INTRODUCTION

The General Election saw a fantastic result for Labour in Birmingham and in May 2018 we will fight elections in every ward in the city for the first time in more than a decade.

Birmingham, like other towns and cities across our country, has suffered huge cuts under the Tories, with over £650 million axed since 2010.

Despite this, the Labour council has built more homes in the last eight years than any other council in the UK. It has also attracted thousands of new jobs, helping young people in particular get the skills they need to further their careers, and helped new businesses start and grow. The Commonwealth Games bid provides a huge opportunity to build on this success and bring world-class sport to the West Midlands.

Two days before polling day in June thousands of people turned out to our Birmingham rally to hear Labour’s message of hope that rising inequality and poverty are not inevitable, that we can invest in our NHS, schools and social care. We can challenge a system rigged in the interests of an elite few.

But to change that failing system, we need your ideas, your input, your enthusiasm. Labour is your party - and your priorities, as well as your skills and dedication, must shape it.

So please share your knowledge and get involved with this policy process so that together we can build a city that works for the many, not the few.

Jeremy Corbyn MP
Leader of the Labour Party
DEAR FRIEND

Next year we fight elections in every ward for the first time since 2004. The result will decide who runs Birmingham for the next four years.

The stakes could not be higher.

If we win, we get the chance to build on the ideas of Labour’s brilliant general election manifesto – that helped us deliver record Labour majorities in the general election.

If we lose, we will watch a Tory Council that ran Birmingham into the ground work together with a Tory Government that has got it in for our city – just as Britain leaves the European Union.

We can’t let that happen.

We have to win the battle of ideas.

And that means we need your help getting our election manifesto right. So, please join in.

Give us your ideas for the plan we put to the people of our city next year.

Ian Ward, Leader Birmingham City Council
Liam Byrne MP, Chair, Birmingham Labour Policy Committee
This Tory government has got it for Birmingham...

1. Our council has been forced to make savings of over £650 million since 2010 – that’s over 75 per cent of the current net budget. By 2019-20, Birmingham City Council must make savings of a further £100.5 million.
   • We’ve already lost around 40 per cent of our workforce yet Theresa May found £1 billion to fund her friends in Northern Ireland’s DUP to prop her up in power.

2. While the police force in leafy Surrey has lost £28 million, the West Midlands Police has lost an incredible £145 million – that means we have now lost 2,000 officers, reducing the Force’s size to the smallest ever. Meanwhile, violent crime is soaring.

3. Our older citizens have been hit hard: since 2010, our adult social care budget has been slashed by 48% – and we get no additional money in social care support grants. This means 7,000 less day care spaces across Birmingham.

4. The Tories want to cut our school budgets by £50 million – forcing schools to sack teachers, teaching assistants and vital support staff.

5. Never forget, the last Tory Council ran our city into the ground:
   • The Tories’ propped up the city by borrowing millions in dodgy loans – locking the council into deals worth over £110 million at interest rates of over 4%, locked in for 50-60 years. One 50 year loan from Midland Bank was at 11.5% – when the Bank of England minimum lending rate was 0.5%.

   • The Tory Lib-Dem failure to sort out Equal Pay and Single Status exposed the council to successful legal action and an eye-watering £1.3 billion bill.

   • The Tories’ mismanaged contract with Capita meant Birmingham paid tens of millions of pounds more than necessary for IT. At one stage 10% of the revenue budget was being diverted to pay for IT. And then the Tories’ extended the contract until 2021.

   • The Tories’ built the Library of Birmingham without a plan to pay for it: the costs are nearly £2 million a month – half on interest payments for the £187 million build.

   • The Tories’ failed to sort out refuse collection and keeping our streets clean – they preferred to stick to outdated plastic sacks instead of wheelie-bins, and spending millions on un-affordable overtime.
Our ambition is different. Since 2012, we’ve taken the right decisions for our city.

1. Labour promised to get Birmingham back to work – and we’ve delivered:

   With an economy worth £24.8 billion, we’ve delivered economic growth of nearly 20% in the last five years – one of the largest growing city economies in the UK.

   - Labour’s Business Charter for Social Responsibility has accredited 421 organisations, creating over 1,000 jobs, over 400 work placements, over 200 apprenticeships – and 623 contracted employees uplifted to the Living Wage.
   - We’re now home to 34,000 companies and 700 international firms and last year we were the most entrepreneurial city in Britain outside London: 17,473 new businesses opened their doors in 2016 – an increase of 25% on the previous year.
   - Birmingham has surpassed London to become the country’s leading city for business growth rates in 2016.
   - We attracted 2,580 foreign direct investment (FDI) jobs in 2016/17 – created from 74 FDI investments.
   - Nearly 2 million square feet of office space has come on-line with huge projects transforming our city.

2. We promised jobs for our young people – and we’ve delivered:

   - Our Birmingham Youth Promise guarantees young people education, employment, training or work experience within 4 months of leaving a job – and supports 10,000 young people
   - Our Birmingham Jobs Fund created 4,527 job starts for people aged 16-24 – of which 3,638 (80%) are apprenticeships.
   - The new Young Talent for Business programme has created 142 jobs starts for people aged 16-29 – of which 30% are apprenticeships.

3. We promised to re-build council houses – and we’ve delivered:

   - We’ve built 2,217 homes since 2012 – more than any other council in Britain – creating over £2 billion in investment for the City.
   - Birmingham City Council has built more affordable homes than all the city’s housing associations put together.

4. We promised a Living Wage – and we delivered:

   - Today Birmingham City Council pays the Living Wage to around 4,000 employees (1,600 of them working in schools across the city).
   - Through the Birmingham Business Charter for Social Responsibility, more than 600 employees of our contractors or service providers have had their pay increased to the Birmingham Living Wage.

5. We’ve put Birmingham back on the international map – beating all-comers to become Britain’s candidate to host the Commonwealth Games
Now as Britain leaves the European Union, we have to make sure that Brexit makes us, not breaks us. That means making sure we use huge new projects like High Speed 2 and 3, a bigger airport and inward investment to become Britain’s export and enterprise capital.

And, because we’re Labour, it means sharing that opportunity fairly for all.

We want Birmingham to become the place where everyone:

1. Has the chance to work and earn a decent way of life
2. Has a decent place to live, in neighbourhoods that are clean and green where it’s easy to get around
3. Has the chance to learn, acquire new skills and improve themselves
4. Has the chance to live an independent life in good health
5. Lives freely in a city, free from fear or crime
6. Is well supported raising their family and living a healthy lifestyle
7. In a city free from discrimination
8. Is part of a strong, active community with the power to shape our city’s future.

Now we need your ideas, for how we turn our ideals into action.
Our record. The Labour council has presided over a city that has grown nearly 20% in the last five years – one of the largest growing city economies in the UK. Where we promised the Living Wage – and delivered. Today Birmingham City Council pays the Living Wage to around 4,000 employees (1,600 of them working in schools across the city), and our Birmingham Business Charter for Social Responsibility has helped ensure more than 600 employees of our contractors or service providers have had their pay increased to the Birmingham Living Wage.

The Challenge. We now need to go further and build on our success.

• We have less people in high-wage professional and technical roles and less people in the important information, communication and financial services sectors than elsewhere in Britain. This means wages are only just average compared to the country as a whole.

• And we have too few people in work of any kind – in fact the West Midlands has one of the lowest employment rates in England. In particular, our levels of youth unemployment are unacceptably high.

Our General Election manifesto promised that the next Labour government will create an economy that works for all.

• We will take advantage of near-record low interest rates to create a National Transformation Fund that will invest £250 billion over ten years upgrading our economy, for instance, by linking HS2 with other rail investments, such as Crossrail of the North, and rolling out super-fast broadband.

• We want to create an innovation nation with the highest proportion of high skilled jobs in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development by 2030, by increasing R&D investment.

• We want national and local government to use the £200 billion a year in the private sector procurement to upgrade our economy, create good local jobs and reduce inequality.

• We will develop a network of regional development banks that reinstate the lower small-business corporation tax rate and declare war on late payments.

• And we will double the size of the co-operative sector.

Questions

• How do you want to see Birmingham's economy change in the years to come?

• What could our Labour council do to help Birmingham create more good jobs and spread take-up of the real Living Wage?

• How do we need to make it easier to start and grow a business here?

• And does the Labour council use its own muscle as a purchaser of goods, an employer, and a builder to help?

What do you think?
Our record. Our Labour council promised to re-build council houses – and we’ve delivered. In fact, we’ve built 2,217 homes since 2012; more than any other council in Britain – creating over £2 billion in investment for the City. Indeed, Birmingham City Council has built more affordable homes than all the city’s housing associations put together.

The Challenge. More and more people – especially younger first time buyers – are now priced out of owning their own home and too many are forced to rent from bad landlords.

• Over the last 20 years, the average cost of a home in our region has more than tripled – from under £50,000 to over £150,000. More and more people rent in the private sector where average costs are now over £600 per month for a two bedroom property in the West Midlands. And, under the Tories, homelessness is soaring.

• We need more homes for people to rent and buy. There needs to be another 89,000 homes built by 2031 but the city only has the capacity for 51,000.

• There are too many bad landlords owning substandard properties who exploit vulnerable people, forcing them to live in terrible conditions.

• Too many places feel tired and look unattractive. Our green spaces need improvement, and we need to unlock residents’ passion to get stuck in and help improve their local area. Around 1,100 deaths per year in the West Midlands are partly attributable to air pollution. And there are still too many former industrial sites in need of redevelopment. Its still too hard to get around.

Our General Election manifesto committed the next Labour government to building over a million new homes, transforming transport, radically tackling poor air quality and decarbonising energy.

• By the end of the next Parliament we will be building at least 100,000 council and housing association homes a year for genuinely affordable rent or sale.

• We will remove government restrictions that stop councils building homes and begin the biggest council building programme for at least 30 years.

• We will end insecurity for private renters by introducing controls on rent rises, more secure tenancies, landlord licensing and new consumer rights for renters;

• Labour will invest in a modern, integrated, accessible and sustainable transport system that is reliable and affordable – and start by bringing our railways back into public ownership.

• We will introduce a new Clean Air Act to deal with the Conservative legacy of illegal air quality.

• And we will transform our energy systems, regaining control of energy supply networks and support the creation of publicly owned, locally accountable energy companies and co-operatives.

Questions:

• What should be our priorities for building more homes in Birmingham?

• What steps should we take to drive up quality and security in the rented sector?

• What practical steps can be taken to improve transport?

• And what action should we take to improve the local environment, cut air pollution and green the city’s energy system?

What do you think?
PRIORITY 3: HAS THE CHANCE TO LEARN, ACQUIRE NEW SKILLS AND IMPROVE THEMSELVES

Our record. Birmingham’s frontline teaching staff have done extraordinary things to improve school standards and, despite the Tory government, equip our young people with a flying start in life. Labour’s Birmingham Council has taken radical steps to drive down youth unemployment, creating the Birmingham Youth Promise, which supports 10,000 young people.

The Challenge. We need to keep driving forward education, skilling and reskilling, as nourishment for a curious and creative city.

• Today, one in three of our young people reach the age of 19 without the qualifications they need to get a good job.
• We have one of the highest proportions of young people who then leave education and become unemployed in the whole of England.
• The Tories have shredded the Adult Education budget and slashed funding for further education colleges.
• Young person face sky-high university fees – and a real shortage of apprenticeship places.
• Meanwhile, workers who lose their jobs have no recourse to help for retraining – ESOL funding has been destroyed.

Our General Election manifesto promised to make lifelong learning a reality.

We will create a unified National Education Service (NES) for England to move towards cradle-to-grave learning that is free at the point of use.

• We will overhaul the existing childcare system and transition to a system of high-quality childcare places in mixed environments with direct government subsidy and extend the 30 free hours to all two-year-olds, move towards making some childcare available for one-year-olds and extend maternity pay to 12 months.
• In schools, schools, we will deliver Investment; Quality, driving up standards across the board; Accountability, ensuring all schools are democratically accountable; and Inclusivity. A Labour-led education system will enable each to find their learning path through a wide choice of courses and qualifications.
• Labour would introduce free, lifelong education in Further Education (FE) colleges, enabling everyone to upskill or retrain at any point in life, set a target to double the number of completed apprenticeships at NVQ level 3 by 2022.
• We will reintroduce maintenance grants for university students, and we will abolish university tuition fees.

Questions:

• What can the next Labour council do to help create pathways of lifelong learning, from early years through to adulthood?
• How do we ensure that the city has the skills to flourish?
• And how do we ensure that education, and our immense cultural assets, are used to create education that is cultural, enriching and fun?

What do you think?
Our record. Our Labour council has worked hard to protect children's services, children's centres, our leisure facilities and libraries from the worst of the Tories' cuts. Programmes like BeActive have helped drive up participation in sports. And of course, we've put Birmingham back on the international map – beating all-comers to become Britain's candidate to host the Commonwealth Games.

The Challenge

- Too many of our families face tough conditions in which to raise children. We have one of the highest rates of child poverty in the country. Many of these children live in working families. Overall, an incredible 29% of Birmingham's children live in a deprived household.
- Birmingham is ranked first for total number of fuel poor households.
- Many of the changes the Tories are making are putting families under huge pressure. The rollout of Universal Credit is causing real hardship.
- The new rules on childcare only extend free childcare to certain families - not to all. Cuts are forcing Children's Centres to close.
- The acute pressure on Special Educational Needs, to forcing parents to give up work to care for their children.

Our General Election manifesto promised that Labour will end the Conservatives £400 million worth of cuts to youth services and end the closure of over 600 youth centres.

- We will overhaul the existing childcare system and transition to a system of high-quality childcare places in mixed environments with direct government subsidy and extend the 30 free hours to all two-year-olds, move towards making some childcare available for one-year-olds and extend maternity pay to 12 months.
- We will ‘pause and fix’ key benefits like Universal Credit; we will scrap the punitive sanctions regime; scrap the Bedroom Tax; and reinstate Housing Benefit for under-21s.
- To make sure that autistic people are able to access the whole of their community and to put an end to social isolation, Labour will set the ambition to make our country autism-friendly. We will set up a new £250 million Children’s Health Fund to support our ambitions.
- We will introduce a £1 billion Cultural Capital Fund to upgrade our existing cultural and creative infrastructure to be ready for the digital age, investing in creative clusters across the country, based on a similar model to enterprise zones.

Questions:

- What matters most when we talk about making our city a great place to bring up children? For example affordable childcare, good schools, places to play, and safe communities?
- What would you do to make a positive difference for young people?

What do you think?
Our record. Labour is the party that built the NHS – and Labour is the party leading the debate for a National Care Service that guarantees dignity and independence for all. On the first day of the new Labour council in 2012, we became a Living Wage employer, delivering a pay rise to care staff across the city.

The Challenge. Our city needs to become healthier, we need to tackle pronounced health inequalities and transform home care services for elderly residents. Today, the difference in life expectancy between Sutton Coldfield and the city centre is around eight years.

- Our infant mortality rates are amongst the worst in the country
- Only 54% of adults undertake moderate exercise each week.
- People in poorer areas of Birmingham live up to 7 years less than the wealthy suburbs.
- The Tories are driving our NHS to the point of crisis. Waiting times for operations in our hospitals are rocketing. Waits at Accident & Emergency are getting longer. There is bureaucratic confusion and disorder amongst the Tory-created Clinical Commissioning Groups. Social care services are being starved of funding and services are being drastically rationed for vulnerable people in real need. New services – like home-based complex-care for the elderly – are urgently needed. Morale amongst frontline NHS and social care workers is at rock bottom.
- Private home care agencies, care homes and hostels often maximise profit, over-load staff and syphon off profits for private shareholders.

Our General Election Manifesto committed us to over £30 billion in extra funding over the next Parliament through increasing income tax for the highest 5 per cent of earners and by increasing tax on private medical insurance.

- We will lay the foundations of a National Care Service for England, and we will increase the social care budgets by a further £8 billion over the lifetime of the next Parliament, including an additional £1 billion for the first year.
- Labour will also act immediately to end the worst excesses of the Conservative government’s changes. We will scrap the punitive sanctions regime; the Bedroom Tax; and scrap cuts to Bereavement Support Payment, and reinstate Housing Benefit for under-21s.

Questions

- What steps can the next Labour council take now to help defend our NHS?
- What steps can we take to begin the development of a National Care Service?
- How do we help those at the receiving end of unfair changes to the benefits system?
- What steps can we take to improve conditions for residents and workers delivering home care across the city?
- How do we help adults of all ages become fit and stay fit, eating well and taking part in regular exercise?

What do you think?
Our record. Thanks to our Labour Police & Crime Commissioner, we’re DOUBLING police recruitment with 800 new officers, 150 PCSOs and 200 crime-fighting specialists. And, working with Birmingham City Council, the Police & Crime Commissioner has established a Commission on Gangs and Violence to divert young people away from a life of crime.

Our challenge. In recent surveys, crime has emerged as the Number 1 issue that Birmingham residents worry about – and violent crime is rising. Yet the Tories have got it in for our police.

- The Tories have cut the funding for the West Midlands Police FIVE times harder than leafy Tory shires like Surrey. In fact, according to the National Audit Office, we’ve been hit as hard as any force in the country (joint with Northumbria).
- That means a £145 million real terms cuts since 2010. Since 2010 nearly 2,000 officers have been lost according to last official Home Office figures.
- The West Midlands Police force is having to spend £22 million from its reserves this year to balance the books. Just to stand still, inflation and pay awards will cost £18 million next year.
- That’s why people feel unsafe – from drug dealing in the park or misbehaviour on buses or speeding drivers.

Our general election manifesto committed us to recruiting 10,000 more police officers to work on community beats, equivalent to at least one more for every neighbourhood in the country.

- We will ensure appropriate support is provided to victims of crime and introduce legislation for minimum standard entitlements to service from criminal justice agencies; and
- Labour will halt cuts to the Fire Service.

Questions

- What should be Labour’s priorities for tackling crime in the city?
- What more can the Labour council do together with our Labour Police & Crime Commissioner?
- Is there more we can do locally to help tackle re-offending?
- What more should we plan to help divert people from crime – and how do we deliver them amidst the Tories’ on-going austerity?
Our record. The Labour party is a democratic socialist party that believes that together we can achieve more than we can achieve alone. We are committed to the values of democracy. That means we want to engage the citizens of the city in taking the decisions that affect all of our futures.

Our challenge. We know that in most elections we have turnout rates that are lower than the national average.

• While we are one of the most diverse cities in the country, the power structures of the city – in business and in public life – do not reflect the city’s diversity.

• As one of the youngest cities in Europe, we need to do more to ensure that young peoples’ voices are heard in the corridors of power.

• Elsewhere in Europe, political parties are using new strategies to maximise involvement in the way ideas are debated and policy is made. In particular, city governments are leading the way in opening up data and information, and using digital technology to get more people involved in shaping decisions, for instance, on budget priorities and planning of public spaces.

Our General Election manifesto committed the next Labour government to establishing a Constitutional Convention to examine and advise on reforming the way Britain works at a fundamental level. We will consult on its form and terms of reference and invite recommendations on extending democracy.

Questions

• What do you think our council can do to involve more of the city’s residents in the decisions that are taken on their behalf?

• Are there lessons that we can learn from others about how to use new technology and new techniques to open up our democracy?

• What other steps can we take to create a healthy, vibrant party and democracy in our city?

• How do we encourage greater participation from those who are underrepresented and whose voice is often unheard?

• How do we transform the way we listen to young people when we take decisions and organise debates?

• What are the things that we should try to help inform Labour’s future Constitutional Convention?

What do you think?