

# On Day One

## Labour in local government's priorities for the next Labour Government

How a Jeremy Corbyn-led administration could work with local government to deliver for the many, not the few

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# Foreword

**Andrew Gwynne MP**

Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Across the country, year after year of cuts have stretched local authorities to breaking point. As the sector struggles to cope with decreasing funding and financial uncertainty, demand for children's services and adult social care has continued to rise – for every £1 of council tax collected in 2019/20, as much as 56p could be spent on caring for the elderly, vulnerable adults and children. When faced with choices; of where to cut, and where to invest the government has continued to show that they do not understand the real life, human challenges facing this country.

In challenging times, the work of Labour councillors has become even more important. Local government has suffered the biggest austerity cuts of any part of Government – with Labour communities hit the hardest. But despite this, our Labour councils are still leading the way both as the frontline of government for our communities, and often as the last line of defence. Labour councils have demonstrated leadership and innovation in the toughest of times, delivering new community facilities, world class transport systems, creating ground-breaking energy networks, using technology to improve social care services, and building greener and more sustainable towns and cities.

As we prepare for a future Labour government, we must learn from the innovations that have made a difference and given people in our areas real hope during these difficult times.

The messages of 'On Day One' are clear: that the future of our country cannot be formulated by politicians in Westminster, but needs to be built in partnership with local leaders and local people, in towns, cities, and counties across the country. That devolving power to a local level gives Labour an opportunity to show people that we trust them to make decisions and take control of their own lives. And that if local government is properly funded then it can help the next Labour government deliver the improved vital public services our communities desperately need.

Despite the challenges that local government has faced, our Labour local government family continues to be at the forefront of delivering the better, fairer, and more equal society that we all strive for. This publication helps show that under the next Labour government it can be central to ensuring that we are able to put those values back where they belong – at the heart of our national life.

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# Introduction

Local government can  
help Labour deliver  
from Day One



**Cllr Nick Forbes**

Leader of LGA Labour Group and  
Leader of Newcastle Council

 @nick\_forbes

Local government offers a golden  
opportunity for a future Prime Minister  
Jeremy Corbyn to make an immediate  
and visible difference to people's lives

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## Why 'On Day One'?

The original idea behind 'On Day One' was simple – that leading Labour councillors from across England and Wales should lay out the immediate challenges facing local government, and to describe how they should be met 'On Day One' of a future Labour government led by Prime Minister Jeremy Corbyn. The authors have accomplished that task, but on reading the essays together I have been struck by the emergence of another, more compelling theme: that if the next Labour government wants to deliver immediate and visible change for the many, not the few then the fastest and most direct route to achieving it lies through local government.

## Reversing the damage of austerity

Since 2010 Labour councillors have had hellish choices presented to us, but we have never shirked the need to take decisions, however unpalatable they have been. We have listened to and worked with our communities to understand their priorities. We have examined every budget line and stretched every pound left available to us. But as each of the essays from Richard Watts, Linda Thomas and Peter Box show, austerity has had a devastating effect on key public services that provide protection to the most vulnerable members of our society – children at risk, disabled adults and older people who require support, and the many families who are barely getting by despite being in work. On Day One of the next Labour government an immediate priority must be to reverse the damage wrought by austerity – council budgets are now so tight that there is no room to cope with the extra pressures which we know are coming. The Local Government Association has clearly set out the size of the funding gap in local government – the calculated shortfall is £5.8bn by 2019/20, plus £1.3bn that is needed to stabilise the care system, £7.1bn in total. Labour must urgently commit to meeting this desperately-needed investment, but it is also vital that we also give councils the freedom to implement the right solutions for their areas.

## Fair funding and financial freedoms

The next Labour government will be under immediate pressure to make a difference to the lives of those who have suffered from austerity – and they will need local government to do it. Since 2010 we have used our creativity and experience to find innovative ways to best defend those we were elected to protect – a task that has given Labour councils no pleasure, but in which they should rightly take pride. If Labour councils can achieve so much despite the constraints of austerity, can you imagine what we could do with the tools and resources we need? It is this very experience of squeezing extra value out of increasingly scarce resources that shows why John McDonnell should empower local government with a central role in dismantling austerity – and give councils the freedom to take those decisions for themselves. Sharon Taylor's chapter also makes an important argument about the opportunity offered by shifting public spending away from crisis management, and into early intervention and prevention. A Labour government committed to making a permanent and irreversible shift in the economy would do well to consider making a wholesale change to the system by which we measure the value of a public service intervention, and how we deliver social justice.

## Trusting in localism

In this publication Labour in local government makes a clear argument in favour of a bigger role for the state, but also argues that the state must be better – and that evidence shows that this is best achieved locally, not from Whitehall. The state under Labour must not be an all-powerful, distant and centralised government, but a local, accountable, and inclusive state, where power is shared with communities. Judith Blake outlines how real devolution – not the skin-deep version offered by this government – could become the driver of an economic recovery that benefits the many. Innovation and creativity must be encouraged and nurtured, not stifled.

Key priorities of elected national government will still be vitally important, but ministers will need to give freedom to local communities to decide how they are implemented in their areas. Lib Peck outlines why this is so important: the next Labour government must learn from one of the major criticisms of the previous one, and resist the temptation to meddle from Whitehall or constrain councils with ring-fencing. Crucially, Labour in government will need to become comfortable with the inevitable result of decentralised power and localised decision-making – that there will be varying outcomes in different areas. This should be welcomed as a route to finding new and better solutions to improving the quality of public services, or at the very least tolerated as a necessary by-product of giving communities more control.

## **Building local identity**

Localism makes sense in terms of delivering efficient and improved public services, but there is a much more powerful political argument too. Many communities in our country expressed how they have felt a loss of identity, and an impression that they no longer have control over their own lives. This was most obviously manifested in the vote to leave the European Union, but the chance to stick two fingers up at Westminster would probably prove just as popular. Local government is connected with our communities, and built on foundations of openness, transparency, and accountability. We don't pretend that giving more power and freedom to councils and local communities would be a magical panacea that would restore faith in the political system at a stroke, but the public have always placed significantly more trust in their local council than in the national government. Local people can have much more subtle and engaging conversations with their local politicians about what's right for their area than they could dream of having with a national government. And this is exactly what creates a better sense of place, and a stronger local identity. This offers the next Labour government a real way of being able to meaningfully return power and control to people who would otherwise feel increasingly shut out of the system.

## **Harnessing the experience of local leadership**

In Labour council leaders and councillors the next Labour government has a ready-made army that can deliver results from the very first day in power. They offer a deep well of experience that the next Labour government can draw from, as I hope you will realise from reading this book. The contributions here are just the tip of the iceberg – there are currently over 120 Labour council leaders in England and Wales, each an expert on their local area and each with a profound knowledge of public service delivery gained from operating at the frontline of the state. They deserve the trust of Labour in government – as Amy Cross outlines in her contribution, councillors are the most accountable members of the party – rightly answerable to residents, local members, and party bodies. And councillors also deserve a wider voice in the Labour Party – with better representation on the NEC, and opportunities for leading councillors to work together with the next Labour government, as suggested by Simon Henig.



## **Delivering for the many, not the few**

If a future Prime Minister Corbyn unshackles local government from the stifling constraints of Whitehall, and asks councils to put power back in the hands of communities, then we could start to see genuine and radical change in days, not years.

The fastest way to end the housing crisis? Give Labour councils the freedom to build a new generation of council housing, as Rishi Shori sets out in his chapter, and councils could start work on building new homes within weeks.

Need to spread growth and prosperity across the whole of the UK? Devolve real power to our regions and our cities, and learn from the experiences of the Welsh Labour government working hand in hand with Labour councils, as described by Debbie Wilcox.

Want to ensure every child is given the chance to succeed? Let councils invest in the early help services that we know guarantee better outcomes for children at a lower cost, and restore the power of councils to ensure every child has a place at an excellent local school.

In almost every area in which Labour wants to make our country fairer, local government is better placed to make it happen than central government. With sufficient funding and greater freedom to take decisions over vital services in their areas local councils can generate economic growth, build new homes, strengthen communities, and provide compassionate care and sustainable support for our most vulnerable people. And thanks to the contributions in this book, you'll see that under a Labour Government, Labour councils could do it On Day One.

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# Labour would reap the rewards of investing in local councils



**Cllr Sharon Taylor**

Leader of Stevenage Council

 @sharonstevenage

Sharon Taylor argues councils are Labour's most powerful weapon to destroy austerity

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**In many ways it is deeply ironic that the first local authority to have collapsed under the weight of austerity piled upon it by a Tory government should be Tory-run Northamptonshire County Council. Whilst failures of local leadership will certainly have made it worse, be in no doubt that Tory austerity has been the direct cause the financial crisis facing Northamptonshire - and that other councils could soon be following them.**

Austerity has been a disaster for local government – or more importantly, a disaster for the residents who rely on the hundreds of vital services that councils offer. Perhaps what is most astonishing is that it is only now that councils like Northamptonshire are starting to collapse, considering the level of cuts that have been made since 2010 under the cloak of austerity. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, which provides councils with most of their funding in the form of Revenue Support Grant (RSG), was hardest hit by the cuts – welcomed with glee by then Communities Secretary Eric Pickles. As a result, and despite council tax increasing, council spending power will be 22% lower in 2018 than 2010.

As my colleagues outline elsewhere in this publication, the combination of funding cuts and rising demand for adult social care and children's services offer a real threat to the vital services for the most vulnerable. And the need to put every spare penny towards keeping these services going has had a significant knock-on effect – almost 60% of council expenditure is likely to be spent caring for vulnerable children and adults by 2020, leaving increasingly little to fund other services, like cleaning streets, running leisure centres and libraries, and supporting community safety. This unprecedented pressure led even Tory council leader Lord Gary Porter to demand that councils are “at the front of the queue” for new funding if “austerity is coming to an end”. The problem being that there is no evidence whatsoever that Theresa May or Philip Hammond think austerity should come to an end – or even that they are listening.

This would have been different under a Labour government – we are an anti-austerity party, and the 2017 Labour manifesto included a commitment to find an immediate £2 billion for local government, which would have helped fill the £5.8 billion gap we face by 2020. But despite making unexpected gains from the Tories we lost the election – and austerity continues.



While Labour councillors have rightly attacked and opposed austerity, and have done all they can to highlight the unfairness of loading the cuts onto the backs of those that can least afford to carry them, we have never shrunk from the challenge of maintaining Labour values in the delivery of local services.

Whether it was the Gershon Review, Best Value, or area-based budgets, councils have always been asked to do more with less, and they have almost always delivered. Labour councillors continue to have to do this because we don't have the luxury of waiting for the next Labour government – we have to fight every day to protect our friends, neighbours, and fellow citizens who rely on us.

## “Council spending power will be 22% lower in 2018 than 2010”

Labour councils are increasingly faced with impossible choices – but at no point have they been tempted to abandon the people who have placed their trust in them. They have examined every budget line to cut out every ounce of fat they could find, in an increasingly desperate attempt to shield their communities from the Tories cuts – what Jeremy Corbyn has praised as ‘amazing creativity in the toughest of times’.

But anyone with any direct experience of working in local government will know that it has always been the most efficient, and the most resilient, part of the public sector. Before anyone had even heard of ‘austerity’ councils have been focused on improving efficiency.

But it is this very experience of stretching every penny

of the increasingly scarce resources at our disposal – put to the test even more by the last eight years of austerity – that offers a glimpse of what Labour in local government could deliver if we were properly funded, and freed from the centralising constraints of Whitehall.

An early task for the next Labour Government is finding a way to make local government funding fairer and more transparent – and to increase our independence from central government. Although councils are responsible for about £1 in every £4 of government spending, we are responsible for raising less than 10% of taxes – making England one of Europe's most centralised countries. There is currently little ability for councils to raise taxes other than council tax, which is becoming increasingly regressive.

Council tax itself needs complete reform – it results in distorted and unfair comparisons between neighbouring areas. This is made worse by the widespread misunderstanding that council tax is how councils get the majority of their income – which means many people are understandably baffled when they see services being cut despite council tax bills going up.

Any new system of local government finance should also increase the independence of local government from the Treasury. The current solution to this is to replace Revenue Support Grant (RSG), which previously formed the largest income for most councils, with the ability to retain up to 75% of local business rates. By 2020 the Government will have reduced RSG by the equivalent of 77p in the pound, leaving councils almost entirely reliant on council tax, business rates, and local charges. Increasing council's financial independence is a step in the right direction, but many Labour councils have a very low council tax base and little genuine ability to attract new rate-paying businesses. Many more councils could go the same way as Northamptonshire, unless a new and fairer way of redistribution is found by the next Labour government. This is a huge task, and unless work begins in opposition there is little hope that the first day of a Labour government would have an immediate long-term solution – not least because it should rightly be jointly agreed with local government, rather than handed down by the Treasury.

But the next Communities Secretary could argue for some increased freedoms for councils from Day One – based on recognition that councils are democratic, transparent, and accountable, and that councillors can be trusted not to overstep the boundaries of acceptability set by regular interactions with the ballot box.

This should include immediate abolition of the council tax referendum limit, increased powers to levy higher council tax on empty homes, and the ability to look at local taxes such as land value tax, tourism tax, and possibly even local retention of a portion of income tax. Councils running schemes that are of benefit to the public good – for instance responsible licensing of landlords, should be able to be run on full cost-recovery basis, and councils should be free to set – and levy – larger fines for anti-social crimes such as fly-tipping. Councils should also be freed to borrow capital where it will be used to invest in infrastructure that will support future growth. We should be able to use the combined spending power we have from procurement, investment and pensions to the maximum benefit for community wealth building in our local economies. Labour councils have made a start on this around the country but there are still technical and legal obstacles which a Labour government could help remove.



Another immediate win for Labour would be to commit to fully replacing the £8.4 billion UK-wide funding gap for local communities that will open up at the point we officially exit the EU, and ensure a viable locally-led successor to EU regional funding is put in place. All of these solutions could be brought in quickly, while the harder job of finding a truly sustainable long-term funding settlement continues.

Almost all of the successful evidence-based early intervention programmes are located in local government – despite the crushing weight of austerity that has understandably forced councils to divert resources to the ‘sharp end’ of social problems. It is mostly understood through the prism of supporting children – where overwhelming evidence shows that investment in supporting the crucial first 1000 days of a child’s life results

in significantly better health, social, educational and economic outcomes across the whole of child’s life – but its logic extends to almost all public services, including criminal justice, skills and health and crucially to our role in delivering decent homes.

“If we have one message for John McDonnell on his first day as Chancellor it is that he must force the Treasury to grasp the nettle of early intervention”

The freedom to innovate and increased self-reliance would also allow councils to put in practice what we have called for over many years, a real and radical approach to public services that could make lasting improvements in the lives of our citizens, to prevent many of the most enduring social problems and to stop the misery of social injustice being handed on from one generation to the next: early intervention.

Crucially, for a Labour government that will be grappling with the need to avoid being labelled as irresponsible spenders, early intervention offers real and significant long-term savings in public spending. If we had one message for John McDonnell on his first day as Chancellor it is that he must force the Treasury to grasp the nettle of early intervention – not just for children and young people, but across the whole spectrum of social policy. The rewards are enormous – in better and more worthwhile lives for millions of our fellow citizens, in real and measurable gains in social justice, and in real long-term savings to the public purse.

If John McDonnell wants to see an irreversible shift in the balance of wealth in favour of working people, then he must take steps to ensure a similarly permanent shift in the balance of power from Whitehall to local communities. By trusting in local government's democratic accountability, understanding of communities, and experience of making every pound count, he can deliver immediate and visible improvements to people's lives. And by investing in our ability to deliver early help to people who need it, and who might otherwise be a huge drain on public resources, he can deliver both social justice and long term savings to the Treasury.

It is local government – efficient, transparent, and closer to communities than any civil servant sitting in Whitehall could ever dream of being – that can be the most powerful weapon in destroying the effects of Tory austerity. It will be up to the next Labour government to unleash it.



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# The importance of having the best start in life



**Cllr Richard Watts**

Leader of Islington Council

 @richardwatts01

Richard Watts sets out how Labour in  
government can ensure that every child  
has the opportunity to thrive

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**At the heart of a Labour government elected to make difference for the many, not the few, must be the commitment to give every child and young person the best start in life, no matter their background.**

For too many people, the circumstances into which they are born are still the determinant of their life chances. But Labour councils have shown that, given the right support, we can tackle inequality in our communities.

In the face of Tory austerity, Labour councils across the country have worked incredibly hard to protect services for children and young people that help them start life well. From Children's Centres to support for the most vulnerable, Labour councillors have demonstrated their values by protecting these vital services as far as possible. But we cannot escape the reality that doing so comes at the price of savings elsewhere. The first priority of an incoming Labour government must be to immediately provide local councils with the funding we need to deliver the services children and young people rely on in order to thrive.

The short-sightedness of the Tories' austerity agenda is clearest to see from the impact it has had on Sure Start Children's Centres. More than 500 Children's Centres have closed since 2010 in England thanks to government cuts imposed on local councils, depriving children of vital support which we know gives them a great start in life. Children's Centres must be at the heart

of locally designed comprehensive family support services. We know the first few years of a child's development are incredibly important for a whole range of issues, and that's why we need a clear commitment to re-establish a comprehensive model of a Children's Centre in each local community.

Building on the legacy of the Sure Start programme, which brought together many different services in a place that was accessible to parents, a Labour government needs to continue to build wraparound support that puts children and families first. Local councils are uniquely placed to bring together vital support for children and families, and to develop more comprehensive support. From play and early education opportunities for children, to employment advice for parents; local councils need the freedom and funding to develop local networks of support services provided in community-based settings.

The flexibility that councils must have to develop programmes that tackle the challenges local communities face should be extended to how genuinely affordable childcare operates. The expansion of support for working families with 3 and 4 year-olds is clearly welcomed, but the prescriptive manner in which the Government has introduced it has proven problematic for families and for providers.



What is needed is more flexibility for how funding can be used, appreciating that not all families will need the same type of support, and that this funding could be used to support alternative provision. Recognising that one-size fits all models, however appealing to our universalist instincts, deny local areas the ability to design services that work for their varying needs must be a core principle in a genuinely radical and reforming Labour government.

All this has been allowed to happen whilst the Tories persist with cuts to schools that will certainly hit schools in the least well-off areas hardest. This risks undoing years of progress that has seen educational outcomes and the quality of local schools transformed. A Labour government must seek to level funding up for schools to that of areas where investment and local accountability have delivered improving results and standards.

## “Children’s Centres must be at the heart of locally-designed comprehensive family support services”

Unlike Labour’s clear vision for a comprehensive education that trusts teachers and backs local accountability, the Tories have presided over a disastrous ideological fragmentation of the education system. The Gove era ‘reforms’ have left in their wake a trail of failed attempts to force competition into the system, at the expense of improving standards.

We know that the public want more accountability over their public services to ensure they are run effectively and with the interests of local people put first. As a first step in a two-stage process of reform,

a Labour government must give its full backing to the need for local accountability for all schools. At the heart of this approach is the principle that every state funded school must be locally accountable.

Whilst it would be tempting to simply rip-up everything that the Tory government has imposed since 2010, the lengthy legislative, and likely legal, process of doing so would distract from getting our education system back on track. Whilst we clearly want a more cohesive school system with local accountability, our focus must be on standards, not status of schools. It’s been a long time since councils ‘ran’ schools, but a constructive relationship of challenge and support between councils and schools must be the basis for all types of schools.

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## The importance of having the best start in life

Cllr Richard Watts

The fragmented schools system means that a growing number are not receiving effective support or scrutiny. A Labour government that believes in collective solutions to the challenges our society faces must ensure academies are part of the local family of schools, benefiting from mutual support and challenge, and working together to support local communities.

There is no good reason why councils and maintained schools should not have the power to take over failing academies and Free Schools if they have an excellent track record in school improvement. Combined with these new freedoms, giving councils powers and responsibilities for place-planning, school admissions, and protecting vulnerable children that apply equally to all schools, a Labour government would be enabling local areas to shape education in a sustainable way.

Local councils also need to be given the freedom to open new schools where they are needed. The Free School programme has sunk hundreds of millions of pounds into purchasing expensive, and often inappropriate premises, to open schools in areas where there are surplus places.

Many of these schools have now closed, or failed to open in the first place. The bizarre position where local councils are responsible for providing sufficient school places, whilst having their ability to open new local authority maintained schools constrained, must end. A Labour government needs to allow councils to build new schools, with funding support, and support councils to expand existing well performing schools.

Whilst the pressure on all council services has been growing thanks to Tory austerity and demographic changes, there is increasing recognition that it is in vital children's services where this pressure is becoming most concerning. The LGA has estimated that the situation with children's social care services, which support some of the most vulnerable people in our society, is simply not sustainable. Councils are facing a £2 billion funding gap for children's services by 2020, and councils have seen an 83% increase in children on child protection plans over the past decade. It is abundantly clear that a Labour government must address this funding black hole that affects those who can least afford for services to be under such pressure.

Children's services, like much of the work local councils do, help tackle issues early by providing the support children and young people need. This model of early help and prevention has been pioneered by local councils.



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## The importance of having the best start in life

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We need a government that recognises to go further and to help reduce pressures on other public services, local councils need financial support to develop targeted intervention services.

Take mental health; at least one in ten children and young people are affected by mental health problems – with the unreported figure likely to be far higher. We also know that over half of all mental ill health starts before the age of 14, yet Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are being starved of support. The historical underfunding of these services is compounded by the fact that only 6.7 per cent of mental health spending is spent on services for children and young people.

It is estimated that around three quarters of young people are not able to access the support they need, and those that do have to wait far too long, leading to issues escalating and becoming more complex. A Labour government that wants to see a true parity of esteem between physical health and mental health must recognise that local councils through CAMHS services need the support to play their part.

The LGA has called for a rollout of independent counselling in all secondary schools. Evidence shows that on-site independent counselling services have seen a reduction in psychological stress in pupils that have access to it, as well as improvement in behaviour and educational achievements. Supporting this affordable policy would deliver a meaningful difference for many children and young people.

Local councils play a central role in our communities for people of all ages. But it can be said that it is with children and young people where determined local councils can make the biggest difference. When properly funded and given the powers we need, local councils can provide the early help and support that children and young people need to achieve their full potential. From Children's Centres providing support in the community, to support for care leavers transitioning into adult life; Labour councils across the country are putting Labour values into practice every day.

A Labour government working alongside local Labour councils towards our shared ambition of making our country a fairer place for all is a partnership that will make a difference for the many, not the few.



“There is no good reason why councils and maintained schools should not have the power to take over failing academies and Free Schools”

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# A Labour approach to social care



**Cllr Linda Thomas**

Leader of Bolton Council

 @LindaThomasUK

Linda Thomas sets out how Labour can fix the current social care crisis – and meet the challenge of finding a sustainable long-term solution to changing demographics

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**Successive governments have been warned time and time again that shifting demographics are storing up a ticking time bomb in future demand for care for older people. People are living longer, and more people are living with long-term and complex chronic health conditions that require managing through care. And while the UK may not yet be in the same position as Japan - where more nappies for adults are now sold than for babies - we are certainly heading that way.**

Social care continues to receive increased media attention and is subject to frequent public debate. But despite many years of intensive lobbying by politicians, charities, and other interested parties, this Government continues to prevaricate, offering sticking plaster solutions.

There is little hope that this Tory government will do what is needed to meet this future challenge, when they have caused the current crisis in social care – where austerity cuts have created the perfect storm and put huge pressure on local councils and the NHS alike. Since 2010, councils have dealt with a £6 billion funding gap in adult social care services. This has been met through £3.4 billion of savings to adult social care and £2.6 billion taken from additional savings to other services.

The Government's one-off investment of £2bn over three years runs out in 2020, and allowing councils to levy an extra 3% precept on council tax simply shifts the burden of a national crisis onto local residents. Council tax rises also raise very little in the deprived areas that require extra money most.

The new 'Adult Social Care Support Grant' introduced in 2018 is not new money and was instead created from savings in the New Homes Bonus – it is literally a rebadging of funding already promised to councils, and its creation actually leaves some councils worse off overall as they lose more in New Homes Bonus payments than they gain in grant. Even after these changes, adult social care still faces an immediate and annually recurring gap of £1.3 billion, which is the difference between what care providers say they need and what councils currently pay – and as a result there will be an overall funding gap of £2.2 billion by 2020.

So it will be up to the next Labour government to solve both the current social care crisis and also to find a sensible approach to meeting the longer term challenge. Ensuring our most vulnerable fellow citizens receive the care and support they need to live in dignity and comfort is fundamental to our Labour values.



Making the right choices about how to meet this challenge, and navigating the key demographic issue of the twenty-first century, could be the biggest decision the next Labour government has to make. Unless we want to see the whole of local government bankrupted by the growing cost of social care, the next Labour government needs an immediate plan of action and a determination to implement it On Day One.

The Better Care Fund was meant to be a catalyst to encourage and formalise joint commissioning of services, but while there are examples of very good practice these are not uniform and depend very much on trust and good relationships between local government and NHS colleagues.

With new funding, councils will be able to implement new ways of working. The acute sector is still finding it nigh on impossible to close beds, which is where the savings to implement integration were meant to arise. Even models such as health devolution in Greater Manchester with

transformation funding are struggling under financial pressures. The model to date has seen joint commissioning as the accepted route to encouraging joint working in the community. Integrated teams are established around neighbourhoods of tens of thousands of people with GP practices working as part of community teams across both sectors.

Adequate funding would also help find the crucial missing piece of the jigsaw: homecare. Local government is finding it increasingly difficult to commission homecare at rates that allow providers to pay wages that are commensurate to the value of caring for our most vulnerable people, or to provide the level of care that service users really need.

“Since 2010, councils have dealt with a £6 billion funding gap in adult social care services”

There is no escaping the fact that what is most desperately needed from the next Labour government is a serious injection of funding – starting with meeting the immediate gap of £2.2bn. Funding councils properly would create immediate better outcomes for people who need support, and would have a knock-on saving to acute costs in the NHS. Government attempts to divert attention from this central failure to invest the necessary funding have been misguided and overly bureaucratic.



Many care workers across the UK have to work just 15 minute visits which leave them unable to provide the care that is needed, and many are not paid for their travel time between visits. Some work on zero-hours contracts, and receive just the minimum wage. These poor practices are bad for care workers (who are mostly women) and bad for those receiving care too – vulnerable people often have to experience many different care workers at a time in their lives where they need stability and daily certainty for their most personal care.

Many Labour councils have prioritised addressing this challenge by adopting Unison's Ethical Care Charter, designed to ensure both decent care for vulnerable adults and good employment standards for care workers. Councils that have signed up agree to pay at least the real Living Wage to all care workers, to schedule care visits according to the needs of the individual-with care workers given enough time to provide the care needed-and pay care workers for travel time.

Other measures include offering homecare workers regular training and ensuring providers have clear and accountable procedures for care workers to raise concerns about the wellbeing of the people they are caring for.

If the next Labour government was able to provide the investment we need then all Labour councils would be able to afford to meet these commitments – and our manifesto pledge of introducing a £10 minimum wage would also help to improve the attractiveness of homecare work, and result in a more motivated workforce with higher status. Councils would also be able to integrate care workers into integrated Health and Care Teams.

Care workers should be seen as an integral part of Neighbourhood Teams, working closely with all professionals. By encouraging recruitment of care workers from the locality, benefits would accrue from not having to pay for long periods of travelling time. And we could improve pathways into other health work from initially becoming a care worker, and they should be on offer to make it an attractive proposition for those who want this opportunity. Greater Manchester's Care 2020 model would progress us well down this route.

Relieving the terrible cost pressures on social care would allow councils to focus on what experts know can make the biggest difference to the looming cost pressures of demographic change – early intervention and prevention. If low-level needs are prevented (or even delayed) from developing into more serious or acute needs then both the individual and the state benefits.



Effective early intervention and prevention increases independence, improves quality of life, and provides a financial return to the state (irrespective of whether that is the NHS or the local council) by reducing the use of expensive acute services.

Truly effective interventions are locally designed – preventative early intervention will not work if it is attempted to be remotely imposed from Whitehall, or even by the highly centralised and bureaucratic NHS. This is why it is vital that local councils retain control of social care – and why many in local government are suspicious of what may lay behind the concept of a ‘National Care Service’. If Labour introduces a National Care Service that offers a one size fits all approach, rather than bespoke local services, then it will fail – and be highly inefficient and wasteful too. But if the concept involves setting national criteria for care eligibility and thresholds for charging, then properly and fairly funding both local government and the NHS to jointly deliver integrated care in the most appropriate way for their local population, then it will be a success.

One suggestion would be to set the eligibility criteria, allow people to choose the sort of care and support they require, and then for it to be free. This is a truly person-centred approach and the savings in the system would come from no longer requiring an army of commissioners to dictate how many minutes and hours an individual should have – and it would most certainly crack that thorny issue of fifteen minute visits! This system is operated successfully abroad and is worthy of consideration by a Labour government.

It would end the unfairness of a postcode lottery for home care, as entitlement once acknowledged would have to be guaranteed. We also need to ensure that people are able to be as independent as they want to be within the social care system. Where this system has been introduced people have not abused the system and only requested what they felt they needed not dictated to by a professional – surprisingly many request less.

Integration of health and social care systems should be on the basis of the NHS and local government being equal partners. When a Health and Care plan is agreed on the basis of evidence from a Joint Needs Assessment the spending on that plan should have a mechanism where it is jointly agreed, implemented, and monitored.

“If Labour introduces a National Care Service that offers a one size fits all approach, rather than bespoke local services, then it will fail”

For the first time ever this would make Health and Social Care governance truly accountable. In order to do this, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 would need reversing, which is also important if we are to end the private sector infiltration of our health system.

The crucial decision for the next Labour government will be finding a sustainable funding solution for those who need long-term residential care. It has long been unfair that people suffering from dementia who require care are not be treated the same as those with physical illnesses and given free NHS treatment. Tackling this has become a political football and our most vulnerable senior citizens deserve better from our politicians.

In the absence of a cross party consensus, which is unlikely given the apparent lack of interest from the current government to working with other parties to find one, Labour will have to step up. Constantly kicking the issue of long-term care into the long grass with yet another Green Paper is not in anyone's interest – we need to demonstrate we have the capacity and resolve to deliver a solution that is in line with Labour values.

As a Labour Party our whole philosophy is encapsulated in our proudest achievement – the introduction 70 years ago of a National Health Service that guarantees all citizens, irrespective of their circumstance, access to free health care at the point of need. It should be the mission of the next Labour government to establish another equally sustainable and iconic system, that will also endure for 70 years or more – and that offers a further guarantee that all citizens, irrespective of their circumstance, will have equal access to the care and support they need to live in comfort and dignity for the rest of their lives.



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# Why the root causes of poverty must be tackled



**Cllr Peter Box**

Leader of Wakefield Council

Peter Box shows how Labour councils are leading the way on tackling poverty in their communities

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**Poverty is increasing. The poorest members of our society are becoming even poorer and hard working families are worse off. People are struggling to get by and many more are barely just managing.**

The Government tells us that the best route out of poverty is through employment, yet nationally, one in eight workers live in poverty, nearly one million people in work rely on Housing Benefit – double five years ago – and 47% of adults on low incomes spend more than a third of their income on housing costs. Low wages and precarious work contracts mean that employment is no longer a route out of poverty for too many. We are living in an age of mass in-work poverty, and where wage growth continues to lag behind prices for ordinary families.

The combined effects of welfare changes and cuts – the Bedroom Tax, changes to the rules governing assistance with the cost of housing for low income households, reductions in Council Tax support, extensions to the benefit cap, changes to Personal Independence Payments and much more – is taking its toll on in cities and towns such as mine, which is being disproportionately hit by these policy choices. Labour has already pledged that a Labour government would act quickly to end the Bedroom Tax, and it will also need to look at what action to take on other Tory welfare policies that are so damaging to our residents and communities.

The freeze on most working age benefits, cuts to work allowances, rising costs of everyday essentials, and high housing costs are exacerbating the financial pressures faced by families and individuals on low incomes. Increasing levels of debt are causing depression and anxiety as people struggle to manage their finances. The gap is widening between housing support and housing costs, particularly in the private rented sector. Additionally, people are increasingly turning to councils for support, at a time when councils are facing the worst cuts in their history and are stretched to capacity. And it is households containing a person who is receiving disability benefits that are the worst off as a result of the government's reforms closely followed by families with children.

Child poverty in the UK now affects 30% of children and we know too well the effects that poverty can have on a child's health and their education. Even more worryingly, a recent report by the IFS shows that this figure could increase to 37% by 2021. This is simply unacceptable. A Labour government should not and would not subject the most vulnerable of society to such hardship.



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## Why the root causes of poverty must be tackled

Cllr Peter Box

The roll out of Universal Credit, the Government's "flagship reform of the benefits system" is quite frankly a sham: a flawed system that is causing untold damage and suffering. Rent arrears, foodbank use, and the use of payday loans are commonplace in areas where Universal Credit has been rolled out. Private landlords across the country are no longer taking on tenants in receipt of Universal Credit and in the very worst cases, people are being served eviction notices because they do not have the necessary savings to tide them over during the long wait for initial payment. Citizens Advice, Disabled People Against Cuts (DAPC), Gingerbread, and even members of the Conservative Party back Labour's calls on Universal Credit, as we all want this system reformed.

Where I'm from, like many other areas the length and breadth of this country, tackling poverty has long been a significant challenge for the council and our partners. The most recent index of multiple deprivation ranked us as the 65th most deprived District in England, out of 326 Districts. Around one in eight Wakefield residents, over 47,000 people, live in neighbourhoods amongst the top 10% most deprived in England.

18% of Wakefield's annual economic turnover is in welfare payments, including over £0.5bn to subsidise low wages – £162m in Working Tax Credits and £120m in Housing Benefit. There are around 16,700 people who are not working due to health issues, including a significant increase in mental health claimants during the last few years. The impact of welfare cuts will reduce working age benefit payments in Wakefield by £166m per annum by 2021 from its 2010 figure.

These figures are stark. In Wakefield, we have always been at the forefront of initiatives aimed at prevention and early intervention. Many of these are having an extremely positive impact locally, however, we recognise that more must and can be done. That is why in Wakefield we are currently in the process of designing a poverty reduction programme with the aim of ensuring that as few people as possible become poor and that periods of poverty are exited as quickly as possible.

**"Universal Credit is quite frankly a sham; a flawed system that is causing untold damage and suffering"**

Because of this, a Labour government must deliver an effective benefits system, ensuring that people in-work are able to access a system that enables them to escape poverty. Analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has shown for example that increasing work allowances to their original levels would result in 340,000 fewer people in poverty and 8 in 10 families living with children escaping poverty.

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## Why the root causes of poverty must be tackled

Cllr Peter Box

As a council we pay a local living wage of £8.75 per hour and we encourage other local businesses to do the same. And we are reshaping our procurement strategy to better incorporate social value and increase the proportion of council spend in our District.

Our good growth plan aims to improve resident's quality of life, strengthen opportunities, and improve prosperity across local communities, boosting skills so that local residents can take up better quality jobs. Key outcomes also include narrowing the gap in average weekly earnings against the regional average, increasing the number of economically active adults, and keeping housing affordable along with increasing the number of higher level apprenticeships and business support for some sectors. We deliver a package of pre-employment support that provides links between employees and residents furthest from the job market. Labour in government needs to ensure that councils have the tools to do these locally based initiatives that stimulate growth and generate benefits for residents.

We have formed a housebuilding partnership with our local social housing provider to accelerate the delivery of new, good quality affordable homes in locations where housing is needed most. The partnership provides a range of training, employment and apprenticeship opportunities for local people, and wherever possible, employing local businesses.

We are driving up conditions in private rented accommodation through our Strategic Housing Enforcement policy. We now have powers to issue penalties to landlords of up to £30,000 if they fail to repair, manage, or improve their properties when required to do so.

Our flagship mortgage rescue scheme has now been adopted across the Yorkshire and Humber Region and our Mortgage Assistance Loans and Preventing Repossession Fund are also part of a support package aimed at helping people who are at risk of losing their homes.

We are tackling fuel poverty head on. We actively go out into communities offering advice on how to switch energy suppliers, provide energy saving tips and discuss funding and support available. We also offer interest free loans to those on low incomes in receipt of certain benefits to help pay for insulation and heating work in homes. And our rent deposit scheme helps homeless people to secure private rented accommodation by providing landlords with a bond guarantee on their behalf along with housing related support during their tenancy.

A Labour government needs to make sure that citizens have access to genuinely affordable housing and that the poorest members of our society are able to gain the help and advice needed to ensure that they are not paying more for essential goods and services.



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## Why the root causes of poverty must be tackled

Cllr Peter Box

Despite the best efforts of local authorities, like ours, to drive poverty reduction, poverty rates are on the increase right across the country. The Labour Party recognises that government must co-ordinate a national response to poverty reduction, bringing together the resources and skills of councils and local service providers, working alongside businesses.

Investment is needed in health, the support offered to families along with education and training – targeting funding in areas where it is most needed so that our most disadvantaged individuals and families are not left behind – and government needs to address the economic disparities that exist throughout the country by, for example, supporting inclusive growth.

The next Labour government should work with local government to develop a more co-ordinated approach to supporting people into work, particularly for those facing barriers to work, for example making access to childcare more affordable and in some cases free to low-income parents, improving careers advice, improving access to training and development opportunities, providing good quality apprenticeships and enforcing a Living Wage.





"A Labour government needs to work with local government to develop a more co-ordinated approach to supporting people into work"

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# No return to the ringfence



## **Cllr Lib Peck**

Leader of Lambeth Council and  
Deputy Leader of the LGA Labour Group

 @cllrpeck

Lib Peck argues that local councils should always be able to set their own priorities for spending

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**When I first became a cabinet member in 2006 there were a multitude of issues, structures, and decision-making processes to get my head round. In amongst the many challenges that even the best of inductions rarely equips you for, I realised quickly that understanding the budget is the most important of them all. Get to grips with the money – where it comes from and where it goes – and you are more than half the way towards understanding how to deliver on your local priorities.**

The complication of the budget in those days was not the lack of money – that seems a luxury now! Our Labour government invested huge amounts in local communities in Lambeth. Just think of the transformational impact of Sure Start Children's Centres, Building Schools for the Future, or the New Deal for Communities.

Rather, the issue back then was the dizzying multiplicity of funding streams that flowed down from central government. Dependent on your comprehensive performance assessment you may be able to earn money to invest in your local arts projects. Or you could receive money through the Supporting People programme to support vulnerable people in the community to live independently.

This approach was further reinforced by the Audit Commission's approach to local government. What started out as a sensible and appropriate attempt to improve the largely under-performing part of the public sector ended up instilling a deeply destructive parent – child relationship between central and local government. In too many incidences it warped local priorities. Ticking the box on the paper too often took precedence over resident assessment of local service.

I vividly remember how Lambeth's overall rating by the Audit Commission was on a knife-edge between a stellar three star performance and a dismal one star mark. What was the difference between those two hugely different judgements? One criteria in one sub category of evaluation – namely whether every resident lived within a mile of a library.

Even putting to one side the idea that libraries should be the most decisive issue amongst the near hundreds of services a local council operates, it looked only at the single, rather arbitrary measure. There was no interrogation of the accessibility of the library, the opening hours of the library, indeed the general quality of service provided, all of which I am sure residents would have considered more important.



Fast-forward a decade and there is no longer an Audit Commission, yet local government is now widely recognised as the most efficient part of the public sector. Unlike many other public service institutions it cannot run up a deficit, it has to manage a budget, and it has to keep within its financial envelope. Local government finances have taken the brunt of Tory austerity over the past eight years, so tangible action will be needed both on a short and long-term basis to repair the damage done when a Labour government enters Downing Street.

For example, Liverpool City Council has responded to the issue of fuel poverty by setting up Liverpool LECCY, a not-for-profit energy supplier to supply energy to residents at a lower cost to other providers. Barnsley Council has set up "Enterprising Barnsley" that supports Barnsley-based businesses with a wide range of services to help them start-up expand and invest in order to create jobs and stimulate investment. And Southampton City Council has introduced a House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) licencing scheme in areas

of the city where demand for HMOs is high in order to ensure that standards in the private rented sector are high, the impact on the community is managed, and to help resolve any issues that arise.

"It is Labour in local government that is providing radical innovative and pragmatic solutions to the huge challenges we face"

Within the Labour family, it is Labour in local government that is providing radical, innovative, and pragmatic solutions to the huge challenges we face, despite the relentless pressures of austerity. An incoming Labour government should recognise this and work with local government to learn from their experiences and to support them further.

And in Lambeth – take mental health. Lambeth is a borough that suffers from high levels of poor mental health. But hospitalisation can't and shouldn't be the answer. That's why we have developed the Lambeth Living Well Network. Formed in 2013, the network provides earlier support and a 'front door' to mental health services to people with mental health needs. We removed eligibility criteria to encourage people to seek early help and pioneered 'self-introduction'. This shift towards a more preventative approach has produced impressive results, with the number of referrals to secondary care falling by 40% and a marked increase in the number of people accessing support.

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## No return to the ringfence

Cllr Lib Peck

We have also begun to address the debilitating over-representation of BAME people in our mental health system. Black Thrive, a community-led initiative, informs how mental health services can improve and genuinely meet the needs of black communities.

It is already making an impact and delivering on its mission statement of building a culture in Lambeth whereby black communities are able to thrive, supported by accessible services, which provide the same excellent quality of support for all people regardless of their race.

Our employment work is another example of local government innovation in action. In Lambeth, where the employment rate is currently the highest the borough has ever seen, the challenge is much less about providing jobs, but more about the quality of jobs on offer. We led the way in becoming a Living Wage employer in 2012 but too many of our private sector partners have not followed suit. Despite the huge growth in jobs, investment, and opportunity in the borough in the past few years, there are still large pockets of poverty and deprivation.

This is one of the reasons why we set up an independent Equality Commission to work with representatives from across the borough and to focus on the lived experiences of our Portuguese, Somali, Black Caribbean & disabled residents.

One of the things we found was that there was a particular issue with low pay in the Portuguese community. We heard from residents who were holding down three jobs because no one job paid well enough for them to survive. So, working with one of our seven Business Improvement zones we are launching a London Living Wage Zone where we use our influence to encourage good employment practice, including fair pay.

These examples demonstrate that when left to derive solutions to local issues, local people and local politicians know best. Only at a local level can issues be addressed with the necessary attention to detail and situational awareness that a councillor possesses, leading to the most efficient solution.

It is quite obvious that if problems and solutions are different, so too should be the funding. Ring fenced funding is but another expression of the 'centre knows best' approach, implying that national priorities are necessarily more important than local priorities. It promotes the misguided idea that Whitehall is better equipped to judge what's best for a community than democratically elected councillors. Additionally, ring fenced funding comes with incentives and conditions that stifle a more creative and radical solution.



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## No return to the ringfence

Cllr Lib Peck

While it may be politically seductive for an incoming Labour government to highlight one area of policy and to ring fence money towards it, it rarely works for at least two reasons. First it tends to place an overemphasis on one specific policy area and one specific approach at the expense of equally important investment needs. Second, it tends to re-enforce the silo mentality that afflicts all big bureaucracies.

The NHS is the best example of this. We all want to save the NHS but there is neither much point or indeed much chance of doing so if we don't recognise that it is inextricably linked to adult social care and that a holistic approach towards funding needs to be taken alongside a patient focused approach towards healthcare. Where Labour has already been unable to resist temptation – such as with our existing pledge to ringfence an extra £500m in funding for Sure Start children's centres – it would perhaps be helpful to consider time-limit the ringfence for say three years. This would ensure all councils immediately re-invest in these priority services, but would later be free to invest in other interventions if they judge them to be more effective.

Ultimately, what local government needs at a local level is more money – and an incoming Labour government's pledge of £2 billion more for local government is welcome. This needs to be in the form of more sustainable and guaranteed funding on a long-term basis that gives local government the freedom to spend money in response to local needs. We welcome fewer restrictions so that we can build our own homes or run our own schools without having to set up companies to borrow or multi-academy trusts to govern.

Above all, we need to see more confidence from an incoming Labour government that the most creative approaches, the most effective delivery and, the best chance of positive outcomes occur when local government can work with local people to find answers to very specific local needs, challenges, and ambitions.



"Ring-fenced funding is just  
another expression of 'the  
centre knows best'"

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# A decent home for everyone



**Cllr Rishi Shori**

Leader of Bury Council

 @CllrRShori

Rishi Shori sets out why Labour should  
give councils the power and the freedoms  
to deliver the homes we need

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**Homes offer us security and stability. They are the foundation on which we build our lives and the place we spend time with our families. And for many English people, owning a home of our own remains a mark of success. But too many people in our country don't have a house they can truly call home - they are locked into insecure or temporary accommodation, living in places they can't afford, with home ownership an unachievable dream. The root cause of this crisis is lack of supply and unaffordability - and the current government is doing almost nothing to address either challenge.**

After eight years in power, the Tories still have no plan to build the homes we need. Rough sleeping has become a national scandal, and one of the most visible effects of austerity. In many parts of the UK rents are rising faster than incomes. Housebuilding has fallen to its lowest level since the 1920s, and affordable housing is at a 24-year low. And changing demographics are posing different challenges, with an ageing population putting new pressures on housing.

Since the Tories came to power in 2010, the number of households in temporary accommodation has risen by 65%, and rough sleeping has risen by 169%. Many blame the Tories' welfare reform agenda for these increases, but the failure of the Tories to support the building of more affordable and social housing has also played a large part. The shortage of social housing has led to a rise in residents living in the largely unregulated private rented sector, where tenants can be vulnerable to low quality and poor landlord practices. The insecurity of short tenancies means families can often find themselves without a home at short notice, forcing them into homelessness and leaving the local authority to pick up the pieces. More affordable homes, both to buy and rent, and better regulation of the private rented sector would go a long way to reduce the number of people who are homeless.

Despite government constraints, many Labour councils are trying to find innovative solutions to build more housing. Last year Croydon Council established the charity Croydon Homes to buy 250 homes in the borough to be let at 65% of market rents on three-year assured tenancies. Several Labour councils have established wholly-owned companies to build houses that are then protected from Right To Buy.



Many Labour councils have set up landlord licensing systems to crack down on rogue landlords, and countless Labour councils are doing all they can to build more council houses, despite the constraints that the government have kept in place.

One of the first moves that local councils would be asking for is the abolition of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) borrowing cap. This would free councils up across the country to borrow to build more council homes, allowing increased flexibility to closer

align supply with demand. It has been called for by both the LGA and the Treasury Select Committee – and it doesn't technically cost the government anything. Indeed in many European countries

borrowing for housing does not even lie on the government's balance sheet. Ultimately, the private sector will not build the homes we need on their own – lifting the borrowing cap can spark a renaissance in house building by councils.

A Labour government must also swiftly allow councils to keep 100% of receipts from properties sold through Right to Buy, so we can replace homes and reinvest in housing – this will go a long way in helping councils to increase supply. The Right to Buy scheme reduces already stretched social housing stock and acts to stifle new developments. A total of over 1.83m social housing properties have been sold under Right to Buy, with sales in the last 4 years averaging four times greater than the five years before that. Reforming Right to Buy could include the potential widening of exemptions of the scheme and a reduction in the discount offered.

## "After eight years in power, the Tories still have no plan to build the homes we need"

Whilst there is a general consensus that something must be done, the government appears to lack the will to do anything about it. The government approach to all aspects of housing – be it allowing councils to build houses, homelessness, or the private rented sector can be described as dysfunctional at best. But local authorities are in a prime position to rocket up the supply of additional housing – if only they were given the tools to get on with the job.

So what do Labour councils need a Labour government to do? In truth, Labour's current housing policy already ticks pretty much all the boxes in terms of providing the freedoms we need. Labour will establish a new Department for Housing to focus on tackling the crisis and tasked with improving the number, standards and affordability of homes. And John Healey, who was an excellent housing minister under Gordon Brown, has been clear that as Secretary of State for Housing he will give councils the power to build the homes local communities need.

A Labour government must tackle the problem of unimplemented planning permissions, as this is a major barrier to more homes being built. Recent figures from the LGA show that unimplemented planning permissions currently stand at 423,000. It is now taking eight months longer on average from permission to completion than it did five years ago, which slows down the rate at which new homes are built. Labour must also look at how the National Planning Policy Framework can help housebuilding, and how actions that block supply – such as landbanking – can be prevented. Labour should look at models for enabling a greater proportion of land value capture, and consider how the workings of the national planning system might be amended to help deliver the outcomes councils want to see for all places.

Local authorities are facing a £5.8bn funding shortfall in funding by 2020, which is leading to stretched services and cuts to other services. A large part of the burden of speeding up the planning process has fallen upon local government, but delays to the ability to raise planning fees by 20%, and no response to consultation allowing local authorities to raise the fees by a further 20% have meant that planning departments are further overstretched. A Labour government should urgently look at how local authorities are able to raise money through planning fees in a fair way. In turn, this would have an impact on the speed of the planning process and the building of new homes.

Private renting was once largely the domain of young people, but there are a growing number of families and older people in the private rented sector that will have new demands, including greater security whilst children are at school. Labour should act to ensure all tenants have the opportunity of a secure multi-year tenancy. Labour have also pledged to pause and review Universal Credit and to end the Bedroom Tax if elected, which would be a welcome step.

The next Labour government must not ignore the opportunities that devolution can bring, and a Labour government must support regions to come up with creative ways to encourage home building in their area. Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, has recently introduced the Mayor's Town Centre Challenge to regenerate town centres, but this challenge will also introduce new housing into towns. Mayor Burnham is pursuing a housing deal for Greater Manchester that will allow the area to unlock the delivery of marginal sites with flexible budgets to deal with specific local housing issues. In conjunction with schemes such as the Mayor's Town Centre Challenge, this new power will give the local area the power to build more houses as part of regeneration schemes.



And there needs to be an awareness that capacity within councils currently, and skills within the employment market to recruit from can't be up scaled overnight. Local authorities will need a Labour government that accelerates proposals to offer new routes into construction. A joined-up industrial and skills strategy should help to develop an energetic construction sector with a skilled workforce. This should build on the work of groups such as Housing the Powerhouse, a coalition of housebuilders, land promoters, and business voices coming together, who seek to 'bridge the construction industry skill gap by providing education and training opportunities, so the supply of new homes isn't held up by a lack of qualified labour'. And there is the capacity and capability of our communities to be able to take advantage of economic growth. Wider public sector reform policies on employment, skills, business, and health need to consider the need and impact of housing supply to support inclusive growth.

Mayor of London Sadiq Khan is correct when he describes the task of tackling the housing crisis as 'a marathon, not a sprint'. But Labour councils offer the next labour government the chance to get a head start in the race to build new housing. We can play a critical role in building the types and numbers of homes that our communities need, and it is crucial that a Labour government works with and listens to local government. Give us the tools – and we'll get on with the job.



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“Labour councils offer the next  
Labour government the chance to  
get a head start in the race to build  
new housing”

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# Devolution can deliver an economy that works for the many



**Cllr Judith Blake**

Leader of Leeds Council

 @cllrjudithblake

Judith Blake sets out how devolution can  
help local areas improve outcomes for their  
communities

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**The demand and desire for devolution to areas of England has been growing stronger ever since the Scottish Referendum. Leeds and Yorkshire are no different. Negotiations continue with ministers to try to get a deal over the line, but local Tory opposition has made progress painfully slow. Meanwhile, Manchester and Liverpool have agreed devolution deals and have elected Labour Metro Mayors.**

The next Labour government must get a grip of this issue and prioritise devolution for areas like Yorkshire because of the significant benefits it could mean for economic growth for the UK. I am of the firm opinion that devolution can lead to better outcomes for local people, and help Labour deliver an economy that works for the many.

The reason that devolution should be a priority for the next Labour Government is primarily economic. Growth in the UK has been throttled by the Tories woeful approach to the economy, and held back by the continued over-centralisation of our economy and over-reliance on London. In other European economies, it is normal for the largest regional cities to have Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita that is higher than the national average, with cities acting as a beacon for jobs and growth.

But in the UK, although the total economic contribution of the ten Core Cities (Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield) is greater than London, most UK cities still lag behind the national average – only Bristol outperforms the UK average. If the combined in-work productivity gap with the UK average were addressed, the core city regions would contribute an additional £79.5 billion to the UK economy.

The amount of money cities control directly in England is very small compared to other countries and national policies don't cater for the strengths or needs of different places. Often, they take a blanket approach, treating everywhere the same. There is a lot of evidence that national agencies struggle to join up with local agencies in England, resulting in duplication and inefficiency. It also means that cities and the people who live there don't decide what's best for them, which ignores distinct local needs, wastes public money, and gets poor results. Labour's approach to devolution should recognise this and avoid being prescriptive on solutions, instead letting different areas make their own decisions on what works best for them. This should also include non-urban areas such as the shire counties.



Devolution comes with the obvious benefit of giving local people more say over the decisions that affect their daily lives. We live in one of the most centralised countries in the world, where for every £1 generated locally by taxes, only 9p remains with local authorities while the rest goes to the Treasury. However, from the point of view of some of the very deprived areas of Leeds, including the Middleton Park ward that I represent, the main argument in favour of devolution is that it can create jobs, economic growth, and better social outcomes. The Labour Party has always had improving life chances at the heart of everything it does, and devolution should be seen by an incoming Labour government as another way to further this aim.

We've already seen real benefits for local people in Leeds, in terms of improving life chances and increasing access to jobs. We had local control of the skills agenda through our Devolved Youth Contract, which helped over 2000 young people move into education or employment with an 81% success rate. This compares to only a 65% success rate at the time for the Whitehall managed programme. In addition, through our locally devolved Business Growth Programme, we have levered in £8 of private sector investment for every £1 spent on supporting businesses to expand, creating over 3000 new jobs across the region. This has also helped us kick start development in our Enterprise Zone, with businesses moving in and creating much needed jobs for nearby deprived communities.

**"We live in the most centralised country in Europe where for every £1 generated locally by taxes, only 9p remains with local authorities"**

Devolution works, and an incoming Labour government should look at all the successful examples of devolution delivering benefits and support regions and areas to make the most of devolution, based on these examples.

We've seen the benefits of local control on social outcomes too. In Leeds, our approach to children's social care is now viewed as a national exemplar.

We have implemented a restorative and preventative approach including Family Group Conferencing, which has improved the outcomes for vulnerable children substantially. Between 2012 and 2017 our approach safely reduced the number of children in the care of the council in Leeds by 220, bucking a national trend and guaranteeing more children stayed with their families.



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## Devolution can deliver an economy that works for the many

Cllr Judith Blake

In the same period, the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans in Leeds reduced by nearly 400, and the number of referrals to children's services reduced by 15%, compared to a national increase of 7%. We are all well aware of the £2bn funding gap in Children's Services forecast by the LGA, so an added benefit is these outcomes help us safely achieve savings to be re-invested in other front line services. For example, this has meant in Leeds we have been able to protect all of our Children's Centres. If further freedoms were devolved by a Labour government, imagine how much more could we achieve!

However, don't let these achievements give the impression it's been easy for local authorities in recent years. Austerity has hit councils in the north and urban areas hardest. Cuts to our funding due to Conservative imposed austerity (with the help of the Lib Dems) have cut our grant by £240m a year, reducing local authority spending by over 40%. Tackling poverty and inequalities is one of the defining challenges of our age, but as we know Tory austerity is making things much worse. We know there are now 400,000 more children living in poverty nationally, and in Leeds we now have 155,000 people living in absolute poverty, including 26,000 children.

As a council we are determined to focus unapologetically on doing all we can to improve the lives of the poorest the fastest, but as this shows the challenge is considerable. Two thirds of children living in poverty are from a household where at least one person is in work. 65,000 people in Leeds earn less than the Living Wage, so we need future economic growth to be inclusive and create jobs that provide good pay and conditions. Empowering local leadership is the most effective way to do this.

For a Labour government to tackle the economic challenges posed by the increasing north-south divide, low productivity, and Brexit, devolution is an obvious way to go. 5.4m people live in Yorkshire. We have an economy worth £100bn a year, twice the size of Wales. Most importantly, it is estimated devolution would double the size of Yorkshire's economy over the next 30 years. This would benefit the whole country, as it would help rebalance the national economy, with areas in the north starting to contribute much more than they do now.

An obvious response to this request is to ask why councils don't just get on with it, rather than waiting for the Treasury or the next Labour government to grant devolved powers? The answer is that strong evidence demonstrates there is a clear relationship between the ability of local authorities or city regions to drive growth and the relative level of local freedom and financial control they have.



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## Devolution can deliver an economy that works for the many

Cllr Judith Blake

Around the world, it is the cities that have higher levels of control over both money and policy decisions that tend to perform best economically. They can more easily join up their plans with their public spending priorities, and drive better outcomes. With the right support, and in partnership with local business, local authorities could do so much more. Core Cities research shows that by 2030 they could put 1.16million more jobs and £222billion into the UK economy – equivalent to adding the entire economy of Denmark to the UK.

The scale of this opportunity is huge. It is imperative an incoming Labour government grabs this opportunity right from the very start. While cities like Leeds have bounced back from the recession, other areas have not recovered as quickly; we still have too many people unemployed or working in low paid jobs. The people I represent want us to do everything we can to create good quality jobs and improve social outcomes. This requires economic growth and local solutions to local problems. It will require a Labour government to trust local areas with greater local control as opposed to the Tories who have used devolution as a front for cuts. Only this can help avoid a reliance on 'trickle down economics' and make sure all communities benefit from economic growth.

As we've seen when things are left to centralised government and the market, the big social challenges of our age go unmet and the rich just get richer at the expense of the poor. It's always been the role of Labour to lead our country into each new era – so let's make sure it is Labour that leads the way to a bright new future of economic success powered by devolution.



“It is the cities that have higher levels of control over both money and policy decisions that tend to perform best economically”

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# For England, see Wales



## **Cllr Debbie Wilcox**

Leader of Newport City Council  
and Leader of the Welsh LGA

 @debbiewilcox1

Debbie Wilcox explains how Labour can learn from the successes of joint working between local and national government in Wales

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**Sitting on the other side of the Severn Bridge as the leader of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Newport City Council gives a unique vantage point. It demonstrates how a devolved administration working with local government offers an alternative to the Tory devastation to local government in England. It is a model that our party will need to develop the moment a Labour government is in power and starts to build a new Britain.**

Throughout the period of austerity, Welsh councils have worked closely with the Welsh government to blunt the impact of austerity and offset its excesses. We have avoided the Westminster approach of using councils as 'human shield' for cuts and seeking to shift the blame for their failed management of the economy to Town Halls. Nobody in local government could have raised anything other than an ironic smile as we watched Conservative MPs attacking Tory Northamptonshire for issuing a Section 114 notice for a "bankruptcy", or the Defence Secretary setting up a petition attacking his own Tory council for implementing the cuts he voted for.

In Wales we do things differently. In relationship terms, the model of a Welsh Labour government and Labour councils working to offset the Tory attack on our communities should provide a blueprint for a Labour government nationally to deal with the crises that councils face.

No one expects a Labour government to wave a magic wand, but the spectacle of ministers like Eric Pickles and Sajid Javid pretending to promote localism while they seek to destroy local government should be consigned to the nearest refuse collection vehicle.

I do not want to create the impression that Wales represents the land of milk and honey for councils. It has been harder hit by welfare cuts than other parts of the UK, the legacy of Thatcher's attack on our stable industries still adversely impacts us, and the gulf in productivity between Wales and the best performing parts of the UK is huge. These are the issues that the Welsh government and councils have sought to address by working together. But this test has been completely exacerbated by the Tory pursuit of massive cuts that is challenging the very existence of Welsh public services.

Local government through its collective voice – the WLGA – recognises the scale of the cuts to the Welsh government budget over this period. We also recognise the grave concerns surrounding the prospect of further huge reductions to follow. We have fully supported Mark Drakeford, our Labour Finance Minister in Wales, in his call for an end to austerity.



Unsurprisingly, the Welsh government have sought to protect the legacy of Aneurin Bevan, and provided significant protection for the NHS. This has partly extended to social care. Whereas social care in England has been cut by over 20%, in Wales between 2009-10 and 2016-17, older adult social care rose as a share of total service spending by an average of 0.8 percentage points. In 2014/15, Wales spent £1.2bn on personal social services, excluding family and children's services. This is worth around £397 per head of population, higher than in England at £290.

Creating a social care tax or common insurance fund is being actively considered. WLGA fully support this principle that with a small sacrifice Wales can tackle this problem via a system of enhanced social insurance. How might it work? The broad-brush principles need further consideration but are based on the fact that currently some 1.4 million people are working in Wales with an average income of about £29,000 a year. Income below £8,000 is not liable for national insurance contributions and would not pay the levy. That still leaves annual pay of £2.8bn (1.4 million times £20,000). If

Welsh workers paid a levy of just 1%, that could bring in some £280m a year. There are different ways to carve that up. At most, £80m could go immediately to social care,

leaving £200m a year to accumulate in the fund. That would be an immediate increase of 15% in social care spending for the elderly. A national Labour government will immediately face the problem of how to fund social care, and looking to Wales will provide one method of how this could be done.

Contrast this social justice approach with the so-called Tory 'dementia tax' and it leads me to question why such a methodology should not become a key focus for our party entering a general election? Let's actively develop a new approach about a dedicated social security fund that means everyone can be promised adequate social care in old age – a promise that could revolutionise the way we live our later years.

## "We have avoided the Westminster approach of using councils as a 'human shield' for cuts"

However, the demographics behind these figures tell a different story. Due to demography, chronic conditions and rising costs, the Health Foundation estimates that pressures on Welsh social care will rise by around 4.1% a year between 2015 and 2030/31. This will require the budget to almost double to £2.3bn by 2030/31 to match demand. In response to this, our Finance Minister Mark Drakeford and Local Government Minister Alun Davies are looking for ways to make social care sustainable into the future.

Let me stress this is not a 'whingers charter'. Over the past decade all Welsh councils have been transforming their services to mitigate the effect of reducing budgets. It is councillors more than any other cadre of elected representatives who have had to take the most difficult decisions and prioritise while some have fancifully argued that we should set illegal budgets.

These service transformation programmes include alternative delivery models, income generation, demand management, and digital technology as well as traditional efficiency savings. The programmes are developed in collaboration with citizens and communities to incorporate continuous improvement and innovative practices. This delivers sustainable local services for communities.

In Wales we have studiously avoided outsourcing services to the private sector. We have worked closely with our colleagues in the Wales TUC and set in place national agreements like "Partnership and Managing change" by which the social partners (the Welsh Government, employers and trades unions) work together to manage change as a fundamental part of how we improve the delivery of public services in Wales. Our primary purpose is protecting the public services workforce as far as we can.

We are aware that this social partnership approach is less common in England, but it has reaped huge dividends in the Welsh context. Wales has a national Workforce Partnership Council (WPC) where the public services workforce and its future is at the heart of all our considerations. The vision for public services in Wales is shared by social partners who see public services as being efficient, world class, designed with citizens in mind, provided by model employers, and delivered by a well-trained workforce.

The WPC has also been the forum for debates about local government reform. Councils across Wales have organically built regional frameworks that have developed into City Deals or growth bids. In South East Wales I am involved in the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal. This is a £1.28 billion programme that will achieve a 5 per cent uplift in the region's GVA by delivering a range of programmes that will increase connectivity, improve physical and digital infrastructure, as well as regional business governance.



My own passion as a former teacher is for improving skills and enhancing the life chances of our young people. I lead on the 'Skills for the Future Project' which aims to support skills and employment and will provide region-wide school engagement with pupils and parents to offer careers advice and guidance. We are on the cusp of a digital manufacturing revolution, but we lack the engineers with the necessary digital skills. Cyber security is another key area where digital skills aren't confined to digital industries but are a concern for individuals and industry. Ten large authorities working together in southeast Wales see this as central to our programmes. It is because of this the City Region Cabinet has already agreed to invest £37.9 million to support the development of a compound semiconductor industry cluster in southeast Wales.

One final point is that all this could be at risk because of Brexit. Our First Minister has consistently argued that Wales needs to retain membership of the Single Market and Customs Union, and local government fully agrees. We know that nearly two-thirds of Welsh exports (goods not sold within the UK) are sent to the EU. We also know Wales receives around £245m more from the European Union than the nation pays in. Cardiff University has said Wales' contributed £414 million to the EU but received £658 million in funding, creating a net benefit to Wales of around £79 per head in 2014.

It would be my personal wish that On Day One of a new Labour government, a sensible Brexit solution would be reached to mitigate the impact on Wales, but also that a Labour government looks to Wales and the successes that have been achieved when national government and local government work together.





“The Welsh government, employers, and trade unions work together to manage change as a fundamental part of how we improve delivery of public services”

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# Putting councillors at the heart of government decision making



**Cllr Simon Henig**

Leader of Durham Council and Chair of the ALC

 @simonhenig

Simon Henig talks about how a Labour government should listen to councillors and learn from their experiences in power

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**Labour councils and councillors are the beating heart of our communities, taking decisions daily that shape and affect our localities. Our six and a half thousand elected councillors represent tens of millions of people across England, Scotland, and Wales, influencing decisions that are made on almost all aspects of life locally. The time has come for this to be reflected and our councillors to have a strong voice at all levels of the Labour party.**

A list of just a few of the 1300 council functions brings home the importance of the role of the councillor: adult social care services, children's services, the environment, economic development, highways, planning and licensing, public health, libraries, arts and culture, leisure, a range of responsibilities in housing. If we add those areas where councils and councillors work with our neighbours and local partners and have at least an indirect influence – such as in health, public transport, the local economy, fire and rescue, and policing, we are left with a list that covers almost all key decisions that are made locally. And not only is this list an extensive one, going way beyond the remit of the newly renamed Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to influence the work of at least seven other government departments, councils are the only body in every locality able to take a strategic role across all areas of policy, placing Labour councils and councillors in a hugely influential position.

Geographically too we can map the extensive scale of this influence. Labour councils deliver services for more than 25 million people, by far the largest section of the party currently in power. This influence extends far and wide – from the boroughs of London to the great cities and urban areas of the north, from the major cities of the Midlands to the key centres of East Anglia, from the valleys and great centres of industrial Wales to important cities across the south such as Bristol, Exeter, and Southampton. Even where we are not in power locally, Labour councillors serve communities in a multitude of areas that have no Labour parliamentary representation – from Cornwall, Shropshire and Worcestershire to Hertfordshire, Essex and even Surrey. In large swathes of the country, it is Labour councillors who are our standard bearers, at the heart of our campaigning and the key to our future success.

The diversity of areas of decision-making in which Labour councils lead the way also serves to highlight the point. Whether Preston City Council's attempts to boost their local economy, Newham's campaign on fixed odds betting terminals or County Durham's participatory budgeting, Labour's local authorities are continually innovating, redrawing the boundaries and setting a route map for what could be possible nationally.



The LGA Labour Group's recent publication '100 Innovations by Labour in Power' includes initiatives in energy efficiency, tackling fuel poverty, combating homelessness, up-skilling the workforce, helping residents lead healthier lives, integrating health and social care services, helping our children with free school meals, breakfast clubs and hot meals in holiday times, cracking down on rogue landlords, supporting those affected by domestic abuse, delivering affordable homes, bringing empty homes back into use, innovating in public transport, regenerating our towns, investing in leisure facilities, in the digitisation of services and in culture-led regeneration; this is just a sample of what our councils have delivered and achieved.

It is Labour councils who have led the way in paying the Living Wage, Labour councils who have delivered thousands of apprenticeships, Labour councils who have helped the unemployed find work, supported new businesses and delivered new homes and jobs.

The list is impressive, all the more so after eight years of austerity in which ideologically driven Tory cuts have put local services under severe financial pressure as never before. Given fair and sustainable financial support under a Labour government, the potential for Labour councils is huge.

And yet the scale of innovation over policy, influence over key areas of decision making and representation of tens of millions of

people is still not reflected when it comes to decisions and structures within the Labour Party.

When Labour comes to power and forms a government, many Labour councillors will have been in power across the

country for a number of years. An incoming Labour government with Jeremy Corbyn in Number Ten must make use of their breadth of experience in power, and ability to work across government departments.

**"Using the expertise of Labour councillors will help a Labour government deliver the fairness and social justice that everyone wants"**

It is Labour councils who have signed the UNISON Ethical Care Charter, it is Labour councils who have led the way in welcoming asylum seekers and refugees and it is on many Labour groups where on the centenary of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, women's representation now exceeds 50 per cent.

Given the influence of local government over a wide range of policy areas, and our role in delivering vital public services, why not recognise it with a real say for our councils and councillors? A senior local government figure should be offered a seat at the Cabinet table, and a local government representative invited to every ministerial team meeting.

## “Labour councils deliver services for more than 25 million people”

Using the expertise of Labour councillors will help a Labour government deliver the fairness and social justice that everyone in the Labour movement wants. It is important that this dialogue is maintained far beyond Labour's initial period in power, as joint working between local and national government, both delivering policy outcomes and internally in Labour will result in better outcomes for everyone.

The representation of councillors on our party structures remains too often tokenistic, an afterthought. This is the case from the party's National Executive Committee, where only two Labour councillor representatives compare with thirteen places for the trade unions, to regional boards, some of which until recently had no local government representatives at all.

Advances are being made. In recent times Labour councillors have been invited to political meetings of the Shadow Cabinet and to planning meetings for election campaigns. The Association of Labour Councillors has been re-formed, we now have a better idea of where our significant financial contribution goes and Labour once again has an annual local government

conference after many years without. But this cannot be the end of the process of change, it must be just the start.

But Labour councillors should be at the heart of all our decision-making structures as key partners, with a level of representation to reflect our level of influence over decision-making and within our local communities across the country. This should include the NEC where councillor representation should be at least doubled.

Whether in planning our campaigns or our communications, we need and deserve the voices of councillors to be heard. We should be heard as an integral voice in our national structures, in our devolved administrations and our regional bodies.

A party with a strong voice for our councillors will be a stronger party, a campaigning party, a party ready to innovate and a party ready to govern. Let's build on the start we have already made and make it happen.



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# Accountable, visible, and dedicated – and deserving of a real voice



**Cllr Amy Cross**

Blackpool Council and ALC North West representative

 @CllrAmyCross

Amy Cross sets out why Labour councillors are the most accountable politicians in our party – and argues they should play a central role in the new mass membership Labour Party

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**Labour has been an inherently localist party ever since it was created over a century ago. Local branches and societies, where grassroots members and activists have always driven change in their own communities, formed the foundations of the emerging party. Labour councillors have always been key figures, providing local leadership and focus – and in the years in which Labour’s popularity (and our membership) was in the doldrums, Labour councillors have kept our party alive as a campaigning force.**

Over the past eight years they have again shown how they act as a protective shield during Tory rule too – with Labour councils determined to find new ways of delivering on our party’s enduring values. So as the Labour Party Democracy Review begins to look at how our hugely increased membership can become a mass movement which can transform society, why does it sometimes feel like the 6,500 Labour councillors are suspiciously viewed as part of the problem, when we should be part of the solution?

Perhaps some of the problem is a misunderstanding about the role of the councillor – personified by the suspicion that Labour councillors in power are just ‘doing the Tories work for them’, or that we are somehow not accountable. But that is plainly incorrect – and we need to set the record straight if we are to be given the recognition that we deserve.

So, how have councillors ended up where they are? Just like MPs, council candidates must be vetted – submitting an application to the Local Campaign Forum, and undergoing a vigorous interview by a panel of Labour members to judge their ability, knowledge, and appropriateness to stand. However, unlike MPs, successfully elected councillors must also be re-interviewed each time they stand again. No other elected Labour representative has to repeat this kind of formal process each time they stand to be re-elected and no other faces as much continual and ongoing scrutiny and accountability.

I’ve been proud to serve my community as their councillor for the last seven years – but it’s only when I actually became a councillor that I really understood the numerous ways in which the responsibilities and accountabilities of my role are governed. Being a councillor is a complex role, and we’re required to wear a number of hats – executive positions or committee members, representative for our ward, and also as a key party activist. We also have a combination of personal, individual and collective responsibilities for their council’s activities. In addition, we are expected to support the agreed policies of the group and abide by decisions we have made collectively – just as in parliament, it is vital we are disciplined enough to offer a united front.



As a local councillor my behaviour is regulated by the Council's stringent code of conduct, based on the Committee on Standards in Public Life's seven principles of public life developed by the Nolan Committee. My legal powers to act are constrained by numerous acts of Parliament relating to planning, licensing, and local government finance. Councillors in leadership positions, such as Cabinet members, are scrutinised by councillors of all parties through formal scrutiny committees, and by our Labour colleagues at our Labour Group meetings.

Our Local Campaign Forum oversees our campaigning activity – offering challenge where needed – and feeds back in respect of local and national issues, and we jointly oversee the development of policies for our local manifesto.

But of course councillors are directly elected to represent the people and therefore our overriding accountability is to our local electorate, not just local Labour Party members. In winning their votes we have been entrusted to represent their interests at the Town Hall. I am also directly available

to my constituents at regular ward surgeries, and during Full Council meetings held throughout the year – all of which are open to the public not just to attend but also to raise questions. Councillors are rightly and visibly held

to account through local newspapers and TV too. It is an intensely demanding and rewarding role – and one that seldom fits neatly into office hours. Throughout my time as a councillor I have found myself taking down the details of someone who has approached me for help or to register their views about something while I've been doing the weekly shop, while grabbing a bite to eat with friends, or even while I've been on holiday. And the same is true for every other councillor I have met since I first joined the Labour Party thirteen years ago.

## "All Labour councillors take seriously our responsibility to be accountable to Labour Party members"

All Labour councillors take seriously our responsibility to be accountable to our Labour party members too – attending branch and constituency Labour Party meetings to provide regular reports about council activities and decision making. We welcome the opportunity to have constructive dialogue with party colleagues, recognising the value in helping us understand the hopes and fears of local communities.



Considered in the round, it is fair to say that councillors are the most accessible and visible politicians in the Labour Party – no other figure is more accountable to the public or to local party members than their local councillor. So given the level of responsibility that Labour councillors have, and the intense scrutiny and accountability that Labour councillors face, why does it still feel like councillors are treated like second-class politicians by the Labour Party?

Our existing national party structures continue to undervalue the work that councillors do, and the role that local government can play for the Labour Party in both opposition and in government. Despite some recent improvements, it still feels like every time we make progress in one area we are forced to take two backwards steps somewhere else.

To give some context, the Association of Labour Councillors was re-established in 2013, in order to ensure all Labour councillors have representatives that act as a conduit between themselves and the national party, and assisted by the re-created party staff role of Local Government Officer. I am proud to be the elected representative for the North West Region on the ALC Executive, and have worked hard to re-establish our voice in the national party.

When we initially met, we had high hopes, and it undoubtedly started well with meetings and conversations with the Shadow Cabinet, Deputy Leader and other shadow ministers, who all seemed keen to embrace this new relationship. More recently we have worked closely with Andrew Gwynne, a fantastic advocate for Labour in local government, in his role as national campaign coordinator. He has also involved councillors in planning the national campaign strategy for local elections – a real improvement on previous years, and a move that allows us to use our experience and on-the-ground intelligence to sharpen the campaign.

The ALC Executive has also organised training and webinars, and put on fringes and plenaries for councillors to attend, sharing best practice and trying to project our voice beyond the local government family. But it still sometimes feels like a struggle to attain the working relationship we had been striving for – with difficulties in accessing contact details for the councillors in our respective regions, and all our campaign ideas and communications requiring approval by the Party. Given we are entrusted with running multi-million pound budgets and running vital services to vulnerable people, why doesn't the party trust us to draft our own newsletters?



Councillors make a significant financial contribution to the party through our required ALC subs – but this money is not ring-fenced for local government support and campaigns, and until recently it hasn't been clear where they do go. Labour councillors also donate millions more to their local parties and in most areas are by far the biggest contributors to local campaigns.

Moving forward, the Democracy Review offers us an opportunity to explain our role to new members, and to argue for changes within the party that can help councillors, and ultimately the Labour Party, deliver in a more constructive and collaborative way than ever before. One of the objectives of the Democracy Review is 'developing the relationship between Labour's local authority representatives and local parties', but our relationships at a local level and accountability are strong and robust in a way that is not replicated anywhere else within party structures. What is needed is an examination of how the links between local Labour councillors and the national leadership team could be made stronger. Given that local government will play a key part in delivering large parts of the next Labour manifesto, should we not be given more opportunities to discuss national policy pledges?

Within our party it is absolutely crucial that councillor representation on the NEC is increased. Currently, local government only has two reserved places, currently held by Nick Forbes and Alice Perry. They both do a great job of speaking up for local government within the party and often add knowledge of how local government works, where there is little or none. But given that local government is responsible for a quarter of all public spending, and that over 25 million citizens live in an area run by either a Labour council or under a Labour Metro Mayor, shouldn't we have a much bigger voice?

Our party's evolution into a truly mass membership party is truly exciting, and offers a genuine chance to put more power into the hands of the grassroots. But I believe there is much that our party should learn from Labour councillors too. As the most accountable politicians in the party, every day we are faced with the task of balancing our responsibilities to the wider community with our political values, I hope we'll finally be recognised as part of the solution.



“The Democracy Review offers us an opportunity to explain our role to new members, and to argue for changes within the party that can help councillors”

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# Campaigning to win – unleashing the potential of our councillors



**Cllr Michael Payne**

Deputy Leader of Gedling Council  
and Deputy Leader of the LGA Labour Group

 @michaelpayneuk

Michael Payne argues that electing Labour councillors means that we're able to put Labour principles into power

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**Campaigning is at the heart of everything Labour councillors do. Electing Labour councillors helps elect Labour Members of Parliament and a Labour government, but as well as being a stepping stone to further electoral success, it means we're able put Labour principles into practice to improve lives and change our communities for the better.**

“Councillors need to be rooted in the communities they represent and are active throughout the year”

Except for a four year period of Labour majority control, Gedling Borough Council had been a Conservative stronghold since its creation in 1974. Winning majority Labour control in 2011 was a big ask – going into the election with a low base of just nine councillors out of fifty. Against the odds we won outright control with the one of biggest swings to Labour from the Conservatives in that year's local elections. We don't profess to have all the answers but I'm sharing Gedling Labour's story to highlight that with teamwork, hard graft and a mixture of community campaigning and voter ID it is possible to win in previously difficult territory for Labour.

Our success in local elections wasn't a one off either – we also successfully held control of Gedling Borough Council for a historic second term in 2015 and won all eight County Council seats in Gedling constituency for the first time ever in 2013, taking Labour to majority control at Nottinghamshire County Council. We also held all County Council seats for Labour against the odds in May 2017, which denied the Conservatives an outright majority at County Hall.

It is also worth remembering that Gedling constituency was a solid Tory constituency before Vernon Coaker's victory in 1997 – it is a

testament to him and team Labour in Gedling that he's retained the seat ever since. His track record as a fierce campaigner and outstanding constituency MP are also key ingredients of our success locally.

There are a few things that made a genuine difference to our efforts locally. There will be many other examples across the country but here's a few key elements that contributed to our success:



1. A hard-working local MP that remains rooted in the constituency they represent and is firmly on the side of all their constituents however big or small the issue. And a solid team of staff to support the MP in their constituency office.
2. Local councillors who work closely with the MP and deliver on a set of clear pledges. They also needed to be rooted in the communities they represent and are active throughout the year, not just at election time. They need to become the 'go to person in the community' to address people's issues and concerns.
3. Good quality literature that is delivered all year round and supported by activity on social media. This only works if the elected politicians in the area are authentic – being recognised from their ward walks, local casework, and support to local schools, businesses and community groups etc.
4. Teamwork – everyone working as an effective organisation to deliver for the local community to win elections and to value everyone for their contribution whether a supporter, member, councillor or MP.
5. Confidence and courage – the belief that you can win whatever the odds stacked against you. Retreating to 'Labour areas' and simply identifying the 'core vote' is a missed opportunity and only leads to identifying an ever decreasing pool of voters.

Across the country Labour councillors and councils are improving people's lives every day. The work we do is municipal socialism in action. We are pioneers of radically progressive policies, campaigners for positive change in communities and problem solvers in our wards and divisions. Labour in local government led the way on introducing the Living Wage, demonstrated the positive impact of introducing free school meals for all primary school pupils before it was even being debated in Whitehall and Westminster and are helping resolve often complex issues for residents every day – we are the frontline defence against unrelenting Tory austerity and must be front and centre of Labour's local and general election campaigns.

There is more the Party can do unleash the potential of our six and a half thousand Labour councillors.

This year Labour councillors have played a key role in the strategic planning of the national campaign for the local elections – the Party should ensure this happens every time there is a set of local elections.

Labour councillors are now one of the biggest collective contributors to the Party's funds – we must be given a real say on how this funding is spent to help win elections.

Even when there isn't a Labour government nationally, Labour councillors and councils are implementing Labour policies and making decisions that improve people's lives. We are the backbone of the Labour movement and deserve significantly increased representation on the Party's National Executive Committee.

Labour councillors are also often the coordinators of door-knocking and leafleting sessions in their own wards and for Labour Members of Parliament – there needs to be a consistency in the access to membership information for Labour councillors in their wards and divisions so that they can engage as many members of our movement as possible in campaigning to win.

Taking the best of the municipal socialism that is evident in Labour-run town halls across the country into Downing Street at the next General Election would be a major step towards building a country, economy, and society that works for the many, not just the few.



**"This year Labour councillors have played a key role in the strategic planning of the national campaign for the local campaigns"**

Our Association of Labour Councillors' regional representatives, and LGA Labour Group regional representatives also need to be given places on Regional Party Boards to ensure the voice of councillors is heard and our campaigning experience is utilised.

## The LGA Labour Group

The LGA Labour Group exists to fight the corner for Labour councillors and Labour councils at a national level, both within the cross-party Local Government Association, the corridors of Westminster, and in the Labour Party. The Group provides a strong voice for Labour local government and acts as a platform for ideas and argument for all those committed to an effective localist element to Labour politics and policies.

The Labour Group has good working relationships with the front bench, Parliament, and the Labour Party, and seeks to influence policy and political decisions through frequent individual and group meetings between leading councillors and shadow ministers.



@LGA\_Labour



fb.com/LGALabourGroup

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