



**SNP**

**MAKING  
SCOTLAND  
BETTER**

# MAKING SCOTLAND BETTER

The council elections on May 3 are about your local community. Wherever you are in Scotland, SNP councils and SNP councillors will work with the Scottish Government to make your street a better place to live.

## **COUNCIL TAX FROZEN**

We will keep the Council Tax freeze, enabling households to keep more of the money they earn.

## **EXTRA POLICE**

We will continue to drive down crime by keeping the 1000 extra police in our communities.

## **CREATING JOBS**

We will build for recovery, with SNP councils creating new jobs by investing in new schools and homes.

## **HELPING YOUNG FAMILIES**

We will deliver 600 hours of free and more flexible nursery education, helping young parents across Scotland.

## **OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL**

We will offer a learning or training place to every 16 – 19 year old not already in work, training or education.

## **FREE PERSONAL CARE**

We will continue to provide free personal care to support our older folk.

## **SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES**

We will continue to deliver the Small Business Bonus, the best rates relief package in the UK.

## **CARING FOR CARERS**

We will introduce carers' champions to ensure carers receive better support from their local council.

## **FAIRER PAY**

We will introduce the living wage for the lowest-paid council workers.

## **JOB SECURITY**

We'll extend our policy of no compulsory redundancies to include council workers, giving job security and thus boosting local economies.

## **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**

We will ensure SNP councils work in close partnership with the NHS to deliver improved and more integrated care for older Scots.

## **FREE BUS PASS RETAINED – AND EXTENDED**

We guarantee to retain the concessionary bus pass – and are extending it to cover Dial-a-bus services.



## Foreword

### by Rt Hon Alex Salmond MSP

In last year's elections to the Scottish Parliament, the SNP stood before the electorate and asked to be judged on our record, our team and our vision for the future of Scotland. And we were honoured to receive the support of so many of our fellow Scots.

Now, in government, we are working hard to repay the trust placed in us, by putting into effect a range of policies designed to make Scotland a fairer, wealthier, safer, greener and smarter nation; a country ready to face the challenges – and seize the opportunities – of this twenty-first century.

We are working to secure for Scotland the powers of an independent country, and the people will have their say on our proposals in the historic referendum in the autumn of 2014.

This year, on May 3, the elections are about your local community and who will take the important decisions that shape how that community develops over the next five years. With your votes, you can elect a strong team of effective SNP local councillors and SNP councils that will work to build recovery, support families and improve and protect your local services.

Despite the unprecedented cuts in public spending, the SNP government has protected council budgets and that means we can take forward key priorities:

**Building for recovery:** building new schools and homes to help create and protect local jobs

**Safer communities:** keeping the 1000 extra police on our streets

**Protecting family budgets:** as other bills rise, we'll keep the Council Tax frozen and protect people from the impact of Westminster cuts

**More nursery hours:** helping parents with an increase to 600 flexible, free nursery hours

**Fairer pay:** we'll deliver a living wage for council workers

**Helping local businesses create jobs:** with the best business rates relief in the UK

**Opportunities for young Scots:** working with the Scottish Government to get unemployed local youngsters into an apprenticeship, training or learning place

**Working together:** SNP councils will work together with you and with the Scottish Government, to make your community stronger, safer and fairer. We ask you to join us, to show your support on May 3, so together we can make Scotland better



ALEX SALMOND MSP

First Minister and Leader of the Scottish National Party

## Introduction

The SNP enters the campaign for the local government elections on 3 May with a strong record, a powerful vision for a better Scotland and growing support across our nation.

We are determined to build on that record and to make life better for the people and communities we serve.

We believe it is fundamentally better for our nation if decisions about Scotland's future and Scotland's successes are taken by the people who care most about Scotland – that is by the people of Scotland. That, at its simplest, is what independence means: Scotland's future in Scotland's hands.

That decision, on Scotland's future, will be taken in the autumn of 2014. This year, on May 3, you will have the opportunity to choose who is best placed to take the decisions about the future of your local area. In this manifesto we set out our national shared policy priorities. Local manifestos will set out in more detail the vision for individual council areas, as set out by the local SNP council group.

May's elections matter. In these tough economic times local councils have a key role in driving our economy, building and protecting our communities and providing services that put people first.

Local councils play a crucial part in delivering the services that hold the fabric of our society together – from educating our children, to channelling the support our older citizens need to

stay safe and healthy at home; from keeping the streets lit and the roads maintained to managing our waste and recycling and safeguarding our environment – and from working to breathe new life into our high streets and town centres, to helping our young people get the training and skills necessary to play a fulfilling part in building a better Scotland.

Thanks to all those who voted SNP in 2007 and 2011 we've been able to ease some of the pressure on family budgets with the Council Tax freeze. We've started building new council houses, creating jobs in the construction sector and providing better homes for thousands of families. And, working with local authorities, parents and teaching professionals, we've ensured that over the last five years more young people are now leaving school with better qualifications. This is just the beginning. With the support of people across Scotland once again, we will continue the council tax freeze until 2016 and get central and local government working in tandem – and even harder – to create jobs.

That is why the share of the budget allocated to councils this year was higher than when this administration came to power in 2007, and why we want to put communities at the heart of decision-making.

SNP councillors will work hard to make Scotland's communities fairer, more prosperous and more successful places to live. Last year we sought and received your support. With your continuing help we can redouble our efforts to build a Scotland we can all be proud of.

# Making Scotland Better:

## **COUNCIL TAX FROZEN**

We will freeze the Council Tax until 2016, saving the average household £1200 since 2007, and protect our lowest paid and pensioners from UK cuts to Council Tax benefit.

## **NO COMPULSORY REDUNDANCIES**

We will continue the practice of no compulsory redundancies, giving families stability and supporting the economy.

## **A LIVING WAGE FOR ALL COUNCIL STAFF**

All SNP councils will introduce the living wage of £7.20 by April 2013, helping up to 20,000 low paid workers.

## **SMALL BUSINESSES CHAMPIONED**

To protect jobs and support local economies, 85,000 small businesses will benefit from the Small Business Bonus, worth over £130 million a year, and local areas will be able to keep more of the business rates they raise, encouraging economic growth.

## **BEST NURSERY EDUCATION ENTITLEMENT IN THE UK**

We will provide a minimum of 600 hours of nursery education for all three and four- year olds, and all looked-after two- year-olds, putting Scotland at the forefront of provision across the UK.

## **TAKING CARE OF CARERS**

Every SNP council will appoint Carers' Champions – both an elected councillor and an officer who will work with carers and across all departments to ensure carers get the help that is needed. We will continue to fight alongside kinship carers for proper recognition and financial support.

## **COMMUNITIES EMPOWERED**

We will give local communities, urban or rural, the right to buy unused public assets for community use and a greater say over local services.

## **FREE PERSONAL CARE**

We will ensure our older people continue to receive free personal care.

## **COMMUNITY SAFETY CHAMPIONED**

We will ensure there are 1000 extra police officers on our streets and work to cut crime by tackling knife use and providing activities for young people. We will ensure policing priorities are set at local level.

## **BETTER SCHOOLS, LOWER INFANT CLASS SIZES PROTECTED**

New lower class sizes will be protected and we will half the number of children in poor-quality school buildings.

## **MAKING HOUSING MATTER**

We will build 5000 new council homes across the country by May 2016, and help housing developments hit by the recession back to life.

## **ADVANCING YOUTH SKILLS**

We will support youth employment by taking on apprentices, offering training places or targeting unemployment hot spots with support for firms to take on young people. We will work together with the Scottish Government to ensure every 16 – 19 year old has a training or learning opportunity.

## **PRIORITISING INVESTMENT**

SNP administrations will work with the Scottish Government to find new investment to protect and create jobs and boost our local infrastructure, including unlocking capital investment from pension funds, such as those supporting local authority pensions.

## **GENERATING A FITTER, HEALTHIER SCOTLAND**

By 2014 all pupils in primary school will participate in two hours physical education per week, while secondary students in S1 – S4 will be timetabled for two periods of PE weekly. Every school child will have access to on-road cycle training to boost confidence, road sense, personal independence and fitness.

## **PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY**

We will put communities at the heart of local services, increasing the amount of information available to the public and introducing public petitions committees.



## Building recovery

The global downturn has presented a challenge to governments everywhere. Belts have had to be tightened and we know that in local authorities, as in central government, some tough decisions have had to be made.

In tackling the recession the SNP in Government and at local level has prioritised measures designed to reinvigorate the economy by protecting jobs, investing in new homes, roads and hospitals and boosting consumer confidence.

In local government SNP councillors will work with all parts of the economy and all parts of government to stimulate economic recovery.

The top priority of every SNP Council will be to produce an economic recovery plan that delivers growth, opportunities and jobs.

### Investing in recovery

Local councils can be major investors in economic growth and we will use every tool at our disposal to support recovery.

The construction industry is a key player in securing economic recovery, and councils can play a critical role in supporting jobs, skills and training by directing investment to new construction projects such as schools, roads, or enterprise parks. Every £100m invested in new capital projects like these can support 1400 jobs.

### Building recovery, building homes

Across Scotland SNP councils have been building what in many instances have been the first council houses for a generation. 3,300 new council houses were built between 2007 and 2011, compared to a total of six under the last Labour-Lib Dem administration between 2003 and 2007.



**“The top priority of every SNP council will be to produce an economic recovery plan that delivers growth, opportunities and jobs.”**



*Alex Neil, Cabinet Secretary  
for Infrastructure and Capital Investment*



Over the next three years a further £710 million will be invested by local authorities in constructing new homes, helping our economy and crucially helping people to build a better life in a new home that's safe, warm and affordable.

SNP Councils will also work with the Scottish Government to deliver 30,000 new affordable homes within the lifetime of this parliament.

**We pledge:** to build 5000 council houses. SNP councils will continue to make resourcing house building and refurbishment a priority in setting their budgets, while dedicating necessary funding to meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

### **Building recovery, building communities**

In the SNP we are committed to equipping Scotland with an infrastructure that's fit for the twenty-first century, and doing so in the most cost-effective way. That's why we've abandoned Labour's discredited Private Finance Initiative and are building a new generation of infrastructure funded directly through capital spending and using not-for-profit distribution models via the Scottish Futures Trust.

Schoolchildren across Scotland will benefit from Scottish Futures Trust funding, with capital having been allocated to help fund new schools from Happyhansel in Shetland to Dalbeattie in Dumfries & Galloway. The first school built under the SFT's £1.25 billion Scotland's Schools for the Future programme, Pumpherston and Uphall Station Community Primary School, was officially opened in February 2012. SNP councils across the land will continue the progress on new schools that is creating jobs and building classrooms for the future.

We will reinvigorate communities by supporting the construction of a new type of community infrastructure known as 'the Hub', which seeks to revolutionise the way Scotland's public bodies plan new facilities and deliver their services. From small GP practices to large combined community, health and sports centres, the Hub brings together local public sector organisations to increase joint working and the shared delivery of sustainable community buildings.

Each of these investments improves services, supports communities and, by creating and protecting jobs, puts money back into the economy and helps secure growth.

### **Building recovery, building business**

The Scottish Government is also piloting a new form of infrastructure funding, known as Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) which enables councils to borrow funds for investment, in anticipation of the future returns from taxation yielded by the investment (because of rising property prices, increased businesses, and additional development).

The mechanism is suitable for developments such as strategic road improvements, flood defences, pier extensions and urban regeneration, and SNP councils will monitor the pilots closely to determine whether TIF might provide an appropriate vehicle for projects which would otherwise be out of reach using conventional funding sources.

### Seven Cities Strategy

About 30 per cent of Scots live in our seven cities – vibrant hubs that are home to many of our most important cultural institutions and hosts to major national and international events. Our largest cities are punching above their weight – Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow all featured in the UK top five of cities in the recent UHY Hacker Young analysis of Gross Value Added. This measures a region's contribution to the UK economy according to the value of the goods and services it produces – but we know that with a focused Cities Strategy we can achieve still more.

Since being returned to power in 2011 the SNP Scottish Government has introduced a new Cities Agenda, aimed at bringing together investment in the economy, transport, culture and infrastructure to support these engines of growth in the Scottish economy.

The new Cities Investment Fund supports a Scottish Cities Alliance, which allows the leaders of Scotland's city local authorities to team up in a new economic partnership to attract investment, create jobs, and so help Scotland's cities compete more successfully on the international stage. Greater teamwork should accelerate the pace of investment in our cities by developing the programmes to lever in funding from the private sector or the EU, support inter-city collaboration to promote large-scale projects, and nurture schemes which channel wider city-region investment.

SNP-led city councils will fully subscribe to this philosophy, building on their combined strength to develop strong investment propositions designed to be attractive to potential

investors, and focused on the themes of connectivity, sustainability, knowledge and culture. Priorities will be securing improved rail and air connectivity with key national and international markets, as well as world-class digital connectivity; continuing to pioneer in the transition to a low-carbon economy by being in the forefront of renewable technology, and exploring opportunities to deliver combined heat and power energy systems and district heating networks across the cities; maximising the cities' collective academic research expertise, and forging closer working links between the cities and national agencies to promote the cities and their related regions as desirable places in which to live, visit, study and invest.

Plans to complete the M8 between Edinburgh and Glasgow, as well as to develop faster and more-frequent rail connections between these cities and Stirling, Perth and Dundee, plus the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness, and upgrade of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen demonstrate our vision in action.

**We pledge:** SNP councils, working together with the Scottish Government, will maintain the momentum on these core projects to help our cities compete more successfully on the international stage.



## Jobs and growth

### Encouraging Enterprise

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting business and to creating a more competitive environment, and the Small Business Bonus Scheme (SBBS) is just one example of how we are making a positive difference.

SBBS and other reliefs combined give Scottish business the competitive edge. Over 85,000 properties now benefit from the Small Business Bonus – the most generous package of business reliefs available anywhere in the UK. Individual businesses are incurring savings of up to £4260 per annum, and the total value to SMEs into 2011-12 is £131 million as part of a business reliefs package totalling over £500 million.

The Federation of Small Business has repeatedly said that since 2007 the Small Business Bonus has made the difference between success and failure for hundreds of small businesses

and new starts squeezed between the banks and big business, and this over a period when small businesses have delivered 40,000 new jobs.

The business reliefs offered by the Scottish Government mean that Scottish businesses can pay as much as £3000 less in business rates than would be levied on a comparable property in England, allowing the company to spend the saving on investing in staff training and development, and channelling more money in the local economy.

As a party that champions enterprise we recognise that nurturing small businesses is good for Scotland, with staff from SMEs consistently reporting both higher levels of job satisfaction, and increased sense of loyalty and commitment to the employer, and we know that small businesses play a vital part in local economies. Local councils will work with the

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*John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary  
for Finance, Employment and  
Sustainable Growth*

 /JohnSwinney

Scottish government on proposals to support small businesses in taking on apprentices. And local authorities will now receive a greater portion of the business rates they raise, giving councils all the more reason to invest in enterprise.

**We pledge:** The Small Business Bonus Scheme will remain in place.

### **New investment, new jobs**

The Scottish Government is in the forefront amongst governments in the UK in looking at using the funding locked into pension funds to invest in our economy. Pension funds, particularly those belonging to local authorities, want to invest in long term projects that are stable and secure. Too often the money in these funds is invested in multi-nationals or overseas when, if managed properly, it could produce as much value for the fund and for the community if invested locally – creating jobs and opportunities for local people. There are lessons we can learn from south of the border, where Manchester Airport is owned by a consortium of local authorities in the area, including their pension funds. We will explore how this model can be applied in Scotland.

We want to see pension funds invest in key areas – supporting new housing construction or regenerating town centres. Scotland’s local authorities will work with the Scottish Futures Trust to be among the first to develop projects and tap into that rich source of investment.

**We pledge:** SNP Councils will also work with the Scottish Government to investigate ways that the billions currently held by pension funds and invested beyond Scotland can be rechannelled towards infrastructure projects to improve the

quality of life for Scotland’s people. Each council will be required to produce an economic recovery plan, detailing its strategy for securing growth.

### **Investing locally, supporting local economies**

Investment in local infrastructure and local services can support the economy by providing work for local firms, particularly small and medium-sized businesses. The SNP believes that opportunities to tender for public sector contracts should be transparent and inclusive. We will encourage businesses to register with the Public Contracts Scotland website which aims to give local business a fair opportunity to tender for local government and other public sector contracts, with the world’s first mobile application to alert businesses when new opportunities arise. And we will work with the Scottish Government to legislate so that all contracts are advertised on the website, available to local business and that our young people have opportunities to get training and employment on all contracts awarded by the council

As one of the biggest players in any local economy, the financial management of councils can have a significant impact on the financial health of local business suppliers and contractors. SNP councils will maintain a policy of prompt payment for suppliers in order to assist their cash flow.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will be transparent in their contract awards, and fair and efficient in settling their bills.

### **Protecting jobs**

When times are tough people become concerned about the security of their jobs and are increasingly reluctant to spend

money in the shops, on building projects to spruce up their houses, and luxury items like holidays. And we know that some young people are finding the road into work a difficult one, with limited job opportunities while the economy recovers. We believe that at all levels of government our first task to support recovery must be to protect jobs and investment to give people security and protection against rising bills, low pay and the spectre of redundancy.

By giving security to those working hard to provide local services – as teachers in our schools, social workers in our communities, or those that keep our buildings safe and our streets clean – we can protect jobs and drive recovery, giving people the certainty to invest and to spend.

In 2011 the SNP made a clear commitment to no compulsory redundancies in the Scottish Government, its agencies and the NHS. That has given people the certainty to invest, to make plans for their families and to spend. We will extend this pledge to cover the 300,000 people employed in Scotland's local authorities, and by doing so deliver economic security and economic growth.

### **Social enterprises**

We recognise the contribution that social enterprises make to employment, particularly in innovating services in areas of social and economic disadvantage and around environmental and sustainability issues, as well as low-carbon solutions. SNP councils will continue to support the third sector to increase its contribution to the economy, by establishing partnerships and seeking opportunities for mutual capacity-building.

Our local authorities will ensure supported businesses, employing disabled people who face particular challenges in finding employment, have every opportunity to win contracts.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will directly involve social enterprises in drafting a full social enterprise strategy for each council area.

### **Tourism**

We understand the crucial contribution that the tourism and hospitality sectors make to every local authority's economic livelihood, most particularly in their job-creating potential. We believe that the lead role in the development of Single Outcome Agreements being given to local authority-led community planning partnerships offers a significant opportunity for VisitScotland to contribute to local economic development through the promotion of tourism. SNP administrations will do their utmost to support tourism, while having regard to the complementary roles identified for, respectively, local authorities and for VisitScotland as set out in the Minute of Agreement under the National Strategic Framework, all with a view to securing the most effective, targeted use of resource.

SNP administrations will also recognise the obstacles to growth of the tourism and hospitality sectors caused by the UK government's adherence to policies on increasing Air Passenger Duty, maintenance of an internationally uncompetitive rate of VAT, and a restrictive and expensive visa regime. Where appropriate they will join with the Scottish Government in lobbying for the adoption of a fiscal and cost structure better aligned to the needs of tourism, particularly in economically fragile regions.

**We pledge:** SNP administrations will work with private and public sector partners and appropriate voluntary groups to maximise the tourism potential of their areas.



## Opportunity through education

### Opportunities for All

Too many of our young people are finding it difficult to get their first foot on the jobs ladder.

In difficult financial times, and despite a draconian cut in the Scottish Government's budget imposed by Westminster, we are making unprecedented investment in equipping our young people with the education, training and skills to help them build a bright future.

The SNP government has provided the funding to place 25,000 young people in modern apprenticeships each year for four years – and each of those apprenticeships is linked to a real job. There's been massive investment in the college sector, with

a £200 million commitment to build a new City of Glasgow College, and further combined investment of £100 million to build new colleges in Inverness and Kilmarnock.

To keep educational opportunities as inclusive as possible, we are determined that access to post-16 education should depend on ability to learn, not on ability to pay. That's why we've kept Scotland's university students free from the debt burden of tuition fees, as well as saving Educational Maintenance Allowance so it can continue to give support to 16 – 19 year olds from lower-income households. From 2012-13 to 2014-15 our total investment in post-16 education and training is £5.95 billion.

The SNP government appointed the first Minister for Youth Employment in these islands to provide our young people with the training opportunities that will help them win and hold



**“Over the next four years we will refurbish or build new schools to take another 60,000 children out of crumbling school buildings.”**



*Michael Russell, Cabinet Secretary  
for Education and Lifelong Learning*



down jobs. As the designated Minister, Angela Constance will work with local authorities on an all-Government, all-Scotland basis to ensure that funds to tackle youth unemployment are directed to schemes that will give our young people an opportunity to gain the skills that will set them up for life. We believe councils should lead by example. SNP councils will ensure all bidders for major local authority contracts provide targeted recruitment and training plans for young unemployed people in the area. And, as major local employers, councils will refresh their employment strategies to provide opportunities for young job-seekers to secure an apprenticeship or training place within local authorities

**We pledge:** SNP councils will engage positively with initiatives including the annual tranche of 25,000 modern apprenticeships and the Opportunities for All programme which guarantees a training or learning opportunity for every 16 – 19 year old, as well as protecting our £31 million allocation to the Educational Maintenance Allowance to support many young Scots to go further in their education and training. We will also seek to develop support mechanisms for the recently-announced technical and professional apprenticeships, a new framework which will help employers develop staff to degree level.

### **Re-establishing the excellence of Scottish education**

In our first term the SNP government began the work of making Scotland’s school estate fit for the twenty-first century by building or refurbishing 358 schools. This development programme halved the number of youngsters being taught in run-down schools, but there is further to go. Over the next four years we will refurbish or build new schools to take another 60,000 children out of crumbling school buildings.

Parents, children and teachers all know the difference smaller class sizes can make. Class sizes in primary 1 – 3 are now smaller than when Labour left office. We undertake to protect those lower class sizes over the next four years.

SNP Councils will continue to take forward the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), supporting teachers, parents and pupils as this innovative and high-quality curriculum moves towards complete introduction in our schools.

Over the next four years the new exams will be rolled out and pupils will complete their secondary education within CfE. Colleges and universities will also start to phase in the Curriculum, transforming education for all children from earliest years through to further and higher education. The acknowledgement that Scottish Studies should take its place within the curriculum adds another, exciting dimension to this development.

We believe that Head Teachers are well placed to make decisions about the resources they need. SNP Councils will support a greater degree of devolved school management, ensuring that Head Teachers and staff can apply resources where they are needed, but still within an overall local authority system, moving the responsibility for some day-to-day decisions away from town halls and into classrooms. We also want to support new teachers to get the skills and experience they need. That's why under our teacher induction scheme we will secure places in schools for all probationary teachers.

With absence and indiscipline at record lows, SNP Councils will build on the success of the SNP Government in restoring Scottish education to its rightful place as a major generator of national well-being and future prosperity.

SNP councils will also seek to take full advantage of the Scottish Government's heritage education travel subsidy which, by offering financial assistance with travel costs, encourages schools to make visits to our most important heritage sites. All Historic Scotland sites, plus New Lanark World Heritage Site and the National Trust for Scotland's battlefield sites at Bannockburn and Culloden and the stunning new Robert Burns Birthplace Museum qualify for the scheme in support of Curriculum for Excellence and outdoor learning.

**We pledge:** we will maintain teacher numbers in line with pupil numbers and secure places for all probationers under the teacher induction scheme. Through our Curriculum for Excellence we will support pupils through secondary school to develop creative, flexible, confident and responsible approaches to learning, to equip them with the skills to thrive in the modern world.





## Helping families

Local authorities are the part of government that has the biggest impact on your day-to-day life. The services provided by local authorities are all about you, their residents.

In times of pressure local authorities have a crucial role to play, not just in protecting and delivering frontline services, but in easing the burden on households and families, raising our ambitions through education, and in tackling poverty in our communities.

When many services offering support for families are under threat from the actions of the UK Government this role is all the more important.

Local authorities are there to provide support and services for everyone from the youngest child to our oldest pensioner. They help us all fulfil our ambitions by providing education for our

children and young people, and protect us in our times of need with care and support for our elderly.

SNP councils will always put the people of Scotland's communities first to help you achieve your ambitions.

### **Council Tax: frozen – and incomes protected**

We understand the pressure on household budgets. That's why we want to introduce a living wage and ensure people can feel safe in their jobs with a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies.

We also want to help households with rising living costs including keeping Council Tax bills under control.

Increases of over 60 per cent under the last Labour-Lib Dem administration had put enormous strain on pensioner and

**“Under the SNP there will be a right to a minimum of 600 hours of nursery education for all three and four-year olds, and for all looked-after two-year olds.”**



*Aileen Campbell, Minister  
for Children and Young People*

 /ClydesdAileen

lower-income households who had limited resources, but were outside the eligibility thresholds for Council Tax benefit.

In 2007 the SNP worked with local authorities across the country to freeze the unfair Council Tax and SNP councils will keep it frozen for the next four years.

By 2016 this commitment will have saved the average Band D household £1200 helping those on the lowest incomes, who paid a larger part of their income in Council Tax bills, the most.

To help our younger households SNP councils will retain the student exemption from Council Tax, which is now under threat in England, and will work with the Scottish Government to deliver an exemption for students who are in between full-time courses.

We believe that the Council Tax freeze has been a real help to families and householders across Scotland at a time when we are all feeling the pinch. That's why we disagree strongly with the UK Government's decision to cut Council Tax benefit.

Council Tax benefit helps more than 560,000 households meet their Council Tax bills. Of those 38 per cent are pensioners on fixed incomes. The UK Government's decision to cut Council Tax benefit for this group would actually mean the least well-off in our society seeing their Council Tax bills rise.

The SNP will not implement the UK Government's attack on the least well-off, our elderly and our vulnerable. Working together the Scottish Government and local authorities will

invest £40 million next year to protect household budgets and stand between the UK government's damaging cuts agenda and ordinary households in Scotland.

**We pledge:** The Council Tax will stay frozen to 2016, and we will act to protect the least well-off in our society from UK Tory-Lib Dem cuts.

### **Supporting household budgets**

We are putting in place measures to blunt the impact of the UK government's housing benefit reforms – which will affect 95,000 households in the social rented sector – by working with COSLA and housing associations on mitigation schemes. We are also funding the Chartered Institute of Housing to deliver training for local authorities and housing associations on how to assist their residents.

Council and third sector advice staff can play an important role in achieving income maximisation for struggling households, thereby helping some families keep their heads above water. There will be a significant impact on Scotland's communities as a result of the UK government's welfare cuts. But this is not just about budget. It's about people, and just as the Scottish Government is doing all we can to support individuals, SNP councils, as part of their continuing mission to tackle inequality, will promote benefit, welfare and employment advice to ensure people get what they are entitled to in full.

### Transforming early years

One of the most important duties councils discharge is to support the very youngest in our communities.

We want our children to have the best start in life we can possibly offer them. We must therefore do everything in our power to deliver access to good quality, stimulating nursery education.

We have made some progress on the issue since we came to power in 2007, but more must be done.

Under the SNP there will be a right to a minimum of 600 hours of nursery education for all three- and four-year-olds, and for all looked-after two-year-olds. We will ensure this is delivered with a legal guarantee in the Children's Services Bill, due to come to Parliament next year.

Simply providing care during the school day is not appropriate for some families. That's why we will ensure that nursery education and childcare provision is flexible, to meet the differing needs of parents leading complex lives in modern Scotland.

This represents another milestone in our ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world in which to grow up. It delivers improved childcare to approximately 120,000 children, enabling Scotland's government and local authorities to support parents who are marginal to the labour market to become better engaged, increasing participation and productivity, and moving families out of poverty. Local

authorities will work with the Scottish Government's Early Years Taskforce to help parents and children achieve their full potential, break out of cycles of unemployment or low pay, and improve the life chances of our youngest people. SNP councils will also draw upon the new generation of Children and Family Centres that will be trialled and rolled out across Scotland.

**We pledge:** Every three- and four-year-old, and every looked-after two-year-old child, wherever in Scotland they live, will have a statutory entitlement to receive a minimum of 600 hours of pre-school education per year. This statutory obligation will be placed on local authorities by the Children's Services Bill, due to be introduced next year.



## Stronger communities

Many of the best ideas in our communities don't come from local authorities but from residents. We believe communities have a good idea of the kind of services they need and the local facilities they want.

### **Empowering our communities**

One problem faced by communities can be empty buildings – either on high streets or in housing areas – that drag the area down. SNP councils will use new powers under the Unoccupied Properties Bill, currently before Parliament, to increase Council Tax on empty homes to try and bring them back into use. We will offer home owners who need help, loans to make empty properties suitable for people to live in.

In some cases community groups and organisations may want to take over empty public properties. SNP councils will harness opportunities to support transfers to community ownership of under-used/unused public assets, and will investigate

innovations including transferring to communities control over the management of council estates.

### **Supporting our town centres**

At their best, lively, vibrant town centres can be life-affirming places with thriving shops, appealing coffee shops and attractive bars. The finest of them have a unique identity, a particular 'sense of place' that's representative of the community they serve, and have a good retail mix of national chains and well-run, one-off stores around a historic market place or town hall and interesting cultural spaces. They create a public realm that's as inviting, self-confident and attractive to tourists as it is to locals.

Nearly 90 towns benefited from the Scottish Government's £60 million town centre regeneration fund which has seen shop-fronts improved, derelict buildings refurbished, streets and parks refreshed and brought people back to under-used town centres.

**“We know that Scots of all ages have talents, many of which can be applied to enrich the lives of all around them.”**



*Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary  
for Culture and External Affairs*



In addition, this year town centres can benefit from £10 million to support Conservation Areas, helping some of our most historic town centres – from Whithorn to Wick, and Stornoway to Stromness.

Farmers’ markets help bring people into town centres and can lead to new shops opening up and increasing business for existing retailers. To help farmers’ markets we propose that temporary or weekend markets will no longer need to apply for planning permission, and we have set up a dedicated £200,000 fund to help markets move forward.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will continue to encourage sustainable town centre and village development, and will involve local residents, businesses and community-focused social enterprises as partners in the regeneration process

### **Reviewing Community Planning Partnerships**

To tackle the challenges we all face, and to tap into the potential of collaborative working, Scotland’s 32 Community Planning Partnerships must be at the centre of an outcomes-based approach. Scotland’s public services must work together like never before as part of our response to the recommendations of the Christie Commission.

A Statement of Ambition for the future of Community Planning was published to provide a clear direction on community planning, aimed at making it more effective, and enabling new, more meaningful, Single Outcome Agreements to be considered by new council administrations. A clear focus on ‘place’ and people will be at the core of how councils plan services going forward.

### **Community Councils**

The SNP Government will consider the work and recommendations of the Community Council Short Life Working Group, to be published in the summer, alongside the Community Empowerment Bill.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will use the new planning laws to build a Scotland of vibrant communities, ready and equipped to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

### **Letting our communities flourish**

We know that Scots of all ages have talents, many of which can be applied to enrich the lives of all around them. Creative activities, festivals and events are an important part of bringing people together, tackling isolation and achieving our aspirations. Local authorities have a role to play in developing and nurturing talent and enthusiasm by sponsoring festivals and encouraging community arts and events by artists, musicians, drama groups, writers and crafts folk.

Programmes like our Youth Music Initiative aim to make sure our young people can fulfil their musical potential to the benefit of us all, and widen their own experiences.

Many of these events revolve around local schools and libraries. Libraries are a key cultural resource in many communities. The days are long gone when libraries were simply a repository of books. Nowadays the best of them offer mother and baby services, support for new community members with language lessons, internet access and training, and cafés where people can meet and exchange ideas. They help children learn to read, provide information and offer online access, and in doing so promote inclusion and help prevent social isolation.

**We pledge:** SNP councils recognise the value of our arts, culture and library services and will work to enhance participation and protect services.

### Connecting communities

Improving connectivity across Scotland will support future innovation in the digital economy and ensure Scotland's businesses are competitive in the global digital environment. Delivering the ambition that next-generation broadband should be available to all by 2020, with significant progress by 2015, as set out in *Scotland's Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland*, is one of the government's key targets.

In 2011 the SNP announced the establishment of the Scottish Futures Fund – a £250 million boost for projects aimed at improving infrastructure, attainment and well-being across five crucial priorities. One of those funding streams, the Next Generation Digital Fund, will be applied to ensure that all of Scotland – including our most rural and remote communities – are equipped to take advantage of the digital revolution, by accelerating the roll-out of superfast broadband (both cable and 4G-based) across the nation.

We know that this has been a consistent demand of the tourism and hospitality industry, and believe that it will play a significant role in promoting both tourism and the e-businesses that can play a significant part in underpinning the sustainability of fragile economies.

Rural authorities will also benefit from a £40million fund to support the roll-out of broadband.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will work in partnership with the Scottish Government to access the Next Generation Digital Fund to ensure optimal connectivity for businesses and households throughout Scotland.

### Road improvements

The Scottish Government has continued to prioritise investment in road maintenance, despite the significant reductions in Scotland's capital budget made by the Westminster coalition. SNP councils have played their part by allocating increased resources to improving winter resilience, and have made progress in tackling the years of neglect that left too many roads hazardous.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will continue to advocate the benefits of road maintenance programmes, and will work in partnership with the Scottish Government in identifying routes where infrastructure upgrades are required. They will also, where appropriate, work with relevant stakeholders on improving cyclist safety to help encourage a shift to more active travel alternatives, helping to make Scotland greener and healthier.

### An agenda for rural Scotland

SNP councils, like the Scottish Government, are committed to community empowerment, and we believe that the most sustainable solutions for rural Scotland should emerge from rural communities themselves. That's why we are exploring the establishment of a Rural Parliament for Scotland. Initial meetings have already taken place, and a seminar will be held in May, allowing dialogue between a wide range of rural stakeholders and representatives from existing European rural parliaments, and providing a forum to discuss and take forward proposals.



We've also kept the pressure on over the impact on spiralling fuel prices of UK government duty. After years of campaigning at Westminster and in Europe we finally achieved a partial derogation in respect of duty for island dwellers, but much more needs to be done, and mainland Scotland's rural communities would be prime beneficiaries of the Fuel Duty Regulator we have continued to champion.

The Scottish Government's Rural Funding Opportunities Guide provides contact information for various funding streams totalling £180 million. It has taken practical steps to support local development aspirations such as an increase in the intervention rate for village facilities, maximising local contributions to strategic objectives, and investment support for improving rural broadband coverage.

Improved connectivity is a key priority for the Scottish Government. That's why we have pledged that next-generation broadband will be available to all – in every part of Scotland – by 2020 and that significant progress will be made by 2015. The Digital Infrastructure Action Plan, which was published in January 2012, explicitly recognises that digital connectivity for rural and remote areas is particularly critical, as this is where the market is unlikely to deliver. It is in these areas where investment will therefore be focused.

Land ownership is key to building independent, resilient rural communities and creating a sense of confidence and community empowerment. The SNP both in government and at council level is persuaded that community land ownership can bring tremendous benefits, both to the acquiring communities and to Scotland as a whole. That's why the Scottish Government is committed to providing opportunities for rural communities to acquire land via the £6 million Scottish Land Fund, which can help communities who bid successfully to take control of their surrounding land and woodland and

improve these for future generations, while creating work and economic benefits for the local community.

We wish to see Scotland take on responsibility for the Crown Estate Commission so that the resources generated in Scotland can be used to support the development of the offshore renewable sector and bring benefit to communities across Scotland.

Scotland's rural communities are crucial partners in the success of our booming food and drink sector, which achieved record exports, worth £5.4 billion, last year. This remarkable performance meant the target to achieve exports of £5.1 billion by 2017 was not only smashed, but achieved six years early. We will champion our salmon, seafood, red meat, fresh produce and whisky sectors and facilitate expansion in both traditional and emerging markets in the Middle East and China, and work to drive longterm sustainable growth into the rural economy. We want to ensure that communities in our remote and countryside areas have the best possible chance to contribute to a flourishing Scotland. At Westminster SNP MPs have lobbied long and hard to make sure the UK government isn't allowed to ignore the needs of rural Scotland in designing its plans for the future of postal services, and the Scottish Government has done its bit to help keep rural post offices open by establishing a post office diversification fund. Awards this year are helping post offices from Freefield in Shetland, to Coldingham in the Borders, and Kirkcudbright in Dumfries & Galloway to gear up for the future.

**We pledge:** SNP councils, working in partnership with the Scottish Government, will continue to champion our remote and rural areas, identifying and acting upon opportunities to create jobs and build sustainable growth, and working to make rural communities more resilient.



## Fairer

Across the world the evidence tells us that the most successful countries are those with the lowest levels of inequality. Our ambition is to deliver a Scotland that is not only a rich country, but also a rich society.

Step by step, our aim is to reduce inequality across Scotland and to provide on-going and improving support for groups, such as carers, who do so much for the most vulnerable in Scotland.

### Protecting Incomes

No one who works full time should live in poverty. Living below the poverty line isn't simply unfair – it's bad for our society and bad for our economy. We believe that paying a fair wage is the right thing to do. That's why in government we adopted the

Scottish Living Wage (currently £7.20 an hour) for all staff, those employed by Scottish Government agencies, and all NHS workers.

Extending the living wage to the staff of Scotland's local authorities will – if implemented across the board – benefit around 20,000 people and is the next major step we can take to raise the living standards of our poorest working families.

**We pledge:** [SNP councils will introduce the living wage by April 2013](#)

### Tackling inequality

Scotland has limited powers to address inequality but in areas of health and education we can work together across government, local authorities, the third sector and communities to make a real difference.



**"We acknowledge the debt we owe to carers for the loving commitment, compassion and tenacity they display in looking after some of our most vulnerable people, often in the face of considerable personal hardship."**



*Nicola Sturgeon, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy*



Our responsibilities don't just start when a child goes to school. We must work hard across government, local councils and our communities to address inequality and give all young people the best possible start in life.

At the heart of our approach to tackling inequality is prevention. Our £272m Early Years Change Fund supports local authorities and the NHS in delivering effective early intervention in a child's life, and represents the most radical programme ever launched to provide early action to provide mums and dads with the extra support that can transform the life chances and secure positive outcomes for children from our most disadvantaged communities.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will embrace the preventive strategy

### **A partnership with carers**

We acknowledge the debt we owe to carers for the loving commitment, compassion and tenacity they display in looking after some of our most vulnerable people, often in the face of considerable personal hardship. During last year's election we promised that we would extend the Energy Assistance Package to people on Carer's Allowance, and accomplished this in November. We pledged to increase respite care by 10,000 weeks, and have done so. We have also announced that voluntary sector organisations will receive £9 million over the next three

years to provide short breaks for carers. This is in addition to a further £2 million allocated this year for short breaks for disabled children with additional needs and their parents.

As part of our commitment to carers' issues we undertook to convene a Carers' Parliament, giving an opportunity to raise the issues that impact most on carers' lives with MSPs and Ministers, and the first of these will be held at the Scottish Parliament on 1 October 2012. We believe that this will be more responsive to carers' everyday needs if it operates in conjunction with a consistent presence in the corridors of power. That's why we are proposing that SNP Councils will appoint Carers' Champions to liaise with carers and their representatives. These champions (at both official and elected member level) will be charged with making a holistic, cross-departmental assessment of how council actions – and policies in development – will affect carers and care recipients. Champions will work to ensure their voices are heard, their interests safeguarded, and that measures are taken to optimise outcomes. Our Carers' Champions will support kinship carers in their fight for proper recognition and support from the UK benefits system.

We are also determined to ensure that those who choose self-directed care receive guidance to design and achieve a package that meets their needs and aspirations.

SNP councils will additionally work with schools to ensure that teachers receive training to help identify young carers and assist them in accessing and beginning to navigate the bureaucracy around available support services. We will also seek to build a degree of pragmatic flexibility into the requirements of Educational Maintenance Allowance so far as they relate to the attendance record of young carers.

Our consultations with third sector care providers and partners indicate that disproportionate time and constrained resource is devoted to tendering for renewal of contracts awarded for short-term durations. We will investigate the experience of some English authorities and strive to find ways to offer longer contracts with the possibility (subject to attainment of key performance indicators) of built-in extensions, providing greater funding security. We believe this will benefit the organisations by permitting focus on quality delivery, and users by allowing greater continuity of care.

**We pledge:** to work with statutory, third sector partners and voluntary groups to introduce Carers' Champions in every SNP administration; to make special provision to safeguard the educational opportunities available to young carers, and to investigate aspects of our contractual arrangements with third sector partners.



## Safer

From our village streets, to our town centres or busy cities we all want communities where we feel safe and can enjoy life.

As we set out elsewhere in our manifesto, this commitment to building safer and stronger communities means having town centres that are lively and vibrant places to be. It means having a planning system that supports community development, not hinders it, facilitating the best possible transport and digital connections.

Achieving safer communities also means feeling safe and secure on our streets and in our homes.

The SNP is committed to building safer communities.

### **Safer on our streets**

We are proud of the progress that has been made in tackling crime since the SNP government came to power in 2007. More than 1000 extra officers have been added to the strength of our police service, and the more visible deployment of these extra officers has brought recorded crime to a 35-year low, with the clear-up rate for non-sexual violent crime (such as murder and serious assault), also reflecting the best position for 35 years.

Public engagement with the police can be improved by initiatives like the 'campus cops' – community police officers based in schools – who become involved in activities with pupils, provide positive role models and encourage community safety. Independent research has shown that their participation is valued by both staff and pupils.

**"More than 1000 extra officers have been added to the strength of our police service, and the more visible deployment of these extra officers has brought recorded crime to a 35 year low."**



*Kenny MacAskill, Cabinet Secretary  
for Justice*



**We pledge:** the 1000 extra police officers on our streets will be maintained.

### **Reforms that make sense**

We will ensure the new, national Police Service of Scotland follows local priorities. Single services will strengthen the links between our police and fire and rescue services and the communities they serve by enabling individual local councils, not regional joint boards, to take on a new role at a national level to shape services in their local area. They will do this through a range of detailed measures, for example by requiring the Chief Constable and Chief Officer to designate a local police commander and local senior fire officer for each council area.

Crucially, the Police and Fire Reform Bill clearly links national and local imperatives by providing that local authorities will be consulted on strategic priorities and strategic plans, by placing duties on the Chief Constable and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service tied to local service delivery, and by ensuring that local plans reflect national strategic plans where appropriate. It does all this while retaining the flexibility for local authorities to develop their own models of engagement and formulate local plans reflecting local priorities and circumstances. The Bill will also provide greater integration with community planning, by placing specific duties on the local senior officers in that regard.

**We pledge:** Your newly-elected local councillors will all have a role to play in setting the priorities of police in your communities. This brings policing closer to communities than ever before.

### **Making justice real**

Making communities safer is about more than just police on the beat. Excellent work is done by the CashBack for Communities Programme which uses bad money for good purposes. Cash seized from the proceeds of crime is used to get youngsters off the streets, away from trouble and into positive activities, giving them the chance to reach their full potential. Since the programme began we have invested over £45 million to benefit over 600,000 young people with the opportunity to participate in initiatives involving sporting, arts and cultural or diversionary youth work programmes.

In a groundbreaking move, the Power Skills programme has provided opportunities for youths coming through the CashBack programme to get off the streets, gain an engineering qualification and have the chance to progress towards an apprenticeship with ScottishPower.

Councils can also suggest ways low-level offenders can make amends to their communities by setting up schemes under Community Payback Orders, in which offenders take part in programmes such as clearing paths of snow and ice during bad weather, renovating elderly care homes, helping to clean up streets of graffiti and litter, or re-setting fallen gravestones for repair.

Our *No Knives Better Lives*, programme – a partnership between local councils, police and the government – works intensively with young people to educate them in the danger of carrying a knife and the benefits of getting knives off our streets. It has delivered dramatic results, with the pilot showing a 23 per cent decrease in the number of young people carrying knives. We will continue to roll out *No Knives, Better Lives* where communities need it.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will continue the work of Cashback and *No Knives, Better Lives* to reduce the risk of offending which blights the lives of victims, and of encouraging young people into positive activities. We will encourage business sector partners to provide incentives – such as tickets or kit – to reward young people offering voluntary commitment to help their peers channel their energies in a constructive way.



## Greener

### **Making our communities greener**

Current levels of recycling save Scotland's councils £20 million per year, compared with sending the same volume of material to landfill, but we need to do better.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will achieve record levels of recycling and targeted environmental enforcement as we move towards a zero waste strategy.

We will also work to make communities greener by increasing the provision of allotments. For many people allotments offer a chance to garden, a place to grow vegetables or to relax by working outdoors. SNP councils will work with local people to assess and meet the demand for additional allotments.

We will investigate making increasing use of renewable energy in council properties and schools as part of effort towards delivering the Scottish Government's legislative targets in moving towards a low-carbon economy.

### **Planning our communities**

Local councils are responsible for planning in our communities to deliver sustainable economic growth, to build for recovery and to protect the spaces in which people live.

The planning system can play a key role in accelerating sustainable economic growth and building our recovery.

Whilst the planning system has seen significant change in recent years, the economic context has changed considerably. The Scottish Government is keen to seek further improvements to the planning system, particularly where current procedures and practices add little or no value to the outcomes.

SNP councils will share best practice in planning and ensure that a positive culture in planning and economic development is promoted.

**“SNP councils will achieve record levels of recycling and targeted environmental enforcement as we move towards a zero waste strategy.”**



*Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary  
for Rural Affairs and the Environment*

 /RichardLochhead

### **Investing in community energy initiatives**

The Scottish Government has committed to ambitious targets on climate change and renewable energy as part of its vision to develop a clean energy future for Scotland. On its election in 2007, the SNP government launched the CARES Loan Scheme, which offers loans to meet pre-planning costs, with a budget of £7.75 million. It has offered loans totalling £4 million to 42 projects which will produce 56MW of renewable energy. Since May 2007, over 800 grants for community renewables, worth some £16 million, have been allocated under CARES and its predecessor scheme. SNP councils will continue to work in partnership with the Scottish Government to achieve a target of 500MW of community renewables by 2020. That could be worth £2.4 billion to Scottish communities and businesses over the lifetime of the projects.

We will develop proposals for the creation of public energy companies, tasked with investing in publicly-owned renewables, leasing public assets to appropriate renewable energy developers, and buying energy on the wholesale market to become a domestic supplier in the local community. The revenue generated can then be invested in energy-efficient investment and supporting community-owned renewable projects.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will work with the private, public and third sectors, including co-operatives and community bodies, to develop proposals for public energy companies, based on community renewables.

### **Public transport**

We believe that an efficient transport system is one of the key enablers for delivering faster, more sustainable growth and employment opportunities, as well as being central to our ambitions for a low-carbon economy and connecting our communities.

The Scottish Government, as part of the Scottish Futures Fund, set up a four-year £50 million Future Transport Fund which will focus on low-carbon transport, from electric cars to improving walking and cycling schemes. Many local authorities already have plans to help cut carbon emissions from transport. For example, Aberdeen is looking to invest in hydrogen buses to help clean up pollution in the city. All SNP councils will have a green transport plan to cut carbon and encourage walking, cycling or alternative forms of transport.

### **Buses**

For many people buses are the main mode of transport, in particular offering personal freedom for our young people and our senior citizens.

The SNP will maintain Concessionary Travel Scheme for older and disabled people and is extending it to include Dial-a-bus services to help people in remote or rural areas.

Bus services in some areas work better than others. One way to tackle this divergence, and drive up standards is for local councils, bus operators and their regional transport partnerships to enter into a Quality Bus Partnership under which operators undertake to meet specific standards and minimum service levels. The SNP administration in



Renfrewshire introduced the first partnership in Scotland last year and SNP councils where bus services are not meeting public needs will introduce Quality Partnerships. SNP councils will also work with the Scottish Government and the industry through the new bus services group to improve bus services across the country.

We will also make Transport Scotland available to support any local authority, such as East Lothian, which wishes to take a lead in providing bus services to meet local needs.

An SNP administration in Edinburgh will ensure that Lothian Buses remains publicly owned.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will consider whether to commence an audit to determine whether a statutory Quality Bus Partnership is required to raise prevailing local standards to an acceptable level.

### **Rail: a strong track record**

The SNP Scottish Government has made a strong commitment to boosting Scotland's rail infrastructure, with investment this year of £426 million, the highest since rail devolution. Since 2007 we have invested in services which offer a total of 30,000 extra seats each day, and have opened five stations, including a new facility at Laurencekirk, which has attracted almost double the number of passengers forecast.

We are proud to have delivered the Airdrie-Bathgate Rail Link, the longest new rail line in Scotland in a century, and to have overseen the Stirling-Alloa-Kinross line which has enjoyed patronage of more than four times the original passenger estimate.

We know that people value the convenience of a local rail service, and have committed that no stations will close and, recognising the economic importance of rail connections to Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness, that cross-border services will continue to run north of Edinburgh.

We are also delivering the Borders rail link, and the Scottish Government is investing £1 billion on electrifying the core rail network between Edinburgh and Glasgow, reducing journey times between our largest cities to around 35 minutes on the fastest trains.

Where communities want to reopen rail stations or see new railway stations built, local authorities will work in partnership with government, communities and developers to raise funds for new stations across Scotland. We will also work with transport authorities, train operating companies and Network Rail to get as many people using local rail services as possible. In Glasgow the SNP government has announced a £246 million investment to restore the subway and keep the city moving.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will work to ensure that the maximum number of communities can benefit from improved public transport and safer roads.





## Healthier

Local authorities have a crucial role to play, working with the Scottish Government and the NHS, to deliver a healthier Scotland for young and old.

SNP councils will work closely with partners across the public sector to deliver improved care and build a more active nation.

### **Dignity in later years – integrating health and social care**

Our older people deserve the chance to live an active retirement with as much personal independence as they wish, secure in the knowledge that we all share a duty of care.

At the heart of our commitment to older people is the right to free personal and nursing care.

We also recognise the social and health benefits that come from the additional travel undertaken using the free, concessionary bus pass, which keeps older people in touch with friends

and family, and helps counter the risk of social isolation. In the coming year we will invest £187 million in supporting concessionary travel and extend it to local Dial-a-bus services.

Many people reach a point where maintaining that precious independence needs support from local services and health professionals. In the past the coordination between social work, care and health services hasn't been as smooth as it should have been, particularly in dealing with the care and support needs of people with dementia, and others with complex needs. That's why SNP councils are taking – and will continue to take – a lead in improving services for older people by ensuring better integration of health and social care services.

As well as requiring policy and delivery to be better coordinated, we will increasingly ensure that this commitment is visible on the ground. Hub developments that will see health professionals, social work and care providers working out of

new, integrated centres – improving access, and encouraging joined up working that always has the client as its focus – will play a key role in this.

We are also legislating to give older people, and others who rely on help from caring services from councils and third sector partners, more control and choice in designing the kind of support that meets their needs. Making sure that self-directed support meets the aspirations of care users will be one of the major challenges of the next few years.

### **Warm homes**

Fuel poverty is a blight on our society. In local authorities and in government we will work hard to bring an end to this scar on the conscience of an energy-rich nation. Our energy health checks – offering benefit and tax credit checks, and access to the lowest-cost energy tariffs as well as an energy-efficiency audit, and help in accessing free or subsidised insulation – have been a success. They have delivered an average of over £1600 increase in annual income for the thousands of pensioner households who have accessed the Energy Assistance Package and taken up the offers of help – with even bigger dividends for non-pensioner households. Over the next four years we will invest £50 million in a Warm Homes Fund, which will help us do more to help those living in fuel poverty, many of whom are older folk.

**We pledge:** SNP councils will prioritise working with health and social work services and third sector partners to accelerate the pace of integration. Health and Social Care Partnerships will transform future social care services, and remove cost-shunting.

### **Making schools healthy**

Schools can play a key part in educating our young people on the importance of a good diet and exercise regimes. The Commonwealth Games in Glasgow gives us the ideal springboard to show young Scots how they can achieve personal goals through participating in sport and attaining and maintaining physical fitness. By 2014 all of Scotland's primary school children will receive two hours of physical education every week, and all our secondary school pupils in S1 to S4 will have two periods of PE.

For many young people a bike is one of the first signs of growing up, allowing a first taste of personal freedom. SNP councils will work with the Scottish Government and cycling charities to ensure all our school pupils are offered on-road cycle training to keep them safe.

**We pledge:** that by 2014, within SNP council areas, all pupils in primary school will participate in two hours physical education per week, while secondary students in S1 – S4 will be timetabled for two periods of PE weekly.

Together, at national and local level, the SNP will be working hard to create jobs, protect family budgets and to make Scotland fairer and our communities safer.

SNP councils and SNP councillors will work in partnership with the Scottish Government – that way we will get more done.

We know that there is much to do to make Scotland the sort of country we all know it can be. Every SNP vote will make a difference. Together we can, and we will, make Scotland better.



**The council elections on May 3 are about your local community. Wherever you are in Scotland, SNP councils and SNP councillors will work with the Scottish Government to make your street a better place to live.**

This manifesto sets out our policy priorities, wherever you live in Scotland. And our election film brings to life the positive effect of SNP councils working together to make Scotland better. Tune in on April 23 or May 1 to BBC2 5.55pm, STV 6.25pm, BBC1 6.55pm or Border 10.30pm to see for yourself. Or take a walk down 'Scotland Street' now, scan the QR code.



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