

# Scottish party manifesto analysis: Local Government

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## SNP

### Key policies:

- Expand local economic powers, strengthening regional partnerships.
- Introduce a mansion tax, adding two new top council tax bands.
- Reduce public body bureaucracy, improving efficiency and delivery.
- Embed Community Wealth Building, keeping more value in local areas.
- Invest in local infrastructure, incl. the £350m Better Surfaces Fund.

### Summary and analysis

The SNP's approach to local government centres on increasing local control, strengthening community decision making and reforming how services are delivered. The manifesto commits to expanding the strategic role of regional economic partnerships, implementing the Community Wealth Building Act to ensure that locally generated wealth stays within communities, and using public sector reform to reduce bureaucracy and integrate services more effectively. It also proposes new revenue powers through a mansion tax added to the top of the council tax system, intended to raise additional funds for local services. Alongside this, the SNP pledges major investment in housing, transport and public services that local authorities help deliver, including a new housing agency, a homelessness fund, and a £350 million "Better Surfaces" programme for local roads. While the manifesto emphasises devolving power to communities and enabling councils to play a larger role in economic development, it provides less detail on how local authorities will be supported to manage these expanded responsibilities within existing financial pressures.

## Scottish Labour

### Key policies:

- New fair funding formula for local government
- Local Democracy Act
- Statutory consultations for service closures
- Give local authorities power and resources to generate income from community owned assets
- Redefine community benefit for local energy projects
- Simplify Community Right to Buy

### Summary and analysis:

Scottish Labour's proposals for local government focus on restoring financial stability, improving the quality of local services, and strengthening the ability of councils to respond to community needs. The manifesto highlights the pressures created by years of constrained budgets and commits to fairer, more predictable funding, including multi-year settlements and reforms to ensure money reaches frontline services. It places particular emphasis on improving local infrastructure, supporting communities through a statutory partnership agreement, and ensuring councils have the resources to maintain roads, housing, and essential neighbourhood services. Labour also links local government to wider social goals, such as tackling poverty, improving childcare access, and supporting community safety, which positions councils as key delivery partners rather than passive administrators. While the manifesto sets a clear direction of rebuilding local capacity and reducing waste, the operational detail on how councils will manage expanded responsibilities or navigate the transition to new funding arrangements is outlined at a broad level rather than through specific implementation plans.

## Reform UK (Scotland)

### Key policies:

- Consideration for city mayors in reformed councils
- Review the 32 local authorities for duplication and efficiency
- Local authorities will raise their own revenue, decide their own spending and keep their own surpluses.
- Profits from new 'Annual Property Tax' will be given to local authorities
- Review of the unfunded statutory obligations for councils

### Summary and analysis:

Scottish Reform's proposals for local government reform centre on reversing what they characterise as decades of overcentralisation, fiscal dependency and structural inefficiency within Scotland's 32 council system. The manifesto presents local authorities as constrained by duplicated functions, unpredictable revenue streams and unfunded statutory duties imposed by Holyrood, which it argues have diverted resources away from core services such as road maintenance and waste collection. Their plan to review council structures, consider alternative governance models such as city mayors, and replace LBTT and business rates with a single, predictable Annual Property Tax signals an intention to shift revenue raising power and financial responsibility directly to councils. However, while the proposals emphasise greater autonomy and a more stable funding base, the manifesto offers limited detail on how transitions in governance, staffing or statutory obligations would be managed. Reform expects councils to operate with greater independence and efficiency, yet the administrative and workforce capacity required to absorb these expanded responsibilities is not fully explored. Overall, the agenda outlines a decisive move towards decentralisation and local self-sufficiency, but the operational framework

needed to embed these changes across Scotland's diverse local authority landscape is less clearly articulated.

## Scottish Conservatives

Key policies:

- Increase funding for local services by guaranteeing councils a fixed share of the Scottish Government budget
- Commit to reviewing council administered housing support by tightening Discretionary Housing Payment eligibility.
- Reduce mandatory reporting and guidance burdens placed on councils, freeing capacity for core local services.
- Strengthen transparency requirements for organisations influencing local authority decisions.
- Introduce a Local Power Bill to give councils freedom over spending and multi-year budgets
- Review all council Arms Length External Organisations (quangos) and close those not delivering value for money

### Summary and analysis

Scottish Conservative proposals for local government concentrate on improving the financial stability, accountability and efficiency of Scotland's councils. The manifesto presents local authorities as constrained by complex funding rules, excessive bureaucracy and inconsistent oversight, and sets out plans to guarantee councils a fixed share of the Scottish Government budget, simplify the funding formula, and provide multi-year financial certainty through a new Local Power Bill. It also commits to strengthening local democratic control by ending the ability of Scottish Ministers to overturn local planning decisions and by reviewing all Arms Length External Organisations to ensure they deliver value for money. Alongside these reforms, the party emphasises tighter scrutiny of how public money is used locally, including clearer transparency requirements for third sector bodies receiving council funding and stronger controls on senior pay. However, delivering fixed budget shares and multi-year settlements may be challenging in a constrained fiscal environment, and simplifying the funding formula could create distributional tensions between councils. The proposals also leave open how councils would build the capacity required to manage greater financial autonomy without additional administrative support. Overall, the manifesto outlines a vision of local government that is financially empowered, more transparent, and focused on delivering core local services rather than navigating unnecessary administrative burdens.

## Scottish Liberal Democrats

Key policies:

- Guarantee fair funding for local authorities
- Increase income from renewable energy within local authority areas
- Transfer ScotWind rental income to nearby councils

- Grant local authorities full power of general competence
- Reform council tax, with a move to land value system.
- Offering local communities the opportunity to establish a burgh or island council to serve their area

#### Summary and analysis:

Scottish Liberal Democrat proposals for local government reform focus on restoring financial stability, strengthening local autonomy and modernising planning and service delivery. The manifesto positions councils as central to economic development, housing delivery and community safety, yet also acknowledges that years of budget pressure have constrained their ability to meet rising demand. Their commitments to fairer funding, new local taxation powers, and a reformed planning system signal a shift towards giving councils greater control over revenue and decision making, but the manifesto provides limited detail on how these changes would be sequenced or supported during transition. The party expects local authorities to take on expanded responsibilities, from tackling regional inequality to improving high streets and supporting community-based justice interventions, yet the operational capacity required to deliver these functions is not fully addressed. Proposals to modernise planning, encourage innovation, and strengthen local partnerships with business and community organisations depend on significant administrative and workforce capability, which the manifesto references but does not comprehensively outline. Overall, the agenda sets a clear direction towards decentralisation and local empowerment, but the governance and resourcing framework needed to embed these reforms across Scotland's diverse local authority landscape is less fully articulated.

## Scottish Greens

#### Key policies:

- Empower councils with greater control over local services and decision making
- Establish a new fiscal framework for local government
- Reaffirm the Verity House Agreement
- Support new governance models such as single authority city regions
- Reduce barriers to elected office
- Update licensing legislation and reform legal bases for local governance
- Strengthen grassroots democracy through new community engagement standards

#### Summary and analysis:

The Green manifesto set out a broad agenda for strengthening local democracy, centred on expanding councils' fiscal autonomy, modernising governance arrangements and deepening community participation. The manifesto positions councils as key actors in rebuilding services, shaping local economies and supporting a just transition, but also highlights the constraints created by Scotland's highly centralised system. Plans to increase locally raised revenue, develop a more stable fiscal framework and reduce national direction signal a shift towards greater local

control, yet the practical sequencing of these reforms and the support required during transition are not fully detailed. The manifesto outlines an expectation that councils will take on wider responsibilities, from expanded municipal ownership to enhanced roles in licensing, procurement and traffic management, but the administrative and workforce capacity needed to deliver these functions is not comprehensively addressed. Commitments to improve access to elected office, reform by election processes and support new governance models indicate an ambition to modernise local representation, while proposals to strengthen participatory budgeting and community engagement depend on consistent standards and sustained institutional capability. Overall, the agenda sets a clear direction towards decentralisation and community led decision making, but the governance and resourcing framework required to embed these changes across local authorities remain less fully articulated in the manifesto.

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