

"It's time to sort it out."

The Liberal Democrat

Manifesto for County Council Elections

2017



INTRODUCTION



The Conservatives came to power in 2005 claiming that Labour was incompetent and they would sort out their financial mess. They've failed. For 12 years, they have pursued a reckless policy of keeping council tax low to attract votes and remain in power; rather than a strategic and fair policy to ensure that they are able to **do their job** – to plan for and deliver efficient, effective public services in both the short and long term.

The Conservatives trumpet having one of the Lowest County Council Tax levels in the UK as a good thing for Northamptonshire, despite common sense dictating that *the lower council income is - the poorer services are*.

Northamptonshire's public services are struggling to manage the impacts of years of meagre funding. The recent B Heard survey placed Northamptonshire as the second worst place to live in the UK. The survey assesses Counties by looking at crime data, the quality of schools, the number of people in poverty, fire service staff numbers, planning and health indices; and combines that with information from public opinion surveys to give an overall score.

Since 2009 the Conservatives have repeatedly been warned by Care Home Providers that the payment level from NCC is *so inadequate*; that it will mean that they can no longer provide safe and effective Care for the Elderly (See BBC programme on Rising Care Home Closures on 9th Feb) and many are no longer bidding to deliver publicly funded Care.

NCC is in financial meltdown. The Conservatives are rearranging the deck chairs with their "New Generation Programme" reorganisation to camouflage their financial crisis.

The budget is "balanced" by so-called "theoretical savings" which kicks the problem and public awareness down the lane, and importantly means they avoid scrutiny until *after the May elections*. The reorganisation effectively outsources the delivery of services to "arms-length" organisations; changes the democratic oversight model; and severely limits the ability of councillors to monitor expenditure and ensure that service standards are maintained or improved as needed.

12 years of consistent failures by the current Conservative administration *to plan and deliver the services needed by the people of Northamptonshire in a financially responsible manner*, has led to massive deficits and the cutting of essential services.

The Conservatives' reckless policy of having one of the Lowest County Council Tax levels in the UK has meant that they have planned and delivered inadequate and reduced services. This document sets out the manifesto of the Liberal Democrat Party for the Northamptonshire County Council Elections in 2017 and how we will work to maintain and improve services.

IT'S TIME TO SORT IT OUT

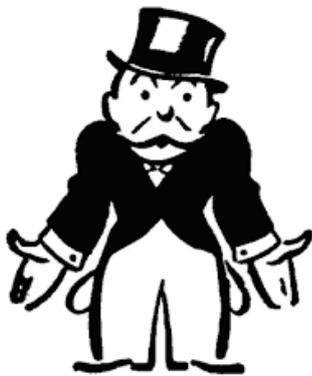
Below you will find the Liberal Democrat approach to restoring the Council's operations:

To effectively plan and deliver for your current and future needs

To ensure that your Council Taxes are used responsibly, effectively and in line with identified needs.

FINANCES

Liberal Democrats believe that Council Tax is an unfair way of collecting money for local services. Our preference is for a Local Income Tax. However, we *must* work within existing fiscal processes. The Conservatives claimed in previous elections that council tax could be frozen and services could still be delivered. They were wrong and knew they were wrong. Having won elections on this false agenda, the Conservatives are now raising council tax by the highest percentage that they can and will still have to cut basic services: **We will not see any benefit from this year's increase!**



All County Councils in England are being forced by the reductions in central government funding to make cuts, but Northamptonshire is in a worse position than most, because of years of Conservative financial mismanagement. We will take the financial process "Back to Basics"; taking back control of Budgets by working on a needs basis, rather than historical funding processes or formula. We will be honest about the needs of the County, funding decisions by central government (especially the plans to reduce central funding for councils to insignificant levels by 2020) and how and why they affect Council Tax bills.

MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Liberal Democrats will **make your money work efficiently and effectively for you**
- We will plan for the long term and communicate the budgetary situation **honestly**
- For services to be maintained, let alone extended or improved **council tax will need to increase each year to reflect the government's plan to eliminate central funding.**
- We will work nationally through the Local Government Association to get Central Government to take the strain off local councils to **support the needs of Britain's ageing population**

REDUCING BUREAUCRACY

The current Conservative proposals - to outsource most of its services to arms-length organisations cynically disguise the scale of their financial mismanagement. We will restore real Democratic controls to shine a light on these areas.



Their “Next Generation” proposals are wrong for the residents of Northamptonshire.

They would reduce control, scrutiny and over the sight of decision-making by elected councillors; with the public having little hope of influencing desirable changes and improvements to services - with the Council having been locked into lengthy and bureaucratic contracts with third

parties. Liberal Democrats will stop the whole ‘Next Generation’ project.

We would work towards the abolition of Northamptonshire County Council with its’ functions being devolved to Unitary Councils - closer to and more accountable to you. Without the County Council, unitary councils will come together in voluntary partnerships to strategically plan and deliver some services - but with Councillors in control to maintain democratic oversight and **accountability** to Council Tax Payers.

MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Liberal Democrats will stop the whole ‘Next Generation’ project and work towards the abolition of Northamptonshire County Council and its’ functions being devolved to Unitary Councils, closer to and more accountable to you.
- We will support unitary councils to come together in voluntary partnerships to strategically plan and deliver some services - but with Councillors in control to maintain democratic over sight and accountability to Council TaxPayers.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE



People are living longer. The number of people aged 70+ in Northamptonshire is expected to rise by 35,000 between 2014 and 2024 (more than 43%)¹. The Conservative County Council has failed to plan and provide for the increased demand for Care over the past 12 years. Care Home Providers have warned for years they are not paid enough to house local authority clients, but *despite* these warnings, Northamptonshire has closed local authority run homes.



Northamptonshire County Council has failed to establish an effective working relationship with the NHS, meaning that ‘delayed discharge’ (bed blocking) has increased and put local hospitals under

unnecessary greater strain. This was graphically highlighted on “Look East” on 9th February. Central government action may be needed to head off a national crisis. Even

so, the County Council *must* improve the effectiveness of its partnerships with local NHS Trusts. Liberal Democrats recognise that bed blocking can only be addressed if there is **a viable and motivated care home sector (both public and private) across Northamptonshire**. As part of our "Back to Basics" approach, we believe that a full “Value For Money Review” of current and future needs and commitments is required, in collaboration with stakeholders in Adult Social Care.

MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Liberal Democrats will create partnership based working to address the issues facing adult social care, adopting good practices developed by other local authorities which are tackling ‘bed blocking’ far more effectively and efficiently than Northamptonshire
- Using Social Care precepts, we will be prepared to pay more but will also expect more from the private Care Home Sector and will develop Halfway House facilities jointly managed with the NHS to free up hospital beds.
- We will create multi-skilled teams to support the patients in the transition from hospital bed to supported or independent living in their own home.

CHILDREN SERVICES



In April 2016, an inspection by Ofsted said: "**Children's services in Northamptonshire require improvement to be good.**" Somewhat better than 2013, when child protection, adoption and help for looked after children



were judged inadequate - but the Council needs MORE, BETTER and FASTER action. When last inspected, 43% of Children's Services staff were employed through agencies (including managers at all levels of the organisation). As seen elsewhere such practices are overpriced and lack accountability. We will, as part of our "Back to Basics" approach, reset spending priorities based on current and forecast needs; focussing on staff retention and continuity of care. We will

drive out ethnically judged service delivery, increase the in-house Foster Carer team, creating an ethos of Professional Staff development and retention. We will pay the Bonus Increment that was withheld by the Conservatives last year.

MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Liberal Democrats Will Increase NCC foster payments to increase the volume of County Council in-house provision.
- Work to attract more high-quality social workers to permanent jobs.
- Prioritise Prevention schemes to reduce the number of looked after children

¹ <https://www.northamptonshireanalysis.co.uk/resource/view?resourceId=1487>

EDUCATION AND TRAINING



Central government reforms have greatly shrunk the role of local government as an Education Authority. The main roles of Northamptonshire now lie in co-ordinating admissions arrangements and supporting pupils with special needs with their education, health and care. In this new environment, Northamptonshire underperforms educationally. In June 2016, Ofsted said: "Across Northamptonshire, there are too many 'early years' providers and schools of all types and



phases that are not good enough. ... There needs to be greater oversight and coordinated action from those accountable for educational provision in the county".² The Council publicised a £1m 'Race to the Top' improvement initiative but it UNDERSPENT, and there has been NO public independent evaluation of its financial or educational effectiveness.³

In the academic year 2015/16, Northamptonshire County Council provided just **four Apprenticeship** places.⁴

School places are an emotive subject for many *parents*. We share your concerns, particularly about oversupply in some areas and undersupply in others, exacerbated by the ease at which new free schools can be set up with no regard to surplus places. We will use what powers we have to deliver school places more appropriately and cost effectively.

The Government has signalled a shift back to Grammar Schools. Liberal Democrats will campaign against the re-introduction of selective secondary education in Northamptonshire.

MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Working with the Regional Schools Commission, your Liberal Democrat administration will intervene to ensure school planning and delivery is appropriate, placing new schools in the right locations.
- We will challenge the establishment of Free Schools that risk taking pupils away from existing schools, examining both their viability and ability to perform. We will take back the local initiative.
- Liberal Democrats will deliver 100 additional council run or supported apprenticeships within our first 100 days in power.

² Ofsted letter of June is at

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/527715/Chris_Russell_s_letter_to_Northamptonshire_June_2016.pdf

³ FoI asking about Race to the Top is at

https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/race_to_the_top_strategy#incoming-870079

⁴ FoI asking about apprenticeships is at

https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/apprenticeships_6?nocache=incoming-905655&incoming-905655

HIGHWAYS

Conservatives came to power in 2005 saying that they would sort out the roads and potholes. They have failed. More money has been made available to the County Council, but it has not been used to address the most urgent or important needs.



Roads across Northamptonshire are now in an even poorer condition, and there will be less money available in the future to address the growing backlog of problems. Emphasis has been placed on Roads at the expense of money spent on improving Pavements (used by large numbers of people in Northamptonshire's urban areas). To address the 12 years of failure, we will improve the processes behind the Street Doctor system to ensure it is accurate and useful. We will invest in equipment to properly repair potholes, and make this available to contractors, in a "Pothole Priority" scheme. Developer funding for highways is underused. We will address this as part of a review of the Highways contracts under our "Back to Basics" budgetary approach.

MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Liberal Democrats will ensure that there is a more equitable distribution of funds between Rural and Urban areas
- There is no 'quick fix' available for the County's roads so Liberal Democrats will set out a rolling three-year programme so that everyone can see and comment on what is planned and when it will be addressed.

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY



The Liberal Democrats are aware of the need to work locally to reduce damaging climate change, and we will put the Environment at the heart of everything we do. As the Council is basically bankrupt, we will be clear on the costs of any proposals we make.



While mindful of cost implications, all new Policies will seek to do the least possible damage to the environment, and all policy & service provision changes will consider how to minimize current damage. Given the current perilous state of the Councils finances, we will invest in cost-reducing measures that reduce our impact on the climate whenever possible. There is a clear

opportunity to consult with the public and with Districts and Boroughs to improve the infrastructure for cyclist and pedestrians to reduce car use and improve people's Health and Wellbeing.

We would look to reduce the quantity of vehicle traffic in our major centres and to improve traffic flows enabling destinations to be reached with fewer delays.

MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- We will sign up to the Local Government Association 'Climate Local' initiative & put the Environment at the heart of everything we do
- We will work in close consultation with cyclists to improve cycling/walking routes around the County & install safe cycle parking at all County Council buildings.
- We will install new short stay paid for car parking, with free electric vehicle recharge stations.
- We will establish Park and Ride solutions for our major centres and a municipally owned bus

PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING



Liberal Democrats value personal choice and responsibility and do not want a 'Nanny State'. We recognise that prevention of avoidable ill-health can generate massive savings and reduce pressure on the NHS.

To illustrate the importance of prevention, The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence estimates that in 2007/08 the direct cost to the NHS of people being overweight and obese was **£5.1 billion**.⁵ An estimated £14 billion a year is spent nationally on treating diabetes and its complications. The number of cases of diabetes is expected to rise to 4 million by 2025. Reducing the costs related to diabetes by even 0.1%, by, for instance, promoting diet and exercise to prevent the onset of Type 2 Diabetes, would yield estimated savings of £14 million⁶.



The wider economic costs of mental ill-health in England have been estimated at £105.2 billion each year. To address the elements of these problems which have a direct bearing on the County Council; we will ensure that Mental Health issues are taken seriously, both within the Council and by our service providers.

MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Liberal Democrats will take the County Council's responsibilities for public health and wellbeing seriously.
- We will maintain budgets in this area in real terms, on the basis that prevention will result in larger savings to the public purse.
- We will evaluate the effectiveness of all interventions and prioritise those areas likely to produce the greatest savings.

Fire Services

The role of the Fire Service has changed in recent years from focusing on the speed of response to call-outs towards preventative work. Fire prevention activity is vulnerable to cutbacks as it is not seen as essential. The service also plays a greater role in assisting at road traffic accidents.

Manifesto Commitments

- Liberal Democrats recognise that the role of the Fire Service is highly valued by the public and that it is changing substantially. We will keep it strong, effective and local.
- We will protect the Fire Service budget in cash terms to ensure that prevention measures are prioritised, maintained and continue to save lives



The Future

Northamptonshire County Council is fast approaching an era of rapid change. Our Manifesto addresses both the historical issues and the future uncertainties.

A fresh approach to local government across the County is required.

We will be campaigning for the abolition of the County Council and its replacement with unitary authorities. Our preference is for a minimum of 3; bringing decision-making and accountability closer to you and your communities, together with services developed to meet local needs. We will approach the budgeting process in a "Back to Basics" process, which will look at current and future needs rather than only historical funding- the better to cope with changing circumstances. The people of Northamptonshire deserve better, and the Liberal Democrats will deliver a more responsive, effective, honest and accountable Council.