

# LOTHIAN MEMBERS' UPDATE

Alison Johnstone MSP & Andy Wightman MSP

MARCH 2017 | AM MÀRT 2017



This is a report to you, our Party colleagues, focusing on our recent work as MSPs. We fought to secure the biggest budget concession in Holyrood's history and are now building the case for more local powers. We continue to make progress in advancing our radical policies on poverty, health and social security – and how these might look in an independent Scotland. We're also supporting Lothian residents in speaking out against the impacts of short-term holiday lets and new flight paths.



Your Scottish Green Party MSPs for Lothian, Andy and Alison.

## Greens secure budget deal

Green MSPs achieved more in this year's budget than any party has won in any previous budget concessions, persuading the Scottish Government to allocate an extra £160million for councils to spend on local priorities such as schools and social care.

Communities throughout Scotland will welcome the additional resource, which has already mitigated the effect of many planned cuts in local services, but there is still huge work to do to protect and improve public services, following a decade of an unsustainable Council Tax freeze and years of cutbacks.

In addition, the growing centralisation of local government finance has undermined local democracy for too long. Only 12 per

cent of the funding of Scotland's local authorities is under their fiscal control, and even that meagre autonomy is compromised by the Scottish Government holding councils to ransom by punishing them if they set council tax rates that do not meet its preferences.

That's why in March, Andy published a paper that proposes a fiscal framework for local government, urging a new relationship of equals between the Scottish Government and local councils.

Successive Scottish Governments have treated councils as an afterthought rather than an equal partner despite the importance of local services. If we want a flourishing local democracy as is taken for granted elsewhere in Europe, we must increase fiscal autonomy and provide local government with a greater range of fiscal powers.

Your Green MSPs will continue to build the case for progressive national taxation and for more power at local level to ensure fair funding for public services.



Read the full 'Fiscal Framework' report at: [greens.scot/](https://greens.scot/)

## Tackling Child Poverty

In February, Alison welcomed the publication of the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Bill and urged Ministers to focus on boosting families' incomes.

The Bill proposes a target that by 2030 fewer than 10 per cent of Scottish children are living in relative poverty. At the moment, in some parts of Scotland, a third of children live in relative poverty.

In recent months, your Green MSPs have secured a number of anti-poverty measures from the Scottish Government, including:

- A pledge to roll-out nationally Glasgow's **Healthier Wealthier Children** scheme in which health visitors help vulnerable families access benefits to boost their incomes.
- A pledge to explore a **Young Carer's Allowance** to help the estimated 30,000 carers under the age of 16, many of whom struggle financially.
- A pledge to review the **funding formula for GP practices**, as those in deprived communities with bigger workloads only receive £3.79 more per patient than those in affluent areas.
- A pledge to not use **benefit sanctions** in devolved employment programmes.

Green MSPs ran for election on a manifesto which pledged to use new powers over social security benefits to top-up Child Benefit by £5 a week. Research by the University of York shows that this would lift around 30,000 out of poverty, with around 200,000 children estimated to be in poverty currently.

The Child Poverty Bill is another good step forward but we need to go much further on boosting incomes in order to meet targets. We should consider creating duties for public bodies to deliver practical help, such as

helping vulnerable families boost their incomes by helping them claim benefits to which they are entitled.

We would also encourage the Government to consider additional measures. We need to know that reducing child poverty is not merely achieved by moving those just below the poverty line slightly above it. There is evidence to suggest that 'the poverty gap' is growing and that the average family in poverty is further below the poverty line than it has been previously. We are also urging Scottish Ministers to act on the recommendations of the Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health's 'The State of Child Health' report which concludes that 400 Scottish child deaths each year are potentially avoidable and urges the Scottish Government to adopt a 'child health in all policies' approach to decision making.

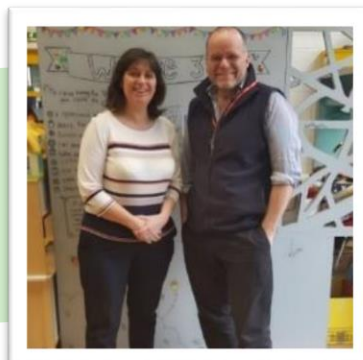
The link between poverty and poor health is well established and this shocking report shows we need a transformation in how Government approaches the issue. Four hundred preventable child deaths each year must prompt serious action. We need to see a shift in spending to make it easy to be active every day. The lack of funding for walking and cycling while motorways and air travel are set to benefit, and the deep cuts planned to sports agencies and council services, show that Scottish Ministers haven't grasped how serious the situation is.

Greens have made tackling child poverty a priority in this session of Parliament, and we're proud to have already pushed the Government to take action on a range of measures but we still need to see other interventions and a more humane approach to social security. Green MSPs will engage constructively with the Child Poverty Bill and the forthcoming Social Security Bill, so that the scourge of child poverty is truly tackled.

Read more at: [greens.scot/alison-johnstone-msp/blog/](https://greens.scot/alison-johnstone-msp/blog/)



Alison and Bliss champion Coady calling for investment in neonatal care.



Andy visiting The Yard, an adventure play centre for disabled children.



Alison supporting the League Against Cruel Sports.

# News in brief

## Protecting free bus passes

In January, Alison challenged Scottish Ministers to scrap a proposed consultation on raising the age at which people qualify for a free bus pass.

The benefits of free bus travel for people over 60 are huge, and it makes no sense to change what can be a lifeline for many. We unequivocally oppose any moves to raise the eligibility age for free bus passes.

It beggars belief that at the same time as proposing cuts to bus service funding and restricting who gets a bus pass, Scottish Ministers want to give wealthy frequent fliers and hugely polluting aviation firms an easier ride by cutting Air Passenger Duty. Access to everyday public transport is a social justice issue, something the SNP have failed to grasp despite being in government for almost a decade.

## Action on short-term holiday lets

Following December's debate on the future of Edinburgh's World Heritage Site, Andy and Alison received many emails from constituents with stories of the detrimental impact short-term holiday lets are having on their local communities.

In January, Andy hosted an expert roundtable on this issue and used General Questions to ask the Scottish Government whether it will take action to regulate growth in short-term letting of residential property, but was disappointed to learn that the Scottish Government has no plans to do so.

Greens will continue to make the case that the planning system - specifically use-classes orders - can and should play a significant role in ensuring that communities and councils have the tools that they need to regulate the residential character of not only the city of Edinburgh but many villages and rural areas across Scotland.

## No new flight paths

Andy and Alison have been contacted by concerned residents, as Edinburgh Airport's proposed changes to flight routes would negatively affect many communities.

Shockingly, this includes communities set to be overflown by flight paths which were not included in the initial proposed design envelope, including in South Queensferry and Winchburgh.

Furthermore, at no point has the option of not expanding been considered. This latest so-called consultation is pointless as it wrongly assumes that more air travel is a good thing. Your Green MSPs will continue to challenge Edinburgh Airport's profit-driven motives and put forward sustainable ways to support our economy.

## Time for a citizen's income

In March, Alison took part in the Scottish Parliament's Social Security Committee's evidence sessions on Universal Basic Income.

Earlier this year, Finland became the first country to trial the idea, with a monthly payment of £475 replacing income support benefits, including tax credits, and being offered to a cross-section of society, including people both in and out of employment. A range of cities across the world are also piloting the idea - which has been Scottish Green policy since our foundation in 1990 - and Fife and Glasgow Councils are considering it too.

This couldn't come at a better time. With the devolution of new welfare powers and the establishment of a new social security system in Scotland, we rightly should be thinking how we can radically rebuild our social security as much as the current and recent governments have tried to destroy it.



Andy hosting the 'Radical Solutions to the Housing Crisis' roundtable.



Alison supporting Marie Curie's campaign for better end of life care.



Andy supporting the Further Education Lecturers' Association.

# Parliamentary Business

## Recently in Parliament, Alison and Andy have lodged motions to:

Seek confirmation that reforms will be enacted to extend the Scottish SPCA's existing investigative powers over crimes relating to domestic animals to **wildlife crime**, following a 2014 consultation which demonstrated overwhelming support.

Recognise the work of **Edinburgh Tool Library** - the UK's first tool library - in promoting sharing tools as a way of reducing waste and making access to tools affordable for everyone. The charity now has 600 members including several refugees from Syria, who are joining the community to improve their English language skills and make things for other people and groups, and its own employment programme, **ToolsForLife**, which supports young people who experience barriers to work, pairing them with a mentor to learn valuable practical and life skills and build confidence.

Acknowledge research showing that around the world in 2010 between 2.7 and 3.4 million **premature births may be linked to air pollution** and support all efforts to reduce air pollution and to improve maternal health in Scotland and around the world.

Welcome Shelter Scotland's annual report which shows that families with children spent a total of almost **one million days in temporary accommodation** last year, noting that long periods in temporary accommodation can damage children's

mental and physical health and disrupt their education.

**Congratulate the athletes, coaches and staff at Scottish Athletics** on their recent outstanding performances, including Andy Butchart's new Scottish 3,000m record, Laura Muir's British 5,000m indoor record and European 3,000m indoor record, Eilidh Doyle's world-leading time in the indoor 400m, Callum Hawkins' Scottish half-marathon record, and Heather Paton breaking the 25-year-old Scottish record in the 60m hurdles.

**Congratulate Mel Young**, co-founder of the Homeless World Cup and founder of The Big Issue Scotland, on receiving the 2016 Jackie Robinson Humanitarian Award for his contributions to tackling homelessness and poverty through sport.

Note with regret that Scotland is unique in the UK in its lack of provision of courses in **Russian language in schools**, which has had a knock-on effect on the provision of Russian in further and higher education, and urge the Scottish Government to meet with those concerned to see what can be done to address this.

View all motions online at [parliament.scot](http://parliament.scot)

### Andy's Committees and Cross-Party Groups

Andy is the Scottish Green Party's spokesperson on Housing and Land Reform. In Holyrood he sits on the Economy, Jobs & Fair Work Committee and the Local Government & Communities Committee.

Andy is a member of the following Cross-Party Groups:

- Credit Unions
- Housing (Convener)
- Industrial Communities
- Nuclear Disarmament
- Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency
- Russia (Convener)
- Scottish Showmen's Guild (Deputy Convener)
- Towns and Town Centres
- Women in Enterprise

Contact Andy on 0131 348 6368 or [andy.wightman.msp@parliament.scot](mailto:andy.wightman.msp@parliament.scot)



### Alison's Committees and Cross-Party Groups

Alison is the Scottish Green Party's spokesperson on Health & Sport, Social Security and Children & Young People. In Holyrood she sits on the Social Security Committee and the Health & Sport Committee, as well as on the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

Alison is a member of the following Cross-Party Groups:

- Animal Welfare (Deputy Convener)
- Children and Young People (Deputy Convener)
- Construction (Deputy Convener)
- Deafness
- Health Inequalities
- Improving Scotland's Health: 2021 and beyond
- Learning Disability
- Sport (Co-Convener)
- Walking, Cycling & Buses (Co-Convener)

Contact Alison on 0131 348 6362 or [alison.johnstone.msp@parliament.scot](mailto:alison.johnstone.msp@parliament.scot)

