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# Moving from rhetoric to reality

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**The Wise Group's manifesto  
for better lives in a better  
Scotland**



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The Wise Group's manifesto for better lives in a better Scotland

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**The Wise Group is a leading social enterprise which prides itself in making lasting and positive differences to people's lives.**

We're proud because we help people find jobs, provide advice to people struggling to heat their homes and support people to find their feet following time in prison.

To do this, the Wise Group is committed to living our values and to colleague wellbeing, one of our key guiding principles and the cornerstone of supporting others.

The Wise Group works in partnership with everyone from large businesses to national and local government and third sector organisations who provide essential specialist support to our customers. Together, we are greater than the sum of our parts.

**For more information visit [www.thewisegroup.co.uk](http://www.thewisegroup.co.uk)**





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## A word from our Chief Executive

**Sometimes it is the people no one imagines anything of who do the things that no one can imagine.**

The Wise Group's vision for Scotland is of a country where everyone has equal opportunity to contribute and to thrive.

If the pandemic and economic woes of the past have taught us anything, it is that society and business are a reflection of each other. With an economic scale of around £2 billion, social enterprise and its role in the recovery needs to be understood. Through growing our social capital, we do what we do with purpose at the heart whilst delivering economic benefit.

The monumental scale of the economic and civic challenges we face leaves us in no doubt that our focus must be on a new approach. This calls for a strategic reset, collaboration, integration and the leaving behind of positions. And crucially, it is incumbent on all of us not to lose sight of the progress we have made by building on old processes.

As a nation, we must more fully recognise the value of social enterprise and its principles as a viable, agile, entrepreneurial business model and career path as traditional support programmes alone will not solve our jobless crisis or lead our recovery.

Rooting recovery and service design in customer need is a must. Would our greatest innovators build products in splendid isolation from their end-users?

Designing services based on customer need can be difficult, not least as needs are often complex and interlinked, and so civic solutions often miss the mark as a result.

During the pandemic, we have proved that we can do 'difficult'. Now it is time for imagination and willingness to do more 'difficult', with collective effort to pioneer new solutions that might just work.

In our manifesto, we highlight how social enterprise principles and entrepreneurial spark offer a bright addition to doing business and understanding what those in our care need, so we can revolutionise service design and delivery to enable people not simply to survive but to thrive.

Only by adopting this approach and these solutions can we work in partnership to tackle poverty, reduce inequality, and build better lives in a better Scotland.

**Sean Duffy, Chief Executive**

## What we need to build better lives in a better Scotland

The Wise Group is on a mission to transform people's lives.

The Wise Group believes that our work offers highly valuable insight into some of society's most significant social and economic challenges, now more than ever.

To power the economic recovery of Scotland and its communities, we believe that the following four foundations are necessary and practical steps needed now:

- ① Using technology as an enabler
- ② Forming strategic partnerships
- ③ Putting flexibility at the heart of programmes and procurement
- ④ Building in ability to demonstrate the efficacy of interventions in changing attitudes and behaviours

To enable Scotland to build forward, in an increasingly complex poverty landscape, here we set out our asks of the next Scottish Government.





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## Turn wellbeing economy rhetoric into reality

**To power the economic recovery of Scotland and truly champion and tackle current poor performance on addressing inequality in our communities, we need an evidence-led, needs-based approach, coupled with a procurement strategy and approach with community-based wellbeing firmly and demonstrably at its heart.**

**Recognise** social enterprise as the vehicle to move this ambition from rhetoric to reality. Independent, agile and dynamic, social enterprise is the way to do business for a fairer society and a more inclusive economy. Throughout the pandemic, as well as before, social enterprise has acted with pace, and in many cases as the innovator, offering funders and government new ways of delivering their obligations. Working together, we can do more.

**Implement** flexible and collaborative approaches to procurement with redefined success factors that deepen interaction with wellbeing and inequalities.

Some of the Wise Group's most successful programmes are measured not by numbers or units but by behaviour change and progression, more in line with Scotland's National Performance Framework principles. They are person and impact centred rather than spreadsheet and contract centred.

This is evidence that with the correct relationship, motivation and collaboration this is possible. Behavioural change achieved through the delivery of identified needs can co-exist with contractual performance indicators.

**Build** evidence-led, needs-based support that is rooted not in mandating but in co-design. If we are to fuel a renewed society in which citizens and communities can realise their potential, we must recognise the value of the contribution of those we aim to support, and base support not on what we think others need but on what people tell us they need.





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## Connection is everything

**The pandemic has served to remind us of the importance of human connection and the value of relationships.**

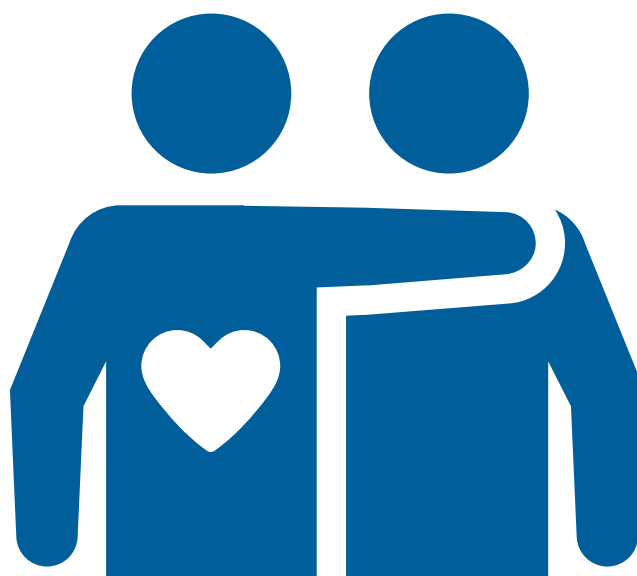
Relationships increase our confidence and self-esteem. They make us feel important, worthy, and good enough. We are motivated by those powerful feelings to develop social skills so that we can meet people, develop friendships and engage in society.

**Support** a mentoring approach to lifting people out of poverty. Our work with individuals, communities and businesses that has proven that this relationship based approach provides the best results.

Without access to relatable experience and dedicated mentoring support our attempts to address social and economic challenge will not have the impact that is needed.

Mentors provide the glue between individuals, communities and the services they need, leading to a more sustainable outcome and longer-term impact.

***We go the distance, so our colleagues and customers reach a positive and sustainable future.***





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## No tech, no skills, no chances

**We believe that a perception change is needed in order to realise and understand the value of equipping people with the right technology and the right digital skills, and equally the risk of not doing so.**

**Focus** greater investment into identifying gaps in the availability of and access to technology and assessing digital skills needs. This work should seek to engage the hardest to reach customers who are long-term unemployed or with experience in the justice system for example.

Prevention of digital exclusion and improving digital access and skills holds the potential to unlocking opportunities and having a life-changing effect on those living in poverty.

***We hurdle boundaries and innovate.***





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## Find a job, get a job, keep a job

**The need for rapid re-employment to underpin economic recovery is not in question.**

Scotland is a complex patchwork of communities, cultures and local economies meaning 'people and place' has never been more important. Every part of Scotland will be impacted differently and at different levels. Recognition and appreciation of individual labour market requirements is crucial.

**Adopt** a recovery and growth effort that is localised. It is imperative we find inclusive regional and local solutions that twin-track rapid and inclusive recovery to ensure that the most challenged and economically fragile in our communities do not drift further from the reality or hope of any sort of sustainable future.

**Implement** a more joined up approach to national and local employability support in Scotland aligned with local authority outlay to amplify local expenditure.

**Ensure** flexibility within support programmes so provision is less transactional and stop-start, and more nuanced to enable people to flow in and out and interact with different elements of support provision as and when need dictates. We call for a shift in mindset to one of customer journey and customer experience for greater impact and more sustainable outcomes.

**Support** employers to invest in re-skilling, up-skilling and training in order to improve productivity performance, build resilience to technological change and capitalise on opportunities in new occupations or sectors where demand is growing and those arising from Scotland's transition to net-zero carbon. Investment in individuals' skills helps to narrow inequalities and improve social mobility into the future.

***We are ambitious to make a real difference every day: socially, financially, culturally.***







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## Heating or eating must be a thing of the past

**We know that many people in Scotland face financial hardship, and are worried about paying their energy bills and heating their homes. COVID-19 restrictions have exacerbated the challenge, worsening existing struggle for some and bringing new struggle to others.**

To enable Scotland to achieve statutory targets for reducing fuel poverty, and ambition to reduce carbon emissions and become a net-zero society by 2045, much remains to be done.

**Invest** in a mentoring approach to tackling fuel poverty. The Wise Group is the largest delivery provider of in-home advice and advocacy for fuel poverty support in Scotland.

Prior to the pandemic, our work with individuals, communities and businesses had proven that mentoring provides the best results in lifting people out of poverty.

As how we use energy at home is a key fuel poverty driver, now more than ever, we are convinced of the

importance of delivering home energy advice through a relationship-based approach.

**Champion** technology as an enabler in the blend of support required to tackle fuel poverty. As COVID-19 restrictions have been put in place, we have adapted our services as required to building remote support, utilising technology and wider engagement tools to continue helping people including the more vulnerable and those in remote and rural communities.

**Support** energy suppliers to work more collaboratively with home energy advice providers to deliver fair and just access to energy, and help find ways for customers to pay for fuel and stay warm and well in their homes.

Especially as energy bills will rise from April 2021 as result of Ofgem lifting the price cap on standard tariffs back to pre-pandemic levels.

***We thrive through collaboration, kindness and learning together.***





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## Smarter Justice

**Scotland's longer-term Smart Justice ambitions will remain at risk without a clear strategy that is progressive, appropriately targeted and funded, and aligns national and local justice support.**

The Wise Group is a solutions-focused service provider within the justice sector. We have robust insight into the challenges that people in the justice system face, and are committed to contributing to the ongoing conversation and development of future strategy.

**Implement** evidence-led, needs-based community justice services that support a change from custodial to non-custodial community-based disposals and interventions. Collective effort to build confidence in Community Payback Orders (CPO), Electronic Monitoring, and the use of Supported Bail as meaningful alternatives to custody will reduce our prison population. Holistic wrap-around support that helps individuals deal with the issues that have brought them to the attention of the justice system in the first place is key to reducing re-offending and creating safer communities and fewer victims of crime.

**Recognise** the value of connection. Many of our mentors have experience of the criminal justice system, including imprisonment.

They are experts and know what does and does not work in treading the path to desistance. Relatability between the mentor and the individual being supported is key to inspiring people to make change and achieve better, lasting outcomes.

**Embrace** technology advance and innovation by adopting the Wise Group's approach to investing in pilots aimed at supporting the delivery and effectiveness of Justice related interventions. For example, our CPO Connect programme is borne from a pilot and offers a secure and flexible way to complete the Other Activity element of a CPO. Online sessions on a range of practical topics, delivered by trained facilitators, count towards Unpaid Work hours, and provide the opportunity to learn new life skills. CPO Connect could also support a move to increase the proportion of hours designated to Other Activity, enabling Justice Social Work Services to focus on higher risk cases and strategic collaboration for effective support towards desistance.

***We celebrate and respect individual difference.***



w i s e g r o u p

## In the words of our customers here's why our asks are our asks

"Working with a mentor was a turning point for me. I've always been the one to call friends, ask them how they are. I've never had anyone call me to see how I'm doing, however this was what Mark did. A call to ask how I'm doing has helped to keep me on the straight and narrow".

"Without the help from my work coach, I wouldn't have been able to get my job in Glasgow. You've been really supportive and helped me overcome the things that were holding me back, like my lack of IT skills. You've not only helped me find a job but made sure I had the skills to get the job and keep the job."

"I was struggling with my energy bills, facing difficult choices, so I called to ask about help with topping up my meter. A phone call later, I was referred for wider support and I've now benefitted from a brand new heating system that'll lower my bills. I want to say a massive thank you as I no longer have to wait two hours to run a bath hot enough for my children, which to me means the world."

"I would like to say a big thank you for supporting me when I was released from prison. If it wasn't for your support then my life of drugs and crime would have continued. You opened a lot of doors for me and your constant visits gave me the confidence I never had before. My life is now important to me. Being back with my family has helped me become a decent father, son and brother for the first time in my life. You helped me up from the bottom step. I will never forget this."

"I'm absolutely delighted with the tablet, and support to get started, thank you so much. I've been able to get on to my Universal Credit account easily, and have already taken part in two Zoom meetings with recovery groups."



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Building bridges to opportunities

**[www.thewisegroup.co.uk](http://www.thewisegroup.co.uk)**

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