

## **SCPO Briefing Paper 9/4**

### **Briefings from Manifestos – 3**

### **POVERTY, SOCIAL JUSTICE &**

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

*This is one of a series of SCPO Briefing Papers in which we are taking the topics identified by the churches as key election issues and summarising the Manifesto commitments on these themes of the parties now represented in Parliament. In the new situation, all of these are significant background to coming policy.*

#### **Banking**

- Labour would develop community banking schemes and would work with the commercial banking sector to ensure that all communities have access to basic banking facilities without having to pay for them.
- The Greens would develop an Ethical Financial Services strategy.

#### **Community**

- The SNP would pilot a community empowerment scheme giving deprived communities the ability to opt for empowered status, allowing local people to co-manage a proportion of public spending and services. They would consult on measures to enable new models of community management of facilities within local authority control, such as parks or libraries, to ensure that local people get the best use out of them. They would also consider ways to transfer under-used public assets into community ownership without the need for ministerial approval, where community benefit can be clearly demonstrated. The Lib Dems also want opportunities for communities to manage local libraries, parks, sports facilities and other spaces and services where local people want it. The Lib Dem model would see local people form appropriate management bodies responsible for day-to-day running, with their own devolved budget, but remaining within the strategic control of the principal local authority. The Greens want to ensure that decisions are taken at the most local level possible too, with communities participating in decision-making, especially in the planning system.
- Labour would ask Highlands and Islands Enterprise to bring forward a report on an all-Scotland approach to support the development of social enterprise.
- Labour would establish Town Centre Trusts which would be tasked with developing local plans for town centre regeneration. They would also invest an initial £50m into a Town Centre Turnaround Fund which would refocus derelict buildings and contaminated land funds, and historic and townscape heritage funds to pump more investment into small towns. The £50m would be a primer to attract public and private funding. Conservatives would establish a Town Centre Regeneration Fund, worth £20m every year, available to towns for regeneration projects. The Lib Dems want to see more innovative local funding vehicles to lever in private investment and work towards a National Regeneration Fund, creating a partnership between the public and private sectors to support infrastructure costs, land remediation, mixed use developments and environmental improvements.

- Labour would establish a new community environment standard and set up an action team of NGOs and others to improve access to greenspace for families and children. Children and young people would also be involved in planning play and activity areas.
- The Lib Dems would put in place a legislative presumption against the sale of urban greenspace and playing fields for development; but in the limited cases where sales are allowed "every single penny" from the sales would go to improving local greenspace and expanding activity opportunities.
- The Lib Dems want a new Common Good Act to modernise the framework for land; property or funds to be held in trust for the local community; and allow the revitalisation of common good funds where local people can have access to money to regenerate local communities and spaces.
- The Greens would introduce a Sustainable Communities Bill to replace top-down Regeneration Outcome Agreements with Community Service Agreements to provide local residents with a meaningful say in determining mainstream service priorities. The Bill would also reform the Scottish Enterprise 'Business Gateway' to support new ways of stimulating business formation and growth (including social enterprise) in disadvantaged communities; it would require that at least 5-10% of land in regeneration areas is kept in some form of community ownership and that at least 10% of public spending goes through social enterprises by 2012.

### **Debt**

- The SNP want to establish a Scottish Lenders Code of Conduct setting minimum standards for lending practices with appropriate safeguards against exploitation.
- Labour wanted to get tough on loan sharks and, to this end, would ensure appropriate surveillance evidence is admissible in court; provide increased protection to witnesses; and introduce Serious Crime Prevention Orders to exclude loan sharks from the communities they prey on.

### **Employment**

- Labour want the Full Employment Agency to work closely with the UK Government to help 100,000 people off benefit and into work by 2015. They would end 16-19 year olds not being in employment, education or training; reduce the number of adults on incapacity benefit; and help lone parents into work and training.

### **Income**

- The SNP are committed to cohesion - for the wealth of every region to increase and for there to be a 10% reduction in GDP disparity per head between the richest and poorest parts of Scotland.
- Post-independence, the SNP plan to develop a fully integrated tax and benefit system to guarantee every citizen a minimum income, remove financial barriers to work, and help people lift themselves out of poverty. Prior to independence they would work to reduce dependency by improving educational and economic opportunities, particularly in areas of deprivation. The Greens also support a citizens income scheme, which would replace all tax allowances and most welfare benefits and it would be set a level to provide basic shelter, food, clothing and heating.
- The SNP said that they would set specific targets to increase the proportion of national wealth held by each of the lowest 6 income deciles.

- As part of the Healthy Green Homes initiative, the Lib Dems would support the introduction of Warm Zones to target fuel poor households and ensure they receive the funding support available to them.
- The Greens would end age discrimination in the minimum wage.

### **Miscellaneous**

- Labour would establish a national anti-poverty unit, working for social justice, reporting directly to the First Minister.
- Labour and the Lib Dems wanted to supplement GDP with other measures, such as indicators of wider well being and quality of life. The Greens also said that Government decision making should take account of sustainability and social justice, not GDP alone.
- The Lib Dems would address the growing number of people living in fuel poverty in the private rental sector by giving more support to local authorities to work in partnership with landlords, including low and zero interest loans and a grant support scheme for buildings in multiple occupation.
- To help develop a consensus on tackling poverty, the Lib Dems would establish a cross-party working group, involving people affected by poverty and their organisations, to explore and address the causes and effects of poverty and wealth inequality in Scotland.
- The Lib Dems would introduce a Project Enterprise scheme for Scotland to provide micro-credit, business support, advice and training to people from low income backgrounds to help them to lift themselves out of poverty and break the cycle.
- The Green Party expressed support for the universal provision of services rather than means testing.

### **School meals**

- The SNP would pilot free school meals for pupils in Primary 1-3, starting in areas of deprivation, and increase entitlement to free school meals for a further 40,000 children living in poverty.
- Labour would increase free school meals, to an extra 100,000 children in working families on maximum working tax credit, as would the Lib Dems.
- The Greens would introduce free, healthy school meals.

### **RACIAL JUSTICE**

- The SNP said the Act of Settlement 1701 is discriminatory and accordingly they would seek agreement with the Government in London on its appeal.
- The Lib Dems said they would improve data collection systems to measure more accurately Scotland's ethnic diversity and trends in racial inequality.

### **REFUGEES & ASYLUM**

- The SNP would seek an enhanced role for the Parliament in the Shortage Occupation List and they would press the case for a Scottish green-card that is awarded to qualified immigrants, who want to come to Scotland for five years or longer.
- Labour would create a one-stop shop for employers, workers and migrants to provide advice on employment, skills and qualifications.
- The Lib Dems said dawn raids are not the right approach to removing people, especially for families with children and that they would press the Home Office to change the system to a more sensitive, integrated approach involving the education authorities, social

work departments and the UK agencies where children are involved. The Greens said they would campaign to rule out dawn raids by legislating against forced entry and they would press the Home Office to reduce deportations of families.

- The Greens would also provide emergency services for destitute people arriving in Scotland from abroad.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

- The SNP want to scrap the council tax and replace it with a local income tax set at 3p. This would apply at both the basic and higher income tax rate and would not be levied on savings income. Second homes would continue to be liable for local tax and would make the same level of contribution as present, with payments made through business rates. The SNP said that 9 out of 10 pensioners would pay less under this local income tax.
- The Lib Dems also want to scrap the council tax and replace it with a local income tax based on the ability to pay. Under their plans they say 70% of households would be better off and most pensioner households would pay nothing. The Lib Dems said that the average local income tax rate in Scotland would be 3.5 to 3.75%.
- Labour pledged not to increase council tax by more than inflation for the next four years and they would introduce an extra two bands to the existing council tax system: one at the top and one at the bottom. They said that would ease the financial pressure for those in the lowest value properties and ensure that those in higher value properties make a more proportionate contribution. Labour also said that within 2 years they would cut water and sewerage bills by 50% for all pensioner households.
- The Conservatives would cut council tax in half for all pensioner households where the occupants are over the age of 65 in addition to the discount a single pensioner already receives. The Conservatives would write this into statute alongside the existing single person's discount, in order to guarantee that the discount would be ongoing.
- The Greens want to replace the council tax and uniform business rates with a Land Value Tax which they said would provide a fairer basis for local authority funding.
- The Conservatives would commission a review of local government with a remit to pass power, wherever possible, "back to people". While the review is in progress, the Conservatives would reduce the ring-fencing of funds and with the exception of funding for joint police and fire boards, local authorities would be free to spend their money as they see fit.