

Scottish Liberal Democrats - Policy Roadshows for 2021

The coronavirus crisis has shaken the foundations of our beliefs about how our lives, jobs, societies, economies, governments, and environments work. It reveals deep and lasting problems. This is a time for individuals, political parties and governments to rethink what we want from life, and pursue new purposes.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats are preparing for the 2021 elections to the Scottish Parliament.

At every election we ask our members to help us develop our policy platform.

Five year ago we did this through face-to-face meetings at venues across Scotland. This time we are going to use digital and online meetings.

We know it is not enough to have the best policies. We have to have the best message that explains them and shows off our values. What are the ideas that will cut through, that are sharp, noteworthy and important to people's lives?

How can we break our proposals down into shorter chunks that people can remember, yet which also communicate our values? The election review from 2019 shows that people will want clarity from us.

At your local party online meeting coming up soon we are going to look at six big themes as we try to address the challenges we will face in the post-virus world.

Your local party meeting can decide the order you work through the six themes. They are set out from A to F on the following pages.

At the local party meeting, at the end of the discussion on each theme, we will ask you to choose between some priorities from that section. Your meeting chair will guide you through that process.

If you want to contribute in writing, if you can't make it to the meeting, you can send comments to your local party convener who can add them to the views expressed at the meeting. Once we have concluded the summer roadshows, and carried out other work to prepare a draft manifesto, the Policy Committee will bring clear priorities and proposals to our party conference for formal agreement.

Thank you for your help.

Best wishes

Carole Ford

Policy Convener for the Scottish Liberal Democrats

A. Economy

In recent years the Scottish Liberal Democrats have championed increased productivity through education and better mental health, better support for science and innovation, and of course no Brexit to cut off trade.

How do we restart the Scottish economy after the virus?

How do we persuade people to start up businesses again, if they have witnessed self-employed people who they know bitten by a sudden economic collapse?

When should the state step in to support big and small businesses?

What implications does the growth of remote working have?

How do people get to work if public transport isn't considered safe?

What will need to do to support food and farming, and the wider rural economy?

How can our universities get back on track after the crisis?

What happens to the North Sea oil and gas industry as it transitions away from fossil fuel?

Is it fair to focus on a fundamentally changed economy when lots of people might just want their old job back?

How do we create jobs that are worth having for people in the gig economy?

How will we pay for the recovery fairly?

Policy areas that you might include in this section: enterprise, business taxation, science, universities, colleges, skills.

B. Social Justice

How do we build a more socially just society as we emerge from this crisis?

Poorer communities suffered more from the lockdown, living in smaller homes without a social network that could be replaced with Zoom meetings.

Some people had big gardens and leafy avenues to enjoy in the lockdown. Other people were arrested for sunbathing on Glasgow Green.

School pupils from poorer backgrounds may not have had the laptops and iPads that their richer classmates used during the lockdown.

What can we do to improve social justice and fairness in Scotland?

Universal Basic Income is seen by some as a good answer. But might we want something like a Universal Service Guarantee so that nobody has to worry about the cost of housing, bills and basic necessities. Or do we just increase the level of Universal Credit? What does a 21st century safety net look like?

Are there innovations in how communities can come together?

Resilience – how can this be built at a country level, local level, and individual level?

What changes to Scottish taxation and spending priorities will build a better future?

Policy areas that you might include in this section: taxation, social security, housing, local government, voluntary sector.

C. Health and social care

Liberal Democrats have put a lot of emphasis (and won some big victories) on improving mental health services, which reduce the burden on the rest of the NHS and other public services. The lockdown brought mental health to the front of people's minds.

National government policy-makers had told us they had integrated health and social care but the crisis showed the problems. Can we do more to break down the barriers between public sector silos?

What is a successful long term model for social care after the crisis?

Social care has long been a Cinderella service but is now a national focus of attention and described as "the other frontline".

What should we do about the care homes of Scotland? Some are run for-profit others provided by councils or the voluntary sector.

People in Scotland say "growing old is not for the faint-hearted". How do we change that?

How can the state most effectively support everyone to have good health and wellbeing, including mental health? What tools do people need to manage their own health?

Emotionally we all feel we want to pay health and social care staff more, but will that make us healthier and happier on its own?

How important are routine health waiting times going forward? The clock stopped on the government's targets because of the crisis. Is it a priority of the recovery plan?

Policy areas that you might include in this section: health, social care, Scottish health concerns such as life expectancy, diabetes and heart disease.

D. Putting young people at the heart of our plans

We have always wanted to be the 'party of education'. We want to raise attainment especially among those from less well-off backgrounds. Our plans for expanded nursery provision and a 'pupil premium' were ways to deliver extra support. They fostered the critical brain development that is recognised worldwide as important for later achievement.

- But four million children in the UK live in poverty.
- Half a million children suffer neglect, cruelty, violence and hunger every day.
- One in ten children in Scotland suffer three or more Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- A poor start in life leads to teenagers at the centre of crime, substance abuse and rising suicide rates.

The lockdown has brought to the fore inter-generational unfairness. It is sometimes summed up that younger people have been laid off work and kept indoors to keep older people safe. Many younger people were already growing angry that the Baby Boomers had got the good pensions and owned buy-to-let houses while young people have to live on gig economy wages and pay private rents.

And now young people face the prospect of decades of public debts mounted up to cope with the virus crisis.

What can we do for generational fairness?

How can we put children and young people at the heart of our manifesto?

What should we do in Scottish schools to raise attainment?

How can we make sure every young person gets the chance to achieve their potential? Does everyone get a fair chance of going to university if that is right for them?

The Nordic education model says that early guaranteed kindergarten and later start to formal schooling is a big social investment. Will that work here?

What parts of the SNP's education record will still be fair game to mention at a post-virus election?

Policy areas that you might raise in this section: education, childcare, refocusing the economy onto the needs of the young and the gig economy, universities.

E. The climate emergency and the environment

Look at what the virus crisis has done for some parts of climate change policy: flights cancelled, commuting ended, people walking and cycling more safely.

How do we get lasting change at every level – government, business, individuals?
How do we persuade people to pay to save energy at home when they see massive and wasteful gas flaring at Mossmorran chemical works or Grangemouth refinery?

What happens after the recovery when people are still nervous about public transport and prefer their cars?

What can we do to promote walking and cycling?

If a Scottish airport is proposed for closure, should we try to save it?

How do we set Scotland on a path to net zero carbon by 2045? The decisions need to be made in the next five years. Have we got anything new to offer?

What steps can we take to restore natural habitats and peatlands which are proven to absorb carbon?

The idea of a “circular economy” means that we are careful with resources, and re-use and recycle products more easily. How can we make this a reality?

Is there a place for 4-day-week working?

Should we prioritise the ending of fuel poverty so that every home is a warm home?

Policy areas that you might raise in this section: environment, energy, transport.

F. What will the election be about – the constitution and government record?

The nationalists had expected the 2021 election to be about whether they had permission to call another independence referendum.

Other parties wanted the election to be about the SNP's record after 14 years in power – falling education attainment, lengthy NHS waiting times, failing Scotrail services, sluggish economic progress. The virus crisis has reset all of those

How far can we still tackle those issues? Will the public still want us to remind them that services were slipping before the virus?

Should we say something about Scotland's place in the world as we see it? Does the virus and the way it spreads influence what we think?

How do we want politics to look in the future? Should we try and make it less adversarial?

Policy areas that you might raise in this section: independence referendum, general politics, focus on young people, focus on older people.