



Future Trends for Scotland: Implications for Fife

Final Report

April 2026

Topics: Economy, Education and Skills, Environment, Equalities, Health and Wellbeing, Housing and Community, Population

Summary

The Scottish Government’s Future Trends report 2024-25 identifies 60 trends across six themes that are likely to be important to Scotland over the next 10-to-20 years.

Politics and Governance 	Geopolitics and global development	Technology 	AI and emerging technologies
	Conflict		Green technologies and life sciences
	Migration		Global technology companies and data
	Democracy, polarisation and misinformation		Cyber
Economy 	Living standards and inequality	Natural Resources, Energy and Climate Change 	Climate change and just transition
	Labour market and skills		Biodiversity and soils
	Trade, investment and supply chains		Water and marine ecosystems
	Fiscal sustainability and financial markets		Food, agriculture, forest, land and waste
Society and Communities 	Demography	Health 	Population health
	Poverty and wealth		Infectious diseases
	Education and justice		Mental health
	Society and culture		Health systems
	Housing and infrastructure		

1. Politics and Governance
2. Economy
3. Society and Communities
4. Technology
5. Natural Resources, Energy and Climate Change
6. Health

These trends highlight foundational cross-cutting issues including demographic change, technological change, climate change, and changing information behaviours.

High impact trends	High opportunity trends
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic ageing • Climate change impacts on coastal & rural areas • Technological acceleration & digital expectations • Mental health and complex care • Rising inequalities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewable energy & green jobs • Community wealth building & local circular economy • Data-driven public services • Digital health innovation • Skills transition towards future sectors

These trends carry important strategic implications for local authorities like Fife Council, and for its community planning partners, impacting planning for population, services, infrastructure, and resilience.

The Scottish national trends signal that Fife will face intensifying demographic pressures, rapid technological disruption, climate related challenges, and evolving economic and governance demands. Fife’s long-term planning will need to integrate climate adaptation, inclusive digital transformation, skilled workforce development, and prevention focused public services.

Scottish Trends

The table below provides an overview of the key Scottish trends and the likely implications for Fife.

Type	Trend	Scottish Trend Summary	Implications for Fife
Foundational	Demographic Change	Foundational trend shaping Scotland	Ageing population pressures
	Technological Acceleration	Technology and AI reshaping services	Need for digital services and cyber resilience
	Climate Change	Climate pressures affecting infrastructure	Coastal risk and adaptation needs
	Changing Information Behaviours	Shifts in information access	Higher expectations for digital engagement
Economic	Economic Volatility	Economic uncertainty	Local economic resilience needed
	Automation	Automation reshaping labour market	Reskilling in manufacturing/services
	Skills Transition	Need for lifelong learning	Partnership with colleges for future skills
Environmental	Climate Impacts	Rising climate risk	Flood/erosion risk
	Natural Resource Pressure	Environmental pressures	Biodiversity and land-use pressure
	Net Zero Transition	Shift to renewables	Growth in offshore wind/hydrogen
Health	Ageing & Chronic Illness	Rising multimorbidity	HSCP pressure and prevention
	Mental Health Demand	Rising mental health demand	Youth mental health services
	Digital Health	Shift to digital healthcare	Need for integrated digital care pathways
Society	Inequalities	Risks of widening inequality	Targeted anti-poverty work
	Community Cohesion	Pressures on community fabric	Community resilience planning
	Changing Households	Increase in single-person households	Loneliness interventions
Governance	Governance Complexity	More complex governance systems	Cross-system integration
	Public Expectations	Higher transparency expectations	Transparent digital communication
	Preparedness	Need for strategic foresight	Scenario planning needs


Foundational Trends

There are a number of foundational trends which will impact all services. These include demographic change, technological acceleration, climate change and changing information behaviours.

Trend	What Scotland's Horizon scan says	Implications for Fife
Demographic Change	Identified as a foundational cross-cutting trend shaping Scotland over the next 10–20 years	Ageing population drives demand for adult social care, accessible housing, transport, and community support. Rising lone-person households increase risk of isolation.
Technological Acceleration	Technology and AI reshaping jobs, living standards, and how people access information	Need for digital public services, data integration, cyber-resilience, workforce reskilling, and digital inclusion.
Climate Change	Climate change highlighted as a foundational trend with major long-term consequences for Scotland's economy, land use, health, and infrastructure	Increased coastal risk (East Neuk, Levenmouth, Kirkcaldy), demand for adaptation infrastructure, net zero transition impacts on local economy.
Changing Information Behaviours	People are accessing and using information differently, creating new expectations for services and decision-making	Rising expectations for transparency, real-time communication, and digital channels. Need for inclusive design to avoid exclusion.

Society and Communities

Demographic change is highlighted as a foundational trend shaping Scotland's future.

 Society and Communities	
Demography	S1: Scotland's population is expected to grow over the next 20 years, and will continue to age
	S2: Scotland's population is becoming more urbanised, with depopulation in many rural communities
	S3: Scotland's population is expected to become more diverse
Poverty and wealth	S4: Overall relative poverty rates have been broadly stable over the past decade
	S5: Wealth inequality is growing between generations and within generations
	S6: A growing number of older people risk not having enough pension savings for retirement
Education and justice	S7: Crime has fallen in recent decades, particularly youth crime, but crime is increasingly online and internationalised
	S8: School populations are expected to decline in future, but pupils will have more complex needs
	S9: Scottish further and higher education sectors compare well globally, but are under increasing financial pressure
Society and culture	S10: The number of people living alone or experiencing loneliness is increasing
	S11: The growing use of social media is increasing connection, but is also linked to polarisation and online harms
	S12: The use of AI and online platforms are changing how people create and experience culture
Infrastructure and housing	S13: Housing affordability is a significant challenge, especially for low-income households renting privately
	S14: Infrastructure costs are growing, making it harder to meet future challenges such as decarbonisation

Key Scottish Trends

- Social cohesion pressures linked to demographic change, economic inequalities, and changing community structures.
- Vulnerable communities face higher exposure to environmental, health, and economic shocks.

What this means for Fife


- Risk of widening inequalities in Levenmouth, Kirkcaldy, and parts of Cowdenbeath.
- Growing importance of community hubs, local resilience networks, and targeted place-based approaches.
- Increased need for data-driven anti-poverty strategies aligned with Community Wealth Building.

What Fife needs to plan for

- **Ageing population pressures** - Fife already has ageing demographic profiles in many communities. Slower population growth, rising dependency ratios, and increasing complex care needs will intensify demand for adult social care, community support, preventative health, accessible transport, and adapted housing.
- **Changing family structures & household types** - With more single-person households, Fife will need to adapt its housing strategies, neighbourhood planning, and loneliness/ isolation interventions.
- **Population movement & regional inequalities** - If Scotland experiences internal migration driven by economic opportunity or climate impacts, Fife may need to respond to inflows/outflows—especially affecting schools, workforce planning, and local regeneration strategies.

Natural Resources, Energy and Climate Change

Climate change is another foundational issue shaping all other themes, with major long-term consequences for Scotland’s economy, land use, health, and infrastructure.

 Natural Resources, Energy and Climate Change	
Climate change and just transition	N1: Global climate change will lead to further increases in extreme weather events in Scotland
	N2: The shift away from fossil fuels will transform Scotland’s infrastructure and economy, increasing the focus on just transition
Biodiversity and soils	N3: Biodiversity loss and risk of ecosystem collapse are accelerating globally and in Scotland
	N4: Soil degradation and coastal erosion are increasingly impacting the quality and availability of land
Water and marine ecosystems	N5: Scotland’s future water quality and availability are increasingly at risk due to climate change and human activity
	N6: Marine ecosystems are increasingly vulnerable to climate change, pollution and contaminants
Food, agriculture, forestry, land and waste	N7: Concern about food security and production is increasing due to geopolitical pressures and the impacts of climate change
	N8: Changes in land uses are increasingly contributing to the climate and biodiversity crisis
	N9: Increased levels of waste and pollutants are hazardous for health and biodiversity

Key Scottish Trends

- Trends around climate impacts, environment, and natural resources increasing in importance.
- Climate and natural resource pressures are central to long-term planning in Scotland’s trend-pack.

What this means for Fife

- Flooding, coastal erosion, and infrastructure risk along the Fife coastline.
- Opportunities in offshore wind, hydrogen, and circular economy sectors.
- Greater need for biodiversity recovery and nature-based solutions in rural Fife.

What Fife needs to plan for

- **Increasing climate-related risks** - Coastal communities like Levenmouth, Dalgety Bay, parts of Kirkcaldy and the East Neuk may face increased flood risk, coastal erosion, and infrastructure vulnerability.
- **Net zero transition** - Opportunities exist in renewables (offshore wind, hydrogen), but the transition may also disrupt carbon-intensive sectors and require reskilling.
- **Land use, biodiversity, and food systems** - Fife’s agricultural areas will need to adapt to climate shocks and shifting regulatory expectations. The council may face growing responsibility for local food resilience and nature recovery.

Economy and the labour market

Trends include global economic uncertainty, automation, AI, and a move towards skills-intensive industries.

 Economy	
Living standards and income inequality	E1: Real earnings growth has been relatively flat since 2008. Technology and net zero could determine future living standards
	E2: Income and wealth inequality have fluctuated over recent decades but remain largely unchanged
Labour market and skills	E3: Scotland's working-age population is growing, however ageing and ill-health create uncertainty for the future labour market
	E4: Automation and decarbonisation are expected to change the labour market, displacing and creating jobs
	E5: The focus on lifelong learning and skills will grow in future
Trade, investment and supply chains	E6: The global economy is becoming more diverse, driven particularly by growth in Asia
	E7: The likelihood of supply chain disruption is increasing
	E8: There is growing focus on private investment to meet future challenges, but views differ on the role of foreign investment
Fiscal sustainability and financial markets	E9: Fiscal sustainability challenges are leading to increased pressure on public service provision
	E10: Following a period of relative financial stability, global debt and financial market risks are growing

Key Scottish Trends

- Economic volatility, global uncertainty and changing living standards shaping future prosperity
- Automation disrupting jobs and skills needs; lifelong learning becomes essential

What this means for Fife


- Transition pressure on manufacturing, services and public-sector jobs.
- Increased need for local skills pathways aligned with renewables, digital, and care.
- Greater significance of Community Wealth Building to stabilise local economies.

What Fife needs to plan for

- **Automation and job transformation** - Fife's manufacturing, service, public-sector, and logistics sectors may see substantial restructuring. Demand will rise for digital, green, and technical skills.
- **Need for lifelong learning & skills transition** - Local employers, colleges, and the council will need to support retraining, apprenticeships, and pathways into growth sectors aligned with Scotland's national economic shift.
- **Cost pressures & inequality risks**
Economic volatility could worsen local inequality, requiring stronger anti-poverty strategies, fair-work commitments, and targeted support for vulnerable groups.

Technology and digital change

The report identifies rapid technological change and shifts in how people access information as foundational trends.

	Technology
AI and emerging technologies	<p>T1: The adoption of AI is increasing across society</p> <p>T2: Increasing development and adoption of more use-cases of quantum technology</p> <p>T3: The Scottish space sector is growing, with an increased dependence on space assets, data and activities</p>
Green technologies and life sciences	<p>T4: Growing focus of technological efforts towards supporting energy transition and net zero ambitions</p> <p>T5: Scotland's life sciences sector is growing, with cross-cutting opportunities increasing</p>
Global technology companies and data	<p>T6: Multinational technology companies are dominating markets with greater focus on how to regulate them</p> <p>T7: Society is becoming increasingly digitalised with more services being provided online</p>
Cyber	<p>T8: Cyber-attacks and threats have grown in sophistication and frequency</p>

Key Scottish Trends

- Technology and AI reshaping jobs, living standards, and how people access information

What this means for Fife


- Need for digital public services, data integration, cyber-resilience, workforce reskilling, and digital inclusion.

What Fife needs to plan for

- **Digital public services & expectations** - Increased expectations for personalised, accessible, and real-time public services—relevant to Fife's transformation programmes.
- **Cyber resilience** - More digital reliance means heightened cyber-risk for local authorities and care systems. Fife will need continued investment in resilience, data governance, and system security.
- **Digital exclusion risks** - Fife has communities with lower digital access; ensuring inclusion becomes fundamental to avoid widening inequality.
- **AI and automation in local government operations** - Opportunities include predictive analytics for care, housing, and transport; however, adoption requires governance, skills, and ethical frameworks.

Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing trends highlight complex health needs, rising mental-health challenges, and the increasing role of technology in health.

 Health	
Population health	H1: The population is projected to experience an increasing burden of disease
	H2: Obesity has been slowly rising for many years
	H3: Cigarette use shows a long-term fall, but vaping is increasing. Drug and alcohol-specific deaths remain high
Infectious diseases	H4: Immunisation uptake is declining and vaccine hesitancy rising
	H5: Antimicrobial resistance is stable in Scotland but rising globally
	H6: The risk of another global pandemic is increasing
Mental health and neurodiversity	H7: Common mental health conditions are increasing, especially in young people
	H8: Neurodivergence diagnoses are increasing, particularly among adults and girls
Health systems	H9: The NHS is under pressure, with increasing demand and workforce pressures a major challenge
	H10: Advances in medicine and technology are improving healthcare

Key Scottish Trends

- Ageing, chronic illness, and rising mental health demand highlighted across national trends.
- Future care models increasingly digital, integrated, and community-based.

What this means for Fife

- Demand pressures on the Health and Social Care Partnership - especially community nursing, home care, and multi-morbidity support.
- Requirement for digital care pathways and improved data-sharing infrastructure.
- Increased urgency for preventative, place-based support aligned with “No Wrong Door”.

What Fife needs to plan for

- **Growing burden of chronic conditions** - An ageing population combined with socio-economic deprivation pockets (e.g., parts of Levenmouth, Kirkcaldy) will drive long-term demand for preventative care and integrated models.
- **Mental health demand rising** - National trends suggest ongoing increase in mental illness, especially among young people - requiring strengthened early intervention systems.
- **Integration of health & social care** - Fife’s Health & Social Care Partnership will need to accelerate digital care pathways, community-based support, and multi-agency alignment.

Politics and Governance

The Future Trends for Scotland report highlights increasing complexity, geopolitical uncertainty, and changing citizen expectations of governance systems.

 Politics and Governance	
Geopolitics and global development	P1: The global geopolitical environment is increasingly unpredictable
	P2: Multilateral institutions are increasingly unable to respond to global challenges
	P3: Progress in global development and inequality is stalling
Conflict	P4: The number and severity of conflicts is increasing globally
	P5: Conflict is changing, with new technology and actors and expanding into space and cyberspace
Migration	P6: Voluntary and involuntary migration are increasing
Democracy, polarisation and misinformation	P7: Democracy faces challenges globally and dissatisfaction with political institutions in the UK has increased
	P8: Political and social polarisation are increasing
	P9: Mis- and disinformation are a growing risk in the UK, and trust in institutions is falling

Key Scottish Trends

- Governance systems facing more complexity and higher citizen expectations.
- Horizon-scanning emphasises the importance of long-term planning and preparedness across public services.

What this means for Fife

- Public services must be integrated, transparent, and co-designed with communities.
- Increased reliance on predictive analytics and scenario planning.
- Financial pressures will intensify the need for prevention and service redesign.

What Fife needs to plan for

- **Rising expectations of transparency and participation** - “No wrong door”, trauma-informed, and person-centred models will need to mature alongside improved cross-system data-sharing and coordination.
- **Increased demand for preventative and place-based services** - This aligns with Fife’s existing Community Wealth Building and prevention commitments—but may require re-prioritisation of investment and workforce capacity.
- **Fiscal pressures & multi-level governance complexity** - Continued strain on public finances could affect capital investment, service sustainability, and the pace of transformation work.

How trends map to Fife policy priorities

The table below provides a summary of how national trends map to Fife policy priorities.

Fife Policy Priority	Relevant National Trends (Scotland 2024–25)	Implications for Fife
Community Wealth Building	Labour market change, automation, climate transition	Skills transition, local economic resilience, fair work focus
Addressing the Climate Emergency	Climate change, natural resource pressures	Adaptation, green energy, resilient food & land-use policies
No Wrong Door / Prevention	Ageing, health pressures, changing expectations of services	Integrated access, digital pathways, workforce sustainability
Tackling Inequalities	Economic instability, demographic shifts	Poverty strategies, inclusive digital access, targeted support
Health & Social Care Integration	Rising chronic illness, mental-health demand	Community-based care models, tech-enabled care
Digital Transformation	Tech acceleration, changing info use, cyber risks	User-centred design, data integration, cyber resilience
Governance & Collaboration	Governance complexity, long-term preparedness needs	Whole-system planning, foresight, community engagement

Inequalities

The trends that affect Scotland’s future will have differential impacts for different equalities groups. Intersecting inequalities and disadvantage may reduce the resilience or the ability of individuals, households and communities to adapt to future challenges, or to take advantage of future opportunities. In many cases the trends have the potential to drive and deepen inequalities further.

While the trend material presented reflects some of the ways in which the trends interact with inequalities, a systematic review of evidence relating to all equalities dimensions of the trends described was outside the scope of the Future Trends for Scotland project.

Cross-cutting implications

These trends carry important strategic implications for local authorities like Fife Council, and for its community planning partners, impacting planning for population, services, infrastructure, and resilience.

There are a number of cross-cutting implications for Fife's long-term planning, including:

1. Service Re-design & Workforce

- More complex needs and fewer workers due to demographic trends.
- Need for digital skills, data literacy, and adaptive workforce planning.

2. Infrastructure & Place-Making

- Adaptation for climate resilience (flood protection, energy efficiency).
- Redesign for ageing populations and inclusive mobility.

3. Economic Development & Skills

- Support transitions into green and digital sectors.
- Local innovation hubs, college partnerships, and employer collaboration.

4. Data, Digital, and AI

- Data-driven decision-making will be essential.
- Ethical and inclusive digital transformation to avoid exclusion.

5. Community Resilience & Inequality

- Targeted interventions for areas of deprivation.
- Strengthening local networks, prevention, and community-based approaches.

This review of the Scottish national trends signals that Fife will face intensifying demographic pressures, rapid technological disruption, climate related challenges, and evolving economic and governance demands. Fife's long-term planning will need to integrate climate adaptation, inclusive digital transformation, skilled workforce development, and prevention focused public services.

The trends point to a range of possible futures, but the final outcome is not pre-determined. As part of the development of the next Plan for Fife, community planning partners must collectively agree how they will plan and deliver public services for the benefit of local communities which respond to the challenges and opportunities which are anticipated in the future.

About this report

Fife Council Research and Insight Team works on prioritised projects to deliver strategic insight for the Council and community planning partners in Fife.

We aim to deliver engaging high-quality general insight for those involved in delivering public services across Fife.

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Important Notes on this Report

1. This report is intended as a prompt piece to inform leadership discussions about the development of a new plan for Fife from 2027.
2. It considers the implications for Fife from the 'Future Trends for Scotland: Horizon Scanning 2024-25' project.
3. Over the course of 2024-25, the Scottish Government led a Horizon Scanning project seeking to understand key trends, risks and opportunities that could be important for Scotland over the next 10-20 years.
4. More than 180 stakeholders representing government, the wider public sector, third sector organisations, academia and business contributed their insights during different phases of the project, offering direction and constructive challenge to help refine the findings.
5. The report and the accompanying trend pack set out the 60 key trends identified as part of the 'Future Trends for Scotland: Horizon Scanning 2024-25' project.
6. This is part of a wider programme of work to embed foresight into strategic decision making across government, and the wider public sector, in order to improve resilience in Scotland and make the most of future opportunities.

Resource	Link
Future Trends for Scotland: summary report	Future Trends for Scotland: Findings from the 2024-25 Horizon Scanning Project
Future Trends for Scotland: findings from the 2024-2025 horizon scanning project	Future Trends for Scotland - Future Trends for Scotland: findings from the 2024-2025 horizon scanning project - gov.scot
Future Trends for Scotland: Horizon Scanning 2024-25 - Trend Pack	Scottish Government Horizon Scanning Trend Pack Final June 2025