

REBUILD SCOTLAND

The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2021

Our plan to rebuild Scotland

1. Full fibre broadband rollout
2. £2 billion extra for our NHS
3. £500 skills grant for everyone
4. Recruit 3,000 more teachers
5. More local policing

Introduction from Douglas Ross

Scotland stands at a crossroads. We are emerging from over a year of restrictions put in place to tackle coronavirus.

Those restrictions closed shops and schools, they separated families and friends. On a national level, they have done incredible damage to our economy, but they have also affected every single one of us personally.

Coronavirus has sadly cost the lives of over 10,000 Scots. However, the pandemic also united us around protecting what mattered.

We came together as communities to follow the rules and help each other through this. The UK and Scottish Governments largely worked together to support the whole country – such as protecting over one million Scottish jobs through furlough and vaccinating 2.6 million Scots in just four months.

We are almost at the end of this health crisis. Yet, we then face the long and difficult task of rebuilding the Scottish economy, of getting businesses back to earning a living and creating jobs for those people who have been left unemployed. This will require the same collective national effort that saw us through the worst days of lockdown.

However, the SNP now want to take Scotland off the road to recovery. Nicola Sturgeon has said that she wants to hold an independence referendum when we are in the “recovery phase” from the pandemic.

And so, Scotland faces a choice. To continue with our recovery or to allow the SNP to pursue a referendum. We cannot have both.

A second independence referendum would damage our economy. Just like in 2014, it would divide our country when we all need to pull together to rebuild.

If we continue with our recovery, we can get our Scottish Parliament 100 per cent focused on getting our economy growing and supporting our public services. On the things that really matter to you and your family.

We can deliver full fibre broadband for every household and business in our country by 2027.

With a growing economy, we can increase the NHS budget by £2 billion.

We can give every single Scot access to £500 for training, every year.

We can restore our schools by recruiting 3,000 teachers.

And we can ensure that there is more local policing to keep your streets safe.

Those are just a few examples from this manifesto of what we can do with a Scottish Parliament working in the national interest. Of the positive programme we can take forward, if we get all of Scotland's parties to focus on our recovery from the pandemic and if we work with rather than against the UK Government.

But we will not be able to achieve any of that if the SNP win a majority in this election, which they will take as a green light to hold a second referendum.

So the only way we can choose to continue with recovery is by stopping that SNP majority and their plans for another independence referendum.

And just like in 2016, the only way that we can prevent that outcome is if voters come together and give their party list vote to the Scottish Conservatives.

We need to stay on the road to recovery to prevent coronavirus resulting in a lost generation of Scots.

Only the Scottish Conservatives can keep our country united and focused on our national recovery from the pandemic.

Let's secure our recovery and rebuild Scotland together.

Douglas Ross

Leader of the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party

End Division. No Referendum. Rebuild Scotland.

Coronavirus has affected every single person in Scotland. Lives and livelihoods have been damaged, and we have all faced moments when it has seemed like it is just too much to bear. The pandemic has been an awful tragedy that has cut the size of our economy by a tenth and claimed the lives of 10,000 Scots. It has also had deeply personal effects, isolating us from friends and family, disrupting learning and work and stopping us from doing the activities we enjoy.

However, thanks to the tremendous success of the UK vaccination programme, which has seen over 2.6 million Scots receive their first dose in just four months and over 500,000 receiving their second, we are now lifting restrictions and can begin to see an end to the lockdown and the pandemic. We will be able to get our lives back and renew our relationships with family and friends again.

Yet we cannot forget, with the promise of happier times ahead, the deep scars that coronavirus has left across Scotland. Our people and our nation need time to rebuild and to heal so that a generation is not permanently affected by the pandemic. Children need to catch up on a year of missed schooling, businesses need to get back to regular trading and our NHS needs to be supported to get through a backlog of delayed operations, put on hold because of coronavirus. Our economy is not expected to recover to pre-pandemic levels until 2024. **It should be the only priority of both of our governments to focus on delivering that recovery**, so that our public services and economy can rebuild fully from the pandemic.

This is a monumental task of national importance. That is why it is incredible that the SNP believes that now is the right time to hold a second independence referendum. Nicola Sturgeon has said that she wants to hold that vote in the first half of the next Parliament and SNP ministers and senior MPs have called for it to be held later this year. The SNP have also committed to hold that referendum regardless of whether it is agreed by the UK Government or not. **If the SNP win control of our Parliament, they will hold that referendum at the earliest opportunity.**

Just when we have gone through a health crisis and are deep in the middle of an economic crisis, the SNP want to start a political crisis - one that would consume our Parliament and our politics just like it did in 2014. That would be the last thing our country needs to recover from the pandemic. It would damage our recovery by distracting attention away from our economy and public services. It would divide our country, set the Scottish Government against the UK Government, and divide our communities, turning friends and family against one another, just when we all need to pull together to rebuild. **We cannot recover with a referendum hanging over our future.**

If the SNP win a majority then they will hold a referendum and put their political obsession ahead of our national interest. **At the Scottish Parliament Election, voters have the chance to say no to a second independence referendum by denying the SNP a majority.** Without a majority they will not be able to pursue a referendum and will need to focus instead on rebuilding our country. A Scottish Parliament without a majority means that all of Scotland's parties will have to work together in a national effort to deliver our recovery.

At the last Scottish Parliament Election, more than 500,000 Scots backed the Scottish Conservatives with their party list vote and together we stopped the SNP from winning a majority and taking forward their plans for a divisive referendum during the last five years. **Together, we can stop them again.** As the largest opposition party, we can stop a referendum and get the Scottish Parliament laser-focused on delivering our recovery from coronavirus. The other parties are too weak to prevent a majority and will not stand up to the SNP.

In this election, Scotland faces a choice between an SNP majority government pushing for another divisive referendum or a Scottish Parliament working to rebuild our country. **Only a party list vote for the Scottish Conservatives can stop a referendum again and secure our recovery from coronavirus.**

Our legislative programme

As part of a Scottish Parliament focused 100 per cent on our national recovery from coronavirus, the Scottish Conservatives would bring forward the following legislation to rebuild Scotland:

Victims Bill

Enterprise Bill

NHS Future Funding Bill

Arts Bill

Local Policing Bill

Communities Bill

Circular Economy Bill

Nature Bill

Animal Welfare Bill

Agriculture Bill

Armed Forces & Veterans Bill

Free Speech Bill

Scottish Parliament Reform Bill

Referendum (Repeal) Bill

Non-Domestic Rates Reform Bill

Driving Scotland's economic recovery

Our economy is not an abstract concept, it concerns every single job and business in our country. It affects the wages of workers and the resources that we have to fund public services. Over the past 14 years, **Scotland's economy has never been the top priority of the SNP Government.**

The restrictions put in place to manage the coronavirus pandemic have done severe damage to our economy. 2020 saw the sharpest recession on record, with the Scottish economy shrinking by a tenth. The Scottish Fiscal Commission estimates that our economy will not recover to pre-pandemic levels until 2024, with unemployment expected to almost double later this year. While the rollout of vaccinations may be bringing an end to restrictions, their legacy on our economy will last for much longer.

The cycle of easing and tightening restrictions has seen shops, restaurants and pubs expend savings as they have been forced to close for protracted periods. Many businesses that have not been directly affected by the restrictions have still seen their customer base shrink or have suffered as a result of supply chains drying up. Sadly, there are businesses that have closed their doors for the last time and many people who have lost their jobs.

The UK Government's furlough and self-employment income support schemes, which have protected over one million Scottish jobs, were a lifeline for many workers. However, we have seen the SNP repeatedly fail employers. Promised funding has taken months to pay out and many businesses have found themselves having to meet the costs of fighting coronavirus alone.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that **supporting our economy to recover will be the foremost challenge that the Scottish Parliament faces over the next five years.** If we do not back businesses and support growth then we will hold back our recovery and people will lose their jobs. In 2014, we saw job creation and investment decisions delayed because of the Independence Referendum. We need to stop an SNP majority and another divisive referendum so that our economy can recover and grow.

Our number one priority

The economic impact of the coronavirus restrictions is going to make unemployment a key challenge in coming months, despite the support provided through UK Government job support schemes. The Scottish Conservatives believe that every single person should have the right to work, to earn a living for themselves and their family. No one should want to work but be unable to get a job.

We need to be focused now on preventing unemployment and helping those who become unemployed to find work. That is why **the Scottish Conservatives believe that achieving full employment should be the number one priority for the next Scottish Parliament.** We would deliver a Scottish economic recovery focused on creating good jobs in every part of our country.

Supporting businesses as we reopen our economy

Throughout this pandemic we have faced a difficult balance between protecting lives and livelihoods – between taking the necessary action to control coronavirus and shutting down large sections of our economy. So many people are worried about the future of their job or their business.

It is essential that we continue to support businesses, to protect jobs and our economy, in the immediate term as we ease restrictions. We must support our economy to survive and recover. That is why we led the opposition within the Scottish Parliament for increased engagement, tax reliefs and support from the SNP Government for business. **The Scottish Conservatives would take a cautious approach to easing restrictions but one that does not leave them in force when the data suggests we can safely reopen faster.**

We also need to ensure that the needs of employers are represented at the heart of decision making as we recover. We would establish a standing Business Recovery Council, to ensure that the interests of business and our economy are central to our plan to rebuild Scotland.

Throughout this pandemic, the Scottish Government has been slow to pay out grant support and many businesses have found themselves ineligible for payments. The SNP has created over 40 business funds and in some parts of the country employers have been waiting months for applications to be processed. That is why we would **introduce a 10-working day national standard for all grant applications** to be processed, with support for councils that are lagging behind. We would **simplify the interface for businesses to access government support**, both for COVID and non-COVID related funding. We would ensure that businesses likely to remain closed for the longest, like nightclubs, continue to receive regular payments.

To ensure businesses can continue to focus on protecting their staff and customers from coronavirus and on recovering from the pandemic, **we would delay the introduction of any new non-COVID related regulations on businesses to April 2023**. We would also introduce a one-week minimum adaptation period between the announcement and introduction of new restrictions, in the instance that they are required for a future local or national outbreak.

Delivering competitive business rates

The pandemic has shown us very clearly that the current system of taxing non-domestic property does not work for many businesses. Physical retailers find themselves paying higher taxes than their online competitors, despite the latter often supporting fewer local jobs and generally enjoying lower costs. Hotels struggling to make ends meet are counted as large businesses and pay a supplement because they occupy a large property. The system for assessing the rateable value of properties is underpinned by legislation set in 1854.

To support businesses to recover from the pandemic and prevent a cliff edge increase in taxes on those that are already struggling, the Scottish Conservatives fought alongside business and secured an extension to the 100 per cent relief on leisure, hospitality, retail, newspaper and aviation businesses for the whole of 2021-22. Given the continued economic uncertainty we would also look to offer **at least 25 per cent rates relief to businesses in 2022-23**. The exact level will be dependent on the economic conditions at the time. **We would also maintain the poundage rate freeze until the 2023 revaluation**. In addition, we will ensure that businesses are not penalised through the 2023 revaluation process for measures taken to make their premises COVID-secure.

The Small Business Bonus Scheme means that a business premises with a rateable value of £15,000 pays nothing in tax, whereas a business with a rateable value of £15,001 pays tax of £5,513. We would retain the Small Business Bonus Scheme and introduce a more tapered scheme on rates relief for businesses with a rateable value of £15,000 and £20,000 to remove the cliff edge on relief.

The Barclay Review made some important contributions, but we are nearly four years on from its publication and it was hindered by the SNP's decision to make it a cost neutral review. We need to be prepared to go much further in reassessing the way we tax business. **The Scottish Conservatives would undertake a wholesale review of the business rates system before the end of the Parliament**. This work would be informed by the ongoing review in England.

A skills revolution

Our economic recovery must be driven by investing in people. Gone are the days when workers would be educated in their youth, find a job and work in that sector all their lives. Now people will have multiple careers and will need to train and acquire skills throughout their working lives. To keep Scotland competitive, we need to overhaul conventions on learning and deliver a skills revolution.

To incentivise lifelong learning, by 2023 we will **introduce a Right to Retrain Account for every single Scottish adult, containing £500 to be spent on training every year**. We will fund 100,000 accounts as a pilot in 2021 and 2022 to help people newly unemployed as a result of the pandemic to gain new skills.

People who have become unemployed need to acquire skills to help them get a job quickly, which means courses with inflexible entry dates which take a year or longer are not suitable. We would bring together employers, skills providers and colleges to form new Institutes of Technology and work with them to design a new system of **Rapid Retraining Courses - short, sharp courses tailored to employment opportunities**. Given the pressing need for digital skills in our economy, we would ensure every single Scottish adult has basic digital skills by 2026.

To tackle unemployment, **we would create a network of Job Security Councils to swiftly find new opportunities for laid-off workers** and ensure that skills are retained in sectors of our economy where there is continued need for them. We will set up the first of these to respond to the downturn in the oil and gas sector.

Apprenticeships are a great way of ensuring that our workforce, and especially the next generation, has the skills our economy needs. The UK Apprenticeship Levy, worth around £246 million in funding for the Scottish Government, was introduced to grow the number of apprenticeships, yet the SNP have failed to meet their own manifesto promises on apprenticeship numbers. We would flip the system to a demand-led approach, whereby employers create places and then come forward to bid for funding from government. This approach could **deliver unlimited apprenticeship opportunities**. Our ambition would be to spend every penny of the Apprenticeship Levy on supporting apprenticeships.

We would also expand funding and subject range for Foundation and Graduate apprenticeships. We would remove the £15,000 artificial cap on government support for an employer for apprenticeship places. We would ensure that apprentices under 25 are required to receive ‘off the job’ training through day or block release. Only 38 per cent of new Modern Apprentices are women, so we would deliver a fresh campaigning initiative to encourage more girls to take up apprenticeships after school.

Rebuilding every part of Scotland

In order to deliver full employment, we need to promote growth and good jobs in every part of our country. People should be able to find a good job locally and not have their opportunities restricted because of where they live.

£1.8 billion is spent each year on economic development in Scotland by our two governments, 32 local authorities and a score of development agencies and public bodies. We need to ensure that resource is being effectively mobilised to create jobs and support businesses to grow. The Fraser of Allander Institute has warned of a “cluttered policy landscape” holding our economy back.

We must take advantage of Scotland’s regional economic strengths and build them up. Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the new South of Scotland Enterprise are catered towards the economic strengths of their areas. Scotland’s two governments are already funding £3.3 billion of investment through the City and Region Growth Deals Programme, which has seen Scotland’s local authorities come together to form natural partnerships. We have also seen business partnerships, such as Opportunity North East, play an important role in securing regional investment.

To deliver growth and create jobs in every part of our country, we would bring forward an Enterprise Bill **establishing an economic development agency in each region of Scotland**. This would enable us to create lasting partnerships between government, local authorities, education providers and business and build on the work started by Growth Deals and the increased contact between councils and businesses as a result of the coronavirus grants process. These new agencies would be a single point of contact between businesses and wider government.

Working with rather than against the UK Government

The economy is an area of shared competency – both the Scottish and UK Governments have responsibility for it. This can lead to instances where Scotland gets the best of both worlds from its two governments, such as the City and Growth Deals programme. However, it can also lead to duplication and waste, such as in the similarities in services offered by the Department for International Trade and Scottish Development International. This friction benefits the SNP's constitutional obsession, but it does not benefit enterprises looking for government support.

To encourage more collaboration between our governments in support of Scotland's economy, we would **give the UK Government shared strategic oversight of these regional economic agencies**. We will work with the UK Government and local government on developing projects for funding through the Community Renewal Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Selling Scotland at home and abroad

Driving Scottish exports will drive our recovery. Scotland has a wealth of iconic national products and to make a success of leaving the EU, we need to promote those products to new markets. We have the opportunity to become a trading nation, but it will require a clear strategy and focus.

One of the great assets that Scotland has is its diaspora. They are both a market in themselves but also ambassadors for our produce reaching larger markets abroad. However, our neighbours in Ireland are much more successful at using their diaspora to build an international network of influencers. The GlobalScot network run by the Scottish Government is comparatively small and makes fewer connections.

The Scottish Conservatives would follow the Irish model to maximise the use of our diaspora to sell Scotland. We would **expand the GlobalScot network to enhance Scotland's international presence and exports**, with the aim of doubling sign ups by the end of the Parliament.

To provide expertise to Scottish companies selling abroad we would establish an export mentor scheme, where companies with exporting experience can support those looking to expand abroad. We would also drive a national exporting campaign, encouraging companies to expand internationally, and **establish a Scottish Exporting Institute**, following the model of the National Manufacturing Institute, to act as a hub of trade expertise in Scotland.

In addition to international exports, the Scottish Conservatives would also look to boost Scotland's trade with the rest of the UK. 60 per cent of Scotland's trade is with the other three UK nations. We would **create a network of Scottish trade hubs in major UK cities to support investment and export opportunities both to and from Scotland**.

Making Scotland the best place in the world to visit

We do not just need to sell Scotland's products abroad, but also its potential as the best place in the world to visit. The Scottish tourism industry is reliant on international customers, yet the pandemic has meant that holidays were cancelled last year and the sector is almost certainly going to miss out on another peak season in 2021. Given that our tourism sector is going to be more reliant on domestic visitors this year, we would deliver **a fresh campaign to market Scotland as the destination of choice for the rest of the UK**.

However, we must also work to protect communities and local services. We will promote responsible tourism, so that businesses bring benefits to the communities and environment that they are located in.

The SNP have taken a one-size-fits-all approach to managing short-term lets, damaging B&Bs and self-catering accommodation in an attempt to manage the Airbnb boom. We are opposed to any regulation that

does not put local choice at its heart and fails to distinguish between established accommodation providers and the recent boom in short-term lets. **We are opposed to the SNP's plans to introduce a tourist tax**, as it will only damage an industry that has already suffered as a result of the pandemic.

Innovation in our recovery

Coronavirus and the restrictions that have been put in place to control it have changed how we live our lives. Many people are now more reliant on their home internet connection to work and do business and this is likely to continue even after the pandemic.

However, the SNP's rollout of the digital infrastructure required to support this has been marked by excessive delay. They promised that their R100 superfast broadband rollout would be finished in 2021, yet they only signed the contract to deliver it in the north of the country at the end of last year, with the completion date being delayed to 2026.

The Scottish Conservatives would **connect every single home and business property in Scotland to full fibre broadband by 2027**. This will allow for a future-proofed digital network capable of supporting 5G mobile coverage. We will use all levers of government to achieve this ambition, including the tax system, planning rules and skills development. We would bring forward legislation requiring every new home to be built with a full fibre connection. We will **begin the rollout in the rural areas left behind by R100**.

We also need to support Scottish companies to take full advantage of our enhanced digital infrastructure. We will move up to 10,000 Scottish businesses online each year through a new e-commerce taskforce, with our ambition being to **make Scotland the 'E-Commerce Capital of Europe'**.

The speed and success of coronavirus vaccine development has demonstrated the importance of innovation. We need to take that same approach to research to drive our economy. That is why we would increase public R&D expenditure in Scotland to 2.4 per cent of GDP by 2026. We would also work with universities to commercialise Intellectual Property, through a new Scottish Future Growth Fund.

The economies of Scotland's city regions are driven by being centres of excellence, whether it is oil and gas in Aberdeen, financial services in Edinburgh or software in Dundee. We would support sectoral clustering to deliver the critical mass and international reputation to attract investment and create skilled jobs. We would use the Scottish National Investment Bank to support innovation in our economy, such as the Scottish space sector to **enhance Scotland's reputation as a world leader in satellite technology**.

Enhancing our circular economy to deliver a green recovery

As we rebuild from the pandemic, we need to ensure that we are delivering a green recovery, where every job is a green job. We need to create a truly circular economy where we reduce, reuse and recycle materials to cut down on waste and create jobs. The best way of achieving this is by working with rather than against businesses. We will encourage innovation to develop new business models which help to secure supply chains, retain value, deliver highly skilled jobs and reduce our carbon footprint. The vast majority of businesses want to reduce emissions and do their part to help Scotland achieve net zero by 2045 and they should be supported and encouraged by government to do so.

To deliver this, we would **bring forward a Circular Economy Bill early in the next Parliament**. This will set new targets for reducing our raw material usage, especially those that are single use or difficult to recycle.

Alongside this, we will invest in our recycling capacity and fund the creation of a Centre for Circular Economy Excellence to drive the rollout of best practice in business, public sector, the third sector and communities. We will establish a **Circular Economy Awards Scheme to recognise innovation in reuse and waste reduction**. We will ensure that public procurement is used to incentivise the delivery of our environmental targets and enhance our circular economy.

We will work with the UK Government to align the introduction of our Deposit Return Scheme with the rest of the UK, ensuring the successful delivery of the scheme. We would continue to maintain Scottish Landfill Tax rates at parity with Landfill Tax in the rest of the UK to deter waste tourism.

Later this year, the UK Government will host the global COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow, the largest international conference to ever be held in our country. We need to use this opportunity to **showcase Scotland as a world leader in tackling climate change and on environmental delivery.**

Delivering a just transition for the energy sector

We need to deliver a wholly renewable-powered Scotland, and we have the wealth of natural resources to achieve this. However, we also need to take account of the important role of oil and gas in the Scottish economy and the tens of thousands of jobs that are reliant on it. We must make sure that our transition to a renewable Scotland is fair and creates opportunities, rather than leaving a legacy of unemployment and damaged communities.

We believe that North Sea oil and gas has a long future of many decades ahead, with petrochemicals continuing to be used in the plastics, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals we use every day. **The UK Government's transformative North Sea Transition Deal will invest up to £16 billion to reduce emissions and secure 40,000 jobs.** We would ensure that the Scottish Government is a partner in the North Sea Transition Deal, to support supply businesses through the transition and as part of our proposals to give the North East a fair share. We have always said that we would base our approach to fracking on scientific evidence of its impact. As such, we are opposed to fracking in Scotland.

We will ensure **that Scotland continues to be at the forefront of the UK's expanding offshore wind sector.** We also support the expansion of onshore wind capacity in Scotland where it is agreed by and benefits local communities, as well as our country as a whole. We would incentivise the creation of a wind turbine decommissioning centre.

We will support the development of emerging renewable technologies, particularly tidal, as we look to make Scotland a renewable powerhouse. We will make the adoption of green hydrogen a priority, as a fuel source in transport and for supporting the exporting of renewable power, as we **deliver Scotland's clean energy transformation.** We will work with the UK Government to develop and expand Scotland's pumped hydroelectric energy storage and carbon capture capacity.

Procuring growth

As a principle, the Scottish Government should support Scottish companies in any way it can. Devolved public bodies in Scotland spend £12.6 billion procuring goods and services each year. This is a massive lever for driving growth, if we mobilise this resource to support the Scottish economy and if we use it to achieve best value rather than lowest cost.

We would deliver a 'Scotland First' approach to procuring goods and services with public money. That means taking into account local jobs, skills development, environmental and social impacts and support for the Scottish economy alongside costs. As part of this we will blacklist companies that fail to pay supply chains on time, make it easier for small and medium sized businesses to bid for contracts and encourage suppliers to deliver solutions, not just services.

Financing our recovery

Many of the public services that we take for granted each day have been put under severe pressure because of the pandemic. Our NHS will have to work through a long backlog of operations and treatment, our schools will have to catch our children up after a year of disrupted education and our council services will have to look

after the most vulnerable people in our society and continue to support local economies. While we need to take account for the spending decisions made to get us through coronavirus, our public services also need to be supported to recover with growing public spending over the next five years. We are committed to tackling Scottish Government waste, but these efficiency savings should be reinvested.

The UK Government has delivered £13.3 billion in additional funding for Scottish public services since the pandemic began. This is on top of the Union already being worth nearly £2,000 in additional public spending per head in Scotland. Being part of the UK is essential for supporting our public services to rebuild.

The SNP have made Scotland the highest taxed part of the UK, ensuring that over 1.1 million Scottish workers, doing the same job and earning the same wage, have less money to spend than their counterparts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is unfair that Scots pay more in tax, especially when we do not receive better services because of SNP mismanagement. Put simply, **in Scotland we pay more to get less.**

The Scottish Conservatives are Scotland's party of lower taxation. However, we also recognise the uncertain fiscal situation and the need to support our public services and economy at this time. As such, **funding our recovery must come first.** Tax cuts should only be considered when we can afford to do so. By the end of the Parliament, **we would seek to ensure that Scottish taxpayers do not pay higher income tax than those in the rest of the UK,** while retaining the starter rate for low earners.

Improving Scotland's transport links

Scotland needs the right transport infrastructure in place to recover and rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic. Connectivity is vital for enabling new businesses to establish themselves in Scotland, allowing existing businesses to grow, attracting visitors and supporting jobs across the country.

The SNP's Infrastructure Investment Plan lacks the ambition required to support Scotland's recovery and they have a record of failure when it comes to delivering major infrastructure projects - from failed ferry procurement to delays to key road and rail projects. The Scottish Conservatives would put an end to this inefficiency and ensure that planned capital funding increases over the course of the next Parliament are better spent on projects which will improve Scotland's productivity and boost economic growth.

Improving connections between Scotland's main population centres will attract investment and benefit surrounding areas. Investing in infrastructure in rural areas will connect communities and boost tourism. To oversee this, the Infrastructure Commission should be put on a statutory footing and become accountable to the Scottish Parliament. The Commission should work with Regional Transport Partnerships to produce long-term infrastructure plans for their areas.

Scotland's roads and railways connect with England's and investment in cross-border infrastructure is vital. We welcome the interim report of the Union Connectivity Review and will work closely with the UK Government to deliver its final recommendations, as well as those of the ongoing Williams Rail Review.

National transport infrastructure

Scotland's roads, rail and ports require significant ongoing investment to meet the changing needs of our population and achieve our environmental targets.

- Upgrading Scotland's roads

The SNP's target to phase out new petrol and diesel cars by 2032 will not be met unless action is stepped up now. **An ambitious new electric vehicle action plan** is required to take Scotland into the next phase of the rollout and deliver a complete national charging infrastructure by 2025. As well as public charging points, we would continue to subsidise their installation in homes and workplaces. We would also review barriers and launch a new scheme to support the installation of charging points outside flats, and require all new large

developments to incorporate charging points. Subsidies to make electric vehicles more affordable to consumers must also continue, including for used vehicles.

The transition to electric vehicles is a major shift, but one which still relies on having a good road network. Several key routes in Scotland are in desperate need of improvement, including the A77 and A75, which are vital for ports in the area, the A82 between Glasgow and Inverness, the A90 between Dundee and Aberdeen, the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness, and the A9 between Perth and Inverness.

The entirety of the A1 in Scotland should be upgraded to a dual carriageway, with the Scottish and UK Governments working together to ensure the road is fit for the future. The M8 should be extended to three lanes and work on a new road to bypass the A83 Rest and Be Thankful must begin immediately. An urgent solution to ice forcing the Queensferry Crossing to close must be in place by the winter. All these projects will **improve links between Scotland's major cities** and benefit areas on route.

Local projects such as the Sheriffhall flyover, a Dundee Northern Relief Road and bridge maintenance in Aberdeenshire should be taken forward by Regional Transport Partnerships.

We also need to promote hydrogen-powered vehicles - the Scottish Conservatives would invest in this infrastructure and carry out a feasibility study on a **'hydrogen network' between Aberdeen and Inverness**.

- Revitalising our railways

Rail is crucial for connecting communities across Scotland and supporting tourism. The 1960s Beeching cuts saw many of Scotland's iconic railways and stations close, and the Scottish Conservatives would carry out a comprehensive review of such decisions. Where there is an economic case for it, **we would reopen rail lines and stations to support local growth**. Work to improve rail links between Aberdeen and the Central Belt needs to be accelerated, plans for a direct line between Perth and Edinburgh should be taken forward, the Highland main line should be dualled and the Scottish Government should work with the UK Government to extend the Borders Railway to Carlisle. Efforts to decarbonise Scotland's railways must be stepped up, including the electrification of more lines.

Scotland's rail delivery model must prioritise improvements for passengers and value for money for taxpayers, while recognising that COVID-19 will have a permanent impact on travel patterns. To recognise this shift, the Scottish Conservatives would introduce a flexible season ticket to save money for workers who are commuting for less than five days a week and implement the Rail Delivery Group's wider recommendations on fare regulation reform. We also support pegging Scottish rail fares to the Consumer Price Index instead of the Retail Price Index to protect passengers.

Finally, we would **introduce a Scottish Smart Travel Card which would enable passengers to use all types of domestic transport anywhere in Scotland with one contactless card**. This would consolidate concessions, ensure passengers pay the cheapest fare and automatically refund delayed or cancelled journeys.

- Supporting the aviation industry

Scotland's airports must be supported to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on air travel, including the maintenance of vital routes within the UK. A clear roadmap for when and how international travel can restart is essential, alongside ongoing support for the sector while restrictions remain in place. The Scottish and UK Governments should monitor the recovery of domestic flights and consider the use of public service obligations or the subsidy of airport charges if any of Scotland's key routes are under threat.

We support maintaining parity with the rest of the UK on Air Departure Tax.

- Promoting Scotland's ports

The Scottish Conservatives believe that freeports present a unique opportunity to boost Scottish exports and local economies, particularly as oil revenues decline, so **we will support freeport bids from ports across Scotland**, including one in the North East. We would also support trust ports to submit joint bids, for freeport status or other opportunities, while also working to support all ports by reviewing planning regulations, utilising enterprise zones, incentivising diversification and ensuring they benefit from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. To further support coastal communities, we will prioritise them for access to Community Investment Deal funding.

Scotland's ports and harbours play an important role in our economy but also provide vital transport connections for Scotland's island communities. The SNP have repeatedly let these communities down – allowing harbour infrastructure and vessels to degrade, failing to improve performance and overseeing the failed procurement of two new ferries for CalMac's west coast routes. **We would scrap Caledonian Maritime Assets and introduce long-term contracts for ferry operators** as part of a review of island connectivity, aimed at simplifying ferry services and ensuring they are as sustainable, efficient and effective as possible while also considering alternative ways of connecting island communities.

Local transport infrastructure

The state of local roads must be improved to benefit all road users. The Scottish Conservatives would **invest £200 million in a Road Maintenance Fund to repair potholes** over the course of the next Parliament, through which councils can bid for funding. We would also ensure councils have the funding they need to keep on top of road maintenance by passing on increases in the Scottish Government's capital funding to councils.

During the pandemic, the number of people cycling and walking to work has increased and we must take steps to maintain this. Due to the changed context, the Scottish Government's 2030 active travel ambition should be brought forward to the end of the next Parliament. Over the course of the next Parliament, we would **increase the share of the transport budget which is spent on active travel to 10 per cent**.

All local schemes must meet a range of standards to ensure they are suitable for buggies, wheelchair users and older people, set by the Active Nation Commissioner whose role should be put on a statutory footing. Temporary schemes implemented during the pandemic must be evaluated and only maintained if they have been effective. Councils should lead post-COVID reviews of changed travel patterns in their area and be encouraged to create more low traffic neighbourhoods, bus and bike only roads, school streets and low emission zones where they would be beneficial. By the end of the next parliament, **every city in Scotland should have a cycle network designed for commuting**. In 2021, we would invest £1 million in cycle proficiency training for adults and cycle repair vouchers to encourage more people to take up cycling.

Active travel should sit alongside a strong public transport system in every part of Scotland. Rural bus routes have been in decline for years, and the pandemic has accelerated this. To address gaps in bus services, the Scottish Conservatives would **implement provisions in the 2019 Transport Act to allow local councils to propose bus services in their area**. We would also review the role of Regional Transport Partnerships in the delivery of transport services, with an ambition to develop more integrated transport networks.

To help achieve emissions targets, we would develop a long-term transition strategy to give operators the confidence to invest in hydrogen and electric buses. This would include a multi-year commitment to the Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme and making loans and leases available from the Scottish Government. Alongside this, a scrappage scheme should be launched to encourage operators and local authorities to upgrade their buses. Accessibility for disabled passengers should be a condition for receiving support for any new routes or transition plans.

Rebuilding our communities

The Scottish Conservatives believe that every part of Scotland and every community should be backed to succeed. We believe that decisions are best made as close as possible to the people who are affected by them and that choice and variation of approach between communities is a national strength, not a weakness.

However, 14 years of SNP Government has seen centralisation and uniformity prioritised over localism. Their centralisation agenda has resulted in many communities across our nation being left behind and suffering from underinvestment. They ignore local objections and raid the budgets of local services. They are the party of Yes Scotland, not the party of all of Scotland.

The Scottish Conservatives understand the link between strong local economies, good council services and a vibrant community. We will respect local decision making and ensure that local services get the funding they deserve. We will stand up for the interests of all parts of Scotland and support every village, town and city to rebuild.

Fairly funding our local services and empowering councils

Our councils are responsible for maintaining our roads, educating our children, disposing of our waste and maintaining public buildings and leisure facilities. They are an essential component of government and ensure that local solutions are delivered for local problems rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

However, the SNP have stripped our councils of powers and funding. They have raided local government budgets to finance their own pet projects. From 2007 to 2019, the Scottish Government's budget increased at more than double the rate of the grant they gave to councils. While the Barnett Formula ensures that the Scottish Government's budget is linked to UK Government spending, there is no such protection for local government and the services they run.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives would bring forward a **Communities Bill to introduce fair funding for our councils**. This would deliver a new financial framework that ensures councils automatically receive a set percentage of the Scottish Government budget each year, mirroring the relationship the Scottish Government has with the UK Government. This would **prevent the Scottish Government from underfunding councils and local services** by failing to pass on increases in its own budget. We would ensure that councils have full control over the funding they receive through this framework.

However, fair funding is just the start of empowering councils. We also need to ensure proper protections for local decision making. In 2019, four in ten planning decisions appealed to SNP ministers had their original decision from the council overturned. That means hundreds of developments going ahead on the instruction of an SNP Government in Edinburgh against the wishes of communities and local representatives across the country. This is a clear SNP power grab.

We would amend planning laws, so that the Scottish Government cannot overturn a local planning decision. This would ensure that major developments require engagement with communities and that national infrastructure needs to deliver clear local benefits to those that will be affected by it.

Community-led growth

As we rebuild our economy from the devastating impact of coronavirus, we must back every single community across Scotland to succeed. The Scottish Conservatives believe that where you live should not limit your opportunities. Everyone deserves to be able to get a good job without having to leave the community that they grew up in or have built their life in.

However, under the current SNP Government, parts of our country have not seen the investment they deserve. We would **deliver a programme of Community Investment Deals, worth up to £25 million each**, to create

good local jobs. Our initial £550 million investment in these Deals would be tailored to the existing strengths of a local area and would look to leverage additional investment from the UK Government, councils and local employers, following the existing City and Region Deal model.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that we should do all that we can to remove geographic discrimination across Scotland. We have long campaigned against households and businesses in remote and rural parts of Scotland having to pay higher delivery charges. We would work with the UK Government to **make it illegal to charge higher costs when posting to remote and rural parts of Scotland**.

We would also support the operation and formation of co-operative enterprises and mutual banking as communities recover from the pandemic.

Restoring our town centres and high streets

Our town centres and high streets have been hit hardest by the coronavirus pandemic. Yet many of them have been struggling for the last 14 years, with many major brands moving to out of town sites or online. Under the SNP, **every year we see more and more local businesses shutting up shop for good on our high streets**.

To rebuild our communities from this pandemic, we need to tackle the long-standing problems which have emptied our high streets and undermined local businesses. We need to look at how we transform our high streets into experiences, where people go to eat, do activities and shop. Services were originally driven to the high streets on account of the footfall from shops, we now need to use those services to re-engage communities with local shopping.

To make them more competitive, we would support our councils to exempt high street and town centres from paying any business rates. We would also **provide full funding for councils to scrap parking charges on publicly-owned car parks** to encourage more people to support our high streets to recover.

Closed shutters and ‘to let’ signs are a blight on our town centres and high streets, a reminder of their decline. To tackle this, we would support communities’ ‘first right to buy’ when local businesses are facing closing their doors. To increase footfall in our town centres and turn them into places where people live, we would also relax planning laws to allow for the re-development of long-term unoccupied business properties into good quality housing.

We know the positive effect that green spaces can have, not only on the environment but also on people’s mental and physical health. This has never been so visible as during lockdown. Therefore, we want to expand communal green spaces so that people who don’t have access to private gardens can still enjoy green spaces. To achieve this, we will work with councils to **redevelop brownfield sites in the centre of large towns and cities as new park areas, as part of a new national public gardens strategy**.

New housing with new services

Scotland will need tens of thousands of new homes over the next five years. However, we know that new housing developments put pressure on existing local services like roads, schools and shops. Far too many villages, towns and cities in Scotland have seen new housing estates created, with little thought to how this will impact on essential local infrastructure. In our rush to build new housing, we have failed to build new communities.

The SNP have consistently failed to achieve their housing targets - they promised 50,000 affordable homes over this Parliament but have delivered fewer than 40,000. The Scottish Conservatives believe that we need to set ambitious housebuilding targets for the next Parliament to deliver the homes that Scotland needs. That is why **we would deliver 60,000 new affordable homes**, with two thirds of these being new social housing. We will aim to increase overall house building across all sectors to 25,000 per year by the end of the

Parliament. To support building and renovations in remote and rural parts of Scotland, we will invest £50 million through the Rural Housing Fund.

Scotland has an ageing population, so there is an ever-increasing need for housing to be accessible. This issue is compounded by a lack of disabled housing, with the number of people with a disability on council waiting lists doubling in the last two years. We will encourage the future proofing of new-build housing for easier accessibility adaptations. To help older people stay in their homes for longer, we will work with councils to ensure the adequate delivery of care and repair services across Scotland.

We welcome the report of the cross-party Tenement Maintenance Working Group and will look to deliver on its recommendations in the next Parliament, to keep tenements safe, energy efficient and well maintained.

Delivering energy efficiency in homes is an essential part of achieving our net zero target. The Scottish Conservatives amended the Fuel Poverty Act so that the Scottish Government will have to support all fuel-poor households to reach EPC C by 2030. A drive to renovate homes could create thousands of jobs across Scotland, while also ensuring we meet our climate change targets.

To achieve this ambition, **we would spend over £2.5 billion over the next five years on energy efficiency in homes and buildings.** We would also create a Help to Renovate scheme, to support owners making their properties more energy efficient and set aside a specific Rural Transition Fund to support energy efficiency in off grid areas.

We recognise that energy efficiency is being held back in Scotland due to a skills gap, especially in rural areas. We would make delivering the skills necessary to improve energy efficiency a key priority for our skills programmes. To further improve energy efficiency standards, we would review and update the EPC system.

There are over 47,000 long-term unoccupied properties in Scotland. In many cases these properties are dilapidated and have become a blight on our communities. We would **introduce Compulsory Sales Orders for long-term unoccupied properties in Scotland.**

We will support housing associations and consider new models for meeting Scotland's social housing needs. There are 685 housing associations across the UK but only 11 of these are in Scotland. We would fund a pilot programme for cooperative housing in Scotland.

However, **we cannot just build housing - we need to build communities.** We need to deliver proper town planning and the services that people will use, so that new housing is not a burden on those people who already live in an area. This includes shops, parks, public pathways, roads and schools. We would work with councils to more effectively secure investment in local services from large home developments.

The Grenfell fire was a horrible tragedy that showed how unsafe some of our housing stock is. Safety experts have raised concerns about the cladding used in at least 85 high rise blocks and over 130 other buildings, including schools, across Scotland. The SNP Government has received £97 million in Barnett Consequentials from a UK Government scheme to remove unsafe cladding in England but have so far failed to act. **We would follow other parts of the UK in banning the use of combustibile cladding in Scotland.** We would also undertake an extensive audit to identify all buildings where combustibile cladding is used, not just high-rise properties, and support remedial work where it is needed.

Reducing the costs of buying a home

Taxes on the buying and selling of property in Scotland are among the highest in the world. The SNP's decision to replace stamp duty with Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (LBTT) in 2015 further increased costs on homebuyers.

In response to the pandemic, the SNP Government increased the threshold at which LBTT was paid to £250,000 last year. However, in this year's budget they decided to drop the threshold back down to £145,000, costing homebuyers an extra £2,100 in tax per transaction.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that everyone should have the opportunity to own their home and that our tax system should support that ambition. That is why **we would permanently increase the threshold for paying LBTT to £250,000**, with the five per cent band starting from that point as it does now. This means that over three quarters of home buyers will pay no tax at all. We would also introduce this threshold for non-residential property.

To take account of the variations in house prices across Scotland, we would allow councils to create their own local LBTT discount schemes. We would also review the Additional Dwelling Supplement to ensure that families moving home are no longer unfairly targeted by it.

The SNP's decision to end Help to Buy will damage the housing market and remove vital support for those unable to afford the full costs of buying a home. **We will restore funding for the Help to Buy scheme.**

Our council tax system is outdated but it is well understood and raises a stable form of revenue with which to fund local services. The SNP have promised reform in four manifestos but failed to deliver it. We believe that **certainty and stability are what families need right now**. In the absence of cross-party support for a reform proposal we will not support any overhaul or revaluation of the council tax system over the next five years. It will be for parties to build a consensus in the next Parliament around a reformed system and then put it to the Scottish people in the next election.

Supporting community spirit

The coronavirus pandemic and restrictions have made us appreciate the value of community and brought out the very best in human kindness. More people in Scotland are volunteering than ever before, whether it is picking up shopping for elderly neighbours who are shielding or through national charities.

It is important that we do not allow this community spirit to disappear - we must utilise it to help rebuild Scotland from this crisis. We will create a national database to make it easier for people across Scotland to find volunteering opportunities in their local area and for organisations to access willing volunteers.

To support voluntary sector organisations to better deliver services, we will ensure that those in receipt of national funding receive multi-year settlements. Our new fiscal framework will enable councils to do the same for those in receipt of local funding. This will ensure that the third sector can get on with the job of supporting vulnerable groups and our communities with certainty, rather than having to worry about funding each year.

Kick starting Scottish culture

Scotland has a strong cultural identity which benefits all of our citizens and attracts visitors from around the world. However, our cultural institutions have been hit hard by the pandemic and need support to reopen.

To help music venues, heritage sites and festivals recover, we will set up a £50 million Cultural Kick Start Fund. As part of this, we will deliver **a half price entry programme for heritage sites for the remainder of 2021.**

We will also **bring forward an Arts Bill** to ensure local authorities carry out a minimum level of cultural planning and engagement, provide a more sustainable funding model and introduce measures to ensure a fairer geographic spread of resources.

The Gaelic language is one of Scotland's greatest cultural assets and we would continue to promote and support it. We would refresh the Gaelic Language Plan this year with an ambition to increase the number of Gaelic speakers.

Delivering a fair share for the North East

The North East of Scotland used to be the powerhouse of the Scottish economy but under the SNP's centralisation agenda, it has been left unsupported as the oil and gas industry has faced difficulties. Taxes have been hiked on Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire businesses and key services like schools, GPs and the police have seen cuts. At the same time, Aberdeen Council receives the lowest central funding grant from the SNP of any council area.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that the North East deserves a better, fairer share from the Scottish Government. We will support the economy of the North East to get back on its feet. We will create a North East enterprise agency to better grow the economy of the region, backed by £1 billion over the next ten years to create jobs and opportunities. We will also back the delivery of a freeport in the North East.

As part of our fair funding settlement for councils, we will ensure that the North East is not penalised for having higher council tax and business rates revenue than anywhere else in Scotland. **Local taxes raised in the North East should be used to fund schools, roads and local services in the North East.** We will protect local services across the region from centralisation, including by re-opening the Mulberry Unit at Stracathro, the minor injury unit in Banff and Turriff and the Inch community hospital.

We will upgrade and build new infrastructure across the North East. We will upgrade key roads by dualling the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness and improving the A90 at Laurencekirk and Ellon. We will review the reopening of local railways and stations if they will drive local growth, like the Formartine and Buchan Railway and Brechin and Newtonhill stations. We will improve broadband and mobile phone signal by beginning our plan to roll out full fibre broadband in rural and northern parts of our country.

Restoring world-class Scottish education

Nicola Sturgeon asked to be judged on her education record and said it was her “number one priority”. On this basis, the poor state of Scotland’s schools is a damning indictment of her leadership. Under the SNP, teacher numbers have fallen, Scotland has slid down international league tables, subject choice has declined and the attainment gap has persisted.

Schools have been further let down during the coronavirus pandemic. Remote education was patchy, the 2020 exam results were an unprecedented fiasco, and not enough is being done to support children to catch up. **We must not allow the SNP’s failures during the pandemic to create a lost COVID generation.**

Every child deserves the opportunity to go to a good local school that is in a decent condition and has enough teachers to offer the range of subjects they need for their future. Access to a good education can be life changing and getting it right for Scotland’s children now will prevent the COVID-19 pandemic robbing them of opportunities.

Equipping our young people with the skills they need to succeed in a changing global economy also benefits Scotland as a whole. A well-educated population supports economic growth, creates jobs and improves productivity, while also reducing poverty and inequality.

Restore our schools

The Scottish Conservatives believe a knowledge-rich curriculum gives children the best start in life. Experts have raised concerns about the SNP’s Curriculum for Excellence and the OECD are currently reviewing it. The OECD review must be published immediately after the election - we would implement recommendations which would restore standards in Scotland’s schools.

The SNP have also asked the OECD to review assessments and qualifications, hinting that, after cancelling exams in 2020 and 2021, they would scrap them for good. The Scottish Conservatives would oppose this and support the continued use of exams as they are the best way to equitably assess the achievements of pupils.

We would also rejoin international studies and comparisons including the TIMSS and PIRLS rankings - we should learn from other countries around the world instead of shying away from comparisons.

Boosting the teaching workforce

Teachers are key to improving school standards, but they are overstretched and undersupported. The Scottish Conservatives would review the quality of teacher training and introduce a new workforce strategy worth **£550 million to recruit 3,000 more teachers over the course of the next Parliament**. This would support people with experience in sectors such as STEM to start a new career in teaching and create a Rural Teacher Fund to attract teachers to work in rural areas.

In addition, the recommendations of the Independent Panel on Career Pathways for Teachers should be implemented to improve retention and a review of the use of supply teachers and part-time contracts should be carried out to ensure employment conditions do not result in trained staff leaving the profession.

To improve participation in STEM subjects, we would introduce **a dedicated STEM teacher in every primary school**.

Increasing teacher numbers would improve subject choice and reduce class sizes and the need for composite classes. This would allow us to introduce a ‘subject guarantee’ to students – a commitment that **everyone will be able to take at least seven subjects in S4**.

Fair funding for our schools

Ensuring schools have the funding, buildings and equipment they need is also key to improving standards.

School funding is allocated by councils – Scottish Conservative plans to introduce a fair funding formula to pass increases to the Scottish Government’s revenue budget on to councils will ensure adequate funding is available for schools in every part of Scotland.

In addition to their fair share of revenue funding, schools also need sufficient capital funding. Over 10 per cent of Scottish schools are in Poor or Bad condition, leaving over 60,000 children in sub-standard classrooms. Our plans to also pass on increases in the Scottish Government’s capital budget to councils would help them to maintain existing school buildings, and we would ensure all promised funding for new buildings is allocated by September 2021 so work can begin as soon as possible. These steps would **ensure every child is learning in a suitable local school building by the end of the next Parliament.**

Improving school standards

The final key to improving school standards is inspection and accountability. We would establish a **new independent school inspector** that would report directly to the Scottish Parliament. It would inspect schools regularly, ensuring they are no longer left for over a decade without inspection, hold local authorities to account for the standard of their schools, and monitor and publish impartial data on school standards across Scotland. In addition, the new inspectorate would enforce the requirement for schools to be politically neutral.

Clear inspection ratings should continue to be given to inform parents and support schools to improve. Schools which struggle to improve would receive direct intervention from the new inspectorate and innovation would be encouraged to boost school improvement. We would introduce an annual £1 million Somerville Fund to recognise individual schools who have developed innovative practice and enable them to share it within their local area.

Supporting children to catch up

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on our children’s learning. While disadvantaged pupils have been worst affected, every single child has been impacted and a long-term system-wide programme is required to help them catch up.

We would invest £120 million in a two-year catch-up premium, allocated directly to schools on a per pupil basis. Evidence-based guidance on the most effective interventions for each year group should be provided to enable schools to spend this funding well. We would also set up a £4 million Transition Fund to support children starting primary or secondary school in 2021.

Further targeted support is required for disadvantaged pupils who have been hit hardest by school closures. **The Scottish Conservatives would set up a £35 million national tutoring programme** to provide one-to-one or small group tuition for children who need the most help to catch up.

Children’s mental wellbeing has also been impacted by the pandemic. As an immediate response, we would invest £8 million in additional training for school staff and holistic support from specialist mental health charities. Over the course of this Parliament, **trained mental health leads with links to NHS mental health teams should be introduced in every school.**

Tackling inequality

Closing the attainment gap is vital if we are to give every child in Scotland the same opportunity to succeed. Despite being in charge of Scotland’s schools for 14 years, the SNP have failed to close this gap.

The Scottish Conservatives would improve the way in which attainment funding is allocated and spent. We would work with experts to develop a more accurate way of measuring deprivation amongst school children. The current Attainment Scotland Fund is split into multiple pots which are allocated and distributed in different ways – we would introduce a new **multi-year commitment to allocate £1 billion of attainment funding** directly to all schools over the course of the next Parliament, based on the level of deprivation amongst their pupils. We would develop a menu of evidence-based interventions, including tutoring, for schools to inform how they choose to spend attainment funding in the way that works best for their local community.

In addition to interventions in the classroom, the Scottish Conservatives would immediately introduce **free school breakfasts and lunches** for all children in primary and special schools. We would also support continued provision for eligible children during the school holidays.

Pupils with additional support needs

Children with additional support needs are being let down by the SNP.

Our catch-up premium would be weighted to provide more funding for children with additional support needs, accompanied by bespoke advice on the most effective interventions for them. We would also implement the recommendations of the review into additional support for learning and continue to grow the support staff workforce - including by improving data collection on the composition of this vital workforce and formalising the role of pupil support assistants.

We would ensure initial teacher training fully prepares all teachers to identify and support children with conditions such as dyslexia and autism. Alongside improving diagnosis pathways, these measures would help ensure children and families who require low level support are able to get the help they need. For those who have more complex needs, we will ensure there is sufficient capacity in specialist provision and work closely with the third sector and child and adolescent mental health services to ensure the right support is in place.

Supporting children's wellbeing

Beyond education, schools also play a crucial role in supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Issues such as nutrition and climate responsibility should be embedded within the curriculum from an early age. Schools must also be supported to provide older children with the most effective information on drugs, alcohol, smoking and sexual health, including by introducing dedicated PSHE teachers in all schools. Schools should emphasise the importance of **respect, tolerance and equality** in an age appropriate way to prevent bullying, racism, homophobia and misogyny.

All children should be able to take part in creative subjects and activities such as music and sport both during and after the school day. As a basic right, we must **ensure every child has the opportunity to play an instrument, learn a language and play a sport at school:**

- We would ensure instrumental music teachers can access GTCS registration and accreditation and make music education a core part of the curriculum to ensure lessons are available to all students free of charge.
- We will fully implement the commitment to teach children two additional languages and develop a new strategy to increase the number of students studying languages in the senior phase of secondary school, as well as supporting Gaelic education in areas of historic prevalence where pupils and parents wish to learn.
- To improve PE provision within schools, we would review the physical education training which teachers receive and introduce specialist PE teachers in primary schools by the end of the next Parliament.

Outside school, extracurricular activities like music lessons and sports clubs are often only available to families who can afford them, meaning disadvantaged children miss out. After school activities also provide essential childcare for working parents. We would introduce **free wraparound childcare** for children in

Primary 1-3, equivalent to five hours a week, and work with schools and local community groups to build capacity and create choice for parents.

To help children and young people recover from the disruption of COVID-19 and ensure those from deprived backgrounds can access the same experiences as their peers, we will ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate in at least one week of residential outdoor education in their school career. These experiences have proven to be life-changing in terms of building confidence and self-esteem.

Progression from school

To support young people with subject and course choices, we would accelerate the ongoing review into careers advice and ensure it is focused on long-term employability, not just an immediate positive destination.

To put this ethos into practice, we would replace the current school leaving age of 16 with a new skills participation age of 18. We would introduce paid internships for every S4 pupil, make foundation apprenticeships available in every school and review the options available for young people at SVQ Level 4.

We would **support Scottish universities to maintain their world-leading reputation** and improve access for Scottish students, including by continuing to provide free university tuition and introducing a special support payment for students in receipt of benefits.

To **rebalance the relationship between academic and vocational education**, we would launch a review of the post-18 education landscape in Scotland. In the interim, we would ensure all Apprenticeship Levy funds are spent on apprenticeships, remove limits on the number of funded apprenticeships available and guarantee off-the-job training for apprentices aged under 25.

Scotland's colleges are central to our economic recovery so new regional taskforces should be set up to bring together education agencies with local businesses to ensure the right skills are in place – working with new economic development agencies in every region. In each region, we would also support employers, universities and colleges to come together to establish Institutes of Technology to deliver modular courses and higher-level technical training in specialist areas.

In addition, we would work with the sector to develop a **national student mental health action plan** for universities, colleges and apprenticeship providers – coordinating services and addressing disparities in the support available to different types of students.

Supporting children & families

The 1,001 days between conception and a child's second birthday have more influence on their future than any other time in their life.

To ensure every child has the best start, we would support the continued review and development of the universal health visiting service. In addition, Family Nurse Partnerships must be available for young mothers in all areas of Scotland and expanded to support more vulnerable women aged 20 and over. We would pilot the use of Family Hubs to bring health, education and social care services together and provide a 'one stop shop' of parenting support for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Improving access to early years education

Early years education is crucial to giving every child the best start. We would take action to increase uptake of the 600 hours of funded childcare available to disadvantaged two-year-olds. **The 1,140 hours of funded childcare promised to all 3- and 4-years-olds must be introduced in August 2021** without any further delay and must deliver the choice promised to parents. All parents who choose to defer their child starting primary school should be able to continue to access funded childcare from August 2021. We would also invest £1 million in early language support this year for disadvantaged children at nursery to reduce the 'word gap' before they start school.

Prioritising children's social care

While every effort should be made to support families to remain together, we must ensure Scotland has a strong care system for when this is not possible. Kinship care should always be supported if it is an option for looked after children. **The recommendations of the Independent Care Review must be implemented in full and on time by delivering The Promise.** To further support those in foster care, we would roll out the Mockingbird Programme across Scotland to build supportive communities around foster families. We would also implement a register of foster carers to further professionalise the sector. A review into the barriers to adopting should be carried out and all support available to looked after children should remain in place for those who are adopted. We would maintain the Care Experienced Bursary for students and pilot similar support for estranged students. We support the Wave 70/30 ambition to reduce adverse childhood experiences.

Supporting our NHS

The NHS is a cherished institution which is central to our British values. For over 70 years it has cared for us, from the cradle to the grave, and it has continued to do so throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the risks and challenges faced by staff every day.

COVID-19 hospital admissions have reduced significantly from their peak, but the NHS still faces the most challenging period in its history. The vaccination programme is ongoing, many people are being affected by long COVID, thousands of appointments, treatments and operations have been postponed, and the peak of the mental health impact of the pandemic is still ahead. The Scottish Conservatives will focus on supporting the NHS to rebuild and recover.

We remain committed to the founding principles of the NHS – universal, comprehensive, and free at the point of use – and would **protect NHS funding by enshrining a ‘double lock’ in legislation** guaranteeing that the NHS budget will increase by Barnett consequentials or 2 per cent more than inflation, whichever is highest, in every year of the next Parliament. Based on current estimates this would result in an **overall increase in annual funding of at least £2 billion** by 2025-26.

On top of annual funding increases, we would provide an additional **£600 million to tackle the NHS backlog** in 2021-22. A major clinician-led prioritisation exercise must be carried out to ensure those in most need get seen first. Outpatients appointments and elective surgery must be available seven days a week, with remote consultations offered where appropriate. We would speed up the delivery of Early Cancer Diagnostic Centres and prioritise boosting the diagnostic workforce, which is key to tackling the ‘hidden backlog’ of those who are yet to be referred due to the pandemic. A sustained and targeted campaign should be launched to encourage people who have been putting off visiting their GP to come forward, with a focus on preventing health inequalities worsening.

Recognising NHS staff

Immediate action to support staff retention is required. We would work to agree a **new multi-year pay deal** for Agenda for Change staff as well as doctors and dentists. We would invest an additional £40 million in staff wellbeing this year, including rest facilities and mental health services, and fully establish a Scottish Workforce Specialist Service to provide ongoing mental health support to NHS and social care staff. Staff who have left the NHS should continue to be supported to return to the health service, while all staff who are approaching retirement should be offered opportunities to alter their roles instead of leaving. The Scottish and UK Government should work together to address the pension taxation issues preventing senior consultants from working extra shifts.

To address long-term recruitment issues, a comprehensive approach to overseeing workforce planning for the whole of NHS Scotland, in every profession and at every level, is required and accurate data must be available to underpin planning assumptions. Medical school training places should be increased in line with forecasted future need. Priority should be given to Scottish domiciled students, and access and graduate entry programmes should be promoted. More flexibility is also required during the early stages of doctors’ careers to improve retention.

To support the wider NHS workforce, safe staffing legislation should be fully implemented to ensure clinical involvement in staffing decisions and clear processes for concerns to be raised. Nursing student places should be increased and steps should be taken to widen access and improve student retention. Workforce planning should aim to create the correct skill mix and utilise allied health professionals to their maximum potential.

Providing cutting-edge local healthcare

Local hospitals and health services have been neglected by the SNP, who have broken promises and let down local communities. We would **introduce a Local Healthcare Guarantee to restore a presumption against**

centralisation and protect local services. We would take immediate action to replace Edinburgh's Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion and reinstate consultant-led maternity services at Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin.

We would also review the formula which allocates funding to local health boards to ensure it recognises local need.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a rapid increase in the use of technology by the NHS. Positive examples of innovation should be adopted permanently as part of a **'digital choice' approach** – accessing some health services online will be helpful for many, particularly in rural areas, but it will never be suitable for everyone.

Technology has a particularly significant role to play in the management of long-term conditions as it can help to maintain independence and reduce hospital appointments and admissions. We would encourage the use of home healthcare technologies, like smart inhalers, and pilot innovative services such as nurse-led clinics for people with conditions including diabetes, COPD and heart disease to improve their quality of life and reduce the need for secondary care. We would also ensure patients with life-changing conditions are able to access specialist support at home following discharge from hospital if they need it, to enable them to adapt and regain independence.

Cancer services have been severely impacted by the pandemic – while the immediate focus must be on restarting services, long-term plans to improve cancer diagnosis and care are also required. We would **publish an updated full cancer strategy**, including a national cancer genomic testing pilot.

Long COVID is a new challenge for the NHS – ongoing research must be coordinated across the UK and specialist clinics should be set up in every health board to support patients.

Prioritising primary care

GPs are a central part of Scotland's health service – they are embedded in their communities and know their patients best. The Scottish Conservatives would support GPs by **investing at least 11 per cent of the overall NHS budget into general practice by the end of the next Parliament**, increasing training places to deliver the 800 more GPs promised by 2027 and ensuring all GPs are supported by a multidisciplinary team. This would enable GPs to offer longer appointments to those who need them. GPs must also have access to the technology they need to deliver high quality remote care when required.

Pharmacies also provide vital local healthcare on our high streets and should be supported to deliver more services. To maximise the role they can play, we would train more independent prescribers to enable pharmacists to treat a wider range of common conditions which would otherwise need to be treated by a GP. Pharmacists must also have full access to patients' medical records and IT systems which link them to wider health and care services, and e-prescribing must be more widely adopted. The Medicines Care and Review Service must be promoted to all patients with long-term or multiple conditions.

GPs and pharmacies must also have clear routes to refer people to other local sources of support. Social prescribing must be embedded in primary care, including by rolling out Community Link Workers and links to advice services more widely.

Revolutionising mental health

Scotland's mental health support services were under pressure before the COVID-19 pandemic and now face immense challenges.

The Scottish Conservatives would increase mental health funding to 10 per cent of the frontline health budget during the next Parliament. We would kickstart **a permanent shift towards community mental health services** by expanding programmes such as cognitive behavioural therapy, social prescribing, exercise referral

schemes and peer support. These services would be available through community triage centres in order to offer people with mild to moderate mental health problems support within six weeks. To address more serious mental health issues, we would develop a Self-Harm Strategy and work with stakeholders to update the Suicide Action Plan. To help ensure the right services are available in the right places, we would improve the use of data and develop a comprehensive multi-agency workforce plan.

Improving Scotland's public health

Under the SNP, Scotland has become the 'sick man of Europe' with poor public health outcomes and stark health inequalities which have left too many people vulnerable to COVID-19. Public health must now be prioritised to reduce health inequalities and rising pressures on the NHS. A cross-portfolio approach is required to tackle the causes of poor health and address the links between economic and health inequalities.

To kickstart action to improve Scotland's public health, we would launch a national campaign this summer to encourage people to develop and maintain healthy habits as lockdown restrictions are relaxed.

- Encouraging a healthy diet & exercise

Improving Scotland's diet is key to improving public health. Our plans to introduce free school meals and breakfast clubs for all primary pupils and ensure the importance of good nutrition is embedded in the curriculum will help teach children how to make healthy choices. Our 'Scotland First' procurement policy would encourage public services to prioritise local healthy food. We would also develop a new National Food Strategy to promote local produce. We would ensure that ongoing support for the hospitality sector includes a focus on promoting local healthy food, and invest in weight management services and other positive initiatives to help people maintain a healthy weight.

We would ensure local councils have the guidance and powers they need to utilise planning and licensing policy to create healthy environments which promote healthier food options and physical activity.

We would also **encourage physical activity by making it more accessible**. Lockdown restrictions have emphasised the importance of access to green space for exercise – we would launch a new public gardens strategy, including significant investment in developing brownfield sites into new green spaces. We would increase spending on active travel, bring forward targets and boost the powers of the Active National Commissioner. Employers also have a vital role to play in encouraging physical activity, so we would pilot public sector employers offering dedicated breaks and opportunities to be active.

Improving access to community leisure facilities is an essential part of increasing rates of physical activity, but they are in a precarious position following years of SNP underinvestment and the devastating impact of the pandemic. We would ensure leisure facilities are embedded in COVID recovery and local regeneration plans, deliver fair funding for councils to support facilities and develop a national strategy to protect assets. We would also invest £1 million to **support more schools to open their facilities to the public** during evenings and weekend.

Elite sport can inspire grassroots participation, so as international competitions resume, we must ensure Scottish athletes are able to continue representing their country on the world stage. We would **double SportScotland's budget over the course of the next Parliament to fund grassroots and elite sport**, supporting our athletes and training the next generation.

Football in particular is woven into the fabric of Scottish society and plays a vital role in every community. We would **back the UK's bid to host the 2030 World Cup and bid to hold the final in Scotland**, as well as developing a Road to 2030 strategy for grassroots football. We would also support a review of football governance in Scotland to ensure it is inclusive and fully representative of all levels of the game.

- Reducing rates of smoking, drug use and problematic drinking

Beyond diet and exercise, we must also tackle Scotland's stubbornly high smoking rates, which are underpinned by economic inequalities – one in three people smoke in Scotland's most deprived communities compared to 1 in 10 in the least deprived. Greater action is needed to achieve the 2034 target to reduce smoking rates to 5 per cent, including an ambitious new strategy and increased enforcement of existing regulations. The use of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products must be monitored closely and regulated in the same way as cigarettes. We would maintain **funding for smoking prevention and cessation services**, while ensuring tackling inequalities is at the heart of all interventions.

Drug deaths have reached a record high in Scotland – a shameful sign of the SNP's failed drugs policy. The Scottish Conservatives secured an additional £20 million a year for residential rehabilitation services, but more action is needed to turn the tide. We would ask the Drugs Death Taskforce to publish **a comprehensive review into the provision of drug treatment and recovery services** before the end of the year. Our focus would be ensuring rehab is available to everyone who needs it when they need it, prioritising abstinence-based programmes and improving retention rates.

We must also tackle problematic levels of alcohol consumption. We would work with the sector to roll out the inclusion of low risk drinking guidelines on alcohol packaging and support local communities to engage with the licensing system. We would carry out **a review of Scotland's alcohol services** – prevention, early identification and intervention must be prioritised, while data must be improved to ensure that anyone with an alcohol problem, or at risk of developing one, can access treatment and recovery services, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances.

Reforming social care

A roadmap for the full return of care home visiting must be published and an **urgent inquiry into the handling of care homes during the pandemic** must commence immediately.

The Feeley Review into Adult Social Care is welcome – action is required to address the historic underfunding of the sector and ensure it is prepared to care for Scotland's ageing population.

We support many of the recommendations and principles set out in the review, including introducing national employment conditions for staff and viewing the social care system as an equal partner to the NHS, while adopting a person-centred approach which empowers supported people and their carers. However, we share COSLA's concerns about the proposed governance and accountability changes which would lead to significant centralisations.

We would maintain local democratic accountability of the social care system and avoid any unnecessary structural reforms. We believe local authorities are best able to deliver high-quality person-centred social care as part of a whole-system approach, particularly as they deliver other vital services upon which supported people rely. We would **work with councils, families and providers to take forward reforms which will embed choice and put adult social care on a sustainable footing**.

As part of this, we would **ensure that Scotland's social care system works for those who have a terminal illness**. Conditions like MND progress rapidly and we can no longer allow people to die while still waiting for the support they need. Fast-tracking of support and adaptations and the use of anticipatory planning are essential for those with a terminal diagnosis.

We would also fully implement Frank's Law, which the Scottish Conservatives brought to Parliament, and ensure adequate support is in place for people with dementia and their families. We would review the expansion of post-diagnostic support and ensure everyone with advanced dementia receives an individual assessment of their health and care needs. We would also review what changes are required to ensure personal and nursing care payments sufficiently cover the cost of care. We would **increase investment in dementia research** and work to raise awareness.

We would develop **a new national plan for palliative care** to ensure everyone can access the support they need whether they die in hospital, a hospice, a care home or at home. In addition, we would maintain funding for children's hospices and support the Bereavement Charter for Scotland to ensure all bereaved families can access the practical and emotional support they need.

Tackling crime & putting victims first

The SNP have failed to prioritise local policing, protect victims or properly punish criminals in Scotland. Their failures have enabled violent crime to increase and left victims without the justice they deserve.

In contrast, the Scottish Conservatives have demonstrated that we are tough on crime and will support the police and prioritise victims. We will work to address the causes of crime while also ensuring that, once a crime is committed, the offender is punished properly and the victim receives the support they deserve.

More local policing

Since the SNP's police merger, 681 frontline officers have been cut and over 100 police stations have been closed. The local impact of national policy decisions is not being properly considered and fewer officers are on the street. We would **introduce a Local Policing Act** to guarantee a strong police presence in our communities and enable more community input in policing decisions, including by reinstating police scrutiny boards across Scotland. We must ensure more officers are on the streets instead of backfilling office vacancies by adequately investing in support staff. We would support special constables and review their remuneration. We would also provide the full amount of capital funding which Police Scotland requested this year to invest in proper IT systems and the buildings and vehicles they need to operate effectively.

As well as funding the police properly, we must protect them from harm. The Scottish Conservatives led the campaign to implement Finn's Law to increase the punishment for harming service animals. We have also proposed **doubling the maximum sentence for assaulting emergency workers**. We would support the rollout of body worn cameras to frontline officers, as they are a vital tool to reduce violence and provide evidence for prosecutions.

Tougher sentencing & justice for victims

The SNP have effectively scrapped short prison sentences of less than twelve months and failed to deliver effective community sentences. The Scottish Conservatives would **revoke the presumption against short prison sentences and strengthen community sentences** to ensure they all include unpaid work and are completed in full. We would also pilot more intensive types of community sentences. We would double the fines police can issue for anti-social behaviour.

We would introduce 'honest sentencing' to ensure sentences given are the sentences served. To implement this, we would **end automatic early release** and ensure courts are upfront about the length of sentences. We would also enable judges to sentence the very worst criminals to **Whole Life Custody** to ensure that life really does mean life.

When criminals are released on licence, we would increase the use of electronic tags and ensure that anyone who has breached their licence conditions once is not allowed out on licence again. Removing a tag should be an offence and an automatic public inquiry should be carried out if any criminal released from prison on licence commits a serious crime.

We would **introduce a Victims Law as our first piece of legislation**, which would include a range of other measures to give victims the justice they deserve.

Our Victims Law would:

- end the Not Proven verdict so victims get a clear outcome
- enable all victims to provide victim statements so their voices are heard
- implement Michelle's Law to protect victims and their families from offenders
- enshrine in legislation the right for all victims to be notified of decisions not to prosecute or discontinue criminal proceedings so they can challenge the decision
- implement Suzanne's Law so killers cannot be released if they have not revealed the location of their victim's body
- introduce a statutory timescale for Fatal Accident Inquiries to commence so families can get answers as soon as possible
- restrict the right of the accused to request post-mortems to protect murder victims' families from further trauma
- improve access to the Victim Notification Scheme so more victims receive information about the release of offenders
- ensure families of murder victims can access the Victim Notification Scheme without arbitrary restrictions
- expand restorative justice to allow more victims to receive an apology from offenders

We would also immediately reverse the SNP's cut to the victim support budget this year and commit to increasing it in every year of the next Parliament. In addition, we would support the expansion of the Barnahus approach, which supports children who are victims or witnesses, across Scotland.

Court delays prevent victims getting justice or closure. There was already a significant court backlog at the start of 2020 and COVID-19 restrictions have exacerbated the problem. We would accelerate measures to address the backlog and adopt permanent modernisations.

We would review legal aid fees and work with the legal profession to develop a sustainable criminal defence workforce strategy.

Finally, fraud has increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic and court delays have resulted in a lack of prosecutions. The Scottish Conservatives support the implementation of a statutory aggravator meaning **tougher sentences for criminals who intentionally target vulnerable people**.

Tackling the causes of crime

Being tough on crime is important, but we must also act to **prevent crime happening in the first place** by addressing links between crime and mental health issues, drug and alcohol use and poverty.

The Scottish Conservatives are committed to delivering equality of opportunity, including tackling the issues which result in those living in the most deprived areas of Scotland being statistically the most likely to be victims of crime. Education is a key tool in reducing the likelihood of anyone becoming involved in crime, and we are committed to taking action to reduce inequalities from the early years onward.

Well-resourced and responsive mental health services are fundamental for preventing people coming into contact with the police. When this does happen, the police must have clear routes for referring anyone experiencing a mental health crisis – we would invest a further £5 million over the course of the next Parliament to continue the rollout of a nationwide Distress Brief Intervention programme. The Scottish Conservatives will also maintain the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit and expand the Navigator programme which offers support to people who have experienced violence when they attend emergency departments.

44 per cent of violent crimes are committed when the offender was under the influence of alcohol and 30 per cent were committed under the influence of drugs, so our support for drug and alcohol services will also have

a positive impact on crime rates. Finally, we would support mentoring services for veterans who are at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

Reducing reoffending

As well as toughening up community sentences to ensure they are more effective, we would also **improve the rehabilitation provided within prisons** in Scotland. All prisoners must be able to carry out meaningful work, learn skills which translate to jobs outside prison and have access to a wide range of educational opportunities. The scandal of prisoners being paid to sit in their cells because no work opportunities are available must end. Screening on arrival in prison to identify those who need basic numeracy and literacy support could make a massive difference to offenders' life chances upon release. Access to mental health and addiction services in prison is essential, and efforts must be stepped up to prevent the use of drugs, particularly new psychoactive substances, and alcohol within prisons. Specific support programmes should be designed and piloted for those serving short sentences.

To prepare prisoners for release, throughcare services, which the SNP suspended in 2019, should be available to all prisoners with input from specialist third sector providers. We would also strengthen links between the prison service and local authorities to minimise re-offending when prisoners are released.

In addition, we would refresh Scotland's youth justice strategy to break cycles of offending and increase the focus on education by incorporating formal education into community sentences for young offenders and making returning to education a licence condition for any young offenders who are released early from a custodial sentence.

Repealing the Hate Crime Act

The Scottish Conservatives have strongly opposed the SNP's Hate Crime Act. To protect free speech, **we would introduce a Protection of Free Speech Bill to repeal the Hate Crime Act** and prevent other attacks on freedom of expression. While genuine hate crime must be punished, freedom of speech must be protected from this overreaching legislation.

Tackling violence against women and girls

The prevalence of violence and harassment against women and girls has triggered calls for action. We believe the issue should become a joint responsibility of the equality and community safety ministers. This autumn, we would launch **a national campaign, focused on schools, to challenge attitudes towards sexual harassment.**

We welcome Lady Dorrian's review into improving the management of sexual offence cases and will take forward recommendations which will improve the experience of victims, whilst ensuring that the right to a jury trial remains protected. We would introduce a legal right to anonymity for victims of sexual offences and review whether legal changes are required to remove the 'rough sex defence' in Scotland. We would support the implementation of the Forensic Medical Services Act and work with health boards and Police Scotland to ensure victims of sexual violence are not forced to travel long distances to be examined.

We would introduce a new 'sex aggravator' to punish crimes motivated by misogyny more harshly and provide additional **funding for domestic abuse charities** to respond to the impact of COVID-19 until the end of 2021.

Supporting Scotland's Fire & Rescue Service

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has played a vital and diverse role throughout the COVID-19 pandemic – we will continue to support the wider transformation of the service to ensure they are prepared to tackle new and emerging risks and support their communities. As part of this, the Service must receive an adequate amount of capital funding to ensure they can operate effectively.

Representing rural Scotland & our natural environment

Scotland's rural communities have been neglected by the SNP for too long. They have been held back by poor infrastructure, diminished services and a lack of clarity for farmers - this must change now. Rural areas must not be left behind as Scotland recovers from COVID-19, so we have set out plans to spread economic growth and improve public services. We must also tackle rural crime and support the fishing and farming communities who are the bedrock of our rural areas.

Scotland's rural areas are also diverse natural environments which we must protect - they are crucial for tackling climate change and attracting visitors. We would strengthen environmental and animal welfare protections to preserve these areas for the future.

Protecting our natural environment for the next generation

Our natural environment is one of Scotland's greatest assets, and we must do everything we can to protect and nurture it so it can be enjoyed by future generations. The Scottish Conservatives greatly value and support all those groups which, for generations, have worked tirelessly to maintain and enhance our countryside, its biodiversity and the highest standards of animal welfare.

One in nine species in Scotland are threatened by extinction. To prevent this, the Scottish Conservatives would bring forward an ambitious Nature Bill to strengthen environmental protections on land and sea for Scottish species and their habitats.

Our coastal communities can thrive and grow while we better protect our marine biology - the two are not mutually exclusive. With 61 per cent of the UK's domestic waters, Scotland has an important role in responsible marine stewardship. We will review the current Marine Protected Areas in Scottish waters, with a view to expanding their extent, and pilot the introduction of Highly Protected Marine Areas. We will promote sustainable fishing and effective stock management. We would establish a **£25 million Cleaner Seas Fund - to fund projects that will take harmful products including plastics out of our seas.**

We will support the restoration and protection of island habitats used by seabirds. We would also protect Scotland's iconic salmon rivers. We will support land managers in controlling our deer population to reduce damage to our natural environment.

We would establish Nature Networks across Scotland to better safeguard protected areas, allow species to move between habitats and ensure that our natural assets are treated as part of our national infrastructure. We will work with the UK Government to ensure Nature Networks are seamless where they cross between Scotland and England. We will fund a national strategy for the management and removal of invasive non-native species, where they damage our environment.

Peatland covers more than a fifth of Scotland, yet around 80 per cent of Scotland's natural peatland is degraded. To prevent further damage, we would end peat extraction for use in compost and we would aim to increase peatland restoration to 20,000 hectares annually by 2024-25.

Trees are nature's carbon capture technology and the basis of many natural habitats. We would **increase new tree planting in Scotland to 18,000 hectares annually by 2024-25.** However, quality and biodiversity are also important, so we would increase the proportion of new planting that is of native species, while ensuring that Scotland's forests are productive. We would work with the construction sector to increase the use of timber for building. We would place a particular emphasis on protecting and reversing the decline in Atlantic woodlands, known as Scotland's rainforests.

In recognition of the role of nature in helping many people to get through the pandemic and to collectively remember friends and family who lost their lives to coronavirus, we would focus tree planting over the next year on **the creation of COVID Memorial Gardens in and around communities.**

Scotland has two national parks, Loch Lomond and The Trossachs and the Cairngorms. Nearly twenty years on from their creation, **we would create Scotland's third national park in Galloway** and consider other proposals for further parks.

As we have seen during the pandemic, green spaces are essential for our mental wellbeing and physical health. For many people, our Green Belts provide this escape and they also protect our natural landscape from expanding development. **We will strengthen protections for Green Belts**, both to protect the land and encourage the development of brownfield sites in cities and towns.

Delivering the highest standards of animal welfare

The Scottish Conservatives stand for the highest standards in animal welfare. We are proud of our campaign to deliver Finn's Law in the last Parliament, giving proper protection for service animals like police dogs. **We will continue to work with other parties across the Scottish Parliament to strengthen protections for animals in Scotland by bringing forward a new Animal Welfare Bill.**

As a result of the lockdown, the demand for pets is at an all-time high. Less scrupulous sellers will see this as an opportunity and pet theft has increased. It is unfortunately likely that we will see many animals not receiving the attention they deserve, being mistreated or being abandoned when restrictions are lifted and normal life resumes. Vigilance on the part of lawmakers towards the treatment of domesticated animals will be more important than it has ever been.

While ear cropping dogs has been made illegal across the UK it is still possible for dogs to have their ears cropped abroad and then brought to this country for sale. As part of our Animal Welfare Bill, we would ban the sale of dogs with cropped ears in Scotland. **We would follow Wales in banning the use of electric shock collars.** We would amend the Dangerous Dogs Act, so that dogs are not automatically put down due to their breed.

We also would take forward measures to improve the welfare of farmed animals in transportation. In doing so, we will take account of Scotland's geography and established farming models. We do not believe that the scheme as proposed in England is right for Scotland.

Cracking down on rural crime

The nature of crime is often different in rural and remote areas but it is no less severe - the cost of rural crime has more than doubled since 2017. It needs to be treated with the magnitude it deserves, starting with a review of sentences and penalties. We would also take steps to **improve the reporting and recording of rural crime** and support the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime to spread best practice for liaising with farmers and rural communities within Police Scotland.

Litter, fly-tipping and irresponsible camping are an increasing blight on our natural environment and green spaces in communities across Scotland. We will **increase fixed penalties and maximum fines for litter and fly-tipping** and use the increased income to resource council enforcement measures, as well as introducing regular reporting. We will also bring in new legislation to ensure that local authorities and other agencies can effectively prosecute offenders and make them pay for clean up costs.

We helped shape new livestock worrying legislation and will deliver tougher and more comprehensive legislation to tackle this issue and compensate farmers in our Animal Welfare Bill.

With more people spending time outdoors, we must encourage them to **enjoy Scotland's countryside responsibly**. We would expand Visit Scotland's current responsible tourism campaign to provide farmers with resources to explain the Scottish Outdoor Access Code to the public and provide packs to schools to teach children about how to protect the countryside. We would also commit to expanding ranger services permanently by delivering the actions set out in NatureScot's policy statement and ensuring they have the funding they need.

Supporting Scotland's farming communities

Agriculture is the backbone of our rural communities, from the rich and fertile arable heartlands of Aberdeenshire, East Lothian and Angus to the dairy farms of Dumfries and Galloway and the hill sheep farms and crofts of Argyll and the Highlands and Islands.

However, the SNP have repeatedly failed to support Scotland's farmers and crofters during their 14 years in power. Their botched CAP payment system left farmers out of pocket and uncertain about the future of their farms. They scrapped support for new entrants into the sector and have cut agri-environment support. They short-changed farmers to plug gaps in the Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme and have failed to tackle rural crime.

This cannot continue. The Scottish Conservatives will work to deliver the changes needed to support this crucial sector. Leaving the European Union has presented challenges and opportunities for Scotland's farming communities, and we must take action now to secure the benefits it can provide. The SNP have dallied and delayed - they promised to set out details of Scotland's new agricultural policy by the end of 2020, but farmers are still waiting.

We must not waste any more time. Uncertainty over the new approach means that farmers are holding off from investing in their businesses until the direction of travel has been set. A blueprint for consultation must be published within 100 days of the May election.

Alongside a new farm payment system, we would work with Scotland's world-leading food and drink sector to **boost demand for Scottish produce** and **ensure the farming sector is sustainable** by supporting new innovations and technology as well as new entrants.

Scotland's new agricultural policy

In the immediate future, stability is required to enable farmers and crofters to prepare for the introduction of Scotland's new agricultural policy. The UK Government has provided a commitment to maintain current funding levels until 2024, providing a stable backdrop as the new policy is developed. However, changes to the current agriculture support system are also required to **provide stability and certainty** until the new system is implemented.

Work to improve the Basic Payment System, remove the Crop Diversification requirement and amend the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme, Scottish Upland Sheep Support Scheme and Beef Efficiency Scheme must continue. In addition, the Permanent Grassland requirement should be removed and a review of Ecological Focus Areas should be carried out.

Farmers and crofters make a significant contribution to efforts to reduce carbon emissions through their stewardship of the countryside, often without any financial support. Many are willing to go further, but the SNP's current funding is insufficient - the Scottish Conservatives would reverse cuts to the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme and agree a multi-year extension until the new agricultural policy is implemented. We would also review the value of the Agricultural Transformation Programme, while ensuring the funding is spent effectively to support low emission farming.

Scotland's new agricultural policy must **allow farmers to farm**, while also supporting the sector to become more sustainable and meet the Ambition 30 target for Scotland's farming, fishing, and food and drink sectors to double their turnover by 2030.

The development of the new agricultural policy must be farmer-led and we would work with the sector to design it, prioritising simplicity at every stage. The Scottish Conservatives believe it must adequately support the diversity of farms in Scotland, particularly those in less favoured areas, by ensuring a basic level of funding is provided to all farmers and crofters who are carrying out responsible agricultural activity. We believe additional funding should be focused on improving productivity and sustainability. It must also support farmers to make long-term investments and reduce bureaucracy. We would ensure Regional Land Use Partnerships sufficiently represent the agricultural sector and support the delivery of the new agricultural policy.

In addition, we would work closely with the UK Government to deliver a UK-wide funding framework which supports Scotland's new agricultural policy and **recognise the importance of trade within the UK** to our agricultural producers.

Boosting innovation

While encouraging innovation should be central to Scotland's new agricultural policy, additional support will also be required to ensure our farmers and crofters are able to continue making high quality products like Aberdeen Angus beef, Scotch lamb and malting barley for Scotch whisky.

To help attract young people to work in agriculture, a review of the qualifications available in Scotland's schools and colleges should be carried out to ensure high-quality options, from full-time courses to apprenticeships, are available. It is vital that young people receive cutting edge training in modern farming methods if they are to support our farms to keep innovating. Even once trained, it can be too difficult for young farmers to enter the sector without inheriting a farm. We would **support new entrants in the sector** by reinstating the Young Farmers and New Entrants Start Up Grants as well as the New Entrants Capital Grant Scheme. We would encourage inter-generational partnerships via mentoring schemes, with a focus on supporting women in the sector. We would also **support succession planning** and ensure farm tenancies work for tenants and landowners.

Existing farmers need access to the latest skills too, so we would launch a national agricultural Institute of Technology to bring together farmers, colleges and universities to deliver short modular training courses for farmers, online and face-to-face. We would **invest an additional £10 million a year in agricultural research and development** and support pilot farms to trial new ways to improve farm efficiency and spread best practice across Scotland.

We would work with the UK Government to ensure the Shared Prosperity Fund includes schemes which **promote farm diversification**.

Creating a National Food Strategy

To achieve Ambition 2030, we must increase demand for local Scottish produce as well as supply. The SNP failed to deliver the promised Good Food Nation Bill, so the Scottish Conservatives would **launch a comprehensive 'farm to fork' review of Scotland's food policy** as a key part of Scotland's economic recovery from COVID-19.

The UK's food system coped remarkably well during the pandemic, but it demonstrated our reliance on 'just in time' supply chains and imports from abroad. Encouraging public services, businesses and individuals to buy more local products will have multiple benefits. Our review would build on Ambition 2030 and use Scotland's new agricultural policy as a foundation. It should be led by an independent figure and report by summer 2022. Its remit should include ways to strengthen producers' bargaining power, support them to

upscale and export, better label Scottish produce, ensure public procurement utilises Scottish produce wherever possible, promote Scottish produce at home and abroad, including in our schools, reduce food waste and boost food and agri-tourism.

Promoting our fishing sector

Now that we have left the EU and the Common Fisheries Policy, the Scottish fishing sector has the opportunity to grow after years of managed decline. There have been initial difficulties, but the opportunities remain.

The Scottish and UK Governments need to work together to land that opportunity. The UK Government has committed £100 million towards modernising the catching and processing sectors and the Scottish Government will receive another £14.5 million per year to support Scottish fishing - both of Scotland's governments must work together to use this funding to deliver a better future for the sector.

To do this, the Scottish Conservatives would negotiate **a transformative sector deal for Scottish fishing** so that we can bring together catchers and processors with the Scottish and UK Government around a shared vision for the future of the industry. This will grow the sector by setting a long-term investment strategy with government and employers.

The Scottish Conservatives will take further action to support our coastal communities, including by supporting freeport bids and targeting Community Investment Deal funding at these areas.

Protecting the most vulnerable in our society

The Scotland Act 2016 devolved substantial welfare powers, including control over benefits worth £3.6 billion, to the Scottish Parliament. **It will take the SNP Government nearly a decade to accept the full transfer of devolved benefits, when in 2014 they promised that an independent Scotland would take just 18 months to set up.** Meanwhile, the costs of setting up their new social security agency have doubled to £651 million - money being used for administration instead of helping claimants.

The UK Government has increased Universal Credit payments by £20 per week to support those on low or no pay during the pandemic. The Scottish Conservative approach to our social security system will build on this by targeting the use of our devolved powers to help specific groups within our society. We will deliver a distinctive 'Scottish approach' to social security underpinned by the broad shoulders of the UK welfare state.

Tackling child poverty

One in four children in Scotland live in poverty, with poverty rates forecast to rise over the next ten years. Poverty has only increased as a result of the pandemic and will rise further if we do not focus on our economic recovery and tackling unemployment. It is those with the least that are most damaged by the impact of recessions.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that getting our economic recovery right and focusing on creating jobs is an important initial step in challenging poverty. Over a third of children in poverty live in workless households. Therefore, **delivering a growing economy with full employment is essential to tackling child poverty.**

However, while work is the best route out of poverty, that is not the only action we should take to tackle child poverty. That is why **we would deliver free school lunches and breakfasts for all children in primary school**, ensuring that they get a decent meal twice per day. We will also build 40,000 new homes in the social rented sector to ensure that children grow up in warm, safe housing. In addition, we would complete the rollout of the Scottish Child Payment and increase payments to £20 per week by the end of the Parliament.

Supporting carers

Unpaid carers are the backbone of our social care system, yet they often go unrecognised. It is impossible for government to do enough to reward carers for what they do but that should not stop us from striving to do more.

We would ensure respite services are supported to reopen to assist carers who have been under extreme pressure during the pandemic. Existing carers legislation must be fully funded and implemented, and services for unpaid carers must be joined up to prevent carers falling through the cracks.

We would improve the Carers Allowance by introducing a taper rate so that carers do not lose 100 per cent of their allowance if they earn £1 over the £128 per week limit on earnings. We will also **extend payments of Carers Allowance to up to six months after bereavement** and allow carers in full time education to continue to receive Carers Allowance.

We must ensure carers are supported to remain in work wherever possible, including by providing dedicated employability services to support those who have had to give up work to return when they are able.

We would introduce a new action plan for young carers to ensure there is a coordinated approach to identification and support.

Tackling homelessness

Homelessness is a blight on modern Scotland. Over 5,000 adults sleep rough at least once per year, with our homelessness death rate being double that of England and Wales. The number of children living in temporary accommodation has reached its highest level since records began. This is a national scandal that requires action, which is why **we are committed to eradicating rough sleeping in Scotland by 2026.**

We would accelerate Housing First and roll this approach out across all local authorities, to get people into safe and stable housing as quickly as possible. Pioneered in New York in the 1990s, Housing First emphasises that having a settled home will ensure people have the security they need to fully engage with other forms of support and begin to turn their lives around. However, in Scotland, the SNP are removing central funding from the programme, leaving it to local authorities to deliver. **We would invest £10.8 million over the next Parliament to deliver a national Housing First Programme.**

We would also utilise the private rented sector in the medium term, with a Help to Rent scheme, to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to access and sustain a tenancy in the private rented sector. Over the long-term **we will ensure that there is sufficient accommodation across Scotland with the biggest social housing building programme since devolution.**

Supporting people with disabilities into employment

We believe that everyone should be entitled to work and that everyone should be given the support they need to get secure employment. The SNP's Fair Start Scotland programme has failed to help people with disabilities into jobs, with just 1 in 6 participants finding long-term employment.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that a new approach to supporting disability employment is required. We would create a government owned company, based on the Swedish Samhall model, providing meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The aim of this model would be to **give people with disabilities the experience and in-work skills they need to secure long-term employment** outside of the company. We would also establish a fundamental review of disability assistance, to deliver a human rights-based system.

Making Scotland a land fit for heroes and their families

Veterans have served our country, some in life-endangering situations, and now our duty is to serve them. Yet there are many veterans and families that are not being recognised for their sacrifice – they may be homeless, struggling to get a hospital appointment or trapped in a cycle of reoffending.

The Scottish Conservatives aspire to be the natural party of our Armed Forces and Scotland's veteran community. That is why we fought at Westminster for service personnel living in Scotland to be compensated for the SNP's higher income tax so that they did not receive less pay than their comrades.

We value the sacrifices made by those who have served in our Armed Forces and their families and know how difficult the transition to civilian life can be. We also know the value that veterans and their families can bring to the communities in which they choose to live. We want servicemen and women who choose to settle in Scotland upon leaving the Forces to know that they are settling in a land fit for heroes, that offers them and their families the most generous support of any part of the UK.

To achieve this, we will bring forward an Armed Forces and Veterans Bill which will further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant in law for devolved Scottish public bodies like local government and our NHS. We would encourage businesses to voluntarily sign up to its provisions. Through the Bill we will also enhance support for veterans to transition to civilian life and make the best use of their talents, recognising them for the asset that they are to our communities and economy.

We will use our devolved welfare powers **to create a new top-up benefit for veterans households in receipt of Universal Credit**. In addition, we would introduce a specific veterans' Help to Buy scheme to give veterans and their families more support when buying a home in Scotland.

Delivering aid abroad

The Scottish Conservatives are committed to promoting Scotland's role at home and abroad. Scotland plays an important part in the UK's international aid commitment, which is among the most generous of any major economy in the world. We support the continuation of the Scottish Government's £10 million International Development Fund and the long-standing Scotland Malawi Partnership.

Providing equal opportunities

We will tackle prejudice and discrimination in all forms to ensure no one is held back from succeeding due to their race, sexuality, gender, religion or disability. Equality of opportunity for all is central to our conservative values, so we will embed the removal of barriers into all our policies.

We would work with the UK Government to end conversion therapy in Scotland and ensure frontline responders are trained to support victims of hate crime. We would also work with community representatives to develop a targeted approach to tackling poverty amongst ethnic minorities and take forward work to tackle poor health outcomes amongst ethnic minority groups, building on the work of the Expert Reference Group on COVID-19 and Ethnicity.

Ensuring the Scottish Parliament works in the national interest

The next Scottish Parliament must be one that works in our national interest. It needs to put political obsessions to one side and focus 100 per cent on managing this pandemic and rebuilding our country. That can only happen if we stop an SNP majority and their push for a divisive second independence referendum, which only a party list vote for the Scottish Conservatives can do.

In a hung parliament, we have the opportunity to strengthen the role of the opposition to hold the government to account. This will ensure that we avoid bad law like the Hate Crime Act, Named Persons Scheme and Offensive Behaviour at Football Act. It also means that we can reduce the cost of politics, leading to smaller and more efficient government.

Strengthening Scottish democracy

The past five years have seen the Scottish Parliament implementing the powers that were devolved in the Scotland Act 2016. However, many powers over tax and welfare are still administered by the UK Government and a date has not yet been set for the Scottish Government to completely take over. The focus in our Parliament needs to be on using the powers that we have to rebuild Scotland, not on more arguments about powers for their own sake.

The Referendum Act would allow the SNP to fast track their plans for a divisive second independence referendum with minimal scrutiny. We would **repeal the Referendum Act to remove the threat of the SNP rushing through another independence referendum.**

At Westminster, there are clear rules around recall, allowing a by-election to take place in certain circumstances, but no such rules exist for MSPs. We will **introduce Mackay's Law, allowing the public to recall MSPs who have broken the law, grossly undermined trust or failed to contribute to Parliament for more than six months.** This will mean that Scotland will never again face the scandal of a disgraced former minister remaining an MSP, earning over £100,000 and failing to represent his constituents.

Scotland was the first part of the UK to deliver votes for 16- and 17-year-olds for Scottish Parliament and local elections. The Scottish Conservatives continue to support a voting age of 16 for all Scottish elections.

We believe that the SNP Government's decision to give the vote to prisoners is an affront to democracy. Offenders should lose their right to vote when they commit serious crime and are still serving their punishment. **As the only party in the Scottish Parliament that opposed prisoner voting being introduced, we would revoke this right.**

Strengthening the opposition

The SNP Government claims to stand up for the Scottish Parliament but regularly ignores its votes and treats it with contempt. **Over the last six months, our parliamentary processes have been exposed as weak and not up to the task of holding the government to account.**

We will lead a cross-party commission on improving how the Scottish Parliament operates and strengthening its role in scrutinising the Scottish Government. This will include considering the accountability of ministers to Parliament through a disciplinary process independent of government, lack of legal protections for MSPs in debate and the election of committee chairs.

We will also use this commission to explore how we modernise the working practices of the Scottish Parliament, to make them more suitable for MSPs with young families.

Cutting the cost of Holyrood politics

We believe in efficient government, not costly politics. The SNP used to promise a “smaller, better-focused ministerial team” that would “reduce bureaucracy” but **over their 14 years in government the SNP have become more bloated than the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition they replaced.**

To reduce the cost of politics and get the Scottish Government 100 per cent focused on the task of rebuilding our country, we support a reduction in the size of the Cabinet from 12 to 6, as the SNP themselves did in 2007, and a cap on the number of ministers and advisers. This will create a more focused team, solely engaged in our economic recovery and the running of devolved public services.

Given the need to maximise resources going to our frontline public services and the need for politicians to lead by example, **we will support a freeze in MSP and ministerial pay for the next five years.**

Prioritising our recovery

The next five years need to be focused on a collective national effort to rebuild Scotland from the impact of coronavirus. We need to support our public services to help the people who rely on them and kickstart our economy to create jobs. This should be the priority now for our Scottish Parliament.

After the election, the Scottish Conservatives will be prepared to work with any party that wants to put our recovery first and deliver a programme to rebuild Scotland. Now is the time for coming together in the national interest, not old rivalries and party politics.

However, we cannot deliver our recovery if our Parliament and our country are paralysed by the SNP's obsession with another divisive independence referendum. We cannot move forward if we are divided by an SNP majority government that wants to put that referendum before our recovery.

That is why we are asking you to use your party list vote for the Scottish Conservatives on the 6th of May, to stop a second referendum and secure our recovery.

If pro-UK voters come together behind the Scottish Conservatives then we can stop an SNP majority, just like we did in 2016, and ensure that the Scottish Parliament focuses on our recovery.

A second referendum is the last thing we need right now. It is time to rebuild Scotland.