One Cambridgeshire Fair for All

The Labour Party Manifesto for the 2017 Cambridgeshire County Council Elections
Foreword

Cambridgeshire is one of the most unequal counties in the country. The area of Greater Cambridge is a major national and global economic driver. But, in the north of the county, especially Fenland, as well as areas of Cambridge, people suffer from high levels of deprivation and a chronic lack of investment. In the same county as the University of Cambridge and Silicon Fen are some of the worst performing schools in Britain. Differences in life expectancy between the north and south of the county remain shockingly large.

Fighting inequality is Labour’s number one priority on Cambridgeshire County Council. All Labour’s policies aim to make Cambridgeshire a fairer place to live for everyone, whether rural or urban, wealthy or poor. We will help local businesses create jobs and apprenticeships by pushing for essential transport and communications infrastructure and more efficient public services. We will support young people into work and training through both targeted and universal support services.

Cambridgeshire enjoys some of the most diverse areas in the country. The county should aspire to become better integrated by reducing inequality. Residents and visitors need to be free to live their lives in our county whatever their income, race, gender, religion, beliefs or sexuality, and without fear of intimidation from right-wing political parties and groups. We will work to defend communities threatened by organisations preaching racism or discrimination, and work to promote mutual understanding and integration.

A Labour County Council would:

- Stand up for Cambridgeshire by protecting crucial services and demanding proper national funding from the government.

- Grow Cambridgeshire’s economy fairly and sustainably by investing in major infrastructure projects across the county, spreading the benefits of growth from Greater Cambridge.

- Reduce poverty and inequality by prioritising funding for the poorest areas and fighting for a Living Wage for all low-paid workers, particularly council employees and those employed by the County Council’s agencies.

- Prioritise the wellbeing of the county’s children and young people and our elderly and disabled adults despite the social care crisis being caused by a failure of national government funding.

- Improve bus services and cycling provision to reduce congestion and pollution, and work with the City Deal and devolution agenda to deliver housing and infrastructure by consent.
Contents

1. Council Finance 4
2. Economy and Infrastructure 6
3. Environment and Climate Change 8
4. Adults and Social Care 10
5. Schools, Children and Young People 12
6. Public Health, Wellbeing and Mental Health 14
7. Highways and Community Services 15
8. Governance 17
1. Council Finance

The council faces huge financial challenges as a result of the abolition of national government grant – the Revenue Support Grant – by 2019-20. Meanwhile the County Council has refused to raise additional council tax as recommended by national government.

It is deeply regrettable that the government is forcing councils to increase council tax to remain solvent. Raising council tax should always be a last resort but the government has left Cambridgeshire County Council without any choice. The costs of failing to deliver proper services now will generate far bigger costs in the future. Until the government wakes up to its responsibilities in providing support for the neediest and most vulnerable by national grant, a Labour County Council would step up to the plate.

It is only by working with our hardworking and talented staff to transform council services and make them as efficient as possible that we will be able to continue to deliver the services residents need. Continuing change in the way we operate is inevitable to allow the council to deliver more for less, but Labour will ensure that this never compromises our principles of public service and fairness. Labour is determined to deliver for all residents while prioritising projects and policies that will make a real difference to those who need our help the most. Further, it is vital that the County Council creates its own revenue streams so that it is less reliant on council tax and national government grant.

We will campaign for the various District Councils and the County Council to work together to remove duplication and confusion, and enable more efficient local government, greater democratic accountability and cost-effective public services. By streamlining and reducing the costs of local government, we can release funding to pay for better public services and economic growth, helping create jobs across the county. We will work to establish integrated planning arrangements for major sites, bringing together county and district plans on housing, transport and infrastructure, all with a common purpose and timetable.

By paying public-sector workers a decent wage, the County Council will act as a positive role model for the private sector. A living wage would also contribute to kick-starting the economy recovery by putting money into people's pockets. We will push for the Living Wage to be paid to all low paid workers, council employees and those employed by council funded agencies. We will campaign for other councils within the county to persuade all major employees to pay the Living Wage.

A Labour County Council would:

- Pay all employees of the County Council the National Living Wage and not George Osborne’s phoney ‘living wage’. This would be £8.25 rather than £7.20
per hour. We would also reform the County Council’s agency policy so that only employers accredited by the Living Wage Foundation receive contracts. We would create five new Living Wage apprenticeships at the County Council across all departments to mitigate the impact of staffing cuts and create new job opportunities for young people.

- Invest more in the County Council’s transformation programme as and when funds become available. To continue to provide the best services possible with fewer resources, we have to look at new ways of delivering services. We will focus on non-profit or social methods of transformation rather than contracting out or privatisation.

- Conduct a social audit of all council spending to ensure that we direct scarce resources to the services which do most to help families and individuals who are struggling and vulnerable.

- Campaign within the Local Government Association for the restoration of national funding through the Revenue Grant Settlement.

- Create a £29m commercial property investment fund over five years. This would allow the County Council to use commercial rents to fund services. This fund would invest in commercial property primarily in Cambridgeshire but also in other opportunity areas to generate revenue from commercial rents to reinvest in council services. It would also be used to invest to increase revenues on County Council assets like the publicly-owned county farms estate. Each investment would produce a return of 6% per year.

- Consider using the County Council’s prudential borrowing powers to purchase property and produce further investment.

- Increase the County Council’s reserves from the currently dangerously low levels so that the County Council is prepared for the unexpected and can invest more into services, such as looked-after children, when it is required.
2. Economy and Infrastructure

More and more people are moving into the county and it is one of the fastest growing in the country. However, too much of the growth is focused on Greater Cambridge. The county needs major infrastructure projects to relieve the pressure on Cambridge and spread the wealth across all Cambridgeshire. We will develop a comprehensive economic vision for Cambridgeshire by building an economic base with a healthy mix of knowledge-based businesses, skilled manufacturing and engineering, public sector employment and innovative start-ups supported by high-quality infrastructure.

We would make the County Council a provider of affordable homes for sale and rent in well-connected locations across the county to help alleviate the housing crisis and provide vital new funding streams for the authority. Everyone has the right to acquire the skills necessary for employment and everyday living and we will campaign to ensure that the County is at the forefront of providing education and upskilling for life.

To develop the county’s economy fairly and sustainably, transport infrastructure must be a priority. Fenland suffers from the worst 'transport poverty' in England due to the high cost of motoring, lack of public transport, and distances travelled to access essential services. Many communities are very isolated. We will examine ways of putting bus services back under democratic control, especially using a second devolution deal, to plough profits back into public transport, not into the pockets of shareholders. We would invest in better rural bus services, and will work to restore subsidised bus services where no viable alternatives are available. We will also encourage co-operatives and social enterprises to provide additional community transport options.

A Labour County Council would:

- Push for a second devolution deal to secure bus franchising powers for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough using the Bus Services Bill. This will allow the mayoral combined authority to take control of local bus services on a model like Transport for London with the power to franchise local bus services. The mayoral combined authority would have the power to specify bus services and invite bus operators to bid for the franchises. We would work with the new mayoral combined authority to plan better bus services and meet the needs of rural communities.

- Campaign for more rail investment, including completion of the Oxford to Cambridge line, contributing to the Wisbech rail link, opening the Soham and Ely North railway stations, developing the Addenbrooke’s railway station, increasing freight capacity and reducing bottlenecks at key junctions. We would also work with Network Rail to make sure the Peterborough to Stansted rail service stops at the new Cambridge North railway station.
• Work with the City Deal and a wider partnership to deliver the infrastructure schemes and transport measures needed to support sustainable growth in Cambridge. We would create a city centre ‘clean air zone’ to reduce traffic congestion and pollution as well as encouraging walking, cycling and public transport. We would tackle unacceptable levels of commuter parking and secure additional investment from government and transport companies. This would be in line with Cambridge City Council’s ‘7 Point Plan to Cut Congestion in Cambridge’:
  www.cambridgelabour.org.uk/labour_s_citywide_congestion_plan.

• Review slippage in the County Council’s capital programme and create an investment fund to bring forward infrastructure projects.

• Abolish the £1 Park and Ride parking charge. The charge was imposed in the dying days of the minority Conservative administration despite opposition from residents and the Labour Group. Implementation of the charge was a fiasco. Usage of the sites has plummeted. It has never raised the expected revenue. It has generated extra parking problems for nearby residents and worse congestion and pollution especially in Cambridge.

• Restore the Cambridge city centre shuttle bus service. Although it was abolished by the Conservatives several years ago, it operated in an area poorly served by the commercial transport network. It reduced pollution and congestion in the city centre while improving accessibility especially for the elderly and disabled.

• Provide affordable homes for sale and rent by making the County Council a housing provider. These will be mixed communities which will also create vital new funding streams for the County Council.

• Keep Fenland Learning Centres open to provide much-needed skills investment in a deprived area of the county.

• Introduce a county-wide ‘Pedestrians’ Charter’ to protect their rights.
3. Environment and Climate Change

Environmental concerns and dealing with climate change are at the top of the Labour Party's agenda, illustrated by our support for reduced car use and better public transport, energy efficiency throughout the county's properties and a reduction in the county's carbon footprint. We will pursue sustainable green policies throughout the County Council. We will pioneer plans to cut emissions from buses and taxis.

One-third of Cambridgeshire is below sea level and the County Council's refusal to take the risk of climate change seriously threatens property and livelihoods across the county. Labour will support a comprehensive strategy for the management of flooding and draught conditions across the county. We believe in renewable energy and we will encourage organic practices throughout the County Council's extensive farms estate.

A Labour County Council would:

- Develop a climate change strategy which aims to make Cambridgeshire a zero-net carbon county by 2050. To lead the way, we would reduce emissions from our own estate and property portfolio and work with partner organisations across Cambridgeshire to cut carbon emissions. We would invest further in green energy using council income and applying for national grants to reduce the county's carbon footprint.

- Divest the County Council's substantial pensions and investments fund from fossil fuels. This would make the County Council fossil fuel free and a model for other public sector as well as private sector organisations.

- Work with residents, businesses and other organisations to reduce vehicle emissions across Cambridgeshire. We would work with coach, bus and taxi operators to seek funding for transformational reductions in diesel emissions to improve public health.

- Provide high quality green infrastructure. We would use all opportunities offered by planning, the City Deal and other projects to achieve green public spaces. This includes planting more trees and ensuring that new developments provide the open space and recreational facilities that residents need.

- Promote energy-saving schemes by building on the collective energy switching policy to use the collective power of Cambridgeshire residents to negotiate cheaper energy prices. We would improve promotion and advertising and create a private sector energy officer to improve information, publicity and uptake of energy and insulation schemes such as the Green Deal and the Energy Companies Obligation.
• Develop a new food nutrition, production and security policy. This would develop the principles of the previous Labour government’s ‘Food 2030’ strategy which was abolished by the coalition government. Our policy would prioritise reducing the number of people in food poverty as well as those suffering from malnutrition and obesity due to changes in food processes and diets. It would also ensure that everyone in Cambridgeshire is ‘food literate’ in the same manner that local authorities are attempting to increase online literacy. We would provide guidance and best practice information for food producers. We would review the provision of school meals and ensure they are sustainably sourced with good educational initiatives for children.
4. Adults and Social Care

The County Council, much like other primary-tier authorities across the country, is undergoing a social care crisis. Despite our ageing population, the failure of national government to fund elderly social care properly combined with the County Council’s refusal to use its powers of taxation to deal with the issue has made the problem far worse. NHS providers like Addenbrooke’s struggle to introduce out-patients into the social care system due to a chronic shortage of affordable and high quality care, leading to major emergencies especially in winter months.

We will lobby the government to introduce a fair and permanent system for charging for adult residential care and home care. We will press for an increase in funding for adult social care, services for older people and those with learning disabilities. We will campaign to ensure that the highest standards of care are provided to older and disabled people. Every person receiving care should be treated with the utmost dignity and respect.

Since 2010, Cambridgeshire County Council has faced seven years of ruthless austerity. All Revenue Support Grant provided by national government – once the main source of funding for all councils alongside council tax – will no longer exist by the year 2019-20. Over the same period, Cambridgeshire County Council has experienced a growth in the number of adults and children in need of social care. However, all the coalition and Conservative governments have done is cut the grant given to the County Council to meet that need. Meanwhile the Better Care Fund simply recycles existing funds and provides no new support for care services.

These devastating cuts are sometimes dressed up as ‘transforming lives’, ‘service improvements’, and ‘building community resilience’. But these are immoral and unfair cuts impacting savagely upon the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in society.

But adult social care is not about providing elderly people with affordable care and dignity in retirement. It is also about protecting adults with physical and mental disabilities. Further, the County Council nearly abolished the Local Assistance Scheme altogether before the Labour Group saved it at a full council meeting. This fund is a last-resort, emergency crisis welfare fund for the neediest and most vulnerable victims of almost unimaginable circumstances. We oppose remodelling the service and we would invest further contingency support. We would do more to advertise the fund.

A Labour County Council would:

- Raise the Adult Social Care Precept by 6% over the coming four years as well as raising council tax by 1.99% each year over the coming four years. This would inject at least a further £7.5m into our crisis-hit social care system.

- Reverse the £163,000 cut and increase funding for the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme to provide vital crisis assistance for victims of domestic violence.
violence, the homeless and other victims of unexpected and serious emergencies. We would better advertise the fund and integrate it with the NHS, social care and council services.

- Invest £6.5m for care and support for adults with learning disabilities to increase their independence and resilience.

- Invest £2m for care and support for adults with physical disabilities and autism to help them live more independently by supporting their personal budgets.

- Increase the number of care providers, create a new home care service and increase the hourly rate for home care. This would involve a care home owned and operated by the County Council.
5. Schools, Children and Young People

Despite the sterling work of generations of parents and volunteers to secure fairer funding for Cambridgeshire, recent announcements by the government still leave the county's schools among the worst funded in the country. Our nursery schools are fighting for survival and government funding changes could lead to growing disparities between schools depending on their size and whether they are in urban or rural locations. Due to high levels of deprivation, the safety of children in the county remains a cause of major concern and more work needs to be done to make sure children can become ‘looked after’ by the County Council and remain in safe and secure environments.

We will lobby the government to improve funding for Cambridgeshire’s school children following the failure of the new school funding formula. We would also work with voluntary organisations and staff to protect nursery schools from closure and oppose the creation of new grammar schools. We will work to ensure better planning for school places, especially in high growth areas like Cambridge, so that parents can make an informed choice for their children and for the provision of high quality school buildings. We will push for proper and meaningful consultation to take place when schools propose to convert to academies and we will campaign for schools to remain within local authority control. Finally, we will campaign to ensure that ‘looked after’ children, including child refugees, receive the best possible care and attention.

A Labour County Council would:

- Redouble efforts as part of the fairer funding for Cambridgeshire’s schools campaign to make sure all schools, no matter their size, type or location, receive a proper level of funding on a par with the rest of the country.

- Create free breakfast clubs to be established at all schools to ensure that all children receive at least one nutritious meal a day.

- Campaign for public and private sector employers to offer apprenticeships to young people and work with other councils to get young people into education, training or work.

- Invest a further £1.6m in budgets for looked-after children. The County Council’s plans to reduce the number of children in care are wholly unrealistic and the Department for Education’s own research into current children service provision concluded: ‘In the future, the local councils face risks such as the growing need among some groups in the population, for example child sexual exploitation and mental health, which are particularly uncertain and have implications for future spending. The capacity to forecast and prepare for these risks is very limited.’ We would improve the County Council’s capacity wherever possible.
• Restore Locality Teams which work with children in the most disadvantaged families.

• Keep the current level of children’s centre provision.

• Keep special needs support for schools and restore the Cambridgeshire Race and Diversity Service. This service provides translation services for schools and educational providers for children from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

• Build a new secondary school for Cambridge.

• Continue to rehome Syrian refugees, especially child refugees, working with the Home Office and the network of Eastern region councils.
6. Public Health, Wellbeing and Mental Health

Over recent years, primary-tier authorities like Cambridgeshire County Council have become responsible for public health. Although public health funding was supposed to be ring-fenced by the government, cuts to NHS and social care services have had a knock-on effect on public health provision in Cambridgeshire and resources are becoming increasingly scarce.

The integration of public health into the County Council offers an opportunity to develop a wider health agenda for Cambridgeshire, which draws on local knowledge, capacity and participation. In addition, public health expertise should be utilised to assess the health and wellbeing impact of all County Council policies so that the public can be assured that its health is being protected.

The County Council also performs a major scrutiny function over the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in overseeing NHS services. We will continue to ask the tough questions, especially as the CCG is currently developing its ‘Sustainability and Transformation Plan’ for the future of NHS services in Cambridgeshire.

Mental health is a hidden issue in our society and a Labour County Council would work to increase education and understanding as well as invest more in preventative support and mental health services. The voluntary sector is currently under too much pressure in delivering mental health support. The renegotiation of mental health contracts is reducing the quality of the service which should be provided by the local authority.

A Labour County Council would:

- Reverse the £130,000 cut on voluntary sector contracts for adult mental health support.
- Implement the Mental Health Concordat in partnership with other organisations, refocusing council service delivery on the needs of residents experiencing mental health issues.
- Campaign for national government properly to fund NHS and allied services without recycling existing money in the Better Care Fund.
- Require public health scrutiny of all new policies to ensure there is no negative impact on population health and wellbeing.
7. Highways and Community Services

Community services stretch from well-maintained highways to community groups and decent libraries – well stocked and under public ownership. But roads and pavements in Cambridgeshire’s towns and cities are a disgrace. In the busiest parts of the county, tripping hazards present a constant danger to the elderly and some streets are virtually inaccessible for wheelchairs and the disabled. Cyclists are at risk on roads and dual-use pavements. We will ensure that road safety activity targets the poorer parts of the county where children are four times more likely to suffer serious injuries in road accidents than those who live in the wealthier communities. We will demand more investment in the repair and maintenance of roads and pavements. We will work to ensure that investment in infrastructure is sensitive to the local environment and is sustainable.

We will push for investment in high-quality strategic cycle routes across the county, segregated cycling routes wherever possible, more and safer cycle parking, and we will campaign to make dangerous junctions safer for cyclists. We will promote cycling and walking and to work with parents, teachers and school governors to organise ‘walking buses’ and safer routes to schools.

All the County Council’s libraries should remain open and in public ownership. They are the foundation of a civilised society. They also provide vital recreational and employment opportunities for everyone. We would make sure libraries are well stocked and provide modern services for up-skilling as well as leisure activities. We would also turbocharge the current agenda of transforming libraries into ‘community hubs’ at the centre of our communities, towns and villages where residents can access a range of services.

Community service provision would form the basis of Labour’s anti-poverty strategy. We would make sure all council funding is targeted toward reducing poverty and inequality by making sure residents receive the best deal from energy companies and access the services to which they are entitled. We would also harness the power of the voluntary sector in providing credit and support services for residents so that communities become stronger and more resilient despite seven years of harsh austerity policies from national government.

A Labour County Council would:

- Prevent library closures and keep all libraries open, well stocked and under public ownership. We would reverse the recent £325,000 cut to the library book fund and turbocharge the ‘community hubs’ strategy.

- Invest £10m over four years in an emergency urban roads and pavements repair fund. We would also invest in better maintenance of verges and footpaths as well as roads, pavements and cycle ways. We would reverse
cuts to the ‘Rights of Way’ budget and grit more of the county’s busiest pavements, especially those in town centres and near schools.

- Protect grants to community organisations providing crucial, bread-and-butter services to support those who stumble upon tough times.

- Tighten criteria on discretionary funding to ensure that it focuses on the most disadvantaged. We do not wish to reduce any grants for organisations which fund activities or projects that have a positive benefit for the community but grants to organisations directly helping those struggling should take priority.

- Provide more dropped kerbs and other improvements in accessibility for people with mobility issues.

- Establish a Cambridgeshire anti-poverty strategy. We would provide more access to credit unions for those struggling with living costs in Cambridgeshire and who resort to pay-day loan companies charging extortionate interest rates. We would provide help with energy and water bills for households paying over-the-odds for their water based on rateable values where no meter has been fitted. Water companies offer many free services but uptake is low and many residents are unaware of the savings they could make. Labour would develop a new scheme to assist residents review their water bill and establish whether they would benefit from changing to a meter, moving to the assessed charge basis or taking up other water efficiency schemes.
8. Governance

The County Council was poorly served by a ‘strong leader and cabinet’ system of governance which existed until May 2014 after the Conservatives lost their majority in the 2013 County Council elections. The County Council was dominated by Conservatives who for decades treated it as their personal fiefdom while cutting services and totally ignoring places like the city of Cambridge and at the same time neglecting their back yard in Fenland. Conservatives themselves now concede that the County Council has been left inefficient and bureaucratic after they controlled it.

We support the continuation of the ‘committee system’ of governance which was established in May 2014. In a hugely politically diverse county like Cambridgeshire, this system means that places like Cambridge – which has not returned a Conservative county councillor for over a decade – are finally no longer ignored. It also means areas like Fenland which have been taken for granted for years by the Conservatives can make their voices heard.