

**Better schools
Better services
Better value**

**Welsh Liberal Democrat manifesto
for the local elections 2012**



**Welsh Liberal Democrats
Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru**

Contents

Introduction from Kirsty Williams AM	2
Our vision for local government	4
Our record	6
Council tax	6
Schools	8
Job creation	9
Regeneration	10
Health and social care	11
The environment	12
Housing	13
Community safety	14
Transport	15

Introduction from Kirsty Williams AM

Dear friend,

The local elections on May 3rd offer you the opportunity to make a real difference for your community. The Welsh Liberal Democrats have demonstrated that they can lead local councils to better public services, schools and value for money. Across Wales, in various local councils, the Welsh Liberal Democrats have delivered services for half the population of Wales with huge success.

In tough times, Welsh Liberal Democrats put local people first. That is why we have worked to keep council tax low. We know that council tax is an unfair tax and that in these tough times families are finding it difficult to manage their finances. Welsh Liberal Democrats in Cardiff and Wrexham have delivered the two lowest council tax rises in Wales, and this year Welsh Liberal Democrats in Swansea have frozen council tax.

Our priority as Welsh Liberal Democrats has always been to make sure that the most disadvantaged children get the help they need and deserve. When money is tight, you have to be really clear what your priorities are. Welsh Liberal Democrat councils have been investing in schools. We have increased spending on pupils and schools in areas where we are in control. We have also secured £32 million to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds through the Pupil Premium.

Welsh Liberal Democrats are putting local people first. We have a reputation for standing up for local people and for pushing for investment in the areas we represent. It is very easy for politics and politicians to become remote but Welsh Liberal Democrats keep in touch all year around. We go that one step further for the people in our community.

The message is clear. Voting for the Welsh Liberal Democrats will deliver you local champions who will fight for better run councils, investment in education and councillors who will campaign for you and your community.

This manifesto is an insight into the Welsh Liberal Democrat vision for local authorities and includes concrete examples of how we have improved communities across Wales.

It is a vision for better local services, better schools and better value for money. A vote for the Welsh Liberal Democrats is a vote for just that.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kirsty Williams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kirsty Williams,
Leader, Welsh Liberal Democrats

Our vision for local government

Wales is not just a nation; it is a nation of communities. These communities, whether rural or urban, are amongst our strongest assets as a country. But not every community faces the same challenges or requires the same solutions. That is why Welsh Liberal Democrats believe in giving each local council the ability to make the right decisions for their area.

Our vision is of a thriving local democracy, where everyone's voice is heard and power is not hoarded by one political party for years.

More powers for your local council will mean more tools to tackle the issues your community faces. More freedom will allow local innovation to flourish and less control from the Welsh Government will mean local needs will be addressed – not just the needs of the Labour party in Cardiff Bay.

Welsh Liberal Democrat councillors have **a reputation for being strong champions for their community.**

They care about their area, work hard all year around and stand up for local people.

Too many councillors forget why they are elected and become the voice of council bureaucracy in the community. **Welsh Liberal Democrats remain the voice of the community at County Hall.**

Better politics, that puts local people in charge

Welsh Liberal Democrats want greater freedom for local councils.

We want to introduce a single power of “general competence” to give local councils more choice over what they do; similar to the one Liberal Democrats have delivered in England. We want to reduce the number of specific funds that councils are given, funds that have to be spent on what the Welsh government wants not what local people judge is in the best interest of their community. Instead, this money should be given to local councils to spend on what they decide is important. This won't mean less money; instead it will mean councils can spend their money on what they want. We would begin these changes by introducing a Community Bill of Rights, guaranteeing new powers for councils.

But reforming local government needs to be about more than just giving additional powers to the town hall. Local democracy also has to be strengthened. Councils need to reflect the different political voices that exist in every community. Local democracy needs to be restored and renewed in some councils in Wales, especially those that have been run by Labour for decades.

Welsh Liberal Democrats have been campaigning for changes to the way local councils are elected for generations. We want to hear all views and believe that all communities deserve real democratic accountability. We want to see a new electoral system, the Single Transferable Vote, so that every vote counts and the local council is elected fairly – this will mean an end to the unrepresentative one-party politics that exists in many parts of Wales. The Scottish Liberal Democrats have already achieved this and local politics has been re-invigorated as a result.

We also need to clean up the way our councils do politics. Fairer elections will contribute to this by making sure many more seats are contested. We also want an independent review of the way councils manage their own affairs. That way we can promote the open and transparent practices of the best councils across Wales.

This is our vision for local government in Wales. Your council will have more opportunity to change your community. Your council will be elected fairly. And your council will be trusted to get on with the job.

Welsh Liberal Democrats save you money

Welsh Liberal Democrats have proven that we can invest in public services and keep council tax rises low.

Council tax is unfair and it hurts the poorest in society the most. That is why we have worked to keep council tax low. But we understand that local people want high quality services too. Welsh Liberal Democrats have improved services by making the councils we run more efficient and by reforming the services that we deliver. Too often, other parties just find money by raising unfair council taxes.

Welsh Liberal Democrats know how tough times are, which is why **we are providing real help.**

Welsh Liberal Democrat councils have had the **lowest council tax rate increases** of all councils in Wales.

Welsh Liberal Democrats have proven that we can manage local council finances well. The independent Wales Audit Office has said that Cardiff Council, led by the Welsh Liberal Democrats, “has clear and firm leadership within the Council and finances are managed effectively.” Welsh Liberal Democrat-led Wrexham Council “has strong and well developed financial management and a history of not overspending on its annual budget.”

Managing finances well delivers better services. For example, Cardiff Council invested in alley gates to discourage illegal fly-tipping. Instead of spending £1 million each year cleaning up this mess, we have now halved this cost. In Ceredigion, Welsh Liberal Democrats have ensured the council saved over £5 million on new buildings, when the Labour-run Welsh government spent more on a similar building in the same area. And a campaign by Welsh Liberal Democrats in Merthyr Tydfil has seen the council save thousands by cutting the number of plush events for Councillors.

In recent years, local authorities have started to find savings and improve public services by working together more, across a wider range of areas. When local authorities choose to do this they can share knowledge and save money.

However, the Welsh government has decided to take a command-and-control approach to this project, ordering councils to merge services as they direct. We want to see cooperation led by councils and subject to democratic, local scrutiny.

In Westminster, the Liberal Democrats have delivered a massive increase in the personal allowance, meaning that the taxpayers have saved £330 a year – with another £220 due next year.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats' insistence on value for money has meant that we can boast the lowest council tax increases of any party in Wales over the last 6 years. Cardiff and Wrexham have seen the two lowest council tax rises in Wales and Swansea has frozen council tax this year.

Our approach will ensure value for money.

Welsh Liberal Democrats deliver better schools

We believe that investment in education is the best way to tackle poverty and to strengthen our economy. But children in England have more than £600 each year spent on their schooling than children in Wales. That is why we have promised to close this funding gap between Wales and England, starting with the poorest pupils.

Welsh Liberal Democrat Assembly Members have used their influence to insist that a pupil premium was established in Wales, so that schools will be able to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment and close the spending gap. We ensured that education was treated with the priority it deserves during budget negotiations.

We secured £32million, focused on improving the attainment of the poorest pupils; schools will now receive £450 for each child who receives free school meals.

The pupil premium will begin to break the link, school-by-school, community-by-community, between poverty and attainment that has dogged our education system for too long.

Welsh Liberal Democrat-led councils have invested in schools in their areas. Under Labour, Cardiff had the second-worst funded schools in Wales. Now, led by the Welsh Liberal Democrats, it has the second best. In Powys, we have ensured each pupil aged 11-16 receives an extra £150 for their school. In Swansea, we have invested an extra £1.2 million to improve literacy and numeracy. And in Wrexham, we overhauled the way pupils were supported, nearly doubling the number of pupils achieving five GCSEs since 2004.

Our approach will help improve standards in schools.

Our priority as Welsh Liberal Democrats has always been to make sure the most disadvantaged children get the help they need to succeed.

Over the next year, **£32 million** will benefit children from disadvantaged backgrounds. **Nearly every school across Wales will benefit.**

Welsh Liberal Democrats create jobs

In difficult economic times, every part of the Welsh economy needs to be firing on all cylinders. Unfortunately, local authorities do not have all the powers that they need in order to stimulate the economy in their areas. The Welsh government keeps too much of that power for itself and is too remote to provide economic growth. Welsh Liberal Democrats have shown that local councils can attract investment in the local economy and support small businesses.

We would give local councils incentives to expand their economies and encourage local businesses by allowing councils to keep some of the additional business rates that they receive. We also believe it should be easier for councils to fund new developments by paying off loans from the additional business rates they receive.

Welsh Liberal Democrats have been investing in the Welsh economy. In Newport, work has begun on a major redevelopment of the city centre in order to attract big-name firms to the city; they have already attracted one large firm, creating up to 1,200 jobs. In Swansea, we have delivered progress on the SA1 development and developed a comprehensive strategy for improving the economy that will last until 2020.

We have also been supporting small businesses. In Cardiff, the Cardiff Capital Fund has been offering loans to new small and innovative businesses. This has been part of a wider regeneration of Cardiff which included completely regenerating the city centre by building a new retail centre, attracting John Lewis to the city and investing in a new library. These helped to rejuvenate the Cardiff economy and create jobs in the city.

Our approach will deliver job creation across Wales.

Welsh Liberal Democrats regenerate communities

Successive Labour governments and councils have let down Wales, failing to encourage regeneration. They have not built the strong, thriving communities that Wales needs. We want to see every community, rural and urban, benefit from economic growth and strong local services.

Local councils need to be at the forefront of regeneration efforts. They can best tap into local knowledge to rebuild communities in a way that reflects local priorities.

We want to bring communities back to life across Wales and provide everyone with quality local services, amenities and employment.

Strong and prosperous high streets and town centres with small, independent shops help ensure economically active communities. Across Wales, we have supported investment in town centres. In major cities, such as Newport, the council has unveiled plans to redevelop the city centre and in Cardiff a new retail centre has been built and a business district has been planned. But we've also supported smaller towns that are finding the economic downturn difficult by improving the appearance of neighbourhood and community high streets including regenerating district shopping centres and town centres in rural areas.

We've invested in local amenities to ensure that communities are thriving. In Swansea, we reopened the leisure centre after it was closed by Labour. In Cardiff, we have invested in libraries, saving and refurbishing many that were under threat when Labour ran the council as well as building a state-of-the-art central library in the city centre. We have also undertaken a major refurbishment of libraries in Aberystwyth.

Our record of investment in school buildings, new houses and local road improvements has helped regenerate communities across Wales.

We are also proposing a Community Bill of Rights, which would give local councils new powers to protect local heritage so it can be used to spur local regeneration. For example, important local buildings could receive extra protection from development and green spaces could be protected from development.

Our approach will see investment in local communities.

Welsh Liberal Democrats deliver healthier communities

Social care is one of the most important council responsibilities. Care services are provided to the most vulnerable in our society and it is our belief that we should look after those who need support. To do this we need to bring our social care system into the modern age. Social care must ensure people are looked after in ways appropriate to their needs by maximising their independence and maintaining their dignity in old age.

We will give you more choice over the care you receive so that it matches your needs. We want to see local councils and the NHS make greater use of personal budgets for care services – developing a personalised support plan that individuals can influence and control themselves to ensure it meets their needs.

Welsh Liberal Democrats will connect the disjointed provision of health and social care. We want to improve collaboration between the NHS and care services, beginning by extending the use of shared budgeting and collaborative working between the NHS and Social Services in order to reduce delayed transfers of care. In Swansea, we have invested extra money in social services and helped turn the department around.

This fits in with the work we have been doing where we run councils to ensure that services are reliable and give people freedom over the care they receive. In Powys, we gave free leisure centre access to the war wounded. In Conwy, we have developed a card to help carers receive council services at a reduced cost – rewarding them for the work they do.

Welsh Liberal Democrat councillors have also campaigned against ill-conceived hospital closures where there is no clinical reason for the change. We have marched against any possible down-grading of the hospital in Bronglais and opposed the temporary closures of Minor Injuries Units across Wales. We believe that better care is provided in local facilities and that closing them can worsen care provision and increase costs.

Our approach will support healthier living.

Welsh Liberal Democrats protect the environment

Climate change is the biggest challenge facing Wales for the next few generations and every part of Wales has to play its part to reduce our carbon footprint. However, the local needs of different parts of Wales vary and the local environment is different everywhere. So councils must be given the chance to adapt to their own local settings.

Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that re-using our waste is one of the best ways of helping the environment. It is often cheaper and cleaner to re-use these materials rather than creating new ones from scratch. It stops us from having to send our waste to landfill, helping the environment and cutting councils' Landfill Tax costs. Every household in Wales should have access to free, effective recycling.

Welsh Liberal Democrats have led the way in raising recycling rates in areas that we control. They have risen everywhere where we lead the council or where we are in charge of the recycling portfolio. When Labour last ran Cardiff Council in 2004, residents had to pay for recycling bags. Now, the Welsh Liberal Democrats have introduced free weekly recycling and recycling rates have risen to 50%. In Wrexham, recycling rates have quadrupled under the Welsh Liberal Democrats. In Conwy, a Welsh Liberal Democrat councillor was appointed to the council's cabinet and his dedicated work on recycling ensured the government's 40% target was reached two years early. He was also responsible for creating a new, smarter recycling system which means eight types of recycling can be collected at once.

We also need to tackle our carbon emissions. There are two ways of doing this; the first is to use energy more wisely, cutting down on waste. The second is to use more clean, renewable energy.

Across Wales, Welsh Liberal Democrat-led councils have been promoting renewable energy. Wrexham council has installed solar panels on social housing and used the profits to reduce the fuel bills of all social housing tenants in the area.

Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly are in the process of securing additional money for fuel poverty programmes that will help the poorest people in Wales save energy, keep warm and reduce their fuel bills.

Our approach will contribute to cutting carbon emissions.

Welsh Liberal Democrats create more affordable homes

Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that everyone has the right to adequate housing for the health and well-being of themselves and their family. We will only make this a reality if we increase the supply of affordable housing. Welsh Liberal Democrat-led councils have ensured that more affordable homes are available across Wales.

Every area has different housing needs. We want to give local councils more freedom to deliver so that they can build homes in accordance with local needs and with local support. The needs of rural communities are very different from urban communities.

We want local councils to have greater powers to restore homes that have fallen into disrepair. We want a Wales-wide Empty Homes Strategy to bring old homes back into use. This will include changing the rules so that it is as easy to renovate old houses as it is to build new ones and streamlining the process where local councils can purchase empty homes. We want councils to have greater powers to require affordable homes to be built as part of new housing developments – building on their existing abilities. In Cardiff, we have announced plans to build 350 new council houses; with greater powers, this figure could be higher.

It is increasingly difficult for young people to get on the housing ladder as the credit crunch has made it hard to get a mortgage without having a large deposit. We have already delivered or supported Mortgage Guarantee Schemes to help young people secure first home deposits in Cardiff, Conwy, Ceredigion and Powys. Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly are pushing for a Wales-wide scheme to help young people pay for a deposit on their houses.

Housing rights need to be available to everyone, regardless of what sort of home they live in. That is why we have proposed a law in the National Assembly to improve the rights of people living in Park Homes. We've also been working to increase the quality of student housing so that students' homes are safe and that the surrounding areas are more pleasant.

Our approach will create more affordable homes.

Welsh Liberal Democrats make communities safer

Welsh Liberal Democrats believe in freedom from crime and the fear of crime. Local councils play a vital role in making our communities safer and working with the police to deter criminal behaviour. Local people need to be involved so that local priorities are considered. Local councils also have to be trusted to use the tools that they have to make their communities safer.

We support a continued role for Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings and Community Safety Partnerships. We'd like to see more of an opportunity for young people to get involved in the process too. Greater freedom for communities to pursue their own priorities means that the police and the council can focus on the matters that concern local people.

We are pleased that the UK Government has rolled out the "101" number across the UK, giving residents an alternative to calling 999, releasing pressure on the emergency services and allowing people to raise community concerns. Welsh Liberal Democrats kept this going in Cardiff when Labour pulled the funding for it.

Across Wales, Welsh Liberal Democrats have been involved in making communities safer and in reducing crime. In Wrexham, we worked with the police to invest in 47 additional PCSOs across the borough and as a result crime rates have fallen. In Cardiff, we have invested heavily in alley-gating and introduced free graffiti removal. Across Wales, such as in Powys, our councillors have supported 20mph speed limits outside schools, helping to improve road safety.

Our approach will support safer communities.

Welsh Liberal Democrats support local transport links

Transport is essential to economic development but also for social justice. That is why Welsh Liberal Democrats want to support local authorities to improve their transport links. We want a coherent approach to transport policy by reducing the number of agencies involved in creating transport links by setting-up a regional transport authority, led by two or three local authorities.

We would encourage improved bus services in rural and poorer areas by re-regulating buses, so that local authorities can ensure that all of their communities are served.

The Labour-run Welsh government is making it more difficult for people to use public transport. Recently, they announced a 25% cut to the grant that helps bus companies cover fuel costs, and now fares will have to rise. At the same time, they are spending over £1 million each year subsidising flights from one part of Wales to another. We would prefer to see this money spent on other forms of public transport.

Councils play a vital role in ensuring that the road network across Wales is suitable for the modern age.

Across Wales, Welsh Liberal Democrats have been making it easier to get across Wales. In Newport, we invested £21 million to fix crumbling local roads in the city, long before the Welsh government woke up to the problem. This involved a one-off investment to bring the roads up to scratch and then on-going investment to ensure they never become so bad again. This has been so successful that we are planning to try it in Cardiff too.

Our approach will ensure better transport links.

Welsh Liberal Democrats

Freedom Central, Blake Court,
Schooner Way,
Cardiff Bay.
CF10 4DW.

Tel: (029) 2031 3400

Email: enquiries@welshlibdems.org.uk

Web: <http://www.welshlibdems.org.uk>

If you require this manifesto in
an alternative format, please
contact us on
(029) 2031 3400
or
enquiries@welshlibdems.org.uk

www.welshlibdems.org.uk

Printed, published and promoted by R. Thomas on behalf of Welsh Liberal Democrats all at Freedom Central, Blake Court, Cardiff. CF10 4DW.