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ENVIRONMENT | 6 August 2026

Scotland Delays Its Private-Jet Levy While Empty Private Jets Remain Beyond Reach

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotland-delays-its-private-jet-levy-while-carbon-restraint-reaches-everyday-life/>



Ministers say private-jet users should pay a fair share because their emissions per passenger are disproportionately high. Yet Scotland's additional levy will not begin until April 2028, a year after Air Departure Tax starts, while empty private jets remain beyond the reach of the devolved tax.

Scotland will begin collecting its replacement for Air Passenger Duty on 1 April 2027, but the additional charge promised specifically for private jets will not

start until the following financial year.

The timetable was confirmed when the Scottish Government published its analysis of responses to the Air Departure Tax consultation on 15 July 2026. Air Departure Tax will initially reproduce the UK Government's rates and distance bands, while the Scottish Private Jet Supplement will follow in April 2028. Its rate has not yet been announced.

Private-jet passengers will not travel tax-free during the intervening year. From April 2027, the UK Government's higher Air Passenger Duty rate is due to cover private and business jets weighing at least 5.7 tonnes, rather than applying only to aircraft of at least 20 tonnes carrying fewer than 19 passengers. Scotland says it will reproduce that expanded definition when its devolved tax begins.

The issue is therefore not the complete absence of aviation tax. It is Scotland's decision to postpone its additional private-jet supplement for a year after Air Departure Tax becomes operational.

A Promise Of A Fair Share

The Scottish Government has already made the political and environmental case for higher private-jet taxation.

Its Climate Change Plan says private jets produce more emissions per passenger than commercial aircraft and that those choosing to use them should pay a fair share for the privilege. Announcing the policy in January, the then Finance Secretary told private-jet users: "In Scotland you will pay, and pay a fair share, for that privilege."

The Government says matching UK rates during the first year will provide certainty and stability for the aviation industry and taxpayers. Rates for 2028–29, including the Private Jet Supplement, will be set in the 2027–28 Scottish Budget after consideration of their economic, environmental and social effects.

Consultation respondents challenged why that transitional protection should extend to private aviation. Oxfam Scotland said it understood the desire to provide stability during the tax's first year but did not believe private jets should benefit from the delay. Other respondents argued that private-jet demand was

relatively resistant to price because passengers were already accepting very high travel costs.

The Government has consequently reached a curious position. It has declared private aviation sufficiently unequal and carbon-intensive to justify a special charge, but not sufficiently urgent for that charge to begin with the tax designed to carry it.

The Flight With Nobody Aboard

The more serious gap concerns private jets carrying no passengers.

Air Departure Tax is legally a tax on the carriage of people from Scottish airports. When an aircraft flies empty to collect a client, return to its operating base or position itself for another booking, there is no passenger carriage against which the tax can be assessed.

The Scottish Government acknowledges that it does not presently have the devolved power to charge these so-called ghost flights. It has said it will engage with the UK Government about obtaining further powers, but it has not published a timetable for doing so.

One consultation submission from the Aviation Environment Federation said approximately 41 per cent of private-jet flights were empty legs. That is the organisation's estimate rather than an official measurement of Scottish flights, but it shows why the omission may be substantial rather than theoretical.

An aircraft carrying one wealthy passenger can be taxed. The same aircraft, burning fuel with nobody in the cabin, cannot be charged through Scotland's present mechanism.

The atmosphere does not distinguish between a paying passenger and an empty leather seat. The fuel is still burned and the carbon still released.

Private jets will not benefit from the proposed Highlands and Islands exemption. The Scottish Government has confirmed that the exemption will cover commercial passenger services but not private-jet travel, although military flights, emergency medical services, search and rescue, firefighting, training and research flights will remain exempt from Air Departure Tax. That is an appropriate distinction between essential connectivity and discretionary private aviation.

It does not, however, resolve the empty-flight problem.

Carbon Restraint Reaches Everyday Life

Sainsbury's has made a commercial decision to move its own-brand range towards white-shelled eggs by 2028. The supermarket says an independently verified assessment found white eggs had a 12.7 per cent lower carbon footprint per kilogram because the hens converted feed more efficiently and remained productive for longer. The eggs have the same nutrition, taste and quality; the visible change is the shell.

New Great Britain-wide ecodesign regulations come from the UK Government and apply to appliances newly placed on the market. The rules raise minimum efficiency requirements, phase out inefficient vented and condenser models and encourage the sale of heat-pump technology after a transitional period ending on 18 January 2027. Households may keep using functioning dryers already in their homes.

These measures originate in different institutions. They nevertheless reveal a common direction. Carbon calculations increasingly shape what households buy, what retailers stock, how products are manufactured and how apparently minor aspects of everyday life are redesigned.

Carbon Reaches The Highland Farm

Scottish agriculture produced 7.5 million tonnes of greenhouse-gas emissions in 2024. Methane from animal digestion accounted for 4 million tonnes, or 52.6 per cent of the agricultural total. Suckler beef remained the largest agricultural subsector, producing 3.1 million tonnes.

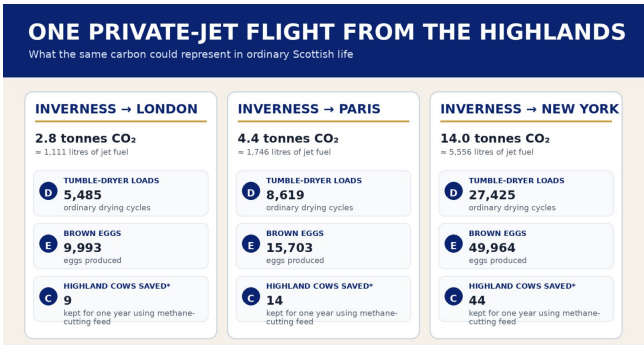
Agricultural emissions have declined partly because livestock numbers have fallen. Between 1990 and 2024, Scotland’s cattle population decreased by 21 per cent and its sheep population by 35 per cent. This does not mean that farmers were ordered to cull animals for climate policy, but fewer livestock have contributed materially to the recorded reduction in emissions.

Methane-reducing feed additives offer another possible route. Bovaer, whose active ingredient is 3-nitrooxypropanol, was authorised for use in Scotland in December 2023. The Scottish Government has said farmers may use it if they choose; there is no universal requirement forcing it into cattle feed.

Government-commissioned evidence has modelled a 20 per cent reduction in enteric methane from beef cattle receiving 3-NOP. Its practical application is more straightforward among housed animals receiving controlled daily rations than among cattle grazing extensively across Highland hills and crofts.

The accompanying Modern Scot graphic uses this model to show how many Highland cattle could, in carbon-equivalence terms, be kept for a year if methane savings from specialised feed offset the estimated emissions from a private flight. “Saved” does not mean that Scottish policy currently presents farmers with a literal choice between the additive and slaughter. It is an illustration of the relative scale of the carbon being discussed.

The comparison still exposes a difference in treatment. Farmers are expected to examine livestock numbers, breeding, feed, manure, fertiliser, machinery, land management and productivity. Private aviation has received an acknowledgement of its disproportionate emissions, followed by another year before Scotland’s additional charge begins.



What One Private Flight Represents

Transport & Environment estimates that a private jet can emit approximately two tonnes of carbon dioxide in one flight hour, although fuel consumption varies substantially according to the aircraft, journey, weather and operating conditions. A peer-reviewed global study covering more than four million private-flight legs calculated average direct emissions of 3.6 tonnes per flight in 2023, with total private-aviation emissions of at least 15.6 million tonnes that year.

The Modern Scot graphic applies the two-tonne hourly benchmark to illustrative flights from Inverness to London, Paris and New York. It compares those flights with tumble-dryer use, egg production and the

potential methane reductions attributed to specialised cattle feed.

These are carbon-equivalence illustrations, not flight-specific inventories. They exclude the additional warming effects created by aviation emissions at altitude and should not be read as precise accounts of any individual journey.

Their purpose is to translate tonnes into the ordinary quantities against which the public is increasingly asked to measure its behaviour.

Economic Arguments Remain

Private aviation is not used solely for holidays. Consultation responses identified high-value business travel, investment meetings, sporting and cultural events, golf, country sports, whisky tourism and visits to private estates. Some respondents warned that excessive taxation could move flights and associated spending to airports elsewhere in the UK.

Those concerns should be considered. Aviation is mobile, and a poorly constructed tax could shift departures without reducing the number of flights. Emergency and public-service operations also require protection.

But these arguments do not answer the central point. The Scottish Government has already decided that private jets should carry an additional charge. It has already placed the measure inside its Climate Change Plan. It has already invoked fairness and the disproportionate emissions produced per passenger.

The remaining dispute is about whether the policy matches the urgency of the language used to justify it.

The Test Of A Just Transition

A fair transition does not require every source of carbon to be treated identically. Nor does the existence of private jets excuse avoidable emissions from homes, appliances, food production or agriculture.

Fairness does require proportion.

A household may face a higher initial cost when replacing an appliance. A retailer may redesign its supply chain around relatively small differences in agricultural efficiency. A farmer may be encouraged to alter feed, breeding and herd management while carrying the commercial and practical risks.

Against that background, certainty and stability for private aviation is unlikely to satisfy the public as the sole explanation for postponing Scotland's additional levy.

The Government should now publish the evidence required to judge the policy. That includes the number of private-jet movements leaving Scottish airports, the proportion that fly empty, their estimated emissions, the revenue expected from the supplement and the level at which the tax might alter behaviour rather than simply become another manageable operating cost.

Ministers should also provide a timetable for seeking the additional powers needed to address ghost flights and explain why the Private Jet Supplement cannot begin alongside Air Departure Tax in April 2027.

These are not arguments against improving appliances, reducing agricultural methane or lowering the environmental cost of food.

They are arguments for applying the same seriousness at the top.

Brown eggs, tumble dryers and Highland cattle have all entered the carbon calculation. Scotland's private

jets have entered it too, but their additional bill will arrive later, and when they fly empty, the present system cannot send one at all.

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War Exposes Scotland's Dependence On English Supply Routes

Read online: <https://modern.scot/war-exposes-scotlands-dependence-on-english-supply-routes/>



Scotland has avoided a sustained nationwide shortage of fuel, food or essential goods. Yet 21.1 million tonnes entered the country by road from elsewhere in the UK in 2024, with 97 per cent of that measured flow coming from England. Many of those goods began their journeys much farther away, but passed through English ports, warehouses and distribution centres before being carried north. As war raises the cost of diesel, shipping and insurance, Scotland is paying more to keep goods moving, and the burden grows with distance.

An empty shelf is the most obvious sign that a supply chain has failed. It is also one of the last.

Long before a product disappears, the disturbance arrives through a higher wholesale price, a longer shipping route, an insurance surcharge, a delayed container, a dearer tanker delivery or a haulier deciding how much of the latest diesel increase can be passed to the customer.

By that measure, the wars affecting the Middle East and the Black Sea have already reached Scotland.

There is no evidence in the public data examined by Modern Scot of a sustained nationwide interruption to food, fuel or other essential supplies. Ships are still unloading. Tankers are still making deliveries. Supermarkets are still stocked.

The evidence instead points to something quieter and more difficult to see. Scotland's supply chain has been repriced.

That cost does not travel directly from a distant war zone to a Scottish shop. It passes through ships, ports, refineries, import terminals, warehouses, distribution centres, lorries, ferries and local delivery vehicles. Every stage adds distance, labour, fuel and another place at which delay can occur.

The system has held. That is not the same as saying it is comfortable, transparent or secure.

The War Arrives By The Litre

The scale of the international disruption is not speculative.

Ship movements through the Strait of Hormuz fell from around 130 a day in February to six a day in March, a collapse of approximately 95 per cent. UN Trade and Development said shipping and insurance costs had risen together, sending additional expense through international supply chains and increasing pressure on prices.

The effects reach beyond oil and gas. Significant fertiliser volumes also pass through the Strait, connecting disruption in energy and maritime transport to the future cost of farming and food production. UN Trade and

Development has warned that the conflict is already being reflected in fertiliser markets and increasing risks to food supply and trade.

The crisis has not ended. Reuters reported on 5 August that eight vessels had crossed Hormuz on the previous day, compared with a normal pre-war flow of approximately 130 to 140 vessels.

As of 27 July, the International Maritime Organization had recorded 62 confirmed maritime incidents in the Strait and wider Middle East, together with 17 confirmed seafarer deaths. The commercial shipping system has been operating through a live conflict in which vessels, crews, ports and energy infrastructure have become targets.

Pressure is also growing in the Black Sea. Attacks on ships, ports and export terminals have interrupted grain and oil movements, damaged infrastructure, suspended some shipments and raised freight and war-insurance costs. The disturbance is overlapping with continuing pressure in Hormuz and renewed danger in the Red Sea.

Scotland does not need to buy every barrel directly from the Gulf, or every tonne of grain directly from the Black Sea, for those events to arrive here. Refined fuel, crude oil, tanker capacity, fertiliser, marine insurance and freight are traded internationally. A vessel removed from one route, a war premium added to another and a refinery competing for constrained supplies can all alter the price paid in Scotland.

Official figures show how sharply the cost reached the road.

In the week beginning 23 February, average UK petrol cost 131.71p a litre and diesel 141.46p. By the week beginning 3 August, petrol had risen to 159.89p and diesel to 179.19p.

That represents increases of 28.18p for petrol and 37.73p for diesel, 21.4 per cent and 26.7 per cent respectively. For a 55-litre tank, the difference is approximately £15.50 for petrol and £20.75 for diesel. A business purchasing 1,000 litres of diesel faces an additional cost of about £377 compared with February. The figures are UK averages, meaning prices in rural and island Scotland may be higher.

A household encounters the increase once at the pump. A haulage company encounters it across an entire fleet, before a single loaf, prescription, parcel, restaurant delivery or machine component reaches its destination.

Scottish Businesses Are Already Reporting The Damage

The effect is visible in the Scottish Government's own business surveys.

In March, 9.6 per cent of businesses with at least ten employees and a presence in Scotland said they had experienced global supply-chain disruption, up from three per cent in February and the highest proportion recorded since May 2023. Of the businesses affected, 62.4 per cent identified conflict in the Middle East as the principal cause.

During the same survey period, 39 per cent reported an increase in the prices of goods or services they purchased, while 35.4 per cent expected to increase the prices they charged during May.

By April, 57.9 per cent of Scottish businesses reported some form of concern about their supply chains. International conflict was the leading concern, cited by 47.2 per cent, followed by shipping disruption at 25.1 per cent.

More than half of exporters reported that the cost of exporting had increased during the year to March,

while 36.6 per cent of importers reported higher importing costs.

The alarm was especially pronounced among the businesses responsible for keeping goods moving. During the second half of June, 91.1 per cent of transport and storage businesses said they were concerned about rising fuel prices, while 90.3 per cent were concerned about energy costs. International conflict remained the most commonly identified supply-chain risk.

These figures measure concern, disruption and rising commercial costs. They do not prove that every price increase has been caused by war.

They do prove that the businesses moving Scotland's goods recognise conflict, fuel prices and maritime disruption as immediate risks—and that some have already experienced the consequences.

A distributor can absorb an increase, pass it to the customer or divide it between the two. None of those options makes the cost disappear.

The charge travels until it reaches somebody unable to send it any further.

Scotland Is Paying A Distance Penalty

The clearest evidence that geography magnifies the international shock comes from domestic heating oil.

Between February and March, the average Scottish heating-oil price rose from 69p to 113p a litre, an increase of 44p. The increase in England was 38p, from 65p to 103p.

Across the UK, a typical 500-litre order became approximately £200 more expensive in a month. The Competition and Markets Authority found that 83 per cent of the retail increase was attributable to higher wholesale costs, rather than suppliers materially increasing their profits.

The regulator also identified a distinctly Scottish exposure. Households in remote areas, including parts of Scotland, generally have fewer suppliers and face higher prices because they cost more to serve. Prices increased more sharply in some remote areas after the Middle East conflict because the underlying cost of getting the fuel there had risen further.

This is the principle running through Scotland's wider supply chain.

A delivery in a densely populated area can serve many customers within a short distance. A tanker or lorry travelling through the Highlands may cover substantial distances between drops. An island delivery may require storage at another terminal, a ferry crossing, suitable weather and a further local journey.

The international price shock begins in the same market. It does not finish at the same cost.

The farther the goods travel, the more fuel, labour and handling they require.

The latest shock has also arrived among households already carrying severe financial pressure.

Consumer Scotland found that 38 per cent of Scottish households could not afford to heat their homes comfortably, while 19 per cent reported energy debt or arrears. Those findings were gathered in January and February, largely before the full effect of the conflict, and therefore describe Scotland's vulnerable starting position rather than hardship caused entirely by war.

Citizens Advice Scotland recorded average energy debts of more than £2,800 among those seeking help during the first three months of 2026, rising above £3,200 in rural areas.

Scottish Government modelling estimates that 800,000 households -- 31 per cent of all Scottish households -- will be in fuel poverty between July and September, including approximately 420,000 in extreme fuel poverty.

The projected fuel-poverty rate rises to 42 per cent in remote rural Scotland and 49 per cent in remote small towns. These figures reflect wider household energy costs and cannot be attributed solely to war, but they show how little room many families have left to absorb another externally driven increase.

The Road Is Scotland's Supply Chain

The journey taken by goods into Scotland is central to understanding how an international fuel shock reaches Scottish households and businesses.

Scottish ports handle substantial volumes of freight, particularly crude oil, refined products and other bulk cargoes. But much of what Scotland consumes does not arrive directly at a Scottish harbour. It enters Britain elsewhere, passes through an English port or distribution centre and continues north by road.

In 2024, UK-registered heavy goods vehicles carried 21.1 million tonnes of goods into Scotland from elsewhere in the UK. Some 97 per cent came from England.

Only 18 million tonnes travelled in the opposite direction, leaving the recorded cross-border road-freight balance substantially northbound.

The North West of England supplied approximately 7.7 million tonnes. Yorkshire and the Humber accounted for 19 per cent of the total and North East England for 17 per cent. Together, those three English regions accounted for nearly three-quarters of the measured goods entering Scotland by UK-registered HGVs.

The detailed freight tables include more than 5.5 million tonnes of food products, including beverages and tobacco, together with more than two million tonnes of agricultural, forestry and raw-material products.

This does not mean that 97 per cent of everything consumed in Scotland comes from England.

The figure applies specifically to goods entering Scotland from elsewhere in the UK on UK-registered HGVs. It excludes direct maritime imports, foreign-registered vehicles, smaller vans and goods produced within Scotland.

It nevertheless records a very large physical flow upon which Scottish shops, manufacturers, farms, construction companies and households depend.

The paperwork may say that the final journey began in England. The contents may have begun their journey in continental Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East or the Americas.

A container can arrive at Felixstowe, Liverpool, Southampton, London Gateway, Dover, Hull or another English gateway. It may be unloaded, handled, transferred to a regional distribution centre, divided into separate loads and placed on a lorry travelling north.

England is therefore not necessarily the producer of Scotland's imported goods. It is frequently the port, warehouse and road system through which Scotland receives them.

The Scottish Government has itself concluded that Scotland is heavily reliant on English ports, particularly the Channel ports and tunnel, because they provide the most effective routes to and from continental Europe for a wide range of industries.

The dependence runs in both directions.

A government-commissioned examination of the Scottish food-and-drink supply chain found that most containerised loads it examined travelled by truck or rail to English ports. Fresh seafood exports to the European Union went almost entirely by road through the Channel Tunnel, while sections of the red-meat industry depended upon processing and other supply-chain operations in England.

The report described parts of the Scottish food-and-drink sector as heavily dependent upon the English supply chain.

Five Hundred Miles Can Be Hidden In One Delivery

Transport Scotland identifies the M74–M6 as Scotland’s principal trunk-road connection with the rest of Great Britain and, through southern ports and the Channel Tunnel, continental Europe.

Other border crossings include the A1 north of Berwick-upon-Tweed, the A697 at Coldstream, the A68 at Carter Bar and the A7 north of Longtown. The A75 connects the main north–south corridor with the ports at Cairnryan and Loch Ryan.

These roads are not simply routes for motorists. They are physical arteries through which food, medicine, household goods and industrial materials reach Scotland.

A product destined for the Highlands may move from an overseas manufacturer to an English port, then to an English warehouse, north through the M6–M74 corridor, into a Scottish distribution centre and finally onto another vehicle travelling towards Inverness, Wick, Thurso or the west coast.

For an island, another depot, lorry, ferry and local delivery may be added.

During 2024, UK-registered HGVs lifted and delivered approximately 121 million tonnes within Scotland. The average freight journey was 107 kilometres, although that average combines short urban deliveries with far longer rural movements.

Each road leg consumes diesel at the higher price. Each transfer requires handling, refrigeration, storage, staff and time. Each stage creates another place where delay, weather, mechanical failure or infrastructure disruption can intervene.

The cost of supplying Scotland does not end when a lorry crosses the border. For goods destined for the Highlands and islands, some of the longest and most expensive stages of the journey may still lie ahead. A delivery may require another distribution centre, hundreds of miles of road travel, a ferry crossing and a final local vehicle before it reaches the customer.

Could More Goods Arrive Directly?

Scotland has had no regular international roll-on, roll-off freight ferry since the Rosyth–Zeebrugge service ended in 2018.

A direct vessel from continental Europe to Scotland could, in principle, remove hundreds of road miles and at least one transfer from some journeys. It could provide an alternative during disruption at Channel ports, the Channel Tunnel or the main English road corridors.

It would not automatically be faster or cheaper.

The previous Rosyth service suffered from limited frequency, a longer sea journey and arrival times poorly suited to highly perishable seafood. Large logistics companies choose routes according to cargo volume, delivery windows, vessel schedules, backhaul opportunities and the location of customers, not simply the shortest line on a map.

A government-commissioned review found that customers often preferred the speed and flexibility provided by longer road journeys followed by shorter and more frequent Channel crossings. A direct Scottish route would require sufficient cargo in both directions to make it commercially viable.

Yet the same study found significant underused container capacity at existing Scottish ports, including Grangemouth and Greenock. Some freight currently travelling south to English ports by road or rail could potentially be carried through Scottish gateways instead.

The question is therefore not whether Scotland should sever itself from the English logistics system. That would be commercially absurd.

The question is whether one principal system should be allowed to become so dominant that Scotland has too few practical alternatives when fuel costs rise, ports are disrupted or roads are blocked.

Resilience does not require isolation. It requires choice.

The Warning Was Given In 1948

It would be historically false to present pre-war or post-war Scotland as self-sufficient.

At the beginning of the Second World War, around 70 per cent of Britain's requirements for food and livestock feed were imported. Rationing was introduced partly because attacks on merchant shipping threatened access to the overseas supplies upon which the country already depended.

The immediate post-war years brought continued rationing, shortages, damaged shipping and far less consumer choice than Scotland enjoys today.

But Scotland possessed more of the physical capacity required to receive, manufacture, process, repair, refine, store and move goods within the country.

The argument over English ports is not new.

In February 1948, the House of Commons was told that Glasgow had empty berths while ships waited to unload at Liverpool. During the first six weeks of that year, 6,000 tonnes of bacon, meat and butter intended for Scotland had been unloaded at Liverpool and carried north by road or rail.

The annual rate was said to be equivalent to the cargo of 17 large ocean-going vessels. MPs complained that the arrangement required four handling operations instead of two, burdened an overstretched railway system, consumed scarce petrol and sometimes delivered deteriorated meat to Scottish consumers.

One Glasgow MP described the unnecessary use of petrol as a "national wastage".

The language belongs to 1948. The structural question could have been asked this week.

Why should goods intended for Scotland be unloaded farther south, handled again and carried hundreds of additional miles when Scottish port and distribution capacity might provide an alternative?

The figures from 1948 and 2024 cannot be compared directly. They cover different commodities, markets,

vehicle classes and systems of measurement.

What they reveal is a recurring concern: goods intended for Scottish consumers being routed through English ports and then carried north at additional cost while Scottish capacity remains available.

Scotland Has More Goods, And Fewer Alternatives

The Scotland that emerged from the war was poorer and more heavily rationed. It also possessed a much larger productive base.

New historical national accounts show that manufacturing accounted for roughly one-third of Scottish economic output in 1948.

By 2023, manufacturing's share of Scottish gross value added had fallen to 9.9 per cent, down from 17.4 per cent in 1998. The service industries had increased their share substantially over the same period.

That comparison does not mean every factory closure weakened food or fuel security. Modern services create wealth and employment, while greater productivity means industrial capacity cannot be judged solely by employment numbers or its percentage share of the economy.

But national resilience depends upon more than total economic value. It also depends upon what a country can make, process, repair, store and move when international systems are disturbed.

Scotland once moved substantially more freight by rail and coastal shipping.

Rail freight lifted in Scotland fell from 29.8 million tonnes in 1960 to 5.4 million tonnes by 1994–95, later recovering partially. Coastwise freight lifted in Scotland fell from 25 million tonnes in 2000 to 14 million tonnes in 2015.

Modern logistics produced extraordinary efficiency and consumer choice. Central warehouses, containerisation, national supermarket networks and motorway haulage can move large quantities quickly and reliably.

They also concentrated the system.

Efficiency removed duplication. In a crisis, duplication has another name: spare capacity.

Scotland's First Fuel Crisis Without A Refinery

The present crisis is also testing Scotland after crude-oil refining ended at Grangemouth.

Scotland's only oil refinery formally ceased production on 29 April 2025. The site was converted into an import and fuels-distribution terminal.

Petroineos says the terminal continues to serve the Scottish market reliably through road, jetty, rail and pipeline infrastructure. The present evidence does not show that the import-terminal system has failed.

What has changed is the route of dependence.

Scotland previously imported much of the crude oil refined at Grangemouth, so the former arrangement was never wholly domestic. But Scotland retained the industrial capacity to turn crude into petrol, diesel, aviation fuel and other products on site.

That stage has gone.

The Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan states that, following the closure, Scotland's residual demand must be met through imports of finished fuel products. The country exports much of the crude oil associated with its waters while importing the finished fuels it consumes.

Scotland remains supplied, but it holds less control over how the finished product is made before it arrives.

What Scotland Is Entitled To Know

Scotland is wealthier than it was in 1948. Its shelves carry an abundance and variety that post-war households could scarcely have imagined.

It is also weaker in one precise and defensible sense.

It has a smaller manufacturing base, no operating crude-oil refinery, reduced rail and coastal freight capacity, no regular direct roll-on, roll-off freight link with continental Europe and a supply chain in which an enormous measured volume passes through English ports, warehouses and roads.

Scotland possesses abundance with fewer alternatives.

This is not an accusation that England is withholding goods. England is exposed to the same wars, energy markets and maritime disruption. The vulnerability is not hostility. It is concentration.

Scotland's elected governments and representatives should now establish what proportion of the country's food, medicines, finished fuels and essential industrial inputs enters Britain through ports outside Scotland.

They should identify which English ports, distribution centres and roads, and which Scottish terminals, railway routes and ferry links constitute single points of failure.

They should publish the cumulative effect of higher fuel, freight and insurance costs upon Scottish businesses, and explain how much of that additional burden is being amplified by the long road journey north.

They should measure the distance penalty paid by the Highlands and islands, where international increases are compounded by longer delivery routes, fewer suppliers, additional storage and ferry transport.

They should assess whether commercially viable direct freight services to Scotland could provide greater resilience, and whether Grangemouth, Greenock, Rosyth or other Scottish ports could handle more of the goods currently carried north from English gateways.

They should identify which domestic refining, manufacturing, food-processing, storage, repair and freight capabilities must be treated as strategic infrastructure rather than left entirely to short-term commercial calculation.

And they should explain the contingency if conflict-driven shipping and fuel pressure coincides with a severe storm, a ferry failure, a cyberattack, an English port closure or a prolonged interruption on the M6–M74.

Scotland's shelves remain full because ships are arriving, English ports and warehouses are operating, the border roads are open and the lorries are moving.

That is resilience of a kind.

It is also a warning.

War has not emptied Scotland's shelves. It has revealed the long, expensive and increasingly concentrated chain that keeps them full, and the Scottish households and businesses at the farthest end of it are already carrying a disproportionate share of the cost.

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ECONOMY | 6 August 2026

Scotland's International Services Exports May Have Reached £19 Billion – But The Official Estimate Stops At 2023

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotlands-international-services-exports-may-have-reached-19-billion-but-the-official-estimate-stops-at-2023/>



A report commissioned by the Scottish Government estimates that Scotland's international services exports may have reached £19.2 billion in 2025. The corresponding official estimate is not expected until 2027, exposing a wider problem: Scotland has several accounts of its economy, but no single current, detailed public record showing how its goods, services, onshore and offshore activity fit together.

Scotland's international services exports may have risen to more than £19 billion in 2025, according to research published by the Scottish Government on 5 August.

The figure would represent considerable growth from the official estimate of £15.6 billion in 2023. Professional, scientific and technical services may have contributed £5.7 billion last year, followed by financial and insurance services at £3.1 billion and information and communications at £2.2 billion.

Yet none of those 2025 figures has been confirmed through Scotland's principal official export publication.

They are "nowcasts": statistical projections created to estimate what may have happened since the last available year. The researchers say the figures are not unquestionable predictions and should be treated as indicative estimates until the official statistics are published.

The next edition of Export Statistics Scotland, covering both 2024 and 2025, is currently scheduled for 2027. Scotland is therefore entering the second half of 2026 without a confirmed estimate of how one of its most important export sectors performed last year.

The Trade in Services Report was commissioned by the Scottish Government and produced by the Fraser of Allander Institute in partnership with Prosper and the Centre for Inclusive Trade Policy. It examines financial services, professional and business services, science and research, creative industries, digital technology and energy-related work.

Its purpose was partly to assess the barriers facing Scottish businesses abroad. A secondary objective was to examine the quality and limitations of the data used to measure services trade.

The report's authors found both commercial opportunity and statistical uncertainty.

A Large Export Sector That Is Difficult To Observe

Services accounted for approximately 41 per cent of Scotland's international exports in 2023. They include financial advice, engineering, research, software, design, legal work, consultancy and specialist energy

services that support many highly skilled and comparatively productive jobs.

But services are more difficult to count than physical goods.

A bottle of whisky or a piece of machinery can be recorded as it crosses an international border. An engineering design sent electronically to a client abroad leaves no comparable physical trail. Financial advice may be delivered online, scientific work may form part of a longer international project, and consultants may travel temporarily to complete a contract.

A Scottish company may also establish an overseas office, employ staff in another country or work through a locally based partner. Those arrangements can be necessary to meet licensing requirements, satisfy customers or qualify for public contracts.

The new report found that businesses commonly respond to foreign market barriers by changing where and how they work. Some establish subsidiaries or local offices. Others hire employees in the destination country, form partnerships or redesign their service to comply with local rules.

These decisions can preserve an international customer while making the resulting activity less visible in conventional export figures. Services supplied through an overseas commercial presence, transactions within the same corporate group and work delivered through partnerships are not always captured as a direct Scottish cross-border export.

The report warns that this affects more than the headline total. It can change where economic value is created, where employment is located and how firmly an expanding business remains anchored in Scotland.

Businesses Face Barriers That Do Not Appear At The Border

The report concludes that Scotland's services-export challenge is increasingly one of market access rather than an absence of skill or international demand.

Businesses described difficulties involving professional qualifications, licensing, short-term visas, data rules, procurement eligibility, local-establishment requirements and duplicated compliance work. Some of these are formal legal restrictions. Others come from customers who prefer or insist upon a local office, locally recognised insurance or familiarity with domestic standards.

These barriers often do not prevent trade entirely. Instead, they increase the fixed cost of winning and delivering a contract.

A large company may be able to absorb that expense. A smaller Scottish business may decide not to enter the market, reduce its activity or move part of the work abroad. The report found that such responses can narrow international engagement even where the aggregate export figures appear resilient.

The researchers also raise a concern about the way Scotland's services performance is interpreted. Trade with England, Wales and Northern Ireland is economically valuable, but it is commerce within the UK rather than access to an international market.

The report says present statistical frameworks have the potential to overstate Scotland's international services competitiveness when domestic UK trade and overseas export capacity are not clearly distinguished. A business may perform strongly within the UK while still facing growing obstacles in the European Union, North America or emerging markets.

That is a policy problem as well as a statistical one. Government cannot judge which barriers require

attention if it cannot clearly see where firms export, how they deliver the work or when international activity has been moved outside Scotland.

One Economy, Several Different Accounts

The delay in confirming the 2025 services figure points towards a wider question: where should the public go to see the complete account of what Scotland produces, sells and buys?

The closest answer depends on which part of the economy is being discussed.

Export Statistics Scotland is the principal official source for Scottish exports. Its latest edition estimates that Scotland exported £93.1 billion of goods and services in 2023. International exports accounted for £37.7 billion, while £55.4 billion was sold to the rest of the UK.

That publication is broad. It covers goods and services and attempts to measure commerce with both international markets and the rest of the UK.

It is also delayed, survey-dependent and incomplete in ways that are not immediately obvious from the headline number.

Export Statistics Scotland excludes oil and gas extracted from the UK Continental Shelf. It includes services supplied to the offshore industry, but not the value of the oil and gas itself. Scottish goods sold to an English business and later incorporated into an international export are ordinarily recorded only as a sale to the rest of the UK.

HM Revenue and Customs provides a second picture. Its regional trade figures are much more current and show Scotland's international goods exports falling by 3 per cent to £24.2 billion in the year ending March 2026. Goods imports rose by 17 per cent to £25.7 billion.

Those figures cover goods crossing international borders. They exclude services, oil and gas and trade between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

They are therefore timely, but narrow.

Quarterly national accounts provide another measure. They estimate exports, imports and the trade balance for the onshore Scottish economy on a national-accounting basis, but do not provide the detailed breakdowns available in Export Statistics Scotland.

The Scottish Government also publishes separate satellite accounts for offshore or “extra-regio” activity. These cover an illustrative geographical share of oil and gas extraction in Scottish adjacent waters and can be combined with Scotland's onshore supply-and-use tables to create what the government describes as a “Whole of Scotland” economic account.

That work is valuable and prevents offshore activity from disappearing entirely from Scotland's economic analysis. The most recent offshore estimates extend to 2024, although the latest years are provisional and the series remains classified as official statistics in development.

But the resulting national accounts are not the simple public ledger that many people may assume exists.

They do not provide one current document reconciling detailed export destinations, international and rest-of-UK trade, goods and services, company income, ownership, profits, taxation and the proportion of economic value retained in Scotland.

The Scottish Government's own methodology acknowledges that there is no total measure of Scottish imports directly comparable with Export Statistics Scotland. It also explains that Scotland's position within the UK customs system requires some UK values to be apportioned statistically rather than observed directly.

Why The Figures Do Not Naturally Join Together

The fragmentation is partly structural.

Goods travelling from Scotland to England do not pass through a customs border. A business in Edinburgh selling software to a customer in London does not complete an international export declaration. HMRC therefore cannot count intra-UK commerce in the same manner as goods sent to France or the United States.

Many companies operating across Britain do not publish separate Scottish accounts showing sales, costs, profits and investment. The Scottish Government must rely on business surveys, administrative records, national accounts and statistical allocation methods to estimate Scotland's share.

Services are more difficult again because there may be no shipment, customs form or single place of delivery. The work may be performed remotely, during temporary travel, through a multinational company or from an overseas subsidiary.

Offshore activity introduces a further boundary. Some statistics describe only the onshore economy. Others include a geographical share of offshore output. Export Statistics Scotland excludes offshore extraction, while separate satellite accounts attempt to measure it.

Each decision may be reasonable for the purpose of the individual publication. The difficulty arises when politicians, businesses and the public try to compare the resulting numbers as though they describe the same thing.

They do not.

Scotland has current information about some international goods, delayed information about wider exports, separate estimates for offshore production and national accounts constructed for another purpose. The country does not lack statistics; it lacks a single, current public account that shows how those statistics connect.

The Questions The New Report Leaves Behind

The 5 August report recommends improving Scotland's services-trade evidence base. It calls for clearer distinctions between domestic UK services flows and international exports, along with better measures of firm-level international exposure, regulatory costs, market-entry success and the different ways services are delivered abroad.

That recommendation leads to a wider set of questions.

Why will Scotland's official export estimate for 2025 not appear until 2027, when trade policy and business conditions can change considerably within two years?

Who is responsible for bringing together Export Statistics Scotland, HMRC goods data, quarterly national accounts and offshore satellite accounts in a form that an ordinary reader can understand?

Should Scotland publish an annual economic ledger that clearly distinguishes between onshore and offshore activity, goods and services, international and rest-of-UK commerce, recorded figures and statistical estimates?

Such a ledger could not remove every uncertainty. It could show which figures come from customs records, which come from business surveys, which are modelled and which are apportioned from UK totals.

It could also identify what remains unknown.

How much Scottish services work is now delivered through overseas subsidiaries? How many businesses have moved employment or activity abroad to gain market access? Where do the profits generated by Scottish expertise ultimately flow? How much economic value remains in Scotland once a company expands internationally?

The new report cannot answer all those questions. It shows why they must be asked.

Its central estimate is encouraging: Scotland may have generated more than £19 billion in international services exports last year. But the number has had to be modelled because the official estimate remains two years behind.

Before Scotland can judge whether its export strategy is working, it needs a clearer view of what is being exported, where the work is being done and how much of the resulting value stays here.

The report published on 5 August brings that gap into public view. It should now bring Scotland's economic accounts -- and the institutions responsible for explaining them -- under closer scrutiny.

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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 6 August 2026

Scotland Looks To Displaced Care Workers To Add 45,000 Hours A Month

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotland-looks-to-displaced-care-workers-to-add-45000-hours-a-month/>



The Scottish Government says a recruitment scheme could add 45,000 hours of adult social-care work each month, but the figure describes potential staffing capacity rather than care already delivered—and cannot be matched against Scotland’s incomplete record of people waiting for support.

Scotland has placed a large number on a small and carefully targeted recruitment programme.

The Scottish Government says its Adult Social Care Displaced Workers Scheme could eventually generate as

many as 45,000 additional working hours each month. The estimate is based on approximately 270 international care workers entering new employment after losing previous sponsored jobs through no fault of their own.

So far, 37 employers have used the latest phase of the scheme to recruit 120 workers. The hours attached to the larger figure are therefore a projection of what might become available if the expected recruitment is completed. They are not a record of 45,000 hours already worked, commissioned or delivered to people waiting for care.

Public Health Scotland reported that 6,454 people were waiting for an assessment of their social-care needs on 1 June 2026. A further 2,900 people had already been assessed but were waiting for a care-at-home package. Those awaiting care at home required an estimated 33,140 hours of support every week, 26 per cent more than the comparable figure a year earlier.

Even those totals do not describe the whole country.

Public Health Scotland warns that not every local authority can provide figures for every measure. Where missing returns cannot be estimated, the national total is labelled “Scotland - All Areas Submitted”. The agency says plainly that this will underestimate the true Scottish figure. Local authorities also periodically revise their submissions, while differences in definitions and recording practices mean comparisons between areas require caution.

Scotland can therefore produce a precise-looking estimate of the working hours a recruitment initiative might create, while lacking a complete national measure of the people and hours currently waiting for support.

A Scheme For Workers Already In Britain

The programme does not reopen international recruitment or bring a new group of care workers into Scotland from overseas.

It is designed for international workers already living in the UK who have lost sponsored employment, often because their former employer lost its sponsorship licence. Without another approved employer, those workers may face the disruption of losing their immigration status despite having experience in a sector with persistent vacancies.

Scottish social-care employers can receive targeted funding to meet costs associated with employing them, including Home Office fees and relocation expenses. Employers must hold a valid health and care visa sponsor licence, be registered with the Care Inspectorate and have a genuine vacancy they have been unable to fill. Each employer can seek assistance for up to three workers.

The scheme therefore serves two purposes. It helps retain trained workers who might otherwise be lost to Scottish social care, and it offers providers limited assistance with vacancies that have proved difficult to fill.

The Scottish Government initially committed £500,000 to the programme. In February, it projected that the scheme could secure up to 30,000 additional hours of adult social-care work each month, calculated on the basis of 200 displaced workers each working 37.5 hours a week. At that stage, as many as 250 workers were expected to be re-employed once checks were completed.

The latest 45,000-hour estimate is larger, but it remains an estimate of labour capacity. It does not reveal how many recruited workers have started work, how many hours their employers have commissioned, or which services and communities have received the additional capacity.

Hours Are Not Interchangeable

The temptation is to set the promised 45,000 monthly hours against the 33,140 weekly hours of care at home that people were waiting to receive in June. That would produce a dramatic comparison, but it would also be misleading.

The two figures do not measure the same thing.

Public Health Scotland's total relates specifically to care-at-home packages that have been assessed but not provided. The recruitment scheme applies more widely across adult social care. Workers may be employed in care homes, housing support, care-at-home services or other registered provision.

Nor does an additional employee automatically create an additional package of care. Providers need contracts, commissioned hours, management capacity, transport, training and sufficient funding from councils or health and social care partnerships. A worker may fill an existing vacancy without expanding the total number of hours purchased by the public sector.

The scheme could nevertheless protect services from losing capacity and help employers cover work that would otherwise remain unfilled. That has value in a sector where staffing shortages are widespread.

At the end of 2024, 44 per cent of registered Scottish care services reported staff vacancies. In nine of the country's 32 council areas, at least half of services had vacancies. Care-at-home providers, housing-support services and care homes for older people and other adults were among those reporting the greatest difficulty recruiting. Employers most commonly cited too few experienced, qualified or suitable applicants.

A Narrower Route Into Care Work

The scheme has also become more consequential following changes to UK immigration policy.

The UK Government closed the route to new overseas recruitment of care workers in July 2025. Home Office statistics show the number of Health and Care Worker visas issued to main applicants in caring personal-service occupations fell from 107,772 at the earlier peak to 1,397 in the year ending March 2026. The Home Office attributes the sharp recent fall partly to the end of overseas care-worker recruitment.

Immigration policy is reserved to Westminster, leaving the Scottish Government unable to reopen the visa route itself. Its displaced-worker programme operates within the remaining space: matching Scottish employers with people who are already in the country and still eligible to move to another licensed sponsor.

That may prevent experienced workers from being pushed out of a sector that needs them. It does not resolve the deeper questions surrounding social-care pay, retention, commissioning and the financial condition of providers.

What Scotland Still Cannot See

The next test should be delivery rather than projection.

The Scottish Government could publish how many workers have actually begun employment, their broad geographical distribution, the types of services employing them and the number of funded hours subsequently delivered. It could also explain whether the reopened phase has received additional funding beyond the original £500,000 allocation.

None of that requires identifying individual workers or employers. Aggregated figures would allow the public to see whether the programme is expanding care, maintaining existing services or primarily preventing further deterioration.

The incomplete waiting-list figures require equal attention. Public Health Scotland has been publishing national management information on social-care assessments and care-at-home delays since 2022, but some councils remain unable to supply each requested measure.

That leaves Scotland with two partial views of the same system: one measures potential workers without fully showing where their hours will go; the other measures unmet need without receiving complete information from every area.

The recruitment programme may be practical, humane and useful. It preserves people's employment and offers some relief to services struggling to recruit. But 45,000 potential hours should not be mistaken for 45,000 hours of care delivered—or for evidence that Scotland's waiting lists are beginning to clear.

For now, the country can count the hours it hopes to create more confidently than the care it has yet to provide.

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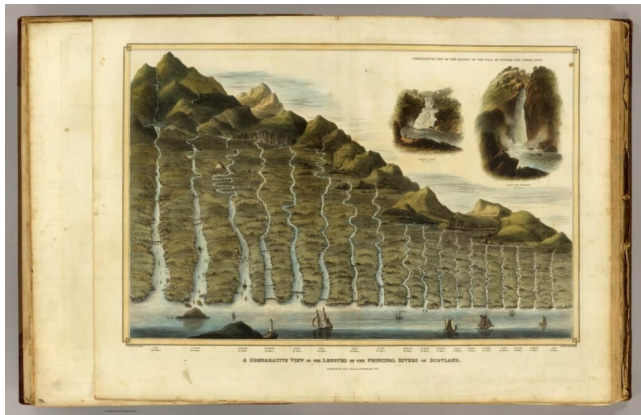
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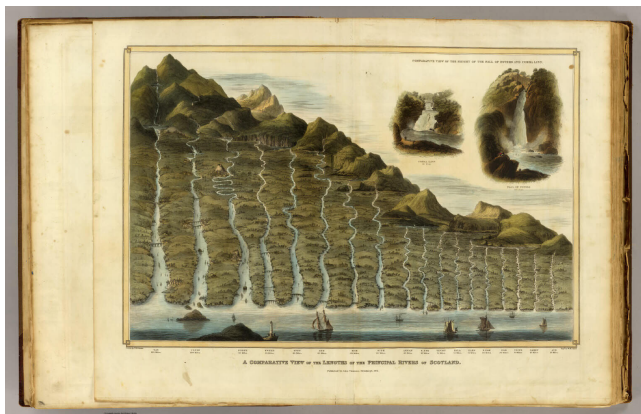
HERITAGE AND ARTS | 5 August 2026

Scotland's Rivers In 1831: What A Remarkable Atlas Reveals About Two Centuries Of Change

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotlands-rivers-in-1831-what-a-remarkable-atlas-reveals-about-two-centuries-of-change/>



A hand-coloured chart published nearly two centuries ago attempted to place Scotland's great rivers side by side. The Tay still stands at the head of the country, but closer examination reveals altered waterfalls, engineered channels, shifting measurements and a landscape now facing pressures its makers could scarcely have imagined.



Scotlandrivers

At first sight, the image resembles an impossible Scottish landscape: a single mountainous wall descending towards the sea, cut through by a procession of rivers and watched by sailing vessels waiting at their mouths.

It is not a conventional map. It is an early geographical infographic.

The plate is titled *A Comparative View Of The Lengths Of The Principal Rivers Of Scotland*. It was drawn and engraved by the Edinburgh artist, printmaker and

mapmaker William Home Lizars, and published by the cartographer John Thomson.

The plate itself is dated 1831 and was issued in Thomson's *Atlas of Scotland* in 1832. The original was a hand-coloured engraving measuring approximately 65 centimetres across.

The rivers have been lifted out of their true geographical positions and rearranged as parallel streams, generally from longest to shortest. Mountains, bridges, settlements and ships give the comparison the appearance of a landscape, but the scene never existed anywhere outside the engraver's imagination.

Two smaller illustrations in the upper-right corner compare the Falls of Foyers, beside Loch Ness, with Corra Linn at the Falls of Clyde.

These were not incidental decorations. Both waterfalls were celebrated destinations in the early nineteenth century, when dramatic Scottish scenery had become a subject of tourism, art and romantic literature.

The Rivers In The Picture

The engraving names 18 rivers and gives their supposed lengths in miles.

River

Length Shown In 1831

Tay

110 miles

Clyde

100 miles

Forth

90 miles

Tweed

85 miles

Spey

85 miles

Dee

80 miles

Don

60 miles

Nith

60 miles

Annan

40 miles

South Esk

40 miles

Teviot

35 miles

Isla

35 miles

Earn

35 miles

North Esk

30 miles

Esk

30 miles

Teith

30 miles

Garry

25 miles

Ayr

25 miles

These labels can still be read on high-resolution versions of the engraving preserved in public collections.

The list is revealing because it is not a modern scientific ranking of separate river basins. It places major rivers beside tributaries. The Teviot flows into the Tweed; the Isla and Earn join the Tay; the Teith enters the Forth; and the Garry belongs to the wider Tay system.

“Principal” was therefore an editorial judgement. The selection reflected reputation, regional importance, scenic interest and the information available to the atlas makers. It was not produced by a national hydrological database, chiefly because no such thing existed.

Several substantial rivers are absent, including the Findhorn, Deveron, Beaully, Ness and Lochy. Their omission does not mean they were unknown. It shows that even an apparently objective diagram carries the priorities of the person who made it.

Did The Rivers Become Longer?

Modern measurements do not agree neatly with Thomson and Lizars.

River

1831 Chart

Common Modern Measurement

Tay

110 miles

About 117–120 miles

Clyde

100 miles

About 106 miles

Spey

85 miles

About 105 miles

Tweed

85 miles

About 97–100 miles

Dee

80 miles

About 88 miles

Don

60 miles

About 84 miles

Forth

90 miles

About 29 miles for the river proper

The Tay is still accepted as Scotland's longest river system. Tay Rivers gives its length as 117 miles, while other modern references measure approximately 120 miles depending upon the headwater selected.

The Clyde River Foundation records the Clyde at approximately 170 kilometres, or about 106 miles. NatureScot describes the Spey's main river as approximately 170 kilometres, while the River Tweed is now commonly measured at between 97 and 100 miles.

The Dee's main stem is generally measured at approximately 141 kilometres, or 88 miles, while the River Don is commonly recorded at about 135 kilometres.

That does not mean the Spey physically gained 20 miles or that nineteenth-century surveyors misplaced a quarter of the Don.

Why river lengths differ: a river's reported length depends upon which headwater is selected, where the river is considered to end and how closely the measurement follows every bend and meander.

A measurement made from a small-scale printed map will smooth away minor bends that become visible through modern Ordnance Survey mapping, aerial photography and digital geographical systems.

The Forth provides the clearest warning against treating river length as a perfectly fixed fact.

The 1831 engraving assigns it 90 miles. The modern River Forth proper is commonly described as approximately 29 miles long, while other organisations use longer figures depending upon whether upper tributaries or sections of the tidal estuary are included.

The old figure probably followed the water from an upper source through the tidal Forth and towards the open sea. Modern figures commonly distinguish the river from the estuary.

That is an interpretation, but it explains the discrepancy far better than the proposition that 60 miles of the Forth have somehow gone missing.

The Rivers Have Physically Changed

The numbers may be slippery, but the physical changes are real.

Rivers naturally move. Banks erode, gravel shifts, islands form, meanders migrate and floods can cut new channels.

Human beings have added dredging, straightening, embankments, weirs, dams, culverts, bridges, reservoirs, industrial abstraction and flood defences.

No river in the engraving demonstrates that more clearly than the Clyde.

The Clyde shown by Lizars was already becoming an industrial waterway, but the great transformation was still under way. From the late eighteenth century, the Clyde Navigation Trust oversaw improvements intended to make the river suitable for increasingly large commercial vessels.

Dredging, quay construction and alterations to the channel helped transform a difficult, shallow river into one of the world's great industrial waterways.

Glasgow Museums describes this as two centuries in which the river made Glasgow and Glasgow remade the river.

A Glasgow archive plan from 1839 (only eight years after the engraving) shows proposals for dredging, removing a weir, constructing wharves and even cutting a canal across a bend near Little Govan.

The Clyde was not merely being mapped. It was being redesigned.

The same pattern occurred on smaller rivers throughout Scotland. SEPA records that agricultural, forestry and urban development resulted in straightening, dredging, channelisation, culverting and damage to riverbanks.

Artificial barriers interrupted fish movement, while abstraction and flow regulation altered the amount and timing of water passing downstream.

The modern policy direction is increasingly to reverse some of that work. Scotland's river basin management programme includes projects to restore urban rivers, improve habitats and remove or ease artificial barriers where practicable.

It is a curious historical turn: earlier generations spent substantial sums forcing rivers into obedient channels; the present generation is spending money attempting to give some of their movement back.

The Two Waterfalls Were Transformed

The most dramatic changes in the engraving may not involve the rivers' lengths at all.

The Falls of Foyers are shown as a great natural cascade dropping through a rocky Highland gorge.

In 1896, water from the area was harnessed to power an aluminium smelter, creating what SSE describes as the first hydroelectric-powered aluminium works in Britain.

Loch Mhor was dammed to provide storage, and the site was later redeveloped as a pumped-storage power station, officially opened in 1975.

Water is now moved between Loch Mhor and Loch Ness through tunnels and shafts, allowing the station to generate electricity rapidly when demand rises.

The waterfall still exists, but it is no longer governed solely by rainfall, rock and gravity.

Corra Linn has also become part of an engineered energy landscape. The hydroelectric scheme at the Falls of Clyde diverts and regulates water from the river.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust warns visitors that levels can change quickly because of power-station operations.

The natural spectacle celebrated in the engraving is therefore still visible, but the amount of water passing over it can be influenced by machinery and electricity demand.

The two picturesque insets have acquired a second meaning. They no longer show only natural wonders. They mark two places where Scotland's falling water became industrial power.

A Different Kind Of Change

The mapmakers of 1831 were concerned principally with distance, elevation and spectacle. The modern questions are increasingly about ecological condition, temperature, flooding and whether rivers have enough space to behave like rivers.

The Scottish Government's flood-resilience work estimates that peak river flows could increase substantially by the end of the century.

Its national strategy says the number of Scottish properties exposed to flooding could rise from about 284,000 to almost 400,000 by the 2080s.

Warmer water and periods of low flow also threaten fish. Adaptation Scotland identifies rising river temperatures and reduced water levels as dangers to fish health, while riparian woodland is increasingly being planted to provide shade, stabilise banks and improve habitat.

The River Spey remains one of Scotland's most important natural rivers, supporting Atlantic salmon, lamprey, otter and freshwater pearl mussel.

Yet even there, environmental bodies have identified pressures from water abstraction, forestry, barriers and physical modification.

The river's outline on a map may appear timeless, but the conditions within it are not.

What The Engraving Really Measures

The chart is not a reliable modern table of river lengths. It is something more interesting.

It records the moment when Scotland's rivers were being converted from local knowledge into national data, just as industrial society was preparing to alter them on an unprecedented scale.

The Tay remains longest. The Clyde, Spey, Tweed and Dee remain among the country's defining waterways. The smaller names of Teviot, Isla, Earn, Teith and Garry, still bind their landscapes together.

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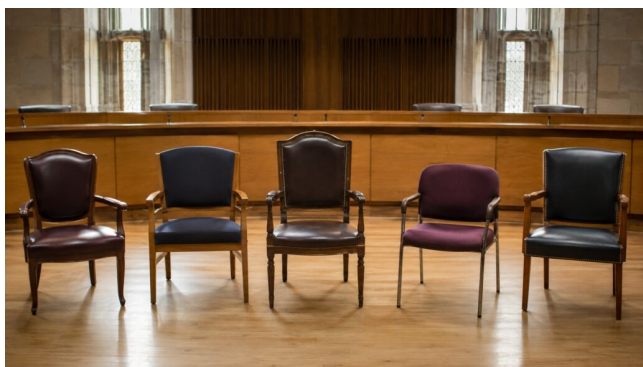
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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 5 August 2026

Scotland's Elected Representatives, Counted: 1,407 Names Across Councils, Holyrood and Westminster

Read online: <https://modern.scot/what-1226-council-seats-reveal-about-scotland/>



[Search Scotland's Elected Representatives](#)

Modern Scot assembled the current official details of Scotland's serving councillors, MSPs and MPs. The directory contains 1,407 elected representatives: 1,221

councillors, 129 MSPs and 57 MPs. Scotland's 32 councils provide 1,226 statutory council seats, five of which were vacant when the local-government data were verified.

Modern Scot data feature | Updated 6 August 2026

A spreadsheet of elected representatives ought to be one of the least romantic topics in Scotland. It contains no mist, no ruined castle and no stag standing moodily beside a loch.

Yet put Scotland's 32 councils, the Scottish Parliament and Scotland's representation at Westminster into one searchable directory and the result becomes something rather more revealing.

Modern Scot's completed directory contains 1,407 serving elected representatives: 1,221 councillors, all 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament and all 57 MPs representing Scottish constituencies.

There are, however, 1,412 elected positions across those three tiers. The difference is explained by five vacant council seats.

Scotland's present local-government arrangements provide 1,226 councillors across 355 wards, a national total confirmed by Boundaries Scotland and the Scottish Government.

Representation

Serving representatives

Seats or positions

Councillors

1,221

1,226

MSPs

129

129

MPs

57

57

Total

1,407

1,412

That makes the directory considerably more than a council contact list. It is a map of the people through whom Scotland is represented locally, at Holyrood and at Westminster.

Three Different Kinds Of Representative

Scotland has 129 MSPs: 73 constituency MSPs and 56 regional MSPs. Every person in Scotland is represented by one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs.

Scotland also returns 57 MPs to the House of Commons. The reduction to 57 Scottish constituencies took effect for the 2024 UK general election following the Westminster boundary review.

And beneath both sit Scotland's 32 councils, where the numerical picture is far less tidy.

The Modern Scot council data records 1,221 serving councillors in 355 wards. Five of the 1,226 statutory seats were vacant on the verification date, giving Scotland a council-seat occupancy rate of approximately 99.6 per cent.

It is within those 355 wards that the spreadsheet becomes particularly interesting.

What The Council Numbers Reveal

Scotland's local government is rarely governed by outright command.

Twenty-eight of its 32 councils have no single party or grouping holding a majority of the occupied seats.

The SNP is the largest force nationally in the Modern Scot dataset, with 413 councillors, but Dundee is the only council in which a national political party holds an outright majority.

Being the largest group is therefore very different from being in control.

In Dumfries and Galloway, Highland and Edinburgh, for example, the leading group occupies only about a quarter of the available seats. Budgets, administrations and local policies consequently depend upon negotiation, agreements and support extending beyond the largest party.

Scotland also has a formidable local political bloc.

Some 237 councillors sit outside the six principal national parties, including 188 recorded simply as Independents and another 49 belonging to local groups, smaller parties or unaffiliated classifications.

That is only 22 fewer councillors than Labour’s entire local-government representation.

The figures describe 32 separate political settlements rather than a single national map: heavily independent island councils, closely divided urban chambers, local alliances, one-member island wards and large multi-member wards.

Scottish local government is extraordinarily plural.

Five Empty Chairs

The five vacant council seats in the Modern Scot snapshot were spread across four authorities: Edinburgh had two, while Highland, South Lanarkshire and Stirling each had one.

Council

Vacant ward

Reason or status

Election position

City of Edinburgh

Ward 15 — Southside/Newington

Resignation of Simita Kumar after moving to Holyrood

By-election 3 September 2026

City of Edinburgh

Ward 17 — Portobello/Craigmillar

Resignation of Kate Campbell after moving to Holyrood

By-election 3 September 2026

Highland

Ward 3 — Wick and East Caithness

Resignation of Willie Mackay

By-election 1 October 2026

South Lanarkshire

Ward 5 — Avondale and Stonehouse

Death of Councillor Margaret Cooper

By-election 17 September 2026

Stirling

Ward 2 — Forth and Endrick

Death of Councillor Paul Henke

Vacancy

Edinburgh Council confirmed that Simita Kumar and Kate Campbell resigned their council seats before taking up new roles at Holyrood. Both wards will vote on 3 September.

South Lanarkshire’s Avondale and Stonehouse by-election, called following the death of Provost Margaret Cooper, will take place on 17 September.

Highland has since published further information about its vacancy. The Wick and East Caithness seat became vacant following the resignation of Councillor Willie Mackay, and, if contested, polling will take place on 1 October 2026.

Stirling Council announced the death of Councillor Paul Henke on 22 July.

The National Shape Of Scotland’s Councils

Among the 1,221 occupied council seats in Modern Scot’s dataset, the SNP is the largest force with 413 councillors, or 33.8 per cent of serving members.

Labour follows with 259.

There are 188 councillors recorded simply as Independent, 170 Conservatives, 86 Liberal Democrats, 33 Greens and 23 Reform UK councillors.

A further 49 councillors sit under named local groups, unaffiliated descriptions or smaller parties.

Party or grouping

Serving councillors

Share of occupied seats

SNP

413

33.8%

Labour

259

21.2%

Independent

188

15.4%

Conservative

170

13.9%

Liberal Democrat

86

7.0%

Named local, unaffiliated and other groups

49

4.0%

Green

33

2.7%

Reform UK

23

1.9%

Total occupied seats

1,221

100%

The SNP has 154 more councillors than Labour, but numerical leadership should not be confused with untroubled command.

Twenty-eight of the 32 authorities have no single group holding more than half of the occupied seats.

Only Four Rooms Have A Majority

Only four council chambers contain a single group with an outright majority of occupied seats.

Three are island authorities dominated by Independents.

Orkney has 19 Independents among 21 serving councillors. Shetland has 18 among 23. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has 21 among 29.

The sole national-party majority is in Dundee, where the SNP holds 15 of the city’s 29 seats.

Elsewhere, the largest group may be large without being remotely sovereign.

The SNP is the sole largest group in 20 councils and shares first place with Independents in Argyll and Bute.

Labour is the largest group in four councils, Conservatives in three and Independents in four, with Argyll and Bute providing the tie.

Dumfries and Galloway is the chamber in which nobody can plausibly enter wearing a crown.

Its largest group is the SNP with 11 of 43 councillors, or 25.6 per cent.

Highland follows closely, with 19 SNP councillors among 73 occupied seats. Edinburgh’s largest group has 16 of 61 occupied seats.

Council

Occupied seats

Political labels

Largest group

Share

Dumfries and Galloway

43

9

SNP, 11

25.6%

Highland

73

8

SNP, 19

26.0%

City of Edinburgh

61

6

SNP, 16

26.2%

Aberdeenshire

70

5

Conservative, 21

30.0%

Argyll and Bute

36

8

Independent and SNP, 11 each

30.6%

Dumfries and Galloway has the greatest variety, with councillors sitting under nine different political labels. Highland and Argyll and Bute each contain eight.

The Islands Decline To Behave

The island councils remain perhaps the clearest evidence that local Scotland does not always accept the party labels offered to it.

In Shetland, 21 of 23 councillors sit outside the six main national parties when Independents and those recorded with no party affiliation are counted together.

In Orkney the figure is 19 of 21.

In the Western Isles it is 21 of 29.

The mainland is not entirely obedient either.

South Ayrshire has 13 councillors outside the six principal national parties, Highland has 28 and Argyll and Bute has 12.

The Highland total includes 18 representatives recorded as Highland Independent and eight as Highland Alliance — reminders that even the word Independent can require footnotes in Scottish politics.

Arran: Scotland's Loneliest Ward

Then there is Arran.

The North Ayrshire island is Scotland's sole single-member council ward. Its solitude is deliberate rather than the result of a vacancy.

Boundaries Scotland considered the distinctive geographical circumstances of the island and proposed a single-member Arran ward under legislation permitting greater flexibility for inhabited islands.

Arran therefore has one councillor because the electoral arrangements provide one seat.

It is constitutionally lonely rather than abandoned.

Seven wards are designed to elect two councillors. Nine wards had only two serving councillors in the Modern Scot snapshot because Avondale and Stonehouse and Forth and Endrick were each carrying an empty third seat.

The more easily concealed vacancies were in Edinburgh and Highland.

Southside/Newington, Portobello/Craigmillar and Wick and East Caithness each had three serving councillors, but each is a four-member ward.

Among a national system containing 180 properly constituted three-member wards, an empty fourth chair can hide surprisingly well.

At full complement, Scotland’s 355 wards comprise one one-member ward, seven two-member wards, 180 three-member wards, 164 four-member wards and three five-member wards.

Those three five-member wards are all in North Ayrshire: North Coast, Garnock Valley, and Saltcoats and Stevenston. Boundaries Scotland’s North Ayrshire arrangements also provide the single-member Arran ward.

Councillors or seats per ward

Wards at current serving level

Wards at full complement

- 1
- 1
- 1
- 2
- 9
- 7
- 3
- 181
- 180
- 4
- 161
- 164
- 5
- 3
- 3
- Total wards
- 355
- 355

The Largest And Smallest Rooms

Measured by statutory seats, Glasgow has Scotland’s largest council chamber with 85.

North Lanarkshire follows with 77, Fife with 75, Highland with 74 and Aberdeenshire with 70. South Lanarkshire has 64 seats and Edinburgh 63. Boundaries Scotland’s national schedule confirms the current 355-ward, 1,226-councillor arrangement.

At the other end, Clackmannanshire, East Renfrewshire and Midlothian each have 18 seats.

Largest council chambers

Statutory seats

Glasgow City

85

North Lanarkshire

77

Fife

75

Highland

74

Aberdeenshire

70

South Lanarkshire

64

City of Edinburgh

63

Holyrood: 129 MSPs

The expansion of the Modern Scot directory beyond councils adds a second, quite different political map.

The Scottish Parliament has 129 MSPs, divided between 73 constituency members and 56 regional members.

The 2026 Scottish Parliament election returned 58 SNP MSPs, 17 Labour, 17 Reform UK, 15 Greens, 12 Conservatives and 10 Liberal Democrats.

There is one wrinkle for anyone comparing the election result with the current directory.

Kenneth Gibson, elected as an SNP MSP for Cunninghame North, subsequently became Presiding Officer and is now officially listed by the Scottish Parliament as having No Party Affiliation.

The current Modern Scot classification therefore records:

Current MSP classification

MSPs

SNP

57

Labour

17

Reform UK

17

Green

15

Conservative

12

Liberal Democrat

10

No Party Affiliation

1

Total

129

This is why the directory uses the simple representative type MSP for every member of the Scottish Parliament, while constituency and regional representation are retained separately.

An MSP is an MSP. The geography belongs in another column.

Westminster: Scotland’s 57 MPs

The third elected tier in the directory is Scotland’s representation in the House of Commons.

There are currently 57 MPs representing Scottish constituencies.

UK Parliament records the present Scottish party balance as 37 Labour MPs, eight SNP MPs, six Conservatives and six Liberal Democrats.

Party

Scottish MPs

Labour

37

SNP

8

Conservative

6

Liberal Democrat

6

Total

57

The contrast between the three tiers is striking.

The SNP is the largest party among Scotland’s councillors in the Modern Scot dataset and the largest party at Holyrood, while Labour holds the largest number of Scotland’s Westminster seats.

The same country therefore produces three rather different political maps depending upon which elected institution is being examined.

The John Party

Political labels are not the only possible means of arranging Scotland’s occupied council seats.

There are 45 serving councillors whose first name is John.

Were they to form a disciplined John caucus, it would be larger than Scotland’s entire group of 33 Green councillors and nearly twice the size of Reform UK’s 23.

There are also 31 Davids, 19 Andrews, 19 Jims, 18 Ians and 16 Jameses.

First name

Serving councillors

John

45

David

31

Andrew

19

Jim

19

Ian

18

James

16

Campbell is the most common councillor surname in the dataset, appearing 11 times, followed by Cameron and Smith with ten each.

There are three councillors called James Adams: two Conservatives and one Labour, distributed across Aberdeenshire, East Ayrshire and Glasgow.

Scotland has also elected two David Aitchisons, two David Wilsons, two Elaine McDougalls, two Gary Robinsons and two Stephen Currans.

The national directory occasionally resembles less a constitutional database than a determined attempt by Scotland to make email correspondence interesting.

What The Directory Ultimately Shows

Seen council by council, Scottish representation can appear fragmented.

Placed together, it becomes much clearer.

There are 1,407 serving people in the Modern Scot directory: 1,221 councillors dealing with the intensely local machinery of Scotland's communities; 129 MSPs legislating and scrutinising government at Holyrood; and 57 MPs representing Scottish constituencies at Westminster.

The council map is dominated by negotiation rather than outright majorities. The Scottish Parliament has a different party balance again. Westminster produces another.

The directory also exposes something political summaries tend to conceal: representation is geographical before it is statistical.

Arran has one councillor. Glasgow has an 85-seat council. A Highland ward can cover an immense physical territory while an Edinburgh ward may contain tens of thousands of voters within a few square miles. Every Scottish resident has one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs, while one MP represents the Westminster constituency in which they live.

The institutions overlap, but the representatives do not perform the same job.

That is why the directory records them separately as Councillor, MSP and MP, while retaining council, ward, constituency, region, party and official contact details beneath those headings.

A list of names, in other words, turns out to be a rather effective picture of how Scotland actually governs itself.

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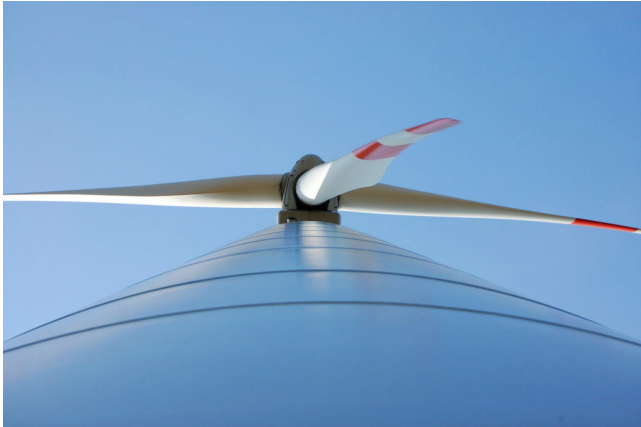
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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 3 August 2026

Twenty Of Scotland's 24 Community Energy Meetings Came From One Consultation

Read online: <https://modern.scot/twenty-of-scotlands-24-community-energy-meetings-came-from-one-consultation/>



Twenty of the 24 community energy meetings identified by the Scottish Government over a 12-month period came from a single offshore-wind consultation.

The record shows that Scotland has machinery for consulting communities about individual plans, but no continuing national system is identified for hearing what happens when several energy projects converge on the same place.

An Environmental Information response published on 23

July 2026 recorded 24 meetings involving representatives of Scottish communities and members of the Government, including ministers and cabinet secretaries.

Twenty were public events connected to the draft updated Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy. The remaining four comprised one meeting involving the Deputy First Minister and the Scottish Seabird Centre and three discussions between planning officials and the manager of the East Lammermuir Energy Projects Partnership.

The figures do not suggest that consultation failed to take place. Seventeen events were held in person around Scotland between June and August 2025, with three further sessions conducted online.

They do, however, show that the Government's record of engagement was concentrated within one time-limited exercise concerned with offshore wind planning.

A formal consultation allows people to respond to a defined proposal before a deadline. It does not necessarily provide a continuing route through which residents can raise problems as plans change, construction begins or additional infrastructure is proposed.

A coastal or rural community may first encounter an offshore wind development through a national marine plan. The seabed lease is handled separately by Crown Estate Scotland. Individual wind farms then proceed through consenting, while converter stations, substations, overhead lines, cable routes, port works and road alterations may each require further decisions by different bodies.

Every process can be valid in its own terms while leaving no single institution responsible for hearing what the combined change means locally.

The consultation behind 20 of the meetings ran from 30 May to 22 August 2025. It considered a draft spatial-planning framework covering the ScotWind and Innovation and Targeted Oil and Gas leasing rounds, together with possible test and demonstration projects.

The plan and its assessments considered up to 37.4GW of generation capacity across 32 offshore option

areas. The Scottish Government described its purpose as balancing economic, social and environmental objectives through a national planning framework for offshore wind development.

The scale of that exercise helps explain why events were held from the Northern Isles to the west coast and the east of Scotland.

It also means the 20 meetings cannot safely be treated as evidence of equally broad engagement across every part of the energy system. They were all generated by the same consultation, took place within the same three-month period and dealt with the same national planning document.

The consultation received 304 formal responses, of which 234 came from individuals and 70 from organisations. The organisations included councils, community councils, developers, public bodies and groups representing fisheries, conservation, tourism and other marine interests.

The analysis recorded recurring calls for stronger local representation, greater transparency and independent oversight. When respondents were asked whether existing bodies or new groups should oversee implementation of the plan, 94 favoured new groups, compared with 33 who preferred existing arrangements. A further 57 said they did not know.

Those responses point to a concern extending beyond whether the public was invited to a meeting. Communities were questioning how they would remain involved after consultation ended and decisions moved into separate planning, leasing and consenting systems.

The public events also produced markedly different levels of attendance.

Some drew substantial local interest, while others attracted very few people. The published consultation material recorded no public attendees at the Thurso event and only small numbers at several other locations. Larger audiences attended sessions in places including Lerwick and Pittenweem.

Low attendance does not prove indifference. It may reflect timing, notice, travel, confidence in the process or the difficulty of understanding how a national marine plan will eventually affect a particular community.

Nor does attendance by itself ensure that what people say becomes part of the formal decision-making record.

The consultation accepted responses through the Government's Citizen Space platform, by email and in hard copy. Those formal submissions were then analysed independently. Discussions held during public events helped officials understand local concerns, but attending and speaking at a session was not the same as lodging a formal consultation response through the prescribed process.

That procedural difference can matter to people who reasonably believe that speaking directly to officials has placed their concern on the record.

The four meetings outside the marine-plan consultation provide a different picture of government engagement.

East Lammermuir has faced a concentration of proposed energy infrastructure in a relatively small part of East Lothian. Planning officials met the area's Energy Projects Partnership manager three times to discuss information sharing and ways of improving coordination between developments.

The meetings suggest recognition of a problem that is becoming more common: communities are being asked to understand connected infrastructure through documents produced by different companies and considered

under separate procedures.

One developer may consult on an offshore wind farm, another on a transmission line and a third on a substation or battery facility. The physical relationship between those projects may be obvious to residents, even where the statutory system treats them individually.

The Scottish Government has previously attempted to improve community involvement through guidance rather than legislation.

Its first Good Practice Principles for community benefits from onshore renewable energy were published in 2014 and updated in 2019. The guidance encouraged developers to begin discussions early, identify appropriate communities and consider how benefit arrangements might work alongside other developments in the area.

Community-benefit payments remain voluntary and legally separate from planning decisions. They cannot be used as a reason to grant consent or treated as compensation for accepting a project.

By February 2026, the Government was proposing another overhaul. Its working paper suggested extending the guidance to energy-storage developments, addressing projects that share sites or grid connections, strengthening governance and creating a Community Benefit Peer Forum and toolkit.

That evolution reflects how much the development landscape has changed since the original principles were written.

A community may now be dealing with wind generation, battery storage, transmission infrastructure and associated road or port works at the same time. Separate benefit funds, consultation teams and application boundaries can make it difficult to establish which organisation is responsible for the wider consequences.

The Government's second information response illustrates another limitation.

A search found no meetings between ministers and community representatives about individual planning applications during the relevant year. The Government said such discussions would generally be inappropriate because ministers may later have a formal decision-making role and must avoid prejudicing live or forthcoming cases.

That safeguard is necessary. A minister who may determine an application should not privately discuss its merits with one side.

It can nevertheless leave communities without an obvious route for raising concerns that are broader than one application.

Residents may not be asking a minister to approve or reject a particular development. They may be trying to explain that several schemes together are placing pressure on roads, housing, public services, crofting land, fishing activity or local confidence in the planning system.

Those concerns can fall between institutions. A marine-planning team considers the offshore framework. A council examines local planning matters. Energy-consent officials assess major electricity infrastructure. Developers conduct their own engagement, while community-benefit negotiations take place outside the consent decision.

The risk is that government receives several technically complete accounts of individual projects but no complete account of what one place is being asked to carry.

The 24 disclosed meetings demonstrate that officials conducted a geographically extensive offshore-wind

consultation and maintained limited contact with several organisations outside it.

They do not show a permanent national system through which communities affected by overlapping energy infrastructure can raise cumulative concerns after a consultation closes.

As Scotland moves from setting energy ambitions to constructing the equipment needed to deliver them, the weakness may become increasingly visible. National plans can identify capacity, developers can progress individual projects and regulators can examine each application, while the lived consequences accumulate in a small number of communities.

The public record currently counts meetings. It does not yet show who is responsible for joining the separate conversations together.

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ENVIRONMENT | 3 August 2026

Scotland Launches £15 Million Flood Fund After Years Of Delayed And Rising-Cost Schemes

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotland-launches-15-million-flood-fund-after-years-of-delayed-and-rising-cost-schemes/>



The Scottish Government has launched a £15 million flood-resilience fund, but communities will not begin receiving money for local projects until 2027 and ministers have not yet explained how much individual councils or areas may receive.

The three-year programme will support local authorities, community organisations and other public bodies working on drainage, coastal protection, property-level resilience and measures intended to reduce the damage caused when water reaches homes,

businesses and public infrastructure.

It will also pay for new data and modelling work, including an interactive tool being developed by Public Health Scotland, and contribute to the establishment of a national Flood Advisory Service intended to help councils deliver major protection schemes more efficiently.

Preparatory work is to begin during 2026, with local project funding becoming available from next year. Detailed rules, priorities and allocations are to be set out in a forthcoming implementation plan.

The announcement arrives against a long record of Scottish flood schemes moving more slowly and costing more than originally expected.

Scotland's modern system of flood management was reshaped by the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009. The legislation moved the country away from councils addressing isolated problems independently and towards national risk assessments, regional strategies and coordinated local plans.

The Government had already begun providing councils with £42 million a year for flood protection in 2008. An agreement reached with COSLA in 2016 guaranteed that annual level for ten years, creating a total funding framework of at least £420 million between 2016-17 and 2025-26.

Under that arrangement, 80 per cent was directed towards larger schemes prioritised through Scotland's flood-risk strategies. The remaining 20 per cent was distributed among all 32 councils for other actions contained in their local plans. Ministers said the system was expected to support 40 major schemes and related works.

The latest £15 million fund is therefore comparatively modest. Spread evenly across three years, it amounts to an average of £5 million annually for the whole country—less than one-eighth of the £42 million that has historically been made available to councils each year for flood work.

It is also unclear whether all of the money is additional.

When the National Flood Resilience Strategy was published on 18 December 2024, the Scottish Government said £15 million had already been set aside in its draft 2025-26 Budget to support the strategy, wider flood resilience and coastal adaptation. The 2026 announcement again presents a £15 million package, this time as a three-year programme, but does not explain whether it is the same allocation carried forward, funding that has been reprofiled, or a separate commitment.

The National Flood Resilience Strategy is no longer new. It was published more than 19 months before the fund was launched and promised a national advisory service as one of its central mechanisms.

The strategy represented a wider change in public policy. Traditional flood programmes had concentrated heavily on large engineered schemes—walls, embankments, channels, pumping stations and other structures designed to keep water away from developed areas.

The newer approach accepts that major defences cannot be built everywhere. It places more emphasis on preparing buildings and communities for flooding, managing surface water through streets and public spaces, improving drainage and using smaller interventions alongside formal schemes.

For householders, that can mean flood-resistant doors, raised electrical fittings, non-return valves, more resilient internal materials and local warning arrangements. At a wider level, it can include redesigned parks and open ground capable of temporarily holding water rather than directing it immediately towards roads and homes.

The Government says the Flood Advisory Service will give local authorities technical support, improve project preparation and provide a governance structure for high-value schemes. Its creation follows repeated evidence that money alone has not been enough to move projects from a council plan to completed protection on the ground.

Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission examined that problem in a national report published on 28 August 2025. They warned that greater urgency was needed and identified barriers including fragmented responsibilities, workforce and skills pressures, inadequate information, uncertain funding and difficulty coordinating public bodies around communities.

The watchdogs found that Scotland's move towards broader resilience would require stronger national leadership and clearer arrangements for delivery. Their work also highlighted the practical difficulty faced by councils trying to manage immediate risks while developing expensive schemes that can take many years to design, approve and construct.

The earlier programme illustrates the scale of that difficulty.

Forty-two formal flood-protection schemes were identified for the first planning cycle covering 2016 to 2021. They were expected collectively to protect around 10,000 properties. By late 2024, reporting cited by The Times indicated that only 16 had been completed, with delays and cost increases affecting parts of the programme.

Official cost records show why progress can become difficult. Flood projects are designed over long periods, depend upon detailed modelling and land agreements, and are exposed to changes in construction prices before work begins.

A Scottish Government information release published in November 2023 recorded differences between initial and later costs across a number of schemes. The White Cart Water Phase 3 project, for example, moved from an initial estimate of £5.9 million to a final cost of £7.2 million. Other projects remained at

development stages where eventual construction costs were still uncertain.

The funding system can also leave councils exposed. For major eligible projects, the Scottish Government contribution is generally fixed at 80 per cent when costs are confirmed following tender acceptance. Councils are responsible for the remaining share and can face further pressure if costs subsequently rise.

This means an authority may support a scheme in principle yet struggle to advance it when its local contribution increases by millions of pounds.

The £15 million programme may help broaden the range of work that can proceed without waiting for a major engineered defence. Sustainable drainage, community preparation and property-level measures can sometimes be delivered faster and at lower cost than walls or embankments.

Those interventions are not substitutes for major protection where one is needed. A household flood gate cannot perform the function of a river scheme protecting an entire town, and a community resilience plan cannot compensate indefinitely for drainage infrastructure that lacks capacity.

The Government's announcement names coastal projects, sustainable drainage, community recovery support, data work and the Flood Advisory Service, but it does not divide the £15 million among them. The public therefore cannot yet see how much will reach physical projects, how much will support national bodies and administration, or what proportion may be spent developing tools and guidance.

There is also no published timetable for the advisory service to become fully operational, no list of communities likely to qualify first and no indication of whether councils will have to provide match funding.

Those details will determine whether the programme reaches places unable to advance projects under the existing system or is spread so widely that its local effect becomes difficult to identify.

The historical record shows that Scotland has not lacked flood strategies, funding structures or lists of proposed schemes. Since 2008, hundreds of millions of pounds have been placed within the local government settlement, a dedicated Act has reorganised responsibilities and two national planning cycles have identified communities requiring action.

The unresolved part has often been delivery: turning assessed risk into an affordable design, completing the statutory process, securing council contributions and constructing the scheme before costs rise again.

The new fund is intended to begin supporting local work in 2027. By then, almost three years will have passed since the National Flood Resilience Strategy promised the framework under which that work would proceed.

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ECONOMY | 3 August 2026

Highland Councillors Back New Controls On Holiday Lets

Read online: <https://modern.scot/highland-councillors-back-new-controls-on-holiday-lets/>



Councillors in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh have backed plans that could require planning permission before more permanent homes are converted into short-term holiday accommodation.

The area committee voted to recommend including the ward in a proposed Highland Rural Short-Term Let Control Area following a six-week public consultation.

Of the 98 respondents who lived in the area, 50 supported the proposal and 40 opposed it. The remaining respondents did not express a clear preference.

The recommendation will now go to Highland Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee, which is

expected to decide later this year whether the wider rural control area should be submitted to Scottish ministers for approval.

The proposal is intended to give the council greater oversight of future conversions of homes into secondary short-term lets in communities facing housing pressure.

It would not ban holiday accommodation or close existing lawful businesses.

What Would The Controls Do?

Within a designated control area, planning permission is normally required before a residential property that is not the owner's main home can be changed into a short-term let.

Applications would be considered through the planning system, allowing the council to weigh the loss of residential accommodation against tourism, economic and local circumstances.

The rules would apply to future changes of use.

Existing lawful short-term lets, second homes, empty properties and purpose-built holiday accommodation would not automatically be affected.

This means the proposal is chiefly designed to manage further growth rather than return existing holiday properties to permanent residential use.

Short-term-let licensing would continue to operate separately. Licensing principally covers matters such as safety and operating standards, while control areas use planning law to manage concentrations of secondary lets.

Long-Running Housing Pressure

The debate over holiday accommodation in Wester Ross and Lochalsh predates the current short-term-let system.

Highland Council housing records from the middle of the previous decade showed that second and holiday homes accounted for 17.2% of housing in Skye and Lochalsh and 15.5% in West Ross.

In some individual communities, the proportion was more than 40%.

Those figures included second homes and holiday properties rather than only licensed short-term lets, but they show that a substantial share of the local housing stock had already been removed from ordinary residential use before the present control-area proposal.

More recent council figures indicate that licensed short-term lets account for approximately 11% of potential dwellings in the Ross and Cromarty West housing market area.

In the mainland part of the Skye and Lochalsh housing market area, the figure is about 17%.

The council has also found that 25 of the 220 homes completed across Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh over a five-year period later became licensed short-term lets.

That finding has added to concern that new construction does not always produce a lasting increase in the number of homes available to local residents.

Tourism And Housing

Tourism is a major part of the economy across Wester Ross and Lochalsh, supporting accommodation providers, cafés, restaurants, visitor attractions and other businesses.

Short-term lets can provide income for property owners and increase the number of places available to visitors.

At the same time, residents and employers have raised concerns about the availability and cost of permanent housing.

Councillor Liz Kraft, co-chair of the area committee, said communities had repeatedly warned that the growth of short-term lets was affecting the supply of homes for people wishing to live permanently in the area.

She said the council had to consider measures that could ease pressure on the housing market and allow more people to live and work locally.

The consultation result shows that opinion remains divided.

Support came from a narrow majority of respondents rather than an overwhelming local consensus. The 98 responses also represent a small, self-selecting group rather than a formal vote of the wider population.

The task facing councillors is therefore to balance the economic importance of tourism with the need to retain enough homes for workers, families and older residents.

Highland's Earlier Control Area

Highland Council already has experience of operating this type of planning control.

Badenoch and Strathspey became a designated short-term-let control area on 4 March 2024, becoming the second such area in Scotland after Edinburgh.

Edinburgh's city-wide control area came into force in September 2022.

Highland Council says early evidence from Badenoch and Strathspey suggests the measure has slowed the growth of secondary short-term lets.

The authority has not claimed that the policy has resolved local housing shortages, and the control area does not prevent short-term-let applications from being approved.

It does, however, ensure that proposed conversions pass through the planning system before they can proceed.

By May 2026, the council said 330 short-term-let planning applications had been received in Badenoch and Strathspey since the control arrangements began.

The experience there will be relevant as councillors decide whether similar controls should cover a much larger part of rural Highland.

Wider Highland Proposal

The Wester Ross decision forms part of a broader proposal for a Highland Rural Short-Term Let Control Area.

The area consulted upon includes parts of Wester Ross, Lochalsh, Skye, Lochaber, Sutherland, Aird and Loch Ness, and other communities in the north and west Highlands.

A separate control area has also been proposed for Inverness.

Consultations on both plans ran from 12 May until 23 June 2026. Responses are being considered by the relevant area committees before the Economy and Infrastructure Committee makes a final decision.

If the committee supports the rural proposal, Scottish ministers would still have to approve its designation.

Planning permission would then be required for qualifying future conversions within the control area.

The council would still need to judge each application on its individual merits rather than applying an automatic prohibition.

The proposal cannot by itself build affordable homes, reduce construction costs or resolve shortages of land, infrastructure and skilled labour.

It could, however, give the council greater control over how many additional homes leave permanent residential use in communities where the housing stock is already under pressure.

For Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh, the immediate decision is therefore narrower than the wider dispute over tourism and housing.

Councillors are not deciding whether holiday lets should continue.

They are deciding whether the future conversion of homes into holiday accommodation should happen

automatically, or only after the effect on the local community has been considered through the planning system.

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INFRASTRUCTURE | 3 August 2026

The Two Water Systems Of Scotland

Read online: <https://modern.scot/the-two-water-systems-of-scotland/>



Thousands of people in rural Scotland rely on private water supplies, but ministers have never assessed how their costs and responsibilities compare with those of households connected to the public network.

A Scottish Government information response published on 21 July 2026 confirmed that no dedicated review had been carried out into differences in water provision between rural communities and the Central Belt.

Private supplies are commonly used by homes, farms,

tourism businesses and small settlements in remote areas.

Water may be drawn from springs, burns, lochs or boreholes, with users responsible for maintaining pumps, pipes, storage tanks, filters and treatment equipment.

For households connected to Scottish Water, this infrastructure is maintained as part of the public network.

No Dedicated Review

The information request sought policies, funding programmes and impact assessments examining rural and urban water priorities over the previous 10 years.

The Scottish Government said it held no policy, strategy, ministerial direction, funding programme or impact assessment divided between rural Scotland and the Central Belt.

It also confirmed that no internal review, equality impact assessment or specific report had examined possible disparities in water-service provision.

The response does not demonstrate that rural communities receive a poorer service or less public investment.

It confirms that ministers have never assessed, in one piece of work, the additional costs and responsibilities carried by people outside the public network.

Private Water Supplies

Around 3% of Scotland's population receives drinking water from a private source, according to official figures.

Earlier government estimates placed the number of people served at approximately 196,000.

Private sewerage arrangements are used by about 7% of the population.

The scale and condition of private supplies vary considerably.

Some serve a single house, while others provide water to groups of homes, farms, hotels, holiday accommodation or food businesses.

Owners may need to maintain the source itself, replace pumps, arrange laboratory testing and install filtration or ultraviolet treatment.

For someone connected to Scottish Water, a fault in the network is generally the responsibility of the public utility.

For a private user, the same interruption may result in an immediate household or business expense.

Scotland's Public Network

Scottish Water was created under the Water Industry (Scotland) Act 2002, replacing the previous regional structure with a single national provider of public water and sewerage services.

The reform unified public provision but did not connect every home, farm or settlement to the national network.

The Scottish Government says drinking water supplied through the public network must meet the same regulatory standards throughout Scotland.

Investment is prioritised according to regulatory requirements rather than through a separate assessment of rural social or economic need.

That creates a common national standard for publicly supplied water.

It does not establish whether residents across Scotland face comparable connection costs or have equal access to infrastructure maintained on their behalf.

Cost Of Improvements

Eligible households and businesses can receive grants of up to £800 to improve an existing private water supply.

The same maximum award was being advertised by the Scottish Government in 2015.

Work needed to make a supply safe and dependable can involve more than installing a basic filter.

Government guidance says ultraviolet treatment may require pre-filtration to remove iron, manganese or natural colour before disinfection can operate effectively.

Other work can include pumps, storage tanks, excavation, pipework and professional installation.

The Scottish Government information response does not show that the £800 ceiling has been assessed against current equipment and installation costs.

Any amount above the grant must generally be met by the property owner.

For some households, that difference may affect whether essential work is completed immediately, delayed or restricted to what can be afforded.

Public Mains Extensions

The Scottish Government has supported work examining possible extensions to public water mains.

Councils nominated communities for assessment by Scottish Water, with selected locations taken forward for further consideration.

Where a main is extended, public funding generally covers qualifying infrastructure only as far as property boundaries.

Householders may still be responsible for the pipe between the boundary and the building, together with Scottish Water connection charges.

The arrival of a public main in a settlement therefore does not necessarily mean that every nearby household can afford to join it.

Emergency Assistance

An emergency bottled-water arrangement is available when a private supply fails.

Scottish Water can deliver bottled water to council depots for distribution to affected users, with costs incurred by Scottish Water and local authorities later reimbursed.

The arrangement provides immediate assistance, but responsibility for repairing the private source, treatment equipment or pipework remains with the owners.

Official testing results illustrate some of the risks associated with private supplies.

In 2018, 42,440 tests were carried out on regulated private supplies serving more than 50 people or supporting commercial activity.

Of those tests, 93.5% met the required standard.

However, 11% of the supplies recorded at least one sample containing *E. coli*.

Around 500 supply owners also contacted councils for emergency assistance after their sources ran dry.

The figures do not cover every private supply in Scotland.

Smaller systems serving one or two homes are generally tested only when an owner or user requests sampling, leaving the national record less complete than the monitoring available for the public network.

Effect On Rural Development

Water capacity can also influence whether rural communities are able to expand.

A village may have sufficient capacity for its existing population but not for new housing.

A business may receive planning permission but still face substantial costs before securing a dependable water supply.

A public main may pass near a property while the expense of pipework and connection remains beyond the owner's means.

These limitations can affect housing, farming, tourism and local economic development.

A full national assessment would need to establish how many properties remain outside the public network, what owners spend on treatment and repairs, how often supplies fail and whether water or wastewater capacity is preventing development.

It would also need to examine connection costs and whether the existing grant remains adequate.

Scottish Water undertakes substantial investment throughout the Highlands, islands and other rural parts of Scotland, while public-health requirements apply nationally.

The existence of private supplies does not in itself demonstrate neglect.

What remains unknown is the full difference between publicly maintained and privately supported provision.

For most people in Scotland, the infrastructure behind the tap is maintained as part of a national public system.

For others, it may begin at a spring on neighbouring land and end with a repair bill that must be paid before safe water flows again.

More than 20 years after Scottish Water was created, ministers have yet to compare those two experiences.

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INFRASTRUCTURE | 3 August 2026

Ministers Confirm Scotland's 20GW Wind Ambition Was Not Mapped To Specific Areas

Read online: <https://modern.scot/ministers-confirm-scotlands-20gw-wind-ambition-was-not-mapped-to-specific-areas/>



The Scottish Government has confirmed that its ambition to install 20 gigawatts of onshore wind capacity by 2030 was not accompanied by a national spatial allocation showing where the additional turbines and associated infrastructure were expected to go.

The clarification was given in a written parliamentary answer published on 20 July 2026, almost four years after the 20GW ambition first appeared in Scotland's onshore wind policy.

Emma Roddick, the SNP MSP for Inverness and Nairn,

lodged question S7W-01551 on 6 July 2026. She asked how the Government had assessed the spatial implications of the ambition, including its environmental, social and financial effects on people, habitats, wildlife and infrastructure.

Energy Minister Stephen Gethins replied that the ambition had been set out in the Onshore Wind Policy Statement in 2022 following extensive consultation. He said it was intended as a statement of Scotland's potential rather than an allocation or mapping of specific sites.

He added that individual developments are assessed against National Planning Framework 4 and subjected to site-specific examination.

The answer draws a clear distinction between setting a national capacity ambition and deciding how the physical consequences of that ambition should be distributed across Scotland.

That distinction reaches beyond planning procedure. Wind developers will naturally favour places with strong wind conditions, available land and realistic prospects of securing a grid connection. The result can be that particular rural areas carry several wind farms, substations, overhead lines, access roads and years of construction traffic while the policy continues to be presented as a Scotland-wide ambition.

Individual applications can assess their own effects on peatland, wildlife, roads, landscape and nearby homes. They may be less capable of showing what happens when several projects, submitted at different times by different companies, place pressure on the same community, transport network or ecological system.

The supporting infrastructure also has to be anticipated. Large turbine components may require road widening, bridge assessments, port facilities, specialist haulage routes and police escorts. New generation requires substations, transmission upgrades and connections to the wider electricity network. Where there is no clear national account of likely development pressure, those needs risk being addressed reactively, one project at a time.

The absence of a spatial allocation also makes it harder to judge where the economic benefits will remain and where the practical costs will fall. Scotland may gain additional renewable capacity and national economic

value, while the most visible consequences are carried by the communities hosting the turbines and grid infrastructure.

A national spatial assessment could have linked likely development pressure with expectations for local jobs, supply-chain investment, road improvements and community benefit. It could also have helped identify where environmental limits, grid constraints or cumulative infrastructure demands might make further concentration difficult.

There is a democratic question as well. The public was given a clear national destination of 20GW by 2030, but not a clear account of where the turbines and associated infrastructure were expected to be located. Communities therefore encounter the policy through individual planning applications, often after the overall ambition has already been politically established.

The issue is whether an ambition of this scale should have been accompanied by a national account of land capacity, environmental limits, transport requirements, grid needs, regional burden and local benefit.

The Scottish Government published its Onshore Wind Policy Statement on 21 December 2022. It set an ambition to deploy 20GW of onshore wind by 2030, more than doubling the capacity installed at the time.

The policy acknowledged that reaching that figure would place additional demands on Scotland's electricity system. New developments would need to connect quickly to distribution and transmission networks, while the movement of larger turbine components would increase pressure on roads, hauliers and police escorts.

What the policy did not provide was a national allocation showing how much additional wind capacity different parts of Scotland might be expected to host.

In practice, the location and distribution of new capacity are emerging through individual applications, development planning, available land, commercial decisions, grid access and the planning and electricity-consent systems.

That allows each proposal to be judged on its particular circumstances. Applications can examine landscape, peatland, wildlife, aviation, residential amenity, roads, cultural heritage and nearby communities.

The difficulty is that a large wind farm rarely arrives as a stand-alone structure. Associated works can include access tracks, road alterations, forestry removal, borrow pits, substations, battery installations and new overhead electricity lines. Several projects may depend on the same road network, port, grid corridor or ecological system, while the transmission infrastructure required to connect them may be considered through a separate process.

The Scottish Government and the wind industry acknowledged some of those wider demands when they published the Onshore Wind Sector Deal on 21 September 2023.

The deal committed both parties to delivering the 20GW ambition by 2030. It said this would require new sites, extensions and repowering at existing wind farms, and the construction of projects that had already received consent but had not yet been built.

It also promised analysis of the development pipeline to support a more strategic approach to electricity-network investment and the transport of turbine components across Scotland's roads.

Those commitments recognise that the effects of wind development extend across individual projects and council boundaries. They do not amount to a spatial allocation of the national ambition.

National Planning Framework 4 gives substantial weight to the climate and nature crises and supports renewable-energy development. The sector deal says that increasing capacity must be balanced against effects on land use and the environment, with safeguards applied through the planning framework.

The Government can therefore argue that environmental and community protections remain part of every decision, even without a national map.

The unresolved question is whether those individual safeguards are sufficient to show the cumulative pressure carried by particular parts of Scotland.

That question is especially relevant in rural areas where wind resources may be strong but roads, grid capacity and public infrastructure are constrained. Some communities already host multiple wind farms, transmission lines and substations, while further projects continue through separate planning and consent processes.

The 2023 sector deal promises community engagement, voluntary benefit payments and routes to shared ownership. It records that more than £106 million in community benefits was committed by onshore wind projects between 2018 and 2022.

Those commitments do not determine where development should occur, how much infrastructure one area can reasonably carry or whether the economic value created by the national ambition will remain in the places hosting it.

The sector deal also links onshore wind expansion to Scottish jobs, training, supply chains and the reuse of turbine materials. It says domestic capability will be crucial both to delivering more projects and retaining greater economic value within Scotland.

A national spatial assessment could have connected expected development with the roads, ports, grid upgrades, workforce and industrial capacity required in different regions.

Instead, those requirements are being addressed through a mixture of project applications, network planning, sector commitments and local decisions.

That may provide flexibility as turbine technology, investment conditions and grid capacity change. It may also mean that development follows the places judged most commercially attractive rather than a published national assessment of where the combined burden can best be accommodated.

The recent parliamentary answer does not show that the 20GW ambition is unachievable or that individual projects will avoid environmental scrutiny.

It confirms something narrower but consequential: when the ambition was adopted on 21 December 2022, ministers did not allocate its additional capacity to particular areas or publish a national map showing where the turbines and associated infrastructure were expected to go.

Scotland established the destination first. Almost four years later, the route is still being assembled one project at a time.

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ECONOMY | 31 July 2026

Fourteen Councils Exceed Welfare Fund Budgets As Crisis Applications Rise

Read online: <https://modern.scot/fourteen-councils-exceed-welfare-fund-budgets-as-crisis-applications-rise/>



Scottish councils received more than 258,000 Crisis Grant applications in one year, while emergency spending increased by 26 per cent and fourteen local authorities exceeded their estimated available budgets.

Scotland’s emergency welfare system ended the financial year approximately £1 million beyond its estimated available budget.

That figure appears modest until the accounts are examined council by council. Fourteen local authorities

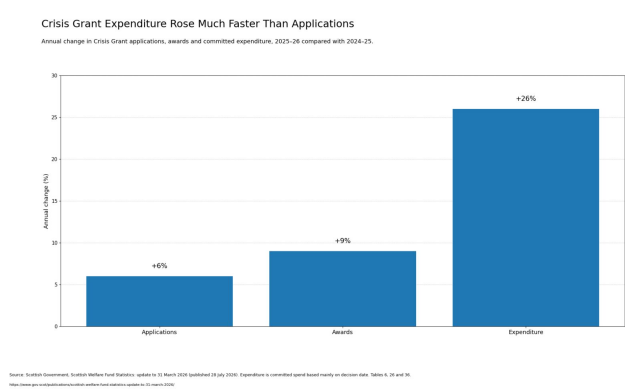
spent more than the resources estimated to be available to them, recording collective overspending of approximately £6.9 million. Elsewhere, councils retained combined underspends of £5.9 million.

The national excess is therefore the arithmetic result of markedly different local positions, rather than evidence of a uniformly funded safety net.

The Scottish Welfare Fund received 337,980 applications during 2025–26, an increase of four per cent on the previous year. Of those, 258,490 were applications for Crisis Grants, intended to help people facing an immediate threat to their health or safety because they cannot afford food, heating or other essential living costs.

Crisis Grant applications increased by six per cent during the year. Councils made 167,990 awards, nine per cent more than in 2024–25.

Expenditure on Crisis Grants rose considerably faster than the number of applications. Councils committed £21.9 million to Crisis Grant awards, an annual increase of 26 per cent. The average award rose from £114 to £130.



Bar chart showing Crisis Grant applications rising by six per cent, awards by nine per cent and expenditure by 26 per cent during 2025–26.

Crisis Grant expenditure increased considerably faster than applications or awards during 2025–26. Higher award values following the introduction of the Universal Credit Essentials Guarantee contributed to the difference. Source: Scottish Government, Tables 6, 26 and 36.

Part of that increase followed the introduction of the Universal Credit Essentials Guarantee into the statutory guidance governing the fund. The guarantee establishes minimum amounts intended to help applicants afford essentials including food, clothing and

heating.

The increase in spending should not therefore be presented entirely as evidence of rising poverty. Councils were also paying larger amounts to successful applicants because the previous amounts were judged insufficient to meet basic needs.

However, the number of applications, the repeated use of the fund and the reasons recorded for seeking assistance point towards a system dealing with persistent household shortages rather than occasional misfortune.

More than seven in ten Crisis Grant applications came from people who had applied previously. Repeat applications have remained close to or above 70 per cent for several years.

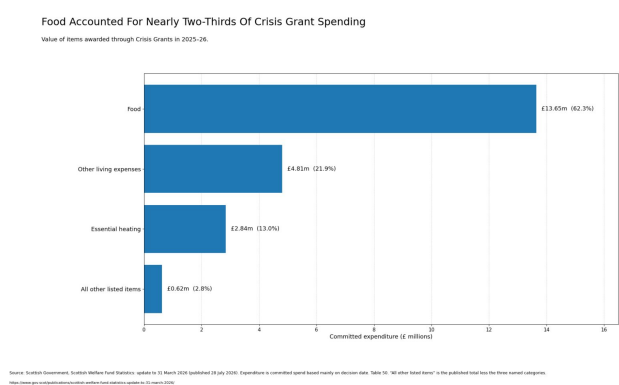
A fund intended for emergencies is consequently being used repeatedly by many of the same households. That does not establish that applicants are misusing it. It suggests that the emergency has often ended only temporarily, usually when a small payment has carried a household through until its next income arrives.

The most common explanation recorded for seeking a Crisis Grant was that the applicant’s benefit or income had already been spent. This accounted for 118,590 applications, or 46 per cent of all Crisis Grant requests.

Disasters such as fires and floods accounted for fewer than one per cent.

The crisis most frequently encountered by the system was therefore not an exceptional physical event but the ordinary exhaustion of household income before the next payment was due.

Food accounted for £13.6 million, or 62 per cent, of all Crisis Grant expenditure. Spending on food increased by 30 per cent during the year, while expenditure on essential heating rose by 15 per cent.



Horizontal bar chart showing £13.65 million spent on food, £4.81 million on other living expenses, £2.84 million on essential heating and £620,000 on all remaining listed items.

Food absorbed 62.3 per cent of Crisis Grant expenditure in 2025–26. Food, other living expenses and essential heating together accounted for more than 97 per cent of the published total. Source: Scottish Government, Table 50.

Across both Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants, councils committed £52 million in Scottish Welfare Fund awards during 2025–26. The estimated available budget was £51 million.

That available budget comprised £41 million allocated by

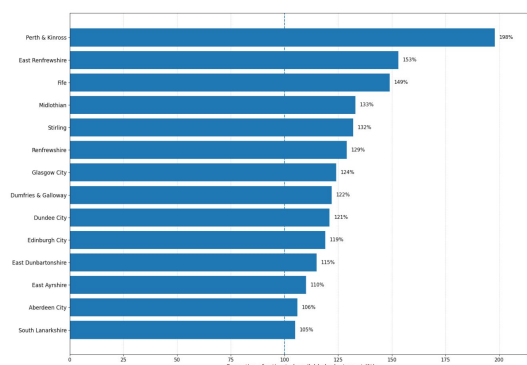
the Scottish Government and approximately £10 million in unused funding carried forward from the previous year. The central allocation included an additional £5.5 million supplied late in 2025.

The extra money helped some councils remain within their available budgets. Fourteen nevertheless exceeded them.

Perth and Kinross recorded expenditure equivalent to 198 per cent of its estimated available budget. East Renfrewshire spent 153 per cent and Fife spent 149 per cent.

Fourteen Councils Spent More Than Their Available Welfare Fund Budgets

Scottish Welfare Fund awards, 2025–26. The dashed line marks 100 per cent of the estimated available budget.



Source: Scottish Government, Scottish Welfare Fund Statistics, update to 31 March 2025 (published 28 July 2025). Expenditure is controlled spend based mainly on decision date. Note: 42.

Horizontal bar chart showing fourteen Scottish councils spending more than 100 per cent of their estimated Welfare Fund budgets, led by Perth and Kinross at 198 per cent.

Fourteen Scottish councils committed more in Welfare Fund awards during 2025–26 than their estimated available budgets. Available budgets include Scottish Government allocations and estimated funding carried forward from earlier years. Source: Scottish Government, Table 42.

The Scottish Government says councils are permitted to supplement their Welfare Fund budgets from other sources. The national publication does not identify which local budgets supplied that additional money, how much each authority contributed from elsewhere or whether other expenditure was displaced.

At the other end of the table, thirteen councils spent

less than 90 per cent of their estimated available budgets. Na h-Eileanan Siar spent 20 per cent, North Ayrshire 44 per cent and Highland 63 per cent.

Low expenditure does not necessarily demonstrate low need. Differences may arise from previous underspends, local application rates, public awareness, administrative practices, eligibility decisions or the manner in which councils record and deliver assistance.

The figures do not establish which explanation applies in each authority. They do show that access to emergency assistance, and the financial pressure associated with providing it, varies considerably according to where an applicant lives.

The differences are also visible in acceptance rates.

Inverclyde approved 89 per cent of decided Crisis Grant applications, while Midlothian approved 52 per cent. Across Scotland, 65 per cent were accepted. Decisions were made on 257,980 Crisis Grant applications and 167,990 resulted in awards, leaving approximately 90,000 decided applications without assistance.

The most common recorded reason for rejecting a Crisis Grant application was exclusion because of the applicant's previous application history. That reason accounted for 27 per cent of Crisis Grant rejections.

This produces an uncomfortable collision within the scheme. Repeat applications demonstrate that many households remain unable to absorb shortages or unexpected costs, yet an applicant's previous use of the fund can itself become a reason for refusing further assistance.

The fund is being asked to respond to recurring hardship while retaining rules designed for temporary emergencies.

Awards remain concentrated among households with the least financial resilience. Around half of Community Care Grants and 46 per cent of Crisis Grants went to applicants living in Scotland's most deprived 20 per cent of neighbourhoods.

Fifty-nine per cent of Scottish Welfare Fund awards went to single-person households, while 27 per cent went to single-parent households. Around one-third of all awards went to households containing children.

The position for 2026–27 requires closer examination.

The Scottish Budget lists £35.5 million for Scottish Welfare Fund assistance and a further £5.5 million for

administration. The Government's child poverty delivery plan describes the combined figure as £41 million of investment in the fund.

Unless further award funding is supplied during the year, the £35.5 million listed for assistance is below the £41 million allocated for awards in 2025–26 and substantially below the £52 million councils ultimately committed.

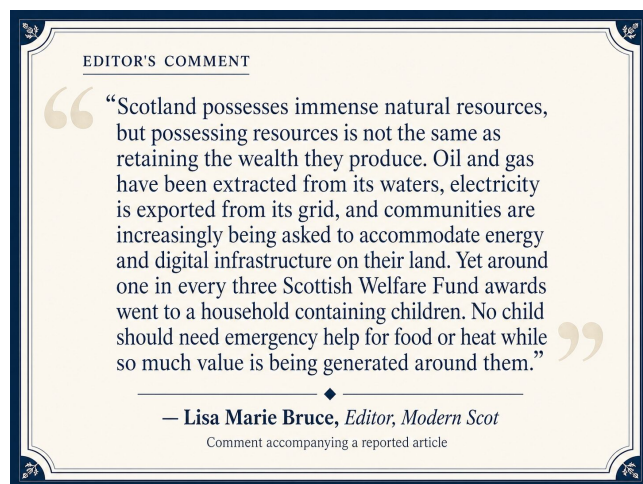
Carry-forward balances and additional council contributions may increase the amount available locally, as they did last year. They cannot be treated as a dependable substitute for an award budget that reflects actual demand.

The expenditure figures also require one technical qualification. They are largely based on the date an award decision was made and should therefore be regarded as committed expenditure rather than final confirmed cash expenditure. Individual totals may be revised after reviews or once the cost of supplied goods is known.

That qualification may alter some figures. It is unlikely to remove the broader pattern of councils exceeding their available budgets in some parts of Scotland while substantial balances remain unused elsewhere.

The Scottish Welfare Fund continues to provide a final line of support. It made more awards, paid higher average grants and helped households buy food, heat their homes and establish basic living conditions.

The unresolved question within the figures is how long an emergency fund can continue treating recurring deprivation as a succession of separate crises.



Comment by LM Bruce, Editor

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ENERGY | 3 August 2026

Scotland's Local Electricity Network Coordination Group Ended Without A Replacement

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotlands-local-electricity-network-coordination-group-ended-without-a-replacement/>



A Scottish Government group established to resolve barriers preventing homes, businesses and public infrastructure from connecting to local electricity networks stopped meeting in August 2024 and was never replaced.

The Local Electricity Network Coordination Group was created in June 2023 as Scotland attempted to accelerate the installation of heat pumps, electric-vehicle chargers and other low-carbon technologies. Its remit extended beyond household

equipment: the Government said electricity distribution networks would also need to accommodate new housing, industrial development and the wider electrification of transport and heat.

The group brought together the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, COSLA, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scotland's two principal distribution network operators, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks and ScottishPower Energy Networks, along with housing, transport, community-energy and charging-sector representatives.

Its terms of reference described effective coordination as “imperative” because of the short period available to strengthen local networks before Scotland's climate deadlines. It was expected to meet between four and six times a year, develop evidence for investment and maintain an issues log recording risks, agreed actions and progress towards solutions.

That work ended after a meeting on 22 August 2024.

Minutes from that meeting said the next session was scheduled for 21 November. However, an information request later established that the November meeting did not take place, no further meetings were held and no successor body was established. The Scottish Government confirmed that the August minutes were the group's final recorded minutes.

Its meetings had recorded practical obstacles affecting housing, heating and transport projects throughout Scotland, including connection delays, uncertain completion dates, network-upgrade costs, incomplete infrastructure maps and difficulties coordinating investment between developers and regulated network companies.

At its first meeting, members were told that applications associated with some household heat-pump schemes had more than doubled while the time needed to facilitate each connection had tripled. Network operators reported increased demand for heat-pump and electric-vehicle connections, alongside difficulties recruiting enough staff to process applications efficiently.

Housing representatives later described grid constraints and delays obtaining estimated electrical loads as

recurring problems for new developments. The group heard that reinforcement work could delay construction and that organisations lacked sufficiently detailed data to demonstrate the full extent of local constraints.

The problem was particularly pronounced in rural communities, where electricity infrastructure is often older and households are more likely to experience fuel poverty. The minutes recorded concern that evidence based on current connection applications would not necessarily show the level of demand expected as heating and transport became more dependent upon electricity.

Electric-vehicle charging operators raised a different set of obstacles. Legal rights, leases, highway permissions and outdated records of buried cables were said to add months to some installations. Participants reported cases in which cables were missing from the locations shown on network records or differed from the infrastructure described. A more consistent approach across distribution areas was proposed as a way of reducing delay.

By April 2024, the group was considering how local forecasts could inform the next electricity-network investment period. Distribution operators use future-energy scenarios to estimate demand from housing, heating, transport and industry and to justify investment to Ofgem. Members also discussed the forthcoming Regional Energy Strategic Plan system and the need to coordinate it with business planning for the 2028–33 distribution-network price-control period.

The final August meeting showed that the immediate difficulties had not disappeared. The Scottish Government's Heat in Buildings team reported that connection problems were blocking installations under Warmer Homes Scotland, the national fuel-poverty scheme. Unpredictable completion dates were affecting contractors, while delays placed additional strain on vulnerable households waiting for work to be completed.

Officials and SSEN agreed to continue discussing the matter at an operational level. The minutes do not explain why the wider coordination group then ceased meeting or what happened to its promised issues log.

There is now a broader system of regional energy planning being developed across Great Britain. The National Energy System Operator published a transitional Regional Energy Strategic Plan in January 2026 to inform distribution-network investment between 2028 and 2033. Full regional plans are expected to provide one integrated view of electricity, gas, heat networks and hydrogen, including a dedicated plan for Scotland.

Ofgem says the new system is intended to improve accountability and coordination by bringing regional stakeholders together around a common view of future energy needs. NESO has also established Scottish stakeholder forums as part of that work.

That programme may eventually perform some of the strategic functions considered by the former Scottish Government group. It is not, however, identified as its successor. The Local Electricity Network Coordination Group dealt with immediate, practical barriers encountered by housing providers, heating programmes, transport bodies, charging businesses and communities attempting to connect projects to the existing network. The full regional planning system is still being developed and is primarily intended to influence longer-term investment.

The Scottish Government's own 2025 climate monitoring report said heat and transport subgroups had been formed and that the coordination group itself was under review after 18 months. It listed no implementation indicators or milestones against which its effectiveness could be measured.

The published record therefore leaves several matters unresolved.

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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 31 July 2026

Scotland Promised Every Pupil A Device. Five Years Later, The National Account Is Still Incomplete

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotland-promised-every-pupil-a-device-five-years-later-the-national-account-is-still-incomplete/>



The Scottish Government said every school-aged child would receive a digital device by 2026. Its latest report records widespread shared provision, leaves councils unnamed and contains figures that cannot be fully reconciled from the published text.

In 2021, the Scottish Government announced that every school pupil in Scotland would be provided with a laptop or tablet.

The commitment was intended to cover approximately 700,000 children by the end of the parliamentary session in 2026. Where necessary, pupils were also to receive an internet connection to support their learning.

Five years later, the Government has published no final national account showing that the promise was delivered.

A report released on 29 July 2026 says that 21 of the 31 councils included in its analysis, or 67.7 per cent, do not provide one-to-one devices across every school year. Pupils in those areas may instead rely upon shared classroom sets, pools of equipment held within schools or devices supplied by their own families.

The councils are not named.

The report therefore establishes that provision remains unequal, but prevents parents from determining where each level of provision exists.

What Was Originally Promised?

The wording used in 2021 was clear.

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government said it would "provide a digital device for every school-aged child", helping an estimated 700,000 children by 2026.

A government announcement issued weeks earlier described the equipment as a laptop or tablet. It said work to provide one to every school pupil had begun.

The background to the announcement used slightly different language, saying all pupils would have "access to an appropriate digital device". That difference between providing a device and providing access would later become important.

The original announcement did not suggest that a mobile telephone would be sufficient. It referred specifically to laptops and tablets suitable for educational work.

What Does One-To-One Provision Mean?

The 2026 report does not provide a formal definition of one-to-one provision.

Its survey asked councils to identify each year group for which they had provided “1:1 devices to learners”. The report contrasts that provision with shared class sets, school equipment pools and bring-your-own-device arrangements.

In this context, one-to-one provision means that a device is allocated for the use of an individual learner rather than shared among several pupils.

It does not necessarily mean that the child owns the device. Nor does the report establish whether each individually allocated laptop or tablet may be taken home.

Access to equipment and connectivity at home was asked about separately. A council could therefore report individual provision in school without the published report establishing that the device was available to the pupil outside school hours.

What Did The Councils Report?

All 32 Scottish councils completed the Education Scotland survey during 2025. One authority declined permission for its response to be included in the published analysis, leaving 31 responses.

The report says 21 councils do not provide one-to-one devices across all year groups. Other pupils obtain access through arrangements that vary both between councils and, in some cases, between schools in the same authority.

Reported ratios ranged from one device for every pupil to one device shared among six pupils. One council reported a ratio of one device for every 15 children in nursery settings, although early learning and childcare was formally outside the statutory scope of the report.

The alternatives included class sets, pooled equipment and bring-your-own-device schemes. One council warned that families with more than one child might not possess enough suitable equipment and that private devices might lack the software required by schools.

Finance was the most commonly reported barrier. Sixteen councils cited funding, including the absence of government support for moving towards one-to-one provision and the cost of replacing devices as they age. Councils also identified maintenance, infrastructure and rural internet connectivity as continuing problems.

The Published Numbers Do Not Fully Reconcile

The report contains an unresolved inconsistency.

It says 21 of the 31 councils do not provide one-to-one devices across all year groups. Arithmetically, that would leave ten councils providing them throughout the school years covered by the report.

However, the preceding paragraph says that ten councils identified the year groups covered by their one-to-one programmes. All ten covered P6 to S6, five extended provision to P4 and P5, and only two included the lower-primary years of P1, P2 and P3.

Those statements cannot all describe complete P1-to-S6 provision unless they relate to different subsets of councils or were interpreted differently by respondents. The report does not explain the distinction.

The underlying survey asked councils to select each individual year group receiving one-to-one devices, including an option for “none”. The Government has not published the completed questionnaires or a council-level table that would allow the discrepancy to be resolved.

Modern Scot is therefore not interpreting the report as proof that ten councils provide individual devices throughout P1 to S6. The only safe conclusion is the one explicitly stated by the Government: 21 respondents said they did not provide one-to-one equipment across all year groups, while the more detailed year-group figures remain unclear.

The Councils Remain Anonymous

The national report does not identify which authority supplied any individual answer.

It does not name the 21 councils without universal one-to-one provision, the councils relying upon bring-your-own-device arrangements, the 16 citing financial barriers or the authorities reporting the weakest device ratios.

It also does not identify the ten councils that said they had not ensured their most deprived families possessed both a device and internet connectivity at home.

Thirteen councils reported providing both devices and connectivity to their most deprived families. Seven reported access to devices without also confirming connectivity, while one reported connectivity without confirming a device. Ten reported that both had not been ensured.

These are materially different levels of support. The decision to publish them only as national totals prevents parents, councillors and the public from comparing local provision.

Separate Council Records Show A Patchwork

Although the national responses are anonymous, individual councils have published information about their own programmes.

Midlothian Council says its £10.5 million Equipped for Learning project provides all school-aged pupils with a digital device. More than 15,000 pupils are reported to have equal access to the programme.

Glasgow City Council provides individual iPads from P6 to S6, with shared devices from P1 to P5 and within early-years settings.

Edinburgh’s Empowered Learning programme also provides personal devices from P6 to S6, while younger pupils use iPads allocated on a shared basis.

Scottish Borders Council provides iPads to pupils from P4 to S6 and class sets for P1 to P3 and early-years children. The council states that its £16 million programme was funded entirely from its own budget rather than specific Scottish Government funding.

These examples cannot be matched reliably to the anonymous 2025 survey. They were published at different times and do not necessarily use identical definitions. They do demonstrate that a child’s access depends substantially upon where the child attends school and how much the council has chosen or been able to invest.

What Did The Scottish Government Provide?

Before the universal promise was made, the Scottish Government provided councils with £25 million during

the pandemic in 2020–21.

That funding produced 72,000 devices and 14,000 internet connections after school buildings closed.

In May 2024, the Government was asked through freedom of information legislation how many devices it had provided under the commitment made in 2021.

Its response stated that the Scottish Government had issued no devices between April 2021 and the date of the request.

The response referred instead to 280,000 devices distributed by councils by December 2022. That total included the 72,000 devices financed by the earlier pandemic programme.

The Government also said it held no more recent information on the number of devices issued by councils or how much local funding they had contributed.

That does not mean that no pupils received computers after 2021. Councils continued to purchase and distribute equipment through their own programmes.

It does mean that, three years after announcing a national commitment, the Scottish Government could not identify any devices it had issued under that commitment and did not hold a current national count of council provision.

What Happened To The Funding?

Several large funding figures have been associated with the policy, but they do not all describe money reserved solely for laptops and tablets.

The 2022–23 Scottish Budget included £15 million for the infrastructure required to provide a device for every school-aged child.

The Government’s accounts later said that “discovery work” had examined the condition of digital infrastructure in schools. That work ended in December 2022, while the remainder of the commitment was still being scoped. Capital funding for the following year was reduced after the Emergency Budget Review.

A separate capital review referred to £140 million between 2023–24 and 2025–26. That figure covered both the rollout of pupil devices and improvements to school infrastructure. It should not be described as £140 million allocated solely for computers.

The public record examined for this article does not contain a single reconciliation showing the amount originally planned, the amount retained after budget reductions, the final expenditure, the organisations receiving it, the equipment purchased and the number of pupils supported.

The published record does not establish that public money disappeared. It shows that announced funding was reduced, delayed, broadened to include infrastructure and ultimately detached from the universal device promise.

In accounting terms, the money is not proven missing. What is missing is the public audit trail connecting the sums announced to the equipment delivered.

It is therefore not possible to conclude from the published documents that a particular sum disappeared. It is possible to conclude that the Government has not published a clear programme account connecting its successive financial announcements with devices delivered to children.

The Universal Policy Was Replaced

In December 2023, the Scottish Government changed its approach.

The 2024–25 Budget replaced universal pupil provision with £10 million of targeted device and connectivity support for disadvantaged households with children. Funding was to be delivered through the Connecting Scotland programme rather than distributed to councils for one device per pupil.

The change may have directed support towards families in greatest need, but it was not the same policy as the 2021 promise. The universal commitment had been replaced before reaching its 2026 deadline.

The Government's child poverty progress report for 2025–26 now records the school-age digital access commitment as having been aligned with a broader strategic approach to technology in schools.

The same report says Connecting Scotland launched two digital-inclusion funds in October 2025 worth approximately £1.4 million. They support local projects and work to develop access to online services. The report does not present those funds as a complete account of the earlier £10 million allocation or state how many pupils received laptops or tablets through them.

What The Evidence Establishes

The evidence does not show that Scotland's schools lack digital technology. Councils have invested millions of pounds, and substantial numbers of pupils have individual laptops or tablets.

It does establish that provision is not nationally consistent.

The Scottish Government promised in 2021 to provide a device for every school-aged child by 2026. It subsequently issued no devices directly under that commitment during the period covered by its 2024 freedom of information response, changed the policy to targeted household support and published a 2026 report in which most councils said they did not provide one-to-one equipment across every year group.

The Government has not named the councils behind the results. It has not published the completed responses. Its detailed figures on year-group provision cannot be fully reconciled from the report, and the various funding announcements have not been brought together in a clear final account.

Responsibility should not be transferred automatically to individual councils. They did not make the national promise, and several funded substantial programmes from their own resources.

The promise was made nationally. The provision became local. Five years later, the public still cannot see a complete account of what was delivered, where it was delivered or how the money announced alongside it was ultimately used.

Reporting Note

The Scottish Government published the council survey results only in aggregate. Modern Scot has not attributed anonymous responses to individual councils. Councils are named only where their provision is confirmed by separately published local-authority records.

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COMMUNITY | 1 August 2026

KEEK Launches To Give Scotland A Fairer Way To Be Found Online

Read online: <https://modern.scot/keek-launches-to-give-scotland-a-fairer-way-to-be-found-online/>



Modern Scot has launched the beta version of KEEK, a human-reviewed search engine for Scottish websites built without paid rankings, sponsored placement or hidden adjustments intended to favour one business over another.

Scotland has thousands of independent businesses, community organisations, visitor attractions, cultural institutions and specialist services. Many are valuable within their own places and sectors, yet remain remarkably difficult to find online.

Modern Scot has launched KEEK in response to that

problem.

Now available in beta at modern.scot/keek, KEEK is a search engine created specifically for the Scottish web. It has been designed to help residents and visitors find genuine Scottish businesses, organisations, services and destinations without requiring those websites to compete against global companies, paid placements and ranking systems that are neither visible nor easily understood.

The principle behind it is straightforward: Scotland deserves a better way to be found online.

Modern Scot believes the dominant search model has failed to serve Scotland as clearly or fairly as it should. A person searching for a local business can be shown national chains, commercial intermediaries, sponsored pages or results selected through complex algorithms whose priorities are not disclosed to the public. Smaller Scottish organisations may exist only a few miles from the person searching and still appear far below larger businesses with greater budgets and more sophisticated search-engine marketing.

KEEK takes a different approach.

It does not sell ranking positions. It does not accept payment in exchange for appearing higher in the results. Businesses will not be able to purchase prominence over other relevant Scottish organisations, and listings will not be quietly rearranged to reward whoever has spent the most.

Modern Scot considers that form of “pay to play” visibility ethically difficult to justify. Search results shape where people spend money, what places they visit and which organisations they discover. When those results are altered by commercial payments or opaque ranking decisions, users are not always seeing the clearest answer to their question. They are seeing an output shaped by a system whose incentives may be different from their own.

KEEK is being built around relevance, clarity and human review instead.

Every public listing contains three basic pieces of information: the name of the business or organisation, its

website address and one sentence explaining what it does or the mission it serves. Those entries are checked by a person before they are approved.

Human review does not mean that KEEK will attempt to judge which Scottish business is “best”. It means that listings can be checked to establish that the website exists, that the organisation has a genuine connection to Scotland and that its description is reasonably accurate, useful and free from misleading promotional claims.

The search engine is intended for businesses, charities, public bodies, cultural organisations, community groups, visitor attractions, accommodation providers, independent retailers, trades, professional services and other websites with a clear and meaningful connection to Scotland.

It is not intended for spam pages, copied directories, placeholder websites, thin affiliate sites or businesses attempting to use multiple duplicate entries to dominate the results.

The aim is to create a practical index of Scottish online life rather than another advertising marketplace.

That distinction could be particularly useful in rural and island communities, where local services are often spread across wide areas and may not have large digital-marketing budgets. A family-run guest house, regional museum, village shop, croft business, independent bookshop or local tour provider may offer exactly what a user needs while remaining almost invisible within conventional search results.

Visitors face a similar problem. Someone planning a trip to Scotland may wish to find locally owned accommodation, independent food businesses, cultural venues or activities connected to the place they are visiting. Instead, search can repeatedly direct them towards the same booking platforms, international operators and heavily promoted destinations.

KEEK is intended to make Scotland’s smaller and more distinctive websites easier to discover directly.

The service remains in beta, which means it is still being populated, tested and refined. It should not yet be treated as a complete record of every Scottish website. The beta allows Modern Scot to examine how people search, identify gaps and improve the way results are presented before the full launch.

The search engine currently sits within Modern Scot at modern.scot/keek, but the completed service is expected to move to its own dedicated domain. That will allow KEEK to develop as a distinct Scottish search platform while retaining the principles established during the beta.

The directory will grow substantially over the coming days. Around 4,600 businesses and organisations receiving Modern Scot’s weekly newsletter are to be added automatically on a rolling basis. Their inclusion will be free.

Other Scottish organisations do not need to wait to be added.

A submission form is available on the KEEK page. Applicants are asked to provide only their website name, website address and one sentence explaining the purpose or mission of the organisation. Those are the three details intended for publication.

The sentence should tell users what the organisation actually does. It need not be a slogan, sales pitch or collection of search terms. A clear description such as “An independent bookshop and café serving the Scottish Borders” is more useful than a paragraph filled with promotional claims.

Submissions are reviewed before publication. Inclusion is not automatic, and submitting a website does not

create a right to appear. Modern Scot may decline entries that have no meaningful Scottish connection, contain misleading information, duplicate an existing listing or appear to have been created primarily to manipulate search results.

There is no charge to submit a website and no fee for inclusion.

KEEK's ranking system is intended to remain understandable. Results should respond to the words entered by the user and the information contained in the approved listing. Relevant results may also be ordered using basic factors such as how closely the business name or description matches the search.

The system is not intended to create secret commercial advantages. There will be no paid route to the top of the results and no sponsored listing presented as though it were an ordinary answer.

That does not mean KEEK will never need editorial rules or technical development. Any useful search engine must decide how to handle spelling, similar names, duplicate websites, inactive organisations and vague searches. Those decisions will be refined during the beta. The difference is that the purpose of those refinements will be to improve the usefulness of the search, rather than to sell preferential access to it.

KEEK will also need the public's help. Scotland's online economy is too large and dispersed for one publication to identify every genuine organisation immediately. Businesses, local groups and readers can assist by submitting Scottish websites that should be included and by reporting records that are outdated, duplicated or incorrect.

The project begins from a belief that digital visibility has become part of economic and civic infrastructure.

Scotland should not have to rely entirely on systems built elsewhere, for global markets, to decide which parts of the country are visible.

KEEK will not replace the enormous technical reach of the world's largest search engines, nor is that its immediate ambition. Its purpose is narrower and more practical: to search the Scottish web deliberately, to check what it includes and to give genuine Scottish organisations a fair opportunity to be seen.

The beta is now open.

Scottish businesses and organisations can submit their websites at modern.scot/keek

TEA WITH GUNNS | 2 August 2026

Clothes Don't Make The Woman

Read online: <https://modern.scot/clothes-dont-make-the-woman/>



I had finished afternoon tea at a lovely establishment in the Highlands and was sitting on a bench outside, waiting for Mr Gunn. It had been a very satisfactory afternoon tea. The sandwiches had been small enough to suggest refinement, the cakes had been large enough to restore confidence, and the bill had been folded discreetly inside a little leather wallet so that one could discover the consequences in private.

Mr Gunn had gone to fetch the car. This sounds like a simple undertaking, but Mr Gunn does not merely fetch a car. He checks it. He walks around it. He looks beneath it for reasons known only to himself and the motor trade. He rearranges objects in the boot which were perfectly content in their original positions, and if another man is standing within twenty yards, Mr Gunn will generally learn where he is from, what he is driving and whether he has ever experienced trouble with the rear suspension.

I therefore settled down to enjoy the weather.

It was bright, calm and almost warm, which in the Highlands means that nothing had yet struck me horizontally. There were blue patches in the sky, and for several minutes it appeared possible that Scotland had been granted summer.

The bench was otherwise empty until a young woman appeared and sat down immediately beside me. There was plenty of room. There was a whole bench of room. There was enough unoccupied bench to accommodate a small walking party, their luggage and one of those dogs which insists upon having its own seat.

Nevertheless, she placed herself so close to my left side that we might reasonably have been mistaken for relatives awaiting the reading of a will.

She did not say hello.

I did not mind. Young people are under tremendous pressure now. They must monitor several emergencies on their phones and remain constantly prepared for someone over forty to ask what they will study at university. A greeting might have caused the entire system to collapse.

She appeared to have been instructed to sit there and wait for her parents. I knew this because she looked repeatedly towards the entrance with the particular expression of a young person whose family had once again failed to organise itself around her timetable.

I recognised the expression. Mr Gunn has seen it on my own face outside hardware centres.

The young woman carried an exceptionally large handbag. It was not really a handbag in the old sense. A handbag once contained a coin purse, a handkerchief, a comb and perhaps a boiled sweet of uncertain age. This was closer to a piece of military luggage with brass fittings. One could have packed a smaller handbag inside it, together with a change of clothes, a full picnic and, in difficult circumstances, a junior member of staff.

She opened it and removed a tablet of corresponding size.

I looked away.

I am not nosy. Nosiness requires deliberate effort, whereas things tend to present themselves directly in front of me without invitation. If a brightly illuminated screen the size of a tea tray is placed six inches from my shoulder, it seems wasteful not to develop a general understanding of events.

The young woman switched on the tablet and began reading a glossy magazine devoted to royal families, beautiful people, aristocratic weddings, expensive houses and parties attended by guests whose grandparents appear in oil paintings. There were photographs of beautiful people arriving at restaurants, beautiful people leaving yachts and beautiful people standing beside horses while pretending that neither the horse nor the photographer had inconvenienced them.

Every few pages there was an article about a private school. The pupils stood in ancient grounds wearing immaculate blazers and gazing confidently towards futures which had apparently already been reserved for them. Behind them were buildings with towers, chapels and several centuries of accumulated certainty.

At my school, we had a place to chain up bicycles and that was considered posh.

I put on my sunglasses. The sun was not directly in my eyes, but sunglasses have uses which are not always meteorological. I then opened my handbag and began searching for a mint.

I knew exactly where the mints were. I had put them in the front compartment shortly after lunch. Nevertheless, a woman is entitled to conduct a thorough search of her own possessions, particularly when reading someone else's tablet. The young woman reached the fashion pages.

The first model appeared to be wearing a formal disagreement between a lampshade and a crustacean. The garment had shoulders, although the word hardly does them justice. They extended beyond the wearer with such determination that she could have cleared a path through a crowded railway station without speaking.

They had presence. They had authority.

The young woman enlarged the photograph.

I leaned further into my handbag, as though the missing mint might have burrowed beneath my purse. The dress rose around the model in several architectural developments. There was no obvious way of wearing it through a standard doorway, although anyone able to afford it presumably owned doors which withdrew silently into the walls when approached.

The model wore the solemn expression of someone transporting a priceless vase across an ice rink. This was understandable. The dress looked as though one careless breath might cause damage not covered by ordinary insurance.

I found the packet of mints and moved it into another compartment so that I could continue looking for it.

The next outfit had something substantial happening around the hips. It was not a skirt, exactly. It was more a declaration of boundaries. The wearer occupied the full width of the screen and appeared capable of preventing two-way traffic on the A9.

I tried to imagine wearing it into the village shop. I would enter first, followed some time later by the dress. By the time the garment had cleared the doorway, three customers would be trapped beside the greetings cards and someone would have had to move the bread display.

I would ask for a loaf and a pint of milk while the lower portion arranged itself around the freezer cabinets. Mr Gunn would say, “Mind the eggs,” shortly after it was too late to mind the eggs.

The young woman swiped again.

The next outfit was covered in flowers. At first, I thought it was rather pretty. Then I noticed that the flowers had been arranged with particular enthusiasm around an area not normally given its own floral display. They climbed over the model’s shoulders, crossed her chest and continued downwards until she appeared to be wearing a small ornamental shrub in a deeply personal location.

The young woman paused to examine the details.

I examined them too, although with considerably greater discretion.

The flowers appeared to be attached with wire. This answered one question and created several others, including what might happen in a thunderstorm and whether the wearer should remain indoors during stag season.

I wondered whether the model could sit down. A surprising number of expensive clothes appear to be designed for people who never sit, eat, visit the lavatory, enter a vehicle or retrieve anything from the bottom shelf. They are permitted to arrive, stand beautifully beside a column and then disappear before practical life resumes.

The young woman swiped again and arrived at a gown with a train.

The train had acreage. At a Highland wedding, it would collect half the churchyard before the bride reached the door. By the end of the ceremony, it would contain gravel, pine needles, two commemorative orders of service, several dead midges and at least one small dog.

The young woman continued studying the gown. Perhaps she was imagining wearing it.

I tried to imagine storing it.

It would require its own room. The room would need double doors, reinforced flooring and possibly a loading bay.

By then, I had begun to understand the purpose of the clothes. They were not intended to keep anyone warm. They were not intended to allow anyone to catch a bus, pack sensibly for a weekend or stand beside a muddy verge.

They existed to make an entrance.

An ordinary dress enters a room with its wearer. These dresses entered first, established a perimeter, notified the authorities and waited for the wearer to be brought in under escort.

The young woman closed the article and rested the tablet on her lap. For a moment, neither of us spoke.

“Some of them are a bit much,” the young woman said at last.

It was the first thing she had said to me. I lowered my sunglasses and considered the matter.

“I was thinking they might be quite useful,” I said.

She looked surprised. “For what?”

“Keeping people at a safe distance.”

She laughed. It was a proper laugh, not the small breath young people sometimes produce when an older person has spoken and they are uncertain whether assistance is required.

“I wouldn’t wear one,” she said.

“Neither would I,” I replied.

“Do you have any fashion advice?” she asked.

“No,” I said.

She smiled and looked back towards the entrance.

I looked down at my shoes.

They were flat, dark, sensible and entirely capable of carrying me across gravel, wet grass, an uneven car park and, if required, a modest national emergency.

I thought for a moment.

“There is one thing,” I said. “If I might.”

She turned back to me.

"Always carry a pair of flats in your bag, the kind you can change into if you need to."

The young woman glanced at her enormous handbag.

“I probably could fit some in here.”

“You could fit a cobbler in there.”

She laughed again.

She looked down at my shoes.

“Are those the kind you mean?”

I looked at them too.

“Yes,” I said. “I arrived in high heels.”

Her eyes widened. “Really?”

“No.”

For a second she stared at me.

Then we both laughed.

Modern Scot - Distinctly Scottish

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