

NORTH DEVON LABOUR

Local Manifesto for District Council Elections May 2019



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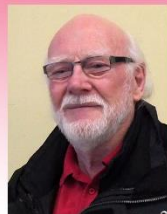
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WE ARE
North
Devon
Labour

North Devon Labour Local Manifesto May 2019

INTRODUCTION

After years of Conservative rule on our County and District Councils, the people of North Devon have the chance to elect a real alternative. Under the Conservatives, Devon CC has waded through the closure and sell-off of community hospitals and failed to secure the promised funding for our schools. Meanwhile our District Councils have seen budgets cuts and services slashed.

Labour will turn around this tired dogma of cutting tax, cutting services and privatising contracts. Instead we will invest in cost-effective local services that will deliver for everyone and ensure the most vulnerable do not fall through the net. Residents of North Devon have suffered long enough from high housing costs, poor infrastructure and neglected services.

Councils deliver vital local services to our communities but their budgets have been savaged by the austerity policies of the Tories and their one-time Liberal Democrat allies. In North Devon, the Conservatives have shown they will not resist the cuts demanded by Westminster, failing to protect vital services. We need an alternative if we are to support our local communities and plan for the future.

HOW WILL LABOUR BE DIFFERENT?

Labour nationally promises to govern for the many, not the few. Labour Councillors in North Devon will follow the same principles, with distinctive policies for our area – on housing, the environment, and more.

Housing

Labour believes that a home is at the heart of all our lives. Labour in power will ensure that affordable homes are built to meet local housing needs and are priced more in line with local incomes and not market rates. We will make sure that they also support environmental goals. Labour will suspend the right to buy and allow local authorities to build new council housing again. We will tackle insecurity for private renters by introducing longer term, secure tenancies and ensure that all rented homes are maintained to a decent standard.

The housing market in North Devon is distorted by a large number of second homes, up to a quarter in some parishes, while at 10%, the proportion of public sector housing (owned by housing associations) is less than the average for Devon and only around half the national average. These factors combine to push up the cost of the available housing in an area where average incomes are low.

At the last count, 1,485 dwellings were vacant in our area, that's 3.4% of the total stock, but many who would aspire to buy a home of their own and could afford the monthly payments on a mortgage cannot raise the huge deposits required and are forced into the large private rented sector - much of which is expensive and of poor quality.

North Devon is only just outside the top fifth of least affordable places in the country while incomes are very low in comparison with national figures. Put these facts together and we have a house price to income ratio in excess of 10 which is one of the highest in England. This means that many local people wanting to buy their own house on the open market have no chance to achieve that ambition.

Young people and local families can only dream of housing security. Far too often developers are failing to deliver on their promise of affordable homes while they build expensive houses on prime land. While the final acceptance of a new Local Plan offers hope that we can protect land from the developers free for all, we still need to use the planning system to work for local communities through Neighbourhood Plans.

Your North Devon Labour Councillors will seek to:

- Borrow to invest in new social housing and pursue a policy of building new council houses for rent – a program that will pay for itself through rental income.
- Ensure that all new housing development should be required to include 30% genuinely affordable homes reserved for people with a local connection.
- Support the creation of Community Land Trusts to encourage affordable homes in our villages.
- Increase Council Tax to 200% for second homes and on properties that have been empty for more than 2 years.
- Identify the number of properties that have been empty for more than 12 months and turn them into usable accommodation for those in housing need.
- Take action to monitor all Houses in Multiple Occupation to ensure correct Fire and Safety standards are maintained.
- Introduce a Trusted landlord scheme to improve conditions for tenants.
- Support properly regulated Traveller Sites.
- Improve the support for rough sleepers and other homeless people.
- Ensure developers meet, in full, their legal responsibilities for community infrastructure in new developments.
- Ensure that planning applications meet the highest environmental standards.

Environment

We will ensure that today's farming, fishing, transport and tourism industries become truly sustainable, so future generations can continue to enjoy the beautiful landscape of North Devon. Labour's plans for regional Investment Banks will invest in green jobs and renewable energy and will help to regenerate our rural and coastal economies.

Your North Devon Labour Councillors will seek to:

- Develop a plan for North Devon to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- Take necessary action to prevent dangerous climate change
- Actively promote the development of renewable energy sources in North Devon.
- Support moves to make sustainability and energy reduction a requirement in all new developments and improve energy-efficiency of existing homes.
- Review all Council policies and proposals for their environmental impact.
- Support actions to reduce plastic waste.
- Promote leisure and cycling and protect and enhance play areas and public open spaces.
- Act to improve air quality, especially in existing Air Quality Management areas such as Braunton.

- Encourage the take-up of electric transport by increasing the number of dedicated parking spaces with recharging points.
- Enhance the policy of 'reduce, reuse and recycle' practices by residents and local businesses.
- Rigorously enforce food, environment and welfare standards to protect animals and consumers.
- Support measures to reduce pollution of our beaches and to improve the quality of water in our rivers and seas.
- Take necessary action to reverse the decline of biodiversity and ensure protection of natural habitats.

Local economy

Our District and Town Councils need to support a vibrant local economy, with good employment and opportunities for young people. Labour nationally will invest in the regions, establishing Regional Investment Banks and targeting support at rural and coastal towns that have been left behind. Here in North Devon we still suffer from poor High Speed Broadband availability and fragile transport links. We need to do more to bring skilled jobs to North Devon and raise wage levels generally. We rely too much on poorly paid part time and seasonal employment.

Your North Devon Labour Councillors will seek to:

- Campaign for the real living wage with North Devon Council becoming a Real Living Wage employer, oppose regional low pay and precarious (e.g. zero hours) contracts, and encourage the creation of sustainable jobs.
- Encourage small business groups and incubate new business models such as Credit Unions and community enterprises.
- Support actions to reduce business rates for local start-ups.
- Press for the speedy introduction of High Speed Broadband **for all** of North Devon and for full mobile(4G) phone coverage.
- Review Local and Town Plans and identify opportunities to support local businesses.
- Resist the closure of Banks and Free ATMs
- Use local residents and businesses rather than outside consultants wherever possible.
- Resist further privatisation of Council services and ultimately bring services back into Council control.

Transport and infrastructure

North Devon is a large geographical area with many isolated communities and poor transport. Our rail link with the rest of the UK is one that needs investment to provide better rolling stock and more frequent services. Local bus services are lifelines for many and need to be protected and improved. Labour will take account of the impact on rural communities of all policies being considered at a national and regional level.

Your North Devon Labour Councillors will seek to:

- Support a shift from reliance on the car to reduce congestion and air pollution, through more sustainable modes such as cycling and public transport including integrated rail and bus provision.

- Support local communities to retain local services, including shops, banks, post offices, pubs and GP surgeries.
- Promote private car sharing and encourage community transport schemes.
- Lobby to retain subsidised bus routes so residents in 'cut off' communities can access work, education, training and essential services.
- Campaign for increased capacity and regularity on trains on the Tarka Line and improve the rolling stock.
- Support the studies and plans for the proposed Taw Link light railway between Braunton and Barnstaple.

Health and wellbeing

The NHS and social care are in crisis across Devon, with community hospitals closed or under threat and private providers failing. Residents are in poorer health than the national average, but there is a shortage of trained healthcare workers. People with long term health issues and other patients are travelling long distances for the care they need, often relying on public transport or volunteers. Mental health services have been cut to the bone and children with acute mental health needs are being sent to other counties because of a lack of beds.

Labour in power will reinstate the NHS as a publicly funded, publicly governed service, planned to meet local needs and free for everyone to use. Nursing bursaries will be reinstated to encourage more people to take up nursing. Funding for mental health care will be put on an equal footing. Labour will invest in social, elderly and end of life care, and provide access to mental health services in schools.

Your North Devon Labour Councillors will seek to:

- Support the campaigns to retain all local hospital services and bring back community in-patient beds.
- Challenge the Care Commissioning Group and local NHS Trust on their policies of closure and rationalisation and support adequate resourcing of 'care closer to home'.
- Promote measures to address waiting times for all health and social care services.
- Oppose further privatisation and ultimately bring back outsourced care provision to Local Authority control.
- Support health and well being programmes and promote participation in sport and active lifestyles including subsidies for disadvantaged groups.

Poverty and benefits

69% of households in North Devon claim some kind of benefit. Many people on benefits in North Devon are battling job and housing insecurity. This could change with the right decision making at District and County level and a national budget to support local economy. The Conservatives consistently fail to address this.

Since July 2018 most new working age claimants of means-tested benefits in North Devon can only claim Universal Credit (UC). Citizens Advice has reported a 50% increase in enquiries where UC has been rolled out. Even when claimants do manage to provide the evidence demanded to support their claim, they often wait weeks to receive it. Labour will scrap the current Universal Credit roll-out and establish a benefits system that supports rather than punishes claimants.

Your North Devon Labour Councillors will seek to:

- End to the roll-out of Universal Credit in our area while the impact on the most vulnerable is evaluated.
- Halt any proposed reductions to Council Tax benefits.
- Work with other councils and agencies to reduce the damage done by benefit cuts and UC.
- Work with Citizens Advice to improve the support for UC claimants and make this advice more widely known.
- Campaign against loan sharks and high-interest loans and promote credit unions.

Education and young people

Every child in a Devon school gets £304 less in funding than the national average, while children in Early Years get £279 less – a funding gap of over £30m overall. Since 2015 there has been a 14.5% increase in the number of children with education, health and care plans, while funding for these vulnerable children has gone up just 2%. Children’s social care funding has also been cut by 18% in Devon since 2010 against a spiralling demand for services creating a crisis in support for families and child protection.

Despite promises that the gap would be closed, our Conservative councillors have failed to follow through. £36m has been allocated to the Route 39 Free school while other schools in North Devon see funding cuts in real terms.

Class sizes are increasing and the curriculum is being narrowed – with creative subjects suffering. The drive towards Academies is fracturing the co-operative links between schools.

Meanwhile youth and community services have been devastated and Sure Start and other early years provision has been cut. The support for free child care is woefully underfunded and providers are now refusing to participate in the scheme and many parents are missing out on their entitlement.

Labour has pledged to bring funding for Devon schools up to at least the national average. Labour’s National Education Service will offer free learning to adults throughout their lives, including at college and university. Sure Start Centres will be reintroduced with secure funding for the future and Labour will invest to provide properly funded 30 hours child care provision.

Your North Devon Labour Councillors will seek to:

- Press for the promised increases in per-pupil funding and support local school heads in their campaign to reverse education cuts.
- Lobby against turning local schools into academies, and eventually return academies to Local Authority control to ensure children have equal opportunity to learn and achieve.
- Resist the creation of any new Free Schools.
- Lobby for Increased provision for children and young people who are excluded from the mainstream system.
- Ensure proper funding for all pupils with additional needs.
- Support funding for local youth services .
- Lobby to support the maintenance of adequate child and family care services.

