish customers and is better equipped to

operate in a competitive environment which will drive down bills for domestic and business customers alike.

## **REGENERATING COMMUNITIES**

Local authorities must also devolve power to other institutions if we are to rebuild our neighbourhoods. We will continue to support the progressive transfer of all remaining council houses to community ownership and management. This will make housing managers more accountable to tenants and empower them to tackle problems such as arrears, maintenance, voids and anti-social behaviour more effectively.

The voluntary sector has a vital role to play in all areas of community regeneration. This is particularly true in relation to helping the most vulnerable people in our society. Although we recognise that the family is still the most important provider of welfare for many people, family breakdown is increasing and this is a major cause of the poverty and distress in many of our neighbourhoods. We need to strengthen families, but also look at innovative ways of addressing social problems. This is the great strength of the voluntary sector when it is given the freedom to adopt its own solutions. We will look at ways of increasing its independence and autonomy, whilst providing a level playing field on which all voluntary organisations can compete for funding.

There is currently too much political control over the activities of voluntary organisations, which is symptomatic of the Executive's whole top down approach to tackling poverty. We will abandon this centralising approach by giving councils their share of Social Inclusion Partnership money and allow them to spend it on the priorities of their areas. We believe that this will be more effective than the current system and is in tune with the new system of community planning.

**VOTE SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVE.**

