

SCOTTISH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS RESPONSE TO JUST & GREEN RECOVERY ELECTION LETTER

2 May 2021

Scottish Liberal Democrats will put recovery first. The pandemic has torn through all our lives and there is no time to lose in tackling the climate emergency.

The Scottish Liberal Democrat manifesto was published on 16 April. You can find a copy here: <https://www.scotlibdems.org.uk/manifesto>. It includes many policies for the next Scottish Parliament that I believe will be welcomed by the Just, Green Recovery Coalition and its supporters. The overlap with the priorities and policies you have outlined is clear to see.

Our manifesto is packed with over fifty top line commitments. Just imagine what we can do if we put recovery first.

Putting recovery first means an NHS recovery plan. It means a greater priority for mental health because poor mental health prevents people from getting on in life. This month the mental health budget increased by £120 million thanks to Scottish Liberal Democrat budget negotiations. Now it needs the full weight of our transformative proposals so there is no wrong door, more local and walk-in crisis services, more specialists in training and the ending of scandalous waits for help. We want a new deal for social care too with the establishment of national care service standards, with the funding put in place to meet those standards. We will prioritise the establishment of national pay bargaining so care workers get proper recognition, fair pay and better careers as soon as possible.

Our Education Bounce Back plan offers unprecedented new entitlements for pupils and staff and extra resources in every school. That means a jobs guarantee for every teacher, ending the anxiety about whether there will be a job for them and the casualisation of the teaching workforce. It means more pupil support assistants, an outdoor learning guarantee including for residential trips, the abolition of fees for instrumental music tuition in schools, and new entitlements for young people to use over the holidays so nobody misses out on activities. We will extend free early learning and childcare to all two-year-olds, building on the existing entitlement won by my party. We will extend the Pupil Equity Fund, again won by Scottish Liberal Democrats, double the Scottish Child Payment and deliver the extension of free school meals all year round for P1-P7 children.

We need action to stop a jobs crisis too:

- A job guarantee for young people to save a generation from unemployment
- New jobs in clean-tech and green energy to future-proof careers
- New retraining support for people who need it with grants up to £5000.

Everyone deserves to be paid a fair wage, to afford a home and use good public services. For many, that wasn't the reality before the pandemic. The cracks were there for all to see when it hit. I've spent months helping people whose incomes evaporated overnight, working constructively with the Scottish and UK Governments to fix gaps in systems and

save livelihoods. But it remains the case that 3 million people have been excluded. It's one of the reasons I called for a Universal Basic Income during the first wave. I still want to take this forward.

We will act to tackle the climate emergency and declare a nature emergency. Scottish Liberal Democrats have been instrumental in forcing the pace of change in Scotland, from setting the first renewable electricity targets early in the Scottish Parliament to recently ensuring Scotland has some of the strongest emissions targets in the world (the heightened 2030 target was the result of a Labour-Liberal Democrat amendment). Now we must meet our targets and decarbonise Scotland through policies such as:

- switching one million homes from polluting mains gas to climate-friendly heating by 2030 and doubling the fuel poverty budget
- a new robust presumption in favour of electric vehicles across government to motivate it to build a charging network that people can trust, as part of our plan to urgently move every form of transport away from fossil fuels.
- using nature to fight climate change, with new legally binding nature recovery targets, expanding woodland using at least 50% native species, rewilding and new national parks.

This will create thousands of jobs.

Every delay reduces the chance of our avoiding catastrophic climate change and species loss. Every delay will cause more pain for those countries already living with its impacts and most at risk of the worst damage.

This is a liberal offer. It's campaigning for better mental health, education and action to tackle the climate emergency that gets me up in the morning. All of that would be at risk if there were five years of rows over independence, borders, the currency and the deficit.

After the year we have endured we must bring the country together to recover from this dreadful pandemic. This is not the moment to go back to the divisions of the past with another independence referendum that will divide because the recovery will require the skills and talents of everyone.

Scottish Liberal Democrats want the next parliament to have a needle-sharp focus on the recovery and on jobs, mental health, education and the climate emergency. To meet the challenge of the climate emergency and recover from the worst health and economic crisis of the last 100 years we cannot have the next Scottish Parliament and the next Scottish Government distracted.

Scottish Liberal Democrats will put recovery first.

If you support our policies and want to see the next Scottish Parliament put recovery first, give Scottish Liberal Democrats both your votes on 6 May.

Willie Rennie
Leader, Scottish Liberal Democrats.