

Southampton Liberal Democrats *serving you*



Summary Manifesto 2010

Forward

The aim of this summary manifesto document is to outline how a Liberal Democrat run city council could make a real difference to improve the lives of the people of Southampton

- **Returning democratic control** – this document sets out ways in which local people can have better democratic control over the council's activities to give a greater sense of ownership.
- **Empowering communities** – strong social networks make the difference between successful and failed regeneration, and this requires local people to be actively engaged as producers of local services and owners of local plans to improve their neighbourhood.
- **Human-scale infrastructure** – regeneration needs to enhance local life, and that means new places must be human, green and allow for local enterprise and privacy.

Each of the council's main areas of work is outlined with a number of policy proposals. These proposals are outline below:-

Democratic Change –listen to the people

- Establish Local Area Committees – give local Councillors a real say in improving their area
- Publish Planning Agreements – so the public can see the full benefit of planning applications
- Increase Council Openness – give a public right to speak at each committee on every item

Environment – our green agenda

- Increase Household Recycling – with kerbside glass and food waste collections
- Home Energy Generation – with a fund to assist householders & better planning system use
- Improve Roads & Pavements – with more whole road repair instead of the pothole patchworks

Education – increasing skills

- Small class & small schools – aim for small local schools with small classes
- Improve co-ordination – ensure that there is more co-operation to spread best practice
- Youth Awards & Youth Councils – to encourage young people greater involvement in society

Finance – providing value for money

- Council Tax – keep council tax raises to below the October RPIX inflation/pension increases
- Climate Change Fund – establish a climate offset fund to improve Southampton's housing
- Invest in Southampton – use the council's investment funds to back projects in Southampton

Business – promoting local business

- Buy local, pay promptly – where possible the council should use local businesses.
- Southampton Business Centre – establish a business centre to specifically help new business
- Local Shopping Centres – create with the shops a full business plan to support local shops

Community – improved and safer neighbourhoods

- Community Justice Panels – establish panels across the city to reduce anti-social behaviour
- Friends of Groups – establish & support volunteer groups that care for community open space
- More PCSOs – greater support for the police by increasing the number of supporter officers

Health – creating a caring city

- Improved care provision – with more care homes, respite care and help for young carers
- Improve Health Care and social care co-operation – to provide a better service for all
- Better Health Prevention – with teeth cleaning in primary schools & increased fitness promotion

Housing – providing better homes

- Improve existing housing – with decent homes plus scheme & community housing plans
- Better student & family housing – by working with Universities to improve accommodation
- Help for residents – with shared equity homes, good private landlords & tackling empty homes

Our main priorities are:-

- **Improved Roads & Pavements** – with step change in funding & better standards of repair
- **Low Council Tax** – with a commitment to keep council rises below inflation
- **Improved Housing** – with community housing plans plus better student and family housing
- **More Recycling** – with new kerbside collection schemes
- **Better Community Justice** – with community justice panels and more PCSO's
- **Greater Local Control** – with eight local area committees across the city

Together all these proposals will improve the lives of people across the city and make Southampton a better place to live and work

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Democratic Renewal

- Establish Local Area Committees – give local Councillors a real say in improving their area
- Publish Planning Agreements – so the public can see the full benefit of planning applications
- Increase Council Openness – give a public right to speak at each committee on every item

Having an open and accountable council is an essential part of what Liberal Democrats stand for. Therefore our key aim is to increase public participation in how their local community is run and progressed forward.

Local Area Committees

Establish across the city Local Area Committee, which would each consist of all the councillors from two city wards and each committee would have authority and budget to:-

- Maintain their area – replacing, repairing streetname plates, maintaining public open space, providing children's playareas, repair roads and pavements, improve the streetscene etc
- Monitor performance –of council services and have the ability to improve them for their area
- Develop plans - to improve youth provision, to improve cycling, to tackle anti-social behaviour, to improve assistance for old people, to improve local retail centres & businesses.
- Community Safety Forums – establish in each local area groups to liaise between community groups, the council and the police to improve community safety and reduce crime.
- Co-ordinate council work – with voluntary groups and give grants to assist them in their work.

Planning Agreements

Every development causes some impact on the area of the development. By law the developer has to pay money to offset this impact. This money paid to the council to improve the area near the development, so:-

- Publish Planning Agreements - so that the process between the developer and council is open and transparent. And so that the public can see both the benefits and impacts of development.
- Capital Improvement Programmes – each local area committee will develop capital investment programmes that will use the money from developers to improve the area. They would be improvements that people wished to see and could be used to define planning agreements.
- Improved consultation – All developments particularly large ones and especially council driven ones or ones on council owned land, would receive wide public consultation. This would consist of wide scale leafleting in the area, public exhibitions and even public meetings.

Open Council

The public fund the council so all council meetings should not only be open to the public to attend but also participate in, and so we propose:-

- Right of address – without prior notice any member of the public would have the right to address the committee or full council on any subject not on the agenda at the start of the meeting. The chair of the meeting would only have the right to limit the time on any one subject (minimum limit 5 minutes)
- Speak on the agenda – without prior notice before Councillors' debate any item on the agenda the public would have the right to speak on that item. The chair of the meeting would only have the right to limit the time for and against. (5 minutes minimum per side)
- Public Call-in – A petition of 500 signatures within 30 days of a cabinet decision would force the full council to call in that decision and a full council vote could then overrule the decision.

All the points above will increase the openness, effectiveness and accountability of the council. This can only improve the way things are run, even if some councillors and officers' of the council will find the glaze of the press and public awkward at first.

Environment

- Increase Household Recycling – with kerbside glass and food waste collections
- Home Energy Generation – with a fund to assist householders & better planning system use
- Improve Roads & Pavements – with more whole road repair instead of the pothole patchworks

Liberal Democrats are passionate about the environment and for many years all aspects of our policy have had a green thread running through them at both national and local level.

Household Recycling

There are obvious reasons to recycle more, like have limited raw materials on this planet and must make best use of those we have and we have limited space dump rubbish. The not so obvious reason is that using recycled material to make new product also saves energy and therefore greenhouse gas emissions and cost to manufacture. So for our part we would enhance:-

- Glass recycling – this would be introduced for all households in Southampton on monthly basis.
- Kitchen food waste – this would be introduced for all households on weekly basis. It would take out the most compostable material from the residue waste (up to 30% in the average bin). This waste would then be processed to produce a soil conditioner.
- Commercial recycling – increase the rate of recycling from trade and commercial premises by increased marketing and maximising any tax or law changes to encourage trade recycling.

Home Energy Generation

An important way to reduce the effects of climate change is to alter the way power generated. Locally this means supporting Home Energy Generation or Microgeneration; so:-

- Microgeneration Fund – this would assist people on low incomes, reduce their heating and/or electric bills by helping them installing a solar-photovoltaic, solar-thermal, ground source heat pump, combined heat and power (CHP) or wind turbine systems to their property.
- Planning System – ensure that sustainable development regulations are used to the greatest extent to promote Microgeneration.
- Council housing and offices – aim to have Microgeneration schemes on all council properties.

Roads & Pavements

The roads and pavements across the city are in a poor condition and so we propose to:-

- Step change in quality – borrow funds to give a step change in the quality of the road & pavements plus organisational/funding changes of normal work to maintain the improvements.
- Whole road repair – ensure that the money spend on road repair is done wisely with more whole road and permanent large scale fixed with less temporary patching.
- Area plans – through our proposed area committee system, every road and pavement would have scheduled action and timescale for maintenance

Public Transport & Car Parking

A vibrant city needs a good public transport system and many city estates were not built for mass car ownership, so we would:-

- Bus passes & Bus frequency – work with the bus companies to increase bus frequency & routes, as well as remove the time restrictions on the free pass
- Parking plans – ensure that the Local Area Committee plans create good home-zone schemes to increase the availability of on and off street parking, and electric car charging points.
- Parking Permits - ensure that first permit is always free

These policies along side existing policies, like CREW weeks, will help improve the environment we live in, as well as, help to protect it for future generations.

Education

- Small class & small schools – aim for small local schools with small classes
- Improve co-ordination – ensure that there is more co-operation to spread best practice
- Youth Awards & Youth Councils – to encourage young people greater involvement in society

The key to any child's future is a good education and it is the local authorities task to provide the best possible support to the schools ensure that good standards of education are firstly achieved and maintained in all schools.

Schools

Research as shown and it is our belief that the both the size of school and size of the class can affect both academic performance and behaviour at school, and so we propose:-

- Small classes & schools – to keep the average class and school sizes small as low as central government funding limits allows, so as to improve standards and a sense of school belonging.
- Support teachers – to give teachers all possible teaching assistant & facilities
- Improved buildings – to assist the teaching staff it is essential that all schools have building fit of purpose in the 21st century.
- Better School Building use – we would look to extend the use of buildings to benefit the whole community by making the necessary changes to school buildings to enable greater evening and holiday period usage, with holiday clubs, parenting classes & further education courses.

School Co-operation

There are great variations across the city in school performance. The local authority should encourage school co-operation so that schools can learn from each other to raise standards. It is our belief that working locally together will produce better results than working in competition against each other as the successive governments have promoted over the years. So we would:-

- Joint headships – to help spread the knowledge and experience of senior headteachers a system would be promoted where a senior head can assist a number of other schools.
- Spread best practice – when teachers have successfully tried a new teaching method we would have more sessions allowing other teachers to visit the school to learn these methods.
- Inter-school conferences – to further spread best-practice and encourage co-operation we propose to have a number summer holiday time conferences for teachers and governors.
- Inter-school sports – ensure there are a variety of sport competitions between all Southampton Schools, across all levels and abilities to promote a healthier life style among pupils.

Youth Awards and Youth Councils

Academic achievement is only one part of a child's education into the world the wider aspect must encourage a greater view of the society and so we would:-

- Youth and Voluntary Awards – promote further the established awards schemes in the city.
- Duke of Edinburgh Award – persuade all secondary schools to start up Duke of Edinburgh Award schemes to encourage pupils to have a wider experience of life.
- Youth Councils – set up a Southampton Youth Council with elected year representatives from each year group of each secondary level school across the city. The council would discuss local issues, particularly Youth related matters and advise the city council on actions to take.
- Youth Grants - Youth Councils representatives in each local area would decide how the Area Committee's youth grant money should be allocated.

These policies will help improve both the academic performance of the children and their wider education of the world around them.

Finance

- Council Tax – keep council tax raises to below the October RPIX inflation/Pension increase
- Climate Change Fund – establish a climate offset fund to improve Southampton’s housing
- Invest in Southampton – use the council’s investment funds to back projects in Southampton

Liberal Democrats believe in a sustainable economy which serves genuine need and provides public services of the highest quality. So like many the financing of the City Council and the how it uses these finances are of keen interest to us, as it is for everyone else.

Council Tax

Liberal Democrats are fundamentally opposed to this unfair and unjust tax which takes no account of people’s income and their ability to pay it. So nationally if it power we would scrap this tax and replace it with a local income tax. However locally we have to work with Council Tax and so we would aim to lessen the impact of it by:-

- Below inflation rises – we would peg the council tax to below the October RPIX inflation rate. This would give clear budget guidance and force every council department to look much more carefully at every penny they spend.
- Scrap unfair discounts – the current discounts to older people above the tax council benefit level and special constables mean that families living next door to people with discounts get no help with their council tax bill, even when they are on similar income levels. This is unfair and even results in the same families having to pay more council tax to pay for the discounts.
- Council Charges – to offset some of the cost of keeping the council tax down council charges on optional items only would increase above October RPIX inflation rate.

Climate Change Fund

Liberal Democrats are fully committed to improving the environment and to do this as a society we have to reduce our carbon emissions by at least 80% by 2050. To assist in this aim we propose to create a Climate Change Fund, this would:-

- Offset fund – to cut all carbon emissions is impractical, however it is possible to reduce emissions and plant trees to absorb the carbon produced. An offset fund such as the Climate Change Fund we propose for Southampton would assist in this campaign to reduce carbon emissions and help the people of Southampton too.
- Home insulation – many homes in the city were built at a time when heating costs were lower than today and so they were built with poor insulation standards. The Climate Change Fund would be used to give out grants to homeowners on low incomes to improve the home insulation and so reduce fuel bill permanently. This will of course include many older people and young families.
- Microgeneration Fund – the Climate Change Fund would also help fund this project.

Invest in Southampton

The City Council like all councils has investment funds that are used to generate income and reduce the tax burden, which is a good thing. However these funds could be put to greater use:-

- Invest in Southampton – there are many projects and developments across the city that need funding. These are commercial projects that benefit Southampton and could produce a good rate of return for the taxpayer.
- Property purchase – the council should purchase more property in Southampton and using the income from the rental to reduce tax levels and to improve services.

The finances of the city council are an important part of the city economy and they should be used in a much more imaginative way than they have been to improve the whole city

Business

- Buy local, pay promptly – where possible the council should use local businesses.
- Southampton Business Centres – establish more centres to specifically help new business
- Local Shopping Centres – create with the shops a full business plan to support local shops

Southampton has for centuries been the centre of trade and commerce in the south with the port playing a key role. Today we are the centre for a worldwide cruise liner business, a retail centre for southern England and a centre for high quality education with two universities. Southampton has naturally a great deal to offer the business community. However the city council must do its part to attract business, promote local business and support local entrepreneurs.

Buy Local, Pay Promptly

The city council is a provider of services as well as a user of services with an annual turnover of over £170 million, so how it spends its money is just as important as on what:-

- Buy local – the council should where possible buy goods and services from local suppliers and businesses, to directly help the local businesses in the most effective manner.
- Pay Promptly – one of the largest reasons small businesses fail is due to cashflow problems. i.e. having to pay their suppliers before their customers pay them. To help the city council should pay all its bills within one week of receiving the invoice.

Southampton Business Centres

When a business is starting up finding the right accommodation is difficult; often landlords require long term rental agreements to be signed and large deposit up front. To assist the start up businesses in Southampton the council should establish more business centres, this would:-

- Offer good rentals – on a easy in, easy out basis with short-term monthly rentals only
- Fully inclusive services – with furnished office space, free meeting room use, 24/7 access, security and caretaking, catering, office services such as mail, courier, fax, copying, printing and IT services.
- Business Support – free business advice to assist as the new business grows
- Retail Properties – similar arrangements should also be pursued for retail outlets in the city particularly in the district shopping centres to encourage local entrepreneurs.

Local Shopping Centres

Essential in any vibrant local community is a healthy, smart and busy local shopping area. It is essential therefore that the council work with local traders to support local centres and shopping parades and so we would:-

- Trade associations – encourage all shopping centres to form local trade associations in order to encourage good healthy dialog and action with each other as well as the council.
- Retail Plans – develop with local traders, local people and the local area committee retail plans to improve the shopping centre or parade and encourage more people to use their local shops.
- Economic regeneration – local area committees would also create economic regeneration plans to encourage new businesses in to the area and to support existing businesses.
- Local business rates – if future regulations allow, set lower business rates for local and small businesses in Southampton i.e. Lib Dem government would return local business rates to local government control
- Post Offices – to encourage vibrant local shopping areas the Council should re-establish Post Offices in areas that have lost them and combine them with 'one-stop shop' type council service points.

These policies will help create, support, improve local businesses and so improve the employment opportunities for all the people of Southampton.

Community

- Community Justice Panels – establish panels across the city to reduce anti-social behaviour
- Friends of Groups – establish & support volunteer groups that care for community open space
- More PCSOs – greater support for the police by increasing the number of support officers

Liberal Democrats strongly believe that local people should be involved in running their communities and this is why we believe decisions taken at the lowest practicable level. This is also why one of our key aims is to establish eight local area committees across the city, with six local ward councillors on each committee. There is of course more to creating a sense of community than creating a city council with a community base.

Community Justice Panels

Community Justice Panels are a means whereby adult and young offenders will have to explain their actions to their victims in front of community volunteers. The panels work by bringing together offenders and victims to resolve the issues and agree a way forward. A Community Justice Agreement is drawn up and signed by all parties to ensure the behaviour is not repeated.

- Local volunteers – trained in Restorative Justice will facilitate the panels.
- Broken agreements - can be dealt with in another way, for example, an eviction notice or court appearance. It can also be referred back to the panel and a further meeting.
- Criminal record - the offender does not have the offence recorded on a criminal record.
- Lower re-offending rates – this form of community justice normally produces significantly lower re-offending rates. (On one panel in Somerset the re-offending rate is just 2%, compare with 60% -70% through the court and prison system.)

“Friends of” Groups

Within the city there are many areas of public open space and other public areas which need more assistance than any council can provide. So across the city have “Friends of” groups that perform volunteer work to improve the local environment in which they live. So we would:-

- Establish more groups – through the area committee system there will be a proactive effort to establish Friends of Groups for all identified areas of open space in the area.
- Group support – these will be supported by the via the area committee’s office in council to get access to professional advice as and when required.

More PCSOs

The police in Southampton do a good job with the limited numbers they have, with the present system is local government it is not the task of local councils to provide Police Officers. However councils can provide Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and tie them to work in specific areas. PCSOs perform a high visibility patrolling, providing reassurance to the communities they serve and they complement the work of police officers by focusing predominantly on lower level crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour. So we would:-

- Increase PCSO numbers – ensure that every local area had more support officers to tackle anti-social behaviour issues.
- Increase PCSO powers –work with the Chief Constable to enable PCSOs powers to be increased as is suitable for each area.
- Community Safety Forums – work with the forums to establish the community’s priorities and assist them in resolving them.

These policies will help create a safer and greener community with a greater sense of shared purpose.

Health

- Improved care provision – with more care homes, respite care and help for young carers
- Improve Health Care and social care co-operation – to provide a better service for all
- Better Health Prevention – with teeth cleaning in primary schools & increased fitness promotion

The responsibility for trying to improve the nation's health lies not only with the National Health Service and the individual but also with councils, indeed past years the major public health improvements were through councils with the supply of good quality housing and clean water.

Improved Care Provision

There is a growing need to provide good quality care for the elderly as the numbers of older people will continue to rise in the next couple of decades and so we would:-

- Care Homes and Respite Care – ensure that more care homes and respite care places are provided in Southampton, either Council run or in partnership with organisations like BUPA.
- Young Carers – establish a register of young carers and try to give them the help in the home they require to live more of a normal childhood.

Improve Care Co-Operation

The council is directly a provider of health care through Social Services and therefore should work as closely as possible with local GPs and home care nursing staff and so we would encourage:-

- Co-location – try to develop local centres at which both NHS and Social Service care staff would be based to maximum co-operation between the various services.
- Single point of contact – each home care patient should have a single person in either social services or the NHS who is responsible for co-ordination of all that person's health and care needs, whether these are council or NHS provided.
- Minimise faces – the number of health/care staff on daily visits a person should be minimised to both improve efficiency and quality of care, essential for those with dementia issues.

Better Health Prevention

The recent debate of fluoride in the water has highlighted the poor level of dental care in some areas as well as the undemocratic nature of health service provision. Other areas of concern are the general level of fitness and the level of alcohol consumption:-

- Hand & Teeth cleaning – as part of a normal health education, primary schools will be given extra help to have regular teeth cleaning session after the lunchtime break.
- Better design – to encourage walking and cycling local area committees will all produce plans to improve pedestrian access to district shopping areas and the local parks.
- Reduce Teenage Pregnancy – by establishing more peer groups to show young people the problems of starting a family too young, combined with better sex education and more teenage drop in health centres.
- Tackle Alcohol problems – in the absence of national law or tax changes the council would work with local retailers and pubs to curb the excessive drink promotions.

Better Leisure Facilities

We support all ways to achieve better facilities. Whether owned council facilities, a non-profit leisure trust, or in partnership with a private leisure company, the aim will be the same:-

- Increase usage and scope – increase the participation with a better range of facilities.
- Minimise the cost – both to the user (particularly low income groups) and the council tax payer.

These policies will help to increase and improve the effectiveness of both care and NHS provision across the city, whilst at the same time looking to improve the general level of health and fitness.

Housing

- Improve existing housing – with decent homes plus scheme & community housing plans
- Better student & family housing – by working with Universities to improve accommodation
- Help for residents – with shared equity homes, good private landlords & tackling empty homes

Good quality housing is one of the main factors to improve a person's wellbeing, so the aim is to improve the quality and availability of housing both within the rented and owner occupier sectors.

Improve Existing Housing

The quality of many houses in the city is not up to the latest standards of insulation or space. Many houses in the city were prior to 1970 when space allowances were not for many of the household appliances most homes now have and so we would promote:-

- Decent Homes Plus – improve all existing council housing to a standard above the current decent homes with the aim to bring all existing council housing up to at least the level 3 standard within the Standard Code for Sustainable Homes.
- Improved new build - improve the standard of new build council houses to level 6 ahead of the required 2016 date. High build quality housing is possible now so why wait until to 2016.
- Community housing plans – develop plans through the local area committees and with the local neighbours to improve the privately owned housing stock. With the assistance of the council in a co-ordinating role and the use of bulk service buying it should be possible to develop individually tailored housing improvement plans to improve the private housing stock.

Better Student & Family Housing

Southampton is a learning city with two universities and many thousands of students living in the city. Many students live in Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) that are in the main large converted family houses. To balance the accommodation in the city we would encourage:-

- New halls of residence – work with the Universities to build new purpose built halls of residences for the students with facilities such as high-speed internet access, low-cost sustainable heating, and communal catering and socialising areas. Each flat/room in the halls should have en-suite bathroom, a kitchenette, a bed, a lounge and study areas. These halls could be university, council or housing association owned and should be rented out on a non-profit basis and a low rents.
- Increasing family homes – increasing the numbers of places in halls of residence would free up many of the large houses to be returned to family homes, plus we would enforce the new planning powers that mean a conversion of a house to an HMO requires planning permission.
- Empty Homes – the problem of empty dwellings across the city should be addressed in a more pro-active manner; currently the council has one officer to tackle hundreds of dwellings.

Help for Residents

To improve the availability of housing we would promote:-

- Shared equity – promote the use of shared equity housing in the part-buy/part-rent sector of the affordable house market so that the benefits of buying a house at an affordable price are not lost after the first house purchase.
- Good private landlords – set up a Southampton City quality mark scheme to award to landlords that maintain the property in good order, provide low-cost sustainable heating, and set reasonable and not excessive rents
- Tackling empty homes – use the powers of the empty dwelling management orders to their maximum possible extent to cut back the numbers of empty and unused homes in the city.

Together all these measures should improve both the quality and availability of the housing stock in Southampton.

What are the Liberal Democrats?

What the Liberal Democrats are and what we stand for is best defined in the preamble to the Liberal Democrats Constitution, the first part of this preamble is below:-

“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. We champion the freedom, dignity and well-being of individuals, we acknowledge and respect their right to freedom of conscience and their right to develop their talents to the full. We aim to disperse power, to foster diversity and to nurture creativity. We believe that the role of the state is to enable all citizens to attain these ideals, to contribute fully to their communities and to take part in the decisions which affect their lives.

We look forward to a world in which all people share the same basic rights, in which they live together in peace and in which their different cultures will be able to develop freely. We believe that each generation is responsible for the fate of our planet and, by safeguarding the balance of nature and the environment, for the long term continuity of life in all its forms.

Upholding these values of individual and social justice, we reject all prejudice and discrimination based upon race, colour, religion, age, disability, sex or sexual orientation and oppose all forms of entrenched privilege and inequality. Recognising that the quest for freedom and justice can never end, we promote human rights and open government, a sustainable economy which serves genuine need, public services of the highest quality, international action based on a recognition of the interdependence of all the world's peoples and responsible stewardship of the earth and its resources.

We believe that people should be involved in running their communities. We are determined to strengthen the democratic process and ensure that there is a just and representative system of government with effective Parliamentary institutions, freedom of information, decisions taken at the lowest practicable level and a fair voting system for all elections.

We will at all times defend the right to speak, write, worship, associate and vote freely, and we will protect the right of citizens to enjoy privacy in their own lives and homes. We believe that sovereignty rests with the people and that authority in a democracy derives from them.”

If you believe the same then join us and help us to bring about a fairer and more just society.

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