

Common Sense for Scotland

 Scottish
Conservatives

**Common
Sense**



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FOREWORD

The Scottish Conservatives are delivering for Scotland. In the last four years, just look at what we have achieved:

- ✓ 1,000 extra police.
- ✓ A four year Council Tax freeze.
- ✓ Cuts in business rates for thousands of small businesses.
- ✓ A new drugs strategy.
- ✓ A £60m town centre regeneration fund.
- ✓ A £26m boost to jobs, the construction industry and first time buyers.

COMMON SENSE POLICIES FOR SCOTLAND



ANNABEL GOLDIE
Scottish Conservative
Leader

Real help for Scotland. Common sense policies delivered by Scottish Conservative votes, for Scotland. Practical help for hard pressed families, communities and business. Scottish Conservative votes delivered these achievements and I am proud of them.

I want to build on that positive record and this Manifesto sets out how we shall deliver even more for Scotland. How we shall support families, create jobs, provide opportunity, keep our communities safe and promote a greener Scotland.

I want to deliver that positive vision for Scotland. I am realistic about the present but I am optimistic about Scotland's future. That is why this Manifesto is credible and costed. It is straightforward and faces up to reality. I make no apology for that. But it also brings forward practical policies, charts a way forward for Scotland and offers hope.

And to those who say to me "You can't deliver" I say to them "Oh really, well just look at what we have delivered for Scotland over the last four years!"

*With best wishes,
Annabel .*

GROWING THE ECONOMY AND CREATING JOBS

With an economy heavily dependent on the financial services and public sectors, Scotland more than anywhere else has suffered from, and is experiencing the lasting effects of, the failure of the financial regulatory regime created by the last Labour Government at Westminster and the problems stored up by its overspending. Worse, Scottish businesses and jobs have been hit severely by the recession, which owing to Labour's failure to support business and address welfare dependency, lasted longer in the UK than anywhere else in the G20.

The outgoing SNP Government at Holyrood has taken some positive steps, following Scottish Conservative pressure, to encourage growth and jobs. However, it has not delivered fully on its pro-business rhetoric and it has failed to see the need to take some tough, "big picture" decisions, such as the need to call time on unsustainable borrowing and rebalance our economy from the public to the private sector.

With the help of the Conservatives in coalition at Westminster, we are confident that Scotland can make these necessary adjustments successfully, and will emerge as a more prosperous nation as a result, with a people whose talents are used more fully, and an entrepreneurial heritage that is brought to life once again.

The new UK Government has done its part to help turn the Scottish economy around. Scottish businesses will save around £280m from the changes we are introducing to National Insurance and up to 59,000 Scottish businesses will benefit from our NI payment holiday for new businesses. We are cutting corporation tax to the lowest rate of any major Western economy, one of the lowest rates in the G20, and the lowest rate Scotland has ever known. While Labour left half a million Scots stuck on out-of-work benefits, we are reforming welfare and are making work pay.

We have also shown our potential to deliver at Holyrood. We have consistently prioritised the promotion of private sector growth in our contributions to the Budget process. In successive Budgets, we have used our position holding the balance of power to force and then consolidate accelerated cuts in businesses rates for tens of thousands of small and medium-sized businesses. And in the most recent Budget, we secured £26m of stimulus for business, comprising £16m of help for first time buyers and getting the housing market moving, leading to 5,500 jobs for Scotland's construction industry and £10m for business start ups, job creation and exporting which will create up to 5,000 jobs.

SUPPORTING ENTERPRISE

The rate of business start ups and entrepreneurial activity in Scotland has flatlined since the advent of devolution, at a rate lower than that of the UK overall. We are punching below our weight and we need to face up to that.

We need to put our faith in our entrepreneurs so we nurture new businesses, design new products and create new jobs. That is why **we will create a Scottish Business Start Up Fund to support individuals access enterprise education, vocational training, and to provide grants and loans to assist in the creation of new businesses.**

The Scottish Conservatives are committed to delivering a step change in enterprise education in Scotland, following the conclusion from the Hunter Centre research that enterprise education doubles the likelihood of an individual becoming an entrepreneur. We will achieve this by **making it compulsory to offer enterprise training at all colleges and universities**, in partnership with local businesses.

To achieve our radical ambitions for growth, it is clear to us that politicians in the Scottish Parliament will need to take

to heart a new determination to work together, to work in partnership with the private sector, and to do everything they can to unite all tiers of government behind the push for growth.

To lead this effort, **we will create a new dedicated Cabinet level Minister for Enterprise and Jobs**, taking responsibility for Enterprise, Planning, Transport and Infrastructure. This post will replace the two existing junior ministerial posts.

Local government exercises several important functions in regard to economic development and we believe that it is time that it is given an incentive to take decisions that help, not hinder, growth. So **we will create a Business Dividend Fund**, through which local authorities will receive extra funding for exceeding targets for business start ups.

Similarly, **we will place a duty to promote economic growth on all public agencies**, and require them to report on the positive – and negative – impacts that the decisions they have taken have had on economic growth.

Scottish Conservatives successfully argued for major reform to the Enterprise Networks in the last Parliament, and it is clear from the Scottish Parliament Economy Committee's recent report that business wants the existing networks to focus on helping business, not further

GROWING THE ECONOMY AND CREATING JOBS, CONTINUED

restructuring. **We will therefore retain Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and Scottish Development International.** However, we expect these organisations to move to shared services for back office functions, either with each other or with other public bodies.

Local Authorities have an important role to play in helping business under the new structure, but there is scope to raise standards. **We will therefore establish a best practice audit of local authority support for business to ensure that all Local Authorities are able to deliver targeted support to business.**

We will expand the Business Gateway service to include all businesses not covered by Scottish Enterprise or Highlands and Islands Enterprise, by giving credit for supporting larger businesses when Business Gateway contracts are renegotiated in 2012. Additionally, we will amend the new contracts to recognise the value of helping existing companies survive.

REFORMING BUSINESS RATES - A BUSINESS RATES REFORM BILL

Under Labour and the Liberal Democrats, Scotland imposed a higher rate on businesses than that applying in England. Thanks to the Scottish Conservatives, that changed – and has been preserved over the last Parliament. **We will legislate to ensure that the main Business Rate poundage can be no higher than in England.**

We will introduce a Business Rates Reform Bill to consolidate the legislation on non-domestic rates and to make the small business discounts we secured in the last Parliament permanent - and to deal with some of the problems arising from the 2010 revaluation. Too many businesses found out at very short notice that their valuations had increased. **We will therefore increase the notice period of a change in liability for business rates as a result of a revaluation to at least six months.**

Under the current system, even where a business appeals a higher valuation, increased rates are still payable until an appeal has been heard. This can cause cashflow problems for businesses, and so **we will allow businesses to defer payment of the disputed amount in the event of an appeal.** In the event of the

appeal being unsuccessful, a commercial level of interest will be charged on the unpaid amount.

The Business Rates Reform Bill will not increase the burden of business rates, and will prohibit sector specific supplements such as the tax on retail jobs recently proposed by the SNP, and stopped by the Scottish Conservatives. **We will extend the scope of the small business rates relief scheme** over the life of the Parliament as the public finances allow.

At the same time, because we have taken tough decisions to tackle wasteful spending and to prioritise economic growth, **we will expand the scope of the rural business rate reliefs** which help protect rural post offices, pubs, hotels and petrol stations.

TACKLING RED TAPE

Scottish Conservatives are committed to cutting the red tape that inhibits the growth of all businesses and small businesses in particular. **We will retain the Regulatory Review Group (RRG) to review red tape and make regulation better focussed and less burdensome on businesses, voluntary groups and the public sector. We will ensure that all local authorities comply with EU rules requiring access to online applications for forms, applications and licences.**

Our aim is for 25 per cent of local and national Government contracts to be awarded to SMEs. Improving procurement practice within the public sector will also help deliver savings.

We will allow any voluntary, private or public sector organisation to refer regulations which are unduly burdensome to the Regulatory Review Group. The Regulatory Review Group, not the Scottish Government, will decide which regulations should be reviewed. Never again will we have a situation such as where the SNP tried to increase taxes on Scottish retail jobs, but blocked the RRG assessing the impact of their plans.

We will take forward the RRG recommendation and investigate moving to a system of alcohol premises licenses where the fees are related to alcohol turnover.

We will strengthen Business and Regulatory Impact Assessments, requiring civil servants to consult with at least 20 businesses across Scotland. We will make their use mandatory for all primary legislation and for secondary legislation whenever there could be a meaningful regulatory impact. The Scottish Government would have to either implement the recommendations or give a formal written response as to why it is not doing so.

GROWING THE ECONOMY AND CREATING JOBS, CONTINUED

We will oppose re-regulation of bus services, which would add additional bureaucracy to transport provision, and shift resources away from public transport to paperwork.

SPEEDING UP THE PLANNING SYSTEM

Despite the new Planning legislation, it is clear that the current regime is not helping drive economic growth. **We will therefore establish a business-led review of the planning system** to report by March 2012 on how we can improve the design and operation of the planning regime to raise economic growth whilst recognising local needs and wishes.

To address the difficulties that developers and self-builders have in getting new properties connected to the mains water supply, **we will impose upon Scottish Water a requirement to complete the work within three months of planning permission in detail being granted for development.**

INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Scotland's future economic prosperity depends on strategic investment in capital infrastructure. Previous governments have wasted too much money on poorly planned schemes and have refused to prioritise.

We will accelerate the introduction of superfast broadband across Scotland to ensure our economic competitiveness is maintained.

We will introduce by November 2011 an updated Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR), providing an indication of the relative priority and timeframe for each project. We believe that all existing timetabled projects can be retained.

The updated STPR will prioritise resources on projects assessed to be of greatest economic benefit, which will put the focus on maintaining and upgrading existing core road and rail infrastructure. Scottish Conservatives believe that the replacement Forth Crossing is Scotland's top transport priority. In view of the importance of the North-East economy to Scotland, and underinvestment in the area under Labour and the Liberal Democrats, we rank the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route Scotland's second most important road project. **We will also pilot the introduction of hard shoulder-running**, initially on sections of M77 and M8.

We will use the borrowing provision made available by the UK Government to enable completion of the new Forth Crossing. This will ensure that other, worthy capital projects are not unnecessarily delayed, and that we can introduce a **Road Maintenance**

Fund. As a result, we can also make commitments on the rail network, which will improve services and encourage modal shift. In particular, **we will continue the Edinburgh-Glasgow Rail Improvement Programme.** However, leveraging additional private investment is also important and so from the next renewal, **we will make the Scotrail franchise available for an extended period of 10 years,** making clear that we expect savings in subsidy or improved investment in rolling stock or better services in exchange. **We will establish an implementation group** to liaise with the UK Government to maximise potential reductions in journey times for Scots as a result of new high speed rail links to London.

We will retain existing lifeline ferry services but will make savings in the Scottish Government's ferry subsidy, partly by tendering the CALMAC and Northlink contracts in smaller bundles.

We will put the Bus Services Operators' Grant on a sustainable footing, and encourage Local Authorities to provide funding to supplement BSOG awards.

We will retain but reform the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT), and give it access to the full range of funding options, including PPP. We expect the SFT to deliver savings in capital procurement above its current level and will require all

public bodies to seek advice from SFT for all procurement. Like all public bodies under our plans, the SFT will have to demonstrate the impact of its decisions on the Scottish economy.

We will introduce a Bill to reform Scottish Water, ending the reliance on taxpayer funding while protecting customers with an enhanced regulatory regime. Scottish Water will become a publicly-owned Public Interest Company, free from government control.

The Edinburgh Trams Project has become a national embarrassment. By now, trams should have been running in Edinburgh. Despite a positive review on progress from the Auditor General in 2007, since then neither the Lib Dem/SNP City of Edinburgh Council, Transport Initiatives Edinburgh, or the Scottish Government through Transport Scotland, have exercised any leadership of the project, which is now not only delayed and likely to be scaled back, but also substantially over budget. **We will therefore not provide any more central government grant funding for Edinburgh trams.**

GROWING THE ECONOMY AND CREATING JOBS, CONTINUED

DEVELOPING TOURISM

The tourism industry is vital to Scotland's economy and visitor spend is currently around £4.1 billion a year. It provides employment for roughly 210,000 people, spread all over Scotland.

A growth ambition was set by the industry and the Labour/Lib Dem Scottish Executive in 2005 to grow the revenue from Scottish tourism by 50 per cent over ten years. We are now past the halfway point, with zero growth.

If Scotland is going to remain a major player, we believe that it has to compete on quality, not price. That means getting skills right, getting investment into the industry and getting a year-round strategy.

We need a highly trained and skilled workforce. We have to get everything right, from the welcome to the general standard of customer care. Tourism training in Scotland currently involves over 400 courses provided by 40 different institutions. **We will establish a private sector group to deliver a wholesale rationalisation**, creating a smaller number of industry-approved courses provided by fewer providers. The system must become demand-led so that we tackle the mismatch that exists between the skills required by employers and the skills offered by applicants.

Investment is needed to improve the fabric of the industry, yet many tourism businesses are struggling to raise finance at the moment. So **we will investigate the viability of a Scottish Tourism Investment Bank**, based on the Austrian model.

We will lead development of a "Year-Round Tourism Strategy". This will help ensure that tourism businesses make a continuous contribution to their local economies and will make employment in the industry more stable and rewarding, which will in turn raise the calibre of entrants and encourage the retention and development of staff.

We will retain the number of Tourist Information Centres (TICs), although encourage premises-sharing with other organisations. We will ensure all TICs provide Scotland-wide information to encourage tourists to travel throughout Scotland.

To encourage more visitors to come to Scotland, **we will aim to establish an EU compliant successor to the Air Route Development Fund**.

Historic Scotland manages many sites that are in an enviable position for encouraging visitors to take advantage of a whole host of tourism opportunities across Scotland. **We will place a formal obligation on Historic Scotland to promote tourism across Scotland**.

REFORMING OUR PUBLIC SERVICES

HELPING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Scotland has a proud and long-standing charitable tradition and we are convinced that charities and social enterprises should play a major part in our civic renewal. Many of them have strong local roots and specialist knowledge and may be better placed to deliver services than the public sector ever could be. **We will therefore consult on introducing a “right to bid” for the voluntary sector.**

We will encourage the use of multi-year funding deals for the voluntary sector, and require all public bodies to report what proportion of their funding is provided on such a basis. **For central Government, multi-year funding will become the norm. We will require all public bodies to report what proportion of their contracts, by value and percentage, are placed with third sector bodies.**

To encourage additional investment in the voluntary sector through private investors, **we will pilot “Social Impact Bonds” (SIBs).** Payments will only be made under SIBs where programmes have been successful – payment by results.

We will review the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) with a view to introducing a less onerous regulatory regime for small charities.

REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Scotland’s largest cities have been let down by their political leadership in recent years. To give people the chance of renewed and accountable local leadership, **we will give people the chance to have a powerful, elected provost by holding referenda in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee.**

Scottish Conservatives successfully argued for the ending of ring fencing for Local Government funding, but the SNP Government introduced new bureaucracy in its place. **We will abolish the concordat.** It will be replaced with a requirement upon councils to set out their own plans and report on progress. To speed up decision-making and communication with business, the voluntary sector and the public, one criterion that councils will have to report against is the percentage of correspondence that they reply to within three weeks.

We will review the funding formula for local government to ensure fairness for all parts of Scotland. Unlike the review undertaken in the current Parliament, we will ensure that all issues, including rurality, are taken into account. We will seek to do this with the agreement of COSLA, and to phase in any changes over a period of years.

REFORMING OUR PUBLIC SERVICES, CONTINUED

However, all local authorities need to make savings in order to protect front-line services. We will ask the Accounts Commission to report on the extent that each council shares services with other public sector bodies. **We will give councils a further financial incentive to share services**, by amending the Council Funding formula. **We will also extend our “transparency revolution” to local government**, with a £500 reporting threshold for non-salary payments.

We believe that local authorities can do more to sustain the communities that they represent. **We will require local authorities to allocate a budget to community councils**, proportionate to the size of the area they cover, so that more community councils may undertake their own projects. **We will also introduce a framework for local authorities to open “council counters” in Post Office branches.**

DELIVERING BETTER VALUE FOR MONEY

We will create a new Cabinet level position of Minister for Finance and Reform, replacing the existing Finance and Sustainable Growth portfolio, and provide a dedicated member of Cabinet with responsibility for decisions on taxation and spending, and for driving public sector reform.

We value people who work in the public sector and while it would be irresponsible to guarantee no compulsory redundancies, we will seek to avoid them wherever possible, and **to help protect jobs we will freeze public sector pay until April 2013 for those earning over £21,000.**

As well as exempting the least well off from the pay freeze, **we will ensure that for new contracts paying salaries of £50,000 and above the proposed salary will be subject to an independent pay assessment and the contract prohibits the payment of bonuses.**

Across the public sector in Scotland there is no single set of comparable data on absence rates, despite the fact that a two day reduction in sickness absence rates in the public sector in Scotland would save £138m per annum. **We will therefore require all public bodies - including local authorities - to publish online, on a comparable basis, absence data** at least quarterly.

At the same time, **we will introduce a new target for sickness absence rates for each devolved public body.** This target will take into account existing performance, and equivalent data from the private sector where comparable. Where there is no appropriate private sector comparison, the best performing public sector comparator within the UK

and Ireland will be used. To encourage service sharing across the public sector, **we will require all public bodies to report the proportion of their budget they spend on shared services and how much they save by sharing.**

We will abolish Regional Transport Partnerships, with the exception of Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, which will return to its previous state as solely a provider of services rather than a co-ordination body. Local authorities will be encouraged to work together where this is sensible. **We will also require local authorities to subject road maintenance work to competitive tender.**

To allow a more focussed and streamlined approach to rural development and regulation, **we will integrate the regulatory functions of the rural bodies in Scotland**, namely the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, Marine Scotland, Food Standards Agency, and the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate, into one new agency called the Scottish Environment Regulator. Similarly, **we will integrate the development functions of the rural bodies into one new agency** called Scottish Environment Development. Taken together, these reforms will enable us to put the functions of five quangos

into two. **We will also abolish the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board.**

We will protect concessionary bus passes fares for all current users, by raising the qualifying age for new recipients to 65 from April 2012. Those eligible for non-age related concessionary travel will be unaffected by this change.

REFORMING OUR PUBLIC SERVICES, CONTINUED

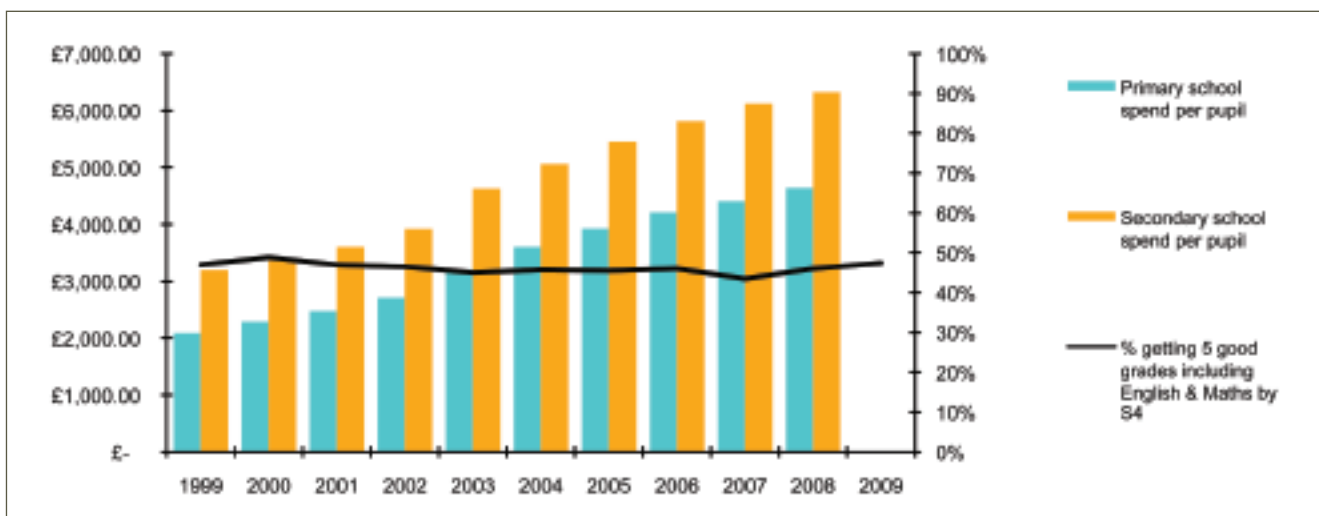
REFORMING OUR SCHOOLS

Educational standards will only improve across the board if parents have a greater say in choosing a school and if there are more incentives and freedoms to change poorly performing schools into good schools. Likewise, not all children can be successful in the same environment. Children with outstanding musical, artistic or sporting talents and those with special needs often require different resources and different types of schools. We therefore want to see a more diverse range of schools which better suit the individual needs of our children.

So we will enable educational charities, philanthropists, not-for-profit trusts and groups of parents to set up new schools and allow existing state schools to be run independently of local authorities.

They will all be non-selective and unable to charge fees. We will allow the sum of taxpayers' money which is devoted to the education of any child to follow them to any state-funded school of the parents' choice. **We will give headteachers of schools remaining within local authority control more powers over the running of their own school,** particularly in terms of discipline policy, recruitment of staff and control over how the school budget is spent.

SPENDING VERSUS ATTAINMENT



Source: Reform Scotland (April 2009).

The highest quality of teaching standards is crucial in raising standards in our schools. So too is good quality professional development and strong leadership throughout every level of the teaching profession. We support the findings of the recent Donaldson Report which stressed the need for the highest standards of teacher literacy and numeracy and we will continue to work with the General Teaching Council for Scotland and teacher training institutions to raise aspirations in the profession, to provide new routes into the teaching profession, more concurrent degree courses and to ensure there is renewed focus for teachers to keep up-to-date with their subject knowledge. **We will ensure there are fewer barriers when it comes to teacher recruitment,** by improving engagement between headteachers and the teacher training institutions, universities and employers. There needs to be more accurate information about both the short term and long term availability of teaching vacancies on a local rather than national basis.

There is growing evidence to show that our education system is failing far too many children. When it comes to literacy and numeracy, one in every six pupils currently leaves primary school unable to read, write or count properly. This means that too many children arrive at secondary school when the best

opportunity to master these basic skills has been lost. Thirteen thousand pupils leave the Scottish schools system every year without acquiring good basics in reading and writing. There is growing evidence that the education systems in many comparable countries are performing far better. For example, in the Trends in International Maths and Science Survey (TIMSS), Scottish pupils were ranked below the global average in both maths and science. Such statistics are not acceptable. Greater focus on literacy and numeracy is essential, particularly in primary school. **We will reform the process of testing reading, writing and arithmetic** to make it more rigorous and to ensure that by the time pupils reach the end of P7 their progress in these basic skills is measured against nationally-agreed criteria. Whilst supporting the principles of the Curriculum for Excellence, we want to see as much focus on acquiring relevant subject knowledge as there is on acquiring relevant skills. We believe that traditional core subjects should be the foundation of all pupils' education. **We will also encourage greater co-operation between different schools so that there is more opportunity for pupils to gain access to the Higher and the Advanced Higher courses** they require for college and university entrance and more opportunity for all pupils to gain access to good quality sports, music and drama facilities.

REFORMING OUR PUBLIC SERVICES, CONTINUED

As well as ensuring that headteachers are able to decide the behaviour and uniform codes that will apply in their own school, **we will pilot Second Chance Centres** for the small minority of pupils who are persistently excluded from school and whose disruptive behaviour is preventing others from learning or teaching. The centres will be separate from the school environment and will enforce a strict code of discipline, while providing specialist help to refocus disruptive pupils' lives.

We believe that, as it stands, the education system fails to engage many young people who are unsuited to academic study or who would rather pursue a skilled trade. This is damaging to the Scottish economy and has created a skills shortage that frustrates householders and business people. **We will encourage schools to introduce a more flexible curriculum structure** which allows pupils to select either an academically-focussed path from S2 onwards or a more vocationally-focused path and we will work with SQA to ensure there is an examination system which reflects this. Pupils should be free to leave school at age 14 provided they engage in a monitored apprenticeship or a full-time vocational or technical training programme which can provide them with the necessary skills for the world of work.

According to the outgoing Scottish Government's own figures, over 70 percent of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) payments are going to households defined as 'not deprived'. In keeping with its original purpose, **we will reform the EMA** so that it is targeted to help those most in need.

REFORMING OUR UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

Scottish universities have a proud tradition but that can only continue if there are additional sources of funding. The status quo is not tenable and the introduction of up-front tuition fees is unacceptable. **We will therefore introduce a graduate contribution** facilitated through income-contingent loans. The contribution will be variable by institution but will only be paid post-graduation once earnings are over a given threshold and at a rate affordable to the graduate. This will make university funding more sustainable and progressive. This will also enable us to **introduce a system of enhanced bursary support for those students** most in need.

In Scotland, undergraduate degrees typically take four years to complete, however there is much scope for change and for greater flexibility in the exam system. **We will introduce greater**

flexibility into the exam system by, for example, providing more scope for S6 pupils with appropriate Advanced Highers or equivalent qualifications and students who possess an HNC or HND to fast track into second year of university. We believe that there is much scope for greater cooperation between universities in Scotland in terms of research funding and administration on a regional basis. We will encourage, and where possible, will help to facilitate this cooperation. The Independent Budget Review report, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, and a number of university principals have all stated that there is a need for encouraging greater private sector investment in our universities. **We will support greater private sector cooperation and investment in the university sector.**

Our colleges are a vital and integral part of Scottish education and their strength lies in their adaptability to the economic and social needs within different regions of Scotland. **We want to encourage greater scope for colleges to work with local schools, universities and businesses** to enhance their economic and social contribution and to open up new opportunities to students through better integrated learner pathways.

REFORMING OUR NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

Scottish Conservatives are committed to delivering better healthcare for Scotland's communities. We are proud of the excellent service provided by our NHS and those who work within it.

But the NHS can always be improved. We believe that reducing management costs will allow more money to be freed up to invest in front-line services, and protect vital local facilities. We also believe that providing a stronger service on the front line of primary care, through early identification of potential health concerns, will enable the NHS to work with families and individuals more effectively in looking after their own health.

The ultimate responsibility for an individual's good health rests with them personally. It is up to the individual to take an interest in their own healthcare and make appropriate lifestyle choices for their own wellbeing. Government's role is to support individuals in these choices, provide information and support, but also provide a greater degree of assistance for the vulnerable such as children and those from disadvantaged groups.

REFORMING OUR PUBLIC SERVICES, CONTINUED

The NHS under the Scottish Conservatives will be protected from funding cuts, will fill gaps in service which currently exist, such as a lack of health visitors or poor access to vital cancer drugs, and will provide a new focus on improving the nation's general health and wellbeing.

Because the Scottish Conservatives value the NHS, **we will protect health spending, increasing it annually in line with inflation.**

However, we still need to use this money efficiently. We start by **reducing top-level management costs by 30 per cent in the Scottish NHS over the Parliament.** All savings will go direct to frontline NHS services.

We opposed the SNP's abolition of prescription charges, which took millions of pounds out of the NHS. **We would reintroduce prescription charges at the 2009 level** of £5 for a single item and £48 for a prepayment certificate – re-injecting £37m into the NHS. At the same time, **we will review the list of conditions which are exempt from prescription charges to remove anomalies and widen the range.** No individual or group who would have been exempt from charges prior to abolition will pay under our plans.

We also support the further development of the role of pharmacists when it comes to prescribing medication. This will allow more money to be saved through the use of generic drugs.

We propose free universal health checks for those aged between 40 and 74. Working with Community Pharmacy, we will deliver a range of drop-in services catching the early signs of potential problems and saving our NHS substantial sums in the long run.

We have supported moves by the Scottish Government to restrict Distinction Award payments and we will study the proposals from the UK Government when published. Our preference is for a UK wide reform of these payments.

As we have been prepared to make tough decisions elsewhere in the NHS, **we will be able to introduce a Cancer Drugs Fund of up to £10m** to ensure that Scottish patients have at least the same access to clinically effective drugs as patients in England and **establish a new IVF Fund** to broaden access to fertility treatment, giving additional funding to those Health Boards providing a minimum standard of IVF access in their area.

We need to remove the inappropriate emphasis on ideology and targets and shift the focus to clinical discretion and what really matters: patient outcomes. With this in mind, **we will ensure NHS Boards have the freedom to commission voluntary and private sector care and remove the ban on entities other than GP partnerships providing primary care.**

To improve access to healthcare, we will **pilot walk-in treatment centres** in our major cities, which could be set up either by the NHS or by independent providers using their own capital. We will **review the provision of out of hours services**, and will seek to amend the contract for Scottish GPs if necessary to ensure adequate services are provided. In return, we will give GPs a greater leadership role in Community Health Partnerships.

We will work with the British Dental Association and local health boards to ensure that every Scot has access to a Dentist, at the same time as pushing for much greater emphasis on the preventative measures needed to improve oral health.

For too long, mental health services have also been given insufficient attention by policymakers. We will promote increased use of talking therapies within the NHS. We will encourage health boards to make greater use of telehealth and telecare

to improve access to healthcare for patients, particularly those in remote and rural areas.

To deliver these improvements, it is clear that some structural changes are required. **We will review the Scottish NHS structure** with a view to reducing the number of health boards and health quangos. Equally, we will look to rationalise the non-geographic NHS boards. While we will allow the pilots for part-elected NHS boards to continue in NHS Dumfries and Galloway and NHS Fife, we will assess their success during the next Parliament before taking a view on the suitability of part-elected boards across the NHS in Scotland.

We also believe that members of the general public need to be given the power to trigger Independent Scrutiny Panels when major service changes are under discussion. We will achieve this by introducing a threshold petition system.

The NHS needs a culture of continuous quality improvement to drive up standards and NHS workers must be confident that they can raise concerns without fear of recrimination. To ensure that this is a reality, **we will make it easier for NHS workers to “whistleblow”** by requiring all NHS Boards to adhere to a consistent national whistleblowing procedure.

REFORMING OUR PUBLIC SERVICES, CONTINUED

We will take action across all parts of government – the criminal justice system as well as the NHS – to help tackle problem alcohol consumption. To support this, we want to see Scotland follow the UK Government’s lead and **ban the sale of alcohol below the cost of duty and VAT.**

REFORMING OUR LEGAL SYSTEM

The Scottish Conservatives remain the party of vigorous action against crime. We have always stood for the protection of the citizen and the defence of the rule of law. We are proud that during the last four years we have been instrumental in delivering 1,000 extra police officers and a new strategy to tackle drug addiction in Scotland. However, crime remains a real concern for many people in Scotland today. The challenge for the next five years is to step up the fight against lawlessness and violence, so that our citizens can live free from fear.

We must tackle crime at its roots. Too many offences are carried out to feed a drug habit or are connected to alcohol. Unless we adequately address these issues, we will not break the cycle of re-offending. We must also ensure that children are adequately supported when a parent is sent to prison so that they do not get sucked into the culture of criminality.

We must ensure that the sentence fits the crime. A long prison sentence will remain appropriate for dangerous criminals, and fines and a tougher regime for punishment outside prison available as an alternative for less serious crime.

Victims of crime are too often forgotten about and we want to give them a strong voice at the heart of the criminal justice system. Further, local communities should have a much greater say over how decisions are made about their local policing priorities.

We must restore public confidence in our justice system. So **we will re-introduce prison sentences of less than three months**, so that custody can be used instead of community service where appropriate. However, **we will also offer tougher community sentences** that the courts and the public have confidence in: offenders will carry out meaningful jobs like litter picking, snow shovelling and beach cleaning, wearing a high-visibility uniform.

Now that such sentences will be available, the case for community courts becomes even stronger. **We will pilot a community court in Glasgow.**

Knife crime is a problem which blights too many communities across Scotland. The outgoing SNP Government has failed to take any action to address the

concerns of the victims of knife crime or deter those who want to carry a knife. This needs to change. We will start by **holding a nationwide knife amnesty** to remove as many knives from the streets of Scotland as possible. As well as giving back to courts their full sentencing powers including short term sentences, we will end automatic early release so that more offenders are actually spending more of their sentence behind bars being rehabilitated and punished. The public expect knife carriers to go to jail and we, whilst recognising the sentencing discretion of the courts, will ensure that our reforms reflect this.

We will channel an element of funds confiscated under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 directly to charities and support groups that help the victims of crime. **We will also create high-profile, Scotland-wide projects on which a significant number of those on community service can be employed,** ensuring that community service is hard work for those sentenced to it, and consolidating the work of many of those involved in it into a benefit that is demonstrable to the Scottish public as a whole.

We will reform legal aid, in particular the scope of civil legal aid.

We will encourage better partnership working between the different agencies

to ensure that anti-social behaviour is tackled swiftly and effectively. In order to tackle anti-social behaviour in some residential areas, **we will amend the Land Reform Act (Scotland) Act 2003 to remove urban access lanes from its scope. We will also legislate to tackle the problem of high hedges** where no agreement can be reached between neighbours.

REFORMING OUR PRISON AND REHABILITATION SERVICES

We are committed to the new Inverclyde, Highland and Grampian prisons and **we will redevelop older parts of the prison estate when economic conditions permit** in order to make them more focussed on rehabilitation.

We need to revolutionise the rehabilitation culture in our prisons. **We will move responsibility for the operation of community sentences from social work departments in local authorities to a new Scottish Prison and Rehabilitation Service (SPRS)** to enable this change of culture. We recognise that for too long prisons have failed to properly rehabilitate criminals which is why the re-offending rate in Scotland is so high.

REFORMING OUR PUBLIC SERVICES, CONTINUED

We will hold be a national review of all rehabilitation schemes currently offered to prisoners whilst in prisons and following release with a view to determining those that work and those that don't. **We will guarantee that all prisoners get meaningful and constructive rehabilitation opportunities**, irrespective of the type and length of their sentences. The new unified Scottish Prison and Rehabilitation Service will also run community-based sentences and this will help us make them more rehabilitative too. **We will also ensure access to proper rehabilitation after sentences**, which is extremely patchy at present.

We will create an official portal, controlled by the new Scottish Prison and Rehabilitation Service, through which community groups can "bid" for community service participants or even prisoners to undertake specific work. Those serving the sentence would all be monitored. It depends on an assessment of individuals and their records, but in most cases the groups benefiting from the work would not administer the offenders on their own, rather there will be supervision in place by employees of the SPRS.

We will introduce compulsory drugs tests for all inmates on arrival and departure from prison. We will extend drugs free wings in prisons and

implement the national drugs strategy in every prison. In prison and outside, we will institute a national review on the implementation of the national drugs strategy.

REFORMING THE POLICE

Scottish Conservatives were responsible for delivering 1,000 additional Police Officers in Scotland over the last four years as a result of our budget negotiations, and **we are committed to maintaining Police numbers over the next Parliament**. In order to ensure we can achieve this at a time when the public sector has to make savings, we will merge Scotland's eight police forces into one.

We are committed to local policing and local accountability, so **we will replace Police Boards with elected local Police Commissioners**, each covering a distinct local area. Individually, police commissioners will hold local police to account such as by setting the local area's target for crime reduction. Police commissioners will not be involved in police operational issues. They would also work with the new sentencing and rehabilitation service. Collectively, they would provide strategic direction throughout Scotland, sharing best practice. They would be elected at local elections and share terms of office with councillors.

Giving people democratic control of the police is a huge step forward, but it is not enough. We need to give local people the information and direct powers they need to challenge their neighbourhood police teams to cut crime. So we will **oblige the police to publish very detailed local crime data statistics every month, including crime maps, and require police teams to have regular neighbourhood beat meetings** so they know what people's priorities are.

HELPING FAMILIES

REFORMING TAX TO KEEP BILLS LOW

We will not use the existing or future Scottish Parliament tax powers to increase income tax in the next Parliament or impose new taxes, such as the discredited local income tax.

Scottish Conservatives first called for a Council Tax Freeze in 2003. Under Labour and the Liberal Democrats, Council Tax increased by 62 per cent in Scotland. In the face of opposition from the same two parties, Scottish Conservatives have ensured that the Council Tax has remained frozen since 2007, and we will now go further. **We will freeze the Council Tax until at least 2013.** However, the Council Tax Freeze can't continue indefinitely. Looking ahead to when it eventually has to come to an end, **we will change the law to give local residents the power to stop bills rising faster than inflation.**

Eligibility for Council Tax Benefit is higher for pensioners than for the population as a whole, but take-up of the benefit is not universal. To help tackle this, and to ensure that those who have contributed to society over the years get a fair deal on tax, **we will legislate to introduce a Pensioner Discount from 2013-14, initially set at £200 per household.** The discount will be available to all

households where all adults have reached the State Pension Age. Students living in the household, and others who are ignored for Council Tax purposes, will not affect eligibility.

We will not hold a council tax revaluation, nor will we introduce new bands or change the ratios between the bands. **We will make no changes to the structure of Council Tax which would increase bills.**

We will remove the power to charge drivers for using existing roads from the statute books.

SUPPORTING PARENTS

We will devote £20m to enable us to give all parents a guaranteed level of health visitor support until their child reaches the age of five. We will ensure that all health visitors are attached to GP practices, allowing for greater communication between the health visitor and the family doctor. Alongside this, we believe that more information on good parenting should be available in all maternity units, early years settings, GP practices and on NHS websites.

We will retain the current entitlement of 12.5 hours nursery care per week but will ensure there is greater flexibility regarding the times of day when parents can use this entitlement. We also favour

a more flexible mix of state, partnership and private provision of nursery school places. **We will extend this entitlement to two year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds**, starting with the most vulnerable.

We support fully the new Additional Support for Learning Act as we were successful in arguing for new measures to be included in the Act to ensure that parents of all additional support needs children are provided with information and support regarding their child's education. **We will ensure that all teachers receive regular training on how to identify additional support needs in a child as early as possible.**

We will encourage all schools to provide comprehensive information to parents about what extra-curricular activities are available in school and we will work with HMIE to ensure there is more comprehensive reporting on these activities within school inspections.

HELPING CARERS AND THE VULNERABLE

We will merge health and social care budgets, placing social care under the control of the NHS. This will remove the incentive to use hospital beds when social care would be a more appropriate (and less costly) alternative. The money saved will be retained in the health and

social care budget, leaving us better placed to meet future demand for social care.

We value the contribution made by carers across Scotland and we want to **make progress in implementing the National Carers' Strategy** to improve services for carers and **will provide additional respite care**. The integration of social care and NHS services will help identify those in need of extra assistance to care for their loved ones. We will work with the voluntary sector, local authorities and the NHS to improve services for carers.

HELPING FAMILIES GET HOMES

People get a sense of pride from owning their own home and home ownership gives people a stake in the maintenance and improvement of their neighbourhood. It also fosters social mobility and enables people to build up capital.

That is why we believe that as many Scots as possible should have the opportunity to share in the benefits of home ownership. That must include those who live in social housing. So **we will reinstate a "modernised Right to Buy"** for new (and recently built) social houses in local authority ownership.

HELPING FAMILIES, CONTINUED

Scottish Conservatives support the work of our housing associations which have a leading role to play in the provision of new affordable housing. We support stock transfer by councils to housing associations with tenant approval. **We will use Right To Buy receipts, stock transfer and institutional investment to fund construction of social houses** rather than placing so much of the burden on higher rents, as the SNP is doing.

We will introduce additional weighting for local people and people with a proven family connection in council and Registered Social Landlords' allocation of housing.

We will encourage the replication of Edinburgh's Private Sector Leasing Scheme throughout Scotland. **We will abolish Home Reports** to help get the property market moving again.

PROTECTING SCOTLAND'S QUALITY OF LIFE AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACT

IMPROVING OUR LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Scottish Conservatives promised a Town Centre Regeneration Fund in our last manifesto, and despite Labour and the Lib Dems trying to vote down the Fund, we delivered £60m of help to high streets across Scotland. **We will institute at least one further round of the Town Centre Regeneration Fund.**

To safeguard Scotland's landscape, **we will introduce national strategic planning guidance for onshore wind to prevent inappropriately sited or sized windfarms.** This will provide certainty to both communities and developers. We will also aim for a sensible and sustainable increase in new productive softwoods and promote themed days throughout the year to encourage environmental volunteering, such as beach clean ups.

REDUCING ENERGY CONSUMPTION

The first step to decarbonising our economy and ensuring energy security is reducing our energy consumption. A Scottish Conservative amendment in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 introduced the Green Council Tax discount and **we will seek to improve**

the uptake of this through a public information campaign.

We will retain Home Energy Reports despite the abolition of Home Reports and **consolidate the various energy efficiency schemes into one system,** with residential and non-residential schemes. **We will require Local Authorities to publish "heat maps"** showing where demand is in their local areas, with a view to increasing the take up of district heating, where appropriate. In the public sector, we will **require all public bodies to publish details of their energy consumption and commit to a target** to reduce it.

A BALANCED ENERGY POLICY

We are determined that Scotland should be the place where a new generation of marine energy sources are developed. We have thousands of miles of coastline and the highest tidal reaches almost in the world, yet under Labour, we saw companies moving abroad to develop wave and tidal power and we want to reverse that trend. **We will take up, in full, the UK Government's offer of additional funding through the Green Investment Bank and we will campaign for the bank to be headquartered in Scotland.** And we want Britain to lead the world in Carbon Capture and Storage.

PROTECTING SCOTLAND'S QUALITY OF LIFE AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACT, CONTINUED

Our colleagues at Westminster are spending £1 billion on CCS. That's more than any other Government, anywhere in the world is giving to a single plant and we want that to be invested here in Scotland, at Longannet.

We welcome the review of nuclear safety that our colleagues in government at Westminster have ordered from the UK Chief Nuclear Inspector and we are confident that any lessons learned from his report will be applied to the UK's new build programme. Therefore, **we will end the policy of current Scottish Government of refusing to consider replacement of existing nuclear power-generating capacity.** Instead, we would consider any proposals to build on existing sites on their own merits. However, we would not permit any new sites to be used. Additionally, **we will amend National Planning Framework 2 in order to designate the replacement of existing nuclear power generating capacity as National Developments.**

SUSTAINING OUR FISHING COMMUNITIES

We recognise the importance of fishing to the Scottish Economy. While we are not prepared to make empty promises like the SNP, **we are determined to do all we can to secure serious reform of the Common Fisheries Policy,** with conservation and industry working hand-

in-hand. We know that we will have the support of UK Ministers, and believe that the best hope for the industry is for the UK to speak with one voice. We must make the reduction of discards a high priority, while securing improved management of fish stocks and the prosperity of our fishing industry.

We are also committed to pursuing domestic fisheries reform. In particular, **we will provide Civil Service support** to investigate the possible development of a vertically integrated, market focused, co-operative model for the demersal sector. **We will also encourage and support aquaculture in appropriately sited developments.**

PROMOTING LOCAL FOOD

Consumers often want to buy Scottish or local produce but are put off by confusing or even misleading labelling. **We will legislate to ensure honesty in geographical labelling for food.** So that government shows a lead in reducing food miles, **we will encourage procurement of local food across the public sector, and retain the Single Farm Payment.**

To help small, local producers and improve the viability of Scottish farming as a whole, **we will move quickly to put in place a risk-based regime for meat inspection,** comparable in scope and

simplicity with those of EU nations which have modernized their inspection services.

Finally, to help people grow their own food, develop their leisure time and improve the appearance of their local area, **we will introduce a right to request disused publicly-owned land be put into use as allotments. We will also provide Civil Service support to create a new Social Enterprise, “Growing Scotland”, to run an online matching service** for people seeking to form gardening co-operatives or to share/borrow plots.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

We want to make the Glasgow Commonwealth Games a great success. **We will use the Games to encourage greater participation in sport across all age groups, and focus on leaving a lasting legacy of sporting facilities for after 2014.**

We believe extra-curricular activities are an invaluable part of any child’s education. In particular, we believe there should be more opportunities for school sport and outdoor education. **We will set up a charitable trust fund, into which we will commit an initial £2m, which will have the specific aim of giving all pupils the opportunity of receiving one full week of residential outdoor education at**

least once between the ages of 11 and 15, and more opportunities to participate in grassroots sport.

Finally, **we will promote sponsored bike schemes** for our towns and cities to encourage greater participation in cycling.

ENHANCING SCOTLAND’S CULTURE AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACT

We will preserve free entry to national museums and galleries. To help Government funded Culture, Heritage and Sport bodies secure additional revenue, **we will establish a new fund to allow them to finance expenditure which will lead to additional income in the future.** A wide range of initiatives will be supported, from encouraging philanthropic contributions to growing existing income streams and developing new ones.

We remain committed to the promotion of the Gaelic language and culture. Having fought hard to move BBC Alba on to freeview, **we will allow, within our new schools model, the creation of new Gaelic schools** where there is local demand.

PROTECTING SCOTLAND'S QUALITY OF LIFE AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACT, CONTINUED

Conservatives protected the international aid budget at UK level, because we are committed to playing a full part in international development, whatever the fiscal problems we have inherited at home. Scotland too has a proud record of overseas assistance, especially in Malawi, **so we will protect the devolved international aid budget for the lifetime of the Parliament.**



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