



MAKING THE DIFFERENCE *in Newcastle*



A Difference You Can See

Newcastle Liberal Democrats

Our Policy Manifesto for the 2011 City Council Elections

Introduction : Councillor David Faulkner, Leader of the Council

Under the Liberal Democrats, Newcastle has become recognised nationally and by our local partners and residents as an efficient, forward-looking and high-achieving local authority.

Almost £50m of annual efficiency savings has been made in the past two years. We're one of the top councils for value for money, and we've improved services whilst keeping council tax rises below the rate of inflation, as promised, every year since 2004 – and there's a council tax freeze for the coming year.

We've continued the transformation both of the council's organisation and of the fabric of the city, whilst continuing to provide high quality services to residents.

Our adult social care service has retained and improved its Care Quality Commission top rating.

Educational attainment continues to improve. The latest Ofsted report tells us that our services for children are performing better than ever. We've completed the modernisation of all our secondary schools, and we're recognised nationally for our work on child poverty.

We've just been independently assessed as "excellent" for our commitment and achievement in promoting equality and inclusion.

Crime is down by 20% over three years – Newcastle is now one of the safest cities in the UK

Your Homes Newcastle has built more new council houses and has almost completed the Decent Homes modernisation programme for the existing council house stock.

Newcastle was voted the greenest City in the country by the independent Forum for the Future for the second successive year

Despite the continued deep recession and the lack of private finance, under the Council's leadership we've started, at long last, the rebuilding of Scotswood, completed the stunning refurbishment of five tower blocks at Riverside Dene (Cruddas Park) and made real progress in Cowgate through a coordinated neighbourhood management approach.

The extension of Eldon Square was completed and is fully let. The "Alive After 5" initiative, with strong council backing, has given city centre retailing a real boost.

So what does all this mean? Well, the latest resident survey shows that 79% think that the council is efficient and well-run. That's very good news.

Despite the toughest financial settlement for local government for decades, we have brought in a budget for 2011/12 that protects frontline services and facilities unlike many (especially Labour) councils, and we will be maintaining a large capital programme that sustains further investment to improve services and support economic development and regeneration.

We remember how bad it was during the previous 30 years of hard Labour. Labour in this city has offered no alternative budget and no ideas to respond to the financial crisis, which their Government created. They just can't be trusted.

The Liberal Democrats can be trusted to continue to provide effective leadership for our city in the tough times ahead. We will protect frontline services and give value for money. We offer a safe pair of hands, having made differences that local people can see and support.

What type of Council do we aspire to be?

These are values that we set out when first elected in 2004. Though the pressures and demands on councils are great – and often contradictory – we recommit ourselves to these principles and values:

- Be an open, accountable, listening, responsive council
- Put the customer and citizen at the heart of everything we do, delivering services in a caring and sensitive manner
- Manage resources in a coordinated way and with an emphasis upon sustainability
- Value the contribution of partners, employees and citizens, trusting each other and working collaboratively
- See the diversity of our people and communities as a strength
- Focus upon continuous improvement in the pursuit of excellence, setting and achieving clear priorities and embracing new opportunities

The Challenge

The Labour Government left an unprecedented peace-time deficit for the new Coalition Government to deal with, having outspent its income from 2002 onwards. Labour's high spend and high borrowing, combined with the lax financial regulation that created the credit and housing bubble, made the UK economy especially vulnerable, and far less able to tackle the banking crisis and global recession than most other countries.

The Government therefore embarked upon a spending reduction programme designed to tackle the deficit within four years, as announced in the post-election budget and the autumn's Comprehensive Spending Review.

This was followed by the local government settlement, which, despite significant lobbying (with Newcastle in the vanguard), resulted in an outcome that disadvantaged areas such as ours with high levels of deprivation. Per capita grant cuts were many times those for more affluent areas with higher council tax bases. We do not believe that the outcome passes the government's own fairness test – and have said so publicly.

Local government therefore faces its most challenging time in living memory. With the public sector making a larger-than-average contribution to Newcastle's economy, the city is more vulnerable to major reductions in public sector expenditure and employment.

In its budget for the coming year, the City Council has had to deal with a shortfall of over £44m. Our aim has been to protect frontline services to the maximum possible extent; to continue with the transformation and efficiency programmes that have delivered huge efficiency savings to date, to work in partnership with others to support and stimulate the local economy, and to ensure that savings do not disproportionately disadvantage the most deprived and vulnerable.

Unlike many other authorities, we have managed to protect our leisure centres, pools and libraries, our cultural facilities, our children's centres, our neighbourhood-based cleansing teams and our city beautification programme.

But we will have a relentless focus on targeting our services to where there is greatest need; sharing resources and staff across functions, teams and locations; maximising back office and

support service efficiencies; more effective commissioning and procurement; charging fair prices for our services; focusing on early interventions to stop problems before they happen; cutting bureaucracy, duplication and waste; and providing encouragement and support for communities to solve their own problems rather than trying to do everything ourselves.

Although our economic performance has improved in the past ten years, the city's economy still lags behind the national averages, especially in employment, skills and enterprise. Our challenge is to build competitiveness and a sustainable economy; to attract retain and grow businesses, and to remove barriers to employment by improving skills and creating an enterprise culture. We want to manage our environment, reduce the city's contribution to climate change and create economic opportunities from green industries.

Newcastle was the 20th most deprived local authority area in 2004 but in the latest Index of Multiple Deprivation it has improved to 66th most deprived. Despite this progress, around a quarter of our residents still live in areas that are among the 10% most deprived in the country. Our challenge is to deliver effective and joined up health and social care services that are focused on the principles of prevention and support for the vulnerable; to tackle child poverty, obesity and alcohol abuse; to provide good quality and affordable housing in safe and revitalised neighbourhoods (with faster regeneration) and to improve the quality of life and opportunities especially for our young people and our older people.

We will continue to run the city in a way that combines sound financial management and sustainability with a commitment to mobilise and deploy the existing and untapped resources among the people and communities of Newcastle to improve our city and neighbourhoods, increase social mobility, narrow the equality gaps and enhance opportunity.

We have described the course that we are following as "The Newcastle Way" – with its principal elements of leadership, focus, performance and working in partnership.

Our top ten commitments

The environment in which we will now be working will be materially influenced by significantly reduced funding, by the demise of the Regional Development Agency and the Government Office for the North East, as well as the regimes of audit and inspection and of the Local Area Agreement.

We face new challenges with the advent of Local Enterprise Partnerships, with the Government's encouragement of independent school provision, with reform of local government finance, with the prospect of elected Police and Crime Commissioners and major changes to community safety arrangements, with major reform of the National Health Service and a new lead role for local government in health improvement. Then there is the Localism Bill and all it will bring, including potentially elected mayors in cities such as Newcastle.

1. We will ensure that Newcastle plays a leading and positive role within the new Local Enterprise Partnership, promoting enterprise, economic development and regeneration, and leading the task of rebalancing the local economy more towards an innovative and growing private sector. We will do this within a context that builds upon our existing joint economic masterplan with Gateshead.

2. We will respond pro-actively to the decentralisation, localism and "big society" agenda because it is with the grain of our current direction of travel in Newcastle. We will work with voluntary, statutory and private sector partners to particularly focus upon promoting

volunteering, empowerment and social enterprise. However, we will ensure that new rights for citizens and communities are promoted in a way that does not simply favour articulate, well-organised interests against those who are less advantaged and the wider public interest, and we intend to campaign against the introduction of an elected mayor for Newcastle in the forthcoming referendum.

3. Our approach to the Government's encouragement of academies and free schools has been to stress the over-riding importance of raising educational achievement, 'narrowing the gap' and promoting inclusion. This will continue to be our challenge to future school providers, our preference being to encourage the development and improvement of schools within the Newcastle schools "family". We will work to influence schools to ensure best use of the additional resource provided by "the pupil premium" for disadvantaged children. We will further develop our targeted and preventative approach to supporting vulnerable young people/families with complex needs, building partnership working between agencies around family and parenting support.

4. Whilst we are concerned at the nature and scale of the top-down reorganisation of the NHS and the risks posed by a potentially damaging market-based approach, we welcome the transfer of public health functions to become the responsibility of local authorities. As a council we will provide leadership and focus for the health improvement agenda, working with existing health institutions, the new GP commissioning consortia and the voluntary and community sector in the city.

5. We will provide the leadership needed for the Newcastle Partnership to deliver its new statement of shared priorities – the "top 20" priorities which embrace the economy and employment, health improvement, community safety, protecting the vulnerable and reducing inequalities, education and skills, cleaner and greener neighbourhoods, more affordable and mixed housing, engagement and empowerment.

6. We want to continue to be recognised as the most sustainable city in the country. We will provide leadership for the city-wide climate change and carbon reduction programme and continue to support the development of electric vehicle infrastructure and of jobs in green industries, especially offshore wind. We intend to help ensure that Newcastle residents take full advantage of the new "Green Deal" and we'll continue to insulate homes to reduce fuel poverty and energy use, and to encourage the use of renewable energy.

7. We welcome the forthcoming review of local government finance and resources. We support the localisation of business rates but only if there is a fair national formula, which equalises resources in the short, medium and long term between richer and poorer areas with different business bases and different capacities to grow. The same principle must apply to any reform of the domestic base, and we will lobby vigorously for all of this. We will also be ready to take full advantage of economic development arising from new models of resource such as tax incremental financing.

8. We will integrate our sustainability appraisals process with other impact assessments such as equality, health and wellbeing and community safety to deliver a single integrated process for taking major decisions within the council

9. We will continue the process of service transformation within the council to make the organisation as effective and efficient as possible, with more focused priority outcomes and robust performance monitoring.

10. We aim to continue to restrict council tax rises to no more than inflation so we can help relieve pressure on household budgets and protect the low-paid.

Service Areas – Achievement and Commitment

Environment, Sustainability and Transport

What we've achieved

Recognition for the second successive year as the UK's most sustainable major city by the Forum for the Future.

Launched a freight consolidation centre for the more sustainable movement of goods into city centre retail areas.

Adopted the Newcastle Declaration on Climate Change and a comprehensive city-wide strategy and action plan.

Introduced a Local Climate Impacts profile, which demonstrates the effect of weather changes on the city and supports effective planning and mitigation.

Recycling and composting rates have improved further to 46% (just 10% in 2003/4)

Worked with and promoted the Newcastle Warm Zone to install 50,000 insulation measures in around 40,000 homes over the last seven years, reducing energy costs by over £5m and saving over 25,000 tonnes of CO2 annually.

Maintained higher investment levels for the improvement of local roads and pavements, and dealt professionally with the consequences for damage and potholes of two severe winters. We are recognised as the third best council in England for cleanliness of roads, the leading metropolitan council for the condition of roads and the third best for pavements.

Continued the roll-out of 20mph limits on residential roads – to be completed by Autumn 2011

We commit to

Continuing the brown bin service for green waste removal.

To be an early adopter of low carbon retrofitting on domestic properties.

To continue a waste minimisation and disposal strategy that increases recycling and radically reduces levels of waste going to landfill.

To enhance the already-successful Enviro Schools programme to improve awareness and engagement among young people.

Improving facilities for cycling in the City, with the introduction of several new cycle routes as part of the Great North Cycleway. We are also consulting on a new cycle strategy for Newcastle.

Supporting as far as possible a truly accessible bus network and continuing the roll-out of less polluting and more environmentally-friendly buses to reduce emissions & improve air quality

Neighbourhoods and Public Protection

What we've achieved

Tackled Serious Violence Crime - so far this year (April-February) there has been a 13% reduction compared to the same period of 2009/10. There has been robust licencing enforcement, marshalled taxi ranks, increased police patrols in peak locations at peak times and improvements to the Best Bar None scheme.

Protected and supported victims of Domestic Violence and sexual violence. We have reduced the repeat victimisation rate for domestic violence from 31% in April 2009 to 24% in September 2010.

Tackled anti-social behaviour - we have reduced anti-social behaviour, fires and noise nuisance by increasing positive activities for over 3,000 young people on Friday and Saturday nights, using community payback schemes to get offenders to work in local communities and through intensive support to families.

Maintained high levels of investment and high standards of environmental cleanliness.

We commit to:

Making our neighbourhoods even safer by tackling local community safety issues and increase enforcement to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Provide increased support to victims of crime.

Retaining well-resourced neighbourhood teams, of locally based staff, continuing to respond to the demands of communities and local people.

Continued focus upon reducing environmental crime and anti-social behaviour such as littering, graffiti, fly-tipping and dog fouling through increased public support and awareness as well as targeted enforcement.

Retention of the present cumulative impact zones as part of licensing policy to prevent over-concentration of licensed premises.

Children and Young People

What we've achieved:

£250m investment in our schools, by acting early to access central funds and manage effectively the complex construction and improvement programme.

A reduction in levels of NEET (young people not in education, employment or training)

Children's Services rated as performing well in the latest Ofsted inspection' - improvements to child protection services, and higher levels of examination achievement in schools were highlighted.

National recognition for work in family support (early intervention prevention) and Beacon status for Child Poverty work

We commit to:

Deliver the £4.5m MyPlace project as a showcase city centre location for young people

Maintain and extend family support services to ensure that children with the greatest need are supported properly through early intervention and prevention and multi-agency working.

Work with schools and Newcastle College to maintain lower levels of NEET, despite the economic situation – with backing for alternative curricula, vocational support, apprenticeships and building effective pathways to further and higher education.

Work to support excellence in our schools with continued investment in buildings (in the near future at Milecastle and in Walker), and working with schools in all sectors to build on school improvement work; the Council looks to retain opportunities to provide school improvement where schools want it.

Adult Care and Health***What we've achieved:***

Our very high standards of services in Newcastle are reflected in our “excellent” rating by the Care Quality Commission who said “The Council has a clear vision for social care and works effectively with partners to deliver key priorities, with an active programme of preventative work and increasing delivery of personalised services.”

Our standards of adult safeguarding have received positive feedback via peer assessment.

Despite significant cost pressures, we are retaining services for users in both "critical" and "substantial" assessment areas

We have made significant progress in the development of reablement services – these are free at the point of use for up to six weeks to maximise the abilities and independence of service user during recovery from major surgery, major illness or serious accident.

We commit to:

Continue to develop partnership working in the new health/social care environment. We will lead in the new public health role and seek to address health inequalities in the city. We will hold our second health and wellbeing summit in the summer.

Continuing to develop support services for carers.

Embedding and extending the personalisation of services.

Managing changes to respite care and day centre provision for the elderly and for people with learning difficulties in a manner sensitive to the needs of service users and their carers.

Finance and Resources

What we've achieved

We've kept Council Tax rises below inflation for each of our seven years as the administration in Newcastle. Council tax here has fallen from being the 14th highest in England in 2004/5 to 96th highest in 2010/11, an annual saving of £33.4 million for Newcastle's Council Tax payers

At the same time as we've been making the council more efficient we've been improving frontline services. That's why we were commended as one of the top five councils in the country for financial performance in this year's government business awards.

Implementation of Single Status 2, and of the first phases of transformation, whilst maintaining positive relations with staff and unions. The outcome of the staff survey was significantly more positive than the previous one.

We commit to:

Continuing to keep Council Tax rises at or below inflation and working with our staff and partners to protect front line services by finding better ways to deliver council services more efficiently and effectively.

Continuing our commitment to staff learning and development and employee support programmes.

Successfully achieving Investors in People accreditation throughout the council.

Culture, Libraries, Leisure

What we've achieved

We reached a milestone in the Ouseburn Parks project with the opening of the new visitors centre and refurbished Pets' Corner.

We have a reputation for festivals of very high quality; Juice is a very successful children's festival, now established as an annual event, and our New Years Eve celebrations of carnival and fireworks is among the best in the country.

We've had great events and projects at the new City Library such as "Taking Liberties" and "Evolving English", which illustrates the strong links we have developed with the British Library.

We commit to:

Continued support for our library network, but working with local communities to build local volunteering that supports "library express" services in shared community buildings.

Progress the "Old Newcastle" Project – a stage 2 Heritage Lottery bid will be submitted through our strong partnership with the Cathedral and the Society of Antiquaries

Build on the great start to our “Active 500” Olympic and Paralympic Games run-up programme that will ensure community participation and a lasting legacy of improved fitness and health – and to develop a strong local cultural programme at the time of the Games to engage visitors and residents

Deliver a new Bridges Festival on the river and riverside in the summer, and explore with partners a bid for the hosting of the 2014 Tall Ships Race.

Development and Enterprise

What we've achieved

The successful £170m extension to Eldon Square, and council support to the “Alive after 5” city centre retail and leisure initiative.

Maintaining momentum to the Newcastle Science City programme in difficult times. This is critical to the promotion of our future knowledge economy and we have strengthened our relationship with Newcastle University and prepared for a new joint venture structure as One NorthEast ceases to be a partner and investor. Science Central site infrastructure development has continued and the planning application for the first “gateway” building has been received.

Stephenson Quarter: showing that we are prepared to step in, where needed, to provide developer support to regenerate the City.

Set up and launched the Urban Regeneration Vehicle that will transform Scotswood, with infrastructure development continuing and the first new houses expected early next year.

We commit to

Development and regeneration of key sites such as Ouseburn, East Pilgrim Street and the Stephenson Quarter

Finishing what we have started in Scotswood and also in Walker Riverside, although acknowledging more challenging timescales for the latter.

Implementing a new economic development policy for the City, to support continued growth in key sectors of the economy in the post-ONE world.

Supporting social enterprises by creating a Social Enterprise Compact that operates across the City, similar to the voluntary sector.

Housing and Communities

What we've achieved

Further significant refurbishment of council stock – notably five high-rise blocks at Riverside Dene, as well as internal and external packages to our 30,000 houses across the city.

Completed the new build of almost 200 new council houses, the first in the city for over 25 years, and identified potential for a further 600-1000 properties.

Homelessness prevention work increased significantly; no bed and breakfast for the homeless needed since 2006; repeat homelessness reduced to a very small number of cases; replacement for Hill Court agreed at Wentworth Court.

Through the Private Rented Service we have introduced a rent deposit scheme and a landlords incentive scheme.

Introduced the community cohesion mainstreaming framework, ensuring that policies and practices across the Council take account of community cohesion issues, and through Newcastle – City for Peace we have promoted tolerance and respect for human rights throughout the city.

We commit to:

Subject to a “yes” vote from residents in the coming ballot, we will help establish a Community Trust in Byker to oversee the revitalisation of the estate and the reawakening of the original Ralph Erskine vision, via the deployment of rent income for investment (following the Housing Minister’s agreement to write off HCA debt)

Strengthening the use of neighbourhood charters via mainstream budget alignment to reflect the needs of local communities, and ensuring that Newcastle remains a national leader in community engagement and empowerment.

Ensuring that we support communities that are under pressure from disadvantage and extremism, and that we promote fairness and cohesion.

Providing more family affordable homes for purchase, rent or shared equity. Working through Your Homes Newcastle to add new stock and to complete the upgrade and improvement of our existing stock.

Offering new council-backed mortgages for purchase of affordable, refurbished apartments in Riverside Dene.

Control the loss of family homes through conversion to Houses of Multiple Occupation by the adoption of an “Article 4 direction” which will come into force in November and will require planning permission for change of use from a dwelling house.