

Scottish Government Programme 2021-22

Introduction

The Scottish Government has published its programme for 2021-22. This sets out its legislative programme and other administrative actions. As is usual not all the programme is new. It includes the continuation of existing programmes and proposals to act on previously announced policy as well as the list of legislation they intend to take through in this parliamentary year. This briefing looks at the most significant elements for UNISON members.

Recovery from Covid

This is described as the first and most pressing priority. Publication of a recovery strategy for government (“and partners”) is to be published soon. This will be aimed at those hardest hit by the pandemic. A focus is promised on those on low incomes with training and employment support for those furthest from the labour market, supporting the wellbeing of children and young people, who we know have been adversely affected by the pandemic. Consultation will be carried out on what legislative measures may be needed and there will be a COVID Recovery Bill in the first year of Parliament.

Economy

Support is promised for developing green skills and jobs with an additional £500 million “to support the new, good and green jobs of the future, including upskilling and reskilling people to access those”. The Young Person’s Guarantee is to be delivered on giving every young person who wants it the opportunity of a job, place in education or training, or formal volunteering. A net zero carbon economy is a stated aim and there are a number of initiatives to advance this including a just transition fund and a green job fund as well as investment in improving housing standards. A Community Wealth Building Bill to enable greater community and third sector ownership of assets is planned. A ten-year strategy for economic transformation is to be developed. In the meantime there will be a £33bn spend on Infrastructure. Attracting overseas investment remains a goal. While many of the individual policies will rely on public services to be delivered, there is little sign in the PfG that services themselves are seen as a source of economic regeneration. Instead the emphasis remains on infrastructure.

Social Care Reform

Legislation on care reform is promised by June 2022. This will be accompanied by a 25% spending increase. The National Care Service that is being proposed will not itself deliver care. Instead, it will be a national agency which funds and regulates the existing network of Integration Joint Boards who currently commission and procure social care. These in turn will be reformed and their responsibilities expanded. All adult and children’s social work and social care, including; alcohol and drug services and mental health services; community justice services and prison social care; all community health services including general practice (GPs). Embedding fair work principles as part of the reforms is promised.



KEY POINTS:

- **This new Scottish Government programme sets out legislation and plans for the coming year.**
- **Budget decisions are still to be made.**
- **The focus is on COVID recovery and social care reform.**
- **A ten-year strategy for economic transformation is to be developed.**



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Local Government

The promised COVID recovery strategy will, the government insist, “outline a shared vision with local government”. Other than a commitment to a human rights-based approach there are few details as to what this will involve. Whilst there are some promises of extra funding for areas the Government deem a priority (e.g. extra funding for play parks) the sector as a whole receives little consideration.

Further discussions will be had on reforming the Council Tax but no legislation is planned for replacement in this parliament. Duties on local government to promote sustainable development will be legislated for. There is no acknowledgement of the financial crisis facing councils. A fiscal framework for councils is promised – but as this is mentioned in connection with a variety of tax reliefs it hardly builds confidence. There is no reference to current or future pay settlements.

Health

One of the reasons so little progress has been made on last year’s legislative programme has been the focus on Brexit. The programme repeats the government’s line on the single market, customs union and its preparations for a ‘no deal’ scenario. It will not support Legislative Consent Motions on the UK Withdrawal Act. The programme announces the intention to increase frontline health spend each year so it is at least £2.5 billion higher by 2026-27, and increase primary care spend by 25% (nb: the extent to which this will be separate to the planned 25% increase in social care spend isn’t entirely clear). Mental Health spend is to increase by 25% and £250m extra over the course of this parliament is to go into tackling drug deaths. Hoped for improvements are to be based not just on investment, but on service redesign: A&E units and cancer services are specifically mentioned in this context. There is to be an across-the-board scaling up of digital care and greater use of video consultations. These will be extended to social care services this year, including care homes and housing support. As with the previously announced NHS recovery plan there are questions around whether staffing at necessary levels is possible.

Education

Early Years & School Age: Free early learning and childcare will be extended to 1 and 2 year olds, starting in this Parliament with children from low-income households. A new system of wraparound childcare for school age children will be developed with a 5-year delivery plan (nb: this measure is being implemented to promote employment not child development). Councils will be funded to recruit 500 additional classroom assistants.

FE & HE: A response is promised to the Scottish Funding Council’s review of provision, and the development (with the SFC) of an estates strategy for colleges. There will also be a review of purpose-built student accommodation taking in regulation and affordability. To improve student mental health 80 counsellors will be recruited in universities and colleges in the next two years. Much of the National Transition Training Fund (NTTF), aimed at supporting key sectors to recover from the pandemic, and enabling future skills transitions, will be directed towards Colleges and universities.

Legislation

There are 15 bills proposed, 12 of these new. Some continue arrangements put in place during the pandemic. With the exception of the Coronavirus Recovery Bill and the National Care Services Bill, they do not have public services as their focus. Some e.g. Gender Recognition and Good Food Nation are in line with UNISON policies and priorities. A draft bill to control private rents is promised by 2025, further delaying action.

Further info

The full Programme for Government (123 pages) is [here](#)

The First Minister’s Statement announcing the Programme is [here](#)

Legislative programme is [here](#)

NHS Recovery Plan is [here](#)

