

DEVOLUTIONARY THEORY

LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICY FOR 2021-22

YOUNG SCOTTISH FABIANS



Foreword by **Cllr Eva Murray**

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Devolutionary Theory: Local Government Policy for 2021-22

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FOREWORD

The Scottish Fabians have always led the way when it comes to policy development and with that consistently promoted a safe space where people can debate well and challenge ideas. I have always been impressed by their ability to keep in mind the role we have to play both at a local and an international level.

And the Young Scottish Fabians are no different; this document proves just that. At a time when we hear many in our movement talk of the importance of listening to young people, the Young Scottish Fabians have been out there doing the work, allowing young Fabians the chance to be heard.

Those of us in Scottish Labour are under no illusion of the challenges ahead both at next year's Scottish Parliamentary elections and in 2022's Local Council elections. This is an uphill battle but we must push forward with our bold and progressive alternative for Scotland.

Devolutionary Theory sets out that path, focusing on the issues that not only matter to people but- if acted on- will change their lives for the better, especially as we continue living with the effects of COVID-19 and, eventually, a post pandemic world.

These are issues like public transport. As someone who doesn't

drive and relies on public transport as well as being a local councillor for a part of Glasgow that is not as well connected as others, I've seen first hand how the cancellation of routes, the hiking of ticket prices and the unreliability of timetables has impacted the communities I represent, making them more and more isolated.

We now have an opportunity to think outside of the box when it



comes to public transport; empowering our communities, addressing the anxieties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and urging people back on to public transport whilst investing in the clean, green jobs and economy of the future.

Getting public transport right is a crucial link to tackling both environmental and social injustices we face in Scotland today and I'm glad to see it addressed in this document.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown the best of our communities, with many third sector organisations stepping up locally across the country to deliver services such as essential groceries, prescription delivery and often providing mental health support, money advice or just a friendly voice to talk to for vulnerable residents. However, the reality is that these services are now at risk and many of those lifesaving projects that have been on the ground since day one of lockdown are now at risk of folding due to the decimation of local government. A priority for all of us must be ensuring local councils have the finances and powers to make real change, to properly empower our communities so they have more power and say on things within their area. This pamphlet sets out a plan on how we do this.

These are just a couple of the issues discussed and solutions presented in Devolutionary Theory. What is clear is that if we want to win again, we must listen to the people we have lost, have those difficult conversations and prioritise the issues impacting those communities. Young Scottish Fabians' Devolutionary Theory does that and presents a blueprint back to power. 🇬🇧

Eva Murray is Deputy Leader of the Glasgow Labour Group and represents the Garscadden/Scotstounhill ward of Glasgow Council. She is the Scottish Labour and Co-operative candidate for Glasgow Anniesland in 2021.

ALBIE MILLS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



As Craig Edward points out later on in this pamphlet, the two greatest threats to Scotland today are poverty and climate change. Most of those writing will be only forty years old when the world finally warms over 1.5°C. It will cause radical changes to our lifestyles and the gap between the rich and poor in our society will be even starker than it is now. What we wanted to achieve with this pamphlet was to point out that a greener and more equal society need not be painful, expensive or complex if the right power is handed to the right people. We need to get people out of cars and onto bikes, buses and trains. We need to get people out of inaccessible, inefficient and expensive housing and into homes which offer people comfort, security and affordability.

This will not be achieved simply by throwing money at the situation. Councils are underfunded, yes, but the last ten years have highlighted how dysfunctional and short-sight-

ed local government funding models really are. If spending power is to return to the hands of local communities, then they need to be able to raise that money themselves and according to their own needs. Whatever your view on the constitutional question, power cannot reside exclusively at Holyrood or Westminster, where it is squandered in party political games. The Labour Party was the party that passed the Scotland Act 1998, giving legislative power to a Scottish Parliament for the first time since the Act of Union in 1707. The great Donald Dewar, who died twenty years ago, described the opening of the Scottish Parliament as “the day when democracy was renewed in Scotland”. If we are to renew democracy in Scotland once more, then we must devolve it once more; this time to local authorities. After all, why wait 292 years when you can do it after 20?

I would like to thank all of the contributors to this pamphlet enor-

mously. When the first ideas were being formulated for a Scottish policy pamphlet for the next two years, the Young Scottish Fabians did not even exist. This document is testimony to the hard work of a group of young people committed to having not just Scottish voices heard, but the voices of local authorities across the country who are crying out for more powers and more funding. Scotland is experiencing a crisis of local government, highlighting the yawning inequalities between different parts of the country and even different parts of its great cities. The future of the Scottish left lies in young people committed to handing social, economic and political power back to its communities and exploring innovative policy in doing so. Thank you to all those in the Young Scottish Fabians who have worked so hard to make this, our first year, such a success and so enjoyable from my own perspective. Bring on 2021, air adhart! 🇪🇸



Albie Mills is a support worker in Edinburgh and Chair of the Young Scottish Fabians.

MARIAN CRAIG

NO COMMUNITY LEFT BEHIND



CCOVID-19 has rapidly reshaped society, changing how we live, work and interact with each other in just a matter of months.

The Scotland we are living in now is not the same Scotland that we knew before. Sadly, many lives have been lost and the economic devastation that COVID-19 is unleashing is only just beginning to unfold.

Despite the shared experience of lockdown, the pandemic has not affected us all equally. Those in 'professional' occupations, such as lawyers, accountants and software developers, who are also more likely to be highly paid and concentrated in cities, have been able to transition to working from home easily with little or no impact on pay or job security. Indeed, for many of these workers, incomes have actually increased as they have been spending less on eating out, travelling abroad and shopping.

Contrast this with the experience of those in so-called 'elementary' occupations, such as cleaners, call centre workers and hospital staff, who have been unable to work during lockdown as their roles cannot be done from home, or even worse, their entire industry has been shut down. These occupations are also likely to be the lowest paid with little job security.

A recent Social Market Foundation report identified the proportion of jobs at 'high' or 'moderate' risk from COVID-19. West Lothian topped the list in Scotland, with 71% of jobs deemed to be at risk. Orkney, highly dependent on tourism, came second at 68%, followed by Falkirk on 67%. Glasgow was next at 65%, with the same proportion of at-risk jobs as North and South Lanarkshire, which were followed by Edinburgh on 64%.

The report noted that, perhaps unsurprisingly, 'an area's recovery

from disruption will depend on local resilience and pre-crisis levels of economic output and employment.' In West Lothian, 40% of the population held roles in factory work, sales, care and the leisure industry in the year to March 2020. Weekly pay for men was £20 less than the Scottish national average in 2019; for women it was £14 less. In West Lothian, 37.6% of the population held a Level 4 NVQ qualification or above, lower than the national average of 45.3%.

While local authorities which also have a large number of professional occupations, such as Edinburgh, can absorb the impact of a battered tourist industry, for others, the loss of such a vital source of income is likely to scar the local economy for at least a generation.

There is perhaps no better illustration of this than the effect of the closure of the Ravenscraig steelworks in Motherwell, North

Lanarkshire. The closure of the steelworks in 1992 resulted in the direct loss of 1,200 jobs and 15,000 across Lanarkshire as a whole. A study published by researchers from Sheffield Hallam University in 1997, five years after the closure, found the 'real' unemployment rate in Motherwell was almost 27% - far higher than the official claimant count of 9%. Today, the manufacturing industry in Lanarkshire has been replaced with call centres, where jobs are low-paid and often insecure.

It is clear that communities which were already vulnerable before the pandemic will need extra support to rebuild when the jobs market has radically shifted almost overnight. And with the Scottish Parliamentary elections now approaching at pace, the SNP is desperately trying to make the elections a(nother) referendum on Scottish independence, rather than focusing on policies which will mitigate the devastating economic impact that COVID-19 is already leaving on

Scotland.

Going into these elections, the Scottish Labour Party must make the case for targeted support, directed towards the communities that were already economically vulnerable prior to the pandemic.

Although at the time of writing the Scottish Government has given £220m to local councils in emergency funding, these funds are only enough to keep councils operational. To prevent entire communities being blighted for a generation, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation should be employed to identify the areas which require government intervention to recover.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is the Scottish Government's official statistical tool for identifying geographical areas at a significant disadvantage. The methodology examines seven aspects of deprivation: income; employment; health; education, skills and training; geographic access

to services; crime; and housing across almost 7,000 'data zones.'

Funds distributed to local councils with the highest SIMD scores should also be ring-fenced, equipping communities to develop economic resilience in the face of an increasingly uncertain world. Ensuring families on the lowest incomes can access affordable nursery places, investing in re-training and adult apprenticeships to help fill skills gaps in high-demand industries and supporting businesses to create good quality jobs can all go a long way to help communities get back on their feet.

COVID-19 is an opportunity for Scotland to be known for its creativity and ingenuity in supporting its people to recover from the worst economic disaster in peacetime. If Scotland wishes to be remembered for handling the pandemic much better than its English counterparts, then radical solutions are needed to rebuild and reshape our society for the better. 🇪🇸



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JOINING UP JOURNEYS

Creating a Public Transport System Fit for a Twenty-First Century Scotland



The government-imposed lockdown due to COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions on public transport use has highlighted the importance of being connected to one other. The pandemic has also highlighted how persistent the class divide truly is.

More affluent households with access to a car have been able to easily follow instructions to only go shopping once a week, and as lockdown eased, to socialise without using public transport. However, for those without access to a car, and those who have been unable to work from home, there is no other option.

The importance of having reliable, accessible and affordable transport cannot be overstated, especially for communities like Glasgow which has the lowest level of car ownership in the UK.

The 'Get Glasgow Moving' cam-

paign, established in 2016, has called for better public transport in Glasgow, which has some of the highest levels of poverty in Europe as well as expensive and unreliable buses. A FirstBus adult day ticket will now set you back £6.30, or £4.70 if you are travelling only within the Glasgow City boundary.

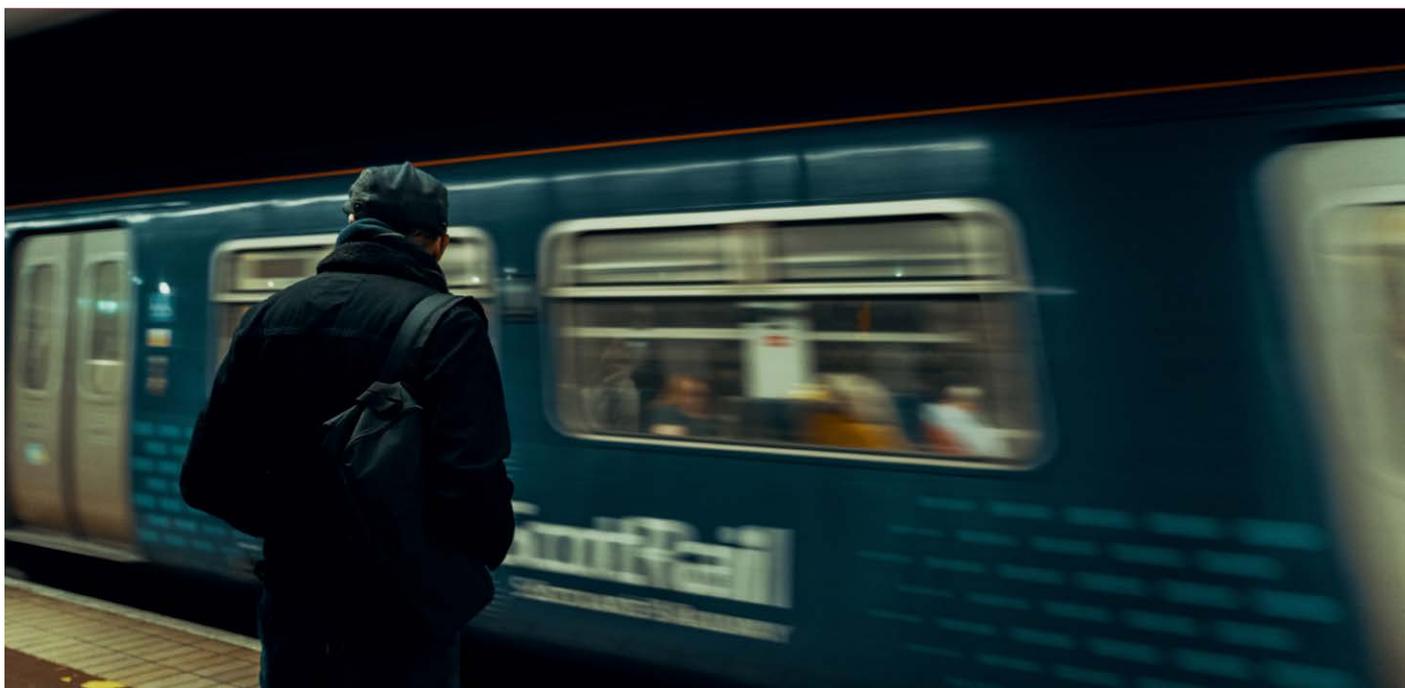
It is no wonder then that the latest figures from Transport Scotland revealed that Scottish people took eight million fewer journeys by public transport compared to five years ago (a 10% decline) while car ownership soared to a record high of three million. There is even emerging evidence that low-income families are being priced off public transport and choosing to use cars instead, even if this places a strain on their finances.

While private bus operators raise ticket prices (fares have increased by 78.3% since 1999) to protect their profits as passenger num-

bers continue to decline, we find ourselves in a vicious cycle where buses become an even less attractive option as time goes on.

While full public ownership of buses is certainly one option, the role of passenger transport executives (PTEs) should not be overlooked. The once powerful Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT, formerly Strathclyde PTE), previously responsible for overseeing the largest suburban rail network outside London, is now reduced to running the ageing Glasgow Subway and maintaining bus stops.

Re-empowering SPT and placing it on par with London's TfL must be a priority if we are serious about improving Scottish public transport. This could be done using a concessionary model with private operators continuing to run services but under the direction of a democratically accountable public body. This works particularly well for the



London Overground, which is operated by Arriva but closely scrutinised by the Mayor of London.

Giving SPT full powers over timetabling, fares and routes will go a long way to creating public transport for the twenty-first century – rather than leaving SPT to only pick up the ‘unprofitable’ routes the private operators are no longer interested in. The benefits would not just be confined to bus travel however – a legacy of SPT’s power is a system of concessionary rail fares for older and disabled passengers, which help make public transport more accessible.

Of course, the transport needs in the Strathclyde region differ from those in the Highland region, so a series of regional passenger transport executives should be set up to respond to area-specific challenges.

Another key policy in local transport comes in the form of cycle hire networks; not just in major cities, but in large towns too. If we are going to have any chance of meeting zero carbon targets, we must increase the rate of deployment of cycle hire schemes. Success has already been seen in the Edinburgh scheme as well as in London. For example, while

each London hire station cost around £200,000 to install and the scheme estimated to cost £140m over the first 6 years, they expect to make up the cost in just over 2 years of operations. Not only did it become the only profitable sector of London’s public transport, but also revitalised the number of Londoners cycling and led to a marginal reduction in air pollution in central London. This, combined with a congestion charge in towns and cities, could lead to a huge rise in active transport: reducing carbon emissions, improving air quality and individual’s health, and most of all, making Scotland’s urban areas safe havens for pedestrians.

If the gains made by environmentally-friendly schemes such as cycle hire networks is to be built upon, then air pollution from local airports also needs to be tackled. The SNP’s proposed Air Departure Tax may seem logical in principle, however in practice it will likely lead to limited change in passenger numbers and overall emissions. Their initial reduced rate plan was rightly withdrawn and Scottish Labour must pursue a multi-banded rate based on distance. This is where the proposition of a sliding scale comes into play: those travelling for leisure will pay a separate,

lower rate, than those travelling for business. This way, those from lower income backgrounds will not be deprived of leisure travel and business will be encouraged to limit the travel of their employees, further reducing greenhouse emissions. Furthermore, this marginal tax rate would apply to the number of trips made by individuals or firms each year. This way, discrimination would only occur against those that fly the most frequently, rather than those who use it sparsely for leisure purposes. Therefore, Scotland can support its tourism industry in an environmentally sustainable manner and the revenue raised can support local green transport schemes.

There is a growing appetite for further devolution, especially when it comes to transport. A centralised public transport system simply does not work. However, devolving regional transport only works when there is power and authority present. Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham’s plans to finally sort out Manchester’s failing bus system have overwhelming public support but are being fiercely resisted by private bus giants such as First and Stagecoach.

It is the ability to integrate different modes of travel (e.g. bus, train, light

rail, ferry and bicycle) which will be key to truly realising the potential of effective regional transport strategies. The Oyster card system, now familiar to almost every Londoner, offers seamless and relatively affordable travel across the capital which should be held up as an example of best practice.

Improving public transport in Scotland requires bold and transformative action, rather than the tinkering around the edges that we have seen since devolution. We must demand that one of the positives to come out of COVID-19 is a fundamental re-think of how our public transport operates, and who

it benefits. In the time of a climate emergency, too, the last thing we should be doing is forcing people into cars because our public transport network is so poor. Now is the time to properly invest in transport, joining up journeys and making it fit for the twenty-first century. 🇬🇧



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CECILY HOLT & ALBIE MILLS

IT'S THE LOCAL ECONOMY, STUPID



CCOVID-19 has demonstrated two points. Firstly, that the front-line services that local authorities provide are invaluable to keep communities thriving during a crisis. Secondly, that the current funding of local councils in Scotland is not sustainable. With a model that relies heavily on an ever-shrinking Scottish Government loan and the regressive council tax, it has become clear that councils are unable to meet the funding requirements as their role has expanded. Councils like Aberdeen, Perth and Kinross and the Highlands have taken some of the biggest hits to

their finances during the pandemic, across the whole of the UK. But even prior to the pandemic, councils such as Moray had raised fears of bankruptcy, and it has long been established that after years of increasing pressures, more councils would soon struggle to meet a balanced budget.

A 2014 report from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) showed that Scotland had the lowest ratio of councils-to-population in Europe and – importantly in the context of this chapter – had the third-lowest proportion of revenue raised by local government

from local taxes. A Scottish Labour government should prioritise initial further funding for local government, through COVID-19 relief grants and through using income tax to increase finances. But the scale of the challenge faced by local authorities just to keep their basic services afloat calls for deeper, more permanent changes to the funding formula. Scottish Labour should offer a new framework to introduce a new tax local system in Scotland, with the powers to make decisions best for the local area, and the finances to keep services running.

Comments on Ringfencing

A Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) report on the initial budget for 2019-2020 saw that although the budget increased by 2% in real terms (£210.5 million), once ring-fencing was account-

ed for, local councils lost 3.4% in real terms (£-319.1million). The SNP Government's increasing reliance on local authorities to carry out their policies, while only funding the SNP's pet projects, has led to

collapse in the way councils can run. While Scottish Government cuts to local government funding of 7.1% reflect a UK-wide trend, funding for Holyrood spending itself has only decreased by 0.8%

(Burn-Murdoch, 2018).

To fully ensure that local councils are given the funds needed to support basic services, and to give them a further degree of autonomy when making decisions, dis-

tinctions need to be made in the Scottish budget between funding offers to local councils and ring-fenced priorities. A Scottish Labour government should commit to a real terms increase in the budget excluding ring-fenced priorities.

Making this distinction ensures sensible and transparent governance by a party, gives councils breathing space to concentrate on their own priorities, and will go some way into pushing funding directly into local authority control.

Local Levies

Scottish Labour should push for legislation to enable local councils to create their own taxes and design a tax system that works for the area. Changes to legislation are cost neutral to the Scottish Government but can lead to increased finances and autonomy for local government.

Over the past parliamentary term and beforehand, Scottish Labour

have been campaigning to introduce a transient visitor levy (TVL). A consultation ran by the City of Edinburgh Council found a £2 a night charge on hotel stays, which would bring in roughly £11-13m, was broadly supported by all category stakeholders (residents, businesses, tourist attractions and accommodation providers). The legislation would be optional for councils

to use, in order for them to make decisions based on local need. Alongside the use of the TVL, councils have had their council tax rise cap raised to 4.79%, which will be instrumental in increasing local authority funding.

A Review of Business Rates for Scotland

The income collected from local levies, however, is limited and more wide reaching reform is needed. The SNP commissioned the Barclay Review to look at local funding reform, but the commission was narrow in scope and avoided discussing wider reforms to non-domestic business rates. As such, the new non-domestic business rates bill currently progressing through Parliament does little but tinker around the edges. It still remains a tax mandated by the Scottish Government which local authorities cannot maximise the benefit of.

Scottish Labour should investigate proposals for reforming non-domestic business rates to give full control to local authorities. The

Scottish Greens recently proposed an amendment to devolve non-domestic business rates, but the process was opposed by COSLA and trade unions like USDAW, as it meant removing the ability for local authorities to set relief rates, disproportionately affecting small businesses. This instance clearly highlights a need to investigate the full impact of devolving some aspects of NDBR through a full commission, with the aim to create full primary legislation reforming business rates.

Scottish Labour could also look at creating and devolving a Fair Work Business Rates Supplement to local authorities. As IPPR Scotland details, this would involve an

additional supplement on business rates for employers who do not adhere to the Fair Work Framework, announced by the Scottish Government in 2016. So far, adherence to the framework has been voluntary and there has been no means of compelling employers to follow the guidance outlined within it. A Fair Work Business Rates Supplement would not only incentivise employers to improve working conditions, potentially leading to a spike in productivity and job security, it would mean that those employers consistently flouting Fair Work recommendations would serve as an additional source of revenue for local government.

Introducing a New Property and Land Value Tax

One idea shown a lot of interest both in Scotland and in leftist circles across the world is that of a Land Value Tax. This tax would be designed to replace council tax and is set based on 'the value of land occupied or owned by households or businesses'. Ideally, this would benefit both renters, who

would avoid paying council tax in an already oversubscribed and overpriced housing market, and first-time buyers, who would benefit from a slow-down in house price increases. In moral terms, it might prove successful in breaking the stranglehold of a few on Scotland's land ownership as well as taxing

unearned wealth. The Land Value Tax would, however, require constant revaluation of bands, zones and properties in order to function properly. This is something that has blighted Council Tax valuation for many years- Scottish rates are still based on property valuations from 1991. Scottish Labour should

commit to revaluation of property tax bands, and crucially, introduce mandatory revaluations for a set time period through legislation, such as every five years.

Scottish Labour needs to be the party that will remove council

tax and replace it with a far fairer option through property tax. In 2016, the Scottish Labour manifesto commitment was a flat rate of £450 plus 0.35% for properties valued up to £180,000; for properties above this benchmark, an ad-

ditional 0.9% on the value above £180,000. These proposals should be revisited with a reflection to any increasing costs for 2021 and funded through changes to income tax.



A New Local Tax System

With the multiple changes proposed, councils should be facing multiple new streams of funding and new powers, as well as increased funding directly from the Scottish Government. Multiple tax streams and broadening the local authority tax base would bring Scotland more in line with other OECD countries, and would give local authorities the opportunity to design their own localised tax

systems, in order to carefully introduce and manage taxes without unintended consequences.

The process of designing a local tax system should be envisioned to encourage local democracy. Impact assessments based on diversity areas and for businesses should be accounted for, to ensure the same demographic groups are not penalised, and to ensure that economic growth of the city is en-

couraged, not stunted. Opportunities like civic assemblies should be designed to consult residents during the process.

The consequence of these new systems should not only lead to fairer funding for local councils, but also increased autonomy for councils to make decisions based on local need, as well as full democratic engagement with the residents they represent.

A Local Carbon Tax

On the issue of climate change, a local carbon tax would provide an effective means of tackling climate change at a local level as well as avoiding the political loggerheads that Holyrood and Westminster seem to be at currently. IPPR Scotland argues that the tax would help 'to drive the behaviour change we

need to see to achieve a just transition to a net-zero economy', not only reaching the Scottish government's target of carbon neutrality by 2045 but it could be levied even higher to reach the 2030 target as set out in Labour's 'Green New Deal' strategy. A Canadian sub-national carbon tax will set

the tax at CA\$50 (£29) per tonne by 2022 and the current levy has only had a minimal impact on economic growth. Public support has also grown for the tax despite the planned rises and this revenue has been returned directly to the local authorities in which it was raised.

While Holyrood needs to be a conduit for the policies that Scotland wants to realise- tackling climate change, poverty and inequality- both government and Parliament need to realise that it is through local government that we can achieve this goal. Scotland has

suffered from years of centralisation since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.

Labour was the party that passed the Scotland Act 1998 and steered Holyrood through its tricky nascent years. If we are to build on that leg-

acy, we must not merely promise devolving further powers to Holyrood or even creating a 'federal Britain'. We need to take a message into 2021 delivering real subsidiarity and effective local taxation powers. 🇬🇧



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CRAIG EDWARD

BUILD BACK BETTER

Housing in 21st Century Scotland



Scotland needs new homes for the future and upgraded existing homes to meet the needs of council tenants across our country. Housing policy in Scotland

has not been ambitious enough to meet these needs. We have identified the following key policy changes that a Scottish Labour government or council could. Before new

homes are built, it is essential that we have green, cost effective, and sustainable energy solutions that provide the energy required for families to use.

District Heating System (DHS)

Climate change and poverty are two serious issues facing our communities. District Heating Systems (DHS) are a significant player in overcoming these inequalities, using a centrally-located plant to distribute heat and power to homes, rather than local boilers. Fifth generation DHS's do not use combustion on-site and have zero emissions of CO₂ and NO₂ on-site; they employ heat transfer which uses electricity which may be generated from renewable energy. This has been proven to cut CO₂ emissions by as high as 85% (CHA, 2020).

For District Heating to be successful at a local level in Scotland,

Holyrood must first be prepared to release a DHS Investment Fund to provide capital expenditure for local government in implementing such projects. As discussed elsewhere in this pamphlet, local government would ideally be able to raise this revenue on its own but given the pressing nature of the climate crisis- a Scottish Government grant would be much more effective and efficient.

This grant would enable each local authority to own their DHS system, providing eligibility to all new build developments and extending this to existing housing. This would be combined with planning reform to

satisfy DHS requirements as a preferred heating network with a feasibility study completed.

On average, a new DHS will save the average three-bedroom house 25% each month on energy bills (Oxford Renewables, 2017) which could be as high as £60 a month, lifting thousands out of energy poverty and reducing CO₂ emissions significantly. Indeed, Project Drawdown ranked District Heating Schemes (sometimes referred to as District Energy Schemes) in 27th position in the best means of tackling climate change (Burnham Nationwide, 2018).

New Homes New Communities

Building new homes is of paramount importance to enable the ending of homelessness, and providing a housing supply that responds to the changing needs of our communities.

5 year parliamentary terms are not

the best way for managing new home supplies. A new ten-year building programme could deliver 125,000 new homes:

- 100,000 minimum will be exclusively council/social housing

- 12,500 minimum will be disabled access housing
- 3,000 minimum will be 4 bedroom or more for families
- 100 minimum 20 home developments will be new sheltered housing complexes

Retrospective Fitting

Local Authorities will be able to apply to the DHS Investment Fund to retrospectively install the infrastructure required, and remove previous heating systems. When

life-cycles end and new heating options are considered, it should be assumed that the DHS system is the preferred option from the outset and written consent from

the Scottish Housing Regulator must be in place if this option is not the preferred means of ensuring that tenants interests are above any other interests.

Disabled Housing Transition Fund

A £25 million annual fund should be established for 4,000 significant adaptations to be made to existing council homes enabling the tenant and their families to live a life of dignity. This can include bathrooms, kitchens, ramps, door widening, and associated planning costs.

Disabled tenants need to have better housing options than currently

exists (Equality & Human Rights Commission, 2018). That's why a New Build Disabled Homes Fund will cement a statutory minimum of 10% of new build homes being wheelchair accessible homes across Scotland. This will be supported by a top-up of new social housing new build rates of £5,000 per unit to accommodate modularisation of rooms, wet rooms as

standard, fitted wardrobes in bedrooms, integrated kitchen appliances at an accessible height, and widened doors and frames.

Existing housing in Scotland must address the challenges of the climate crisis and enable tenants to live in their homes without having to move if their circumstances change.

Tenement Stock

The supply of existing housing must not be forgotten in favour of chasing targets to build new homes. Tenement flats are a prime example of not only bright, spacious, and inviting homes – they are part of our culture and herit-

age. Many of these flats were built 100 years ago, and have stood the test of time. Whilst they provide fantastic homes, the sandstone construction is expensive to maintain (GWSF, 2019).

A 'Tenement Preservation Grant' of £5,000 per unit will transform and preserve these historical buildings and enable social landlords to press ahead with investment in this stock tenure to make them safe and energy efficient.

Former Council Housing Buy-Back

A significant stumbling block for Local Authorities is the 'battenburg' effect caused by Thatcher's selling of social housing in the 1980s.

Four in a block homes with private owners unable or unwilling to allow investment programmes to go ahead, saddling many tenants with homes they cannot afford to heat

and social landlords unable to respond to their tenants' best interests has to stop.

A 'Social Home Repurposing Grant' will enable social landlords to apply for up to £50,000 or the full value if it is less, and buy-back private homes on the open market. The private tenant will then become a

social landlord tenant, saving as much as 33% on rent (Crisis, 2020), which could be well over £100 per month directly into the pockets of those exposed to vulnerable housing situations. This stock will not be allowed to be sold to the private rental market again.

Council Housing Tenant Committee Participation

It is crucial for council tenants to have a formal route to decision-making beyond current tenant participation. Housing Committees are generally made up of elected councillors to take decisions on behalf of tenants. This has to change. To ensure equality for all, each Council must have a minimum of one tenant elected to the Housing Committee who is already a Chair or Vice-Chair of a Recognised Tenants Organisation (RTO).

This member will have full voting rights.

If no tenant member is elected to the Housing Committee, this must be treated as a Notifiable Event to the Scottish Housing Regulator to ensure transparency in decision making and tenant participation strategies adopted by Local Authorities. Tenants having a voice and being able to influence decision making at strategic level is important for holding Councillors and

Officers to account.

Scotland's housing stock has been neglected for too long and, as a result, so have its tenants. I believe that these policies, if enacted correctly, could prove revolutionary in improving housing conditions in our country, as well as lifting people out of poverty and fighting the climate crisis. 🇪🇺



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YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR

Diversifying Scotland's Councils



Scotland's 1,227 councillors, from the tiny constituencies in the Orkney islands to the densely populated Glasgow City Centre, have been on the front-line supporting their communities through COVID-19. Being on the frontline, councillors across the country have gone above and beyond the call of duty to keep us safe, all while trying to deliver essential services on shoe-string budgets.

Councillors make up the heart of local official politics. The main functions of a councillor are, according to the site beacouncilor.co.uk, to a) represent each individual's local community in the council by reviewing local policy and to b)

be the chief liaison between their constituents and the wider political sphere. Nevertheless, whilst the power of councillors as a collective does not go unnoticed, the influence of individuals in local governments in the form of local councillors is, in many ways, an untapped resource. By utilising their powers as figureheads for their communities' unique needs, councillors have the ability to ensure that their communities are being heard in the wider political sphere.

Compared to their counterparts in the rest of the UK, Scottish councillors are relatively well paid, receiving an annual basic pay of £17,854. Yet this is still quite some way from the median salary in

Scotland, which currently stands at £25, 200. Although in the vast majority of cases, being a councillor is not expected to be a full-time job, the role has become increasingly complex and time-consuming, especially given the context of years of cuts to council budgets and now COVID-19.

A profile of Scottish councillors conducted by the Improvement Service (the national improvement organisation for local government in Scotland), found that most councillors reported spending between 26-30 hours per week on council duties. Strikingly, 1 in 20 councillors who had already served one term reported spending between 56-60 hours per week on their duties - far

higher than the figure for first-term councillors - suggesting that the demands of the role are often underestimated.

Balancing paid employment, and other commitments such as caring responsibilities, with the time required to undertake councillor duties can therefore become tricky. It is perhaps unsurprising that Scottish councillors are overwhelmingly men, retired or close to retirement age, and from managerial or other professional backgrounds.

The Improvement Service's survey of local councillors in Scotland found that over half (60%) were between 50-69 years old and only 17% aged under 40. This held true across almost all the main parties in Scotland, except for the Green Party whose average councillor was 41 years of age. Although the proportion of women candidates has risen in recent years – from a dismal 22.8% (2012) to 30.5% (2017), this is still far below the 51% in the general population.

The proportion of women councillors has remained stubbornly low despite efforts from all parties to increase the diversity of their candidates through training and mentoring schemes, and more recently, all-women shortlists. Perhaps the solution to this age-old problem is not through telling women that they belong in council chambers, but by removing the barriers that stand in their way.

Raising the basic annual salary to £20,000, with annual increases linked to public sector pay increases, would go a long way to make standing for public office a more realistic prospect for women and others from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is something that English councils, which rarely offer basic allowances over £10,000, are slowly beginning to realise.

Although having elected representatives from professional backgrounds is not necessarily a nega-

tive, a system which systematically locks out women, ethnic minorities and those from working-class backgrounds is. In 2020, private sector companies are being challenged on their lack of diversity in their leadership teams – why should local councils be any different?

There are many benefits of having diversity in decision-making, and there are even emerging signs that companies with more equal gender representation saw their shares perform better during the peak of the pandemic than companies led predominately by men. If we want to emerge from COVID-19 with a Scotland which works for everyone, we need to ensure that those making critical decisions are representative of the population.

That means electing more women, young people and those from BAME backgrounds, the latter of which shamefully made up less than 1% of responses to the Improvement Service's survey of Scottish councillors.

One way to do this is to ensure social, cultural and economic diversity is to tackle inequality at the application stage, ensuring that it is not just the usual suspects applying for the role. This could be accomplished by encouraging applicants from different postcode areas and streets to previous elections to apply and to enable discussion between the candidates as to what their supporters want. This would ensure that it is not one particular interest or location whose opinions are being met, and that councillors are more likely to make informed decisions as to what their constituents want and expect from them.

Mentoring schemes are another method that could be utilised to encourage dialogue from across factions. A scheme like that of the Poverty Truth Conversations programme by the organisation Faith in Community, which pairs people living in poverty together with peo-

ple in positions of power, would allow for both groups to learn from each other and would create a space in which those from impoverished communities can share their experiences and hardships with one another, creating a sense of community action. The administration of a similar course could be required throughout, or within the final months, of a councillor's employment, ensuring that there is a next generation of diverse candidates, who have been exposed to politics and opportunities to learn from people they may not have had access to otherwise.

Education amongst people who are not normally able to access resources to politics- due to inaccessible language in policy which furthers the stereotype that politics is too remote for most people – is also very important to enable groups not usually seen in politics to gain access to taking part. The accessibility and teaching of wider communities in regards to politics can be accomplished by ensuring that all councillors report their decisions and results to easily accessed locations in their local councils such as social media platforms. This would not only ensure that constituents were educated on what is happening in their local community, but would create a space for debate and lobbying if constituents do not agree with decisions made by local leaders, therefore keeping councillors accountable for their decision-making and constituents engaged in making their own decisions for their own community.

Devoting one's time to public life is too often seen as something that should be done out of martyrdom, but if we want to attract high-quality candidates, we need to accept the need for our representatives to be properly remunerated for the tasks they carry out on our behalf. In Scotland, we are at least further ahead on this argument than in

the rest of the UK, where any suggestion of paying politicians more tends to be met with howls of anguish. The next Scottish Government would do well to capitalise on the favourable public opinion North of the border and could set an example for others to follow.

Whilst the demands of being a local councillor do demand some skills and expertise, these qualities can be found in people from a wide range of backgrounds. A youth club worker has just as much to offer local government in Scotland as someone with over 30

years' experience running a business. It's in all of our interests to knock down the barriers standing in the way of these potential future community leaders. 🇬🇧



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DOMINIC MCGINLEY

DEVOLVING EUROPEAN POWERS



Ambitious projects to unite nations are the essence of socialist internationalism, whether they be on a British or European level. Scotland's exit from the EU must be a matter of deep regret to any internationalist. Marshalling much the same toxic nationalism as that which has poisoned our body politic here in Scotland, Britain's involvement in the EU's radical project has been brought to an end. But it is possible for Scotland to follow a different path, which emphasises our Europeanness, without cutting our ties with the rest of Britain.

The Scottish Government should maintain and develop its quasi-diplomatic presence in the European institutions, including expanding Scottish delegations to the EU and member states. A dynamic Scottish Government can offer a Scottish perspective directly to organisations and countries in negotiations

with the UK.

The immense benefits of European co-operation, in many cases, need not cease after Brexit. The Government has a key role to play in fostering and facilitating arrangements between institutions and companies in Scotland and Europe, with particular emphasis on universities. The Scottish Government should take care to ensure that Scotland's world-leading universities aren't left financially vulnerable by the sudden withdrawal of EU support, students, and staff in addition to the impacts of the pandemic.

It is also imperative that EU Citizens, many unsure of their status and rights, are given support. The Scottish Government have the power to intervene directly to help EU citizens in Scotland navigate the bureaucratic hurdles erected by the UK Government. Financial support mechanisms and strong

advice networks can form part of an effective programme of assistance.

As a matter of principle, long-standing EU Citizens should retain the right to vote in local and Scottish Parliamentary elections.

The last few years have demonstrated, more than anything else, the parasitic nature of Scottish Nationalism. Latched on to our parliament, it consumes more time and energy the fatter it grows, paralysing and eventually outgrowing the original host, with the country left in stasis. Responsible policy seeks not only to halt the march towards the insularity of independence, by fighting against separatism, but to reverse it. We must fight for Scotland's place in the Union for the same reasons we fought for Scotland's place in the EU. Working dynamically across ancient borders and divides in the interests of the people on both sides is at the heart

of the Labour tradition.

Labour remains the foremost party of devolution; bringing power closer to the people is a key element of responsible unionism. We must put the progressive case for the Union, by using Holyrood's beefed-up powers to show how profound change can come, when power is focussed properly. A Labour Scottish Government should be open to the idea of further devolution, particularly of social security powers – constitutional policy should be set not by doctrinaire attachment to some political vision, but by pragmatic and continual assessment of where power should

lie if it is to best serve the Scottish people.

In any case, the powers returning from the European Union provide a new opportunity to further extend the reach of the Scottish Parliament: where they intersect with the devolved matters, Holyrood should be the presumptive recipient of new powers. These new powers are not trivial, and allow Scotland to emulate and extend currently European policy in Scotland.

Areas covered by EU law for which Holyrood will soon have sole responsibility include: renewable energy use in public transport; the local awarding of bus franchis-

es; the provision of cross-border healthcare to EU Nationals; energy efficiency targets; air quality legislation; and marine environment standards. These extensions to the portfolio clearly represent a chance to make tangible changes to the policy landscape here in Scotland, with particular significance for environmental legislation. A bold Scottish Parliament has the power to retain and enhance existing protections and regulations not only for their own sake, but also to set a forceful counter-example to the sly race-to-the-bottom over the border. 🇪🇺



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DEVOLUTIONARY THEORY

YOUNG FABIANS

