



Focusing on the Right Priorities for Scotland

September 2022



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FOREWORD



For Scottish families, this coming winter will be among the most difficult they have ever faced. Energy bills are set to soar to over £3,500 from next month, inflation is forecast to increase to over 20% and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has meant that the everyday essentials we take for granted will become unaffordable for many.

It is clear that families cannot be left to weather this storm on their own. Both of Scotland's governments need to step up to deliver support. While the UK Government has already announced £37 billion of measures, worth £1,200 to more than a quarter of Scottish households, the forecasts for bills have only risen. We therefore need to see further action.

However, the Scottish Government also has a substantial role to play in supporting families and businesses at this time. We also cannot forget our key public services, that have not recovered from the pandemic and are also facing a difficult winter.

It is in this context, that the Scottish Conservatives are setting out our priorities for the Scottish Parliament for the coming year. We want to see the Scottish Government fully focused on supporting families through the cost-of-living crisis, growing the economy, rebuilding our public services, helping communities to recover and building for the next generation.

These priorities are Scotland's priorities. Scots right now want a government that is fixed on tackling the big challenges at hand, not one that is distracted by its plans to hold another independence referendum next year. Another referendum would be the wrong priority at the

worst possible time.

This year, in the Scottish Parliament, we need to come together and give Scotland the leadership it deserves to get through the difficulties ahead. We cannot be held back by party political aims and the same old divisive arguments.

It is time for the Scottish Parliament to be focused on the right priorities for Scotland.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Douglas Ross'. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Douglas Ross

Leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

INTRODUCTION

This coming year in parliament sees Scotland facing big challenges. We are in the midst of a global cost-of-living crisis and our public services have still not recovered from the pandemic. At this time, people across our country expect the Scottish Parliament to come together to focus on these issues – the right priorities for Scotland – rather than on party political aims.

This document sets out the five key priorities for Scottish Conservative MSPs for the coming year. Firstly, we want to see the Scottish Government using the levers that it has to help families and households with their bills. This will see direct support given to the most vulnerable households but also tax cuts for working families, action to bring down the cost of housing and support for increasing Scotland's energy supply.

Secondly, we want to see the Scottish Government work with businesses to return our economy to growth. This will include a return to Covid business rates relief and a refocusing of our economic strategy, alongside businesses and the UK Government, onto growth through developing skills and increasing productivity.

Thirdly, we want to see the Scottish Government tackle the backlogs in our key public services. This will see them using stretched resources to support frontline services in our NHS and justice system instead of on costly reorganisations, while encouraging healthier lifestyles to reduce demand in the long-term.

Fourthly, we want to see the Scottish Government support communities across Scotland by empowering them to recover. This will see them devolving powers and funding away from Holyrood, while giving support to rural and island communities who have too often been left behind by the SNP.

Fifthly, we want to see the Scottish Government look beyond the current crisis towards building a better country for the next generation. We want to see a step change in their approach towards education to return to world class standards. We also want to see climate change targets met to protect our natural environment for future Scots.

While it is clear that the UK Government must do more to help our whole country through this crisis, the same is also true for the Scottish Government. It is time for the SNP and the Greens to put their plans to hold a second independence referendum next year to one side and instead act now to tackle the big challenges that Scotland faces.

PRIORITY 1: SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS

The global cost-of-living crisis is going to be the greatest challenge that Scotland faces over the coming year. There are predictions that inflation could increase above 20% and that energy bills could rise fivefold on last year. That is an incredible cost that most households will be unable to afford.

While many of the levers for action lie at a UK Government level, and we are clear that they should take further action, the Scottish Government also has the powers and resources to take action now to help families. However, the SNP have so far failed to act beyond passing on UK Government support. This is despite rising costs in areas of devolved governance and as a direct result of SNP policy, such as in housing.



The SNP, thanks to their coalition with the Greens, have also failed to recognise the changing international reality and the importance of our energy security. At a time of rapidly increasing energy bills, the SNP still oppose the expansion of our North Sea oil and gas sector and are refusing to consider a new generation of nuclear power plants in Scotland. They would rather increase emissions by importing energy from abroad than support jobs and communities here in Scotland.

Both of Scotland's governments need to be laser focused on taking the substantive action necessary to help families with their bills at this difficult time. They should adopt the same single-minded focus to getting our country through this crisis as they did during the Covid pandemic.

HELPING THE MOST VULNERABLE

Supporting those who are already struggling and least able to manage rising costs should be the first priority for our governments. The UK Government has already announced £1,200 for the most vulnerable households, yet it is clear that more must be done. Average household energy bills alone are increasing to £3,549 per year next month and there are forecasts that they could reach as high as £6,500 by April. The Scottish Government needs to be thorough in reviewing its spending to find additional resources to help the most vulnerable families at this time.

To support the most vulnerable families, the Scottish Government should:

- **Create a Cost-Of-Living Support Fund, following the urgent spending review, to provide additional support payments for the most vulnerable households.**
- **Deliver additional funding to local councils for supporting families at risk of being unable to make housing payments or buy essentials.**
- **Make an immediate payment to households due to be eligible for Low-Income Winter Heating Assistance to offset rising energy bills.**
- **Reallocate the £20 million earmarked for an independence referendum into an additional £200 payment to families eligible for the Scottish Child Payment.**
- **Create a specific Rural Hardship Fund for making payments to off grid households, who are going to see the biggest increases in bills.**

REDUCING THE BURDEN OF TAX

However, the global cost-of-living crisis is not just going to affect the most vulnerable families, it will also be a major challenge for most Scots. Bills are

going to increase beyond what many households can afford, not just those on the lowest incomes. Over one million Scots already face a higher cost for living in Scotland, through it being the highest taxed part of the UK. The Scottish Government needs to use the taxation levers it has available to reduce pressures on family budgets and make Scotland a more attractive place to live and work.

To help reduce the costs on families across Scotland, the Scottish Government should:

- **Ensure that income tax cuts in the rest of the UK are passed onto Scottish workers.**
- **Increase the single person council tax discount to 35%, saving a single person £134 per year on an average property.**

MAKING HOUSING AFFORDABLE

Our broken housing market is also contributing to the cost-of-living crisis, with many families unable to get onto the property ladder or struggling with rising rents. However, the problems with our housing supply predate the current situation by years and are the direct result of an SNP failure to meet their own home building targets. They have also closed schemes designed to help first time buyers, such as the First Home Fund and the Help to Buy Scheme. To tackle rising house prices, the Scottish Government should be increasing house building while creating schemes to help new buyers secure their own home.

To tackle the housing crisis, the Scottish Government should:

- **Set up a Help to Renovate Scheme to provide grants to homes owners looking to make their properties more energy efficient and reduce their bills.**
- **Create a national housing delivery agency with the aim of building 25,000 new homes per year, focusing on affordable and social housing.**
- **Introduce compulsory sales orders for long-term unoccupied properties.**
- **Increase the threshold for LBTT to £250,000, to save buyers up to £2,100.**

- **Provide funding to reopen the Help to Buy Scheme.**

ENSURING OUR ENERGY SUPPLY

This global cost-of-living crisis is a direct result of rising energy prices due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While the UK, unlike many European countries, is not dependent upon Russian gas



imports, we have been affected by the knock-on impact this has had on the global market. The crisis has underlined the importance of our national energy security, yet the SNP and the Greens continue to oppose expanding our supply through nuclear energy and new oil and gas. The Scottish Government should be setting an ambition to make Scotland an energy supplier not just to the rest of the UK but also to Europe to weaken Putin's war machine.

To increase Scotland's energy supply and create jobs, the Scottish Government should:

- **Support new oil and gas fields in the North Sea and ensure that the Scottish Government is a full partner in the North Sea Transition Deal.**
- **Work with the UK Government to deliver a new generation of nuclear power stations in Scotland.**
- **Support the bid for a prototype nuclear fusion plant at Ardeer.**
- **Continue the expansion of new offshore wind farms and onshore wind where it is supported by and benefits local communities.**
- **Work with the UK Government to develop and expand Scotland's pumped hydroelectric energy storage and carbon capture capacity.**

PRIORITY 2: GROWING THE SCOTTISH ECONOMY

Under this SNP/ Green Government, growth is no longer a priority.

The formation of this coalition has damaged the economic credibility of the Scottish Government and nothing the SNP have done since has restored the confidence of the business community or repaired relations with them. Furthermore, their plans for a divisive second independence referendum next year have only added more uncertainty to an already uncertain economic environment.

The rising cost of living, inflation and the expectation of a recession have all combined to undermine business confidence. These are global concerns not unique to either Scotland or the UK, and are a result of the end of the coronavirus pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

However, there has been a distinct lack of action by the SNP to support businesses using the policy levers at their disposal, with full business rates being reintroduced in June. The increasing Green influence on the SNP has also seen the government become more hostile towards investment that could support growth, such as



the expansion of the oil and gas industry into new fields. In addition, the SNP's economic strategy remains at odds with the approach being taken forward in the rest of the UK.

Scotland needs a clear vision which places driving growth at the heart of managing our economy.

SUPPORTING BUSINESSES TO SURVIVE AND RECOVER

The most immediate economic priority of the Scottish Government for the foreseeable future should be supporting businesses through the global cost-of-living crisis. Many Scottish businesses have barely started to recover from the coronavirus pandemic and are now facing rapidly increasing costs in their supply chain, in staffing and in running their premises, all while customers are spending less.

To help Scottish businesses survive the global cost-of-living crisis, the Scottish Government should:

- **Deliver a September economic statement setting out additional immediate support for Scottish businesses this financial year.**
- **Reinstate business rates relief and freeze the rates poundage for this financial year, backdated to the end of the previous relief in June.**
- **Make discretionary funding available to Scottish councils to provide support for the most hard-pressed businesses over the coming months.**
- **Introduce a national pause on any plans to introduce a Workplace Parking Levy in Scottish councils.**

DEVELOPING SCOTLAND'S VISION FOR GROWTH

Too many businesses do not feel that the SNP understands their needs or views them as a priority. As such, there is a need for the Scottish Government to make a significant overture to the business community, both to regain their confidence but also to better align government economic interventions with their own plans for

growth and investment. A refreshed economic strategy should see the Scottish Government properly address the productivity challenge by creating an economic development structure that values innovation and the digital economy.

To work with businesses to drive growth in the Scottish economy, the Scottish Government should:

- **Develop a new vision for growth with the Scottish business sector with a shared ambition for the Scottish economy.**
- **Ensure best value from economic development and enterprise spend by cutting red tape and arbitrary targets, to allow businesses with the most potential to access the funding they need to get started, innovate and grow.**
- **Legislate for a ‘Scotland First’ approach to use public sector spending to support the Scottish economy.**
- **Begin to engage with the business community on a replacement for business rates, while ensuring that any proposals align with the UK Government’s plans for the future of digital taxation.**

WORKING WITH THE UK GOVERNMENT TO DRIVE GROWTH

Both of Scotland’s governments have a shared role in driving economic growth. However, instead of working closely with the UK Government, the SNP oppose investment and attempt to take Scotland out of UK-wide schemes. The result of this is that Scotland is becoming a more expensive place to work and do business as it becomes less aligned with the rest of the UK.

To ensure that both of Scotland’s governments are working closely together to drive growth, the Scottish Government should:

- **Commit to passing on any UK Government tax cuts and set out a plan over this parliament to ensure that no taxpayer continues to pay more in Scotland than they would in the rest of the UK.**

- **Contribute to the levelling up ambition by supporting council project bids and backing schemes with additional funding, as they have done in the City Region and Growth Deal programme.**
- **Support the successful delivery of the freeports initiative in Scotland.**
- **Work together with the UK Government to better align devolved and reserved economic agencies into a single structure with shared oversight.**

DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Any economic vision must also build capacity to ensure growth in the short-term and competitiveness in the long-term. If we are to make Scotland’s workforce more productive, then we need to place a greater emphasis on upskilling and re-skilling. The Scottish Government should recognise that our human resources will always be Scotland’s greatest economic asset.

To develop skills for the future Scottish economy, the Scottish Government should:

- **Legislate to reform Independent Training Accounts into a universal offer of funding as a Right to Retrain for all Scots.**
- **Support colleges and universities to offer more bite-sized, intensive courses for retraining and upskilling.**
- **Shift funding for apprenticeships to a demand-led approach, allowing employers to bid for funding for places based upon need and the quality of training delivered.**
- **Reform university and college funding to end the cap on Scottish students and work to deliver parity of esteem in further education.**

PRIORITY 3: REBUILDING OUR PUBLIC SERVICES

Our key public services are at breaking point under this SNP Government.

While the pandemic caused the build-up of large backlogs and led to the deterioration of waiting time standards in our hospitals and courts, these have got worse not better as Covid has become less of a threat. The SNP are failing to provide the resources or leadership needed to help professionals get through these backlogs or even to meet present demand. Without this support, our essential public services will be unable to recover from the pandemic.

This is especially alarming in our health service as annual trends show that summer is supposed to be the point in the year at which waiting times are at their shortest. However, A&E waiting times are at their worst on record – with around a third of



patients typically and consistently having to wait more than four hours to be seen. Unless there is a substantial shift in outcomes, we will only see this number grow as we head into winter.

In our courts we see many of the same issues. The court backlog has now reached its highest level on record. Justice delayed is justice denied and this is true for tens of thousands of Scots across our country.

We need a real plan to deliver resources to where they are needed most to clear the backlogs in our public services and restore the standards the public expect.

TACKLING THE BACKLOGS IN OUR HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

The backlogs in our healthcare system are interlinked. Often when one part of the NHS is struggling, pressure is placed elsewhere in the service. We cannot take a sectoral approach to managing the backlog which sees pressures transferred around the NHS, instead of being properly managed. If we want to prevent this summer of chaos from becoming a winter crisis, then the SNP Government needs to urgently refresh its strategy to put the NHS on a sustainable footing.

To reduce the backlogs and prepare the NHS for the winter the Scottish Government should:

- **Overhaul the Recovery Plan to deliver a more substantive plan focused on tackling the backlogs and to reflect the changing healthcare situation, now that a year has passed from the original document.**
- **Set a timeframe for achieving NHS waiting time standards, including interim milestones.**
- **Refresh the workforce plan, with a specific focus on addressing issues with retention and recruitment.**
- **Reintroduce emergency funding for dental practices and increase dental tariffs provided by the Scottish Government by a third to ensure all Scots can access a dental check-up this year.**
- **Set up a network of dedicated long-Covid clinics.**

IMPROVING LOCAL CARE

An important factor affecting pressures on our NHS is the condition of our social care system. Scotland's social care system is in a state of upheaval following the end of the pandemic and needs time to recover. However, the SNP want to instead overhaul our care system by creating a National Care Service. This will not just see scant resources wasted on bureaucratic upheaval when we can least afford it but could also lead to residents being sent across the country rather than cared for in their community. The Scottish Government should instead be using additional resources to focus on improving the affordability and quality of local care and on raising pay and conditions for carers.

To ensure that we retain and improve local care, the Scottish Government should:

- **Abandon plans for a National Care Service and spend the £1.3 billion of funding allocated on improving the quality of local care, on staffing and making care more affordable.**
- **Introduce a local care guarantee so that no individual is forced to access care miles away from their community, family and support network.**
- **Empower the Scottish Social Services Council to provide accessible training and qualifications to make care a rewarding career path.**
- **Introduce a single digital patient record which can be shared across care providers and the NHS.**

ENSURING A HEALTHIER POPULATION

We need a plan to end the backlogs and reduce the pressures that the pandemic has caused in our NHS. However, our NHS was struggling well before the pandemic began, with declining waiting time standards and increasing demand. As our population gets older these pressures are only going to grow. The only way to manage these pressures in the future is to take action now to resolve long-standing health problems in

Scotland and encourage all Scots to live healthier lives.

To help Scots live healthier lives, the Scottish Government should:

- **Support our Right to Recovery Bill to deliver a legal right to recovery for Scots suffering from drug and alcohol addiction.**
- **Roll out free school lunches and breakfasts in full across primary and secondary schools.**
- **Support schools to open their sport facilities for community access outside of teaching hours.**
- **As part of a 'Scotland First' procurement strategy, encourage the use of local produce in schools and public service buildings.**
- **Support our Disability Commissioner Bill to establish a Disability Commissioner for Scotland.**

PUTTING OUR JUSTICE SYSTEM ON THE SIDE OF VICTIMS

The Scottish justice system is skewed against victims. Long court backlogs, that pre-date Covid, mean that they are delayed access to justice. Sentencing decisions mean that dangerous criminals are released early, well before their



sentence is due to be completed, or do not go to prison at all. Victim support services and processes are neglected in favour of those to rehabilitate offenders. Our justice system needs to be rebalanced to put victims of crime first.

To ensure that the Scottish justice system prioritises the needs of victims over criminals, the Scottish Government should:

- **Modernise court processes and infrastructure to tackle the backlog in cases.**
- **Increase funding for the police so that they can properly tackle rising violent and sexual crimes.**
- **Support our Victims Law to increase the rights of victims, abolish the not proven verdict and reform Fatal Accident Inquiries.**
- **Support our Domestic Abuse Register Bill to introduce a domestic abuse register and improve education and rehabilitation.**
- **Introduce whole life sentences for the worst offenders and end automatic early release and the presumption against short sentences.**

PRIORITY 4: EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITIES TO RECOVER

Our communities have been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. Many small businesses have closed their doors for the last time, some community services have still not returned to normal functions and pre-pandemic routines have not restarted. Our villages, towns and cities have not recovered fully, and the ongoing global cost-of-living crisis has only presented them with even more challenges.

Scotland's communities are all different and so there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to recovery across our country. They must be given the resources and powers to design and deliver their own future. Ultimately, these decisions must be made in consultation with, and for the benefit of the people who live there.

However, the SNP have spent the last 15 years stripping funding and powers away from our communities. Rather than top-down control, the Scottish Government needs to give the communities themselves the tools they need to recover, while ensuring that national services and policies work for every part of our country.

GIVING COUNCILS THE POWERS AND FUNDING THEY DESERVE

Our communities need the Scottish Government to support them through this crisis but they also need the resources and powers to rebuild for the future. Instead, over the last 15 years we have seen the SNP centralise decision-making and funding away from our town halls. This trend is only set to continue with Holyrood taking control of the delivery of social care across the country through the National Care Service. We need to reverse this trend and ensure that local councils are empowered and properly funded.

To properly support local services and local democracy, the Scottish Government should:

- **Legislate for a Barnett-style financial settlement for local government to guarantee**

that they will receive a set amount of the Scottish Government's own budget.

- **End the practice of Scottish ministers overturning council planning decisions and ensure that local communities have the final say over developments in their area.**

HELPING LOCAL BUSINESSES AND HIGH STREETS

Our high streets and town centres were struggling before the pandemic began but are now facing the task of not only recovering from Covid but being competitive in a global cost-of-living crisis. The pressures on family finances will encourage households to shop for the cheapest option rather than supporting local businesses. Service businesses such as pubs and restaurants



will also see decreased footfall, as they are seen as a luxury that many cannot afford now. As such, government needs to take action to support local businesses and high streets through this difficult period.

To support activity in our town centres and high streets, the Scottish Government should:

- **Support the setting up of community business hubs to give small local businesses a presence on the high street.**

- **Abandon plans to introduce a workplace parking levy and fund the scrapping of charges on public car parks to encourage local shopping.**
- **Scrap plans to introduce a short term lets licensing scheme and tourist tax.**
- **Launch a campaign to support local cultural events, including discounting tickets, recognising the knock-on positive impact of events for local businesses.**
- **Fund an urban parks strategy to redevelop brownfield sites into green spaces.**

BETTER CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Scotland’s infrastructure network is essential to our economy and to all our lives. However, the SNP’s partnership with the Greens means that the future of much needed major road improvements has been thrown into doubt. In addition, the rollout of the SNP’s R100 broadband programme is expected to be finished at least six years late. Replacement ferries have also been delayed by at least five years, with costs spiralling to nearly a quarter of a billion pounds, £150 million overbudget. The knock-on effect of this has been increased breakdowns in the current fleet, the average age of which is 24 years. Strike action since nationalisation has made our railway services unreliable, while ticket prices have continued to increase.

To ensure that Scotland’s communities have the reliable, affordable infrastructure they need, the Scottish Government should:

- **Announce a discount scheme for public transport across Scotland for the rest of the financial year, both in recognition of the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis and as an apology for the disruption in rail and ferry services over the summer.**
- **Invest in the reopening of railway lines and stations that were closed during the Beeching cuts.**
- **Invest in our charging point network to prepare Scotland for the mass rollout of**

electric vehicles and legislate to make their installation in homes and on streets easier.

- **Commit fully to upgrading major roads, including the A77, A75, A82, A90, A96, A1 and the A83 Rest and Be Thankful.**
- **Set up a Pothole Action Fun to invest in the maintenance of local roads.**
- **Support councils to set up their own bus services where there is demand.**
- **Commit to the rollout of full fibre broadband to every home and business in Scotland by 2027 as recommended by the independent Infrastructure Commission.**

SUPPORTING RURAL AND ISLAND COMMUNITIES

Rural and island communities are among the hardest hit by the global cost-of-living crisis. However, they are also too often the losers in a postcode lottery which sees them left with worse services than those in other parts of the country. Children have less subject choice in schools, patients have to travel for hours for local appointments and roads and ferry services are in dire conditions. Our farming sector continues



to face an uncertain future with an ongoing lack of clarity regarding future farm funding, despite the consultation being two years late. Poor housing and infrastructure are holding back local businesses and undermining public services by making it harder to recruit key staff. We need to make every part of Scotland an attractive place to live and work.

To ensure that Scots get the same opportunities regardless of where they live, the Scottish Government should:

- **Give farmers the urgent clarity they deserve on the future of farm funding and build a new system around the simple goal of food security and supporting farmers to farm.**
- **Allow Scottish farmers to make use of gene editing technology.**
- **Plan for future storms by working with councils to build local resilience contingencies, including the automatic release of emergency funds.**
- **Impose a moratorium on the centralisation of local healthcare facilities.**
- **Use education reform to headquarter one of the new agencies outside of the Central Belt.**
- **Support our Fly-tipping Bill to increase the maximum fines on fly-tippers and give councils additional powers to tackle the crime.**
- **Work with the UK Government to explore ways to make it illegal for delivery companies to charge higher costs when posting to remote and rural parts of Scotland.**

PRIORITY 5: BUILDING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Our two governments should have a laser focus this year on helping families through the global cost-of-living crisis and supporting our public services to recover from the pandemic. However, we cannot ignore the need to ensure that the next generation have the skills to compete globally and live fulfilled lives - and that they grow up in a greener country.



Our world class Scottish education system, after fifteen years of SNP government, has become internationally average. This is despite Nicola Sturgeon claiming that it was her number one priority. Leaving this generation of Scottish young people with a worse education than their parents has made us a poorer nation both economically and intellectually and should be considered the greatest failure of this government. The Scottish Government must show this year that they are prepared to turn around declining standards.

Scotland's natural environment is one of its greatest assets and it must be protected for the next generation. The SNP have been good at setting ambitious targets to tackle climate change and protect and enhance our green spaces but poor at taking the action necessary to deliver on them. This parliament must be about climate delivery though a transition that achieves our goals but does not leave people and communities behind.

The SNP and Greens have made it clear that their priority is a divisive second independence referendum next year which they are committed

to spending £20 million to deliver. That is the wrong priority at the worst possible time when we should be focused on the tasks at hand – supporting families through the global cost-of-living crisis and rebuilding our public services. The Scottish Government and Parliament must rise to the occasion of delivering on those priorities – the right priorities for Scotland – instead of being distracted again by constitutional debate.

REBUILDING A WORLD CLASS SCOTTISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

The SNP's record in managing Scotland's schools is their greatest failure, with Scotland's performance in international rankings falling to its worst ever level. Their mismanagement of our schools has only continued with their failure to put in place catch up programmes during the pandemic, leading to many pupils only falling further behind. It is clear that the SNP need to rethink their approach to educating our children to restore Scottish education's world class reputation.

To restore standards in Scottish schooling, the Scottish Government should:

- **Introduce a national tutoring scheme and pilot an extension of the school day to deliver extra support for pupils at risk of falling behind their peers.**
- **Begin to engage with professionals and independent education experts on a new framework to replace Curriculum for Excellence.**
- **Increase school autonomy and parental involvement in the running of schools.**
- **Ensure independence in school and education inspections and re-enter Scotland into international comparisons, such as the TIMSS and the PIRLS.**

- **Improve teacher pay and progression and expand alternate pathways into the teaching profession.**
- **Back our Outdoor Education Bill to guarantee a week of outdoor education to every child.**

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

The SNP and the Greens like to praise their environmental credentials, but the reality is a far more mixed picture than they would like to admit. The SNP had missed their own environmental targets for years and the Greens’ Deposit Return Scheme has been repeatedly delayed past their own deadlines. It is clear that both the SNP and the Greens are more interested in style over substance when it comes to the environment.

To get Scotland on track to meet its climate targets and to protect our natural environment, the Scottish Government should:

- **Protect our green spaces by allowing communities to veto planning applications from developers.**
- **Introduce a standardised kerbside recycling system across Scotland.**
- **Redraft the Circular Economy Bill to ensure that it drives maximum value extraction from products and services.**
- **Set up new national parks, including in Galloway, where there is local support.**
- **Deliver on the Climate Change Committee targets on tree planting and peatland restoration and increase the use of native species to strengthen local biodiversity.**
- **Create a ring-fenced fund for the removal of harmful plastics from the seas around Scotland.**

FOCUSING PARLIAMENT ON THE TASKS AT HAND

The Scottish Parliament was designed to provide Scottish solutions to the challenges of the day

faced in Scotland, while retaining the strength and security of the UK. However, the SNP and the Greens are determined instead to use our parliament to push for another independence referendum next year. That would be a massive distraction and would divide our country at the worst possible time, when Scots are facing a global cost-of-living crisis. The Scottish Parliament needs to be focused on the issues



that matter, with powers to allow the opposition to hold the Scottish Government to account to ensure that it does.

To get the Scottish Parliament focused on the big challenges that Scotland faces today, the Scottish Government should:

- **Abandon preparations to hold a divisive second independence referendum next year.**
- **Support our Mackay’s Law to introduce a recall process for MSPs who break the law or undermine trust in our democracy.**
- **Set up a cross-party commission to reform the parliamentary process which will consider:**
 - Introducing elected committee convenors.
 - Introducing full parliamentary privilege.
 - Empowering the Scottish Parliament to initiate judicial inquiries and quasi-judicial inquiries and compel ministers and law officers to appear before committees and chamber.

