

Programme for Government 2020-21

Introduction

The Scottish Government has published its programme for 2020-21. This sets out a revised legislative programme and other administrative actions. This briefing highlights the issues with greatest impact on UNISON members. This parliament is only 8 months long. The majority of the Programme for Government comprises activity already announced, either in previous years or more recently, or are to be completed years in the future. Unsurprisingly, the Programme for Government (PfG) is dominated by responses to Covid-19.

Covid-19

Much of the PfG is about responding to the aftermath of the pandemic but there are a number of measures and proposals which relate specifically to tackling the outbreak. These include the launch of the protect Scotland app, expanding the winter flu vaccine, research into the virus and its impact, particularly on BAME people. There is ambition to build a domestic supply chain for PPE. "Testing, contact tracing, surveillance and response" is described as "the most significant economic and social policy" in the programme. Various initiatives such as digital learning programmes are to be given more emphasis as a result of the virus.

Economy

The stated focus is on a "green recovery", including details around the £2 billion "Low Carbon Fund". This £2 billion is over the next parliamentary session, so will total around £400 million per year. There are a range of announcements in this area, and it is not entirely clear from the PFG which of these are included in the £2 billion, and which are additional to it. However, the new PFG does include further announcements on a £100 million "green jobs fund", although again this is over five years. There are a range of policies aimed at tackling youth unemployment, including a £60 million "Youth Guarantee" to provide education training, or employment (nb jobs not necessarily at Living wage levels). Local authorities and Health boards are expected to be part of the scheme. The main job creation initiatives though are focused on infrastructure investment

KEY POINTS:

- **The Scottish Government have outlined their programme from now till next years elections**
- **Much of it consists of measures to tackle Covid-19 – or longer terms to drive economic recovery**
- **Their will be a review of adult social care**
- **The Scottish Government are focussed on a "green recovery" but they see this as being largely private sector led and focussed on infrastructure rather than services**

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Local Government

The Programme contains nothing which addresses the scale of the crisis in local government budgets or the urgency of maintaining essential local services. Isolated pledges of money are made in the Programme which may find their way to local authorities – e.g. the £70m for improving the infrastructure for local authority refuse collection, and the £4m for intensive family support promised by the Independent Care Review – but it is far from clear whether this is ‘new’ money, and the sums involved in no way address the problem. There is a pledge to work with local government to deliver “20 minute neighbourhoods,” but with no funding attached. The commitment to implement in full the Independent Care Review recommendations in relation to looked after children and those on the edge of care will have resource implications for local government which are not addressed in the Programme.

There is a mention that “Quality public services and a strong economy must go hand in hand.” But a fundamental lack of recognition of how essential core local authority services are for protecting vulnerable people and local communities as well as delivering the latest central government initiatives. The potential of Local Government as a source of stable jobs and driver of economic growth is ignored. The economic role seen for councils is mostly as a partner agency facility private sector growth.

Health

The Scottish government say they are considering various options to acknowledge and reward NHS staff for their role during the pandemic. It is stated that the government “have not ruled out revisiting the final year of the current three-year pay deal as part of that 2021-22 deal.” To acknowledge the impact of the covid crisis on workers, there will be an expansion of mental health and wellbeing support for health and social care staff, including the development of a Health and Social Care Mental Health Network and enhanced access to digital resources with £5million attached.

A Workforce Specialist Service, which will provide confidential assessment and treatment for mental ill health. This will be delivered through a multi-disciplinary team of mental health care providers, and be supported by the continued delivery of digital wellbeing resources through the National Wellbeing Hub and the National Wellbeing Helpline. Services are to become more digital via “NHS Near Me” Video or telephone consultations becoming the default provision of GP services “where clinically appropriate”. Similarly Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (cCBT) services are to be expanded.

A&E services are to be redesigned. Partly this is to ensure to allow social distancing. The role of NHS 24 is to be expanded to help reduce numbers attending A&E and via a booking system, reduce waiting times. For people with complex needs the adoption of a model of support akin to the COVID-19 Hubs used during the pandemic will be explored.

The commitment to enhancing GP services via the creation of multi disciplinary teams delivering services in the community is restated, as is the commitment to recruiting 800 new Mental Health workers to ‘key settings’ which include GP practices

Adult Social Care

An Independent Review has been commissioned led by Derek Feeley, a former CEO of NHS Scotland. The review will examine how adult social care can most effectively be reformed “to deliver a national approach to care and support services.” This will “include *consideration of*” a national care service. The remit is very wide including; care for the elderly, adults with disabilities including mental health difficulties, and those with alcohol and substance dependencies. It includes all types of care including care homes, care at home, befriending and day services. This wide remit and the short time frame of the review (it is to report in January) suggest that any conclusions are unlikely to be final.

Education

Early Years Education - the Government will set out how it intends to meet its commitment to the 1,140 hours of free early learning and childcare. A new target date for rolling this out Scotland-wide will be announced before the end of 2020.

Education Support Staff – an additional £135m is being committed to help children catch up on any learning lost during the pandemic. Some of this will be dedicated to recruiting 1400 additional teachers and 200 additional support staff and purchasing 25,000 chromebooks.

FE & HE - These figure in the PfG primarily in relation to the Youth Guarantee, or retraining to create green jobs. The Government commit to completing the recruitment of 80 counsellors in universities and colleges. There is a commitment to funding extra university places following the reversal of the SQA downgrading results. There are though no details given.

Legislative Programme

The parliament has only a short period of time left to run, so there are only a few new Bills. These include the Budget Bill, a Domestic Abuse Bill and a bill to incorporate The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law as part of the Children’s Act. The implications for a wide range of public service organisations could be far reaching both in terms of staff responsibilities and resource implications.

Conclusion

This programme for government comprises mainly of measures needed to combat, or to recover from the impact of Covid-19. The programme is strong on issues of environmental sustainability this is to be welcomed. There is though little detail provided about how services, outside the Scottish Government’s favoured initiatives are to be sustained. There is little concrete in the short term to offer comfort and support to hard pressed key workers.

Further Info:

- [Programme for Government \(full\)](#)
- [First Minister’s Statement](#)
- [Review of Adult Social Care- Terms of Reference](#)
- [Youth Guarantee Plan](#)
- [UNISON Scotland statement on PfG](#)
- [Briefing on Scottish Government Economic Recovery plan](#)



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