

TAKING NEWCASTLE FORWARD

Our Policy Manifesto for the 2010 City Council Elections



Newcastle Liberal Democrats
Providing Effective Leadership in Tough Times

Introduction : Councillor John Shipley, Leader of the Council

Look around you.

Despite the worst recession for over 30 years, which is making life difficult for many people, our city is moving forwards.

A wonderful, award-winning new library. A £170m extension to Eldon Square, revitalising the city's retail heart after 35 years.

The Great North Museum opened last year, a refurbished Theatre Royal and Tyneside Cinema, on top of Northern Stage, Dance City and Live Theatre.

New and refurbished schools, and better examination results than ever before for our young people.

The first council houses built in our city for over 25 years, and modernisation well through for 30,000 existing homes.

A three star, top-rated council for adult care and for supporting people with disabilities and the vulnerable.

Newcastle voted the greenest City in the country by the independent Forum for the Future.

One of only two councils (out of over 300) to be singled out by the Audit Commission for our work in responding to the recession and supporting business, jobs, investment and vulnerable people.

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

A “Beacon” Council for how we're working to tackle child poverty, and a homelessness champion council.

One of the country's leading councils for devolving decision-making to local people.

A top council for value for money, improving services whilst keeping council tax rises among the lowest of any council.

All this since you elected a Liberal Democrat Council in 2004.

Remember how bad it was during the 30 years of hard Labour? Don't turn the clock back for Newcastle. The job isn't finished.

We can continue to provide the effective leadership for our city in the tough times ahead. We will protect frontline services and give value for money. We are a safe pair of hands. Support the Liberal Democrats on May 6th!

AN ACHIEVING COUNCIL : the story in numbers

We set an ambitious agenda when we were elected to office to run the City Council in 2004 after 30 years of Labour. Whilst we'd be the first to admit that there's a lot still to be done, we think we've started well and can claim many significant achievements.

£300m annual capital investment by the Council, nearly three times what it was under Labour

£20m of efficiency savings by the Council in the last year alone

£26m kept in your pocket through lower council tax rises than the national average - and below RPI

73% of 16 year-olds now get 5 or more good GCSEs – above the national average now – with a quarter of a billion pounds invested in new and improved schools

30,000 council homes refurbished or under way

25 years on, the city council is now building council houses again

47% household recycling rate, up from Labour's pitiful 10%

20% fall in crime across the city in the past three years

10 Green Flags for our Parks – the best of any North East council

115 Council apprenticeships this year - almost three times the number of the previous year

26,000 children and young people have used free sports and leisure activities through our FUSION scheme

What type of Council do we aspire to be?

These are values that we set out when we first came to power. 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 – Our main aims and responsibilities are to Protect Services and to Narrow the Gaps

Local government faces its most challenging time for decades. We know that from 2011 there will be deep cuts to public sector funding and that local government will be among the worst hit. With the public sector making a larger-than-average contribution to Newcastle's economy, the city is potentially more vulnerable to major reductions in public sector expenditure and employment.

The City Council's aim is 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, and to work in partnership with others to support and stimulate the local economy and to help the more vulnerable. We will aim to continue to restrict council tax rises to no more than RPI so we can help relieve pressure on household budgets.

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.

Despite some recent progress, more than a quarter of our residents 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

Our main commitments for the year ahead and beyond

Our joint Economic Masterplan with Gateshead (the 1Plan) will be launched publicly in the summer and sets out the following key actions that the council will take:

- **Becoming established as a City of Science – the Science Central partners are investing almost 30m to fund masterplanning, initial infrastructure and the creation of the first “gateway” building on the former brewery site; and we’ll be bidding to set up an “accelerated development zone” there to take advantage of proposals in the Chancellor’s recent budget**
- **Helping strengthen the top 200 businesses and support the development of specialisms and clusters**
- **Developing a low carbon economy and improving sustainable travel**
- **Promoting business and cultural tourism**
- **Development and Regeneration of key sites such as Ouseburn, East Pilgrim Street and the Stephenson Quarter**

We’ll be tackling worklessness and developing skills – for example, the Council and Newcastle Futures will be consolidating work through the three new resource centres set up in the city to offer direct help and to enable agencies to channel existing services more effectively.

We’ve reshaped and strengthened our approach to area-based regeneration so more development will be taking place in the key areas of Walker Riverside, Scotswood, Elswick, Byker/Ouseburn and Blakelaw/Kenton during the year

We’ll build 500 affordable homes to meet rising demand over the next few years, and we’ll identify appropriate sites throughout the city for these homes and in readiness for private sector-funded development to be resumed at scale.

Households and firms are likely to continue to find it harder to access finance. So we’ll be rolling out the Council’s £3.6m Enterprise Package of support to provide help to business start-ups, for the expansion of existing businesses and to social and

community enterprise. We'll also implement our new loan fund that will help provide access to finance for viable small businesses that haven't been able to get credit from the banks.

Through Safe Newcastle we'll be tackling the recent increase in the more serious violent crimes (some of which has been caused by improved detection rates from a greater police presence and some by a reclassification of offences) including through the Safe in the City and Night Time Economy Plan,

We're committed to the 10:10 Initiative, which is now part of our recently-announced Citywide climate change strategy – with targets such as reducing the city's level of harmful carbon emissions by 34% of 1990 levels by 2020; increasing household recycling to 55% and cutting car travel by 4% by 2020. We'll continue to help the establishment of the wind turbine blade manufacturing facility in Walker, we'll set up an energy services company, we'll be completing the setting up of the test pilot network of electric vehicle charging points around the city and we'll be introducing an electric vehicle retail delivery service in the city centre to keep large haulage vehicles out of the centre.

The City Council will be more proactive about improving the integration of health services and initiatives in the city – in the new arrangements for commissioning and providing community services and in taking forward the recommendations from the city's first Wellbeing and Benefits summits which took place recently. We will drive a renewed focus on health improvement and health equity, responding positively to the challenge of being a World Health Organisation Health City, with earlier interventions, easier access to health advice and information and the safeguarding of vulnerable people. We'll speed up the process of personal choice and personal budgets for those with care needs.

Subject to final national funding approval, we soon expect to begin work on the exciting new My Place city centre development for young people. We will ensure that commitments to swimmers are honoured as the small City Pool closes and community use at the new Northumbria University pool comes into effect.

We'll be bidding to be one of the pilot authorities under the UNICEF Child Friendly Communities Initiative – this aims to respect rights and ensure a voice for our children and young people and to improve wellbeing and positive outcomes. We'll also be supporting our young people as they set up the first independent Youth Council, with directly-elected representatives.

We hope to get financial approval for our plans for bus corridor improvements in Gosforth and on the West Road, and we will begin the rollout of 20mph speed limits on all residential roads

To ensure the sustainability of those parts of the city with large numbers of houses in multiple occupation, we'll use the new powers that councils have recently been given to control the number and density of HMOs, as well as continue to regulate the ones we already have. We'll continue to support the availability of more purpose-built student accommodation, which will also bring more choice.

We want to create an empowered and empowering city, with devolved decision-making, and budgets that are increasingly deployed locally. This is already happening – by way of just one example, in Jesmond £40,000 will be spent upgrading Jesmond Library and £28,000 on the swimming pool – decisions made locally which would not have been possible under the previous council’s centralised arrangements. The coming year will see the rollout of neighbourhood charters across the city together with a framework for showing how the council and partner organisations will be held accountable.

We’ll make the Newcastle City for Peace initiative a powerful promotional vehicle and catalyst for the equalities, cohesion and inclusion work of the council and its partners. We oppose those who seek to undermine cohesion and who peddle hate and discrimination in our city.

In the year ahead we’ll be putting in place plans for the city to welcome thousands of visitors in 2012 as we host matches in the Olympic Games football tournament. And we’ll be working hard to ensure that England’s 2018/2022 World Cup bid is given the best possible chance through the quality of the NewcastleGateshead hosting offer.

The detail of the hundreds of actions and targets to which the council is committed are set out in the City’s Corporate Plan, the Sustainable Communities Strategy and the Local Area Agreement Targets. The City Council will provide the leadership and focus to sustain these ambitious plans.