

Introduction

The 2009 County Council elections will take place against the background of a worsening economic situation and what many experts believe will be a long recession. The impact on local government in Leicestershire has yet to be fully realised and will present the County Council with new and difficult challenges. Of course it has already affected residents and businesses, the results of which can be seen across the County in job losses, debt problems and repossessions. Many people hoped things would be different under a Labour government – but amidst the worse recession for over 60 years, continuous top down targets from Whitehall and excessive controls; this hope seems to be misplaced.

How the Council faces up to these challenges by helping businesses and residents will be crucial over the next few years. The County Council is one of the biggest employers in the County and spends millions of pounds each year on materials and contracted services. As uncertain as the future is, we know that people still need homes that are affordable, care that is tailored to individual needs and services that reflect value for money. But **most of all the people need to be listened to** – we believe that the only way to do this effectively is to **devolve power out of County Hall and down to local communities**. Informed and empowered communities can engage with their councils to ensure that services are relevant to them.

The Conservatives have a poor record on consulting and listening to the views of residents. They have relied too heavily on a Citizens panel which is unrepresentative of the people of Leicestershire. Liberal Democrats believe in listening to the views of local people – after all they know best what they need. We will work with communities to provide local services and ensure that consultations are genuine and taken fully into account.

Despite the Conservative's majority in recent years, **we have led the way in trying to take party politics out of issues on which we agree. We have not opposed the other parties' policies for opposition sake but have** supported motions from both Labour and the Conservatives, to ensure the best outcomes for Leicestershire. We have also had successes with our motions: **getting £1/2 Million invested for flooding work** on the County's roads, support for the Sustainable Communities Act and getting the Council to sign up to the Nottingham Declaration on climate change. **We have done all this and will continue to do more.**

This manifesto is our pledge to the people of Leicestershire – it shows a commitment to giving power back to local communities, creating flexible services not just dictated by cost, meeting the challenge of climate change, fighting for more powers and money from central government and bringing investment and new opportunities to Leicestershire.

I hope you will find what we have to say interesting

Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

Finance & Resources

Everything the council does costs money – and the majority of this money comes from the families and communities via Council Tax. Liberal Democrats are opposed to the Council Tax and favour a local income tax based on the ability to pay. But more importantly we believe that the majority of the money raised locally should be kept and invested and that central government should disperse money from London locally to be spent on the services and projects that people expect from their tax.

The table below shows the increases in Council Tax since 2002/03 to this year:

Increase	/	8.90%	2.30%	2.70%	4.50%	4.25%	3.90%	2.90%
Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Band	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
A	£514.71	£565.00	£577.99	£593.60	£620.31	£646.68	£671.90	£691.38
B	£600.50	£659.17	£674.33	£692.53	£723.70	£754.46	£783.88	£806.61
C	£686.28	£753.33	£770.66	£791.47	£827.08	£862.24	£895.87	£921.84
D	£772.07	£847.50	£866.99	£890.40	£930.47	£970.02	£1,007.85	£1,037.07
E	£943.64	£1,035.83	£1,059.65	£1,088.27	£1,137.24	£1,185.58	£1,231.82	£1,267.54
F	£1,115.21	£1,224.17	£1,252.32	£1,286.13	£1,344.01	£1,401.14	£1,455.78	£1,498.00
G	£1,286.78	£1,412.50	£1,444.98	£1,484.00	£1,550.78	£1,616.70	£1,679.75	£1,728.46
H	£1,544.14	£1,695.00	£1,733.98	£1,780.80	£1,860.94	£1,940.04	£2,015.70	£2,074.15

Since 2002 Council Tax has gone up by 25% (£265) on a typical Band D property, whilst at the same time the task of finding greater efficiencies has too. The County Council has to provide the same level of service on an ever tighter budget – in line with government efficiency targets. Liberal Democrats believe this has to stop; we are getting to a stage where efficiencies risk damaging frontline services.

The Conservative policy of freezing council tax is an illusion. As a party we have nothing against keeping taxes low – but we feel this is simply an election gimmick based on a commitment from the Conservative Shadow Chancellor George Osborne which has considerable risks attached. The proposal effectively transfers local expenditure to the national purse but there is no such thing as a free lunch and the money will have to be funded from income tax. A freeze on council tax makes us more reliant upon money from central government; money which due to the recession, may not be available. The impression created is that services will remain and tax will be frozen, but this policy carries many risks – and wouldn't come into force until 2011/12.

The other detail this policy disguises is what would happen if the rates can't be kept low, or if the government changes its mind – either the people of Leicestershire are left with large tax increases to make up a shortfall, or drastic cuts in services would have to take place.

Liberal Democrats will:

- ✓ Continue to Campaign against the unfair Council Tax yet keeping council tax as low as possible and protecting frontline services
- ✓ Expand the use of shared services with other local councils to reduce costs and improve value for money.
- ✓ Fight against unelected bodies and quangos that cost money but achieve nothing

Housing

The issue of housing is one of the most pressing in local government across the UK. A need to provide housing that is sustainable, affordable and located appropriately is a key concern for local Liberal Democrats. We have dedicated a lot of time to researching suitable alternatives, challenging government policy and responding to consultations – in doing so we are the only political group on the Council that has consistently developed policies and solutions that will actually make the current housing crisis better. We also believe that the County has a duty to respond to the increased number of households at risk of homelessness and further debt. We think that the County must do more to protect homes and families.

We have:

- responded to consultations on Eco-Towns and the Regional Plan;
- as a national party adopted a motion opposing the Eco-towns system and we support this
- developed our own position incorporating the views of our national party but not solely reliant on it (unlike the Conservatives);
- Succeeded in getting a cross party motion on housing agreed – looking to take the politics out of the issue and make progress towards a solution.

Therefore Liberal Democrats will:

- ✓ Continue to support the plan-led approach to allocating land for development which gives certainty to local communities
- ✓ Continue to challenge the system of nationally imposed housing targets
- ✓ Oppose any further increases to housing numbers at this time – the problem is delivery, not land supply. The districts are already required to allocate large numbers of sites in the next few years
- ✓ Protect green wedges in all planning matters;
- ✓ Press for a better mix of tenures to increase flexibility and improve affordability;
- ✓ Develop ways of regenerating areas using established powers in District/Borough alongside Capital assets of all local government to buy empty properties to provide both affordable and social housing at a time when it's needed most;
- ✓ Utilise the County Council's influence and position regionally to represent the opposition to housing not agreed locally.
- ✓ Support extra funding for the Citizen Advice Bureaux for debt relief & housing
- ✓ Provide facilities from the County Council to provide general advice on housing options (in partnership with Voluntary and Community sector)
- ✓ Work with landlords of Buy-to-Let properties at risk of repossession to protect tenants and ensure they keep their home for as long as possible
- ✓ Create a repossession support unit
- ✓ Produce an empty homes strategy within a year, to bring back properties into use, in consultation with the District/Borough Councils
- ✓ Support the use of Community Land Trusts to supply affordable housing to local people
- ✓ Investigate the possibility of setting site-size thresholds lower than minimum to provide more affordable units with market developments.

Adult Social Care

Liberal Democrats have played a very active role in the scrutiny of Leicestershire's Adult Social Services. We shall continue to work to ensure that these services reflect and serve the needs of our county's residents.

We believe that:-

- Nationally, there should be a 'Care Guarantee' entitling elderly people to a personal care payment based on need, not the ability to pay, and setting out the entitlements, both of people in need of care and their carers.
- There is a real need to personalise the service. Every person should have a say in how their needs are met and to be able, where appropriate, to take a role in how those needs are managed.
- The inequality of funding between the NHS and social care services is a potential barrier to future joint working and the development of social care services.

Our priorities include:-

- ✓ Further expansion of direct payments and individual budget programmes. But while there is clearly a need for developing new ways of delivering services so that users have more say and control over service delivery, we are aware that some new methods of delivery may not be suitable for all users. We would ensure that there was appropriate advice and support for those people taking up these services.
- ✓ Re-configuration which is 'needs' and 'service' led and not 'finance' led. We will oppose service cuts which are simply wrapped up in a package labelled 'savings'.
- ✓ Undertaking an ongoing Scrutiny review panel of home care services and providers. This panel will focus on standards of care and quality of service and will help ensure that Leicestershire's home care is the best in the country.
- ✓ Halting the recent vastly above inflation increases in service charges. We vigorously opposed the large increases in charges introduced by the Conservative administration over the last few years; e.g. the Home Care Hourly charge rose 40% from 2005/06 to 2008/09 (£6 to £8.40)
- ✓ Recognising the critical role of carers, many of whom are themselves elderly or, indeed, children.
- ✓ Ensuring that the voices of Senior Citizens are heard with regard to all services provided by the County Council.
- ✓ Ensuring that the Dignity in Care philosophy is expanded and developed in all our services and those of our partners, Ensuring that the needs of people in care and their carers are taken into account when planning and commissioning services.
- ✓ Monitoring the provision of accommodation for the elderly. We believe that, wherever possible, the council should be seeking to offer choice to service users; that is one of the reasons we recently opposed the Conservative

administration's decision to transfer its remaining council run homes for the elderly.

- ✓ Ensuring that Extra Care Services are provided
- ✓ Ensuring that the needs of people with mental health problems are taken into account and given greater priority.
- ✓ Maintaining the Council's current eligibility threshold.
- ✓ Ensuring that there is a greater take-up of elderly persons' benefit entitlements.

Health

Over the last four years Liberal Democrats at Leicestershire County Council have taken an active role on health service scrutiny committees and we shall continue to do so in the future. In particular we have been actively involved in the scrutinising:-

- The re-organisation of Leicestershire primary care services, including community hospitals.
- The delivery of services by the Leicester acute hospitals (UHL – University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust).
- The monitoring of standards across a range of NHS services.
- The use of high-cost 084 telephone numbers by health services.
- Development and roll-out of Practice Based Commissioning.

Liberal Democrats believe that:-

- A responsive and efficient health service is fundamental to the well-being of the people of Leicestershire.
- Every person matters; therefore the NHS must deliver high quality health services to all, irrespective of income.
- Health services should be administered locally and be locally accountable to democratically elected representatives. Scrutiny committees must therefore play an important role in monitoring and improving Leicestershire's health services.
- The Labour government's centrally imposed health targets have strangled and distorted clinical decision making.
- The integration of health and social services should continue in order to further break down the organisational divide and enable more joint commissioning of services.

Our priorities are for:

- ✓ Greater emphasis on preventative and public health services. We believe this would improve the health of local people and would also be more cost effective.
- ✓ Further integration of the work of the council and PCTs on health issues, including public and mental health.
- ✓ Greater power to citizens to take control their own lives and make their own health choices. This requires better information and support so that patients are able to make informed decisions about their own treatment.
- ✓ Patients to be treated as near to their own homes as is appropriate.
- ✓ Replacing national targets with minimum standards of access to health services (including dental health).

- ✓ Improved accessibility to health facilities; for example longer and more flexible opening hours of GP practices.
- ✓ Reducing the high levels of obesity, alcohol & drug abuse and sexually transmitted diseases.
- ✓ More effective treatment and recovery from mental illness.
- ✓ Improved hygiene leading to reduced levels of Hospital based infections.

Environment, Transport & Infrastructure

The Liberal Democrats continue to place the environment at the heart of our thinking and everything we do as members of the Council. This is now more essential than ever because of the threat of climate change. During the life of the next Council a very important decision has to be taken on waste treatment facilities. We have significant concerns about one of the options being considered i.e. an 180,000 tonne incinerator.

On the Environment Liberal Democrats will:

- ✓ Establish a specialist Climate Change Committee solely for the purpose of Environmental Scrutiny and policy development:
 - Work towards meeting the County's commitments under the Nottingham Declaration
 - Increase energy efficiency of all county properties
 - Utilise alternative technologies to generate electricity and heat including micro-generation
- ✓ Set ambitious recycling targets for household waste of at least 65%.
- ✓ Aim to recycle up to 50% of commercial and industrial waste
- ✓ Look to the most flexible and effective forms of waste disposal (our preferred option is MBT) and not rely solely upon mass scale incineration – see our policy on the website,
- ✓ Assist community groups and VCS organisations to access funding to reduced their climate impact
- ✓ Pursue an active policy of replacing current vehicles with more economically AND environmentally friendly models

On transport/Infrastructure Liberal Democrats will:

- ✓ Campaign to get central government to release more funds to support Concessionary travel costs – reducing the burden on Local authorities and Council Tax
- ✓ Work towards phasing out the charges levied on faith school and post 16-school transport
- ✓ Establish a new 'teenager' rate to allow young people to access transport – this will replace the failure of the Conservative Voucher system. A set low fare will be fairer and easier to access and treats Young People with respect
- ✓ Work with rural communities to develop tailored transport solutions which offer an alternative to the car.
- ✓ Provide 20 MPH zones where communities request them
- ✓ Maintain our commitment to developing innovative transport solutions looking to improve public transport including
 - We will establish 'Quality Bus Partnerships' to ensure a fair deal and service for people who rely upon public transport
 - the provision of carefully selected sites for Park & Rides

- Supporting the Electrification of the Midland Main Line
- ✓ Work on behalf of communities and local councils to support requests for road improvements
- ✓ Support residents parking zones
- ✓ Improve highway drainage to limit the impact of localised flooding
- ✓ Put pressure on Energy companies to connect street lighting promptly
- ✓ Look to increase funding to provide street lighting in areas as part of wider community safety initiatives.

Children & Young People Service

Our children are our future. Liberal Democrats believe that every child should be given the best possible start in life. Our children's services should support parents and children to ensure improved success at school and in their lives.

Liberal Democrats will:

- ✓ Welcome the arrival of Integrated Youth Support Service (IYSS) and expect enhanced involvement and improved facilities at District Level as a consequence
- ✓ Safeguard children and young people (CYP) from physical and sexual abuse as a key objective
- ✓ Support existing and new initiatives to improve CYP health and tackle obesity through sport and other means
- ✓ Work to achieve a drastic reduction in the number of CYP in the NEET category (i.e. those not in education, employment or training)
- ✓ Clarify and develop further the role of Extended Services
- ✓ Welcome and support the further development of Children's Centres and look for improvements in their funding arrangements
- ✓ Continue to support the work of the F40 Group (the Local Authorities worst-funded by central Government) to secure better funding for Leicestershire schools
- ✓ Give backing to further reorganisation of secondary education provided that solutions to change have the support of the local community
- ✓ Continue support to schools at transfer times, i.e. primary to high, high to upper schools
- ✓ Look for further improvement in examination results at Key Stage Four
- ✓ Through wider advertisement and promotion encourage members of the public to become School Governors and then support them appropriately
- ✓ Maintain support for area-based special schools
- ✓ In respect of small schools, retain a top-up allowance within the fair-funding formula to support them
- ✓ Seek to support staff in schools as a priority in maintaining and improving morale
- ✓ Retain our commitment to the principle of high-quality comprehensive education and opposition to the admission of pupils by selection
- ✓ Work to provide high quality play areas where children and young people can play explore and develop.

Young People

Whilst we are aware that the County Council has established CYCLe (County Youth Councils Leicestershire) we still feel that it is appropriate to engage directly with the Young community to find out how council services and proposals will affect them.

Unlike the other political parties our youth policy isn't about forcing young people into a job, or more education. Our youth policy is about providing opportunities and support to ensure that the young people of today are happy, listened to and are able to achieve what they want.

This is part of wider engagement to recognise that the decisions we make on services affect everyone, not just now, but in the future – we are committed to Leicestershire's young people, we are committed to their happiness, safety and freedom to develop and choose. Above all we are committed to listen to young people as individuals not as a labelled community.

Liberal Democrats will:

- ✓ Regularly approach local youth Councils and CYCLe with proposals and views for comment on key issues including Transport, Crime and Skills training/job opportunities
- ✓ Work with CYCLe on the development of new ways of getting the views of young people using new media and technologies.
- ✓ Involve Youth councils in the Children and Young Peoples Service Scrutiny Committee
- ✓ Support applications by communities and youth groups to provide new youth facilities
- ✓ Look for opportunities to increase awareness of, and participation in, the political process – to ensure that all young people in Leicestershire feel their views and opinions are valid.
- ✓ Start a committed recruitment drive to bring in Youth & Community workers to provide support and guidance to young people. We believe that in the hands of professionals and trained volunteers, youth work can meet the needs of young people.
- ✓ Fight against the negative stereotyping of young people and the association to crime.

Communities

Liberal Democrats believe that every community is unique and no single solution fits all. Alongside our commitment to give power back to communities and allow a direct say in services, we also feel that communities should have the power to create local solutions to their own problems.

Alongside this basic principle Liberal Democrats will:

- ✓ Engage with the Voluntary and Community Sector to assist development and support and, where necessary, provide funding directly.
- ✓ Continue to work with different communities through multi-cultural forums in an open, honest and transparent way, including representation by democratically elected members to ensure fairness and balance
- ✓ Continue to refurbish the County's libraries
- ✓ Support local communities by advertising facilities and days out in the county and kick start a 'buy local' campaign to assist small business through these difficult times
- ✓ Ensure that the Voluntary Action Groups across the county have the necessary support to be able to react effectively to local needs. We will continue to oppose moves to centralise these important services.
- ✓ Provide resources and support to enable empty commercial properties to be converted into temporary community centres for use by community groups with public education programs.
- ✓ Provide extra money to community groups and centres to provide self help classes to communities
- ✓ Expand the use of Community Speed watch groups
- ✓ Devolve as many decisions (as appropriate) to Local Forums and allow the local Councillors to engage with their communities to make the decisions that will affect them We will give them devolved budgets to buy services and make local changes as needed
- ✓ We will get rid of the citizen's panel and replace them with a genuine empowerment for Local Forums to give them a direct input into policy making – so everyone can have a say!
- ✓ Fight the 'closed door bureaucracy', where policy is already decided and agreed. We will genuinely give power back to councillors to challenge policy on behalf of their communities
- ✓ Protect the Shire grants scheme as a way to provide resources to community projects and community associations
- ✓ Re-establish the 'Community Plus' budget to support Community Associations in a fair and transparent way.

Policing and Safer Communities

Despite criminal justice being the responsibility of national government there are many ways in which the County Council can and should work to improve community safety locally. The Council has close links with the police but there remains scope to address the community's priorities for tackling crime

Liberal Democrats will:

- ✓ Retain the 50 PCSO's funded by the County Council and look to increase the number with community support – this was a Lib Dem idea in the first place partly funded by a tax on second homes.
- ✓ Campaign against targets that cause police to give cautions (and help meet targets) instead of pursuing convictions for violent crime
- ✓ Campaign to get more police back on the streets by scrapping excessive form-filling which keeps police from frontline duties
- ✓ As many serious problems require contact with the police, but do not necessarily justify a 999 call, we will aim to encourage changes to improve the service non-emergency callers receive by working in partnership with local councils and the police

On youth crime, the County Council's Youth Offending Service has an excellent record and we have strongly supported the pioneering work on youth crime prevention. Labour's approach has risked criminalising a generation of young people even though the vast majority are innocent. A crime is a crime and should be pursued, but at the same time prevention is a better policy. That's why we will:

- ✓ Retain the IMPACT teams – increase their budget and expand the number of teams to fight current areas of youth crime,
- ✓ Roll out a proactive, well supported youth worker programme in every area, build relationships and produce real long lasting change,
- ✓ Ensure that plenty of opportunities are provided to the vast majority of young people who are not a problem – ensuring they are happy and occupied
- ✓ Provide extra resources to support the 'Test Purchase' scheme run by Trading Standards. This will combat the supply of alcohol and cigarettes to young people by testing the vigilance of shop keepers.

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