

Scottish party manifesto analysis: **Justice**

SNP

Key policies:

- Cut court and system delays and improving flow across justice linked services.
- Expand community-based justice, shifting the balance of care toward prevention, early intervention and support in communities.
- Strengthen mental health crisis response, rolling out 24/7 Mental Health Triage Cars and new drop in hubs.
- Treat drug and alcohol harms as public health, expanding naloxone rollout, Alcohol Care Teams and 1,000 rehab beds.

Summary and analysis:

The SNP's justice agenda is framed around a public health approach to justice centring community safety through strengthened policing, prevention and reforms intended to make services more responsive. The manifesto emphasises historically high police numbers, commitments to modernise emergency response through measures such as expanded mental health triage provision, and a broader shift towards early intervention across justice and health. These ambitions, however, depend on substantial capacity within local authorities, Police Scotland, courts and community organisations, yet the manifesto provides limited detail on how these bodies will be supported to absorb expanded responsibilities while also undergoing wider public sector reform. The SNP's focus on reducing harm through prevention, community-based support and improved integration between health and justice relies on strong cross sector coordination, but the manifesto does not fully outline how these governance arrangements will be structured or resourced. Their plans to improve system performance through digital tools, streamlined processes and service integration imply significant investment in infrastructure and workforce capability, though the manifesto does not specify how these improvements will be prioritised within fiscal constraints.

Scottish Labour

Key policies:

- Neighbourhood community crime and prevention officers.
- Scrap sentencing guidelines for under-25s.
- New Strategic Policing Priorities within first 100 days.
- Specialist victims' support team.

- Cashback for Communities Youth Work Fund: £1m for local approaches to youth work and crime prevention.

Summary and analysis:

Labour's justice agenda is shaped by a commitment to community safety through a combination of increased policing, prevention, and victim support. These commitments, however, require substantial local authority and third sector capacity, yet the manifesto does not fully outline how these organisations would be funded or supported to deliver expanded responsibilities. Labour's focus on reducing reoffending through rehabilitation and community-based provision depends on strong integration between justice, health, housing, and employability services, but the manifesto provides limited detail on how these cross sectoral governance arrangements would be reformed. Their ambition to reduce court backlogs and improve case progression requires investment in judicial capacity and digital infrastructure, yet the manifesto does not specify how these would be prioritised within fiscal constraints.

Reform UK (Scotland)

Key policies:

- Abolish the Hate Crime Act.
- Abolish the Scottish Sentencing Council.
- Increase prison capacity to ensure sentences can be fully served.
- Introduce higher sentences for repeat offenders.
- Prioritise local communities in policing and restore a stronger focus on law and order.
- Reverse centralisation and strengthen local accountability in policing.
- Use planning and economic reforms to support community cohesion and reduce antisocial behaviour.

Summary and analysis:

Reform's justice agenda prioritises punitive sentencing, expanded police powers, and the removal of what they describe as ideological legislation. Their commitments to impose tougher sentences and restrict early release assume significant prison capacity and staffing, yet the manifesto does not address the capital, workforce, or operational implications of a more punitive sentencing regime. Their proposals to repeal existing legislation and reduce oversight structures raise questions about legal coherence, equality obligations, and institutional accountability, particularly within Scotland's devolved justice framework. Reform's focus on enforcement and deterrence places less emphasis on prevention, rehabilitation, or community-based interventions, leaving unclear how underlying drivers of offending, including poverty, mental health, and substance use, would be addressed. Their approach also relies heavily on police capacity to deliver expanded enforcement, yet the manifesto does not specify how recruitment, training, or resource pressures would be managed.

Scottish Conservatives

Key policies:

- Increase police numbers and strengthen frontline powers to improve community safety.
- Impose tougher sentences for repeat offenders and review early release policies.
- Expand prison capacity to ensure offenders serve more of their sentence.
- Abolish the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act to change the legal framework for policing.
- Abolish the Scottish Sentencing Council, returning discretion to courts.
- Strengthen victims' rights through faster case progression and clearer communication.
- Tighten justice system accountability by improving transparency in policy development and decision making.

Summary and analysis:

The Conservatives' justice agenda prioritises public protection, sentencing severity, and police powers, creating a distinct set of policy tensions. Their emphasis on longer sentences and reduced early release assumes that increased prison capacity will be available, yet the manifesto does not address the capital investment, staffing, or operational pressures associated with expanding the prison estate. Their focus on strengthening police powers and tackling antisocial behaviour relies on frontline capacity and consistent enforcement, but the manifesto provides limited detail on how recruitment, retention, and training challenges would be addressed. The Conservatives' approach places less emphasis on prevention or community-based interventions, raising questions about long term demand on courts and prisons, particularly given demographic, and social need trends. Their commitments also depend on effective coordination between police, local authorities, and justice agencies, yet the manifesto does not specify how governance or accountability structures would be adapted to support this.

Scottish Liberal Democrats

Key policies:

- Bring forward a Youth Work Bill to tackle youth offending
- Increase investment in the Retail Crime Taskforce
- Specialist mental health staff working with police and prison staff
- Local policing plans to be approved by locally elected people
- Reduce reoffending through welfare, housing and healthcare checks within 48 hours of release

Summary and analysis:

Scottish Liberal Democrat justice policy is a public health approach built around prevention, community safety and reducing reoffending, with an emphasis on shifting

activity away from crisis response and towards early intervention. Their proposals rely on local authorities, police and community organisations taking on expanded roles in diversion, rehabilitation and neighbourhood safety, yet the manifesto provides limited detail on how these actors would be resourced to sustain this additional capacity. The party highlights the need to reduce the burden on frontline policing by reforming processes such as court citations and by improving coordination between justice, health and housing services, but the operational mechanisms for achieving this integration are not fully set out. Their ambitions to strengthen community policing, support victims and tackle persistent issues such as retail crime depend on multi agency collaboration and investment in local infrastructure, while plans to reduce reoffending through improved support on release require consistent access to welfare, accommodation and healthcare. Overall, the justice agenda sets out a preventative and community centred direction, but the governance and funding arrangements needed to deliver it at scale are less clearly articulated in the manifesto.

Scottish Greens

Key policies:

- Introduce a Misogyny and Criminal Justice Bill.
- Decriminalise sex work.
- Enable groups and third sector organisations to raise public interest and human rights cases.
- Defend the right to protest with a National Protest Rights Code.
- Undertake a citizens' assembly to develop proposals to reform the justice system.
- Expand the presumption against short prison sentences for non-violent offenders.

Summary and analysis:

The Greens' justice agenda is centred on decriminalisation, prevention, and community-based alternatives, which creates a set of structural challenges not fully addressed in the manifesto. Their emphasis on reducing the use of imprisonment and expanding diversionary programmes assumes substantial community justice capacity, yet local authorities and third sector providers currently face significant funding and workforce constraints. The Greens' focus on a public health approach which addresses the social determinants of offending, including poverty, housing, and mental health, requires deep cross government coordination, but the manifesto provides limited detail on how these governance arrangements would be strengthened. Their commitment to reforming policing practices and expanding rights-based approaches depends on cultural change within institutions, yet the manifesto does not specify how training, oversight, or accountability mechanisms would be adapted.

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