

What did Anas Sarwar say in Monday's speech?

Leader of Scottish Labour, Anas Sarwar MSP made a trailed speech on Monday morning as a way of introducing what Labour will be doing in this new year.

It includes developing a new approach to dealing with the pandemic, Labour's plan to cut energy bills and encouraging people to come forward as candidates for the Labour Party at the local elections which are coming up in May, and leading the way when it comes to addressing the climate emergency.

TEXT OF MR SARWAR'S SPEECH

Good morning and a happy new year,

The start of a new year is a time for looking ahead.

It's an opportunity to hit reset and be hopeful for what lies ahead over the next 12 months.

And as I look forward, I'm thinking of another year seeing my children grow up, of doing the job that I love, and getting to meet so many of my fellow Scots as I travel across the country.

It can, and will I believe, be a great year for our nation too.

A year where we have much to look forward in the world of sport, with high hopes for Scottish medals at the Commonwealth

Games, the return of Andy Murray, and the men's football team qualifying for the World Cup.

Yes, I'm an eternal optimist.

2022 will also be a year in which Scotland will continue to drive innovation and renewal.

From electric airplanes in Orkney, to spaceports in Sutherland, we are beginning to build the future.

Scotland built the technology of the 20th Century, and together we can build the future of the 21st Century too.

As a nation, we have an extraordinary story to tell, but it's far from over.

I believe the best chapters are yet to come, and this decade will be one where we write our future together.

But looking at the future doesn't mean we can ignore the crises of the present.

In any story, there are challenges to overcome.

I hope 2022 is the year when we turn the corner in the battle against Covid thanks to dedication of our NHS workers, frontline staff and the determination of the Scottish people.

A new phase of the pandemic though must mean a new approach – one that recognises we will be living with Covid in some form for years to come.

That means building resilience back into the heart of the NHS, but also into our economy.

And recognising the toll the past two years has taken on the mental health of so many Scots.

That should already have been done almost two years into the

pandemic.

But the impending crisis we will face in 2022 is the cost of living crisis.

And one big part of that is rising energy bills. That is why Labour have set out a plan to cut the energy bills of most households in Scotland by around £200 this year.

For struggling pensioners and middle or low earners, targeted support would mean £600 more this year for thousands of families.

A plan to retrofit homes means, every year, Scottish households would save £400. I would also give extra support to struggling businesses to get them through.

That's the difference Labour in government can make. That is why the next general election in Scotland can't just be about opposing the Tories, it must be about replacing them too – and only Labour can do that.

It is on us though to do the hard work necessary to be worthy of your support.

There is open debate about the need to reform and renew the institutions of the UK, but we need to recognise the challenges in Scotland too and reform and renew our institutions here.

The reason I spend so much time highlighting the failings at the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital isn't just because of the injustices, but because of what it says about Scottish politics too – a culture where nobody takes responsibility, failings are excused, and we have to wait years for action.

You can't build a nation fit for the future, an NHS fit for the future, an education system for the future or an economy for the future by simply putting ideas for improvement on hold or worse yet just closing our eyes and wishing them

away.

We face a choice – do we go back to the way things were before, or do we build the future, together?

As I said 9 months ago when I was elected leader, I know we have still got a long way to go to earn your trust.

With hard work and determination, I believe Labour's best days are ahead of it, but more importantly I believe Scotland's best days are ahead of it too.

I am incredibly grateful to our dedicated supporters, and I thank each and every one of you for your backing.

In fact, as we look to the local government elections that will be taking place later this year, I want to encourage you to come forward and stand as Labour candidates.

If you want to help your community, work to improve local services, and want to build a brighter future, then please come, join us and stand for us in these elections.

But you'll understand that my priority this year, and every year going forward, is to focus on those who still need convincing.

So today I am setting a challenge for every Labour politician, whether they are in Westminster, Holyrood or in local government, and to anyone that aspires to be a Labour representative.

And I have set myself the same challenge.

Which is to get out of our comfort zone.

To stop talking simply to those we agree with or that support us and start speaking to those who don't.

To stop talking about the past and relentlessly focus on the future.

Because I believe that only Labour can bring our country together to build the future.

Scotland has two governments that seek to divide in their own way.

Both wanting to force you to pick a side.

Well Labour, under my leadership, will always be on your side.

Because when you look at the behaviour of the two other main parties in Scotland – the SNP and the Tories – it's no wonder that Scots are feeling disconnected from the decision-making in our country.

We have a Prime Minister, to put it bluntly, that is disastrous and incompetent.

We have a First Minister that is divisive and increasingly disconnected – someone who wants us to come through the pandemic and divide us all over again.

The Tories have no understanding of the needs and desires of Scottish communities.

And in the SNP, I believe Scotland is being let down by oversight, and a growing arrogance of power.

And I say that, candidly, as the leader of a party which many people believe grew arrogant in power itself.

When politicians or parties begin to believe they are untouchable or unbeatable they begin to lose touch, become distant and take people for granted.

I believe that is happening to this SNP government.

And that's not good for Scotland.

The Tories are out of ideas. The SNP only has one idea.

But I believe there are ideas bigger than independence.

Building the future needs those bigger, bolder, brighter ideas.

I am determined to do the hard work necessary to build that future.

But, to be frank, I can't do that alone.

I want to work with people across Scotland, regardless of your previous or current political persuasion, to build the future.

If you have an idea about how we can develop healthcare, improve our schools or save the planet, I want to hear from you.

Genuinely.

I am serious when I say that I want us to build the future of our country, together.

That requires bold action and thinking outside the box.

That means thinking differently about technology, the role of digital and the changing aspirations of our young people.

Digital technology has revolutionised our lives – from how we stay in touch with our friends and family to how we order food, but our political systems and public services too often feel the same as they were before the iPhone.

We must embrace this revolution and put it at the heart of government and everything that we do.

So we have an NHS – not just saved, but renewed, rebuilt and fit for the future.

Improving health outcomes by building the workforce, identifying and eliminating cancers sooner through innovation and new technologies, building resilience so further viral

infections don't overwhelm the NHS, and by treating mental health with the same speed and care as physical health.

A revamped and future-proofed education system that reflects the needs of our children so they are ready for the world, equipped with the skills they need to meet their aspirations and the ability to live with freedom and security.

It also means thinking differently about our economy and preparing them for the jobs of the future, not just for the kind of jobs their parents do or did.

That means embracing the digital future and promoting entrepreneurship too.

Too many young people across our country are forced to leave their community in search of opportunities.

We must connect local economies so that young people can live, learn, fall in love, bring up families and retire local and have quality local services at the same time too.

And in this new digital and interconnected age, our planet is local.

That's why we also need to lead the world in averting the climate catastrophe, so we can preserve the planet for future generations.

Promises were made in 2021 – it's now time to deliver on those promises.

More of the same just won't cut it. The same old arguments won't change anything.

This requires new thinking and bold new ideas.

This is what I mean by building the future.

The promise I make to you is this- I will work day and night and do the hard work necessary, and work with you, so we can

embrace and build that future together.

Thank you.