

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL
SCOTTISH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

PUTTING ABERDEENSHIRE FIRST

OUR APPROACH ON ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL
2017-2022

May 2017

FOREWORD

PUTTING ABERDEENSHIRE FIRST

Aberdeenshire Liberal Democrat councillors have played a key role in the Council since it was established following reorganisation in 1995. We are proud of our long record of successful delivery for Aberdeenshire residents and businesses; we have listened, set policies and delivered on the promises we have made. In all of this we have consistently put Aberdeenshire first, setting the needs and aspirations of this area above simple party politics.

The change of Administration in June 2015 launched an SNP leadership of the Council. Since then we have seen the first ever forecasted overspend, the failure to consult residents over the implementation of significant increases in Care Charges and the deplorable lack of transparency over the Administration's proposals to relocate the Council headquarters to Inverurie. The council leaders failed to criticise openly the damaging business rates hike which caused outrage in the North East and most significantly, the SNP leadership supported the Scottish Government's attempt to redistribute Aberdeenshire Council Tax.

As Liberal Democrats we are proud to have stood up against this council tax raid, forcing the SNP Government to reverse a policy which would have seen more than £8m of Aberdeenshire-raised council tax being spent in the Central Belt. We also stood firmly with local businesses in the face of the Business Rates crisis that is posing a real threat to jobs and investment in Aberdeenshire

As the North East enters another year of serious economic challenge, compounded by uncertainties over Brexit and the now very real threat of a second independence referendum in 2018/19, it is vital that Aberdeenshire Council has an experienced Administration with an absolute commitment to putting the interests of Aberdeenshire first.

We know the Council is facing challenging years ahead. We remain one of the lowest funded councils in Scotland with ever increasing demand for services as a result not only of demographic change but also the severe downturn in our economy. We will be faced by a Scottish Government that appears to regard local government with contempt and is committed to centralising more and more services under its own control. Liberal Democrats will resist this centralising agenda; we believe local services are best delivered locally by locally elected and locally accountable councils.

Fairness and equity are our guiding principles. We believe all parts of the Aberdeenshire should get their fair share of council investment. We acknowledge the need to make efficiencies and savings but will not compromise on front line services despite cuts imposed by the Scottish Government. We stand for a strong local economy, fair taxation and good public services. We will be a strong and effective voice for our communities, reflecting their diversity and different

needs, particularly in rural areas where many are disadvantaged by poor access to transport and health services.

We recognise the particular needs of our young people and will work with them to deliver better access to services, to better transport, to education and to jobs.

The Liberal Democrats in Aberdeenshire will use their proven experience and ability to work with our residents and our businesses to face the challenges ahead. We will be open and transparent in all our dealings. But most importantly we will put Aberdeenshire first.

Councillor Karen Clark

Leader of the Aberdeenshire Council Liberal Democrat Group

Our Approach to Aberdeenshire Council – transparent delivery for all.

Putting Aberdeenshire First

The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community and in which no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.

As we believe that decisions should be taken as close to the people affected by them as possible, nationally and locally, so we maintain our commitment to maintaining and enhancing our successful Area structure, bringing decision-making closer to the communities we serve.

We believe Local Government, delivered locally, is an essential part of a liberal democracy. It should be based on local solutions combined with common sense and sound, responsible financial management.

At all times Aberdeenshire will be our priority and we will continue to maintain a positive relationship with MEPs, MPs and MSPs representing Aberdeenshire, regardless of political affiliation. We believe that it is essential for there to be mutual respect and understanding between the different spheres of government in the UK.

We fully recognise the importance of co-operation with our neighbouring councils over strategic planning, cross boundary transport, tourism and other key services. Whilst we continue to develop shared council services where appropriate, we will firmly resist any attempts to merge Aberdeenshire Council with any other council.

We will develop a relationship based on respect and openness with partner agencies in both the public and voluntary sectors. We recognise the vital importance of the voluntary sector and the role it plays in strengthening and enabling our communities.

Liberal Democrats were the driving force behind the creation of a positive ethos of openness, transparency and trust within Aberdeenshire Council. We are committed to maintaining this ethos and to maintaining a partnership based on mutual respect between councillors and council staff.

During our twenty years in the Administration, we ensured that Aberdeenshire Council was widely recognised as effective, efficient and responsible. We will restore and maintain that reputation, particularly when it comes to the sound management of finances.

We commit ourselves to putting Aberdeenshire – our residents, businesses and visitors – first and to building on our long record of achievement. In challenging times we commit ourselves to the delivery of excellent local services to and for our residents.

Democracy, Accountability and Responsible Management of Public Funds

The next five years will hold many challenges. As well as continuing pressure on limited financial resources, set against growing demands for council services, we can expect there to be growing external demands for changes to Local Government, its structures, processes and ways of working. Equally Aberdeenshire Council has its own expectations over governance, scrutiny and challenge; we recognise the need for continually increasing efficiency and effectiveness. We also recognise the importance of all Councillors' proactive role in scrutiny and involvement in open and transparent processes. Only then can public money be used effectively and efficiently; only then can Aberdeenshire Council deliver on its enabling role, deliver its services, and be fully accountable to the people it serves.

We will:

- Maintain our record of sound, responsible financial management and financial planning.
- Ensure that Aberdeenshire Council's budget planning is long term in its aims and ambitions and is led by clear, evidence-based and sustainable policies.
- Work to keep the council's borrowing within the agreed limits and explore ways of reducing borrowing wherever possible.
- Ensure that all Councillors recognise that responsibility for scrutiny in Area and Policy contexts is a major part of their role and therefore take an active part in scrutiny activities. We will ensure that effective training in scrutiny is delivered to all councillors.
- Deliver effectively and fairly the changes that have been introduced to Aberdeenshire Council's governance structures, to ensure the council is responsive, with robust processes that deliver efficiently.
- Protect the independence of the Audit Committee and ensure it is properly resourced to deliver its important functions. We will work to enhance the committee's standing and the effectiveness of its working.
- Seek to improve public understanding of Community Planning as well as promoting the council's leading role in that partnership with statutory and non-statutory partners, to deliver integrated and seamless public services.
- Continue to work to establish effective and robust local arrangements to deliver local accountability, scrutiny and governance over local resources and the setting of local policy for Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue.

- Maintain our firm commitment to work with local communities to maximise the long term sustainability of community assets through the effective delivery of the council's Community Asset Transfer policies, to deliver long term social, economic and environmental benefits to our communities.
- Maintain our commitment to work with and support communities to achieve the best possible outcomes under the regulations from the Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015. We will work with community planning partners on tackling inequalities as a specific focus, producing locality plans to make a positive difference for our people.
- Maintain the council's Area structure and continue to develop the role of our Area Committees in setting policy, setting local priorities, scrutiny and oversight of local services. We will ensure Area Committees are supported by appropriate local budgets to support their important role within the council and our communities.
- Maintain the local delivery of liquor licensing, meeting the requirements of the legislation whilst delivering an efficient service to our residents and businesses.
- Continue to recognise the vital importance of Council staff. In all its dealings, Aberdeenshire Council will seek to be a good employer. We will work to ensure that we have the right people in the right places to deliver locally and effectively. We will maximise the skills and abilities that exist within our staff and seek to develop these further through effective training and continuous professional development. At all times we will seek the most cost effective and efficient delivery of services.
- Ensure the council's office strategy is not only enhanced but delivered effectively and transparently, taking in account the present needs of council staff as well as taking fully into account future pressures, including possible restructuring of local government.
- Commit to delivering fully open and transparent processes to provide the best possible Headquarters accommodation as part of the wider office strategy.
- Continue to build on improvements that have been achieved by the ICT service, recognising the vital importance of effective, flexible and responsive ICT solutions and of the best possible connectivity. We will develop the service to become more proactive, with smarter targets and outcomes.
- Consider the effect that all our decisions have upon sustainability and climate change
- Continue to develop an annual Carbon Budget, working with the Finance and other council services to identify costs and opportunities.

- Explore every avenue to reduce the council's carbon footprint, including culture change and investing in technologies. We will work with partners to test innovative approaches.
- Continue to work for the reform of local government funding and for the modernisation of the distribution formula so that it becomes simpler, more transparent and delivers funding fairly. We will maintain our call for an approach that ensures no council receives less than 90% of the average Scottish council's funding per head of population.
- Campaign for a replacement of the Council Tax by a fair system of local taxation which not only takes account of ability to pay but that is local in its collection accountability and administration. We will resist any further attempts by the Scottish Government to redistribute Council Tax income.
- Campaign for a major overhaul of Business Rates to make them fit for purpose and responsive to local circumstances. We will press for greater local control and a move away from the system of centralised rate setting and distribution of receipts.
- Strive to find the best way to ensure residents and communities are informed about and involved in the decision making process and increase public understanding of the roles the council plays in Aberdeenshire. We will continue the programme of briefing meetings for community councils through community council or ward forums and make it easy for people to participate in the decision-making process through meaningful and well thought out consultation.

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Aberdeenshire Liberal Democrats recognise the real challenges faced by the our communities and the council as a result of a changing climate, resulting in more extreme weather events such as Storm Frank in 2015. We are proud of what has been achieved to create more integrated communities, particularly over the delivery of infrastructure to bring transport, work, leisure and housing into better balance. However we recognise there is more to be done to support and strengthen our communities, particularly those vulnerable to the impacts of severe weather, to make them more resilient and able not only to withstand the consequences but also to recover quickly where such events occur. We want to see Aberdeenshire continue to offer the best quality of life.

Liberal Democrats recognise the vital role played by Economic Development in Aberdeenshire and this remains, together with Early Intervention and Demography, one of the three fundamental pillars in policy development and service delivery the council put in place under Liberal Democrat leadership. We recognise that all council

services must contribute to ensuring that Aberdeenshire returns to becoming a prosperous and economically vibrant part of Scotland. We must deliver sustainable growth, low unemployment and a broader economic base across the whole of Aberdeenshire, while giving particular focus to the Regeneration Areas.

There are of course serious challenges, particularly arising from Brexit. The Economic Development service has built successful relationships across Aberdeenshire, Scotland, the UK and Europe, promoting Aberdeenshire as an excellent place to do business. It has had a significant input to European policy-making. We will continue to give high priority to this work, to ensure that Brexit – in whatever form it takes – does not undo all of the good work the council has done.

We will:

- Continue to deliver the Economic Development Strategy and the Regeneration Strategy while ensuring both are kept under review and able to adapt to new challenges.
- Continue to promote Aberdeenshire as an excellent place to do business, encouraging inward investment.
- Maintain the council's commitment to Europe and explore all possible avenues to maintain our involvement. In particular we will strengthen our participation in the North Sea Commission and the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions.
- Work with partners to lobby the UK and Scottish Governments to ensure Aberdeenshire businesses have the best possible access to European and world markets. In particular we will seek to mitigate the uncertainty arising from potential withdrawal from the European Single Market and the Customs Union.
- Maintain and enhance our relationship with and participation in Opportunity North East (ONE) to deliver the City Region Deal for Aberdeenshire.
- Ensure that Visit Aberdeenshire maintains a proper focus on promoting Aberdeenshire to national and international tourist markets while supporting tourism businesses to improve their offer and build an attractive tourist structure in the region as a whole.
- Continue to work with the agriculture and forestry sectors, recognising the importance of these industries to the rural economy and the challenges they face, particularly arising from Brexit.
- Continue to work with the important fishing sector, both catching and processing, in particular on the challenges arising from Brexit.

- Ensure that small and medium enterprises continue to have opportunities to access the council's procurement processes and to tender for the supply of goods and services. We will build on the progress already made in this regard.
- Continue to invest, as resources allow, in our industrial portfolio for both maintenance and the expansion of the supply of suitable units in appropriate locations across Aberdeenshire. We will continue to deliver the council's Asset Management Plan.
- Continue to press the Scottish Government and its contractors to deliver high speed broadband across Aberdeenshire, on time and on budget. We recognise the urgent need for the best communication technology to be available for all premises in Aberdeenshire if we are to compete in the world economy.
- Work with partners to ensure the maximum use of LEADER and other European funding streams for as long as these are available to businesses and communities in Aberdeenshire.
- Continue to work with and support Rural Partnership and Towns Development Trusts to deliver Community Economic Development
- Strengthen relationships with our partners, including the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce, to deliver a strong and sustainable economic base for Aberdeenshire and the North East.

The Planning Service in Aberdeenshire has delivered very significant improvements in performance without losing its focus on creating sustainable and attractive places. There is still more work to be done, particularly in light of the likely contents of the Planning Bill proposed for the summer of 2017. Liberal Democrats are committed to keeping the setting of planning policies local and will resist all attempts to increase Scottish Government influence over this vital function. We also recognise that the Planning Service is integral to our ambitions for Economic Development. We will work with all stakeholders to remove barriers, whether real or perceived.

We will:

- Continue to ensure that the Planning Service and its processes deliver a proper balance between the needs and aspirations of our communities and the needs of businesses in Aberdeenshire.
- Ensure that appropriate infrastructure is maintained and delivered in line with community needs and expectations and that this infrastructure keeps pace with the impact and demands of new housing and other development.

- Continue to support the Strategic Transport Fund (STF) as a mechanism to share the cost of major infrastructure fairly and will work to deliver an equivalent mechanism should the STF not be supported by the Supreme Court.
- Lobby and press for the retention of Strategic Development Planning in the North East through the Scottish Government review process, recognising that the Strategic Development Planning Authority has been very effective in the North East.
- Resist attempts to subjugate local planning and planning policy-making to National Planning while supporting those areas within the Scottish Government's White Paper that deliver real and measurable benefit to Aberdeenshire.
- Support the implementation of the new Local Development Plan, ensuring it is kept up to date and work with all councillors to ensure that Planning in Aberdeenshire remains Plan-led.
- Ensure there are close and effective relationships between the Planning and Economic Development services
- Continue to consult and work with communities, striving to improve our methods of communication and consultation and to improve levels of public engagement with Planning.
- Continue to work with developers and agents to seek ways of streamlining processes to make the Planning system more efficient. We will continue to encourage applicants to submit all the necessary documentation with their applications and continue to encourage the use of pre-application discussions and Processing Agreements.
- Ensure the guidance on the cumulative and other impacts of wind turbines is properly applied across Aberdeenshire, recognising the continuing concern in some areas of Aberdeenshire over these developments.
- Lobby for a radical overhaul of the system of Planning Appeals, to return more decision-making powers to local planning committees, recognising that a system where decisions taken by individual Reporters appointed by Ministers is a major barrier to community engagement in Planning.
- Seek to use planning policies to protect Aberdeenshire's valued and precious landscapes and to maintain and enhance the greenbelt.

Residents' Surveys and other feedback have consistently demonstrated the priority residents give to the appearance and cleanliness of their communities. We will continue to ensure that as far as possible residents' expectations will be met. However we also recognise that the way these important services are delivered will need to be

flexible and responsive to the limitations imposed by budgetary constraints. We will give priority to working with communities in a partnership approach.

We will:

- Ensure that our streets and public open spaces are clean and maintained to a high standard, recognising that this needs to be economically sustainable.
- Develop more innovative methods to maintain public open spaces, including appropriate tree planting and the use of wild flowers to improve biodiversity and environmental sustainability.
- Encourage and enable communities to take more responsibility for their public open spaces and streets. We will assist groups that wish to make improvements to the appearance of their communities.
- Continue to tackle dog fouling through the work of our Dog Wardens, through the provision of bins, the education of dog walkers and through supporting community groups that seek to tackle this issue at a local level.
- Manage all public open spaces responsively and sustainably. We will continue the engagement with Area Committees over annual landscape programmes and changes to policies or approach.
- Work with communities and schools to address the problem of litter within settlements, rural areas and along our roadsides. We will explore ways of raising the profile of this issue and of educating residents and visitors about the environmental and economic consequences of litter. We will support local groups that undertake litter picks or other initiatives.
- Continue the appropriate provision of modern, good quality play equipment within our communities in locations best suited to our young people. We will work with and assist community groups that seek to enhance provision in their areas.

Liberal Democrats are very aware of the devastating impact flooding can have on communities and individuals. We will work closely with partners, agencies and the Scottish Government to develop innovative and effective sustainable projects to give greater protection to all our communities. We will also work with communities to make them more resilient and better able to cope with emergencies of all kinds, making full use of the experience gained during and after Storm Frank.

We will:

- Work with all partners to develop sustainable flood mitigation and prevention measures, working on a catchment basis to provide the best possible flood protection to vulnerable communities.
- Develop further the support, advice and guidance that can be offered to all householders vulnerable to flooding
- Continue to seek to establish a Community Resilience Fund as a specific council reserve, to be used to support communities in their own work to become more resilient.
- Work with partners, including the Cairngorms National Park, land managers, Scottish Land and Estates, National Farmers Union of Scotland, SNH and SEPA on developing natural flood prevention schemes, through restoration of flood plains, appropriate tree planting, peatland restoration and other catchment-wide projects to reduce the impact of severe weather events.
- Encourage all communities to prepare their own Resilience Plans, recognising that communities themselves are best placed to develop such plans. We will actively support communities in this and encourage the active participation and co-operation from our Community Planning partners.
- We will continue to give high priority to flood protection schemes in Aberdeenshire and to the responsibilities and duties laid on the council by legislation.
- Support council staff when they respond to flooding and other emergencies. We recognise the excellent work that was done by many members of our staff during Storm Frank and will ensure that such efforts are fully supported and recognised in future.

Liberal Democrats value and celebrate the high quality of the natural environment and environment in Aberdeenshire and recognise the high importance given to it by residents and visitors alike. We will continue to give priority to environmental issues, to protect our landscape and enhance our biodiversity, improving responsible access to and enjoyment of our natural environment.

We will

- Build on the work already undertaken to improve access and to increase opportunities for walking and cycling, both for recreation and day-to-day travel. We will work with community groups and appropriate agencies, including Nestrans and Sustrans to deliver increased opportunities for walking and cycling.
- Work with partners to remove barriers to access for all our residents and visitors, with a particular focus on those for whom access to the countryside is difficult.

- Continue to build on the positive relationship with the Cairngorms National Park Authority on environmental and access issues, as well as in Planning and in delivering the National Park Partnership Plan 2017-22.
- Continue to work with the Cairngorms National Park Authority to restore the footpath network on Deeside, severely damaged by Storm Frank and work to ensure, as far as possible, this important network is sustainable for the future.
- Explore methods to ensure the path network, including Core Paths, can be maintained and tackle the challenges posed by the number of footbridges for which the council is responsible.
- Continue the successful partnership with the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland) and the Aberdeenshire Outdoor Access Forum and support communities that seek to create and/or maintain paths in their area.
- Ensure that full and proper consideration is given to landscape impacts caused by all development, including major national developments. All such proposals should be evaluated in detail in order to ensure that landscape impacts are minimised and mitigated.
- Work to develop our approach to public consultation and engagement on issues that impact on our landscapes so that residents' views are taken into account and seen to be taken into account.
- Continue to encourage councillors to act as champions for particularly threatened species or habitats.

Liberal Democrats also place a very high value on our built heritage and have given a high priority to both enhancing and protecting it. We will continue this work. In particular we will give ever greater emphasis on the need for the highest standards of design in all new development, seeking designs that respect the built heritage of Aberdeenshire.

We will:

- Work with developers and agents to deliver higher standards of design in new build projects, particularly in larger housing developments. We will encourage design that recognises the local built heritage and is locally appropriate. We will welcome innovation in house design.
- Fully support the Aberdeenshire Design Awards as a means of giving significant recognition to successful and sustainable design in its setting.

- Continue to push the boundaries of sustainability in housing and other development, encouraging the use of the best technologies and design approaches to minimise the use of energy and resources. We will welcome innovation in this regard.
- Give high priority to energy efficiency in council buildings and all council developments.
- Continue to support the work of the North East Scotland Preservation Trust in restoring important local buildings.
- Continue the review of Conservation Areas across Aberdeenshire to ensure they are fit for the 21st century.

Liberal Democrats are committed to the waste hierarchy of ‘Reduce, Re-use, Recycle’ and have worked to establish an efficient waste management service for our residents, one that is simple to use, easy to understand and applied equitably across Aberdeenshire. While the percentage of the waste stream diverted from landfill has increased, we recognise there is still much to do to encourage residents to give more thought to managing their waste and to recycle more, including making better use of the opportunities offered by weekly food waste collections. We will work in partnership with our residents and businesses and ensure there is a proper network of well-managed facilities to make recycling as simple as possible. We will continue to work with our colleagues in Aberdeen City Council and The Moray Council to deliver an energy from waste alternative to landfill.

We will:

- Continue to deliver the council’s Waste Management Strategy, ensuring it is reviewed regularly, flexible and responsive to legislative and other changes.
- Develop the successful partnership that has been built with Aberdeen City Council and the Moray Council to develop common approaches to waste management. In particular we will continue to support the proposed Energy from Waste alternative to landfill and the project to develop an energy from waste plant in Tullos.
- Make it as easy as possible for residents to take responsibility for their waste through carefully designed collection systems. We will ensure that communication with our residents on waste issues is clear, in Plain English and timely.
- Continue to encourage home composting of garden waste as the most sustainable method of dealing with this resource.

- Explore sustainable ways to increase ‘re-use’ of waste where appropriate and in particular foster and encourage community groups willing to work in partnership to extract value from this part of the waste stream.
- Continue to press the Scottish and UK governments to do more to drive down the amount of unnecessary packaging and to take other steps to reduce waste at source.
- Develop new and innovative ways to educate our residents and businesses, including through schools, about the importance of taking responsibility for their waste, increasing recycling and about the economic benefits changing their approach can bring to the council and Aberdeenshire.

Liberal Democrats are committed to delivering the right transport infrastructure for Aberdeenshire in conjunction with our partners. We balance this with plans to reduce the need to travel and promote viable alternatives to the private motor car and the internal combustion engine. We are proud of the work we have done to ensure Aberdeenshire’s roads are among the very best in Scotland and are committed to working to improve the standards and effectiveness of our road maintenance regime, including winter maintenance, recognising always the severe constraints posed by budgetary challenges.

We will:

- Continue to deliver the refreshed Regional Transport Strategy, working with Nestrans and other partners.
- Work with Nestrans and other partners to develop the new Regional Transport Strategy, to lock in the benefits of the AWPR and ensure that Aberdeenshire has a transport system that is in every way fit for the 21st century.
- Work with Nestrans and other partners to ensure the Scottish Government’s review of the National Transport Strategy best responds to the needs of Aberdeenshire.
- Continue to seek the delivery of a modern, integrated transport system, building on what has already been achieved. In particular we will continue to work with Transport Scotland and other partners to ensure the timely delivery of Aberdeen-Inverness rail enhancements, the early delivery of Kintore Station, continue to campaign for a station at Newtonhill and the design and delivery of wider Aberdeen Crossrail between Stonehaven and Inverurie.
- Continue to lobby for improved access at Inch Station. It is unacceptable for an important rural station to be inaccessible to so many.

- Work with Nestrans and other partners to test the feasibility and deliverability of a rail link from Dyce to Ellon. We will promote this project if a sound business case can be developed.
- Campaign and lobby for rail improvements to the south, cutting journey times to the Central Belt and continue to work with Nestrans to influence decisions on High Speed Rail at a UK level.
- Work with Transport Scotland to ensure the timely delivery of the AWPR and the earliest possible completion of A90 Balmedie-Tipperty dualling. We will continue to press for the early delivery of a grade separated junction on the A90 at Laurencekirk.
- Campaign for the Scottish Government to speed up its plans for the major upgrading of the A96 and in particular reach early decision about the route of the road around Inverurie.
- Ensure that council resources are used effectively to maintain the condition of our roads, both through planned maintenance and in responding to reports of potholes and other defects, including street lighting.
- Work to deliver effective winter maintenance with the resources available. We will facilitate the provision of grit bins at appropriate locations within our communities, foster the 'snow warden' scheme and enable communities to do more to assist themselves.
- Press ahead with design and delivery of safety-led improvements to the A947, in consultation with communities along the route and with the involvement of appropriate Area Committees.
- Continue to work for the delivery of the transport interchange at Inverurie.
- Actively look for opportunities to increase the integration of transport modes, including integrated ticketing and timetabling, by working with private and public sector partners.
- Maintain the Area-based bus forums with the active participation of private sector operators.
- Continue to seek solutions that will address the transport needs of our rural communities, including people with mobility difficulties, for young people and for those with no access to private transport. We will consider their needs when taking decisions over transport.
- Consider working with transport operators to devise a scheme to allow subsidised public transport fares for young people, particularly those using buses to access employment, training and education.

- Continue to review town centre car parking to ensure there is an appropriate turnover of spaces and that town centre vibrancy is maintained and enhanced.
- Work with partners to increase opportunities for walking and cycling as alternatives to use of private cars. We will seek to identify ways of delivering safe and convenient routes between and within communities across Aberdeenshire.
- Work with partners to improve the cycle paths along the A944 between Westhill and Aberdeen, to ensure this route is safe for cyclists when the AWPR opens.
- Continue to address the vital issue of road safety by exploring innovative approaches that can bring down the number of accidents on all our roads and through traffic calming within our communities.

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Aberdeenshire Liberal Democrats are committed to giving children the best start in life. We believe that from early years throughout their school years, children should have the best possible chances for their future. We want the people of Aberdeenshire to have the best education and to have support when and where they need it. It is vital there is excellent access to cultural, sport and leisure activities. We will continue to build an integrated service which involves our communities in the decisions that affect them.

We recognise that our schools are a vital part of the services the council offers. Recent years have seen growing external pressure on schools and on our staff and we will work to support our teaching staff as well as the children they teach.

We will:

- Deliver increased hours of pre-school childcare and education in a range of flexible and quality settings, engaging with parents and carers and recognising the vital importance of early intervention.
- Work in partnership with parents and carers to ensure that children are ready for transition stages in nursery, schools and for their future careers.

- Identify and address barriers to attainment to enable all young people to reach their full potential.
- Ensure that achievement is recognised while maintaining and improving the focus on attainment to develop fully rounded individuals, well placed and equipped to move into the world of work.
- Develop and expand links between schools, colleges and employers. We will work with businesses and organisations such as the Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation (OPITO), the Chamber of Commerce and Rotary to build on the successful relationships already established.
- Build on positive relationships with colleges and universities so that our young people have access to the best opportunities to develop to their full potential.
- Continue to invest in the school estate and consult with residents to ensure that it is fit for purpose and in the right places to serve our growing school rolls and our communities.
- Look positively at proposals for new or replacement schools where there is a clear need and community support.

Lifelong Learning, Sport and Leisure

Liberal Democrats recognise the importance of sport to our communities and are committed to ensuring that opportunities for sport and leisure are open to all. We will continue the work we started on enhancing the range of facilities available across Aberdeenshire. We accept that more needs to be done to encourage participation by all age groups and will explore and develop ways to strengthen the sporting culture within Aberdeenshire.

Education does not end when children leave school. We are committed to Lifelong Learning and to providing the best opportunities to all so that everyone can develop their full potential.

We will:

- Support the delivery of opportunities through Local Learning Partnerships and initiatives developed in and by our communities.
- Build on the relationships developed with the voluntary sector in Aberdeenshire

- Seek to remove barriers to sporting and other recreational activities for specific groups such as older people and girls and ensuring all recreational activities are open to everyone.
- Encourage sports and active lifestyles within all our communities, working with other council services and our partners to enhance opportunities for physical activity such as walking and cycling.
- Continue to develop and promote Active Aberdeenshire.
- Seek opportunities for improving sports facilities across Aberdeenshire, particularly when part of our community schools.

Culture and Heritage

The culture and heritage of Aberdeenshire and the North East is rightly recognised as distinctive and important. Liberal Democrats are committed to celebrating our culture and heritage and to developing a greater understanding of it within our communities and for visitors to Aberdeenshire.

We will:

- Use innovative approaches and effective partnership working to celebrate the cultural heritage of Aberdeenshire.
- Develop closer links between Culture and Heritage within ECS and the Environment teams within the Planning Service to improve the service the council provides to our residents and our visitors.
- Modernise our Museums and explore new ways of making the council's collections more accessible, where budgets and resources permit.
- Develop our partnerships with Arts and Cultural organisations to support community based arts and cultural initiatives and projects with advice and such funds as may be available.
- Explore opportunities for funding to support community groups.

The recent changes to the way services are delivered in Aberdeenshire following the establishment of the Integrated Joint Board and the new arrangements for our committees gives greater focus on the work of Children's Services. Liberal Democrats are fully committed to providing excellent support to all children who need it. We place particular emphasis on young peoples' mental health and will continue to work to improve both funding and practice to support young people through such

challenges. We will work with partners to deliver high quality services to children and young people.

We will:

- Ensure that the right support is in place for every child in Aberdeenshire
- Give careful and appropriate support to children with physical and/or emotional difficulties that affect their lives and learning.
- Develop new and enhanced approaches for mental wellbeing among our young people, in partnership with other agencies and with parents and carers.
- Build on the Corporate Parent Role to ensure that all looked after children's voices are heard.
- Expand our network of Foster Carers and promote our adoption services, ensuring that they have access to the training and support they need.
- Work with partners to ensure young carers get as much support as possible.
- Recognise the excellent work done by Youth Forums and Youth Councils in Aberdeenshire and involve them more closely in the work of the council.

CARING FOR COMMUNITIES

There have been radical changes to the way Health and Social Care is delivered across Scotland. An Integrated Joint Board has been established in Aberdeenshire which brings together the council, the NHS, the voluntary and independent sectors to provide the best possible advice, care and support for individuals and their families. As Liberal Democrats, we are committed to making this new organisation a success and will seek to ensure it has the appropriate funding.

There are challenges and opportunities for health and social care services but by working together with our communities we can improve the well-being of our residents by designing effective services, maximising resources, building resilience and encouraging active participation.

Liberal Democrats believe it is vital to have good communication and engagement with all service users, carers and families in place at all times. It is essential to listen to and involve people who receive services to enable them to shape the care they receive to meet their specific needs. We will ensure the continuation of highest possible standards.

Liberal Democrats continue to affirm our strong support for Frank’s Law. It is absolutely essential that action is now taken to ensure people under the age of 65 with a degenerative illness have access to the personal care and support they need.

We recognise that more needs to be done for the large number of people who by virtue of severe sight and/or hearing loss are unable to enjoy the same levels of independence as others. We will take practical steps to support those people to live independent lifestyles in their own communities.

We will:

- Proactively encourage and promote collaboration between the joint health and social care teams to deliver fully inclusive services.
- Build on the positive work done to provide quality outcomes by redesigning services to meet individual needs.
- Respect the rights and dignity of everyone.
- Inform and listen to service users, carers, families and communities.
- Provide a new care home in Peterhead and review the assets required to meet demands across Aberdeenshire.
- Work with partners to engage with carers and provide appropriate support.
- Ensure the growing number of dementia sufferers, their carers and families are well supported and have access to services.
- Continue to lobby and campaign for the delivery of Frank’s Law.
- Continue to seek recognition of the increasing requirement for additional Mental Health services to be available throughout Aberdeenshire.

Good quality, affordable housing is essential to good health. Aberdeenshire Liberal Democrats are committed to the provision of an adequate supply of houses of different tenures and sizes, and to the highest standard of council housing stock. There is a need to explore new creative and innovative ways to meet the growing pressures for accessible and sustainable homes. Tenants and prospective tenants have a vital part to play in the delivery of housing services and we will continue to promote their active participation in the development of strategies and scrutiny of the policies.

We will:

- Work in partnership to review and strengthen the role played by tenants in the housing service
- Monitor the delivery of the stock improvement plan and the provision of further affordable homes across Aberdeenshire.
- Work with the Planning service to ensure the delivery of affordable housing through negotiated Developer Obligations.
- Consider options for the provision of starter homes for younger people.
- Seek ways of promoting local need in the Allocation policy.
- Work with partners to provide advice, information and support at an early stage for people who are at risk of or who are homeless.
- Further develop Care and Repair services and ensure equity of service and delivery of adaptations to allow people to stay in their own homes longer.
- Continue to work with partners to reduce fuel poverty.

Community Justice is delivered by a range of partners in the public, voluntary and private sector. They work together to manage offenders, prevent and reduce re-offending and the harm that it causes. There is also a role to promote social inclusion and encourage communities to provide opportunities for employment, volunteering and desistance. Feeling safe at home and in the wider area is extremely important to the wellbeing of individuals and we will seek to address the wider implications of offending behaviour.

We will:

- Support partners to continue to work together and build on existing arrangements
- Engage with communities to inform service re-design to meet the needs of offenders and victims.
- Raise awareness of Community Justice issues.
- Develop programmes of early intervention and prevention of offending.