



Aberdeen &
Grampian
Chamber of
Commerce

2022 Local Election

Business priorities manifesto

Get to work



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Dear candidate,

The next five years will be a critical period for the North-east of Scotland.

We want to see bold leadership from local authorities in creating the business environment we need to enable the region to flourish. And this starts now, as parties and candidates set out their respective visions ahead of May's local council elections.

Even more important still, is how you will put those promises into **action** once the results are in. The decisions taken in the coming months will set the course for how we recover from the pandemic, create the conditions urgently needed for growth and enterprise, realise the potential of our city and town centres and ensure the necessary investment and infrastructure is in place to support these challenges.

Our collective mission is to transform Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire into the Net Zero Energy Capital of Europe while diversifying our economy, building on other key sector strengths in tourism, life sciences, food, drink and agriculture and digital and creative.

Ambition is nice, but delivery is everything.

Governments and opposition parties at all levels -local, Scottish and UK - must work together to create the conditions that will allow the private sector to take the lead on delivering this vision. There is no room for complacency, half measures, hollow gestures and political dogma. We are all in this together.

The Aberdeen city region has the ingredients: a strong and cohesive economic plan and partnership, a highly skilled workforce, pioneering universities and colleges, a proud history of locally grown businesses taking on the world and an innovative industrial base poised to take on the challenges of tomorrow.

In this document you will find some of the key priorities from the members of Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce, on which we hope to secure a consensus among parties and candidates in this election.

We encourage you to keep an open mind to how we establish a long-term economic plan beyond just the five-year term of the next councils to deliver inclusive growth and enduring prosperity for our fantastic region. The past two years have far too often seen business and governments locking horns, it's time to reset that relationship and work together, in partnership, aligned to the same common purpose.

Economic success will underpin the future of the North-east. If we get that part right, then there is nothing stopping us. If you share that ambition and stand ready to deliver, then AGCC will be willing you on.

Good luck on May 5th. And then it's time to **get to work**.



Russell Borthwick

chief executive,
Aberdeen & Grampian
Chamber of Commerce

Aberdeen and Grampian: the place to do business

AGCC wants the North-east of Scotland to be the best place to do business.

By that we mean the most productive region of Scotland, the most enterprising part of the UK and among the most globally attractive prospects for inward investment.

Local councils have a key role in creating those conditions, in partnership with business.

To get our economy firing on all cylinders, we want our local leaders to:

1. Push for meaningful and ambitious reform of non-domestic rates to stimulate enterprise as we enter the post-pandemic recovery period and look to the future. The way we do business has changed over time and so too must the way that businesses are taxed. A new system should reflect changing property needs and usage and incentivise new businesses to emerge and grow in our towns and cities. In the immediate term, maintain rates relief for the sectors hit hardest over the past two years, redress the fact that rateable values were already too high across the North-east before the pandemic struck and conduct forthcoming revaluations in a transparent manner which reflects fair value based on an average rate over the past decade.
2. Remove all remaining “work from home” guidance and put responsibility back into the hands of employers to design a system which works for them and their staff.
3. Recognise that the proposed Workplace Parking Levy is a system ill-suited to the North-east of Scotland eco-system and commit to not implementing any such system in Aberdeen City or Aberdeenshire. Instead, renew this region's focus, in terms of policy and investment, on transport infrastructure, including improvements to public transport.
4. Work with our world class local universities, North-east Scotland College and local schools to developing the skills and courses needed for our key growth industries which will drive our regional and national economy over the coming decades.
5. Strengthen economic partnerships between the public and private sectors, recognising that the challenges we face to transform and grow our economy will require leadership and risk-sharing between both to unlock investment and create jobs. The North-east is already showcasing what can be achieved, but more joined up thinking will be required between local government, Holyrood and Westminster to create the optimum conditions for business growth in the coming years.



Aberdeen and Grampian: net zero capital of Europe

Businesses across this region are already applying global expertise in oil and gas to develop the low-carbon energy challenges of the future.

The mission for Aberdeen and Grampian is to become the Net Zero Capital of Europe, with offshore wind, hydrogen technology and carbon capture and storage driving our future prosperity. This is a joint undertaking which will require a strong local partnership between business and government.

To give ourselves the best chance of success, we want our local leaders to:

1. Work with businesses and national government to develop investment opportunities which will deliver maximum return on investment for the £500 million Just Transition Fund. We must urgently accelerate our journey to net zero, develop technology at scale and create new jobs within the next five years.
2. Take the lead, create the conditions and broker the necessary deals to enable St Fergus to be a key player in Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage as soon as feasible and before we lose our first mover advantage. This project will be an ambitious but necessary contributor to UK economic growth, vital in reaching our net zero targets, central to creating green jobs and help drive export of products, services and expertise to other evolving industrial clusters around the world.
3. Accept that as part of our just transition to net zero, oil and gas will remain crucial in satisfying domestic energy demand for decades to come. This will require exploration, development and production from new fields, which will be critical for energy security, sustaining jobs and our economy through the transition and unlocking investment in low carbon technologies and renewables.
4. Reject calls for a windfall tax on the profits of energy companies, which is a blunt instrument likely to harm this investment in transition and drive energy prices higher for consumers. Instead, direct existing revenues derived from business into support for renewable and low carbon technologies and demand government incentives or other measures which support reinvestment in net zero.
5. Bring forward a Net Zero Jobs Strategy, developed between local authorities and the North-east business community, which demonstrates how public and private sectors will work together to sustain employment opportunities in the region in the next five years and beyond.



Aberdeen and Grampian: a city region to be proud of

We should all be proud to call the North-east home, but we know that our city and town centres are currently challenged by a range of forces.

Retail and hospitality businesses continue to fight for survival in an ever-changing environment.

We expect the following action from our local leaders:

1. Start to deliver on investment commitments such as the City Centre Masterplan and Beachfront development, including imaginative travel and transport plans. These projects are fundamental to the future success of our city region and that there is no room for pettiness preventing the vision from being turned into reality.
2. Appoint a City Regeneration Director, charged with leading public debate over future use and experience of Aberdeen City Centre, undertaking widespread engagement on plans for its transformation and driving delivery through effective partnership working. Proposals should put people at their heart and aim to create a thriving city centre where people want to live, spend leisure time and work. Companies must be supported to encourage staff back to office-based working.
3. Planning must work with and not against landlords across the region who want to repurpose buildings for residential use and explore bringing vacant and derelict buildings into public hands, redeveloping them as independent retailers, enterprise hubs, co-working spaces or business incubators, supporting start-ups and fostering SME growth. By the same token, in certain circumstances councils should use existing powers to sanction unproductive use of land and property.
4. Convene a summit of mortgage lenders who may be reticent to lend to buyers of city and town centre properties above hot food venues and develop a recommended list of those willing to finance investment in our city and town centres.
5. Trial a pilot scheme to boost Aberdeen's night time economy, with bus travel free to and from the city centre after 7pm from Monday to Thursday. Such a proposal could encourage workers to visit restaurants and bars after work to take advantage of free travel, encourage more people into the city centre on 'off peak' days during the week, encourage more people to use public transport and also present safe travel options for people returning home at night. This trial should be delivered in conjunction with late opening of city centre retail.



Aberdeen and Grampian: connected to the world

Aberdeen is a global hub, serving an interdependent region.

Our connectivity by air, road, rail, sea and online must reflect that, but currently falls well short in terms of delivering maximum economic potential for the region.

Our local leaders should:

1. Work together to ensure the North-east Green Freeport bid incorporating the ports of Peterhead and Aberdeen, and Aberdeen International Airport, is successful. Our well-developed existing port infrastructure across the North-east is ideally placed to capitalise on this opportunity and achieve our growth ambitions in energy, food and drink and other key industries.
2. Demand progress on the infrastructure upgrades required to radically reduce rail journey times between Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh, ensuring that Scotland's three largest city regions can maximise economic output by working together. Beyond this longstanding call for action, we want to see a serious business case developed for expanding rail infrastructure to the north of the city — to Ellon, Peterhead, St Fergus and Fraserburgh, with passenger and freight capacity, potentially using hydrogen trains.
3. Call for a level playing field on air passenger duty and investment in route development, to connect Aberdeen Airport to the rest of the country and the world as we capitalise on energy transition and new tourism opportunities.
4. Play a key role in the rapid acceleration of EV charging across the region, so the North-east can lead the way in low carbon transport. This will require work with commercial vendors and making use of public parking places and community resources and should include provision of a network of rentals EVs for use by visitors and local residents. Availability of charging points at key visitor attractions must be a priority as we seek to deliver the growth of our tourism sector in a sustainable way.
5. Work with the Scottish and UK governments and commercial partners to deliver, without further delay, the rollout of R100 Superfast Broadband scheme to all businesses and households in the North-east of Scotland and bring forward a strategy to tackle significant mobile and data coverage 'not spots' in the region via a 5G pilot region plan.





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Candidate Pledge

I am committed to the future prosperity of the North-east of Scotland, creating a globally competitive business environment, transforming our city region into the Net Zero Capital of Europe, building a place to be proud of, one which is connected to the world and able to fulfil its potential, and to working in partnership to deliver on this vision.

Signed

Date

