**SNP Party Conference: round-up**

Overview

The SNP Party autumn conference 2023 was held at The Event Complex Aberdeen, from October 15 – 17. In March this year, Humza Yousaf assumed leadership of the SNP during a particularly turbulent period. Rumours and speculation ran rampant amid ongoing investigations into the party’s management under Nicola Sturgeon and Peter Murrell. The party’s footing in Westminster has diminished due to unexpected suspensions, defections and the party suffered a spectacular defeat to Labour in Rutherglen. Progress towards independence has stalled and the consensus seems to be that Yousaf has yet to break free from the substantial shadow of Nicola Sturgeon, both in terms of leadership and as First Minister of Scotland.

This marked one of the most sparsely attended SNP conferences in years. Yet, his first keynote address to conference as party leader was well received and could stand as one of his most impressive leadership performances to date.

At conference, SNP members approved a new strategy that outlined their plan to seek a mandate to begin independence negotiations. The plan is contingent on the SNP securing 29 or more of the 57 Scottish seats at the next general election. The intended outcome of this proposal, whether it be a referendum or direct secession negotiations, is unclear, but it is expected that it would be rejected by either Rishi Sunak or Keir Starmer.

Key figures

* Humza Yousaf – SNP Leader and First Minister of Scotland
* Keith Brown – Depute Leader
* Stephen Flynn – Westminster Leader

Key policy announcements

The SNP conference was light on policy announcements, however, there were several significant announcements made through speeches in the First Minister's keynote speech.

**Economy**

The SNP has pledged that they will freeze council tax rates across Scotland. Previously, the Scottish government had proposed raising council tax rates by as much as 22.5% for homes in higher bands. But Humza Yousaf has announced that they will remain the same when councils set their budgets for 2024-25.

Since the SNP assumed power in 2007, council tax has been maintained at either a frozen level or capped at 3%, and the Scottish government allocated additional funding to local authorities in exchange. However, in the last two years, councils were granted the authority to determine their own tax rates, resulting in most regions experiencing increases ranging from 4% to 7% this year. The SNP had previously committed to replacing council tax, at conference Humza Yousaf pledged his commitment to reforming local taxation.

**Health**

In his keynote address, the First Minister announced that over the next three years, the Scottish Government will allocate an extra £100 million annually to improve NHS inpatient and day-case waiting lists. It is estimated that this £300 million additional funding will help to reduce waiting lists in Scotland by 100,000 patients by 2026.

**Net Zero**

The First Minister announced that over the next five years, the Scottish Government will invest up to £500 million to establish a new offshore wind supply chain in Scotland. Yousaf described this investment as a “catalyst” for additional private investment in Scotland’s ports and harbours. The hope is that it will not only foster inward investment and encourage domestic companies to explore new opportunities but also contribute to emission reduction and the creation of sustainable jobs.

Most relevant to Trading Standards:

In the context of net zero initiatives, Trading Standards will play a central role in safeguarding consumer safety during the transition, particularly with new products being regulated. CTSI will be approaching politicians to ensure Trading Standards role is not forgotten in any net zero work.