



Working all year round **Local Elections 2007**

Wolverhampton Liberal Democrat Local Priorities for 2007

The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity - Preamble to the Liberal Democrat Constitution.

These are Liberal Democrat manifesto priorities which we consistently argue for in our local campaigns, our Lib Dem run administrations, and our national manifesto policy platforms.

This year, we are focusing strongly on environmental issues. An issue that has always been at the forefront of Liberal Democrat thinking, we know from Liberal Democrat Councillors across the country that the Green agenda is key to much of their work at a local level.

- *Creating a clean environment*
- *Efficient and accountable Local Government*
- *Creating safe neighbourhoods and safer transport*
- *Caring for the elderly and the young*
- *Promoting culture, regeneration and affordable housing*
- *Education learning for life*

This is not a 'one size fits all' policy programme. Every local agenda is different, every policy fine tuned. But the following demonstrates why voting Liberal Democrat at these local elections will make the difference in each and every area.



Creating *a clean environment and safer transport*

Liberal Democrat priorities for local communities in environment:

- Reducing the amount of waste generated
- Improving recycling rates and efficient waste collection and include recycling of plastics.
- Improving parks and open spaces, public footpaths and provide sufficient adequate dog dirt disposal bins.
- Encouraging energy efficiency in buildings by supporting carbon neutral initiatives and the use of legal powers to encourage use of low energy alternatives.
- Improving air quality
- Promoting Waste Minimisation Networks
- Supporting Bio-diversity
- Setting challenging targets for reducing municipal waste to as low a percentage as possible, through waste minimisation, reuse and recycling; particularly by promoting kerbside household collections. Wolverhampton needs to extend kerbside recycling to plastics and roll out more recycling to the business community.
- Considering all alternatives to incinerators, including new technologies such as anaerobic digestion to recover energy.

Liberal Democrat priorities for local communities in transport:

- Making sure streets have proper street lighting and signposting
- Tackling traffic congestion and encourage use of public transport
- Encouraging walking and cycling by making routes more relevant, including making the provision of cycle racks on buses more attractive where relevant.
- Supporting safety on public transport
- Supporting public transport in rural areas, with the ability to carry cycles.
- Creating ‘low emission zones’ and the introduction of environmentally friendly buses
- Setting challenging targets for maximising new development on brown-field sites and reflecting this target in our development strategies.
- Encouraging the development of cycle-ways and safer pavements by ensuring all new developments incorporate cycle lanes and safe pedestrian areas where appropriate and traffic calming. In Wolverhampton, areas with traffic calming are to get 20 MPH speed limits.
- Encouraging and promoting Safe Routes to School with calmed traffic, safe pavements, good lighting and adults on hand to conduct “walking buses”.



Promoting *culture, regeneration and affordable housing*

Liberal Democrat priorities for local communities in culture and regeneration

- Promoting local business and bringing businesses into the area
- Developing sustainable retail plans to support small shops in local areas.
- Connecting the local community with businesses
- Increasing skills and training available to local people
- Promoting local culture through libraries and other services
- Promoting local sport through renovation of local sports pitches and pavilions.
- Supporting leisure pass schemes, to develop special offers and discounts on attractions and leisure facilities to promote active social and cultural activities
- Promoting free and discounted swimming passes to residents, especially for young people
- Creating safe play and recreation areas for children and challenging recreation areas for teenagers.

Liberal Democrat priorities for local communities in affordable housing:

- Action to improve housing stock held by the council (if appropriate), and to involve tenant participation
- Working with others to provide affordable housing
- Establish targets for effective affordable housing provision along with identifying unused urban space to encourage 'fast track' affordable housing - by using the power to impose empty homes management orders on properties left vacant for more than a year.
- Supporting decent homes that are not council stock – e.g. supporting private sector tenants in making sure their accommodation is suitable, or working with housing associations and enforcing legislation
- Tackling homelessness through money advice trusts and drug rehabilitation.



Restoring faith in local democracy

Better local government closer to home

Liberal Democrat priorities for local communities in running efficient services and decentralising power:

- Making sure that decisions are taken at as local a level as possible by giving local neighbourhood committees real powers.
- Delivering closer public scrutiny – including at a local level, of services and decisions which can help deliver more efficient services, as well as making sure they are what local communities really want.
- Support the scrapping the Council Tax and introducing a local income tax to shift tax-raising power from the national to the local level.
- Introduce tax breaks for local businesses. Once fair tax legislation has been passed to Local Government it will be possible to promote business by tax breaks for new businesses.
- Restoring people’s faith in politics by proving that we can deliver local services efficiently.
- Support the introduction of proportional representation, as in Scotland.
- Establishing a reputation for careful use of public money.



Creating *safe neighbourhoods*

Liberal Democrat priorities to create safer neighbourhoods:

- Combating Anti Social Behaviour and tackling the root causes of crime – for instance, through Acceptable Behaviour Contracts
- Connecting the local community and other agencies (e.g. police, schools); greater support for youth services.
- Taking action to tackle excessive noise and to encourage responsible pub/bar landlords.
- Taking action to improve the local environment to ‘design out crime’ and reduce the fear of crime, and action to reduce street crime and burglaries.
- Giving local communities a say in how their neighbourhood is policed. Minimum levels of service will be set out clearly in a Local Policing Contract, which will require Chief Constables and police authorities to come to an agreement with local authorities on how the policing element of council tax is spent on a minimum policing guarantee.
- Increasing the number of PCSOs and Street Wardens.
- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs), developed by Liberal Democrats in Islington, have been shown to be an effective alternative to ASBOs in reducing anti-social behaviour and are now official Home Office guidance.
- Parental Control Agreements are similar to ABCs but apply to children under the age of 10. Parents or guardians who sign up to a PCA are expected to take full responsibility for their child’s behaviour.
- Cutting alcohol-related crime. We will tackle excessive drinking by cracking down on licensees who serve people when clearly drunk or underage. We will require big late night venues to contribute to the cost of extra late night policing.
- Empower local communities to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in their own areas, including through locally accountable and responsive policing, local authority crime prevention, and lay participation in juries, magistrates’ courts and restorative justice programmes.
- Focus efforts on keeping young people away from crime, by involving young people and their families in tackling offending behaviour through initiatives such as Youth Courts, Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and Parental Control Agreements.
- Support local provision for victims of crime.
- Support local crime prevention



Caring *for all*

- **Liberal Democrat priorities for older and younger people:**
- Campaigning for a local income tax, as the council tax discriminates unfairly against pensioners on low incomes.
- Campaigning for all elderly people to receive free long term personal care – as introduced in Scotland by Liberal Democrats in Government.
- Ensuring that those with disabilities are treated equally and fairly.
- Support carers of all ages and ensure adequate provision for respite care.

- **Improving social care services**
- Working with local PCTs to support people coming out of hospital
- Encouraging independent living by involving service users in how they run and operate their services
- Tackling funding pressures in social services budgets

- **Helping children and young people**
- Improving services by working with others (e.g. police and parents) for instance working with schools to increase attainment, tackle truancy and promote healthier diets in schools
- Helping the “hardest to reach” children in your area
- Involving young people in the planning of services, and to hear their views.



Education

Learning for life

Tests

- Liberal Democrats would reduce the number of tests. We believe that tests should only be used to help teachers monitor and develop the abilities of pupils and provide a record of achievement for parents. Tests that do little more than provide the Government with useless statistics should be scrapped.

Government interference

- We would halt the never ending Government tinkering with the education system. An example of this is the announcement in March 2007 that all pupils will have to study a modern language between the ages of seven and fourteen from 2010. This sounds admirable but it will require specialist language teachers in Junior Schools. How much thought has been given to recruiting and training enough teachers to achieve this? We believe that to give of their best teachers need to work in a settled system and not have to revise and adjust what they do according to the sudden prejudices of whoever is the temporary Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Just who is in charge at the moment? Is it Ruth Kelly, Charles Clarke, John Reid, Alan Johnson or David Blunkett? What a “Here today, gone tomorrow” attitude, leaving an untidy mess in its wake!

Class sizes in primary schools

- Where possible we would reduce class sizes in Infant and Junior schools, to an average of 20 for pupils up to seven years and to an average of 25 for pupils up to eleven years. We believe that this is a critical time in education and that it is vital that every child gets the best possible start in school.

The national curriculum

- We would adjust the National Curriculum so that both academic and skills-based courses are available to meet the needs and interests of all pupils. Pupils need to feel that the education on offer is relevant to real life and will enhance their future.

Specialist teaching in secondary schools

- We would ensure that a core curriculum of English, Maths, Science, Foreign Languages and ICT are taught exclusively by specialist teachers.

GCSE standards

- We would hold an enquiry into why pupils in Wolverhampton underachieve in the GCSE examination. In 2006 the grades achieved resulted in Wolverhampton being ranked 134 out of a total of 149 Local Education Authorities in England. The reasons for this poor record need to be identified and remedial action taken.

University tuition fees

- We would scrap tuition fees and top up fees so that no one is deterred from the chance of a university education because of the fear of debt.