

# Scottish party manifesto analysis: Social Security

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## SNP

### Key policies:

- Progress toward a Universal Basic Income, continuing preparatory work and pilots as part of long-term poverty reduction plans.
- £40 per week Scottish Child Payment for newborns, supporting low-income parents through the first year of life.
- Legally binding benefit take-up targets, backed by income maximisation advisers across public services.
- Automatic payments and compensation for official errors, reducing administrative barriers and improving fairness.
- Reform of discretionary funds and pressure for UK wide system changes, strengthening coherence between devolved and reserved benefits.

### Summary and analysis:

The SNP's social security agenda is framed around using devolved powers to provide targeted, income boosting support and to protect households from the cost-of-living crisis. The manifesto highlights existing commitments such as free prescriptions, free eye and dental checks, and the Scottish Child Payment (SCP), alongside new measures within SCP including a £40 weekly payment for newborns in low-income families, expanded winter heating payments, and legal price ceilings on essential foods to keep basic costs down. It also commits to maintaining free university tuition and other universal entitlements that reduce household expenditure. While the manifesto positions social security as central to tackling poverty and supporting family incomes, it provides less detail on how the system will evolve institutionally or how increased responsibilities will be managed within wider fiscal pressures. The overall direction emphasises affordability, prevention and protecting living standards, but the operational mechanisms for delivering a more comprehensive social security system are not fully elaborated.

## Scottish Labour

### Key policies:

- Standardise the Scottish Welfare Fund
- £40 per week Scottish Child Payment for children under one
- Improved benefit take-up and financial inclusion
- Fairer administration through better Social Security Scotland performance

- Protections against harmful public sector debt collection

#### Summary and analysis:

Scottish Labour's social security proposals focus on improving financial stability, preventing hardship, and ensuring that support reaches people who need it quickly and consistently. The manifesto emphasises standardising the Scottish Welfare Fund, so it is better targeted at preventing homelessness and more closely linked with local money advice services. It also commits to new protections for people in public-sector debt, measures to reduce school meal debt, and expanded access to digital connectivity for low-income households. Alongside crisis support, Labour sets out a broader financial inclusion strategy that strengthens money advice services, improves access to banking, and ensures every young person can open a bank account. The party also prioritises improving the efficiency of Social Security Scotland so payments are delivered effectively and aims to remove barriers that prevent people from moving into work or increasing their hours while in receipt of social security payments. Overall, the agenda frames social security as part of a wider effort to reduce poverty, support financial resilience, and make the system more accessible and responsive.

## Reform UK (Scotland)

#### Key policies:

- Make work financially more rewarding than welfare by redesigning payment structures and reducing high marginal tax rates.
- Introduce stricter, face to face assessments to reduce incorrect or fraudulent claims.
- Reduce the administrative cost of the devolved social security system, which they view as too large and unsustainable.
- Prioritise reducing economic inactivity among working age adults who are not in employment.
- Redirect savings from welfare into adult back to work programmes and apprenticeships in key economic sectors.
- Reform the carer support payment by removing the cliff edge and tapering withdrawal to support progression in work.
- Link welfare reform to wider tax changes to remove disincentives that discourage people from increasing their earnings.

#### Summary and analysis:

Reform UK's social security agenda is framed around restoring work incentives, reducing administrative costs and tightening eligibility within a system they characterise as overly expensive and poorly targeted. The manifesto positions the current structure as financially unsustainable and misaligned with labour market participation, emphasising the need for more rigorous assessments, clearer conditionality and a redesigned payment framework that ensures employment is consistently more rewarding than welfare. Their approach links welfare reform directly to economic activation, identifying a suggested notable group of working age adults

who are not in employment and proposing to redirect savings into back to work programmes and apprenticeships aligned with their priority economic sectors. The party also connects social security to wider fiscal and productivity goals through measures to cap marginal tax rates and remove disincentives that discourage progression. While the narrative is coherent in its emphasis on incentives, efficiency and labour market participation, the manifesto provides less detail on the operational capacity required to deliver more intensive assessments, the governance arrangements for coordinating employment support, and the safeguards needed to ensure that tightening eligibility does not disadvantage people with complex or fluctuating needs.

## Scottish Conservatives

### Key policies:

- Tighten Adult Disability Payment eligibility, requiring diagnosis and proof of unavoidable daily living costs.
- End 'light touch' reviews, replacing tick box renewals with full reassessments.
- Create new fraud recovery powers and a specific offence of benefits fraud.
- Introduce a two-child limit on the Scottish Child Payment to improve work incentives.
- Review the Scottish Child Payment cliff edge to reduce disincentives to work.
- Restrict Discretionary Housing Payment eligibility to reduce top ups unavailable elsewhere in the UK.
- Merge overlapping benefits, starting with carer payments, to simplify administration.
- End taxpayer funded translation services in Social Security Scotland to cut costs.

### Summary and analysis:

Scottish Conservative plans for social security focus on significantly reducing the overall benefits bill, tightening eligibility rules, and strengthening fraud prevention within Scotland's devolved welfare system. The manifesto argues that current spending levels are unsustainable and proposes legislative changes to allow the recovery of overpaid benefits, expand counter-fraud capacity, and create a specific offence for benefits fraud. It places particular emphasis on reforming Adult Disability Payment by introducing a more stringent assessment process for mental health related claims and ending the existing light touch review system. The party also proposes limiting the Scottish Child Payment to two children and reviewing how the benefit affects work incentives. In addition, it sets out plans to restrict eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments and to reassess whether certain forms of devolved welfare spending should continue at current levels. Overall, the manifesto presents a social security system that is more tightly controlled, more closely monitored, and designed to reduce public expenditure while reshaping eligibility and review processes.

## Scottish Liberal Democrats

### Key policies:

- Increase Carer Support Payment by £400 a year.
- Ensure unpaid carers are at least £1,000 per year better off, including through an earnings taper.
- Create Young Carers' Leads in every school and college.
- Supporting the UK Liberal Democrats to ensure Universal Credit covers 'life's essentials', the young parent penalty is scrapped, remove the benefit cap and scrap the bedroom tax.

### Summary and analysis:

Scottish Liberal Democrat social security policy is framed around improving access, reducing delays and strengthening support for carers and low-income households. The manifesto sets out an agenda that depends heavily on administrative reform, including faster processing, clearer entitlements and a more responsive system for people with fluctuating conditions, yet it provides limited detail on how these operational improvements will be delivered within existing capacity constraints. Their commitment to increase Carer Support Payment, expand earnings flexibility for family carers and enhance support for young carers signals a shift towards recognising unpaid care as a core part of the social security landscape, but these measures require sustained investment and coordination with local authorities and third sector organisations. The party also links social security to wider anti-poverty goals through proposals to improve access to childcare, housing and employment. Due to the constraints of Universal Credit powers, the Scottish Liberal Democrats emphasise their commitment to continue to campaign on the work of the Liberal Democrats in Westminster. With an aim to end the young parent penalty for under 25's, remove the benefit cap and scrap the bedroom tax. As such, the manifestos' social security focus lies primarily on supporting carers, and on pushing for reform in Westminster with less consideration of the actions that can be taken within the Scottish Government's remit.

## Scottish Greens

### Key policies:

- Increase the Scottish Child Payment to £40, with an aim of at least £55 by 2030
- Offer Scottish Child Payment supplements to the poorest families
- Increase Scottish Child Payment to compensate for the UK Government's 'Young Parent Penalty'
- Legally binding benefit take-up targets
- Automatic payments using existing data
- Income maximisation advisers in universal services
- Independent review of the Scottish Welfare Fund & Discretionary Housing Payments
- Compensation for incorrect decisions

## Summary and analysis:

The Scottish Greens social security proposals set out an ambitious programme aimed at reducing poverty, strengthening income security and improving the consistency of support, but they also reveal underlying structural challenges. The agenda combines long term ambitions, such as progressing towards a Universal Basic Income and establishing statutory poverty reduction duties, with more immediate measures including higher social security payments through the expansion of the Scottish Child Payment for all children and increases for young parents (under 25 years old), implement a basic income for care leavers and annual uprating of devolved benefits. These commitments signal a shift towards a more predictable and rights-based system, yet the operational and fiscal implications of expanding entitlements at this scale are not fully articulated. The proposals to introduce legally binding take-up targets, deploy income maximisation advisers across public services and expand automatic payments indicate recognition that administrative barriers currently limit access. These proposals imply significant demands on local delivery capacity and data sharing infrastructure. Similarly, plans to compensate applicants for official errors, reform discretionary funds and press for changes to UK wide systems highlight gaps in fairness and coherence, though the mechanisms for coordinating these reforms across devolved and reserved responsibilities remain only partially specified. Overall, the programme outlines a clear direction towards a more generous, accessible and preventative social security system, but the governance, resourcing and implementation architecture required to embed these changes at scale is less fully developed.

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