



SOCIAL
ENTERPRISE
SCOTLAND



Building Wealth, Building Community

A Manifesto For Scotland's Future Economy

Introduction

Social enterprises, development trusts, co-operatives, community owned business and other impact enterprises are the beating heart of local economies across Scotland.

With commitment, passion and innovation they're regenerating neighbourhoods in urban and rural areas, empowering the most excluded and vulnerable people and improving our precious natural environment.

It's essential that politicians genuinely listen to and learn from the lived experiences of social enterprises and the people they serve, as well as adopt the forward-looking policies in this manifesto.

It's equally important that we look to other countries to see what Scotland could achieve if we raise the ceiling on our ambitions – from entire communities organised for the

common good to co-operative rail operators and so much more.

With an increasing awareness that good legislation too often fails to translate into genuine, real-world impacts in our local communities, social enterprises are getting on with the job and demonstrating how practical innovation can bridge the gap between legislative intent and lived experience.

According to the latest Social Enterprise Census there are over 6000 social enterprises in Scotland, generating almost £3 billion for Scotland's economy and employing over 90,000 people.

This is a significant increase since the study started in 2015, when there was a £1.68bn economic contribution and just over 5000 social enterprises.

This impressive and significant economic impact should be celebrated, but there's so much more potential.

Social enterprises form part of a wider landscape of inclusive, democratic business models, including cooperatives, employee-owned businesses, development trusts and community enterprises, that are increasingly working together to transform our economy.

With many more social enterprises and social impact businesses we could see genuine and inclusive economic growth, more quality jobs, a big boost in productivity and the democratic renewal that Scotland urgently needs.

Firstly, we urge all political leaders,

parties and election candidates to support the full implementation of existing policy initiatives:

- [Community Wealth Building](#)
- [Fair Work](#)
- [Public service reform](#)
- [Inclusive, Democratic Business Models \(IDBM\) independent report](#)

We must ensure that these are all adequately funded and fully implemented.

We urge all politicians and officials to raise their ambitions in every other policy area and support this manifesto of affordable, achievable, real-world policies, that will drive the growth of our economy. Financial and cost implications are at the end of this document.

We need to create a new economy that is democratic, sustainable and just. Scotland cannot overcome these challenges by making minor tweaks to the status quo. We must embrace bold new ideas to transform the economy

Miriam Brett, Future Economy Scotland

A Manifesto for Scotland's Future Economy

We're the Heart of Scotland's Economy

Social enterprises are at the beating heart of every local economy in Scotland - creating jobs, delivering vital services, and reinvesting in their communities. Their contribution must be recognised not only in words, but in decision-making and they deserve a permanent seat at the table across all government business and economic forums.

As the current 10-year Social Enterprise Strategy and final Action Plan draw to a close in 2026, we're calling for renewed and long-term investment in Scotland's world-renowned social

enterprise ecosystem. But this moment demands more than continuity - it calls for ambition.

The next strategy should go further, championing social enterprise as part of a broader movement toward inclusive, democratic business.

This means fully integrating social enterprise into all relevant economic strategies and policies - positioning it not on the sidelines, but as a business model of first choice for entrepreneurs, communities and the next generation of change-makers.



Investing in a Fairer Economy

To ensure higher wages, job security and a sustainable economy, Scotland must deliver growth through bold implementation.

To translate rhetoric into action we need to deliver a long-term, strategic funding framework for social enterprises and inclusive, democratic business models (IDBMs).

That means multi-year, inflation-adjusted grants as standard, so organisations can plan confidently and scale impact, avoiding the

volatility of annual funding.

Empower the Scottish National Investment Bank (SNIB) to apply a more flexible definition of return that includes social and environmental impact, not just profit, fulfilling its founding role as a mission-led impact investor.

We also need immediate action to allocate a meaningful share of the Dormant Assets Scheme to the social economy in Scotland, as it remains underutilised and fragmented compared to the rest of the UK.

OUR BIG ASK: Commit to sustainable, long-term investment in the infrastructure and leadership that underpins the social enterprise ecosystem; investment that rises with inflation and is secured through mechanisms such as the Dormant Assets Scheme.

Social Enterprise in Action

Red Chair Highland

Red Chair Highland, an early-stage social enterprise based in Inverness delivers digital inclusion services with a mission to ensure that everyone, regardless of age or circumstance, has access to the digital tools they need to thrive. [Find out more.](#)

Radio City Association

Radio City Association promotes sustainability and energy self-sufficiency in the Garnock Valley and has set out to construct Scotland's first subsidy free, 100% community-owned onshore wind turbine. [Find out more.](#)

Better Public Services

Scotland's public services, like our NHS, are the backbone of a fair society but they must evolve to meet the scale of today's challenges.

Reform, innovation, prevention, early intervention and service user voice are not optional but urgent.

To unlock this, we must harness the skills and knowledge of social enterprises in designing and delivering local public services.

With more social enterprises in social care, childcare, energy, food, transport, culture and more we'll achieve both value for taxpayers and flexible, person-centred services that respond to human needs.

This must also include direct, meaningful involvement of service users in the NHS, ScotRail, Scottish Water and other public services.

OUR BIG ASK: Embed social enterprises and IDBMs into the reform of public services at both national and local levels, ensuring delivery models are democratic and rooted in their local communities.

Social Enterprise in Action

Glenfarg Community Transport Group

Established by the local Community Council, the Glenfarg Community Transport Group provides flexible and accessible community-led solutions in response to unmet local transport needs. It often represents the only means of transport for many vulnerable and isolated people, often older people or people with disabilities.

[Find out more.](#)

Shore Psychology

Shore Psychology is a new social enterprise committed to providing expert, evidence-based mental health support services and using their profits to support charity partners and advance psychological therapies. [Find out more.](#)

West Granton Housing Co-op

West Granton Housing Co-operative Limited was formed by residents in 1990 to provide new rented housing to the West Granton area of north Edinburgh. They currently have over 370 properties, and use all surpluses to benefit its member tenants. [Find out more.](#)



Shore Psychology

Glenfarg Community Transport



Social Value Through Procurement

The social economy can drive economic growth, particularly when social enterprises and other inclusive businesses are embedded in public and private sector supply chains.

For this to happen we must invest in social enterprise capacity building, ensuring they are contract-ready, scalable and equipped to deliver.

We need to incentivise demand through initiatives like an expanded Buy Social Scotland

Business Pledge – encouraging more organisations to buy from social enterprises.

A new dynamic purchasing system would make it easier for buyers to access suppliers, while consortium building support would allow impact businesses to collaborate, pool capacity and successfully bid for large contracts.

Unlocking this means stronger local economies, transforming how we deliver public and private sector value.

OUR BIG ASK: Hardwire social value into every public contract, with real weighting and ring fence reserved contracts for IDBMs.

Partnerships in Practice

Scotland's Bravest & McTaggart Construction

McTaggart Construction supports social impact demonstrated by their investment of over £400,000 in social enterprises, and recent partnership with Scotland's Bravest for site signage, providing veterans with employment. [Read more.](#)

ILM Highland & Highland Council

ILM Highland is a social enterprise delivering environmental and community-driven solutions across the Highlands since 1994. Since 2006, ILM Highland have held a partnership with the Highland Council, providing waste management and resource efficiency services as well as community support initiatives. [Read more.](#)

Grassmarket Community Project & Laing O'Rourke

Grassmarket Community Project's partnership with global construction firm Laing O'Rourke, during the completion of their work on St James Quarter, created vital income and meaningful employment opportunities for its members through providing them with canteen services. [Read more.](#)

Green Economy

We must recognise, support and invest in our green social enterprises and community-owned energy schemes. They deliver over 100 times more local economic benefit per megawatt than privately-owned schemes and provide high-quality, local green jobs.

By embedding community-ownership

requirements in renewable energy policy, creating targeted financial incentives for community-led decarbonisation, and enabling social-enterprise-led retrofit and insulation programmes, Scotland can accelerate the transition to net zero, tackle the climate emergency, and deliver a Just Transition that keeps wealth, skills, and decision-making in local hands.

OUR BIG ASK: Put community ownership at the centre of Scotland's renewable energy strategy, backed by investment, enabling legislation, and long-term contracts to ensure profits stay in local economies.

Social Enterprise in Action

Changeworks

Changeworks is a leading organisation dedicated to decarbonising Scotland's homes and a just transition to net zero, through providing energy advice and decarbonisation solutions, alongside independent consultancy. [Find out more.](#)

Furniture Plus

Based in Fife, Furniture Plus actively combats poverty and social exclusion, especially homelessness, through re-using, recycling and repairing furniture and other household goods which may have otherwise gone to landfill. [Find out more.](#)

Moray Waste Busters

Founded in 2002, Moray Waste Busters started as a food recycling site and has since transitioned into a thriving social enterprise with the goal of reducing waste by saving items from landfills and promoting their reuse. [Find out more.](#)

Point and Sandwick Trust

Point and Sandwick Trust is a charitable organisation based in the Outer Hebrides that uses the income of community generated wind power to support local social, cultural, educational and environmental development. [Find out more.](#)



Pride Outside

Dechomai



Value in Every Voice

Economic prosperity can only be achieved when businesses employ and work with people who represent the reality of Scotland's communities.

Government must continue to pro-actively support and promote equality, diversity and inclusion in employment and business.

While some big businesses start to look backwards, social enterprises are mapping the way forwards in

empowering women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ people.

Guarantee that equality, diversity, and inclusion are not just statements of intent but built into the DNA of Scotland's economy by setting measurable representation targets for decision-making bodies, advisory groups, and boards across government, public services, and economic development agencies.

OUR BIG ASK: Ensure that social enterprises which already lead the way in reflecting Scotland's diversity – are permanently represented in these spaces, with lived experience recognised as equal to professional expertise in shaping policy and investment decisions.

Social Enterprise in Action

Dechomai

Dechomai is a social enterprise, passionate about empowering global majority individuals with leadership and enterprise skills. This is achieved through supporting their members' innovation, businesses and dreams through strategic partnerships and expertise. [**Find out more.**](#)

LEx Scotland

Working across the country, LEx Scotland support and empower people from diverse backgrounds with lived experience of social injustice and marginalisation. They are committed to finding innovative and radical approaches for co-creating transformative change. [**Find out more.**](#)

Proud Futures

Proud Futures work with organisations to develop LGBTQ+ leadership, training and wellbeing programmes that create real culture change. Their approach combines strategic insight with lived experience to support long-term, meaningful change. [**Find out more.**](#)

Global Scotland

Just like Scotch Whisky and Scottish Salmon, Scotland's international reputation for social enterprise development is world-class, as evidenced by the Social Enterprise World Forum, founded in Scotland. This is still not widely known.

Social enterprise case studies

must be at the heart of all international strategies around marketing Scotland, including Brand Scotland and related initiatives, trade, investment, culture and tourism, actively showcasing the achievements and impact of Scottish social enterprises in building a wellbeing economy.

OUR BIG ASK: Incorporate social enterprise and IDBMs into Brand Scotland, showcasing Scotland as a global leader in Inclusive and Democratic Business Models, backed by promotion in trade, tourism and investment campaigns.

Social Enterprise in Action

Buy Social Scotland

Buy Social Scotland national initiative is a campaign that supports Scottish social enterprises to sell their products and services locally, nationally and globally. Through facilitating this, Buy Social Scotland makes it easier than ever for both consumers and organisations to generate positive social impact. [Find out more.](#)

Gender in Emergencies Group

The Gender in Emergencies Group is a feminist social enterprise and non-profit dedicated to advancing gender equality in humanitarian action. Their humanitarian work is supported through providing equality training and expertise. [Find out more.](#)

Shetland Soap Company

Shetland Soap Company works alongside people with a learning disability or autism, to produce a range of soap and skincare products inspired by the Scottish islands. All of their products are handmade locally in Lerwick. [Find out more.](#)



Measuring Our Social Impact

We need a user friendly, simple, affordable and universal toolkit for social/environmental impact measurement.

This should be a Scottish standard for businesses, charities and all organisations, to inform decision-making for government and investors and when awarding contracts.

The process must be led by social enterprise, voluntary and private sector national bodies, working with financial support from government and/or funders, with consideration of Fair Work criteria and the Business Purpose initiative.

OUR BIG ASK: Develop and adopt a clear, national metric that captures all of Scotland's public bodies, private businesses and IDBMs' social, environmental, and economic impact that is co-designed with the social economy sector and embedded into national economic reporting.

Smarter Regulation

We need a review of all regulation that affects social enterprises, including OSCR and specialist sector regulators like the Scottish Housing Regulator, integrated with a review of UK bodies, including the CIC regulator within Companies House.

The outcome should prioritise saving taxpayers money with

potential mergers, better integration and communication, as well as creating a more strategic landscape for social enterprise and economic growth.

This must also pro-actively facilitate simplicity and minimal administrative burdens for organisations.

OUR BIG ASK: Establish a regulatory environment that recognises and supports the distinct nature of social enterprises, starting with a full review of all regulation affecting the sector in Scotland, and pressing the UK Government to strengthen the CIC regulator.

The Tech Revolution

Digital tools, the birth of Artificial Intelligence (AI), remote working technologies and automation hold huge potential to improve lives, business operations and our environment.

They must be implemented ethically and democratically, with proper regulation, involving social

enterprises and other social impact businesses.

When government is consulting, producing strategies and launching investment around technology opportunities, these must take into account the needs of social enterprises, with funding support for implementation.

OUR BIG ASK: Fund and empower social enterprises to close Scotland's digital skills gap and lead inclusive, ethical technology innovation.

Social Enterprise in Action

Cyber and Fraud Centre Scotland

Cyber and Fraud Centre Scotland deliver accessible, affordable and relevant cyber and fraud services, protecting organisations all over Scotland. They reinvest in their community and ensure that all private, public and third sector organisations have access to the resources to stay secure. [Find out more.](#)

Showcase the Street

Showcase the Street is an award-winning social enterprise based in Dundee. Their Showcase Tech Hub uses virtual reality, gaming and technology to support students facing barriers to education, for stroke rehabilitation, as well as for entertainment purposes in their community. [Find out more.](#)

StudioFV

Paisley-based StudioFV offers video production, photography, graphic design, social media management and screen hire to organisations and businesses throughout Scotland. All profit go towards their mission of combatting social isolation and working with those who face barriers to employment. [Find out more.](#)



Wealth and asset ownership are the defining features of all economies and that to address poverty and make better environmental choices, we need more people and communities to own economic activity and assets.

Neil Mcinroy, EDAS

In addition to this manifesto, we encourage you to support the policies from organisations such as:

The Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland, SCVO, Community Land Scotland, Community Energy Scotland, Scottish Community Alliance, Circular Communities Scotland, the Poverty Alliance, SURF, DTAS, Employee Ownership Association and Cooperatives UK.



Costs and Financial Implications

We understand and appreciate the costs and financial implications of any public policy initiative:

- These policies are about shifting to prevention and early intervention – this means that any upfront costs would be easily returned in better public finance outcomes.
- All of our policies are a direct investment in Scotland's economy, people and local communities.
- The prevailing political narrative of “no money left” is untrue and government must examine new, creative ways to unlock finance for public good.

To raise finance for additional investment government and public agencies can:

- Maximise Income Tax returns, including attracting skilled people from other parts of the UK to live and work in Scotland.
- Reform and then replace Council Tax.
- Review the practical financial and economic impacts of non-domestic (business) rates, with potential reforms.
- Take action on introducing land and potential additional property taxes.
- Raise more tax income from large scale renewables.
- Attract private sector investment.
- Ensure that public sector pensions are invested in Scotland's communities wherever possible.
- Tackle all tax avoidance and evasion within the devolved context.
- Make public sector efficiency savings, including technology innovations and social enterprise/community delivery of public services.
- Work in close partnership with the UK Government on these issues, as appropriate, as well as work on the many reserved tax and fiscal levers, including tax reliefs for social investment.

Our Policy Approach



- Social Enterprise Scotland is committed to formulating and promoting clear, affordable and practical policy solutions, supported by case studies and evidence whenever possible.
- We believe in a partnership approach, where we pro-actively break down barriers with the public and private sectors to achieve shared outcomes.
- We understand the financial realities that government, parliament and local authorities are operating within.
- We clearly see how legislation and regulations do not always translate into practical, real-world impacts. This is the big challenge of the implementation gap.
- We strongly believe that there's room for much greater ambition, imagination and new ideas in government policy-making, that drives social enterprise growth and therefore Scotland's economy, meaning many powerful, positive impacts for people's lives.

For any questions or comments about this manifesto, please get in contact with **Duncan** or **Andy** in the Social Enterprise Scotland policy team.