

NEW

HOPE

**OUR PRIORITIES FOR
LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Scottish 
Liberal Democrats

Association of Scottish Liberal Democrat Councillors (ASLDC)

Association of Scottish Liberal Democrat Councillors (ASLDC)

New Hope: Scottish Liberal Democrat Priorities for Local Government

Foreword by Alex Cole-Hamilton:

New Hope with the Scottish Liberal Democrats

After everything we've been through, Scotland needs new hope right now. At the coming council elections, you'll only find that hope with the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

Our councillors and candidates are thrilled by the idea of what community can mean. We see the best in people and we want the best for them. If something isn't working, then we try to fix it.

It's time to move on from the division that has held Scotland back for so long. Let's lay aside talk of an independence referendum and get to grips with what matters right now.

That starts with getting Scotland back on its feet after two years of pandemic and by recognising that our people are facing the biggest hit to household budgets in a generation.

We face so many challenges. Two years of disruption in our schools. The longest ever waits for medical appointments. The climate emergency. So what are we going to do about it?

There are teachers looking for work, so let's use them to cut class sizes and boost support for pupils.

We would put new staff in your local surgery to get you treatment fast.

We would insulate you and your home from the cost of living crisis and the climate emergency.

Across the UK we would put a Robin Hood tax on energy companies making super profits. We would cut VAT, worth £600 for every home.

Scotland has a proud history and our people are magnificent - you can see that in the way we're opening our homes to Ukrainian refugees. But it can be so much more.

Back us this May and I promise you that Liberal Democrats in the villages and towns of Scotland will show you the meaning of hope once again.



Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP
Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats

Education and opportunity for all

We know how hard the last two years have been. Children have missed out on so much. The poverty-related attainment gap has got even bigger. The response should be unprecedented but parents and teachers are struggling to see any difference in what's on offer in our schools. World class training and retraining are essential to rebuilding our country's economic future. Scottish Liberal Democrats want everyone to fulfil their potential.

We will:

- Ensure nursery education meets the promise of 1140 free hours for 3 and 4-year-olds with the flexibility, holiday options and wraparound provision parents require. This pick and mix nursery provision will be designed to meet the varied needs of families.
- Cut costs for parents and support children's development by supporting the extension of early learning and childcare entitlements to all 2-year-olds and preparing for the extension to 1-year-olds.
- Offer families the right to defer entry into Primary 1 and have it replaced with funded early learning and childcare this August, removing the £4,500 price tag that hangs over parents in many areas.
- Value the expertise of teachers in nurseries.
- Campaign to halt the SNP Government's national testing of four and five-year-olds.
- Support children and families with breakfast clubs in all schools and increase the availability of free school meals, removing hunger as a barrier to learning, focused on healthy eating.
- Focus on raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap through:
 - the stronger Pupil Equity Fund already won by Scottish Liberal Democrats which will give schools confidence to recruit more long-term staff.
 - supporting a nationwide teacher job guarantee to cut class sizes, because no teacher should be unemployed or feel underemployed.
 - pupil support assistants providing more in-class support for children who need it.
 - making sure every child has access to connected technology.
 - supporting the expansion of outdoor learning and increased provision of residential experiences to engage children.
 - supporting a new programme of extra supported study for S4-S6 to guide revision, work through problems and consolidate understanding.
 - supporting voluntary pilots of a longer statutory early years phase, using play-based learning to help more children get off to a good start before the age of 7.
- Prioritise the building of top class leadership in our schools, develop support networks and career opportunities for teachers and pupil support assistants, encourage specialist ASN training and innovate to resolve the issue of hard-to-fill teaching posts through three-year packages for probationer teachers for specific areas.
- Help teachers to make best use of digital learning, for example by sharing learning resources between schools.

- Campaign to make all nursery buildings and school estates fit for top quality education and reassert the role of the local authority in increasing capacity to meet local need.
- Ensure that school and nursery designs are flexible and generous, supporting play-based learning, increased activity levels and kitchen and dining room provision.
- Work with headteachers, parents and parent councils to decentralise more powers to schools over their own organisation, staff and resources, including strengthening ASN provision.
- Make sure that young people with additional support needs get the support they need and support the recruitment of more educational psychologists.
- Ensure that young children starting school are not held back by communication barriers, providing effective early intervention.
- Support Scotland rejoining international assessments of education to keep pace with the best in the world.
- Oppose centralisation in education and press for funding to be entrusted to local authorities, not hoarded at Holyrood.
- Campaign to ensure the replacements for the SQA and Education Scotland are dedicated to what local teachers and pupils need, with their direction set by people with recent teaching experience instead of ministers.
- Fund youth work services securely to allow them to reach young people who are not engaged successfully in formal education.
- Restore colleges to a powerful role in local economic development, training people of all ages in the skills they need to start – or change – their careers.

We will improve the life chances of looked after children and those in kinship care, supporting best practice as corporate parents.

We will focus on reducing child poverty and make full use of Local Child Poverty Action Reports. We also support the Scottish Liberal Democrats' Cost of Living Rescue Package. Scotland's child poverty reduction targets must be met.

Health and social care

The virus has shown how much we need and value health and care services and the people who work in them. However, they are under pressure like never before. Staff are exhausted. Waiting lists are painfully long including for mental health support and operations. There are record numbers of vacancies. Two years of the virus and 15 years of SNP mismanagement are each taking their toll.

Scottish Liberal Democrats have a rich history of investing in Scotland's health, introducing free dental and eye checks, free personal care and recently winning £120 million more for mental health.

Now we will work in partnership to:

- Make local authorities mental health champions.

- Set an ambition to give every local authority workplace the benefits of a mental health first aider, capable of providing peer support and identifying signs of ill health among colleagues.
- Ensure education services have the resources to identify young people with mental health problems and help get them early support.
- Support a preventative approach with more counsellors available for schools.
- Participate in the wider system of mental health support to guarantee that there is no wrong door for accessing services and waiting times are drastically reduced.
- Support all staff to take a trauma-informed approach in their work.
- Campaign for more mental health practitioners for key local settings such as GP surgeries and alongside the police.
- Support stronger local health services so that people can get the care they need closer to home.
- Back calls for new support for the sufferers of long Covid who have been overlooked by the Scottish Government, including specialist clinics and in-home support.
- Support voluntary groups that help people tackle loneliness and isolation.
- Signpost GPs and other health professionals to third sector organisations and council services capable of supporting their patients.
- Promote steps to treat drug misuse with compassion and treatment to stop people dying, in addition to providing effective support for needs including housing and employment.

We support the recommendation of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care that there should be a step change in social care with the resources to support it. However, we will resist the ministerial takeover of care services. It was the same Scottish Government ministers who were responsible for sending untested and covid-positive patients into care homes at the start of the pandemic. A takeover risks repeating the expensive mistakes of Police Scotland and the loss of local innovation.

Instead, we will drive up the quality of care for users and move quickly to reward staff with better pay, conditions and career progression.

For people requiring care we will:

- Deliver high quality, flexible and locally-run care services and community care built around individual needs and choices.
- Recognise the right of every person to personalised care.
- Champion preventative approaches.
- Provide companionship and the opportunity for stimulating activities.
- Involve disabled people and other care users in local commissioning so it is informed by local experience of unmet need.
- Review the mix of provision available to people requiring care and support including modern sheltered housing, community care hubs, meal provision, community links and models of independent living for younger adults.
- Modernise day centre provision.
- Ensure that the relatives of care home residents are able to have full and meaningful contact with their loved ones.

For care staff, Scottish Liberal Democrats will:

- Prioritise the establishment of powerful national bargaining with the Scottish Government funding required to deliver on fair work standards for staff.
- Respect the social care workforce for the work they do and require care service providers to comply with fair work standards.
- Allow carers to build relationships and trust with care users, moving away from narrow task-based contracts.
- Implement change as soon as possible, instead of delaying while new organisations are created by SNP ministers which would siphon resources from the frontline.

Greener and cleaner communities

Our plans will accelerate action to tackle climate change to meet Scotland's climate targets. They are among the strongest in the world because of the work done by Scottish Liberal Democrats to lift ambitions. What happens in the next five years will decide if they are met.

We will think global and act local to help achieve net zero and nature recovery. We will:

- Establish local Climate Change Committees and Just Transition plans.
- Commit to cut energy use across local authority buildings.
- Plant more trees and community orchards through a "tree for every citizen" initiatives focused on native species.
- Encourage rewilding and reduce the use of damaging weedkillers.
- Make sure access to green, open spaces, wildlife corridors and woodland are available to every community.
- Protect greenbelts and gaps between settlements for the long-term benefit of local communities, the climate and nature, including through a brownfield-first approach to planning.
- Preserve parks and playing fields as important community green space.
- Deliver clean local environments.
- Support the Scottish Liberal Democrats' campaign for the creation of a new restitution order, the proceeds of which would help victims with the costs of clearing up fly-tipping and increase efforts to catch tippers.
- Support substantial measures to reduce waste and embrace the development of a circular economy.

Scotland's transport is where the least amount of progress has been made in cutting emissions. We will:

- Make electric vehicle charging points a priority in our green transport plans and expect new developments to include charging points as standard.
- Introduce a robust presumption that new council vehicles are electric, reducing emissions and giving the public sector a stake in maintaining the charging network.
- Integrate the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods into planning to bring most of what people need in daily life within a short distance, reducing the need for travel.
- Review closed railway lines and campaign for the reopening of feasible routes.

- Promote community car share schemes, demand responsive transport and community transport schemes.
- Use the powers and influence of local authorities to support transport integration, affordable tickets, and to ensure it delivers economic opportunity and equity.
- Campaign for new local powers to integrate all forms of transport and to control local bus services. Regional transport partnerships should have the power to set routes and timetables, ending Margaret Thatcher’s deregulation so that services suit passengers rather than bus company owners.

To help people be active and to improve the lamentable condition of Scotland’s roads, gullies and pavements, we will:

- Commit resource to tackling the chronically poor condition of local roads and pavements to make them safer for walking, wheeling, cycling and driving, improving the quality of repair to resolve issues first time around.
- Declutter streets to assist visually impaired and disabled people.
- Develop a Safe Routes strategy and incorporate modern streetscape design with separate spaces for cyclists, walkers and motorists to keep them all safe.
- Plan so that every child has done their cycling proficiency test by the end of primary school.
- Support measures to make travel to school more child-friendly, reduce congestion at school gates and aim to reduce car travel to school by more than 10%.

We will build climate-friendly new homes, keep people warm and reduce household energy costs. We will:

- End the installation of fossil-fuel based heating systems in new homes, make district heating the normal choice for new developments and expect the highest energy and insulation standards.
- Support a major retrofit programme in existing housing, declare insulation a priority and focus on households struggling with costs as part of our aim to end fuel poverty.
- Back local combined heat and power projects and expect developers to co-operate on these initiatives.
- Support the Scottish Liberal Democrat plan to insulate you and your home from the cost of living crisis. This includes an emergency nationwide home insulation programme, doubling and expanding the Winter Fuel Payment and Warm Home Discount, and a one-off levy on firms that have made super profits from the soaring energy prices.

Homes, Communities and Leisure

Councils should take a leading role in tackling poverty, meeting local need for affordable housing, cutting living costs and building opportunity. We will:

- Support the building of thousands more homes for social rent, and push the Scottish Government to elevate its nationwide target to match our ambition.
- Campaign for equality in the subsidies provided by the Scottish Government to councils and registered social landlords so that we can deliver more homes.

- Invest more in upgrading and maintaining existing council housing to raise living standards, including improving the surrounding landscape.
- Expand the supply of low-cost housing options, particularly for young people.
- Bring back more empty homes into use, reviewing the reasons properties are left vacant, using council buy back powers and campaigning for the Scottish Government to establish new Help to Renovate loans with a focus on first-time buyers.
- Help communities get the most of the Rural and Island Housing Fund secured by Scottish Liberal Democrats and, once it fulfils its potential, seek its extension.
- Support population growth in rural areas where there is no existing housing stock available for purchase.
- Work with our partners to seek to end homelessness.

We will give increased priority to tackling flooding including ensuring that any new building is balanced by improved and sustainable drainage. We will also support the Scottish Liberal Democrat campaign for a new Climate Emergency Communities Fund to prepare and protect people across Scotland already being affected by extreme weather.

For unpaid carers and those they care for, we will:

- Recognise unpaid carers with guaranteed respite alongside support for those who want to undertake or continue employment, training and education.
- Give carers the right to flexible working hours where it is in our power to grant this.
- Consider introducing a package of carer benefits including free leisure centre access and self-referral to socially prescribed activities and courses.
- Campaign for a £1000 UK-wide uplift to Carer's Allowance.

Most leisure and culture activities are not statutory, meaning they are often among the first victims of financial cuts. We will recognise that they are not luxuries but critical to quality of life at all ages. We will:

- Modernise council leisure and cultural facilities to meet community need.
- Support the retention and modernisation of library facilities and halls as community hubs, multi-use facilities, places of safety and learning.
- Work in partnership with voluntary sector organisations to develop a wide range of sporting and cultural opportunities, including expanding book bugs, activity coordinators and development support for clubs.
- Create new routes for people who are isolated, on low incomes or in poor health to take up leisure and recreation opportunities. We support the Scottish Liberal Democrat calls to help children and young people escape the impact of poverty with new guarantees that they will be able to experience life-changing activities outside of school, including the creation of a permanent nationwide Holiday Fun Fund.

We will work in partnership with the police to cut crime and back reforms to the justice system that work effectively to support victims and cut reoffending. We support the right of communities to engage meaningfully with the national force to influence local priorities and would campaign for new legislation to bring democracy back into Police Scotland.

We will support the Scottish Liberal Democrats' campaign for a commission to recommend urgent steps to prevent violence against women and girls in all its forms.

Local democracy

We want powerful and well-run local councils with a “can do, will do” attitude, committed to the delivery of excellent local services. Local Authorities have suffered serious and disproportionate cuts to their budgets at the hands of SNP-Green budget deals, reducing their capacity for innovation and dynamism and damaging their ability to support local communities.

Strong councils are those that are accessible and accountable to local people. We will:

- Open up councils, campaigning to protect and enhance public access to council meetings (including virtual meetings), creating opportunities to question the council leadership and establishing regular town hall meetings in local communities.
- Listen and act on the lived experiences of service users.
- Support the Scottish Liberal Democrats’ campaign for the Scottish Parliament to establish powers of recall, meaning communities have the ultimate sanction of removing their elected representatives in the event of proven misconduct.
- Treat our political opponents, journalists and the public with respect and have a zero-tolerance approach to abuse.

Scottish Liberal Democrats will oppose the centralising power grabs of SNP Ministers in Holyrood and campaign to free councils to deliver for their areas, with the powers and financial levers they need. We will:

- Support the restoration of local control over council tax and business rates as part of a comprehensive plan to increase the proportion of funding determined and distributed locally.
- Oppose the SNP’s centralisation agenda, including the latest plan to take over social work, children’s services, community justice, and alcohol and drug services.
- Campaign for councils to receive their fair share of Scottish Government resources.
- Work through COSLA to develop a new vision for local councils with a suite of new powers which can be used to make a real difference to people’s lives, particularly in economic strategy, energy, transport, town planning and funding for affordable housing.
- Promote the long-overdue replacement of the council tax.
- Support parity of esteem between local and central government underpinned by a fiscal framework that recognises the important work councils do.
- Adopt fair work principles so that councils, as leading local employers, show leadership and can attract and retain the talent needed for quality services, good governance and to guarantee value for money.

Our community-focus will decentralise power, build wealth, help communities be involved in decisions at an early stage and respect the choices they make for their neighbourhoods. We support the people-centred wealth building agenda.

We will:

- Recognise social and mutual enterprises, voluntary and community organisations as key council partners, supporting them to build their capacity so they can make the

greatest impact. This will include supporting them to run local services and facilities such as community spaces.

- Work in partnership with the voluntary sector and community organisations to enhance the effectiveness of local provision and services, giving people a greater say in and control over decisions which affect them.
- Recognise the social value of land and assets held by public bodies, providing opportunities and support for community asset transfers and letting local people control and benefit from community assets and spending.
- Use the power of councils to bring different services and public and voluntary sector agencies together to develop Shared Service Hubs using community halls, libraries, advice centres and post offices.
- Support meaningful participative budgeting.
- Support community councils to grow and become more effective, more participative and more representative of the areas they serve. We will offer them enhanced roles in matters such as common good, ceremonial and civic matters, town twinning, and the development of town centres and local facilities.
- Support local groups working to improve the environment and tackle the climate emergency, including those operating community gardens and allotments.
- Recognise that planning decisions are best tailored and decided locally, not over-ruled nationally.
- Campaign for rural communities to have enhanced consultation rights and consideration, similar to the Islands Act, to ensure the unique challenges they face are addressed.

Stronger councils for a stronger local economy

The local economy has been damaged and the future of many businesses threatened by the Covid pandemic. Lifestyles, services, travel patterns and choices have changed, sometimes permanently, whilst many local businesses have adapted to new opportunities. Councils must direct resources and effort to supporting recovery on a better basis than before, in partnership with local business. There are major opportunities to keep “leisure pounds” local and to back good local businesses which provide sustainable local jobs.

Liberal Democrats will champion the role of councils in local economic development, reinvigorating town centres and backing good local businesses which provide sustainable jobs. We will:

- Make full use of councils’ economic clout, with better partnerships with local business around decisions and priorities.
- Set the standard for fair employment practice, fair pay, youth employment and the use of local and small suppliers through council contracts.
- Secure the connections to superfast broadband which communities need to work, learn and thrive. Our plans for community connection managers will broker bespoke solutions for communities, particularly in remoter and island areas that have been left out of the main central government programmes. We will also support the

Liberal Democrat campaign to require broadband providers to give cheaper tariffs to vulnerable consumers.

- Adopt new tourism strategies to take advantage of more people choosing holidays in Scotland and give businesses the best chance of capitalising. We will enact a substantial programme of capital works in tourist areas to provide better car parking, electric charging points, public toilets and waste disposal points.
- Work to protect the creative industries that have been hit hard by the pandemic. We will protect performance, rehearsal and exhibition spaces that are at risk because of the lower footfall legacy of the pandemic but which are essential to communities. We will work to get more arts into more communities than ever before to inspire and entertain, including into schools.
- Establish local Green Strategy Boards to drive change and help local firms get the benefit of transition support, minimise their environmental impact, and create green jobs and the industries of the future.
- Provide more apprenticeships.
- Encourage more diverse, small and micro businesses through council enterprise support, valuing community impact and getting them beyond the start-up phase.
- Support food strategies designed to reduce food miles, encourage greater use of local produce in schools, back community food initiatives and champion our regional specialties.
- Encourage colleges to become enterprise hubs, particularly in rural areas, meeting local skills needs and supporting innovative new businesses.
- Create fantastic local business opportunities and green jobs through our plans for warmer homes, heat networks and our focus on the climate emergency.

We will:

- Aim to simplify the crowded economic landscape of City Deals and partnerships, allowing councils and their partners new flexible opportunities for supporting the local economy.
- Support local high streets, increasing the footfall by converting empty shops for alternative uses such as multi-use hubs for public agencies, employment or leisure projects, or residential accommodation where sensible.

Note: Every community across Scotland has its own character, needs and priorities. For that reason, Scottish Liberal Democrats do not produce a manifesto for council elections in the normal way. Instead our party is the strongest supporter of local government in Scotland and of empowering our councillors to make a difference. We support the mandate of our local authorities and of local Liberal Democrat council groups.

We are united by a framework of values, policy priorities and determined local campaigning. This manifesto toolkit from the Association of Scottish Liberal Democrat Councillors focuses on what Scottish Liberal Democrat councillors can achieve for people in our communities. It is a statement of principles and approach applicable to the very different local challenges and decisions they face. It will form the basis of more comprehensive local policy platforms.

A number of policies within this document also require the additional finances and powers for local authorities for which Scottish Liberal Democrats are campaigning.

