



**Southwark Liberal Democrats**

**HOMES ■ KIDS ■ JOBS**  
**And a Council Tax Cut**

**Creating jobs,  
supporting local  
business**

February 2014

Southwark Liberal Democrats will:

1. **Create 1,000 new apprenticeships in the borough** to help revitalise the local economy and create lasting jobs.
2. **Open a new 'Jobs & Enterprise Hub'** offering information and support on jobs and training, as well as providing desk space for start-up businesses.
3. **Offer flexible business rates and provide business loans through the council** to help small companies in Southwark get the financial support they need to thrive and grow.
4. **Create a new "I'm shopping locally" parking scheme and introduce a levy on large supermarkets** to revitalise our high streets and show we are on the side of local shops and markets.
5. **Roll-out free wireless internet across the borough** to put Southwark on the digital map.

## ***Creating jobs and apprenticeships***

Liberal Democrats believe in enabling people to fulfil their potential, whatever their background. To do this, we know that Southwark must have a thriving and diverse local economy, providing genuine opportunities for local workers and small businesses.

We will support every resident who wants to get into paid work or progress in their current career. Re-energising Southwark's economy and creating new jobs will be a named top priority for a Liberal Democrat council administration.

We will also push for more apprenticeships in the borough, which have hugely increased under the Coalition Government (already doubling the number of positions created by the previous Labour government). The Government has also improved the quality of apprenticeships to make sure each one is a genuine opportunity to learn new skills and progress in the workplace, including setting minimum pay rates and training standards.

Apprenticeships have hugely increased under the Coalition Government, but there is still scope for many more. We will work with local businesses to offer 1,000 new apprenticeship opportunities for people who are out of work.

A Liberal Democrat-run Southwark Council will arrange regular discussions with business leaders in the borough so that the council supports business rather than putting up bureaucratic barriers. In return for helping existing businesses grow, we expect apprenticeships and jobs for local residents.

Southwark Liberal Democrats will seek to tap into the incredible resources presented by the number of large multi-nationals operating in Southwark. We want to partner with these companies to ensure they actively contribute to employment in the borough by creating a number of targeted placements to support local residents into work and further learning.

Giving our young people the best introduction to the work place is essential. We want to improve the quality of work experience programmes. To this end, we will work with

businesses and schools to set minimum standards for work experience opportunities, and seek out more organisations in the borough to provide places to students.

Southwark Liberal Democrats will work hard to create more jobs and apprenticeships in the borough by:

- Making the task of revitalising the local economy a top priority for the council, and a named priority for the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.
- Working with all Southwark businesses – whether they are local, national or international – to encourage local employment and get the best outcome for Southwark’s residents.
- Creating 1,000 new apprenticeships to revitalise the local economy and get people into lasting jobs. This will be additional to the apprenticeships being delivered already and will be achieved by working with local businesses to gain their commitment to take on new people as part of a Southwark Apprenticeship Scheme.

## ***A new Jobs Hub for Southwark***

A Liberal Democrat council will open a brand new 'Jobs & Enterprise Hub', likely to be based in a central part of the borough, to provide advice, support, job information and training opportunities to local residents.

The Jobs & Enterprise Hub will also offer desk space for start-up businesses – available to hire at low rates and spread throughout the building to ensure a mixed, vibrant community hub for job hunters, creative and small businesses alike.

The Jobs & Enterprise Hub will bring all the information about job vacancies and training in Southwark into one place to make it easier for residents to know what jobs are available, where and when. We will work with high quality local organisations, including established Business Improvement Districts, to assist people with accessing training, applying for jobs or tailored support for starting up their own businesses.

It will organise work and business related events and seminars, as well as become a central place where outside organisations can host advice sessions (such as high street banks giving advice on business lending, or higher education providers recruiting to vocational courses). We will seek to recruit a leading business person with connections to the borough to serve as the Hub’s ‘Entrepreneur Champion’ to mentor new start-ups and to support the council’s local economic growth.

Not all communities in Southwark are able to access employment equally. Young people, black and ethnic minority job seekers, persons with disabilities and the over 50s face significant barriers to employment. We will provide a step-by-step support service for individuals who are finding it difficult to get into work, training or self-employment.

## ***Supporting new businesses***

Southwark has a huge array of businesses of all different types and sizes, from global companies to new businesses being run from home. Each one of these must be supported to revitalise Southwark’s economy and create more jobs and opportunities in the borough.

A key concern of small businesses is the inability to borrow the money they need to set-up or expand because of the reluctance of banks to lend since the banking crisis. We will look at using council money to set up a council-run lending scheme for new and small businesses in the borough to help them grow and prosper. This would need to be carefully planned – and even then, due to the nature of the lending, it may be a minor financial risk for the council as some of the loans would inevitably be loss-making. However we would aim to run the scheme on a break-even basis. Even if such a scheme ran at a loss, it could still be of significant value to local businesses and the local economy, with wider financial and social benefits for the council and its residents.

The government now allows councils to keep a proportion of business rates. We will use the revenue generated to support and invest in new start-up businesses, which will in turn increase the rates of collection and provide funds for further business development.

The Business Development Team would help start up businesses and social enterprises to secure space in empty council-owned retail premises during their first year of business. The Team would also be on hand to offer legal, financial and business advice, including support during local recruitment and council procurement processes.

We will also offer discounts for businesses setting up on brown field sites to try and get these sites back into use and contributing to the vitality of local areas.

### ***Extending business rate discounts***

Local businesses often struggle to cope with the burden of their business rate bills. Although financial relief is available to qualifying small businesses under national schemes, Southwark Liberal Democrats believe that more needs to be done to target relief to the businesses that need it most.

New powers to do just that were granted to local authorities by the Coalition Government's Localism Act, and Liberal Democrats in Southwark want to put these into action. Under the new rules, local councils can offer any level of business rate relief to individual local businesses, as long as they can fund the discounts from council budgets.

A Liberal Democrat administration will make use of these new powers to encourage a rich business mix on our high streets and support the struggling local businesses that are so highly valued by our communities. Relief will be offered to attract new businesses to underdeveloped areas that are lacking a thriving or diverse business mix.

### ***Revitalising high streets and markets***

Local communities and businesses must be central to shaping the future of their local high streets. We will give community councils a mandate to review and manage some of the stress and risk associated with keeping a business going in certain parts of the borough, and to take a proactive approach to revitalising our town centres.

We will also look at the business mix on offer on our high streets, working with planning and licensing authorities and community councils to avoid saturation by betting shops, payday loan shops and takeaways.

Supermarkets are valued by many customers. However the huge corporate advantages of Tesco and Sainsbury's can stifle local competition and reduce business diversity. Campaign organisation Local Works estimates that every time a supermarket opens, 276 jobs are lost locally. We will redress this balance by introducing a levy on large retail outlets of up to 8.5% of their rateable value (stores with a rateable value over £500,000). This has already been implemented in Northern Ireland where it has helped level the competition. The levy income would then be invested in supporting small, local businesses and improving high streets.

We will work with relevant transport authorities to introduce an 'I'm shopping locally' parking scheme which would give local shoppers a short window of free parking if they are supporting local retailers. We would also explore with local businesses the possibility of introducing a loyalty reward scheme for local shoppers. Additionally, we will continue to support Southwark's markets and work with vendors to produce a quality, diverse and attractive offer for local shoppers.

Under the Liberal Democrats Southwark was awarded Fair Trade status. This has lagged in recent years under a Labour administration, with the borough failing to properly renew its Fair Trade status. We will give much-needed energy back to this campaign and work with local partners to develop plans to act on our responsibilities.

### ***Free public Wi-Fi***

Southwark is an extremely well-located borough and attracts high volumes of commuters, business customers and tourists. Whilst it is steeped in centuries of history, to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Southwark must continue to be seen as being at the forefront of technology, and well-suited to the needs of those living and working here.

To ensure this is the case, Southwark Liberal Democrats will install free public wireless internet access (Wi-Fi), propelling Southwark into a digital borough.

The new scheme will offer at least one hour a day of free, easily accessible Wi-Fi to all residents and visitors. Even beyond the free time allocation, users would benefit from 24/7 access to online council services, or could choose to purchase more time.

The free Wi-Fi would be provided in partnership with an existing internet provider. The provider would likely be able to charge for access beyond the free time limit, meaning that the project would be at nil or very little cost to the council. Similar schemes have already been set-up in other London boroughs – some offering unlimited free internet access. The scheme could initially be piloted along the riverside and in town centres of the borough (such as Bermondsey, Peckham, Walworth and Dulwich), with a view to expanding it throughout all public areas and commercial areas in Southwark.

We will also seek to support digital innovation in areas facing digital challenges, including continuing to fight for faster broadband access in the Rotherhithe peninsula where it is still unacceptably slow.