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Cover image: Teenagers meeting up to enjoy the great outdoors and improve their wellbeing. Photograph used for promotion of [Get into Summer 2021](#), which provided £20 million of funding to support children, young people, their families and carers to enjoy the summer and improve their wellbeing.

# 1. Foreword

The coronavirus pandemic has dramatically affected every area of life in Scotland. We came together as a nation to fight the pandemic. The virus and the public health measures necessary to suppress it had, and continue to have, a substantial, wide ranging impact on our lives, our businesses and our public services.

Throughout the pandemic we have sought to alleviate the overall harm caused by the virus – to our health, to our economy and to broader society.

The success of the vaccination programme in reducing much, but by no means all, of the serious harm associated with the virus enabled us to lift almost all restrictions in summer 2021 with a reduced risk of the NHS being overwhelmed as a result of Covid. Though life is by no means ‘back to normal’ and important public health measures remain in place, this lifting of restrictions has provided the platform for recovery.

Despite progress, we know that the impacts of Covid continue to be felt acutely by many individuals, businesses and other organisations across Scotland – and on our high streets and in our hospitals and especially by all those who have lost loved ones and continue to suffer themselves as a result of Covid.

It is clear that the impact of the pandemic has not been felt evenly. It has both highlighted the inequalities in our society and made them worse. Those who were already the most disadvantaged have suffered disproportionately. They have been more likely to get seriously ill, more likely to be hospitalised, and sadly more likely to die from Covid. They have also been the hardest hit socially, educationally and economically, by the restrictions that were brought in to control the spread of the virus.

For many of our people, the disadvantages they faced have been made worse by the pandemic. Our recovery must be about how we make life better for them. It cannot be about how we get life back to how it was before the crisis because, for too many of our citizens, that is not good enough.

Covid Recovery is about bringing the urgency, flexibility and creativity that was brought to saving lives and supporting people during the pandemic, to tackling the inequality and disadvantage starkly exposed by Covid.

Collectively, we have shown what can be done when barriers are not just broken down but trampled over in the interests of getting the right service or support to the right people when they need it. That is what we need to do again if we are to tackle these problems.

This recovery strategy is neither the end of the story, nor the whole of it. A vast amount of work has already been undertaken and more will follow. It does not seek to provide the level of detail on recovery plans for individual public services, but it does provide the overall principles that will guide them.

This strategy focuses on the efforts we require to tackle inequality and disadvantage. If our people are secure and have firm foundations then our communities, businesses, economy and society will be more resilient.

It will:

- address the systemic inequalities made worse by Covid.
- make progress towards a wellbeing economy.
- accelerate inclusive person-centred public services.

This cannot occur in a vacuum. To achieve these aims we require urgent action across society. From government, local and national, from community groups, charities and voluntary organisations and from businesses large and small. All must play their part, and none can do so in isolation. Every sector has something to contribute to the delivery of these aims and every sector stands to gain from success.

This strategy makes clear that a thriving economy underpins a successful recovery. The efforts of businesses will be central to the success of this strategy, and as we work with business organisations to finalise a set of principles based around mutual respect and a shared commitment to collaboration, we will work together to shape a fairer and more prosperous recovery. The pandemic has highlighted the precarious nature of employment for many people in Scotland. By providing secure foundations for those in work through better wages, working conditions and fair work, then our businesses will be more resilient, productive and profitable.

The Scottish Government will play our part through policy actions that are specifically designed to address one or more of these objectives, like the expansion of the Scottish Child Payment and increased free childcare. But we will also ensure that the other actions across government, from education to tackling climate change, also contribute to our recovery.

We will work in partnership with local government to deliver the joint leadership that is necessary for this effort, recognising the key leadership role councils play in their communities. Our recovery must recognise that different areas had different experiences in the pandemic and also that the changes we have already made, most notably in home working and digital services, open up new opportunities in some areas while creating new challenges in others.

In working with others we will also engage with our counterparts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as each of these nations progress their recoveries. We continue to aim to work in equal partnership with the UK Government, in the best interests of Scotland's people. Our recovery strategy demonstrates a robust and wide reaching set of actions. However they are constrained by our current powers and by the UK Government's increasing undermining of our devolved responsibilities. We will continue to do all we can to keep Scotland safe, protect the gains of devolution and our democratic rights and to make the case for having full control of our recovery.

Over the last 18 months life has changed markedly. Over the next 18 months there is an opportunity to drive a more positive change, but we must move at pace. By working together over that timescale with the same energy, imagination, and urgency as we approached the pandemic, we can achieve that change and drive a recovery that delivers for all of Scotland.

**John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery.**