



Standing Up For Local Communities

Welsh Liberal Democrat Manifesto for 2017



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INTRODUCTION FROM MARK WILLIAMS MP, LEADER OF THE WELSH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS



Dear friend,

Our politics has never been more divided than it is today. The future of our country, communities and economy is deeply uncertain.

The local elections on May 4th offer you and your community the opportunity to stand up for decent, tolerant values and for ideas that will make your community stronger, more open, and more prosperous.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats are united, growing and ready - our values are needed now more than ever. People are turning to the Liberal Democrats as the authentic voice of communities, ready to stand up for our closely held values of tolerance, openness, and unity.

Our fantastic local campaigners work tirelessly all year round to ensure that your local communities have strong liberal voices and strong Liberal Democrat representatives who will stand up for the issues that matter to you. Whether in our cities, towns or remote rural communities, we stand against those Councils that ignore those they are there to represent.

Yet Welsh Liberal Democrats offer more than just opposition. We offer a positive vision for what we can achieve in our communities and across Wales.

Whether that's delivering more than £300m for our schools to give every child the best start in life, building 20,000 new affordable homes across Wales, or protecting funding for local councils.

Our message is clear. A vote for the Welsh Liberal Democrats is a vote for a party you can trust to stand up for you and your community.

We are the party of community champions who will stand up in the interests of our communities at every turn, fighting for a better politics, more accountable councils, and a liberal vision of Wales.

This manifesto is a snapshot into the ideas Welsh Liberal Democrat have to take our communities forward. It is a vision for better local services, more vibrant high streets, and better schools.

We will work to make sure that nobody in our communities is left behind and that everyone has the opportunity to succeed in life. That is our promise to you.

Yours,

WE BELIEVE

A better future is possible – a Wales with strong communities, supported by efficient public services, and with local people in the driving seat.

Our children deserve the best start in life, which means creating an education system that is the source of national pride.

Wales and Britain are stronger in Europe. We will fight for our place in the single market to protect jobs, business and investment, and demand a vote of the people on the final deal.

WE REJECT

The lack of vision of many of Wales' councillors. We will work tirelessly to root out complacency, favouritism and cronyism in politics, creating accountable and responsible local councils.

The politics of division and intolerance that has infected our politics – we stand for an open and tolerant society, where the most vulnerable are protected, supported, and enabled to get ahead in life.

WE WILL

Confront the difficult choices facing communities, and make better use of public money to deliver better, more effective public services for you and your community.

In this election, a vote for the Welsh Liberal Democrats is a vote for -

- 1. Creating stronger communities and better public services to the benefit of all.**
- 2. Giving our children the best start in life.**
- 3. Creating accountable, more transparent and responsible local councils.**

CREATING PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES

If we want to create a successful Wales where everyone has the opportunity to succeed, we need to invest in creating thriving, modern, local economies.

Local councils need to be at the forefront of regeneration efforts, but they don't yet have the right tools.

We will continue to call for powers over local regeneration to be devolved to local councils, including enabling councils to keep half of all business rates, to encourage and stimulate local growth and fund local services.

Every community, rural and urban, must benefit from economic growth and strong local services, and we will tackle the downward turn of many of our town centres and high streets.

We can create thriving town centres and high streets in many ways, including by encouraging the spread of free Wi-Fi, incentivising town-centre parking and re-routing local bus routes.

By giving local businesses the ability to shape and implement their own priorities, we can create successful business communities and stronger local economies.

The Tories' hard Brexit risks the future of the Welsh economy - from our wages, to the success of small businesses, and losing vital investment for our roads and rail network.

The Liberal Democrats are fighting for Wales' place in the single market and demand a vote of the people on the final deal. People did not vote to make themselves poorer, and we cannot let the Tories harm our future.

- **There was a 2.2% decline in the number of shoppers visiting Wales' high streets, compared to increases of 2% and 0.6% in Northern Ireland and Scotland.**
- **Wales receives substantially more EU funding per head than other UK countries: £628 per person in 2014, £224 N. Ireland, £134 Scotland, £102 England.**
- **17,437 jobs have been created or safeguarded by the EU since 2003.**



Welsh Liberal Democrat Councils and Councillors will strengthen local economies and support local businesses by -

- **Engaging more proactively with local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as part of procurement strategy, including auditing businesses to create contracts that meet the needs of local businesses;**
- **Establishing Business Improvement Districts and share learning from City Deals so business owners lead their own priorities for growth;**
- **Making high streets more attractive to shoppers by incentivising town-centre parking, introducing free Wi-Fi, and ensuring good local transport routes;**
- **Developing crisis management approaches to help local economies cope with local economic shocks, such as the closure of a major employer.**
- **Working with the Welsh Government on the creation a Reoccupation Relief Scheme for business rates, to encourage businesses to take on empty shops.**
- **Working with the Welsh Government to enable the use Tax Increment Financing to encourage business investment in major regeneration programmes.**

CONNECTING WALES

Accessible and affordable local transport is vital in helping to reduce isolation and ensure people can access services. We will look not just at transport infrastructure, but digital and social infrastructure too.

Liberal Democrats will continue to call for powers to be devolved to the most local level practical so decision-making on transport is informed by the communities it serves. We will also work with government to deliver major projects like the North and South Wales Metro and the electrification of the North and South Wales mainline on time.

However, it isn't only roads and transport that connect people. We need modern, digital infrastructure fit for the 21st century too.

Wales has the lowest level of superfast broadband of anywhere in the UK and unacceptably poor levels of mobile phone coverage. Our businesses and communities are being held back by digital exclusion, and we must close the gap between rural and urban areas as a matter of priority.



Welsh Liberal Democrat Councils and Councillors will invest in the infrastructure of our communities by –

- **Planning ahead to manage the upkeep of our roads, pavements and cycle routes to stop them from crumbling;**
- **Considering active travel whenever roads are upgraded, including taking measures to make cycling safer;**
- **Giving digital infrastructure investment the same priority as physical infrastructure, to narrow the gap between urban and rural Wales;**
- **Working with the Welsh Government to ensure that all small and medium sized businesses have access to superfast broadband, particularly in rural communities;**
- **Campaign for the creation of regional Passenger Transport Authorities, based in the communities they serve, to deliver more affordable, accessible and integrated transport services;**
- **Campaign to abolish tolls on the Severn Bridge once the debts are paid off;**
- **Abolish tolls on the Cleddau Bridge and trunk the full length of the A477.**

- **30% of small businesses in Wales are without access to superfast broadband.**
- **Only 34% of homes in Wales have 4G coverage.**
- **57% of rural areas have access to superfast broadband.**
- **Wales currently spends £3.93 per person on cycling, far below the £12 spent in Scotland.**

HOMES FOR ALL

For people to live fulfilled lives, they need a decent home, at a price they can afford. But that simple ambition is out of reach for many. Local councils have an essential role to play in providing safe, secure and affordable homes for everyone.

Councils should be building more affordable homes across Wales, making sure private rented homes are up scratch, and helping first time buyers get on the property ladder. Yet in 2014, only 2,218 social homes were built, despite needing 5,000 new homes every year.

In too many areas, developments are rejected because plans lack the proper investment in roads, transport, and schools. Councils should identify suitable sites for developments that are appropriate to the makeup of the community and properly supported by new infrastructure.

We need to be creative in building new homes, including using brown-field sites to transform local eyesores, like the old Penallta Colliery, into new housing estates.

In Government the Welsh Liberal Democrats are;

- **Delivering 20,000 new affordable homes;**
- **Delivering a new Rent to Own model, giving everyone the opportunity to buy their own home, where tenants build up a share in their home through rent payments until they own the property outright, just like with a mortgage.**

- **There are nearly 25,000 empty homes across Wales.**
- **90,000 households were on the social housing waiting lists in 2014.**
- **2,000 new affordable homes are needed annually, with 5,100 new social housing units each year.**
- **140,063 young people aged between 16 and 24 spent at least one night sofa surfing or rough sleeping in 2013-14.**
- **£1.7m in financial support to those at risk of becoming homeless was yet to be allocated by local councils in February 2017.**



Welsh Liberal Democrat Councils and Councillors will make sure your family has a roof over their head by -

- **Working with government to develop a National Empty Homes Strategy to bring the more than 25,000 empty homes back into use;**
- **Ensuring new social housing is built to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and that at least 10% are built to full wheelchair accessibility standards;**
- **Ensure all councils have an accessible housing register, so they know where their wheelchair accessible, adaptable and adapted homes are, and how many they have;**
- **Improving standards in the Private Rented Sector by actively working with local partners, tenants, and landlords;**
- **Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping by exploring initiatives such as the Housing First model;**
- **Lobbying to allow the social housing grant to be used to renovate disused properties, so that additional homes can be brought into use;**
- **Enabling council tenants to take control of services such as repairs, grounds maintenance and security;**
- **Levying up to 200% Council Tax on second and empty homes, where appropriate.**

OUR NATIONAL MISSION OF EDUCATION REFORM

Education reform is our national mission. Working together we will ensure that our young people have an equal opportunity to reach the highest standards. We will be confident, ambitious and innovative.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats are the party of education. We have consistently prioritised investment in our young people and in our schools because we know that the best way we can give everyone in Wales the opportunity to succeed in life is through a good education.

That is why we are investing in our pupils, in our schools, and in our teachers. Reducing class sizes so our teachers have the time to teach, raising the standing and supporting the talent of our teaching profession, and focusing on closing the attainment gap between our most disadvantaged children and their counterparts.

We want to create an education system which is of national pride, where Wales can become the best and provide the very best start in life for our young people.

This is our national mission because we must now work together to get the basics right; raising our standards and ambitions for excellence for all pupils, parents, students and teachers.

In Government, Welsh Liberal Democrats are giving our children the best chance at success by -

- **Extending the Pupil Development Grant to support our young people, investing more than £90m in 2017/18 alone;**
- **Reducing infant class sizes so that teachers have the time to focus on a child's individual needs;**
- **Supporting the introduction of a new Education Leadership Academy to recognise and promote teaching excellence;**
- **Introducing Wales' first ever rural and small schools policy to raise standards in all of our schools, no matter where they are based, and ensuring all schools get a fair hearing when their future is being considered;**
- **Supporting the development of a new curriculum, made in Wales but shaped by the best from around the world, so our young people have the skills to get on in life.**



Welsh Liberal Democrat Councils and Councillors will invest in our children and our schools by –

- **Working with Kirsty Williams in reducing infant class sizes so that teachers have the time to focus on a child’s individual needs;**
- **Prioritising funding for school buildings to make sure that they are fit for the 21st Century;**
- **Making better use of Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, ensuring that councils are able to provide Welsh medium education for those communities where there is a need;**
- **Protecting funding for children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN);**
- **Supporting schools to establish a Parent Teacher Associations.**

- **£282m has been invested in young people through our Pupil Development Grant since 2012.**
- **Each year more than 65,000 children have received the extra support they need to get ahead in life through the Pupil Development Grant.**
- **More than 8,000 infants are in class sizes of more than 30 pupils; we are investing £36m to reduce those class sizes.**

DIGNITY IN CARE

People need care that focuses on their needs and the needs of their loved ones. We believe that services must work together to break down boundaries so patients are not simply passed around, never getting the support that they deserve.

We need more cooperation between services, but we do not support mass top-down re-organisation imposed by Ministers in Cardiff Bay.

Decisions-making on services should be made at the most appropriate level to deliver effective and responsive care, and should be informed by people's experiences.

Across the UK, we are seeing new approaches to delivering social care services, but not in Wales. We cannot keep repeating the same process and hope for a different result. We must think differently about how care is delivered.

In Manchester and Torbay, front-line health and social care services have been brought together to provide seamless care from multiple agencies, reducing the number of hospital admissions and helping people get back to their home quicker.

By integrating budgets and services to deliver seamless and personalised care for individuals we can deliver better, more effective personalised care, keep people in their homes and out of hospital.

- **Around 10% of patients face delays of 26 weeks or more in being transferred to the next stage of their care.**
- **Social Care costs in Wales could rise to almost £1bn by 2030.**
- **71% of older people in Wales are expected to need some form of residential care by 2030.**
- **By merging front-line services and budgets Trafford made £23m in savings over 5 years with Torbay Care Trust saving nearly £250k in management costs in the first year.**



Welsh Liberal Democrat Councils and Councillors will support the most vulnerable in society when they need it the most by -

- **Supporting local initiatives that bring frontline services closer together, including establishing single management structures and pooled budgets through Regional Partnership Boards to create more effective wrap around care for patients, wherever possible;**
- **Creating a single care team in each community to provide the necessary care for patients;**
- **Working towards eliminating 15-minute care slots for patients as it is simply not long enough to provide the care individuals need;**
- **Considering transport when planning health and social services so fragmented transport does not prevent people from accessing care;**
- **Supporting patients who need it by linking them to an independent advocate.**

COMMUNITIES TO LIVE IN

Our cities, towns and villages need local services and community facilities like schools, public transport, local shops, cultural venues and pubs.

Yet for years communities have been losing local services and have often been without the tools or the know-how to save them. We want to empower people to take on local services that are a lifeline for many.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats have a record of strong community representation, standing up for local people, local communities, and bringing new ideas to get things done. We will listen to communities and empower you to make the best decisions for you and your communities.

Welsh Liberal Democrat Councils and Councillors will support thriving, creative and friendly communities by-

- **Establishing Asset Transfer Advisory Committees to empower people to take on the running of local services;**
- **Ensuring the continuation of the local government funding floor, secured by the Welsh Liberal Democrats, to protect councils from disproportionate and unfair cuts;**
- **Working with residents to roll out 20mph zones in residential areas to make our roads and cycling safer;**
- **Convening round table meetings with retail banks to encourage support for a community banking model to create a cost effective way to sustain a branch presence in vulnerable communities;**
- **Calling for the introduction of a Community Bill of Rights to empower communities to take initiative over their local services and assets;**
- **Working with Government to investigate the development of Community Budgets to combine services, encouraging the breaking down of boundaries between different services.**



TRUST AND FAIRNESS IN OUR DEMOCRACY

Democracy in Wales is facing a crisis of trust and legitimacy. Our councils are simply not accountable or democratic enough and this allows poor decision-making and mismanagement to go unchecked year after year.

For Liberal Democrats, delivering a fairer voting system and handing more power to people is an integral part of delivering better public services and a fairer Wales.

We are clear that Welsh Liberal Democrat Councillors and Councils will vote to introduce fairer votes at local government elections, and will continue to call for fairer voting for all elections in Wales.

By giving people a greater say over how services are run by making each vote count, we can create the resilient public services our communities need for the future.

By recognising that people are experts in their own lives, by respecting the views of services users, and by empowering local people, we can create a fairer Wales where everyone has the opportunity to get on in life.

Welsh Liberal Democrat Councils and Councillors will create transparent, more accountable local councils by –

- **Making each vote count through changing our voting system for local council elections;**
- **Introducing votes at 16, giving our younger citizens the chance to make their voices heard;**
- **Co-opting non-voting youth representatives to community councils, and working with partners to introduce Youth Councils where they do not already exist;**
- **Ensuring that the structures and processes of our councils are accessible to the public, by conducting Equality Impact Assessments;**
- **End the culture of excessive ‘golden-goodbyes’ by calling for the introduction of a maximum figure of £90,000 on all future redundancy and severance payments.**

WELSH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The Welsh language is an inherent strand of the fabric of our country. We believe that everyone should be enabled to speak their native language, that everyone should be able to access good quality Welsh public services, and that learning Welsh should be open to all.

From the provision of Welsh medium education, health and social care to accessing local services, we believe that everyone should be able to engage with public services in the language of their choice.

Everyone in Wales must have the right to speak and learn Welsh – whether you come from a Welsh-language family or are newly-arrived in our beautiful country, you should be able to speak Welsh in your community.

Welsh Liberal Democrat Councils and Councillors will strengthen the standing of the Welsh language by -

- **Supporting efforts and initiatives to promote and protect the Welsh language and increase the number of Welsh speakers;**
- **Ensuring the appropriate development of affordable homes in rural Welsh-speaking areas;**
- **Campaigning for VAT on tourism to be cut from 20% to 5% to boost local economies and create jobs;**
- **Promoting the ‘active offer’ model across social care services so patients can access services in the language of their choice;**
- **Supporting calls for language to be a material consideration determining planning applications where appropriate, including making language impact assessments of proposed developments a statutory requirement before planning permission is granted;**
- **Calling for the exploration of business rate relief for independent book and music stores to help protect the last stores in a town, providing that books and recordings from Welsh authors and artists are stocked.**

- **In 2015-16 councils in Wales spent £2.1million up from £1.8million in 2014-15 tackling fly-tipping.**
- **The latest estimate is that there are 291,000 households living in fuel poverty equivalent to 23% of households in Wales.**

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Small and micro-scale energy ownership and generation is vital to empower communities and individuals to meet their energy needs from diverse sources, especially solar and hydropower.

Councils can do more to incentivise and enable local energy projects and reduce their impact on the environment, including by upgrading council owned buildings, supporting co-operatives and local enterprises, and investing in the energy efficiency of social housing.

Kent County Council has invested in energy efficiency, renewable energy and water efficiency improvements across its estate and in schools. Since 2006, £3 million has been invested, delivering savings of £7 million and lifetime carbon dioxide savings of 34,991 tonnes. We can do this here, in Wales, now.

We will also take steps to support individuals and families facing fuel poverty, by supporting community based mentoring schemes and utilising community benefit schemes to tackle fuel poverty.

Welsh Liberal Democrat Councils and Councillors will protect and improve our environment by –

- **Supporting co-operatives to develop renewable energy projects in or on suitable publicly owned buildings and land, where practical;**
- **Tackling fuel poverty by utilising community benefit schemes to tackle fuel poverty and high energy bills, and supporting the development of community-based advice and mentoring schemes;**
- **Upgrading council-owned buildings to improve energy efficiency and reduce energy waste, and investing in low or zero carbon technologies;**
- **Promoting schemes to alleviate flood risk through innovative land management – including planting trees and vegetation, restoring wetland areas, and creating safe flood reservoirs.**



COMMUNITY SAFETY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

No one can fulfil their potential if they live in fear. By ensuring our laws are upheld, we can build strong communities which opportunity for all.

We believe in the importance of protecting civil liberties. Welsh Liberal Democrats believe everyone should be able to be their own person and act as their own spotlight, their own guiding light - everyone should be enabled to live life how they choose, so long as it doesn't encroach on the freedoms of others.

Welsh Liberal Democrats Councils and Councillors will create safe, welcoming and tolerant communities by -

- **Creating Cities of Sanctuary, and fully engaging with the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme;**
- **Supporting voluntary organisations to provide support for refugees, including submission of family reunion applications;**
- **Working with the Welsh Government to continue investment in PCSOs to protect local communities;**
- **Targeting organised crime groups and drug dealers, emulating the approach of Durham Constabulary;**
- **Promote the use of alternative buildings for magistrates' courts and local dispute resolution programmes like Community Justice Panels to bring justice back into the community;**
- **Lobby to keep justice as local as possible by opposing court closures where possible.**



ACHIEVING MORE WHILE SPENDING LESS

The greatest challenge facing Councils is dealing with less revenue year-by-year while still maintaining public services. Most councils have only confronted the situation at budget-time - making cuts to stay in the red. People are told there is no money, leading to frustration - and poor services.

We already know that there are cuts planned for every year until 2020-21, and Brexit will leave a £150bn black hole in our public sector. Councils must act now.

Liberal Democrats are determined to deliver effective, person centred services. Our aim is to deliver effective services that meet people's needs. We will address the challenges ahead and tackle them differently by being creative about how we spend and save, by planning for the future.

Welsh Liberal Democrats will do this by -

- **Listening and drawing on the experiences of residents and service users to gather ideas about how to run services more efficiently;**
- **Tearing down boundaries between services so that you and your communities get the services you need;**
- **Using the latest technology and management methods to run services more effectively - to deliver more at less cost.**



FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN WALES

We want to empower local communities and promote a flourishing system of democratic local government in which power is exercised at the most local level possible.

Welsh Liberal Democrats believe in strong and effective local government that is responsive to the needs and interests of local people, and where our councils are fairly elected and are representative of the communities that they represent.

We believe that whatever the size of your community, you should be empowered to set your own priorities, lead your own regeneration, and protect the social infrastructure that keeps your community alive. That means handing responsibilities and powers over to communities, such as over local regeneration, to communities

We welcome the direction the Welsh Government presents in its plans to reform local government. The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that greater collaboration on vital services such as house building, transport, and economic development are needed to create a prosperous future for Wales and our communities.

Greater regional working between Local Authorities must be transparent and accountable to local councillors and the communities that they serve, and must be shown to bring demonstrable benefits for local people. The Welsh Liberal Democrats will not support plans which create additional, expensive bureaucracy where local people and local needs are not at the forefront of shaping public services.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats will support and push for: The devolution of power from Cardiff Bay to local communities. Giving local government responsibility for areas such as economic development, community regeneration, and the meaningful devolution of power from local authorities to community councils, where appropriate. We will also call for powers that allow Ministers to merge councils by decree to be repealed.



Policy Note

This manifesto represents our key priorities for the period 2017-2022 in local government, in a range of policy areas. Our party passed a number of policy papers during the Fourth Assembly covering these topics in greater detail, which provides a broader context for how we will achieve our aims. Policies from these papers which are not included in this manifesto remain our party policy and we will seek to implement in future as the opportunity arises.

For more information, visit www.welshlibdems.wales/policy_papers

Equalities Note

Opportunities are not equally distributed in modern Wales. Your ethnicity, health, sexuality and gender still too often affect your chances in life, educational attainments, work prospects, how you are treated by the police and the justice system, and even how long you will live.

We have given consideration to equalities issues throughout this manifesto, as well as drawing out some specific priorities. Welsh Liberal Democrats will work to make sure that public services including health, education, housing and employment services are sensitive to the needs of everybody, including people with protected characteristics. This includes women and non-male individuals; LGBT+ individuals; Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals; and people with disabilities. We believe that nobody should be prevented from accessing key services because of their background.

Design by Ben Falkner and Rhys Taylor.

Welsh Liberal
Democrats

Democratiaid
Rhyddfrydol Cymru

