DEMAND BETTER

NORTH SOMERSET LIBERAL DEMOCRATS
MANIFESTO 2019
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Enabling every young person to get on in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A sustainable housing strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Improving our health and well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Building a local economy that works for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Protecting the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Supporting families and communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Making the Council more accountable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demand better for North Somerset

Over the past nine years, since the world economic crash and the start of “austerity”, local government budgets have shrunk in cash terms as a result of Conservative government cuts.

North Somerset Council has been led by the Conservatives since 2007 - for twelve long years. Together with the Conservative government, they have reduced services and pushed up council tax and car parking charges year on year.

Under Liberal Democrat leadership; we will protect the services, invest in the things that matter to local people and, most importantly, listen to residents.

The Conservative administration is out-of-touch and arrogant after so many years in power. They don’t listen and as a result make bad decisions that harm our community and the people who live here.

A Liberal Democrat led Council will always listen to residents and strive to deliver services which you want. We set out in this manifesto the priorities which we would address over the next four years. We ask you to consider our ideas and candidates carefully before election day and help us to demand better for North Somerset by voting Liberal Democrat on Thursday 2nd May.

Thank you.

Cllr Mike Bell - Leader, North Somerset Liberal Democrats
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Enabling every young person to get on in life
ENABLING EVERY YOUNG PERSON TO GET ON IN LIFE

Every parent hopes to give their children a better life than they had. However, British society is still split between the “haves” and “have nots”, so rather than moving beyond their parents circumstances, too many children become trapped by them. Sadly, we can see this playing out in North Somerset. This kind of inequality is not only inherently unfair, it also wastes potential and talents that could benefit the whole community.

So while North Somerset has many excellent schools and excellent teachers, more tailored support is needed in schools to ensure that children don't slip through the net, that their mental health is prioritised and that they are fully supported to go on to lead happy and successful lives.

We believe that a dynamic and children-centred local council is key and we will therefore create, expand and improve programmes aimed at children on the margins.

Children grappling with poverty, mental illness, learning difficulties, disabilities, discrimination and many other challenges deserve our full support. We will ensure that schools, children’s centres, social care and the NHS are all participating in delivering on this objective.

Our priorities in the next four years will be:

● ● We will improve mental health in schools by ensuring all primary and secondary schools have Mental Health First Aid qualified members of staff.
● ● We will work with mental health services to ensure stronger CAMHS services are in place for vulnerable children and young people.
● ● We will explore developing a local ‘Transitions’ programme to help children move from primary into secondary and from secondary into further and higher education or work.
● ● We will strengthen the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities service so that assessments and support are in place at the right time and in the right way.
● ● Launch a major campaign for fairer funding for local schools.
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A sustainable housing strategy
A SUSTAINABLE HOUSING STRATEGY

The Liberal Democrats will lay out our position unequivocally; where housing is both affordable and sustainable, we will support it.

The truth is that the Conservative Council’s local housing plans are neither.

It is vital for both current and future residents that adequate infrastructure is in place ahead of any development in North Somerset.

There are over 20,985 houses proposed in the Conservative Core Strategy and already approved speculative developments across North Somerset. These plans will have significant impacts on our schools, GP services and roads.

The council is now trying to rush through their Local Plan because of pressure from the government and overly aggressive planning policies; this is inevitably leading to inappropriate over development of our area and poor planning decisions.

Our priorities in the next four years will be:

● ● We will ensure that North Somerset gets the new homes it needs each year, and increase the rate of affordable homebuilding.
● ● We will ensure that identified housing need is delivered to the highest quality and includes the required infrastructure, ensuring thriving, mixed communities. We will not support schemes that fail to protect existing communities from unnecessary, poorly-serviced or unpopular development.
● ● We will support a long-term house building plan, and build new council housing for rent.
● ● We will explore ways to create a local ‘living rent’ to support those renting privately or through social housing.
● ● We will introduce a ‘housing first’ approach to supporting rough sleepers, the homeless and those at risk of homelessness, building on the best practice from elsewhere in the country and around the world.
● ● Undertake a review of the Council planning procedures and resources to restore credibility to the process and ensure that all planning applications are properly and effectively assessed and determined.
● ● Deliver a fair deal for private renters by introducing a compulsory licensing scheme for landlords to improve standards and drive out rogue landlords.
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Improving our health and well being
IMPROVING HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Good health is a prerequisite to taking full advantage of life’s opportunities, and we must do all we can to help people stay healthy across North Somerset.

The NHS has been the envy of the world, but it is now facing the greatest crisis in its history, and we urgently need to increase its funding - Liberal Democrats at a national level would raise income tax by 1p in the pound.

As a country, we are living longer, but that means more people are living with conditions like diabetes and dementia and they need help to live with dignity and the maximum degree of independence.

We must set the highest standards in care, abolishing the artificial boundaries that prevent local councils, health and social care services working together.

Health and wellbeing are affected by far more than just the quality of health and social care services. We will work to improve the broader factors that affect people’s health such as access to health activities so that everyone can have the best chance to lead a healthy life.

Our priorities in the next four years will be:

● ● Building on existing leisure and recreation facilities by providing further activities and facilities to promote a healthy North Somerset.
● ● Work with the NHS and social care services to find ways to integrate their work with that of local councils and community groups.
● ● Promote healthy activities across all age groups such as cycle tracks and walking routes, while providing adequate resting places.
● ● Give those age under 18 access to free swimming in council-run leisure centres.
● ● Facilitate the creation of groups to support both physical and mental health in the absence of funding from government.
● ● Assess every green space and park in North Somerset to ensure that there is excellent provision of sports, leisure and physical play opportunities for children and adults.
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Building a local economy that works for you
A LOCAL ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR YOU

There are stark contrasts between parts of North Somerset, between old and young, and between the successful and those left behind.

Liberal Democrats believe that there is much to be done to create an economy that ensures that the whole population benefits from the technological advances which are ahead of us. The Liberal Democrats will work to support growth across North Somerset for a sustainable economy – a local economy that works for the long term: which is prosperous, green, open and fair.

Our priorities in the next four years will be:

● ● Attracting business by offering business rate reductions; and for properties which have been brought back into use after being empty for over six months.

● ● Drive investment in towns across North Somerset to increase higher paid job opportunities which are for local people - keeping people working and buying here boosting the local economy.

● ● Increasing the number of available apprenticeships and training opportunities delivered through the Council and partnerships.

● ● We will prioritise contracts with local companies and organisations to create jobs and support the local economy.

● ● We will work with local town and parish councils to set up an independent destination management organisation to promote and manage tourism in North Somerset.

● ● Introduce a new approach to parking, including free periods on and off-street, no overnight charges and a fair enforcement charter.

● ● We will explore joining the West of England Combined Authority to benefit from enhanced central government funding and improved joint working with neighbouring Councils.

● ● We will encourage Council suppliers to pay their staff the real living wage. We will set an example to local employers by ensuring all council directly-employed staff are paid at least the real living wage.
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Protecting the environment
PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

A couple of years ago, it seemed that the world had come to a consensus on the need to take the perils of climate change seriously. Countries across the globe had recognised that rising temperatures and pollution were not just an environmental issue, but an economic and security problem.

The Conservatives seem determined to take Britain back to the 1980s when the UK was the ‘dirty man of Europe’. They have cut support for renewable energy and home insulation, sold off the Green Investment Bank, failed to control air pollution and refuse to ban Fracking in England and Wales.

Their actions put not just Britain’s environment at risk but the health of its citizens and its economy, undermining the increasingly successful green industries which already employ more than half a million workers.

Liberal Democrats are determined that we live up to our environmental obligations, that’s why we led efforts to persuade North Somerset Council to go carbon neutral by 2030.

Our priorities in the next four years will be:

- Produce a ‘Green North Somerset’ report which will direct us on how best to turn our district green by recycling more and banning single-use plastics in the council and encouraging local suppliers to support this.
- We will create a ‘micro-grid’ in conjunction with other authorities using renewable energy.
- Campaign to ban Shale Gas Extraction (Fracking) in England and Wales. Council land would not be allowed for fracking under any circumstances.
- Installing on-street recycling in our towns and villages to encourage residents to recycle on the go; as well as publishing advice to local residents on things they can do to help our environment.
- Planting more trees and flowers to help tackle air pollution.
- Set out a plan to go Carbon neutral by 2030.
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Supporting families and communities
SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

A fair society is one in which everyone has the means to get by and the chance to get on. It means being able to provide for your family, afford somewhere to live and work within your community.

That’s why we will be focusing on helping more people while saving money. It’s why we will work to build more houses and make them affordable. Moreover, it’s why we will empower communities to run their services – free from interference.

Other local authorities have looked at new ways to support community groups and projects that provide a vital service, and by learning from the success stories and working with our neighbours, we can build a brighter North Somerset.

One person on the streets is one too many, that’s why a Liberal Democrat-led Council would always make sure there were beds provided and programmes to encourage and support homeless people.

Our priorities in the next four years will be:

- Tackling persistent antisocial behaviour by providing the right balance of enforcement together with prevention and active intervention.
- Support new youth provision with uniformed organisations and other community groups to strengthen provision and opportunities for children and young people.
- Support children’s centres and other early intervention services for children and young people to help give them the best start in life.
Demand better for North Somerset

Making the council more accountable
MAKING COUNCILLORS MORE ACCOUNTABLE

Britain suffers from a political system with a lack of openness and accountability. North Somerset Council is unrepresentative of the electorate, and local government is hobbled by central control, and people feel they have no effective means of making known their concerns and priorities. It’s no wonder people feel frustrated and angry at the system.

We believe in a community where people have power over their own lives and how their area is run. To make this happen, we need to revitalise our political system – strengthening devolution and increasing trust in the Council to deliver for local people. This means we need to work cross-party to make the best decisions.

To regain the trust of the electorate, we must lay out a manifesto that genuinely aims to capture the imagination of North Somerset with proposals which put transparency at the heart of what the council does.

It should only ever be local people who help shape policy in our local area, and by giving you more opportunities to see what’s going on inside the Council and refusing to line our own pockets with taxpayers money - our ‘lay everything out for people to see’ approach shows the direction we want to take the authority.

Our priorities in the next four years will be:

- Introduce live video recording of all public council meetings.
- No pay rises for councillors under a Liberal Democrat-led Council until at least 2023.
- Campaign for further devolution of services and the expansion of the Localism Act.
- Reduce the special responsibilities allowances paid to councillors by 20% - so you get more for less from your councillors.
- Make local people aware of who is representing them and promote the best way to contact them for help.
- Reintroduce the cross-party committee system to run the Council, so that all parties are represented on decision-making committees instead of power being held by just six ‘Executive’ councillors.
This manifesto sets out North Somerset Liberal Democrat policies and priorities for local government elections on 2nd May 2019.

Published and promoted by Mike Bell on behalf of North Somerset Liberal Democrats, 44b The Crescent, Milton, Weston-super-Mare, BS22 8DU.