



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

A photograph of the Glasgow Arch Bridge at dusk. The bridge's large, illuminated arch is the central focus, with its white cables fanning out to support the deck. In the background, the Glasgow city skyline is visible, including the Glasgow Cathedral. The water of the River Clyde is in the foreground, reflecting the bridge and the city lights. The sky is a deep blue with some birds visible.

Programme for Government 2025-26

Building The Best Future For Scotland

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First Minister's foreword

Times are tough for households and businesses across Scotland and the world around us is changing in ways that are difficult to predict. These two realities shape this Programme for Government, a programme designed to deliver renewed and strengthened public services and to ensure that people in Scotland are better protected during the cost-of-living crisis compared with elsewhere in the UK.



It is a programme that is focused on delivery and hope. Delivery in response to the challenges we know people are facing in their everyday lives. Hope because we are making the most of Scotland's vast resources to deliver higher standards of living and an improved quality of life for people in all corners of this land.

I want people to read this Programme for Government and see that they have a government that wants what is best for Scotland, a government that understands the realities of their life, a government with the experience needed to chart the right course for Scotland during these times of uncertainty.

People tell me time and again that they are happy with the quality of care they receive within the NHS, which is invariably world class, but the problem is accessing that care. That is why we will be using technology and an expansion of specialist regional centres to deliver 150,000 additional appointments and procedures to reduce waiting times and waiting lists. That includes a 50% increase in surgical procedures such as hip and knee replacement compared with last year.

People speak to me about the difficulties getting appointments at their GP, in particular the lottery of the 8 am call. That is why GPs and other community health services are receiving a bigger share of new NHS funding, extra investment that will build capacity, allowing us to deliver 100,000 extra appointments in GP surgeries focused on addressing the root causes of ill health.

I know that cost-of-living pressures continue to be at the front of people's minds. Over the years, our choices have delivered Council Tax that is on average over 30% lower than in England. Water bills, currently almost 20% lower than in England and Wales, will remain lower, as will income tax for a majority of workers in Scotland. Prescriptions, eye examinations and bus travel for over 2.3 million people will also remain free, students will pay no tuition fees and families with young children will continue to receive a package of early learning and childcare support worth more than £6,000 for each eligible child each year. Together, this is my cost-of-living guarantee.

And we will do more to put more money in people's pockets. This year, the Winter Fuel Payment for Scottish pensioners will be restored, with the poorest receiving the most, and once again, for thousands of commuters, peak fares on our railways will be removed.

Among the many other measures in this programme, parents and carers will find action to address concerns about attendance and behaviour in our classrooms, more help for pupils with additional support needs and steps to better equip our youngsters to navigate the online world.

We have heard the concerns of young people about sky-high rents or their difficulties getting on the housing ladder and, as a result, we are taking forward an ambitious series of initiatives which will give tenants more rights and stronger protections, directly support the delivery of more than 8,000 affordable homes, including for social and mid-market rent, and remove barriers on stalled building sites with the potential to deliver up to 20,000 new homes.

Record funding for local government means that they have the resources to address people's concerns about the state of many public spaces, whether rubbish collection, boarded up high streets, or poor-quality roads. Local action is being supplemented by a national regeneration fund that will support at least 26 projects to renew and restore communities, with a focus on delivering more local jobs.

Alongside addressing key challenges at home, this Programme for Government is designed to prepare Scotland, in particular our economy, for challenges emerging at a global level.

In response to concerns about trade with the USA and the wider impact of US tariffs, we are putting in place a new Six Point Export Plan, with a focus on actions to unlock target markets, showcase Scotland to global buyers and enable more companies to participate in trade missions to both established and emerging markets.

In order to create new jobs and opportunities within the Scottish economy, we are intensifying our programme of targeted engagement with investors to secure investments from our new National Project Pipeline. We will be supporting innovation with multiple measures to help businesses grow, including a new Proof of Concept Fund and an improved system of grants to increase the scale and quality of the Scottish start-up ecosystem.

At the heart of our approach though is a determination to ensure a green industrial future for Scotland. Our work to bring investment to the Grangemouth site is well under way, but I have no doubt that these efforts would be substantially enhanced by the development of carbon capture and storage in Scotland. The UK government has given the go ahead to two sites in England, and it is now time for the Acorn project in Scotland also to be given the green light. The Scottish Government has previously committed up to £80 million to make this happen if the UK Government made the necessary commitments. Given the importance of this keystone project for the Scottish economy, we are now willing, as part of a wider package of investment in industrial transformation, to increase Scottish funding for Acorn, subject to investment from the UK Government as was given to the English projects.

My passion to ensure that Scotland is the best that Scotland can be, is what makes me believe in Independence. I believe Independence will transform the life chances of the people of Scotland.

Within the current powers of the Scottish Parliament, I will always strive to ensure the Scottish Government achieves as much as is possible to improve people's lives.

We have set out bold measures to eradicate child poverty, build a stronger economy, renew the NHS, reduce pressure on family finances and take effective climate action. These priorities are all part of our ambition for Scotland.

Delivering for the people of Scotland is about policy choices but it is also about how we govern.

Over this coming year, I will build on the approach I have taken in my first year as First Minister. I will continue to lead a government that brings people together, because the most effective solutions emerge when we work together.

It will be a government that seeks to empower people and communities, brought together to in common purpose to improve the lives of our people.

It is, and will always be, a government that wants what is best for Scotland – always focused on the priorities of the people of Scotland and working flat out to get Scotland on track for success.

John Swinney MSP
First Minister

Growing the Economy

To deliver for Scotland we have:



Supported **over 3,000 jobs** and over **£168m** of supply chain spend in Scotland in 2024 through the work of the Scottish National Investment Bank

Maintained and strengthened Scotland's position as the **most attractive place in the UK** for inward investment outside London and the South East



More than doubled the membership in Techscaler increasing **from 610 to 1,411** in 2024



Increased GDP per person in Scotland. Since 2007, it has **grown 10.3%**, compared to 6.1% in the UK and proportionally more people earn the real living wage than in the rest of the UK



An **additional £34m** in this year's budget for the culture sector, enabling **Creative Scotland** to extend their multi-year funding to a record number of organisations



Helped secure Sumitomo's **£350m cable factory investment** at Nigg and committed over **£68m investment** in ports infrastructure for offshore wind since May 2024



Funded Scottish Enterprise to support the creation or **safeguarding of over 16,700 jobs** and help companies unlock a record **£1.89 billion** planned capital investment

1 Growing the Economy

Growing our economy

The world currently faces economic uncertainty. Economic shocks have impacted households, businesses and public services. Scotland is not immune but the Scottish economy is resilient.

Through measures in this Programme for Government, we will help protect people from economic uncertainty, by investing in our workforce, supporting people into employment, attracting investment, and backing business.

More money in people's pockets

The current economic uncertainty comes on the back of successive shockwaves which have impacted on household costs – from austerity to Brexit, the pandemic to the cost-of-living crisis. Alongside efforts to boost economic growth and protect those most at risk of poverty, we will help people in Scotland to weather the storm by:

- Keeping university tuition free.
- Delivering free childcare for all 3- and 4-year-olds, and eligible 2-year-olds.
- Giving pensioners the Winter Fuel Payment so they can heat their homes – overturning the UK government's unfair cut.
- Delivering affordable homes across Scotland.
- Investing in a fair social security system and helping people into work.
- Making sure the majority of Scottish taxpayers pay less income tax than those in the rest of the UK.
- Providing free bus travel for 2.3 million people, including older and disabled people, and all children and young people.
- Funding the Small Business Bonus so thousands of small businesses pay no business rates.
- Keeping 40,000 children out of poverty by providing the Scottish Child Payment.
- Keeping prescription charges and eye examinations free.
- Reducing the cost of the school day, through free school meals and the school clothing grant.
- Helping people heat their homes and cut their bills with some of the most generous grants and loans in the UK.

There are many reasons to be positive about Scotland's economic potential, and Scotland consistently ranks as the UK's top investment destination outside of London and the South East of England. This Programme for Government will accelerate action which ensures businesses can create jobs and grow the economy, improve living standards, contribute towards a just transition to net-zero, and secure the growth and tax base needed to invest in public services.

However, while we will do all we can with the powers available, we do so with one hand tied behind our back as many of the most significant levers remain beyond our grasp. We will publish a further paper setting out the economic benefits that independence can bring for Scotland, with economic decisions taken in Scotland, for the benefit of Scotland, rather than a UK government that too often seems to treat Scotland as an afterthought.

Global competitiveness

Scotland is a trading nation and well placed to attract investment and compete on the international stage. However, the threat of trade barriers and tariffs risks real economic damage. We will respond by taking forward a new and ambitious programme of global engagement to showcase our domestic strengths and attract investment, to boost Scotland's profile, competitiveness, and growth.

In response to global trade barriers, we will implement a **new Six Point Export Plan**, to:

- Deliver an International Growth Support Programme, providing grant support to Scottish companies to help them unlock specific international growth.
- Support the delivery of the Sector Export Plans for Technology, Life Sciences,

Renewables and Hydrogen – addressing sector specific barriers, funding research and in-market promotion, and supporting individual companies.

- Bring more global buyers and suppliers to Scotland through inward missions to showcase the strength of Scottish export potential and supply chains.
- Expand Scottish Development International (SDI) support to get companies to their target markets by scaling up 'go-to-market' advice and increasing overseas missions where companies can get a deep understanding of the opportunities and meet buyers.
- Increase funding for our International Trade Partnership Programme with the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and expand access to business membership organisations who can now bid for support for trade missions to established and emerging markets.
- Providing information, advice and support to exporters to the US to help them maintain market share or build new North American business and develop a US Export Plan to identify those US states which offer the best fit for Scottish export strengths.

Last year, we initiated a co-ordinated programme to **attract capital investment** to Scotland in priority areas. We will expand on that progress, by:

- Launching 'InvestScotland', a new portal that will showcase investment opportunities and information for investors and provide a single point of entry to government.
- Accelerating a targeted programme of proactive engagement with key capital investors.

- Strengthening SDI's inward investment activity in Europe and the US by targeting Silicon Valley and other tech hubs to bring scaling companies to Scotland, engaging with global financial hubs to strengthen Scotland's fintech and financial services sector, and leveraging opportunities from our partnership with the City of London Corporation.
- Working closely with the UK Government to unlock up to £25m of seed capital funding for our Green Freeports in the Firth of Forth and Inverness and Cromarty Firth, helping secure significant investment and create jobs.
- Seeking more co-investment from public and private pension funds into Scottish projects and businesses, by working with the Scottish Local Government Pension Scheme.
- Acting on feedback from the consultation underway on how Scottish Ministers could use powers in the Housing (Scotland) Bill to allow for exemption from rent control, in certain circumstances, including new property built exclusively for rent and mid-market rent. This will deliver rent control in a way that supports tenants, takes account of the rights of landlords and continues to support investment in private housing.
- Implementing the recommendations of the Housing Investment Taskforce to unlock new investment opportunities across all tenures. This includes improving leverage of public sector funds for affordable housing delivery, driving a new commercial market for shared home ownership, and supporting a more interventionist approach from public bodies.
- Consulting before the summer recess on how Co-ownership Authorised Contractual Schemes are used by those looking to

invest in Scotland as well as the role of Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (LBTT) in supporting our ambitions to encourage commercial investment in Scotland.

An innovation nation

We will continue to nurture and expand sectors which boost Scotland's profile as a modern, high growth country – in particular tech and innovation, where our international reputation is growing. Entrepreneurs sell Scotland's expertise on an international stage, attract significant inward investment, and will be critical to our future prosperity. We will support innovators, increase startup creation, develop business clusters in innovative markets areas, and build on Scotland's expertise in critical technologies, by:

- Launching the First Minister's Start-up Challenge — a bold initiative to support young people from disadvantaged or under-represented backgrounds to start and scale innovative businesses, through tailored ideation support, mentorship and grant funding.
- Transforming the number of women who start and scale businesses by investing up to £6 million to implement Ana Stewart and Mark Logan's Pathways report – including a further round of competitive funding opportunities and the delivery of 'Pre-Start' support.
- Launching AI Scotland, a new national transformation programme founded on a partnership of business, academia, agencies and government, including a national AI adoption programme for SMEs.
- Hosting an Innovation Summit as the centrepiece of Scotland's Innovation Week, showcasing Scotland as a global innovation nation, promoting knowledge exchange and attracting investment.

- Supporting women-led businesses to export more, including by increasing the number of women who participate in international trade missions.
- Investing £1.2m in Scottish Edge, recognising the critical role it plays in identifying and investing in Scotland's best new companies.
- Partnering with the private sector to deliver an improved Ecosystem Fund, issuing grants to increase the scale, quality and profile of the Scottish start-up ecosystem.
- Creating a University Proof of Concept Fund focused on supporting research projects with significant economic potential to progress towards the formation of new companies by building prototypes, achieving market validation and attracting investment.
- Establishing a Technology Council of global business and academic experts to advise the Government on applying and benefiting from emerging technological trends.
- Delivering a financial support and guidance scheme to support industry clusters to emerge, grow and remain internationally competitive.
- Increasing investment in Scottish Funding Council core research and innovation grants to more than £325 million for the 2025-26 academic year to support the foundations of research in our universities, develop the talent pipeline, promote knowledge exchange, and drive growth.



Making it easier to invest and do business

We will **create better certainty and stability, and make it easier to do business**, including:

- No further divergence from the UK on Income Tax for the remainder of this Parliament – meaning no new bands, rates will remain the same and ensuring that the majority of Scottish taxpayers continue to pay less Income Tax than those in the rest of the UK.
- Recognising the ongoing concerns raised by the licensed hospitality sector on the valuation methodology applied to non-domestic property in this sector, we will commission an independent review to report by the end of 2026 and consider any recommendations in advance of the 2029 revaluation cycle.
- Publishing an action and implementation plan based on an assessment of the regulatory controls which exist in key growth sectors, starting with housing, public infrastructure, and green industries, by the end of 2025 – designed to make it easier to do business.
- Subjecting future Scottish government regulation to scrutiny to ensure that its purpose, content and timing have regard to potential opportunities and impacts on business and investment. This will include supporting improved engagement with business, robust Business and Regulatory Impact Assessments, and good regulatory practice.

Planning is at the heart of economic growth and underpins this government's priorities, particularly in growing the economy and eradicating child poverty. We will **boost planning capacity and reduce barriers to delivery**, by:

- Reversing the decline in professional planners working in public authorities, including appointing, developing and training 18 new future planners in the Scottish Government, and providing 30 bursaries for post-graduate planning by end of September this year.
- Undertaking rapid audits of planning teams in each of the key agencies and working with them to reduce complexity, cost, and speed up processes.
- Providing local authorities, through the Planning Hub, with additional capacity and expertise, prioritising action where evidence shows they are having challenges with meeting timescales or where there are delays in producing local plans.
- Supporting the delivery of three 'Masterplan Consent Areas' including for development associated with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, helping to de-risk investment by putting in place up-front development consents.
- Removing all dated national planning advice to declutter the system.
- Consulting on mechanisms to accelerate house building, including land assembly, build out rates and fiscal measures that stimulate access to land with planning permission where building has not started.

Supporting our rural economy

Our land and seas underpin Scotland's world class food and drink industry – accounting for almost a third of total manufacturing turnover. In predominantly rural and island areas, agriculture contributes over £3 billion in output every year, while our marine economy is worth over £4.9 billion. We will support farmers, crofters, and fishers to capitalise on Scotland's unique position, by:

- Investing an additional £5m in Scotland's food and drink strategy, to drive growth, and £5m to support food processing and marketing.
- Supporting Scotland's world leading fishing sector to maximise fishing opportunities and modernise, delivering technical and management improvements through the Future Catching Policy and our Inshore Fisheries Management Improvement Programme.
- Delivering reformed direct support payments to support sustainable food production.
- Publishing the Rural Support Plan – providing clarity on financial support plans for the next 5 years.
- Further to the consultation on proposals for crofting law reform, introducing legislation this year.
- Progressing the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, which will improve transparency of land ownership, help ensure large scale land holdings deliver in the public interest and give communities more opportunities to own land and more say in how it is used.
- To help improve the processes for communities to buy land and assets, launching a consultation on proposals from the review of community right to buy powers and deliver £7m through the Scottish Land Fund, enabling more community groups to purchase assets.
- Creating more opportunities for new entrants to farming on public land – including considering the use of land acquisition to deliver tenancy opportunities and prioritising capital support for new entrants and the next generation of farmers through the Future Farming Investment Scheme.
- Laying the draft Good Food Nation Plan before Parliament by the summer and establishing the Scottish Food Commission.
- Delivering £14m of funding to support sustainable, inclusive economic growth in the marine economy and coastal communities.
- Streamlining the consenting process for aquaculture, to improve efficiency and clarify the consenting process for aquaculture development between 3 – 12 nautical miles.
- Publishing the National Islands Plan to address island challenges and opportunities over the next five years, investing over £5m for the islands programme and additional support through the islands business resilience programme, while also scaling up decarbonisation efforts through the Carbon Neutral Islands Project.

Scotland's global image

One of Scotland's greatest strengths is our global reach – supported by a diaspora of tens of millions of influential Scots and bolstered by internationally recognised assets, including our natural heritage, culture, and tourism. Capitalising on those networks and strengths, we will promote Scotland at home and abroad, through the Scottish Government-led Brand Scotland partnership and worldwide network of offices, trade and investment envoys and Global Scots, including:

- Delivering the biggest increase in culture funding in the history of the Scottish Parliament, investing at least £100 million more in the arts and culture by 2028-29, with an additional £34 million this year.
- Providing a further £20 million to support Creative Scotland's multi-year funding programme – more than doubling the number of organisations that receive multi-year funding.
- Supporting Scottish Agritourism as they prepare for the World Agritourism Conference in Scotland in 2026.
- Boosting our screen sector, with an additional £2 million ensuring our screen sector can add £1 billion Gross Value Added to the Scottish economy by 2030.
- Hosting a range of events which will put a focus on Scotland, including most immediately the Orkney 2025 Island Games and the 2026 Commonwealth Games.
- Working with VisitScotland, airlines and travel partners to grow international connectivity – including extending seasonal routes and improving frequency and capacity.

We will continue to press the case that EU membership is the best for Scotland, while working with the UK Government to maximise opportunities for economic growth in Scotland from a stronger EU/UK relationship, including:

- Significant easements to the trade in food and drink products.
- Closer cooperation on energy and climate, including on emissions trading.
- Reducing unnecessary obstacles to trade in goods and services.
- Promoting mobility for business travellers, touring artists and young people.
- Rejoining the EU Erasmus+ and Creative Europe programmes.

Skills for success

To capitalise on economic opportunities, we need people with the skills to grasp them. Our colleges and universities are vital anchor institutions across Scotland. We will work with partners to secure a long-term and sustainable future for further and higher education, developing our skills system for the future, including by:

- Maintaining our commitment to free tuition which means that unlike elsewhere in the UK, a Scottish student studying in Scotland will not incur additional debt of up to £28,605.
- Widening access to higher education for students from the most socio economically disadvantaged communities – towards our goal of 20% of all entrants being from the 20% most deprived communities by 2030.
- Subject to legislative processes, delivering a simplified post-school funding body landscape that is sustainable and efficient,

consolidating apprenticeship funding within the Scottish Funding Council by March 2027, and student support funding within the Student Awards Agency Scotland by March 2026.

- Establishing a national Recognition of Prior Learning system - formally acknowledging an individual's skills and knowledge gained through work experience, training, or other learning outside of formal education.
- Investing up to £2m to develop engineering skills in the Glasgow City Region, designed by the Clyde Maritime Cluster in partnership with Skills Development Scotland.
- Introducing a new Scottish Government-led approach to national skills planning, and strengthen regional skills planning, to ensure that post school provision becomes more responsive to Scotland's strategic skills needs and priorities.
- Reviewing and improving school-age and adult careers support, including better information on career choices, job prospects and earnings.
- Supporting schools to access film and screen learning – so Scotland has the workforce to meet the demands a £1bn film and screen industry will create.
- Subject to a successful evaluation, support the continuation of Corseford College, and the learning opportunities it offers young people with additional support needs, through funding of £700,000 in 2025-26.
- Taking forward a review of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig with the aim of providing it a secure future.
- Providing £3.5m so that colleges can deliver the pipeline of skills our economy and

public services need, with new programmes focused on care and offshore wind.

- Fostering links with universities abroad, encouraging foreign investment in our world leading research, and attracting international students and staff, working with our new International Education Trade Envoy, Professor Rachel Sandison OBE and partners.

Improved communities

Global economic uncertainty often has a disproportionate impact on our regional and rural economies. Every community in Scotland must be able to draw on their strengths and assets to benefit from, and contribute to, a stronger economy. Working to ensure the benefits of growth are felt across Scotland, we will:

- Progress the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill, alongside investment in social enterprises, support for co-operatives and employee-owned firms, as well as continued investment in a CWB practitioner's network. This will be supported by the work of the new Economic Democracy Group focused on growing Inclusive and Democratic Business Models in Scotland.
- Invest over £200 million in grant funding in Growth Deals – helping bring projects with significant community benefit into operation, including:
 - Transforming Inverness Castle into a 'Spirit of the Highlands' themed attraction.
 - Upgrading the University of the Highlands & Islands Outer Hebrides Campus project, with a focus on supporting the expansion of renewable energy sectors.

- The Manufacturing Innovation Centre for Moray will bring world-leading research and development expertise to attract jobs and investment.
- Edinburgh Innovation Hub will grow innovation-led enterprise in and around East Lothian, aiming to deliver around 100 new start-ups over its lifetime.
- Renfrew Bridge will link Renfrew with Yoker and Clydebank, improving connections and forecast to create up to 800 jobs in the area over 25 years.
- The development of three new industrial units at Coldstream in the Scottish Borders will enable small businesses to grow and create new jobs.
- Work with regional and local partners to identify how best to formally devolve further elements of decision-making and delivery to Regional Economic Partnerships (REPs), and present options before the end of this Parliament.
- Work with REPs in Glasgow City Region and in North East to deliver Investment Zones in those regions, bringing jobs and clusters of innovation.
- Award new regional contracts, alongside delivery of the £600 million+ R100 programme, so more households, communities and businesses can access reliable gigabit connectivity.
- Provide £70 million of funding – with flexibility for relevant local authorities, including Orkney and Shetland Islands, over how this is used – for inter-island connectivity.
- Deliver capital investment to regenerate communities, supporting at least 26 projects across Scotland that align with local development and regeneration plans, including:
 - Reactivating the Cullipool Village slate quarry – to be owned, managed, and directly benefit the community of Luing, generating income and local jobs.
 - The re-development of Cowdenbeath Town Hall, converting the building into a multi-purpose enterprise space.
 - Cathcart Road Net Zero Industrial Units, expected to create 17 new jobs and unlock an estimated £1 million follow-on inward investment.
- Start the process of identifying, designating and supporting Areas of Linguistic Significance, subject to the passage of the Scottish Languages Bill.
- Implement the recommendations of the Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic, ensuring Scottish Government strategies on housing, transport and digital connectivity urgently address issues which undermine the economic resilience of the communities identified by the report.
- Deliver Scotland's Migration Service and making the continued case for tailored migration routes, including a Scottish Visa, Rural Visa Pilot and Scottish Graduate Visa.
- Support developments of benefit to Gaelic-speaking communities through the Scottish Government's Gaelic Capital Fund, including awarding a £500,000 grant for a new Screen Machine mobile cinema serving rural communities across Scotland.

Eradicating Child Poverty

To deliver for Scotland we have:

Successfully introduced the **Scottish Child Payment** - forecast to keep **40,000** children out of relative poverty in **2025-26**



Increased the value of our 5 family payments which can be worth around **£25,000** by the time a child turns 16



Increased funded childcare hours to 1,140 for 3-4 year-olds and eligible 2 year-olds. If families paid for this, it would cost them more than **£6,000** a year for each eligible child



Helped deliver **34,684 affordable homes** to December 2024, including **26,203** homes for social rent.



Saved families who take up the offer of free school meals **£400 per child** a year



Supported almost 28,000 parents through our devolved employability services between April 2021 and September 2024

2 Eradicating Child Poverty

A national mission

No child should be living in poverty in Scotland. Eradicating child poverty is this government's national mission. We have seen the proportion of children living in relative poverty after housing cost reducing in recent years, with the rate now lower than it has been for a decade and 9 percentage points lower than the UK in 2023-24. But we must do more.

In the coming year we will develop and publish a Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026-31 – outlining actions to keep us on the journey to meeting our ambitious 2030 targets – while responding immediately to the challenges faced.

Tackling the cost of living

Despite limited economic levers, the Scottish Government has a strong record on helping people with the costs of living. Combined, our interventions mean that families with children in the poorest 10% of households are estimated to be £2,600 a year better off this year as result of Scottish Government policies. While the UK Government has not heeded our calls to do more to help people facing financial challenges, we will **support households hit by rising everyday costs** where we can, including:

- Expanding free school meals in S1-S3 in eight local authority areas – covering pupils in urban, rural, semi-urban and island authorities in receipt of Scottish Child Payment – from August 2025.
- Helping over 94,000 households cut their housing costs through Discretionary Housing Payments, including £89 million to mitigate the bedroom tax and benefit cap.
- Ensuring over 460,000 households save on average, over £850 a year through some level of Council Tax Reduction, backed by £350 million.
- A pilot scheme for a £2 bus fare cap in one of Scotland's transport regions, backed by £3 million in this financial year.
- Delivering a £2 million national pilot to support free bus travel for people seeking asylum.
- Providing £1m to all local authorities to deliver holiday playschemes and activity provision for disabled children.
- Helping hard pressed families with the costs of childcare, supporting more parents to get on in work, including:
 - Designing and delivering childcare services for priority families working in 23 'Early Adopter Communities' across six local authority areas.
 - Expanding our 'Extra Time' programme, providing funded breakfast and after school and holiday clubs across Scotland, supporting 5,000 children and their families most at risk of poverty.
 - From August, delivering a £3 million 'Bright Start Breakfasts' Fund to create more free club places for families who need it most across Scotland.
- Helping people with advice to reduce their costs and increase their incomes from social security– with increased investment to over £15 million for free income maximisation and debt advice, including:
 - Supporting 105 organisations, in 33 partnerships, to provide financial advice for people in accessible settings like hospitals and community centres.
 - An extra £2.2 million to support the expansion of tailored advice on council tax debt – building on a pilot that has helped over 1,600 people with arrears.

- Working in partnership with COSLA to empower councils with the information they need to improve recovery of council tax debt – strengthening data sharing so they can act earlier to identify households which may be eligible for council tax reduction and wider support.

We will always protect the most vulnerable people in our society – including protecting support for disabled people and mitigating the worst aspects of UK Government welfare reform. As well as taking steps to protect people from rising costs, we are **investing £6.9 billion in our social security system**, to ensure people have the support they need, including by:

- Developing the systems needed to effectively scrap the impact of the two-child cap.
- Supporting all pensioners to heat their homes over winter by introducing a universal Pension Age Winter Heating Payment from Winter 2025.
- Completing the transfer of over 700,000 people's disability and carer benefit awards from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland.
- Launching our new Carer's Additional Person Payment, to give extra support to people receiving the Carer Support Payment who care for more than one person.

Whole-family support

Families must be able to access the support they need, where and when they need it – with services designed to respond immediately, reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, and wrapping the support around them. Our commitment to increase funding flexibility to

better enable partners to deliver whole family support is being rolled out initially to a core group of local authorities, with the intention of extending to other parts of Scotland quickly thereafter. We will build on this over the coming year so more people benefit, including:

- Expanding Fairer Futures Partnerships to Shetland, North Lanarkshire and Fife – alongside eight existing partnerships – and work to identify further adopters, to maximise incomes and support people into sustained employment or education.
- Funding the Wise Group's relational mentoring programme, providing wraparound support to an additional 2,000 low-income households.
- Recognising the importance of a thriving Third Sector in Scotland we will deliver the Fairer Funding pilot, providing multi-year funding for Third Sector organisations across Scotland and identifying the lessons from an interim evaluation by May 2026 to inform future approaches.

Helping people into work

While our commitment to the social safety net is unwavering, good quality, well-paid work provides an enduring route out of poverty. Our devolved employability programmes have supported tens of thousands of people to enter, and progress in, work – keeping people out of poverty and contributing to economic success. We will help people remain in work and strengthen pathways into employment for those furthest from the labour market by:

- Reviewing the delivery of employability programmes to maximise their effectiveness and bring forward proposals ahead of the Budget 26-27, including consideration of a national model.

- Supporting disabled people to move into sustainable employment through Specialist Employability Support from summer 2025. This will ensure “place and train” models are in place across all 32 local authority areas, supporting closer working between employability provision and employers.
- Investing in Parental Employability Support in every local authority area, with over £40 million made available to Local Employability Partnerships in 2025/26.
- Funding pilot projects that will develop actions employers can take to implement inclusive recruitment practices – including flexible working, support for disabled employees, and supporting people at risk of economic inactivity.
- Working with schools during academic year 25/26 to amplify good practice that supports school leavers to enter positive destinations, piloting with local authorities that have the lowest rates of school leavers entering positive destinations.
- Evaluating the impact of improved health and work services committed to in Programme for Government 2024, which will support up to 1,000 additional people in 2025-26 and beyond, and work with Public Health Scotland to galvanise employer action towards healthy workplaces.

Safe, warm homes

Good quality, affordable housing is vital. We will deliver 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, leveraging in further private and social sector investment to create a total package of around £20 billion, supporting between 12,000 and 14,000 jobs each year. In response to the housing emergency, we worked intensively to increase supply, including bringing more

than 1,000 additional properties into use as affordable homes - helping reduce the number of homeless households spending long periods in temporary accommodation.

Backed by increased investment of £768 million, and implementing the recommendations of the Housing Investment Taskforce to unlock new investment opportunities across all tenures, we will ensure more people can access good, affordable, homes, including:

- Delivering over 8,000 affordable homes for social rent, mid-market rent and low-cost home ownership, with a focus on acquisitions and family sized homes.
- Removing barriers on stalled housing sites to deliver up to 20,000 new homes.
- Driving down numbers of privately owned long-term empty homes, by investing £2 million through the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership.
- More than doubling the budget – from £8.25 million to almost £21 million – to deliver around 8,500 general housing adaptations to disabled tenants, so they can live independently in their home.
- Supporting the completion of the 6 Gypsy/Traveller site demonstration projects funded by the Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund.
- Delivering more affordable homes in rural and island communities by extending the Rural and Island Housing Fund to new applications to March 2028.
- Delivering an equivalent of Awaab’s law in Scotland – ensuring landlords promptly address issues that are hazardous to tenants’ health. Subject to the passage of the new Housing (Scotland) Bill, we will bring forward secondary legislation

to develop timescales for investigation and commencement of repairs that are hazardous to tenants' enjoyment of their homes, starting with damp and mould.

- Tackling homelessness by implementing the new Housing (Scotland) Bill which, if passed, will improve outcomes for those at risk of homelessness and strengthen tenants' rights, including through the introduction of a system for longer term rent controls, and removing the legislative constraint on the level of council tax premium that can be applied to second and long-term empty homes.
- Investing £1 million in a fund administered by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and Homeless Network Scotland, bringing together registered social landlords, third sector organisations and community partners to prevent homelessness and protect tenants' rights.
- Investing £4 million in homelessness prevention pilots in 2025-26, helping duty bearers to prepare for the new legislation and to implement the 'ask and act' duties effectively.



Early child development

Any efforts to tackle poverty must be underpinned by giving every child born in Scotland the best start in life. We are committed to reducing developmental concerns at 27-30 months by a quarter by 2030 – resulting in the lowest levels recorded – and supporting babies, children, and young people through the early, formative years of their life, including:

- Embedding early conversations on preparing for pregnancy into routine health care, to optimise preconception health and care.
- By the end of March 2026, ensuring all pregnant women in Scotland are allocated a primary midwife and receive at least 75% of their antenatal care from them or another from the same team.
- By the end of 2025, meeting our breastfeeding stretch aim to reduce drop off at 6-8 weeks, with babies in Scotland now being breastfed for longer, and inequalities reducing.
- Improving take-up of Child Health Reviews and developing a health visitor learning site.
- Enhancing the contents of the Baby Box by March 2026, building on feedback from parents and frontline practitioners.
- To address growing concerns about children's speech and language development, publish an Early Years Speech and Language action plan by autumn 2025, setting out practical steps to support children's early speech and language development.
- Building on initiatives which supported the creation of over 40 new childminding businesses in 2024-25 – expanding this across 28 local authorities, backed by £1.6 million.

Keeping the Promise

We have made good progress on Keeping the Promise, including a 18.1% reduction in the number of children identified as 'looked after' since 2020. By the end of the Parliament, we will have invested over £148 million through Whole Family Wellbeing Funding to transform family support. We will ensure that we meet the ambitious outcomes set out in The Promise Progress Framework, including:

- Introducing a new Care Leavers payment from 1st April 2026 – a one-off £2,000 payment to help improve the financial security of young people leaving care.
- Bringing forward the Children and Young People (Care) (Scotland) Bill that will support delivery of The Promise.
- Progressing measures for delivering the recommendation in the Independent Care Review to reduce or remove profit made from the care of children in Scotland.
- Publishing a new vision for kinship care by the end of 2025.
- Uprating of the Scottish Recommended Allowance for eligible foster and kinship carers, providing an extra £1.9 million, which is expected to benefit more than 9,000 children.
- Responding to the Reimagining Secure Care report by June 2025 - setting out the Scottish Government's future vision for secure care.
- Testing our approach to Bairns' Hoose across ten areas – providing safe, trauma-informed environments for child victims and witnesses to get the support and recovery services they need – ahead of incremental national rollout from 2027.
- Establishing a National Social Work Agency by Spring 2026, as well as

supporting the social work profession by introducing improvements to systems which support social work professional learning and development.

Ensuring equality

While the impacts of poverty are felt widely, they are also felt disproportionately – minority ethnic communities, predominantly women single parents, and disabled people all face far higher levels of poverty. Policies that value diversity and advance equality and inclusion are under threat around the world. This government remains dedicated to protecting, respecting and fulfilling the rights of all in Scotland, while guarding against the spread of hate and prejudice. We will take action to make Scotland a fairer and more equal country for everyone, including:

- Creating safe spaces for the LGBTQI+ community - funding work that tackles discrimination and upholds the human rights of this group, including through the Equality and Human Rights Fund, and progressing actions within the Non-Binary Equality Action Plan.
- Developing draft legislation and policy towards ending conversion practices in Scotland. Engagement will continue with the UK government for a Bill covering England, Wales and Scotland. However, if this approach cannot be agreed, then we commit to publishing our own Bill in Year 1 of the next Parliamentary session.
- Developing legislation to incorporate certain international human rights treaties into Scots law, working with stakeholders to refine proposals, and laying the groundwork for effective implementation.
- Applying fair work principles – including provision of flexible and family friendly working practices and actions to address workplace inequalities – to public sector funding.
- In response to the recommendations from the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (NACWG), to prioritise the needs of marginalised women and girls, we will work with NACWG and gender equality stakeholders in the development of our next Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan to strengthen the focus on gender in the Plan and to inform the actions it commits to.
- Improving disability competence across government, holding a Cabinet takeover to ensure accountability at the highest levels of government, while improving access to support and services through our Disability Equality Plan – backed by of £2.5 million.
- Ensuring a whole government programmatic approach to tackling gender inequality through development and delivery of an Equality Strategy for Women and Girls.
- Launching the Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland which will work with Government, public bodies and communities to deliver on our vision to tackle systemic racism in Scotland.
- Establishing, through a multi-year procurement, a new Integration Support Service, ensuring refugees, people seeking asylum and other forced migrants living in our communities can access the support they need when they need it, within the scope of devolved competence.
- Accepting the recent UK Supreme Court judgment, a Scottish Government working group is considering its impact on policies, guidance and legislation to ensure we are ready to take all necessary steps when the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) publishes its revised Code of Practice and updated guidance.

- Legislating to add the characteristic of sex to the Hate Crime Act to ensure that women and girls have the same protections in law as other groups covered by the Act.
- Taking forward the actions in the Hate Crime Strategy Delivery Plan until May 2026, protecting against the spread of hatred and prejudice.
- Having guaranteed the Access to Elected Office Fund in law, supporting people with disabilities to stand for election, we will work with electoral administrators to deliver improvements in accessibility for those with sight loss voting in elections, in time for the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections.
- Continuing our commitment to embed equality and human rights across the Scottish Government and the wider public sector we will publish our mainstreaming framework which will include an action plan and toolkit, setting out practical steps to achieve this ambition. This will be complemented by enhancing the effectiveness of the Public Sector Equality Duty as it operates in Scotland.

Our commitment to upholding and promoting rights does not stop at a border. In recent years we've witnessed heightened violence and humanitarian crises across the world. We have resolutely condemned Russia's illegal war against Ukraine, remaining steadfast in our support for the people of Ukraine and for a strong and durable peace that respects Ukraine's sovereignty. Scottish Ministers have been consistent in calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all hostages, urgent access for humanitarian aid, and repeatedly called on the UK Government

to end all licenced arms exports to Israel. We will not turn our backs on those overseas who need assistance – keeping our promise to countries across the Global South to grow our international development budget to £15 million per annum and providing £1 million for humanitarian crises.

However, as the foundations of democracy come under threat around the world, we must double down on our efforts to protect them here in Scotland – guarding against the threat of polarising internal and external forces, and ensure we empower people who feel distant from politics or on the margins of society.

The First Minister's Gathering on strengthening and protecting democracy was an important starting point. It secured a shared commitment, across civic, faith, and political leaders, to foundational principles which will guide our collective response and to working in a shared endeavour to give life to these principles. We will work with partners on specific, targeted actions to:

- Develop counter interventions to the threats to our democratic system.
- Create positive relationships and engage people across society on the issues.
- Work with partners to engage their own networks to strengthen democratic.
- Use the Scottish Government's convening power to advance the dialogue around, and progress the solutions to, the issues identified.

Most immediately, we will support the STUC to pilot and develop activity designed to promote equality and diversity in the workplace and tackle discrimination at work.

Tackling the Climate Emergency

To deliver for Scotland we have:

Tripled the size of the green jobs market in Scotland since 2021

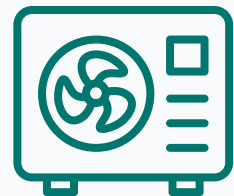


Held the **world's largest** floating offshore wind leasing round



Created the **most generous concessionary travel scheme in the UK**, where over **2.3 million cardholders** benefit from free bus travel

Continued to offer some of the **most generous grants and loans in the UK** to support clean heating and energy efficiency, including up to **£15,000 grants** through our Home Energy Scotland Grant and Loan Scheme



In the last 5 years, created **75% of all new UK woodlands** in Scotland



Invested over £55m in projects through our Nature Restoration Fund



Increased investment for Sustainable and Active Travel from £115m in 2021-22 to over **£188m in 2025-26**



3 Tackling the Climate Emergency

A 20-year mission

This Government is working hard to address the twin crises of climate change and nature loss – the devastating consequences of which are playing out at home and abroad, including damaging wildfires and floods witnessed in Scotland recently. It is more important than ever that we embrace and champion the green revolution to improve the lives of current and future generations both here and overseas.

The journey to net zero also presents significant opportunities – for people, communities, and businesses. Between 1990 and 2022 our emissions halved while the economy grew by 66.6%, showing that a thriving economy and falling emissions can be achieved in tandem.

The coming year will be critical for this pathway, as we set out a route map to reducing emissions and growing the green economy: setting carbon budgets before the summer and publishing our Climate Change Plan by the end of this Parliament which will set out policies and proposals to deliver carbon budgets up to 2040 in a way that delivers a just transition.

A green industrial revolution

Renewable energy generated in Scotland can pave the way for lower bills, while green industries can create jobs and growth. To maximise the economic potential of the opportunities set out in our Green Industrial Strategy, we will remove blockers, create an enabling environment, and make sure that the communities hosting infrastructure directly benefit from it, including:

- Leveraging private investment to develop supply chain clusters for offshore wind to boost local job

opportunities, maximising the impact of our commitment to invest up to £500 million over 5 years, including £150 million in 2025-26.

- Publish a joint offshore wind skills action plan in the autumn, focused on addressing critical skills gaps, in partnership with industry, the STUC, and public sector.
- Establishing and delivering an Offshore Wind Skills Programme in our colleges, helping to create region-specific training hubs for offshore wind skills.
- Delivering a new bidding round for the North East and Moray Just Transition Fund – worth up to £8.5 million – focussed on projects that support jobs, skills and economic opportunities.
- Supporting communities to benefit directly from investment in energy infrastructure in their areas – providing up to £8 million through Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES), for communities to develop renewable energy projects.
- Working with the UK Government to reform the consenting process through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill – reducing timescales to make decisions about whether large scale energy generation and network infrastructure can proceed and how communities can engage earlier in the process.

Scotland's green industrial revolution will support a growing economy, provide quality jobs and support our current industry in the just transition to a net zero future. The Scottish Government is providing support in essential areas, including energy transformation, hydrogen and Carbon Capture and Storage

(CCUS). Grangemouth is an exemplar on where this support coalesces to drive a prosperous future for Scottish Industry. We will:

- Support the Acorn carbon capture and storage project to obtain Track 2 status. The Scottish Government has committed £80 million to make this happen but, given the importance of this keystone project for the Scottish economy, we are now willing, as part of a wider package of investment in industrial transformation, to increase Scottish funding for Acorn to partner with investment from the UK Government.
- To further support Scotland's industrial transition, continue to deliver the Scottish Industrial Energy Transformation Fund, co-investing up to £5 million in 2025-26 with manufacturers to deliver projects that improve energy-efficiency, reduce emissions, drive productivity and increase sustainability.

We hope our willingness to increase our investment as a partner will enable the UK Government to approve the Acorn project in the UK Spending Review. This will help unlock billions of pounds in investment at key industrial sites across Scotland.



- Deliver our £25 million Grangemouth Just Transition Fund. Grangemouth is central to Scotland's industrialised future and our fund will – support industrial transformation, focussing initially on, but not limited to, the immediate opportunities identified by Project Willow – while supporting business to bring forward additional low carbon projects.
- Provide up to £10 million in 2025/26 to support growth in the hydrogen sector recognising that hydrogen is a critical component of Scotland's route to net zero by 2045 and has a pivotal role in industrial transformation, including at Grangemouth.

Decarbonising transport

Acting on transport emissions is vital to our net-zero progress, with domestic transport remaining Scotland's largest source of emissions. Alongside the necessary action by the UK Government, we will support transport services, people and business to reduce their emissions and adapt to climate change, including:

- Introducing new rural and island EV infrastructure grants to help deliver approximately 24,000 additional public electric vehicle charge points by 2030.
- Introducing a new pilot grant scheme to help households without off-street parking to install cross-pavement EV charging solutions.
- Providing up to £4 million to increase the shift of freight from road to rail through the Freight Facilities Grant, and a first round of funding for the HGV sector to explore investments in decarbonised vehicles, charging and fuelling options.

- Expanding support for skills to help businesses and the workforce to adapt to zero emission vehicles, with £350,000 to develop capacity in colleges in EV and charge point maintenance and repair and a further £400,000 for a new heavy-duty vehicle just transition initiative.
- Publishing jointly with COSLA a renewed policy statement on reducing car use in Scotland, which will set a successor target for car use reduction aligned with the development of the draft Climate Change Plan, and working with COSLA and regional transport partnerships to develop delivery plans for car use reduction, reflective of different communities and places.

Decarbonising heat in buildings and tackling fuel poverty

Heating our homes, workplaces, and other buildings is the third largest cause of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland. We are committed to decarbonising Scotland's buildings in a way that does not penalise individuals but does help tackle the climate emergency, rising energy bills, and fuel poverty. We will accelerate action on energy efficiency and clean heating, and build a solid foundation for the next 20 years by:

- Supporting 20,000 households to save up to £500 on energy bills per year, by investing £300 million in 2025-26 to help households and other building owners install energy efficiency and clean heating measures.
- Introducing a Heat in Buildings Bill, setting targets for installing clean heating systems by 2045 – giving a clear signal to home and buildings owners to act when

upgrading their heating system, including provisions to support development of heat networks.

- Improving our public-facing schemes, by simplifying the application process and ensuring that Home Energy Scotland is recognised as a single access point – streamlining the process and making it easier for households to access support.

This is not just an issue of climate justice but also social justice. Modelling shows that, if not for the increases in the energy price cap seen in the last few years, around 389,000 fewer households would be living in fuel poverty. Targeted fuel bill support is urgently needed to ensure that consumers are protected against high costs at source and can afford energy. We have worked with energy providers and advice groups to come up with a deliverable Social Tariff scheme, which demonstrates clear consensus on the way forward. However, the fundamental levers to make a difference lie with the UK Government. We will continue to call on the UK Government to deliver a unit rate discount for energy, with the level of discount proportionate to need.

Reversing the decline of nature

Scotland's natural heritage is one of our greatest assets. We will work with all our communities and land managers on actions to restore and protect nature and to support efforts to adapt to climate change whilst also reducing our emissions. We will act to halt this loss and ensure our natural resources are protected, including:

- Supporting farmers and crofters to produce food, reduce emissions and deliver biodiversity improvements, through

uptake of key baselining activities such as carbon and biodiversity audits and soil analysis.

- Establishing statutory targets to improve biodiversity.
- Increasing the scale and pace of peatland restoration to at least 12,000 hectares, up from a current target of 10,000, this year and creating at least 10,000 hectares of woodlands - which will include over 4,000 hectares of native woodland.
- Implementing the Future Farming Investment Scheme, delivering £14 million of capital support to encourage farmers and crofters to carry out investments to improve business efficiency and achieve nature and climate outcomes. We will also explore opportunities for greater public and private investment in our rural economy with a focus on new entrants to farming, net zero and biodiversity.
- Extending our Nature Restoration Fund in 2026/27 to enable funding of a further round of multi-year projects to help deliver the priorities set out in our Biodiversity Strategy.
- Considering with stakeholders the development of local pilot projects on deer management programmes, including an implementation plan and funding models.

Adapting to climate impacts

The climate emergency is not a distant threat, it is with us today and the impacts are on our doorstep. While Scotland will continue to play our part in reducing emissions, we must also recognise warming trends for the next two decades are set because of past global emissions. Having published our Scottish

National Adaptation Plan in September 2024, the focus is now on delivering on those commitments, including:

- Expanding national coverage of Regional Adaptation Partnerships, building on success in the Clyde, Highland, Southeast Scotland and Tayside regions, with a view to achieving national coverage by 2029.
- Establishing a national flood advisory service to bring more consistency, efficiency and value to how large value flood protection schemes are delivered as part of implementation of Scotland's National Flood Resilience Strategy.
- Developing adaptation guidance specifically for the social care sector, recognising that climate changes do not impact us equally, with some people uniquely vulnerable.
- Through our Adaptation Scotland programme, starting adaptation training services for sectors particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.
- Publishing a Trunk Road Adaptation Plan and working to improve the resilience of our railways.
- Supporting projects through our Climate Engagement Fund, which aims to reach over 7,000 individuals, to build climate knowledge and skills among new audiences.
- Providing training, resources and support through our Climate Action Schools to improve climate literacy and enable climate action among schools, educators and pupils across Scotland, engaging over 1,160 schools.

- Using Scotland's Climate Week to celebrate and showcase climate action from government, business and individuals to build a sense of community, collaboration and agency in tackling the emergency.
- Banning the sale and supply of single use vapes from 1 June 2025 to reduce vaping among non-smokers and young people and tackle their environmental impact.

Global climate justice

Alongside our domestic action Scotland will continue playing a role in securing global change. At a time of spiralling climate disruption globally we will not turn our backs on those overseas who need assistance or look to balance the books on the backs of those hit hardest, including:

- Leading on climate action internationally, leveraging our presidency of Regions4 and co-chair position in Under2, to drive forward ambition and implement bold climate action across counterpart governments around the world.
- At COP30, pushing for recognition of the importance of devolved nations in delivering global climate ambition and the needs of those who have done the least to cause climate change but are suffering the most from it.
- Keeping our promise to countries across the Global South to invest £36 million over this Parliament to support climate justice.

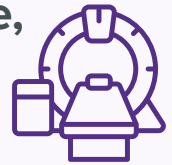
Ensuring High Quality and Sustainable Public Services

To deliver for Scotland we have:

Delivered more than **105,500 NHS appointments** and procedures through our additional **£30 million** investment between April 2024 and March 2025, over **40,000 more** than originally pledged



Treated more patients with cancer on time, compared to the same quarter 10 years ago



Increased residential rehabilitation bed capacity by 21% to 513 in 2024

Met the national performance standard for **CAMHS** waiting times for the first time, with over 90% of children and young people seen within 18 weeks of referral



A record number of pupils (**647,773**) currently taught in schools that are in 'good' or 'satisfactory' condition



Record proportion of pupils achieving the expected level in literacy and numeracy across primary and secondary schools in 2023-24



Seen the proportion of **A-C grades at Higher** being obtained by candidates with **Additional Support Needs** increase, compared to 2019, to **69% in 2024**



Invested over £19m through CashBack for Communities to **support 70,000 young people** at risk of entering the criminal justice system



4 High Quality and Sustainable Public Services

Our precious public services are the engine that keeps our country running. We have improved people's access and experience of these services – exceeding NHS targets, boosting school attainment, increasing the number of police officers on our streets, and reducing the total number of crimes.

We will equip public services to deliver for people when they need them – driving down waiting times, improving standards and making Scotland's streets safer. At the heart of that will be reform – ensuring services efficient and financially sustainable.

A healthy NHS

Scotland's NHS is our most cherished public service. Over the last year, we've seen reductions in NHS waiting times, faster support for children needing mental health support, and recent reductions in the levels of delayed discharges from hospital. In the year ahead we will **reduce the time patients wait for treatment** and ensure no one waits more than a year for surgical treatment by:

- Delivering more than 150,000 extra appointments and procedures, including surgeries and diagnostic tests, and target cancer pathways to tackle backlogs against the 62-day referral to treatment standard.
- Ensuring more people can see their GP and get cared for in the community – reducing pressures in hospitals – including:
 - Supporting 100,000 patients with enhanced service GP appointments by March 2026 for key risk factors including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high blood sugar, obesity and smoking.
 - Ensure more dentists by launching a training package by April 2026 that will support international dentists to join the NHS Scotland workforce.
 - Target financial incentives for dentists moving to work in rural areas from October 2025 and increase domestic dental student numbers by 7% from September 2025.
 - Bringing eye care closer to patients' homes and away from hospital settings – rolling out the Community Glaucoma Service on a national basis.
 - Further expand our Pharmacy First Service, enabling community pharmacists to treat a greater number of clinical conditions and prevent the need for a GP visit.
- Ensuring delivery of 95% of referrals to radiology being seen within six weeks by March 2026.
- Delivering more surgical procedures in our network of National Treatment Centres – to over 30,000 planned procedures, up from 20,000 in 2024-25.
- Expanding our Rapid Cancer Diagnostic Services (RCDS) for people with non-specific symptoms of cancer with a sixth RCDS operational in NHS Forth Valley by spring 2025.
- Ensuring more people can be cared for at home, reducing pressures in hospitals – expanding the number of Hospital at Home beds to at least 2,000 by December 2026.
- Specialised frailty teams in every core Emergency Department by summer 2025 – ensuring frail patients with complex needs receive the wrap-around care they need to return home or into a care setting as soon as possible, improving hospital discharges.

- Providing £4.5 million in 2025/26 for new specialist support across Scotland for Long Covid, ME, Chronic Fatigue and other similar conditions.
- Ensuring NHS Boards progress implementation of the Delivery Framework for Miscarriage Care, including starting to move to a graded model of miscarriage care, and ensuring all clinically appropriate women are offered progesterone treatment, backed by £1.5m funding to NHS Boards in 2025-26.
- Strengthening support for hospices through our commitment to provide £5m to independent hospices across Scotland.

Much of the pressure in our health system stems from conditions which are preventable earlier in life – but which are also often symptoms of inequality. Alongside our work to tackle poverty, in the coming year we will set out how we will support people to **live longer, healthier and fulfilling lives**, by:

- Rolling out Emergency Department opt-out testing for blood borne viruses such as HIV and hepatitis B and C in NHS Lothian and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde - the areas of highest diagnosed prevalence – and elsewhere as the evidence develops and supports this. Funding will be used to provide testing and support for patients



who receive a positive result, ensuring that they can engage with treatment and prevent further health harms and onward transmission of infection.

- Improving mental health support for young people – clearing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services backlogs and meeting the 18-week standard nationally by December 2025 – backed by £123.5 million recurring funding for mental health.
- Improving access to adult mental health treatment – expanding the NHS 24 Mental Health Hub, by December 2025, to provide access to digitally enabled psychological interventions and therapies for people who may benefit from early treatments.
- Continuing to build on the offer of adult mental health early intervention and prevention support in local communities, through our Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults, with a further commitment of £30m funding until 2027.
- Delivering our joint Scottish Government and COSLA Physical Activity for Health Framework, in pursuit of our target to achieve a 15% relative reduction in the prevalence of physical inactivity in adults and in adolescents by 2030.
- Reducing mental health demands on police officers and protect people in crisis, including improving frontline training and the development of national guidance to improve multi-agency working when responding to a person experiencing a psychiatric emergency.
- Establishing a Women's Health Research Fund with the aim of closing gaps we know exist in women's health research. The £250,000 fund will focus specifically

on menstrual health and gynaecological conditions, menopause, pelvic floor health and healthy ageing and long-term conditions.

- Doing all we can to reduce harm and deaths caused by drugs and alcohol - developing a longer-term approach, with a further £2.5 million in drugs and alcohol services
 - Full implementation of the Medication Assisted Treatment Standards and the development of a national specification.
 - Increasing residential rehab capacity by 50%, to 650 beds, and being ambitious beyond our publicly funded placements to 1,000 per year by 2026.
 - Investing a further £2.5 million in person-centred alcohol and drug services, including £1m to provide specific support to develop services for mothers who use drugs and their babies.

Renewal and reform are crucial to futureproofing our health services – protecting patients and staff from the impacts of the growing demand the NHS faces, while making sure that people can continue to access services when most in need. We will take the next steps in reforming these vital services through:

- The innovative Barra and Vatersay Community Campus, including both NHS and Education facilities, will go ahead and we will work with NHS Western Isles, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Scottish Futures Trust to develop a sustainable, jointly funded plan.
- Launching the initial version of the health and social care app by the end of the year, with investment of £12 million and

a published national roll-out programme setting out when the app will be made available progressively across Scotland as well as the longer-term plans for the wider ‘personalised digital health and social care service’.

- Taking the first steps in replacing the Belford Hospital, Monklands University Hospital, and Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion, by providing funding to recommence the business care processes.
- Our Accelerated National Innovation Adoption pathway, and working in partnership with the NHS, universities and industry, establishing:
 - National Digital Dermatology pathway, available to GPs across all territorial health boards by the end of Spring 2025.
 - Pathway for stroke patients to receive a lab-based genetic test to inform what drug they are given to reduce the risk of a secondary stroke, with the first patients benefiting in October 2025, rolled out to all territorial health boards within one year.
 - Pathway across Scotland for newborn babies to receive a genetic test to inform what drug they are given to manage an infection, with the first patients benefiting in October 2025 and rolled out to all territorial health boards within 18 months.
 - National digital intensive weight management programme to support 3,000 people newly diagnosed with type 2 diabetes over the next three years, with the first patients recruited in January 2026.
- Establishing a National Care Service Advisory Board, which will meet for the first time in May 2025 – giving people with lived experience a central role in identifying priorities for improvement and bring greater transparency to planning, funding and delivery.
- Establishing a National Scottish Pandemic Sciences Partnership, delivering on the recommendation of the Standing Committee for Pandemic Preparedness.
- Implementing the actions set out in Module 1 of the UK Covid Inquiry on resilience and preparedness.
- Publishing a Service Renewal Framework before summer – setting out a ten-year plan to deliver our vision for health and social care and the steps for implementation.
- Funding the payment of at least the Real Living Wage to all adult and children’s social care workers who are delivering direct care in commissioned services, and early learning and childcare workers delivering funded hours, backed by £950m.

Getting the A-B-Cs of education right

Education is at the heart of our four priorities. It isn’t just a public service, but a key driver in tackling child poverty and growing the economy, by improving life chances and developing life-long skills. We will work with local authorities to improve the A-B-Cs – **A**ttainment, **A**ttendance, **B**ehaviour, and the **C**urriculum – to maximise achievement for all our children and young people. We will set out our priorities for future reform of school education by June 2025, appointing an experienced headteacher to lead this work.

Attainment in school has a significant bearing on the trajectory of a young person's life—unlocking opportunities, tackling generational poverty, and contributing to our economic growth. In the year ahead, we will **support all pupils to achieve their potential** by:

- Investing up to £200 million in 2025/26 in the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme – with an aim to see the poverty related attainment gaps in primary school literacy and numeracy narrow by around 30% over 2016-2026.
- Supporting the recruitment, retention and training of the ASN workforce, backed by an additional £29 million in 2025-26 in local and national programmes.
- Holding a data summit with all local authorities in Scotland on Additional Support for Learning focused on recommending actions for improving consistency of identification, support and reporting of children's needs at a local level.
- Commissioning Enquire, the National Advice and Information Service on ASL, to improve communication of the key information different audiences need to meet the needs of children with additional support needs.
- Providing local authorities £186.5 million to deliver our joint commitment to restore teacher numbers to 2023 levels, freeze learning hours, and reduce class contact time.



- Working with the teacher unions, and COSLA to agree our approach to delivering a reduction in class contact time at pace – helping to ease teacher workload and create space for them to drive improvement and reform and improve outcomes.
- Beginning construction of 6 new school building projects through the £2bn Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP). By the end of 2027-28, this will have delivered 47 modern, state of the art schools, with a further 117 already delivered through the previous £1.8bn Scotland's Schools for the Future programme.

Everyone should feel safe and respected in their place of study or work – and we know that relationships have an impact on wellbeing and attainment. While for many children this is the case, we know that the overall standard of behaviour and relationships in our schools are not where we want them to be. We will **drive improvement in relationships and behaviour**, and minimise its impact on learning experiences by:

- Launching a national campaign on attendance in autumn of 2025, to support improved attendance at school.
- Setting high expectations for all for learners, publishing new national guidelines on the use of consequences as part of positive approaches to relationships and behaviour.
- Supporting Time for Inclusive Education, including their new Digital Discourse Initiative – supporting schools to equip children and young people with skills to navigate digital media and counter the impacts of disinformation and online hate.

- Taking forward a Ministerial Online Safety Taskforce to strengthen our approach to keeping children safe online, providing oversight and direction across Scottish Government and identifying what more can be done to protect children and young people.
- Implementing the Relationships and Behaviour in Schools Joint Action Plan 2024-27 with local authorities, and report annually to Parliament on improvements.

Reforming the curriculum, qualifications and assessment will underpin our work to support improved attainment, building on strengths in the system while drawing on new opportunities in a changing world. We will set out a single combined timeline for this reform in June 2025, providing clarity about next steps for the education system, as well as:

- Establishing Qualifications Scotland and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, subject to passage of the Education (Scotland) Bill – with new measures to ensure more transparency and opportunities for involvement in decision making, restore the trust of people taking qualifications and delivering them, bring greater independence from government, and increase public reporting on areas for improvement in education.
- Establishing the Centre for Teaching Excellence, hosted by the University of Glasgow, and deliver its full offer to teachers in the 2025 school year, supporting excellent teaching and learning in Scotland's classrooms to improve learning outcomes for children and young people.

- Continuing the Curriculum Improvement Cycle to update and strengthen Scotland's national curriculum for every child and young person.
- Ensuring the removal of written exams in more practical subjects and the piloting of digital onscreen assessment from 2025/26 – further reducing reliance on high-stakes exams and introducing a more balanced approach to assessment.
- Working with Qualifications Scotland to rationalise the qualifications offer in the senior phase to support clearer learner pathways, more flexible modular courses and deliver an improved and more inclusive educational experience.

Ensuring a safer Scotland

The first duty of government is to keep people safe – recorded crime is down 40% since 2006-07, including a 53% fall in serious assault and attempted murder. But that will be cold comfort to the victims of crime.

Backed by £1.6 billion core funding for the police, modernising the workforce to prioritise frontline duties, and £20.3 million to support the improvement of our courts system, we will ensure our that communities are safe, and that victims and witnesses get the support they need.

The levels of **antisocial crimes** that plague our communities have been falling, evidenced by the 25% reduction in vandalism from 2014/15 to 2023/24, but we will do more by:

- Suspending use of concessionary travel cards on a temporary and potentially permanent basis as a result of anti-social behaviour when using the card. Detailed work on the timescale and best mechanism for achieving this is underway, including robust impact assessments, the development of a behaviour code and whether future primary or secondary legislation is required will be part of this process to ensure fair decision making.
- ScotRail will continue to implement measures to address anti-social behaviour to protect staff and passengers, particularly unacceptable behaviour targeted at women and girls. This will include further deployment of Travel Safe teams. As part of this continuing programme, we will respond to the concerns of railway staff and others that the current general ScotRail alcohol ban - a last legacy of Covid restrictions - is counterproductive and ineffective and remove the ban on alcohol on trains. We will replace it with new regulations that focus restrictions more effectively on particular times and locations, similar to previous restrictions.
- Providing a full response to the Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group Report.
- Consulting on revising the current legislation on Football Banning Orders to improve their effectiveness, make sure that they can be applied in response to the misuse of pyrotechnics at football and ensure they remain fit for purpose.
- Implementing year three of the Violence Prevention Framework, which includes the delivery of a range of partnership violence prevention and harm reduction activity.
- Delivering the final year of Phase 6 of the Cashback for Communities programme and commit to a further three-year phase of the programme between 2026 and 2029, alongside increased funding of £26 million for the period – supporting young people who may be at risk of becoming involved in antisocial behaviour, offending or reoffending.

- Tackling retail crime – backed by £3 million funding this year – supporting the development of Police Scotland’s Retail Crime Action Plan and the creation of a Retail Crime Task Force (RTC), enabling Police Scotland to establish a visible and measurable impact on retail crime, and preventing people from becoming perpetrators.

To ensure that **victims and witnesses** of crime feel supported, in the year ahead we will:

- Carry out a comprehensive assessment of the law in relation to non-fatal strangulation to determine if there is further action that needs to be taken beyond existing provisions in law that could be used to tackle this issue.
- Pilot specialist independent legal advice for complainers in rape and attempted rape cases, to help them to understand their rights and feel more prepared for giving evidence.
- Implement a presumption that children under the age of 16 should pre-record their evidence ahead of trial in serious sexual or violent offences heard in the sheriff courts.
- Subject to their Parliamentary passage, work with justice partners and victims’ representatives to implement of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill, including abolishing the not proven verdict, improving the operation of Non-Harassment Orders and the Victim Notification Scheme, and establishing a Sexual Offences Court and a Victims and Witnesses Commissioner; and the Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews (Scotland) Bill, including introducing the first Domestic Homicide and Suicide Reviews.

- Consult on reforms to the parole system to improve transparency, the provision of information for victims, and improvements to processes within the parole system.
- Take forward actions set out in the recently published Legal Aid Reform Discussion Paper – including bringing forward regulations to simplify the judicare system.
- Support the continued roll-out of the Digital Evidence Sharing Capability programme – which will mean fewer victims and witnesses having to attend court – and the roll out of Body Worn Video technology to police officers – increasing public confidence in policing.
- Appoint 25 new panel members to Redress Scotland – increasing decision making capacity, with the overall average number of decisions made increasing monthly – alongside a Board-led plan to take forward improvement initiatives, ensuring that all options to improve waiting times for survivors are explored.

Our prisons need to be well run, safe and orderly to accommodate those who present the greatest risk to the public. We have taken a range of actions over the last two years to **address a rising prison population**. We will now go further to secure a more sustainable population long-term, including:

- Changing the eligibility criteria for home detention curfew (HDC) and deploying GPS technology for use with HDC.
- Providing £347 million in 2025-26 to invest in our prison estate to progress the next delivery phase of HMP Glasgow and HMP Highland which will increase design capacity in the estate by 464 places.

- Working with justice partners to strengthen alternatives to remand through continued investment for bail services.
- Scoping the feasibility of new specialist models of imprisonment for groups such as older and younger people.
- Working with the Scottish Prison Service on improving employability outcomes and therefore reducing reoffending, by piloting Employment Advisory Boards to better connect individuals in custody to wrap around support from a variety of services prior to release.

Protecting the safety and wellbeing of everybody in custody is one of the core roles of our prison service. We will establish a Ministerial Board to oversee **reforms in relation to deaths in custody**, focussed on systemic improvement and prevention, as well as improving the experiences of individuals in custody and their families, including:

- Implementing the recommendations from the Fatal Accident Inquiry (FAI) into the deaths of Katie Allan and William Lindsay.
- Improving information sharing between courts and prisons, bringing forward a package of measures including non-means-tested legal aid for families in deaths in custody FAIs, strengthening family advocacy, and establishing an independent review of the FAI process as it applies to deaths in custody.
- Pursuing with the UK Government the lifting of Corporate Crown Immunity from prosecution under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.
- Creating, subject to parliamentary approval where necessary, a new, independent

National Oversight Mechanism to enhance accountability, transparency, and drive systemic improvements in relation to deaths in custody.

We are also supporting the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to modernise its service provision to meet the changing risks in communities by ensuring its resources are in the right place and are available at the right time.

A safe, sustainable, transport system for Scotland

Our transport infrastructure is the backbone of our economy but also a lifeline for our rural and island communities. Backed by more than £2.6 billion to support public transport in 2025-26, we will support our network to become more available, affordable, and accessible, maintaining vital links between communities and across Scotland, including:

- Abolishing peak rail fares permanently from 1 September, to encourage more people to travel by train, reduce car journeys, and help existing peak time rail passengers with the cost of living. A significant marketing programme will support the abolition.
- Continuing to deliver the major vessels programme with MV Glen Rosa at the Ferguson Marine shipyard, MV Isle of Islay and three other vessels at the Cemre shipyard expected by summer 2026, and beginning work to deliver seven new electric ferries.
- Taking forward plans to directly award the next generation of the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract to CalMacFerries Ltd and make these services more resilient.

- Progressing business cases for infrastructure works at major ports including Port Ellen, Gasaigh and Ardrossan.
- Making it easier for people to walk, wheel, and cycle on everyday journeys by delivering projects through our 2025-26 sustainable travel programmes, including the new Bus Infrastructure Fund.
- Completing electrification and enhancement of the East Kilbride rail line in 2025-26, enabling the introduction of electric trains on the route from December 2025.
- Upgrading and reconfiguring rail power supplies to support existing and future electrification, with a new 'feeder station' planned to enter service at Newton in Lanarkshire during 2025-26.
- Continuing procurement of ScotRail's Intercity Fleet Replacement Programme and explore options around replacement of ScotRail's suburban fleet.
- Making our roads safer and reducing the numbers killed or injured, through delivery of 20 mph speed limits on appropriate roads by the end 2025-26 and of road safety funding for road authorities.
- Building on having met all milestones set out in the delivery plan to dual the A9 since it was published in December 2023, in the coming year we will:
 - Publish draft Orders for the Pass of Birnam to Tay Crossing in Spring 2025.
 - Award the fourth construction contract, for the Tay Crossing to Ballinluig, and commence procurement of the fifth construction contract, Pitlochry to Killiecrankie, both in summer 2025.
- Conclude decision-making on the use of Mutual Investment Model contracts on the Dualling programme.
- Considering the outcomes of local and regional proposals for new stations on Scotland's railway network, for example at Newburgh and Winchburgh, including assessing the case for investment, alignment with our rail investment strategy, public value and contribution to government priorities.
- Progressing work to determine the most suitable procurement option for delivering the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass).
- Progressing delivery of the next phase of the medium-term improvements at the A83 Rest and Be Thankful and on the statutory authorisation process for the remaining elements of the medium-term improvements and the long-term solution.

Reforming services for the future

We will publish our strategy for Public Service Reform in June 2025, which will set out the actions we will take, with local government, public bodies, the third sector and trade unions, to improve public services. Delivery of the actions in the strategy will improve outcomes, particularly for people with the greatest need, help to eradicate child poverty and reduce inequalities, and ensure fiscal sustainability, with strong focus on efficiency and a prevention-first approach, including through:

- Digitisation, automation, sharing, and reduction of back-office functions and estates, and leveraging procurement opportunities.

- Public bodies working closer together through our clusters programme and, where appropriate, starting consolidation of public bodies through our review of the service delivery landscape – ensuring we protect resources that support front line services.
- Streamlining service delivery, using data and evidence, to join up services, reduce duplication and make it easier for people to access the services they need.
- Empowering staff and organisations to remove barriers and deliver more effectively including supporting the third sector as a key delivery partner.
- Shifting focus and expenditure towards agencies and services which take a prevention-first approach.

The Scottish Government continues to recognise the invaluable role local government plays as a crucial partner in the delivery of our shared priorities for the people of Scotland. Effective partnership working is essential, and we have made significant progress in strengthening the foundations of the relationship between our two spheres of government since the signing of the Verity House Agreement nearly two years ago. Maintaining and strengthening this partnership, remains a key priority to ensure we can work collaboratively to meet the needs of our local communities.

We will also make it easier for communities to make decisions about the places they know best and empower local systems to integrate and transform services in line with local priorities. As part of the conclusion of our joint review of local governance with COSLA, by the end of the Parliament, we will publish:

- A blueprint for democratic community decision-making models and test aspects of these models including by supporting the piloting of a citizens' assembly in Dunfermline.
- Preferred models for Single Authority Models in Argyll and Bute, Orkney and Western Isles that have been developed jointly by local government and health and enable a shift towards prevention. This will include a plan and timeline for implementation, with at least one area transitioning to shadow arrangements.
- Alongside this, we will also undertake a further public consultation exercise in Summer 2025 on devolving parking fines to local authorities.

So much of our national progress is built on partnerships across business, communities, and the public sector – working together towards a shared vision. In the coming year, we will further cement this collaboration on our long-term vision – working with stakeholders to reform our National Performance Framework, to set out the kind of Scotland we want to build for current and future generations.

Year Five Legislative Programme



The Scottish Government intends to introduce six Bills in its Year 5 programme.

Year 5 Bills for introduction

- Budget (No. 5)
- Children and Young People (Care)
- Contract (Formation and Remedies)
- Digital Assets
- Heat in Buildings
- Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures

Summary of Scottish Government Bills for introduction

Budget (No. 5)

The annual Budget Bill provides parliamentary approval for the Scottish Government's spending plans, allocates resources to strategic objectives, and supports progress towards the vision of a more successful country.

Children and Young People (Care)

To further support our commitment to keep The Promise, the Children and Young People (Care) (Scotland) Bill will be brought forward ahead of summer recess. The Bill looks to make changes in several key areas related to the children's care system. The content of the Bill will be informed by the recommendations of The Promise and consultations undertaken last year including the Future of Foster Care, Developing a Universal Definition of Care Experience, Children's Hearings Redesign and 'Moving On' from care into adulthood.

Contract (Formation and Remedies)

The fifth Scottish Law Commission Bill this session implements recommendations to reform aspects of the law of formation and remedies for breach of contract. Contract law impacts on day-to-day economic life and it is important to ensure that it is fit for a modern Scottish economy.

Digital Assets

The Bill will clarify the status of digital assets as property in Scots private law, to provide greater legal certainty for individuals and for businesses including those investing in digital assets, for technology and financial start-ups, as well as for the legal sector.

Heat in Buildings

This year, we will bring forward a Heat in Buildings Bill that is deliverable and affordable for households and businesses – setting the long-term direction of travel while providing certainty to building owners and the supply chain.

Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures

This Bill will regulate the delivery of certain non-surgical procedures offered for cosmetic or lifestyle purposes to support the safety of those who undergo the procedures. The Bill will ensure that certain procedures are required to be delivered from suitable premises registered with an appropriate body, and will make provision to support the enforcement of appropriate standards for service providers.

Scottish Government Bills from Year 4 programme which will be introduced before summer recess

- Building Safety Levy
- Crofting and Scottish Land Court

Scottish Government Bills in Parliament

- Care Reform
- Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty)
- Community Wealth Building
- Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews
- Education
- Housing
- Land Reform
- Leases (Automatic Continuation etc.)
- Natural Environment
- Regulation of Legal Services
- Scottish Languages
- Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance)
- UEFA European Championship
- Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at
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St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

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