

# **LEEDS LIBERAL DEMOCRATS**

## **Leeds - A City for All**

### **Leeds Liberal Democrat Manifesto – 2011**

Leeds Liberal Democrats believe that Leeds needs a progressive agenda and not the “Civic Retreat” policy planned by the Labour Party, supported by the Green Party and the Morley Borough Independents.

Instead, we will invest in harnessing the full potential of communities in the city of Leeds to build a more sustainable future.

We will invest in the basic structures essential to make neighbourhoods more attractive to both residents and business.

We will commit to concrete actions to reduce waste and to tackling climate change.

We will shift the balance of power away from Civic Hall and towards our neighbourhoods.

Actions we take now in an economic downturn can make all the difference in building the resilience needed to enable our city to prosper when the economy improves.

The cornerstone of our Manifesto is our commitment to strengthening communities through investment in local decision-making.

Services decided on a local scale are more accountable to those they serve, and more cost effective, as they are made to measure for that community.

Decisions taken locally are also often more innovative, and responsive to provision by local voluntary organisations.

We fully support the coalition’s localism agenda and look to bring its influence to Leeds.

## **1. Culture.**

Leeds Liberal Democrats started the process of bringing a much needed Arena to Leeds; this is just one of the many ways in which we have looked to raise the cultural profile of Leeds. Not only will an Arena help to boost our economy by bringing people into Leeds, but it will bring top class acts and performances closer to home for Leeds residents.

We opposed Labour charging for entry into Tropical World and Home Farm which under a Liberal Democrat administration was free for many. We would reverse this decision.

We believe in localism and fair devolution of money to local areas, and not favoured areas. Leeds is a very diverse City and this is to be celebrated and promoted. Otley for example does not have a separate tourism budget, yet is a unique market town which if correctly promoted can bring millions into the Leeds economy.

## **2. Communities**

Leeds Liberal Democrats would restore area funding based on fair distribution around Leeds and not based on Labour's favoured areas. Everyone pays council tax, so everyone deserves a fair return for their money.

We would address devolution head on and devolve more power to local areas, giving ordinary people more power to decide how money is spent in their area.

There are certainly services that need to be administered on a citywide basis but many more, than is currently the case, can and should be run locally.

We would look to co-ordinate the Parish and Town Council's with the City's administration in order to maximize their influence. Parish and Town Council's have elected representatives with power and with budgets concentrated on their area. Much better co-ordination is required.

There is room for Leeds to commission the Parish and Town Council's to carry out some of their responsibilities for the Council at Parish and Town Council level. This is true localism: local decisions by local people. We need more parishes where there is a local demand so that local communities have genuine local democracy and accountability.

Ours would be a bottom up administration. With local Parish and Town Council's more involved people would be more in touch and empowered than with a remote City Council too big to respond to the day to day needs of the people.

Leeds would, of course, retain the strategic role and deal with issues affecting more than one Parish or where economy of scale really outweighed the local benefit. But even then there would be channels of communication to consult and tailor provision to local need.

Labour has tried to change our area boundaries to benefit their favoured areas. They have also cut £250,000 from the Community Wellbeing Fund just months after announcing the creation of 3 well-paid Area Leader officer jobs.

Our Area Committees need less interference and more influence. We would restore the £250,000 confiscated by Labour.

We propose that £847,000 should be provided to Area Committees with the specific aim of providing a Community Safety Fund to bring together local people, police and councillors to prioritise addressing local crime issues, rather than priorities set from the centre.

We also propose that a further £50,000 should be provided to replace the withdrawal of support by the administration for Christmas Lights events in our outlying communities. Such events have value in bringing communities together and also support the vitality of our high streets. It is recognised that not all parts of the city benefit from this, so the sum would be reintroduced as a general community events fund to be decided by each area.

We propose a Green Infrastructure Fund of £500,000 to be made available for Area Committees to make their own contribution to a more sustainable Leeds.

We are a patchwork city of communities connected by green corridors. Our neighbourhoods and our own wellbeing are enhanced by a quality environment.

Through this fund communities could shape their sustainable future by investing in local priorities around tree planting, allotment provision and walking and cycling routes. Labour and the Green Party voted against such green measures when the Council's budget was set in February this year.

### **3. Planning**

Leeds Liberal Democrats have led the campaign against bad landlords especially in the student areas of Leeds and have taken this right to the doors of Government to bring about better standards for those that come to live and study in Leeds.

The example of the Heart project in Headingley is testament to how local people can be brought together to share creativity and talent to save a valued local building for the benefit of the local community.

We propose to transfer money that would otherwise have been spent on the Council's web replacement project to create a £1 million fund to assist other communities to do likewise with other Council buildings scheduled for closure.

We have supported the development of a new southern entrance to Leeds City Station for which the coalition Government has now approved funding.

We need a joined up approach to planning with the other districts in West Yorkshire to encourage the right type of development in our city to ensure its continued prosperity. Until we have genuine democratic regional government the Leeds City Region is an important strategic body for economic and land development.

#### **4. Transport and Mobility**

Leeds Liberal Democrats are committed to work towards bringing Quality Bus Contracts to Leeds. This would mean integrated ticketing through Smart Cards, like London's Oyster card, so the public would not have to pay each time a different company's bus was used. Changes to bus services would be reduced and subject to consultation.

We will continue to fight for a rapid transport system for Leeds. Leeds is the largest city in Western Europe without one. Currently Metro is lobbying for a trolley bus network and we support this.

We deplore the ending of the FreeCityBus. Labour in Leeds cut this valuable service that helps people move around the City centre and reduces carbon emissions. We would restore it and look at part funding it through smart cards brought in under Quality Bus Contracts. It is well used by elderly people who wish to access Leeds General Infirmary and the Dental Hospital. There is currently no other bus service which links the city centre with the L.G.I. and Dental Hospital.

The FreeCityBus took up to an estimated two million cars off the road during its five years of operation. Without it additional pressure will be put onto the roads into Leeds and this will have the negative impact of increasing congestion.

We need improved signage in the centre of Leeds. Visitors to Leeds, and many residents, are often confused by the poor signage in the city centre. The net result of this is many people unnecessarily driving through the city centre adding to congestion and emissions. Better signage would allow people to reach their destinations quicker.

Leeds lacks Park and Ride. Many people would benefit from large park and ride schemes outside of the city centre with regular bus services taking drivers and passengers into the city centre. We believe that we should be looking at ways of introducing these as soon as possible to reduce congestion and carbon emissions.

We believe that highway maintenance is a key priority for the people of Leeds, as decent roads benefit all, with the distribution of spending spread across the city.

The sustained commitment to resurfacing the city's roads by the previous Liberal Democrat led administration paid great dividends to taxpayers. Claims against the Council diminished, saving many thousands in compensation. Moreover, those roads that were yet to benefit from this investment suffered far worse in the recent harsh weather.

The withdrawal of £1.5 million from the Highways maintenance budget by the Labour Administration is short sighted, and we would reverse that decision.

In addition, in response to the demand from residents blighted by irresponsible and dangerous drivers we will introduce a further £1 million to fund further 20mph zones and Residents parking schemes.

## **5. Employment**

Leeds Liberal Democrats implemented the long awaited equal pay legislation that means women and men get paid the same for the same job, with 10,500 staff better off.

We ensured that the few staff who were to lose out were given pay protection for three years and we worked with them to eliminate losses. Sadly Labour backed them to strike against this, meaning they lost money when they did not need to.

A settlement was reached which included productivity bonuses and improved route efficiencies. Sadly Labour delayed implementing them and this has cost the residents of Leeds millions of pounds. When they were finally implemented they were botched with many people suffering non-collection of refuse for months.

Interestingly Labour, despite campaigning for a better deal for the bin workers, have continued with our programme, thus vindicating us! They clearly only supported the bin worker's strike for political ends.

We recognise that the current economic situation has had a particular impact on youth unemployment, which has been rising sharply since 2008, and that we should respond to this in Leeds with positive proposals within this year's budget.

We therefore proposed to safeguard £500,000 from the Jobs & Skills budget which is currently unallocated to create a Young (18-24) People Opportunity Fund. This would be ring-fenced to be spent within the Third Sector – the voluntary sector - as it is the most effective at engaging those hardest to reach, and can attract further funding not open to the Council.

## **6. Education**

Leeds Liberal Democrats believe that every child should have the best possible education in order to have a better start in life, get a good job and learn about the world. There will be free nursery places for fifteen hours a week for the most disadvantaged two year old children. This is in addition to the fifteen hours already available to three and four year old children.

Nationally Liberal Democrats in Government are introducing the Pupil Premium, which is aimed at funding every disadvantaged child. This funding

goes directly to the school where the pupil is being educated. This means the funding follows the pupil.

The last time Labour were in charge of Leeds, the education service was taken away from the council by the Government and "Education Leeds" was set up to run the schools outside of democratic accountability. During our six years of control we were able to reverse this, and education is now back under the direct control of the Council.

## **7. Social Services**

Since being back in power Labour have committed themselves to closing Day Centres despite campaigning strongly against these proposals when in opposition. We have made it clear that we support personal budgets as a way forward, to deliver better and more appropriate services for older people in Leeds. Labour's dithering on taking urgent decisions is putting the Day Centres that remain under threat which is causing uncertainty and concern to elderly people.

Labour are using in-house staff to provide home services to older people at a cost more than twice what is the norm in the independent sector. We cannot afford to allow this to continue. We believe that if alternative providers are offering good quality care we should use them. This could save the council millions of pounds a year, which can be used to provide more and better services in new areas.

By using care not subject to price/quality competition, Labour have had to put up the cost of day care so much that it threatens its future as fewer people will pay their inflated costs. In consequence falling numbers will make day centres unviable even for those that still want them.

## **8. Housing**

After decades of the selling off Council Houses under previous Governments and not replacing them, bringing about a shortage of Council Houses, Liberal Democrats recently started to build the first new Council Houses in Leeds for over twenty years. This is a programme we wish to continue.

Neighbourhoods can be blighted by rundown, vacant properties, whilst families cry out for an affordable home. Our Empty Properties Initiative would take £2.3 million from the Housing Revenue Account to buy up vacant properties, refurbish them and bring them back into use, with any surplus reinvested back into the scheme.

## **9. Environment**

In office Leeds Liberal Democrats were committed to implementing a pilot scheme to distribute free insulation to 1000 households in Leeds. This is proceeding, but we call for a speedier roll out. We want to go one stage further and insulate every home in Leeds to the highest standard by working in conjunction with energy companies. There are many solutions to improving

the energy efficiency of even the most difficult buildings to insulate and we need to offer a package of improvements that can offer the most appropriate solutions for both public and private housing.

We pledge to fit solar power installations to all suitable Council buildings

We are committed to green our streets and prepare for climate change by planting trees on all our residential streets wherever possible.

We are committed to tackling inappropriate commuter parking and to investing money in better public transport.

We are committed to reducing Leeds' carbon emissions by 41% by 2020 compared with 2009.

We want to roll out fortnightly Green Bin collections for recycling waste, following our successful trials in various areas of Leeds, introducing areas for food waste collection following our successful trials in Rothwell. We could then recycle food waste and power our refuse vehicles with it.

The food waste trial in Rothwell has taken recycling rates to over 50%. Although marginally more expensive in the short term, the more communities that are involved each time that the landfill tax increases, the better for Leeds tax payers. We will fund further food waste rounds.

## **10. Finance**

When in control of Leeds, Liberal Democrats consistently set low council taxes, which were among the lowest in the country. We believe in delivering value for money. Sadly since Labour have taken over we have seen money diverted to their favoured areas and decisions delayed and delayed at a cost of millions to the residents of Leeds.

Faced with a challenging budget Labour has decided to cut services and build reserves which they plan to increase to £19 million. Reserves are for a rainy day. That day has come. It's pouring down. The country was left in a huge financial mess by the last Labour Government and it is our collective responsibility to see that things improve rather than getting even worse. We believe we should be investing that money, not in the bank, but in the future of Leeds.

## **11. Local Businesses**

Small and medium sized businesses employ more people in Leeds than the Council, yet are often uninvolved in the community where they operate.

The example set by some individuals shows what can be achieved when business embraces the aspirations of the community. We propose a £240,000 Business Engagement Fund that will allow Area Committees to reach out to small local businesses to get them more involved in the community; from building links with local high schools to offer work experience, to improving local shopping areas, and to supporting local groups with professional advice.

At the same time local businesses will benefit from support to access the help they need to keep them afloat through difficult times.

## **12. Police.**

Leeds Liberal Democrats would continue to fund Police Community Support Officers in equal measures around Leeds and not just to Labour's favoured areas as they have threatened.

Leeds Liberal Democrats are opposed to the Government's plans for directly elected Police Tsars. While there are some issues with the present system, replacing the current Police Authorities with just one person to set the priorities for policing in West Yorkshire is not the right way forward. We have seen the problems of having one person elected to run a metropolitan council down the road at Doncaster. We don't need West Yorkshire Police to have to cope with dealing with one official, probably elected by a small minority of voters, who has a particular agenda they want to follow.

## **Conclusion**

Our main pledges are for a greener Leeds, with greater local control, and improved transport.

Liberal Democrats believe that Leeds is a city with immense vitality whose citizens contribute their talents to create its great spirit and whose resourcefulness will ensure its future success. We believe that the City Council cannot by itself achieve all that we want for the city and that it has to work with the people of Leeds to enable them to put their time and energy into making it an even better place to live, work and play.

This manifesto aims to give an idea of the kind of city Liberal Democrats are working towards. We are committed to these aims and ideals and we ask for your support in achieving them. Join us now to help make Leeds a fairer, livelier, safer and greener city.

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