



## **TAKING NEWCASTLE FORWARD**

**Our Manifesto for the 2008 City Council Elections**

### **AN ACHIEVING COUNCIL**

We set an ambitious agenda when we were elected to office to run the City Council in 2004. There is much yet to do but we have started well and can claim many significant achievements:

- Council tax has been kept under the rate of increase in the retail price index for the fourth year out of four, yet we have also made savings of nearly £40m over the four years, whilst investing at a rate well above inflation in key services, notably adult social care, children and young people and neighbourhood environmental services.
- Rising educational achievement – Newcastle is the fastest improving education authority in England.
- Recycling rates have quadrupled in four years, from being one of the poorest in the country. Satisfaction ratings for neighbourhood cleanliness have improved dramatically.
- Crime has fallen by 16% in the past year. Newcastle is one of the safest larger cities and “Safe Newcastle” is recognised by the Home Office for innovation and quality outcomes in community safety.

Our progress has been verified by many independent sources:

- The Audit Commission’s latest “direction of travel” report ranks Newcastle as a three star council improving well.
- The huge improvement in resident satisfaction between 2004 and 2006 has been maintained in the latest independent survey. We are the highest ranked council outside London and 5<sup>th</sup> highest in the country.
- Newcastle is improving in the deprivation rankings, from 20<sup>th</sup> most deprived in 2004 to 37<sup>th</sup> in 2007.
- Key performance indicators are improving at a faster rate than ever. 80% of key service areas are above average against comparator authorities on a value for money basis.
- The European Commission Quality of Life survey in summer 2007 has Newcastle ranked third of 75 European cities and top UK city.

## **AN AMBITIOUS COUNCIL**

Our huge capital investment programme – housing, schools, libraries, customer service centres, arts facilities, retail and offices - is well under way and, on a per capita basis, is the largest in the country. We will spend a billion pounds over the next five years, leveraging in much more from partners. This is more than twice the programme of four years ago.

This manifesto sets out our key priorities for the coming year.

## **A VALUE FOR MONEY COUNCIL**

We will:

- Aim to keep the council tax increase for 2009/10 at or below the increase in the retail price index, so delivering our five-year promise on council tax.
- Transform ways of working in the council that will provide a big improvement in performance and attitude, whilst achieving the necessary savings to cope with increased financial pressures and real reductions in Government funding.
- Maintain the rate of progress in our key performance indicators.

## **A STREAMLINED AND MORE EFFECTIVE COUNCIL**

We will:

- Give effective leadership, both internally and with partners and communities, supported by clearer accountability, improved speed of decision-making and a culture of better responsiveness and of achievement - so the focus will be on outcomes.
- Bring in appropriate means of encouraging people towards the necessary behaviours that makes this happen. We will identify and remove internal barriers to a more streamlined and cost effective Council, reviewing and improving support systems and services where needed.
- Build in improved performance management skills across the Council.
- Continue to improve our performance in important areas such as Council Tax collection and benefits assessment. We will implement the Local Housing Allowance and Single Housing Benefit, which is the biggest change in housing benefits in recent years.
- Continue development of information technology security standards, including proper management and security of information in the council.
- Review and agree the future direction of Culture, Libraries and Life Long Learning.

## **A COUNCIL THAT PROVIDES LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS**

We will:

- Develop and communicate a policy response and action plan to the Local Government White Paper, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report / city-region and related issues.
- Lead the required debate on the Council's choice of governance options as laid out in the White Paper (e.g. elected mayor or other options) and related political developments, encouraging engagement and contribution from a wide range of stakeholders both internal and external.
- Confirm and begin active implementation of the Sustainable Communities Strategy and Local Area Agreement, improve the effectiveness and provide council leadership of the Newcastle Partnership.
- Begin the introduction of ward plans and speed up the decentralisation of decision-making, the allocating of council resources, partnership working and performance monitoring at a neighbourhood and ward level, so helping to reinvigorate local democracy.
- Continue to move forward the equalities, social inclusion/cohesion agenda (through implementing the new strategies) and on community engagement. Improve the diversity of the workforce and progress towards achievement of the Local Government Equalities Standard.

## **A COUNCIL THAT INCREASES CHANCES FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE**

We will:

- Continue to reduce the high rate of teenage pregnancies
- Take steps to halt the rise in obesity in children under 11
- Reduce bullying and discrimination
- Continue to raise levels of educational attainment
- Increase school attendance
- Work to improve the life chances for children with a disability
- Complete and open new school buildings during 2008/9 (Excelsior Academy, Brunton First School, Kenton School, Walbottle Campus, Thomas Bewick, Canning Street, Walkergate and Stocksfield Avenue)
- Complete reviews of play and youth services, with an emphasis on more effective delivery in the field.
- Deliver a new, successful Children's' Festival in the city this autumn.

## **A CARING AND HEALTHY CITY**

We will

- Speed up the transformation of adult social care, ensuring that a more personal service plus early intervention and prevention become the cornerstones of adult social care services.
- Continue to develop our multi-agency Safeguarding Adults Partnership through joint working and training of staff across social care and health.
- Make progress on refocusing support to people with learning disabilities to improve access to community based activities and services.
- Continue to give priority to supporting carers.
- Accelerate the use of telecare and other new technologies to help enable older people to live at home.
- Carry through a review of the quality and value for money of meals provision to the elderly.
- Improve coordination between social and primary care, and between primary care and acute services.
- Lend impetus to the health improvement strategy, with a focus on prevention.
- Increase participation levels in physical activity for children and adults and reduce childhood obesity levels. Continue the Fusion scheme for free coached lessons at activity centres and swimming pools.

## **A SUSTAINABLE COUNCIL AND CITY**

We will:

- Extend the council's climate change strategy to include private and public sector partners in the city.
- Implement a new waste and recycling service that continues to increase recycling rates; agree residual waste strategy to increase diversion from landfill; encourage better recycling of business waste.
- Develop the role of Energy Champions and evaluate the prospects for an Energy Services Company
- Build on the success of the existing Green Flag Parks and apply for a total of 10 in 2008/2009 whilst maintaining the standards for parks that have already achieved Green Flag status. Sustain a high level of greening and planting of open spaces.
- Subject to final approval from the Heritage Lottery fund, begin the Ouseburn Parks" restoration project.
- Prepare conservation Area Plans for Gosforth, South Jesmond and Brandling Village.
- Review delivery of residents' parking and traffic management schemes to improve outcomes for residents and Members.

## **A COUNCIL THAT BUILDS AND SUPPORTS COMMUNITIES**

We will:

- Deliver the council's housing strategy, providing new houses at sites across the city and working with communities to deliver decent homes. This will support economic growth and an expanding population by building new environmentally sustainable housing, including a larger number of affordable homes. Use all available planning and enforcement controls to protect housing standards. Oversee 5000 new purpose-built bed spaces for students so that accommodation provision for students matches the rapid expansion of the universities.
- Oversee the approval and adoption of the Masterplan for the Heart of Walker.
- Appoint a development partner to work with the city on the Scotswood EXPO
- Work with some of the most excluded groups in the city, including disabled people, vulnerable workers and people facing multiple barriers to gaining employment, to help them into work, through Newcastle Futures.
- Through Safe Newcastle, review crime and disorder patterns and progress and develop a new three year strategy to tackle these issues
- Implement civil parking enforcement (CPE), allowing the Authority to take over the enforcement of double yellow lines and other non endorsable offences from Northumbria Police.

## **A COUNCIL FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE**

We will:

- Bring into operation the City Development Company and its business plan; improve our ways of working with partners from communities, the public sector and the private sector to increase the pace of delivery.
- Continue major developments that are under way, including Eldon Square redevelopment, Science Central (the former brewery site) with the start of implementation of the Science City Masterplan; progress planning applications for the Stephenson Quarter and the Newcastle General Hospital site.
- Agree with all partners the City Centre area action plan as a practical framework for future mixed-use development, quality built environment and an attractive, safe and inclusive place for local people and visitors.
- Carry out a ballot, via the City Centre Partnership, for the establishment of a business improvement district in the city centre.
- Complete the construction of the Ouseburn Barrage – a scheme which will improve the river environment, protect cultural heritage, improve recreational facilities and encourage economic regeneration.
- Submit an outline business case for Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) to the Department for Transport, though we are not persuaded of the need for road pricing or congestion charging.