

Working Together For A Safer Scotland

Introduction

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We believe in stronger and safer communities in Scotland. We want to see fair rules and fair chances for all. People must have confidence in their justice system, to know it is fair to all and that the punishment will fit the crime.

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It is central that victims, witnesses and communities feel secure. We are aware of the new challenges which now lie ahead. In times of economic recession and unemployment, it is possible that some crimes may increase. When times are tough, people feel more vulnerable and threatened.

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Fairness is at the core of Labour's values and as we seek to develop policy in this area we do so with an aim to ensure people in Scotland feel protected, within fair and safe communities that are policed well.

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Labour delivered for Scotland

Scottish Labour worked hard to lay the foundations for a safer Scotland. With Labour, police numbers in Scotland increased year on year to record levels – up over 1,200 since 1999. These officers were supported by over 500 new community wardens, and crime in Scotland was reduced by 23 per cent since its peak in 1991. Furthermore, crime clear-up rates were at their highest ever, up 43 per cent since 1999.

In the face of fierce opposition from the SNP, we delivered the groundbreaking Anti-Social Behaviour Act. In 2007, there was double the number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders than only two years before. Boy racers were having their cars seized and noisy, disruptive neighbours were being tackled for ignoring the warnings. Dispersal orders were in place and working, and closure orders gave people the respite that they were entitled to.

With Labour, the housebreaking crime rate fell for six consecutive years, and by 2007, was nearly half the level before we were elected. Violent crime rates decreased, and conviction rates for handling offensive weapons increased by 20 per cent between the years 2003/04 to 2004/05.

We invested more than £10 million in a massive expansion of CCTV, providing over 2000 cameras – with £1 million invested in CCTV in 2006 alone.

To improve child protection, we invested heavily in the secure estate provision, making it fit for purpose and expanding capacity. Now, with the SNP, it is lying unused.

In relation to victim support, Scottish Labour is proud to have introduced legislation which has worked to transform people's lives. We provided protection for vulnerable witnesses, and support for victims who had suffered the effects of crime in Scotland. We piloted a successful domestic abuse court and insured that the justice system worked far more in the

interest of victims than it ever had in the past, in particular, by creating the Victims' Information and Advice Service.

5 Scottish Labour delivered the biggest top-to-bottom reform of our court system in generations, providing clarity in sentencing and legislation to end automatic early release. Scotland's High Courts were also reformed to reduce delay and inconvenience for victims and witnesses. In particular, we improved the protection provided for children who appeared as witnesses, offering the most vulnerable a greater sense of security.

10 Communities in Scotland were empowered when we introduced the 'Drug Dealers Don't Care' campaign, and £2 million worth of assets were seized from criminals and invested back into the areas hardest hit by serious and violent crime. We cracked down on irresponsible drinks promotions which encouraged binge drinking and associated antisocial behaviour.

15 Scotland benefited from Labour's tough action against knife crime, which doubled the maximum penalty for carrying a knife in public from two to four years. The police were given the unconditional power to arrest someone suspected of carrying a knife and increased the minimum age for buying a non-domestic knives from 16 to 18.

20 With Labour, Scotland saw the introduction of the most progressive pieces of legislation in 30 years in relation to domestic violence. The legislation improved witness protection, expanded support projects and transformed the crime from an invisible one to one at the forefront of national awareness.

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Scotland is now at risk

30 The SNP's approach to tackling crime in Scotland is chaotic. It was easy for the Nationalist administration to come into power promising easy solutions. It is now clear that they are unwilling to make the hard choices necessary to tackle these challenges and stand up for the people of Scotland.

35 The SNP do not seem to accept that improved policing techniques, new technology (DNA profiling and CCTV) and increased police numbers (up 1,500 under Labour) have led to improved detection rates, and therefore an increased prison population. This means we need an increased prison capacity.

40 Before the SNP came into office, Scottish Labour made clear that we would not shy away from building the prisons needed to ensure public safety, punish serious and persistent offenders and to provide respite to communities. In contrast the SNP have stalled and time-wasted, preferring to release prisoners issued with a six month sentence or less, shying away from the effective action required to protect our communities. Scotland needs new, modern prison buildings, yet the SNP are refusing to use available methods of funding. The construction of Low Moss prison has now been delayed for 2 years. The SNP's closure of a community prison in Aberdeen will mean prisoners being further away from both their families and networks to support rehabilitation.

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Labour passed legislation to end automatic early release, something the SNP government has failed to implement. This has caused further, unnecessary risk to our communities and is symptomatic of the SNP's complacency when tackling crime in Scotland.

5 In relation to domestic abuse and violence against women, the SNP government has abdicated responsibility on this matter, and failed to provide sufficient funding to local government to ensure that the needs of victims are being met. While Labour authorities continue to meet these commitments, others have turned their backs.

10 Before being elected the SNP were quick to promise 1,000 extra police officers. In contrast to Labour's record in relation to police numbers, the SNP have still failed to deliver and are even scaling back on police recruitment in certain areas. Where there is additional recruitment, this is often because Labour authorities are using their own funds, from council tax, to increase numbers and protect public safety. The SNP have also cut back on the recruitment of police support staff, directly impacting on the workload of police officers on the frontline. The Grampian police force recently warned of budget cuts and an actual
15 reduction in the number of posts as they face a £2.5million cut to their budget over the next two years.

20 In a similar vein, as a result of SNP budget constraints, there has been a reduction in the funding of community wardens who support the police in protecting our communities. Services are being starved of resources. Key voluntary organisations, which could have addressed the causes of crime and provided support for vulnerable families, have had their funding slashed.

25 The SNP has failed to face up to their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding our children, failing to make any comments when the damning report into child protection in Aberdeen emerged.

30 The SNP are making moves to abolish six-month prison sentences. These plans would mean 81% of knife criminals, who would have gone to prison, will now escape a jail sentence. This proposal would allow a range of criminals including knife criminals, people guilty of crimes of violence and some sex offenders to avoid custody. These plans entirely contradict measures to protect communities and support victims and shows that targets are driving the policies of the SNP, not the safety of people within our communities. Abolishing sentences of six months or less also comes at a time where breaches of community sentences are at record levels, and there is a shortage of social workers in Scotland.

35 We believe in effective and meaningful community sentences and expanded their use when we led in the Scottish Parliament. The SNP are failing with the community sentence regime currently in operation. There has been a 14% increase in breaches of Community Service Orders, with the social work staff needed to supervise these criminals in the community
40 reduced by 500 in the last 18 months. The SNP are also failing on custodial sentencing versus community sentencing, and ministerial obfuscation and deception on these issues has led to misconception regarding what is more successful. Organisations that administer community sentences are having their funding slashed under the SNP, with SACRO experiencing cuts of hundreds of thousands of pounds in Fife alone. Community sentences
45 can not be administered properly without the proper resources.

The SNP have broken their manifesto promise to increase spending on drug rehabilitation by 20%, and are losing the battle against drugs: this year alone, 12, 562 new problem drugs users were recorded.

5 Criminal justice social work statistics for 2007/08 released in January show a reduction of 14% in the number of Drug Treatment and Testing Orders, despite the fact that the orders are shown to work in reducing crime and tackling re-offending.

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Discussion for the future

15 Fair rules to protect communities

Throughout the country, in every locality, there are people who give their time and energy to help their neighbours, support vulnerable members of society and improve their communities. It is our aim to support our communities by creating a fairer and safer
20 Scotland.

- How do we best ensure our policy supports groups who work to make their communities safer?
- How can we support parents to give their children the best start in life so as to deter
25 decisions which may lead to involvement in crime?
- If the age of criminal responsibility is changed, what impact will this have?
- How can we improve community resources so young people are occupied and not left out on the streets in their spare time?
- What additional measures can police and crime-fighting agencies in Scotland take to
30 tackle crime, from its origin, to the closing stages?
- Do the police have the resources they need to tackle, detect and prevent crime and also to deal with confrontations with criminals?

Labour believes that communities should be empowered, and we want to see justice being
35 delivered at community level – with rapid and visible consequences for those that disrespect and undermine our safety.

- Should we expand the number and how can we increase the effectiveness of
40 community wardens?
- How do we increase the accountability of Scotland's criminal justice and police structures in ways that enhance fairness and effectiveness?

We know that there is more to do to ensure that criminals are unable to prosper from their
45 crimes and illegal trade. In the past, Labour ensured that money was seized from criminals and put straight into the communities hit hardest by serious and violent crime.

- How can we ensure we best use, improve and expand the seizure of criminal assets to benefit communities most affected by crime?

- How do we ensure that spare capacity in the secure estate is used as accommodation to provide support for some of Scotland's most damaged and vulnerable young people?
- How do we ensure there is adequate support and rehabilitation provided for those young people who need to address their offending behaviour?
- How do we improve the disclosure system?

Routes out of offending

10 We will continue to support alternatives to custody and investments in rehabilitation to drive down re-offending.

- How do we efficiently support a multi-agency approach to tackling re-offending?
- How do we build on the success of Age Courts?
- How do we ensure communities have confidence in community sentences?
- How do we build on the successes of organisations like, The Wise Group, in providing routes out of offending?
- How do we work build on the success of drugs courts and improve the reduction of re-offending through the provision of more Drug Treatment and Testing Orders and our new proposal for Alcohol Treatment and Testing Orders?

Access to justice for all

25 We want to ensure that everyone has equal access to justice. Scottish Labour knows that it is vital for all communities, victims and the families of victims in Scotland to have equal access and an equal level of service at all stages throughout the legal process.

30 We are working with trade unions to provide legal protection for workers at their places of work. We introduced legislation in the last Parliament to provide more protection in the law for emergency workers who are the victims of crime in the course of their work. We now want to see this legislation extended to cover other workers including shop workers and transport workers. In the last Parliament we introduced new rights for the victims of asbestos-related illness and their families to compensation and will continue to do so.

35 We will work with trade unions to secure the rights and opportunities of their members to have their cases taken forward through our court system, and take steps to ensure that people who are awarded damages are not left at the mercy of 'claims farmers'. We will support all the efforts of trade unions and relevant agencies which wish to improve safety in the work place.

- How can we ensure our policies are best suited to address and reduce any inequalities that exist within our legal system?
- How do we best address and reduce any obstacles, including financial barriers, that may prevent individuals from having a full understanding of their rights in relation to the legal process?
- How do we best reduce any obstacles that may prevent individuals from coming forward and utilising the legal process?

- How would our policies best support the work carried out by local law centres and should we support increased availability to such advice across Scotland?
- How do we best incorporate access to justice in relation to corporate manslaughter?

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Special needs within the justice system

10 Scottish Labour policy must also consider the issues of mental health in relation to sentencing, and examine how current legal policy fails to properly recognise and treat or rehabilitate people with mental illnesses who have committed criminal acts.

- Should policy discussions include consideration of facilities and funding for building medium-security facilities?
- Should future policy – in consultation and agreement with groups representing affected individuals – incorporate programmes such as the provision of nationally-recognised information cards to individuals with particular disorders for use, when stopped by the police?
- To what extent should the system include provision for treatment/rehabilitation and a proper recognition in the context of sentencing when a person with a mental illness has committed a criminal act?

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Women in the justice system

25 There is particular concern over the way in which female offenders are treated within our justice system and the Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee has commissioned an inquiry into this issue

- How do we ensure female offenders are treated appropriately within the justice system?

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Support victims

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While Labour has achieved a great deal in providing support for victims, we know that better support is central to creating a safer and fairer Scotland. We want to see more awareness given to the needs and wishes of those who have been affected by crime.

40 Scottish Labour is behind the creation of a champion for victims in Scotland, designed with the ability to investigate, challenge and raise awareness of issues that affect victims of crime and understand the impact on the individual and on communities. The proposed champion would also act as a signpost to other services and as a positive voice for victims of crime.

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We want to ensure that victim support is not patchwork, but is consistently available to all communities, victims and the families of victims at all stages throughout the process.

- What measures can we take to ensure that support for victims is consistent across Scotland?

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- What powers and responsibilities should a victims' champion or commissioner have?

5 Effective sentencing

The core purpose of our justice system must be to protect the communities and people of Scotland. Any changes to the way we deal with offenders must be driven by that goal and no other. We are always keen to drive down re-offending and open to exploring new sentencing options that achieve that.

Investment in effective community sentences is an important element. Transparency should drive policy in this area, and Labour's ambition in relation to sentencing policy will remain firm but fair, acting in the best interests of our communities.

- How can our policy be consistent and highlight the inconsistencies and lack of coherent solutions that too often dog public policy and the approach of other Parties?

Scottish Labour will not be afraid to recognise the need for prison. However, we remain committed to ensuring that prison is used appropriately, taking rehabilitation and community sentences into account wherever they are justified. Scottish Labour wants sentencing that works and is seen to be fair.

- How do we best engage with our communities and ensure that we work together to ensure that effective sentencing is delivered?

Unlike the SNP we will not merely use tough language but call for prison sentences as long as the idea of fair and equal treatment is maintained.

A key question will be the balance between rehabilitation and building of facilities and sentencing.

- How will our policy balance funding between rehabilitation and community sentencing versus building of facilities and custody?
- What consideration should be given to the sentencing of youth offenders and how can we ensure it maximises effectiveness in preventing re-offending?
- How do we ensure that effective community sentencing offers real payback to communities affected by crime?

Tackling substance misuse

Scottish Labour recognises that the relationship between alcohol, drugs and violence represents a huge challenge for society, and also places an enormous burden on us in our families, our homes and our communities.

- How do we best evaluate the extent to which alcohol and drug abuse contributes to crime and anti-social behaviour within our homes and communities?

We know that more action is needed to tackle alcohol and substance misuse and we will support bold action to tackle this problem, such as additional restrictions on the sale of alcohol, and action to stifle drug dealers at the highest level.

5 Labour policy should be strong tackling in drug dealers as an extension of the successful seizures attributable to policy implemented by Labour when in power.

- How will our policy build on our achievements and tackle Scotland's drug problem at its core?

10 • How do we empower communities to demand effective action to protect their neighbourhoods?

- What is presently being done to restrict the criminal business of drug dealers who operate at the highest level? What is being done to identify and close businesses that front wider drug activity?

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Within our prisons, we know that offenders continue to obtain illegal drugs.

- How can our policies ensure that better services are in operation in prisons to help people recover from drug addiction?

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Tackling the culture of violence

Scottish Labour is committed to tackling the culture of violence in Scotland.

25 We need to develop effective policy to tackle issues of knife crime, levels of which are high in Scotland and disproportionate to those in England. Even in opposition, Labour is making a difference, strongly backing public petitions in the Scottish Parliament and ensuring the extent to which knife crime blights our communities is much further up our political agenda.

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- What more can be done to highlight to young people the dangers of carrying a knife?
 - How can we do more to ensure knives do not end up on our streets, in the hands of our young people?
 - Successful policy implemented elsewhere in the UK, for example on education might be considered useful when considering key proposed solutions or questions?

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While Labour has a proud record of tackling gun crime across the UK we must never be complacent. We need quick decisive action and a joined up policy to stem the culture of gun crime and protect our communities from the associated threat and fear of dangerous weapons.

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We have to examine ideas on how to eradicate domestic abuse and violence against women. In particular, we want to highlight that substance misuse is not the only factor and certainly not a mitigating factor in domestic violence. We need an all-encompassing policy which extends victims' support and answers the problem of how we ensure greater refuge and assistance for abused individuals, taking consideration of the time-barring issue.

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We believe that violence in the home is totally unacceptable and it has a devastating impact on victims and their families. Women cannot be allowed to suffer in silence. We believe that much more needs to be done to tackle crime motivated by sectarianism, racism and religious

bigotry. Previous groundbreaking efforts to highlight these issues through innovations like, anti-sectarianism summits, have not been continued by the SNP government.

- 5 • What steps can be taken to ensure the appropriate levels of help and services are available to sufferers of domestic abuse and violence against women? How should we build on action taken by Labour in dealing with perpetrators?
- Why is the conviction rate for rape so low, and how can we ensure that rape can be prosecuted as effectively as possible?
- How can we end the social acceptance of domestic violence where it still exists? Does it vary across different generations?
- 10 • How can we make emotional abuse as unacceptable as physical abuse?
- Do the police have sufficient resources and specialist staff to support victims of domestic abuse, right from reporting to trial?
- Is the issue more difficult to tackle in rural areas than urban areas?
- 15 • Do we need new laws in Scotland to tackle the relationship between prostitution and people-trafficking?
- How can we build on Labour's successful legislation on kerb crawling to further tackle prostitution?
- How do we build on the success of the One Scotland Many Cultures campaign and also support further efforts to stamp out racism and sectarianism?