

# A Co-operative Direction for Scotland



**Scottish Co-operative Party**

**2026 PLATFORM**



# CO-OP FOR EVERYONE

**Scottish Co-operative Party**

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# Foreword

It's clear Scotland needs change after almost 20 years of SNP Government. The challenges communities face – from struggling public services to stagnating living standards – require bold action and new ways of working. The Scottish Co-operative Party believes in a different future – one built on co-operation, shared prosperity, and community empowerment. This paper contains the Scottish Co-operative Party's initial policy proposals for the Party's Platform for the 2026 Scottish Parliament Election – focusing on key priority areas.

At the heart of our vision is a more co-operative economy – one that puts people before profit and builds wealth within communities, rather than extracting it. Co-operatives have a proven track record of meeting the needs of communities and could play a transformative role in reforming public services, from social care to dentistry, ensuring high-quality, sustainable services that work for everyone.

We believe that diverse forms of ownership – from co-operatives and mutuals to employee-owned and community businesses – can strengthen local economies and build resilience. By promoting community ownership, we can help communities across urban and rural Scotland take control of key local assets – from renewable energy projects to transport services and much-loved public spaces, such as music venues and libraries.





**“ By embracing co-operation  
we can deliver the change  
Scotland needs**

Scotland’s future must be inclusive and forward-thinking. That will require the Scottish Government to take the lead in working with local authorities, the public sector, further and higher education, social economy and the private sector to build an economy that delivers real, lasting improvements in living standards for all.

The Scottish Co-operative Party’s vision is clear – by embracing co-operation we can deliver the change Scotland needs and build a fairer, more resilient economy for generations to come.

Scotland has a historic co-operative tradition, with approximately 600 co-operatives generating £1.9bn per annum in revenue and serving 700,000 members. The Scottish Co-operative Party believe the co-operative model can play a bigger role in delivering a more equitable, inclusive economy. The Scottish Government should look to deliver at least a doubling of the size of the co-operative economy – with development across diverse sectors.

The Scottish Government can play a leading role in ensuring Scotland has a world-leading co-operative development system. To achieve this, co-operative development must be put at the heart of business support services and economic development strategies – including those related to research and innovation. Public procurement can be utilised more effectively at every level of government to provide opportunities for co-operatives and mutuals to grow through the increased delivery of goods and services.

# Introduction

The Scottish Co-operative Party and its values are in my political DNA.

The values of Co-operation, of mutual aid and of democratic control are at the heart of political outlook as a Scottish Labour and Co-op MSP and as leader of the Scottish Labour Party.

And as we approach the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections, I will ensure that Co-operative values underpin both our vision for Scotland's future and our offer to the people of Scotland.

The reasons for this are simple.

If we are to rise to the challenges before us, then we need bold ideas and fresh thinking.

That is exactly what the Scottish Co-operative Party offers.

The Scottish Co-operative Party has ideas to improve lives and share wealth and power across our society.

From Community Energy - with plans to ensure that the communities that generate Scotland's renewable energy have a stake in the wealth they generate.

To promoting employee ownership – a fundamental Co-operative value that promotes thriving businesses alongside the empowerment of working people.

The party has a broad spectrum of policies to share both wealth and power in Scottish society.

But our plans do not stop there.





From supporting the Co-operative ownership model in football to land reform, Co-operative models of housing and new ideas for public transport, the Scottish Co-op prospectus for Scotland is little short of transformative.

This is a plan for Scotland that I am proud to endorse and proud to stand on as a Scottish Labour and Co-operative MSP.

As leader of the Scottish Labour Party, I will always ensure that Co-operative values are at the heart of our vision for the more prosperous, progressive and just Scotland we all want to see.

Sharing wealth and power.

Promoting Co-operative values in the workplace and in society.

Celebrating the strength of common endeavour and collective action and solidarity.

That's what the Scottish Co-operative Party is all about.

That is what the Labour movement is all about.

And that is what my vision for a better Scotland is all about.



**Anas Sarwar**

Leader of Scottish Labour

Labour & Co-operative candidate for Glasgow

# Co-operative Growth





Scotland has a historic co-operative tradition, with approximately 600 co-operatives generating £1.9bn per annum in revenue and serving 700,000 members. The Scottish Co-operative Party believe the co-operative model can play a bigger role in delivering a more equitable, inclusive economy. The Scottish Government should look to deliver at least a doubling of the size of the co-operative economy – with development across diverse sectors.

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## Policy recommendations:

- **Establish a co-operative growth mandate for all Government delivered business support services – enhancing independent capacity for co-operative development across Scotland**
- Build co-operative development capacity with tailored co-operative business support services – including financial, legal, governance, and regulatory advice – with adequate resources to deliver sustained growth.
- **Ensure that the option to form a co-operative is signposted as part of the work of all enterprise agencies (Scottish Enterprise, Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE), and South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE) and by Business Gateway).**
- **Set a new ambitious national target for co-operative and mutual growth**
- This target should aim to more than double the size of the co-operative sector across Scotland by the end of the next parliamentary term.
- **Implement training and awareness on co-operative models for mainstream business support services across Scotland**
- Co-operative business support needs to be available in every region – ensuring all basic business advice includes co-op options.



- **The Scottish Government should reform procurement processes needed to ensure the system is open and accessible to co-ops and mutuals without unnecessary barriers to entry.**
- **Partner with universities, research centres and Scottish office of Innovate UK on promoting co-op and social business models.**
- **Ensure all innovation and R&D opportunities and programmes are open to new and existing co-ops and employee-owned businesses.**
- **Establish a formal Government convened peer-to-peer network for co-operatives across Scotland – enabling them to share best practice, knowledge transfer and more in facilitating and incubating development.**
- **Support the development of freelance co-operatives – incl. for agency workers and the self-employed – instructing Government-linked business support services and local authorities to promote the model.**

# Community Energy





Community owned renewable energy can help to transform Scotland's energy system and our relationship to it. Locally owned and generated energy puts Scotland's communities in control of their energy usage – facilitating the shift to net zero in a just and fair way. Whether its solar, wind or hydro, community energy projects are already delivering for communities across the country. The Scottish Government can do more to support their growth, ensuring every community has a scheme and access to clean, green energy.

Co-operative models can be highly effective at providing other energy delivery and efficiency projects – such as retrofitting and district heating networks. Community energy groups can be supported to diversify into retrofit services – helping increase demand for household energy efficiency upgrades. Improved energy efficiency will be pivotal in reducing household energy bills, with Scotland lagging other European nations on heat lost per hour. Scotland can also learn from world-leading examples in peer countries such as Denmark, which have developed widespread district heat networks operating on a co-operatively-owned model.

## Policy recommendations:

- **Double the funding for the Community & Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES)**

- CARES currently delivers 88% of development funding for community energy in Scotland and is highly regarded by the sector.

- **Establish a new Scottish Government energy procurement strategy**

- Bulk purchasing energy for the public sector from community energy groups – providing long-term purchase agreements for groups while lowering energy costs for the public sector.

- **Introduce new funding pot targeted at pre-development and early-stage capacity building work**

- Lack of pre-development support has been identified as a major gap in enabling community energy projects to start-up. A flexible funding pot would incentivise new developments.

- **Strengthen the shared ownership conditionality on offshore wind leasing rounds – ensuring there is a meaningful community owned equity stake in new offshore installation.**

- Denmark's mandatory 20% community-owned stake in offshore wind projects could serve as a model for leasing agreements.



- **Instruct local councils and planning authorities to fast-track community energy planning applications and waive local planning fees for new community energy groups.**
- **Support community energy groups to diversify into the delivery of retrofit and incentivise the development of new retrofit co-ops, providing one-stop-shop retrofit services – in domestic, public and commercial property.**
  - This requires new and existing funding pots for community energy groups to be targeted towards diversification into retrofit services and these projects to be eligible for existing business development services.
- **Promote co-operative ownership of district heating networks – learning from the Danish model of co-operative district heating networks.**
  - As in Denmark, co-operative district heating networks could be developed through the provision of low-cost finance, planning and technical support.

# Community Ownership



Community ownership empowers residents to reshape and reimagine their local areas, establishing new institutions and saving much-loved existing ones. For too long communities have felt powerless to ensure their local areas have the goods, services and amenities they need. A Scottish Labour Government can commit to strengthening community rights further – empowering local community groups to purchase a wider variety of assets more rapidly to drive community-led regeneration.



- **Reform Scotland's Community Right to Buy (CRtB) legislation**

- Establish the categorisation of 'Assets of Community Value' in Scottish Law – reflecting the legislation in England's Localism Act 2011. This would streamline the process for purchasing community assets, making the system more proactive and less burdensome. Consideration could be given to reforming the system of ministerial approval of each community asset purchase and transfer.
- Reduce geographical minimums and other growth restricting criteria.
- Increase the CRtB window from 8 months to 12 months for completion of purchase.
- Expand the CRtB to worker co-operatives wishing to purchase premises and assets during business closure, divestment or liquidation processes.

- **Create a new ringfenced Scottish National Investment Bank (SNIB) Fund for community ownership of assets – including renewable energy, land, and property.**

- **Increase funding and support for the Community Ownership Support Service (COSS) – which is directly funded by the Scottish Government to grow community ownership.**

# Employee Ownership



Employee ownership is a growing trend across the UK economy – providing workers with an ownership stake in their workplace. This model delivers a range of benefits to both workers and businesses – leading to improved productivity, business resilience and job satisfaction.

As many business owners prepare to exit from their workplace, the Scottish Government can play a pivotal role in ensuring workers across Scotland can capitalise from the benefits of employee ownership. New support, funding and publicly available information could make a step-change in increasing the rate of employee ownership across Scotland.

## Policy recommendations:



- **Establish Scottish National Investment Bank (SNIB) finance fund for facilitating employee ownership transitions.**
- **Launch an awareness raising campaign within business support services - targeting older business owners and highlighting employee ownership transition opportunities.**
- **Establish a statutory duty on business advice services in Scotland to inform companies about employee ownership options. This should be particularly targeted at companies at risk of closure or divestment.**

# Transport



Many Scottish communities are under served by existing public transport provision – leading to lack of access to public services, work opportunities and social activity. The Scottish Government will need to look beyond existing models of public transport – to incorporate greater co-operative and mutual models at the core of provision.



- **Create fund to scale community and co-operative transport in rural and remote areas – incl. grant and loans scheme for vehicle purchase.**
- **Run a national funding competition with universities, research centres and the co-operative sector to promote platform co-operative transport alternatives in rural and remote areas.**
- **Establish new consumer and worker voice bodies in publicly owned transport provision, including ScotRail and CalMac ferries. This will enable greater accountability and responsiveness to consumer demand.**
- **Amend Scottish Community Right to Buy legislation to designate bus routes as assets of community value (ACVs).**
- This will help to safeguard vital transport connectivity for communities across Scotland.

# Housing



Many residents across Scotland struggle to access high quality, affordable housing. The Scottish Co-operative Party believe co-operative and community-led housing can play a far greater role in delivering long-term affordable and secure housing to residents. Co-operative housing delivers a unique combination of benefits – affordability, resident empowerment, community development and long-term tenure. These combined benefits have made co-operative housing a leading and attractive tenure in countries across the world, including Norway, Germany and Switzerland. There's no reason why Scotland should not have the same.

Many apartment and tenement residents in Scotland suffer from poor estate management delivered by commercial 'factors' – which maintain and manage shared communal spaces. The factor system often suffers from a lack of accountability, high costs and little resident involvement. Residents could be empowered through the promotion and development of co-operative factor management across Scotland.

## Policy recommendations:



- **Launch a three-year pilot programme led by the Scottish Government to develop housing co-operatives in different settings across Scotland.**
- **Instruct Scottish Housing Regulator to review the regulatory environment for social housing to ensure it supports and incentivises the development of co-operative housing.**
  - This could include placing a statutory duty on the Scottish Housing Regulator to promote all Registered Social Landlords housing models especially housing co-operatives.
- **Establish a new framework for local authorities to support co-operative housing and community-land trusts – including reforming the planning process and social value criteria.**
- **Designate housing co-ops with asset locks as ‘community transfer bodies’, to allow them to make asset transfer requests – of land and property- under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.**
- **Partner with universities to support the development of student housing co-operatives, learning from Edinburgh Student Housing Co-op.**
- **Promote the co-operative model for housing factors in estate management**
  - This could include establishing a ‘right to co-operative factor management’ and a ‘right to recall’ factors performing poorly.

# Land Reform



Land ownership in Scotland is more concentrated than almost any country on Earth, with an estimated 67% of Scotland's private rural land owned by just 0.025% of the population. Previous Scottish Labour & Co-operative Government's have advanced legislation to improve equity and access to land, including the Abolition of Feudal Tenure 2000 and the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. These acts advanced citizens and communities' rights to a fairer land system and it is now time to go forward in creating a land system which works for modern Scotland.

## Policy recommendations:



- **Review the case for further land reform measures to promote community ownership – for example, the introduction of a land tax or maximum holding rules (additional tax over certain holdings).**
- **Partner with Community Land Scotland and Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS) in the creation of a new national strategy for the promotion of community-owned land.**
- **Provide consideration for enacting the recommendations of the Land Reform Review Group Final Report 2014.**
- **Explore the introduction of compulsory sales orders on long-term vacant and derelict property and land.**
- **Create national roadmap for the long-term introduction of a Land Value Tax to replace Council Tax throughout Scotland.**
- **A new Land Value Tax would reduce land hoarding and speculation – promoting productive use of land.**

# Community Wealth Building



Local authorities across Scotland have been taking a leading role in enacting community wealth building strategies, using public procurement to support local co-operatives and expand the social economy. Supporting the development of diverse ownership business models helps to retain wealth generated from economic activity in the local economy. Promoting community ownership and co-operatives also works to achieve the decentralisation of power – empowering local authorities and communities to shape their local areas.

## Policy recommendations:



- **Support large public sector institutions to act as anchor institutions for local co-operatives and the social economy.**
- **Review and reform the rules around public procurement to increase social value creation as a core criterion in the decision-making process on contracts and tenders.**
- **Align co-operative development support to new community wealth building strategies – ensuring there is a pipeline of social economy providers to deliver the strategy.**

# Health & Social Care



Scotland deserves a health and care service fit for the future, meeting the diverse needs of residents across the country. The primary care and social care system suffers from a crisis in accessibility and availability – meaning health issues often go untreated and worsen. Co-operative alternatives in primary and social care can empower patients and staff – creating a more democratic and accountable system. The Scottish Government can play a leading role in incentivising the development of a more co-operative care system – in social care, dental care and GP practices.

## Policy recommendations:



- **Prioritise supporting the development of co-operative models for social care and primary provision including providing enhanced funding and resources to deliver this objective.**
- **Partner with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) in raising awareness about advantages of the co-operative model to care delivery – supporting new initiatives.**

# Fan Ownership & Social Clubs



*'Football without fans is nothing'* – in the famous words of Jock Stein, former Celtic & Scotland Manager. But for many supporters they feel increasingly alienated from the football system and their historic clubs. The Scottish Government should look to ensure the voice of fans remains strong within clubs and the wider football system. Fan ownership – commonplace in Spain and Germany – should be supported and encouraged by the Scottish Government. Social clubs are often central to the social lives of communities – creating community bonds and cohesion over generations. With many now at risk of loss or closure, the Scottish Government should look to ensure they can be purchased by local community groups and investors.

## Policy recommendations:



- **The Scottish Government should establish a national plan to support fan ownership – including opportunities for minority or partial fan ownership stakes.**
- **Include social clubs in a Scottish Government commitment to double the size of the co-operative sector.**
- **Establish Scottish Social Clubs Charter – with the goal of safeguarding the social club model and facilitating its revival.**
  - The new Scottish Social Clubs Charter should include new rules on training, planning and licensing.
- **Ensure social clubs form part of the proposed Assets of Community Value (ACV) categorisation in a reformed Scottish Community Right to Buy.**

# Agricultural Co-operatives



Agricultural co-operatives have been a mainstay of the Scottish rural economy for over 100 years – providing benefits to their members in the farming community. Scotland’s agricultural co-ops make a significant contribution to the economy, with a combined revenue of approximately £1.4bn per annum. Yet compared to other comparative nations, such as the Netherlands and New Zealand, there is more to be done to grow the co-operative sector’s share of overall agriculture revenue. A Scottish Labour Government could work to ensure this equitable model of business can compete domestically and globally to deliver for Scotland’s farmers and fishers.



- **Establish an Agricultural Co-operation Support Service**

- Establish a support service which promotes the co-operative model across the agricultural sector – spreading awareness of benefits, governance, and expanding partnerships between existing co-ops.

The service could have the objective of raising the level of co-operative agriculture output towards European peer nations – i.e. Netherlands (70%), Denmark (80%), Finland (79%).

- **Review the case for rolling out the Fruit & Vegetable Aid Scheme to other agricultural producers to upgrade equipment and facilities**

- The existing successful scheme has improved sectoral efficiency and competitiveness. This should be available to dairy co-operative producers.

# Mutual Financial Services



Mutual financial services can be transformative to the lives of their members – enabling people to save and invest in themselves and their loved ones. Scotland has a growing credit union sector, with around 90 credit unions, serving over 400,000 members, with assets of £629m. Credit unions and building societies are more likely to provide physical access to financial services, through branches and access to cash – which can be a vital lifeline for those living in isolated or remote areas. The Scottish Government could boost financial inclusion for people across Scotland by promoting the growth of credit unions and building societies to meet the needs of underserved communities.

## Policy recommendations:



- **Support the creation of an auto-enrolment of public sector employees into local credit unions across Scotland.**
- **Ensure credit unions have a central role in the Scottish Government's strategy and plans to improve financial inclusion for people and communities across Scotland.**
- **Co-operatives should have the environment they need to thrive in emerging industries across Scotland. In the technology sector, new co-operative models are emerging as an alternative to big platform providers, such as Uber and Airbnb, and for software developers.**

# Creative & Technology Industries



Scotland is home to a significant share of the UK's creative industries, with Glasgow and Edinburgh being key creative centres and Dundee home to world-leading Rockstar North Games. In the creative industries, co-operatives and employee owned models can provide workers with greater job security, reduced administrative burden and a greater stake in their workplace. The Scottish Government should look to expand their presence in these high-value sectors by working with external partners, including universities, research centres and the wider social economy eco-system.



- **Specialist support for creative industries incorporating co-operative, employee owned and community owned models**

- Ensure co-operative development resources are available and targeted at the creative and tech industries in Scotland. This could include providing similar resources and services to the West Midlands Ownership Hub in creative and tech clusters in Edinburgh and Glasgow.
- Promote secondary co-operatives to help scale-up creative industry SMEs and co-ops. These secondary co-operatives could provide shared infrastructure which would reduce overheads and increase competitiveness.

- **Ensure business accelerators, incubation hubs and university research centres support and develop co-operative and mutual business models**

- Scotland has an elite university sector, with research and innovation centres that have developed innovative spin-out companies. Scotland accounts for nearly one fifth of university spin-out deals – with the University of Edinburgh and the University of Strathclyde producing the most new starts.
- The Scottish Government should work with universities to ensure their business support and research centres can support the development of new spin-out companies in co-operative and democratic business models. This should include providing training opportunities on these business models for advisers working in or with universities to establish new spin-outs.

# Education & Childcare



Education is an integral value of the co-operative movement and has been present since its inception. A co-operative approach in education and training helps to raise the voice of students, parents, guardians and teachers – creating a more accountable education and early years system.

Co-operative models of childcare can deliver high-quality wrap-around care. As members of the childcare co-operative, parents and workers can be empowered by the model. Supporting this equitable approach to childcare would help to deliver much needed high-quality care for children and parents across Scotland.

To achieve sustained growth of the co-operative model long-term, students should learn about the co-operative movement, its history and its advantages as a business model. Ensuring co-operative education forms part of the curriculum would be an effective way to build up wider recognition for the value of the model.

## Policy recommendations:



- **Support the development of new and existing co-operative childcare provision – including parent-led co-operative models – through business support services.**
- **Introduce the co-operative model and history of the co-operative movement to the Scottish curriculum in appropriate subjects (economics, sociology, history, business studies, etc.) at every level – schools, further education and higher education.**
- **Increase citizen participation and involvement in education executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies.**
- **Establish greater democratic structures within Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate – providing greater voice for parents, workers and citizens to take part in decision making.**

# Fair Trade & a Right to Food



Scotland holds the status of a Fair Trade Nation – reflecting its commitment to fairer trading practices with the Global South. The Scottish Government could go further in embedding fair trade in its procurement and operations – spreading awareness of the benefits and impact of fair trade.

Food insecurity remains a problem across Scotland – with it affecting around 1 in 10 children and adults. Food poverty has a significant impact on children’s development and lifelong health. A new ‘Right to Food’ would be a major preventative measure for health conditions and should be introduced into Scots Law.

## Policy recommendations:



- **Further strengthen public procurement criteria to promote Fairtrade products and agreements in central and local government supply chains. This could include the introduction of targets and reporting for fair trade procurement.**
- **Legislate for a 'Right to Food' in Scots Law.**



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