

SP2026 Manifesto Analysis

Innovation in public services

Lighthouse PR

May 2026



Contents

Contents	2
Cross-party consensus.....	3
Broad agreement (four or more parties)	3
Narrower agreement (two to three parties).....	4
Talking points	4
At a glance.....	5
Scottish Conservatives	6
Scottish Labour.....	6
SNP	7
Scottish Liberal Democrats.....	8
Reform UK Scotland	8
Scottish Greens.....	8

Purpose, scope and method

Scope

This analysis examines what the six main parties contesting the 2026 Scottish Parliament election say about innovation in public services - what it will look like, how it will happen and what benefits it will deliver. It covers health, education, transport, local government, planning and digital services, including artificial intelligence, data-driven delivery, apps and platforms.

Purpose

Rather than look at individual manifestos or the differences between them, I have taken what might be an unconventional approach and looked at commonalities: **where might the parties set aside ideological and tribal politics to work together in the interests of Scotland?**

After all, even if the SNP get a majority it may be a fragile one. The probability remains that throughout or at some point in the parliament, two or more parties will have to work together. That is exactly how the parliament was intended to work. It does on many occasions, but not nearly enough.

There are also a skint public sector and a stagnant economy. We aren't going to solve those issues without more collegiate working.

Method - please read these important notes

I have not done this as paid or even unpaid work for any client. It has been for my own interest and as a contribution to reframing the conversation between the worlds of politics, business and society.

It would not have been humanly possible - for your author at least - to read, digest and cross-reference all of the manifesto content and produce a timely report. Therefore I have used a sophisticated AI tool to help before doing a light-touch review and edit of the most important points. **Both AI and human may have made mistakes. Please do not rely on it as definitive.**

Talking points represent my view and are designed to support further discussion and enquiry.

All page references cite the published PDF page number. Page references are not definitive of a party's whole position - they are signposts to one or more places where policy points are mentioned, not a comprehensive index.

Parties covered: Scottish Conservatives, Scottish Labour, SNP, Scottish Liberal Democrats, Scottish Greens and Reform UK Scotland. They are listed in no particular order.

Links to manifestos

- [Scottish Conservatives manifesto \(PDF\)](#)
- [Scottish Labour manifesto \(PDF\)](#)
- [SNP manifesto \(PDF\)](#)
- [Scottish Liberal Democrats manifesto \(PDF\)](#)
- [Reform UK Scotland manifesto \(PDF\)](#)
- [Scottish Greens manifesto \(PDF\)](#)

Cross-party consensus

Innovation is one of the few themes on which almost every party commits to something concrete. The NHS dominates: AI, apps and modernisation are the default examples. Planning reform comes a close second. Beyond those, the field thins quickly. Education, transport and local government innovation are treated unevenly.

Broad agreement (four or more parties)

- **AI in the NHS is the future.** Conservatives, Labour, SNP, Lib Dems and Reform all back the use of AI across the NHS - in diagnostics, administration, or both. The Greens are the outlier, focused on regulating AI rather than deploying it. (Conservatives p.56; Labour p.15; SNP p.48; Lib Dems p.27, 30; Reform p.8)
- **A single patient-facing NHS app.** Four parties commit to an app for citizens to manage appointments, prescriptions or records. Reform would adopt the NHS England App; the others imply a Scottish equivalent. (Conservatives p.56; Labour p.15; Lib Dems p.27, 30; Reform p.8)
- **The planning system must be modernised.** All six parties call for planning reform. Most frame modernisation as an enabler of investment, growth and housing supply. The Lib Dems alone propose AI-based modelling, pre-screening and document automation across planning departments. (Conservatives p.26; Labour p.31; SNP p.40; Lib Dems p.15, 57, 60; Reform p.9-10, 13; Greens p.6)
- **Public sector modernisation as a theme.** Conservatives, Labour, SNP and Lib Dems all commit to modernising service delivery. Reform goes further and proposes a dedicated efficiency department to

shut down quangos and cut waste. (Conservatives p.56; Labour p.16, 93; SNP p.21; Lib Dems p.16, 56, 59; Reform p.14)

Narrower agreement (two to three parties)

- **A national or publicly-backed AI strategy.** The SNP commits to take forward Scotland's AI Strategy and pilot an AI Scaleup Accelerator. The Lib Dems commit to a Minister for Digital and Emerging Technologies and a published AI action plan for the NHS. Labour commits to a Scottish National Data Library. The Greens call for urgent AI regulation and devolved AI powers. (SNP p.39; Lib Dems p.16, 30; Labour p.33; Greens p.68, 85)
- **Data-driven service design.** The Lib Dems use "data-driven" as an explicit design principle across housing, local government and roads. The SNP cites MyCare.scot as the national platform. Labour references the National Data Library as the underpinning. (Lib Dems p.52, 60, 62, 65; SNP p.17, 48; Labour p.33)
- **Digital adoption support for business.** Labour and the Lib Dems both propose funding to help businesses adopt digital tools. The SNP and Lib Dems both reference Techscalers or scale-up accelerators for Scottish companies. (Labour p.33; Lib Dems p.23; SNP p.39)

Talking points

What 'innovation' actually means

Five parties use the word repeatedly but define it inconsistently. For some it is new technology; for others it is new delivery models, process improvement, or the use of AI. Of course, it could be all. Perhaps what matters more is that there's structure around what success looks like and how it can be achieved. Although I'd add there's a tendency to seek Big Shiny Changes when small, incremental gains are more realistic.

Benefits, measurement and accountability

Most proposals name the action, not the outcome. What success looks like for the public - faster diagnosis, shorter waits, reduced failure demand, resolved first-time - is rarely spelled out. Published targets for AI-supported diagnostic throughput, app active-user rates or planning decision times are absent.

There is a gap others can fill. Businesses, NHS leaders and public-service suppliers will be the ones actually delivering; they should help set the measurement baseline the parliament then holds to account.

AI in the NHS

Five parties support AI in the NHS. The intended model is not spelled out. The Conservatives reference a “Humphrey”-style toolset on the UK Government pattern; the SNP points to Scotland’s AI Strategy; Reform points to the NHS England App.

Clinical risk, data protection, bias testing, workforce training and other issues receive limited attention. The Lib Dems’ commitment to publish an AI action plan “that will underpin its safe, smart and efficient deployment” is the only one of its kind.

The NHS app

Four parties promise a national NHS app. Interoperability with GP, pharmacy, dentistry and social care data is the hard part, and none of the manifestos engages with it. The previous attempt, NHS Inform’s digital services and the patchwork of health-board portals, is not named as a baseline to build on or replace. Reform would adopt the NHS England App. The others imply a Scottish equivalent.

Innovation outside the NHS

Education innovation is nearly silent. Only the Lib Dems commit to digital literacy and AI comprehension for all pupils and to greater freedom for colleges to innovate and borrow. Transport is similar: the Lib Dems alone propose a data-driven Dangerous Roads Programme and a central register of roadworks. Others reference ScotRail modernisation without a delivery model.

Local government is the biggest missed opportunity. Councils are where most citizen transactions happen. Beyond the Lib Dem AI-in-planning proposal, none of the parties engages with how councils would adopt new technology at pace.

At a glance

The table below summarises each party’s headline approach to public-service innovation.

Theme	Conservatives	Labour	SNP	Lib Dems	Reform	Greens
Flagship application	AI across NHS; in-house AI tools; single NHS app	AI scanners; NHS app; National Data Library	AI Strategy; MyCare.scot; Scaleup Accelerator	Minister for Digital; NHS AI plan; AI in planning	NHS England App; general AI adoption	AI regulation; copyright; marine innovation
Delivery route	NHS rollout; Humphrey-style tools	Procurement and adoption funding	Existing national platforms; pilots	Ministerial accountability; action plans	Healthcare Reform Commission remit	Regulation first; public ownership
Benefits claimed	Cut admin; faster access	Faster diagnostics; shorter waits	Joined-up services; responsible scale-up	Safe, smart, efficient deployment	Efficiency; retention	Consumer protection; climate tech
Evidence and measurement	Not stated	R&D target to UK average	Embedded in growth metrics	Published action plan	Not stated	Accountability via legal action
Risk and guardrails	Not stated	Limited detail	Builds on existing AI Strategy	Safety principle stated	Not stated	Transparency; regulation; devolution of AI powers

Theme	Conservatives	Labour	SNP	Lib Dems	Reform	Greens
Key differentiator	NHS-first AI productivity; enterprise zones	AI scanners plus industrial strategy	Continuity: existing platforms and strategy	Structured programme: minister, plan, data	Efficiency framing; English platform reuse	Regulation, climate and rural innovation

Scottish Conservatives

General thrust

The Conservatives frame innovation principally as a productivity lever for the NHS and a growth lever for the wider economy. AI is the main technology mentioned. Modernisation is presented as a way to reduce administration costs and free up clinical time. (p.24, 56)

Key proposals

- **AI in the NHS:** roll out AI across the NHS to cut administration costs. Build an in-house suite of AI tools modelled on the UK Government's Humphrey platform. (p.56)
- **Single national NHS app:** fast-track a citizen-facing NHS app for appointments and records, noting England has had one since 2019. (p.56)
- **AI as economic lever:** capitalise on the AI revolution while protecting livelihoods from negative consequences. (p.24)
- **Enterprise zones:** Canary Wharf-style zones to boost growth and create high-skilled jobs. (p.24)

How they propose to fund it

Delivery is framed as a ministerial priority with central coordination through Growth Scotland (the proposed merger of Scottish Enterprise, SDS and SNIB). No delivery timescale is published for the NHS AI rollout or the app. Funding is positioned as self-financing through efficiency savings. That is an article of faith, not a fiscal plan.

Scottish Labour

General thrust

Labour ties innovation tightly to NHS modernisation and to an industrial strategy. Technology is presented as the means of driving down waits, improving diagnostics and raising productivity. A National Data Library and an R&D target to match the UK average anchor the economic side. (p.15, 16, 33)

Key proposals

- **AI scanners and NHS app:** detect cancer early, speed up diagnostics and give patients digital access to services. (p.15)
- **Neighbourhood health hubs:** co-locate general practice, pharmacy, dentistry, physiotherapy and social care - a redesign that depends on digital connectivity. (p.17)
- **Digital adoption funding:** business support to adopt digital tools and improve productivity. (p.33)
- **National Data Library:** plus an R&D target to match the UK average. (p.33)
- **SNIB innovation mission:** refocused so Scottish businesses can develop and test innovations. (p.32)
- **Techscalars and procurement:** expanded network and SME procurement access. (p.33)

How they propose to fund it

Delivery sits within a single industrial strategy and a 10-year NHS workforce plan. Funding is framed as redirecting existing spend where possible, with a dedicated affordability section in the manifesto. The R&D commitment is a destination, not a path. (p.92)

SNP

General thrust

The SNP frames innovation as a continuation of existing work. A National Council for Economic Growth and a responsible approach to AI sit alongside existing national platforms. Digital government is described as joined-up and modernised rather than reinvented. (p.21, 39)

Key proposals

- **AI Strategy:** take forward Scotland's AI Strategy with a commitment to responsible use of AI. (p.39)
- **AI Scaleup Accelerator:** pilot to connect high-growth Scottish companies with experienced founders and international markets. (p.39)
- **National platforms:** MyCare.scot as a national care app and a national booking system for NHS appointments. (p.17, 48)
- **Full fibre broadband:** accelerated rollout plus a Shetland subsea cable feasibility study. (p.39)
- **Public service delivery:** modernise how services are joined up. (p.21)
- **Rail modernisation:** ongoing investment in publicly-owned rail. (p.67)

How they propose to fund it

Delivery rests largely on existing national platforms, strategies and publicly-owned infrastructure (ScotRail, NHS Scotland). Funding is framed through the Block Grant and the maturing ScotWind leasing revenue. Independence is presented as the longer-term fiscal route. No innovation-specific budget is disclosed.

Scottish Liberal Democrats

General thrust

The Lib Dems present the most structured approach to public-service innovation. A Minister for Digital and Emerging Technologies sits at the centre. Innovation is described as safe, smart and efficient, with data-driven delivery as a common design principle across topics. (p.16, 27, 30, 60, 65)

Key proposals

- **Minister for Digital and Emerging Technologies:** modernise technology across the public sector and help companies leverage emerging technologies. (p.16)
- **NHS AI action plan:** underpinning safe, smart and efficient deployment. Comprehensive NHS app rolled out. (p.30)
- **AI in planning:** major project to integrate AI across all local authority planning departments for modelling, compliance, pre-screening and document automation. (p.60)
- **Data-driven roads:** Dangerous Roads Programme and a central data-driven register of roadworks. (p.62, 65)
- **Schools and colleges:** digital literacy and AI comprehension embedded in schools; greater college freedom to innovate, borrow and create new courses. (p.43, 44)
- **Public-servant-led innovation:** allow public servants to test and scale promising ideas. (p.95)

How they propose to fund it

Delivery is anchored on ministerial accountability, action plans and published data. The Lib Dem fiscal posture rests on halving government consultancy spend, a specialist tax reform team part-funded by the Hunter Foundation, and a review of the quango landscape. None of those is big enough on its own to fund a programme of this breadth. (p.16, 93)

Reform UK Scotland

General thrust

Reform references innovation mainly through tax and efficiency. The public-service specifics are AI and the NHS England App within the Healthcare Reform Commission's remit. The wider theme is that smaller, cheaper government is the real innovation. (p.4, 8, 15)

Key proposals

- **Healthcare Reform Commission:** remit includes AI and the NHS England App. (p.8)
- **10-year modernisation:** railways and harbours. (p.12)
- **Innovation reputation:** rebuild Scotland's by allowing creative and entrepreneurial people to deliver modern solutions. (p.15)
- **Efficiency department:** cut waste and shut down quangos. (p.14)

How they propose to fund it

The manifesto relies on tax reductions, welfare reform and government efficiency savings to release capital. A long-term infrastructure funding model using UK pension funds is proposed. No innovation-specific budget is disclosed. (p.11)

Scottish Greens

General thrust

The Greens concentrate innovation policy on regulation, the green economy and public-service universalism rather than public-sector technology modernisation. Where they mention AI it is typically to regulate it or to devolve regulatory powers. Research and innovation funding is directed at cancer research and marine energy. (p.11, 49, 68, 85)

Key proposals

- **AI regulation:** devolve AI regulatory powers to Holyrood; increase transparency around AI in public decision-making. (p.68)
- **Generative AI and copyright:** urgent regulation. (p.85)
- **Marine energy innovation:** consolidate Scotland's leadership position through sustained support. (p.11)
- **Research funding:** increase institutional research and innovation funding for cancer research. (p.49)
- **Rural and sustainable innovation:** aquaculture, rural innovation funding and forestry innovation. (p.42, 82)

How they propose to fund it

New revenue streams - non-domestic rates surcharges, wealth tax, carbon tax - are presented across the manifesto as the funding source. Regulatory reform is presented as the guardrail without which innovation creates harm. The cost of the regulatory infrastructure itself is not disclosed.