



# **Listening to People - Working for an Even Better Aberdeen**

**The Scottish Liberal Democrats' Action Plan  
for Aberdeen City Council 2017 to 2022 and beyond**

**28<sup>th</sup> April 2017**

## Introduction

Aberdeen is a city with a long and proud heritage, a city with a record of valuing education, a city with a strong entrepreneurial spirit and a city which embraces links across Europe and around the world.

Aberdeen's most valued asset is its citizens and the Liberal Democrats are committed to improving people's life chances and quality of life.

Our city has faced challenges in recent years but it remains a great place to live, do business, work, be educated and enjoy life. We welcome the City-Region Deal and support the objectives of the City Centre Masterplan.

Sadly, over the last five years the council has been led by a coalition of Labour, Conservative and Independent councillors who have inflicted the Marischal Square development on our city centre, allowed major council building projects to go over budget and over time and sought to pick fights with the Scottish Government.

Over the next five years Aberdeen's Liberal Democrat councillors will work to deliver the best possible services, to strengthen our economy and make Aberdeen an even better place to live, do business, work, be educated and enjoy life. Our key priorities to achieve this are:

- Taking action to improve the education and life chances of Aberdeen's children and young people.
- Empowering Aberdeen's citizens and communities.
- Improving transport within our city, including making a real start to repairing Aberdeen's crumbling roads and pavements.
- Making streets safer for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers.
- Delivering, with partners, 2,500 homes to rent by 2022 with the emphasis firmly on social housing.
- Protecting our city centre, Green Belt and local communities from inappropriate developments.
- Retaining and improving local community and sports facilities.

The details of our aspirations for Aberdeen and its citizens are outlined in this document. Key to delivering these aspirations will be achieving fairer treatment for our city and its citizens from the Scottish Government. We will continue to oppose the SNP Government's policies of centralisation and separation. Unlike other parties, we are not dictated to by the Central Belt and our priority will always be the interests of Aberdeen and its citizens.

## **The National Perspective : Scotland, the United Kingdom and Europe**

**Liberal Democrats believe that local elections should be about important local issues and basic services vital to local communities. Yet, in 2017, local policies and voters' decisions are likely to be dominated as never before by national challenges.**

The wellbeing of individuals, communities and our economy is subject to the major uncertainties of the Brexit vote to leave the European Union, the threat of a further referendum on Scottish independence and the sense of alienation still felt by many people after the banking collapse.

Liberal Democrats:

- Support a pluralist and federal view of government, reflecting personal, national and other identities and working through a series of partnerships at community, Scottish, United Kingdom, European and international levels.
- Support and wish to strengthen Scotland's place in the family of the United Kingdom, reformed along federal lines to better reflect the diversity of the nations and regions of the UK.
- Support the UK's continued membership of the European Union. We back a further referendum to give people across the UK the final say on the terms of any Brexit deal.
- Believe that local councils have their own statutory and democratic mandate and should not be regarded merely as agents of central government – and we strongly support the concept of parity of esteem between local and central government.
- Will champion the decentralisation of as much power as possible to local councils and communities.
- Will continue to work to give all citizens an effective stake in the communities of the future, making sure nobody is left out or alienated.
- Want local councils to work in a partnership of equals with the Scottish and UK governments and the European Union. We believe that people count, not public bureaucracy, and we reject the centralist philosophy that government knows best.

## **Empowering Aberdeen's Citizens and Communities**

**Liberal Democrats are committed to subsidiarity and the empowerment of communities and individuals. We are concerned that the SNP Scottish Government is centralising, not devolving, power within Scotland. In empowering Aberdeen's citizens and communities, Liberal Democrat councillors will:**

- Recognise that it is citizens and communities – rather than the city council - that are best placed to say what services they require.

- Seek to give greater control over appropriate services and facilities to local communities.
- In recognising that poverty and exclusion within every community in Aberdeen are real barriers to people participating in the life of our city:
  - Ensure that the impact on poverty and exclusion is considered in determining council policies and priorities.
  - Support the provision of fair and affordable banking, insurance and financial services, and the expansion of credit unions and advice services.
- Work to revitalise the city's network of community councils and, over time as they acquire greater democratic legitimacy, give them a greater role in Aberdeen's governance.
- Consult citizens, community councils and other partners on how best to better involve citizens in the work of the City Council.
- Review the operation of the council's Petition's Committee to make it easier for citizens to submit petitions to the council.
- Remove the barriers to people participating in their community and in local democracy by reaffirming the council's commitment to use plain English – and acting upon that.
- Respect and support the many volunteers who give their time and expertise to improve the quality of life in our city.
- Recognise the important role played in the life of local communities by the city's volunteer-managed community centres and, as a first step, double the core grant funding they receive from the council.
- Appoint both councillor and officer Champions for veterans of our armed forces.

## **Improving Education, Improving Life Chances**

**Liberal Democrats champion education to enable everyone to fulfil their potential and to contribute to society. Providing young people with a world class education is essential to our city's and country's economic future.**

Liberal Democrat councillors will:

- Play a full part in the Scottish Liberal Democrat's "Penny for Education" campaign to secure a transformative £500 million investment for education, and make sure extra money goes to schools to increase attainment for all pupils and to close the gap that exists between young people from poorer backgrounds and their classmates.

- Decentralise more powers to schools, working with parents, to take decisions over the mix of staff, ethos and local priorities, particularly through our Pupil Premium proposals to give extra support to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We oppose both the Conservative free-for-all proposals and the SNP plan for regionalisation of education. We support the continued role of local authorities to set standards and strategy, and provide supporting services.
- Help staff to deliver top quality leadership in our schools, delivering an education system which again challenges the best in the world.
- Prioritise investment in schools and front line education services.
- Work to attract more teachers to Aberdeen to address the shortage of teachers in our city.
- Continue to modernise the city's schools' estate so it meets the needs of Aberdeen's children and young people now and in the future.
- Seek to build closer links between our secondary schools, businesses, colleges and universities to improve connections and educational opportunities best suited to abilities and skills of our young people and adults returning to education.
- Continue to encourage and create alternative opportunities for those young people who have disengaged from the formal education system, including improving opportunities for vocational training, apprenticeships and informal learning.
- Ensure the council follows best practice as corporate parents to get the best outcomes for looked-after young people, those in kinship care and those with additional support needs such as autism, developmental disorders or mental health problems.
- Continue to seek to support young people to receive care in Aberdeen, through fostering, adoption and other services and seek to reduce "out of authority" placements.
- Support the expansion of extra-curricular activities.

## **Campaigning for Better Mental Health and Wellbeing**

**Liberal Democrats have led the campaign for better support for people with mental health problems and continue to campaign for much-improved services.**

Liberal Democrat councillors will seek to work in partnership with the NHS and others to:

- Make mental health support quick, effective and locally available to all those who need it.
- Make Aberdeen City Council a mental health champion, promoting good health and helping people back into employment when necessary.

- Make sure local education services identify young people with mental health problems and help them get early support, and continue to help them as they transfer to adult services.
- Take seriously the health and well-being of carers, providing support and respite.
- Support voluntary groups that help people tackle loneliness and isolation.

## **Providing Affordable Homes**

**Local councils should take an effective role in tackling poverty, cutting family living costs and building opportunity. Meeting the needs for affordable housing is one important step in this.**

**People in Aberdeen have faced difficulty in securing affordable and appropriate housing because of the high cost of buying and privately renting homes in our city. This impacts not just on the individuals and families directly affected but on our city's ability to attract and retain key public sector workers including teachers and NHS staff.**

Liberal Democrat councillors in Aberdeen will:

- Work with partners to produce a ten-year plan to increase the stock of affordable housing to rent to meet the needs of Aberdeen's citizens. The first stage of this initiative will concentrate on the delivery of 2,500 homes to rent by 2022 with the emphasis firmly on social housing. We will ensure that a significant proportion of these are council houses.
- Continue to invest in improving Aberdeen City Council's housing stock to ensure it meets the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and the Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing and continues to be maintained to these standards in future years.
- Invest in environmental improvements in and around our housing stock – such as painting of communal areas and properly maintaining and improving communal gardens.
- Extend Aberdeen's district heating network to offer affordable warmth to many more homes and help alleviate fuel poverty.
- Investigate the feasibility of Aberdeen City Council partnering with Our Power, a not for profit energy company which seeks to address fuel poverty for our tenants by offering lower energy unit costs with no premium for pre-payment meters.
- Ensure that Aberdeen City Council's housing stock provides more choice for our city's older citizens. To achieve this, we will support the continued conversion of some sheltered housing to amenity housing and other sheltered housing to very sheltered housing.
- Seek to work closely with the many good private landlords in Aberdeen.

- Ensure that sufficient resources are devoted to the monitoring and registration processes for private landlords and houses in multiple occupation.

## **Arts, Culture and Sport**

**In developing Aberdeen’s artistic, cultural and sporting life, Liberal Democrat councillors will:**

- Work to continue to attract high quality exhibitions and events to the City.
- Expand community-based arts education and arts development work for all ages and abilities.
- Enhance cultural access and participation.
- Retain Aberdeen’s network of branch libraries and develop them to meet the needs of today’s citizens.
- Work with partners to explore opportunities to develop a museum with a special emphasis on local history, including the history of the granite industry.
- Reinforce help for voluntary-led community centres with encouragement for communities to develop activities and programmes appropriate for their areas.
- Work with Sport Aberdeen, the NHS and others to promote the development of community-based initiatives in sports, exercise and nutrition to improve the health and wellbeing of residents of our city.

## **Protecting and Enhancing Our Environment**

**To protect and enhance our local and global environment, Liberal Democrat councillors will:**

- Continue to invest in Aberdeen’s award-winning parks and gardens and encourage access for all citizens.
- Promote and improve woodland and green spaces in our city and in particular launch a cast neutral “Second Tree for Every Citizen” programme to plant, with partners, a further 210,000 trees in Aberdeen by 2027.
- Invest in Aberdeen’s streetscapes and environment by properly maintaining existing street trees and undertaking a programme to replace missing street trees and plant new street trees.
- Protect our Green Belt and in particular avoid the coalescence of distinct communities.
- Back local communities with more effective enforcement of planning and environmental controls, delivering clean local environments.

- Establish a Community Environmental Improvement Fund for communities to access to implement their own local environmental projects.
- Investigate the desirability and feasibility of introducing one or more Low Emissions Zones to tackle air pollution in Aberdeen.
- Support the enhancement of public education to help maximise domestic recycling rates.
- Review current recycling and waste minimisation policies and practices within council establishments with the objective of increasing recycling levels.
- Seek to replace internal lighting in council buildings with LED lighting where practical.

## **Better Transport, Greener Transport, Safer Streets**

**The condition of many of Aberdeen's roads is lamentable. Potholes cause accidents to pedestrians and cyclists, rough roads destroy the comfort of bus and car journeys alike, while constant ad hoc road repair works are an inconvenience and a drag on the economy.**

In working to improve transport links within our city we must recognise that a substantial minority of households in Aberdeen do not have access to a car. We must also recognise that some communities are poorly, or not at all, served by public transport.

To ensure that Aberdeen has the local, national and international transport links required to appropriately serve our city, its citizens and businesses, Liberal Democrat councillors will:

- From 2018/19, invest at least £5 million annually in road and pavement repairs and resurfacing (more than doubling the 2017/18 budget) using the principle of right-first-time to improve the quality of repairs.
- In acknowledging the hardship being faced by the travelling public as a result of reductions in bus service routes and frequencies by private companies:
  - Work with Liberal Democrat parliamentarians and others for a review of the bus regulatory regime.
  - Work to secure greater competition in local bus services.
  - Investigate the feasibility of establishing alone, or with partners, council owned bus services in Aberdeen.
- Support measures to make travel to school safer and more child-friendly and to reduce congestion at school gates.
- Introduce modern and innovative designs for local streetscapes to make residential streets places for walking, talking and playing.



- Support measures to encourage safe walking and cycling and commit themselves to investing 10% of the council's transport budgets in walking and cycling.
- Work with Aberdeen Cycle Forum to deliver our shared vision of making Aberdeen a cyclist friendly city.
- Establish a public bike and e-bike sharing scheme.
- Support the development and improvement of footpaths across Aberdeen.
- Very substantially expand mandatory 20mph speed limits in residential areas where this is supported by communities.
- Build a new bridge over the River Dee just upstream from the existing Bridge of Dee.
- Work with partners, including Aberdeenshire Council and NESTRANS, to secure improved regional, national and international road, rail, ferry and air links for Aberdeen City and Shire.
- Continue to support the hydrogen buses project and the switch to electric and dual-fuel public and private vehicles.

## **A Vibrant and Diverse Local Economy**

**Aberdeen's Liberal Democrats supported the bid for a City-Region Deal and welcome the start of its implementation. We also support the City Centre Masterplan's objectives.**

We recognise the council has a responsibility to help deliver sustainable economic growth in Aberdeen and Liberal Democrat councillors will:

- Support the objectives of Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce's manifesto for the council elections.
- Work with our partners in ONE, Aberdeenshire Council and others to stimulate sustainable economic development.
- Encourage collaborations of our entrepreneurs in our universities, college and the private sector to develop businesses, services and employment opportunities in the city.
- Maximise the opportunities for the City Council, business community and citizens to benefit from renewable and sustainable energy projects.
- Work in partnership with the academic, business and other relevant sectors to ensure the long term future of the energy industry.
- Collaborate with other Scottish interests in sustaining links in bus, rail and air transport, locally, nationally and internationally.

- Seek to buy goods and services locally whenever possible, subject to complying with the law and public tendering requirements.
- Take account of “food miles” when purchasing food, subject to complying with the law and public tendering requirements.

## **Adult Social Care**

**Adult social care in Aberdeen is provided by Aberdeen Health and Social Care Partnership. In providing empathetic social care, Liberal Democrats will:**

- Support greater personalisation of care.
- Work to help older people stay in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.
- Implement policies to maintain quality of life of disabled citizens in our community.

## **Community Safety**

**Liberal Democrat councillors will:**

- Support, encourage and assist the work of Police Scotland in our city and the work of Community Policing Teams across Aberdeen.
- Improve safety and wellbeing, by continuing to invest in anti-social behaviour teams, Taxi Marshals, City Wardens and community safety projects.
- Develop shared frontline working practices by formalising and extending community safety teamwork at strategic level and in the community in each local area.
- Establish a City Council committee on public protection to work with and support the emergency services and to protect victims of crime and antisocial behaviour. The committee will robustly monitor the performance and resourcing of local service delivery and will hold the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer to account.
- Create a city commission to identify and agree specific integrated solutions for tackling the health and social problems caused by misuse of alcohol and drugs.

## **A Fair Deal for Aberdeen, Its Citizens and Businesses**

**Aberdeen City Council remains the worst funded council in Scotland. Year after year the Scottish Government gives Aberdeen City Council a smaller grant per citizen than any other council in Scotland.**

We recognise that the council depends upon its staff to deliver the services it provides and believe the council must properly reward, train and support its staff.

Liberal Democrat councillors will:

- Campaign for a fair deal for Aberdeen from the Scottish Government and specifically seek in the short term an increase in the “funding floor” from the current 85% to at least 90% of the Scottish average funding per citizen.
- Campaign for more fiscal freedom, greater power for local government and increased autonomy for our city.
- Continue long-term planning, and commit to engage with stakeholders as the council develops long-term financial and service plans.
- Seek to deliver services in house or in partnership with others which are sustainable, achieve best value and protect front line services.
- Invest in staff training and development.
- Introduce a non-domestic rates transitional relief scheme with a budget of £3 million in 2017/18.
- Support significant reform of non-domestic (business) rates to minimise the shock to businesses of dramatic changes in non-domestic rates bills.