

Rebuilding Community Trust:

**The Labour Manifesto for
the North Yorkshire County
Council elections 2017**



INTRODUCTION

This right-wing Tory Government places ideological dogma ahead of the need to provide effective public services; austerity is a failed economic strategy and local government finds itself trapped between a rock and a hard place. Whilst the government takes away resources the demand for council services, if anything, grows. In North Yorkshire, England's largest county, there are exceptional needs which are in danger of being neglected. A higher elderly population needs greater health and social care; far flung communities still need access to high quality education; a huge road network needs maintenance and public transport is being cut back; parts of the county also suffer from multiple deprivation matching the worst in the UK.

We note that central government is forcing local authorities to make budget cuts which will inevitably lead to poorer services. We note that the cuts imposed on local authorities, more than 40% are far greater than the less than 10% cuts it is imposing on itself. We therefore call on central government to review how local authorities can use their assets to raise funds to pay for services, such as a temporary relaxation of rules governing the use of capital reserves, the issuing of local authority bonds or the removal of financial penalties for local councils making modest increases in council tax. Unless such steps are taken, we believe that the financial pressure to take steps such as switching off street lights will outweigh the views of local people.

This manifesto sets out some of the ideas and proposals local Labour candidates would pursue if given the chance. It goes without saying the challenge we face is huge, but with a louder voice we can make a difference. we have demonstrated elsewhere, such as on Scarborough Borough Council or Selby District Council. Labour is a positive voice for change, listening to local communities and challenging the dogma of the detached Northallerton establishment.

Some of the policies we outline here could be undertaken by the County Council on its own and other policies are ones which we want the Council to advocate but which require national government action. We make no apologies for including this second type of policy since we believe they would directly assist the Council perform its necessary duties and deliver clear local benefits. Perhaps the most

significant of these, which underpins much else, is the demand that central government should cease its attack on local councils, and free them up to set local priorities.

There is much talk of a 'Northern Power House,' 'localism' and devolution but little opportunity to practice it. We believe 'localism' is merely a cloak under which the government intends to reduce local councils to organisations having little power which outsource most of their functions. There is abundant evidence that this approach can cost more and does not automatically lead to efficient services.

This document cannot outline all the areas we would seek to make a difference, but we have through consultation with our members and members of the public across the County sought to address some of the major issues that face us. This manifesto focuses particularly on education, health & social care and economic regeneration.

A newly elected Labour Group would subscribe to the principles set out by the Co-operative Councils Network, namely:

Principle 1: The council as a strong community leader

Principle 2: Providing services at the appropriate level, personalised and community based

Principle 3: Citizens and communities empowered to design and deliver services and play an active role in their local community

Principle 4: Public services enabling residents to engage in civil society through employment opportunities

Principle 5: A settlement between public services, our communities and the citizen (this is what we provide, this is what you do for yourself) underpinned by our desire for justice, fairness, and responsibility

Principle 6: Taking responsibility for services – regardless of where they are accessed or which agency provides them

Principle 7: Simple, joined up and easy access to services – location and transaction; “one place to do it all”, “one form, one time to do it all” – providing visible value for money

These principles develop a mutual approach to our public services and clearly rejects the idea that privatisation on the scale now envisaged by the Conservative government will have the best outcomes.

EDUCATION

There are 286 primary schools, 29 secondary schools and 9 special schools, in North Yorkshire an education service with a total expenditure of £426 million. In truth, most of this money passes straight through the system directly to schools themselves to decide how to spend it. However, the council does have an important role to play ensuring that ancillary services are provided, that good governance is maintained and that education services across the county are properly planned and catered for. The Secretary of State for Education has made it clear that she wants all schools to become academies, independent of the education authority.

Education provision at all levels needs to be continually reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of the community it serves. Changes must meet the educational needs of the individuals concerned and need to be cost effective. We are not in favour of change for change's sake.

Our approach to education funding would be evidence based and focused on need.

Our aims will mean that we move further along the road of equality of education opportunity for all in North Yorkshire.

- We oppose forcing a change in status of our schools to academies. This should be a decision entirely for the school to make. It is a decision which should reflect the circumstances of a school. If all schools 'opted out' county wide education services could be severely damaged, and the planning of schools to reflect changing demographics abandoned.
- We are concerned that the government's approach will lead to more inequality in society, through the reintroduction of selection processes creeping into school admission policies. The Council must exercise a strong hand to stop this happening in North Yorkshire.

- The Labour Group will oppose the reintroduction of Grammar Schools, this is a divisive distraction; quality education for all and not segregation of school communities
- Whereas the Government seeks to reduce the influence of parents on school governing bodies; we would like to see greater parent representation on school governing bodies
- We do not support charitable status for private schools
- As part of a wider economic regeneration strategy, we want to see capital investment in new schools. The Building Schools for the Future and Primary Capital Programmes of the last Labour government were one of the first victims of Government's short sighted cuts. Many schools in North Yorkshire benefitted from these programmes but much more work needs to be done.
- We support the federation of schools where this meets the approval of staff, parents and governing bodies.
- We believe the Council should undertake a review of rural school provision to see if improvements can be made where very small schools may have a limited ability to enhance children's education.
- Give every primary-school child who needs it one-to-one tuition
- Pilot a scheme to give all primary-school children a daily free school meal.
- Ensure more schools are available for community use during evenings and weekends.
- Encourage the development of Schools Co-operative Trusts, giving parents a bigger say in how their schools are run
- Expand the number of special educational needs teachers.
- Work with partners in business and education to ensure 75% (Labour's target) of 18 to 30- year-olds to obtain a degree or an advanced apprenticeship.

- Promote small classes for pupils in key stage 2 and above. Poor planning by NYCC means there is a real danger of returning to the bad old days of unmanageable class sizes because there simply aren't enough classrooms in the county.
- Campaign to ensure the repair, refurbishment and expansion of school buildings.
- Campaign to ensure that governors and democratically elected members retain a key role in how schools are run locally.
- We want all children whose parents' preference, is for them to start their education at their local school to be allowed to do so.
- We do not support the selling off of school playing fields and want to see improvements in young people's recreational facilities, paid for by monies generated by the 'Olympic Legacy'

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- We recognise that good health and wellbeing requires good housing, good work opportunities, good recreation, good education and good access to services.
- There are significant variations in health and wellbeing across the county. People living in areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation have life expectancy up to ten years lower than more prosperous areas. We want to ensure that services are targeted at areas with most need and where they will do the most good.
- We believe the ill-health preventative and other services provide by Public Health, are a vital part of health service provision. Cuts to Public Health should not be used to disguise cuts being made by central government on spending on health
- There are above average number of elderly people living in North Yorkshire means that a new way needs to be found to relieve the pressure on funding long term care needs.
- We believe that those who receive, rely and provide care should

have a voice and a stake in the governance and ownership of services will boost quality. This requires more than tokenistic 'consultation' of care workers and those receiving care, but an ownership revolution so that workers, care recipients and the wider community take control of their care.

- Social care co-ops would be driven by the interests of their member-owners rather than the maximisation of shareholder returns. Surpluses would be reinvested into services, improving staff retention through training and the quality of care, rather than siphoned off by shareholders.
- We support a 'Right to run' that puts care workers on the boards of social care providers, and a 'Right to own' that let's care workers and the wider community take over private services facing closure.
- In immediate terms, such measures would begin to put the care sector on a more sustainable financial footing by tackling profit leakage. And by investing surplus back into staff training budgets, rather than lining the pockets of shareholders, would make the sector more cost effective at the same time as delivering higher quality care.
- We believe unitary authorities are better placed to deliver services to the needy, e.g. with better integration of housing and social services. This could happen if our call for unitary local authorities was adopted.

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

The changing nature of local government, which has so far led to the loss of thousands of jobs in North Yorkshire, a reduction in services and in many cases increased charges means that we have to look carefully at how councils are run and raise their income. We also believe that local people should have a greater say. It is not healthy for elected representatives to win office with very small turnouts, even if the government does not see a problem with this

- We will make the case for unitary local government within North Yorkshire, that is we would replace eight current local authorities (the county and seven districts) with just two or three authorities which are responsible for all services in their own area. These unitary authorities could if they wished pool some resources across the county area to achieve efficiencies.

- Following on the above, we would reduce the overall number of councillors by at least the 72 that are presently county councillors, and also reduce the number of chief executives and senior management. We believe the waste of public money could be prevented with having just one council in each area. It is hard to see how, e.g. £300,000 would have been wasted just to cut one tree down (in a dispute between Scarborough Borough Council and North Yorkshire County Council).
- We support a 'recall' power to ensure that failing councillors can be recalled by their electorate and forced to face re-election. This could happen if their original support in votes plus one called for a recall in a properly constituted petition. This is something that would need national legislation.
- We want an end to artificially low caps on council tax increases which automatically initiate public referenda – when the public must be legally enabled to vote on council tax increases. We believe such referenda should only be instigated if an increase in council tax is proposed which exceeds the rate of inflation (in other words, more than a standstill budget). It is the government's job (through the Bank of England) to control inflation.
- As is clear from our adoption of the seven principles listed under the Introduction to this manifesto, we do not support the dogmatic privatisation of public services promoted by the Conservative government. We are faced with further threats of privatised public services in North Yorkshire, such as the fire service, and whilst the County Council is not in this case responsible for providing the service we nevertheless take the view that privatisation of it would not serve the public interest.
- We support the development of the Youth Parliament locally, and would actively promote the greater involvement of young people in the democratic process.

TRANSPORT

- We should pilot, with a view to wider implementation a scheme for switching off traffic lights at periods of very low traffic levels. This would save energy (both the lights themselves and waiting vehicles)

- We should commit the Council to campaign for better transport links between Malton and Pickering– this would boost tourism in Whitby and reduce traffic on a major section of the A64. We would work in partnership with North Yorkshire Moors Railway to ensure that the successful business model they employ is not damaged.
- We should insist that the Council campaigns for the extension of electrification of the railway line to Scarborough from York, preserving a full Transpennine link direct to Scarborough; as is the case with Skipton (population 14,000) Scarborough (population 50,000) should have a direct train service to London.
- We need to search for innovative ways of improving transport in rural areas, e.g. encouraging car sharing and developing a database of regular delivery vehicles which could take passengers, on the model of post buses
- We support the development of long range dedicated cycle paths, such as the Cinder Track between Scarborough and Whitby and would ensure the Council worked with Sustrans to investigate new routes
- We would ensure the Council campaigns for improvements to the A64.
- Our proposal for a single tier authority would lead to the more efficient management of resources, such as car parking and the management of certain infrastructure, e.g. Whitby swing bridge.
- We would ensure the Council demanded more improvements from the Northern Hub, which currently appears to by-pass direct investment in secondary railways in North Yorkshire. Network Rail claim that for every £1 they invest, it generates £4 of economic activity – but this will clearly accrue mainly in the urban conurbations of South and West Yorkshire.
- We would ensure that NYCC was properly represented on the Leeds City Region Transport Panel by an elected member.
- We would introduce more 20 mph speed limits in built-up areas and villages. Given that North Yorkshire has one of the worst road

casualty rates in the UK, more must be done to tackle road accidents. The cost of each road accident far outweighs the cost of mitigating measures.

- We support an 'Oyster Card' approach to public transport in North Yorkshire, to make travel more convenient for passengers. We should do away with separate ticket purchases for two or more stage journeys.

ECONOMIC REGENERATION

The Conservative government's austerity led economic plan is destined to fail. It does nothing to help business, consumers or citizens. North Yorkshire continues to suffer from the imbalance in government business support between the north and south.

- We would seek ways of ensuring that Council contracts specified that suppliers ensured they deliver real apprenticeship schemes.
- The creation of a unitary authority would remove a tier of bureaucracy, which delays development, e.g. in planning.
- We would pursue actions which help social enterprises start – our first step would be to review all council activities which assist in this aim, from giving advice, funding and contracts.
- If a large business is successful and makes a profit, then its owners should be required to establish profit-sharing schemes to distribute a share of the profits among staff.
- Small businesses should be allowed to work together to access finance
- We would explore ways of creating a green New Deal for North Yorkshire, by reference to how other councils have successfully rolled out energy efficiency programmes and created jobs in the environment sector.
- We support the living wage and would review the County Council's own policies on low wages. We believe that the Living Wage would improve productivity, morale and reduce staff turnover, and so like

the National Minimum Wage lead to economic gains.

- Delays blamed on bureaucracy and red tape have slowed down the roll-out of high speed broadband in North Yorkshire. We would establish a Task Group, with partners from business and others to force the issue. We believe the delays are another example of the lack of urgency shown by the Conservative government towards improving the region's economy.
- Our proposal for unitary authorities would simplify planning processes and speed up the consideration of applications.
- We need to support our libraries and would investigate how they could be better used to support businesses, and would call upon local business support networks and agencies to do the same. We believe that local libraries can be kept open by becoming multi-agency hubs delivering a one-stop service for local communities.
- We believe that quality of life is a significant reason why businesses would want to start up in North Yorkshire, and we recognise that in this sense arts and cultural investment is just as important as investment in more traditional infrastructure, as well as being a driver in the creative industries. Therefore, we would resist cuts in arts budgets simply because they are sometimes presented as soft options.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

The Conservative Government has failed by its own promise to be the 'greenest government ever' and has seen energy and environmental initiatives watered down. This has been bad for business, which generally needs long periods of stable policy implementation to plan their investment. North Yorkshire has many natural, renewable resources but little use is made of them.

- Our proposal for unitary authorities would remove the split between collecting waste and disposing of it. Better waste policies could be formulated by one authority.
- We oppose hunting with dogs and would act against any individual

or group hunting on Council owned land.

- The Conservative government's removal of funding from flood prevention schemes has left many communities at risk. We would investigate ways of addressing this. It is clear that such cuts are false economies and by the same token borrowing now to save against future losses makes sense.
- Due to the impact of fracking on Climate Change and the risk that fracking might have on the local environment and tourist industry, we support the Labour Party policy to ban fracking and instead to focus on supporting renewable energy schemes.

March 17