

# Getting Northamptonshire Working

## **A Fair Start & Better Jobs**

- Getting young people into work
- Attract investment and green jobs
- Access to good, local schools

## Safer Streets

- Restore streetlights
- Protect frontline policing
- Fix roads and pavements

## Support when you need it

- Protect libraries and children's centres
- Stop Conservative cuts to voluntary sector
- Root out the abuse of people in care

## **Cut Tory Waste**

- Axe Tories' £6m Quango with an office in Brussels
- Slash top Councillors' pay and cut County Hall spin doctors
- Fight Conservative Police Commissioner cronyism

## Introduction

Northamptonshire is a county with great potential. Sadly its residents have been badly let down by an incompetent, uncaring, arrogant Conservative administration, making the wrong choices at County Hall. Northamptonshire Liberal Democrats are determined to get Northamptonshire working.

The nature of Local Government is changing. In a tough financial climate for everyone the Council must not abandon its residents, particularly the vulnerable. Equally the days of Councils directly providing all services are gone. The role of the Council must be to work across the board with the voluntary sector, schools, Police, NHS, Districts and Boroughs and others to ensure that Northamptonshire reaches its full potential and no-one is left behind.

The financial challenge faced by the Council is not only of the previous Labour Government's making. The local Conservative' track record of financial incompetence, such as the botched sale of closed schools, costing the hard pressed taxpayers of Northamptonshire a potential windfall of £95m, the £32m Carillion contract fiasco, the £22m wasted on consultants in 2009/10 alone, the £15m budget black hole in 2010 or the £2.5m gap in the school meals budget demonstrates their failure.

Not only that, but the Conservatives failed to fix the roof whilst the sun was shining. Prior to the 2008 financial collapse the Conservatives pursued a policy of keeping Council tax artificially low and back office costs high. A bloated Council, starved of income, was unable to effectively deal with the challenges posed when the Government had to reign in the deficit left by the last Labour Government. The result has been cuts to the most vulnerable, which are as unnecessary as they are harsh.

Yet the Conservatives have continued pouring taxpayers' hard earned cash into wasteful vanity projects, best typified by their £6m Quango with an office in Brussels. A financially incompetent, uncaring Conservative administration which refuses to listen has left the County in a dire state.

Meanwhile Labour have failed to hold the Conservatives to account, letting them off the hook for the choices they make locally. We already know that the Labour party can not be trusted with the public finances either – the Corby Cube £12m overspend shows they are as financially incompetent locally as they were in Government.

But Labour in Northamptonshire have repeatedly refused to recognise that whoever runs our Council will have choices to make with the money they receive. They have failed to back the Liberal Democrats in moves to cut the pay of top Councillors, protect low paid staff and hold the Conservative Police Commissioner to account for his cuts to frontline policing and disgraceful cronyism.

The Liberal Democrats want to get Northamptonshire working. We want to put jobs and opportunities at the top of our agenda. We must do more to provide real opportunities for our young people and give them the skills they need to succeed in life. As of January 2013 over 4,000 young people in Northamptonshire between 16 and 24 were claiming Job Seekers' Allowance, a number above the national and regional average. We need to break down the barriers that stop them getting in to work, such as providing free transport for young people in rural areas to get to job placements and interviews.

There are also real opportunities for areas that promote green growth through Government and private sector investment. We will invest in Green growth through building a Solar Farm on Council owned land, generating green energy, jobs and an income stream for the hard pressed taxpayers of Northamptonshire. We will seek to work with partners to promote the national "Green Deal", and will seek to develop schemes to conserve energy and boost renewable energy across the Council. We will also call for all planning authorities in Northamptonshire to ensure that all new building has at least 50% of its roofing either south facing or able to accept Solar panels.

We need to ensure that the young people of today are equipped to take up the jobs of tomorrow. Yet under the Conservatives, the Northamptonshire education system is failing many of our young people.

The Conservatives have failed to provide the right school places in the right areas, blighting many families, particularly those who cannot get places in their local primary school .

But it is worse than that. In Northamptonshire 50% of young people do not get 5 A\*- Cs including Maths and English at GCSE. This is an unacceptable failure to our County's young people.

At the same time only 46% of primary school children and 59% of secondary school children are likely to attend schools ranked "good" or "outstanding" according to recent OFSTED figures. Northamptonshire is ranked 133<sup>rd</sup> out of 150 areas for secondary schools, and is just 20 places from the bottom for primary schools. There can be no excuse for such a damning indictment of the Conservatives' 8 years in power.

Our infrastructure needs serious investment. Whether it is superfast broadband, new cycle networks or public transport, we must ensure our County can travel to work.

The Liberal Democrats are determined to make our streets safer. The Conservatives' decisions to break a manifesto pledge and cut funds for PCSOs, whilst turning off half the streetlights trapped vulnerable people in their homes and led to an increase in the fear of crime. We will turn streetlights back on where people need them, protect frontline policing and fix our roads and pavements.

Meanwhile their Police Commissioner has chosen to cut funds for 45 full time frontline Police Officers and create an £800k office stuffed with political cronies. We will hold him to account and fight these reckless choices.

The basic humanity of our county can be judged by how we treat the most vulnerable. The shocking scandal of completely inadequate children's social services leaving children at risk is unforgiveable.

Northamptonshire Conservatives have proven beyond doubt that they are still the nasty party, ripping the safety net for the most vulnerable with their £19m of cuts to "prevention" budgets, threatening childrens' centres and libraries and piling charges on those least able to defend themselves. We can not allow this situation to continue.

The Liberal Democrats will stand up for the vulnerable in our county, sorting out our care system, rooting out abuse and prioritising quality of care. We will immediately review the Conservatives' Orwellian "Fair Charging Policy" and fund the voluntary sector to get to those most in need. We will protect valued community facilities like childrens' centres and libraries.

The Conservative Council Leader has claimed that if the Conservatives win the election they will hold power for another 10 years. Northamptonshire simply can not take another 10 years of Conservative failure.

The Liberal Democrats want to see a strong economy and a fair society enabling everyone to get on in life. By working hard with local residents, the voluntary sector, other public bodies and private businesses we can make the right choices and get Northamptonshire working.

## A fairer start - better jobs

We know that our economy is heavily influenced by national and international factors. The economy does not stop at the County's borders and that we must work with other Councils, partners and the Government to play our part in ensuring that there are jobs and opportunities for the county's residents, especially the young.

The County Council must concentrate its resources to improve the skills of local residents, fixing our schools, breaking down barriers to employment, upgrade our infrastructure and work with others to attract businesses to our county and region. Everything the Liberal Democrats would do if elected would serve these aims.

We know that how we act now in tackling climate change can actually help to boost economic growth. The Liberal Democrats will invest £10m capital funding in solar farms on Council land, generating green energy, jobs, opportunities for apprenticeships and an ongoing £1m revenue stream, similar to that proposed in Cambridgeshire. We will

implement a “green travel plan” for Council staff relocated in the Angel Street development and we will generate more renewable energy in, on and from our buildings.

With the setting up of the Green Investment Bank and the “Green Deal” for householders in particular, there are opportunities for Northamptonshire businesses to “green” our local economy, cutting carbon and creating jobs. The Liberal Democrats will work through SEMLEP to push for green growth. We want Northamptonshire firms to know about, and get investment from, the Green Investment Bank, and residents to take up the “Green Deal” to improve their energy efficiency.

We must also spend the limited money we have wisely. Currently the Conservatives spend £2m every year on Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership, an organisation that spends over half that money on back office functions. It is clear that NEP has a “top-heavy” management structure, and high running costs. NEP, by its own targets, has also woefully underperformed in terms of creating apprenticeships and skills development.

The Conservatives created NEP despite the fact that South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership already operates in Northamptonshire, and has been very successful, in particular in securing the Waterside Enterprise Zone in Northampton. This is one of the largest Enterprise Zones in the country and is expected to create 17,000 jobs.

If Northamptonshire were to throw its full weight behind SEMLEP it would be one of the largest players and potentially have access to a larger pool of funds. In addition the economy is not an issue that stops at Northamptonshire’s borders – working with others to boost the economy will benefit local residents here too. The cost that other Councils have contributed to SEMLEP has been a fraction of the £2m contribution to NEP. We would set aside £200k to ensure that Northamptonshire’s commitment to SEMLEP was significant.

The duplication of work is unnecessary and costs the taxpayer money. The Liberal Democrats would close NEP and its £300k a year Brussels office, cutting back office costs and management, whilst retaining local knowledge and experience. We will forge a new partnership with Northamptonshire’s MEPs to bring investment to our county.

West Northants Development Corporation is wound up in 2014, just at a time when its work to bring business and employment to the heart of Northampton sees results. We need to ensure that the drive the regenerate Northampton town centre is maintained, and that a single body covering the Enterprise Zone and Northampton Town Centre, bringing together SEMLEP, local businesses and the local authorities takes over where WNDC leaves off.

The Liberal Democrats will also seek to promote Northamptonshire as a place for businesses to be based. We know that we have great potential as a county but we must sell this to major businesses and convince them to move here, creating more good quality jobs locally. We would invest £250k every year to bring businesses to Northamptonshire.

As well as creating jobs and promoting growth it is crucial that we do not leave young people behind. We must break down barriers to the employment market. Nationally, the Liberal Democrats have fought hard for the £1bn “Youth Contract” to offer training or an apprenticeship to every young person. We want to build on this work and ensure that locally the County Council delivers real opportunities for all young people.

In particular we would develop several schemes, at a total cost of £1m net, as follows:

- 1) We will work with Job Centre Plus to cut transport costs for young people going to work placements and interviews. We know this is a real barrier for local young people in rural areas.
- 2) We will work with Job Centre Plus and the voluntary sector to develop a scheme whereby young unemployed people could gain useful skills and experience in voluntary work placements
- 3) We will build on the apprenticeship scheme in place at NCC and push for any public sector capital project in the County to provide apprenticeships. We would also work with major private businesses to encourage more work placements and apprenticeships.
- 4) We will ensure that major contracts let by the Council include a requirement to appoint appropriate numbers of apprenticeships by the winning contractor
- 5) We will ensure the maximum funds possible for supporting economic growth by ring fencing any business rate growth to economic development.
- 6) We will work to develop a business rate scheme for Silverstone so that Northamptonshire benefits fully from a major employer across two counties.
- 7) We will set up a programme to use currently disused public sector land and buildings (such as vacant school sites) for short –term lets to local start-up businesses.

Preparing our children and young people for the jobs of the future is crucial. Every child, no matter the circumstances of their birth, should have the opportunity to realise their potential. A good education is the bedrock of a young person’s life and the single best way to break down barriers and inequality.

We need a school system that prepares young people for the jobs of tomorrow, giving them the skills that our local businesses need, as well as an all-round education.

Parents should be able to send their children to their local school of choice and expect that they get a high standard of education. Sadly, under the Conservatives, exam results lag behind the national average and due to poor planning by the Conservative administration many parents struggle to get their child into the school of their choice. This has been a particular problem with primary schools in urban areas, where the Conservatives have

resorted to desperate measures like using office blocks for school expansions. We would seek alternative solutions and ensure that we are properly planning for future pupil numbers. Unless urgent action is taken this problem will inevitably repeat itself in future years at secondary level.

Central Government has pushed through Academies as their solution to education. As a Local Authority, Northamptonshire County Council still retains a role in ensuring fair access, and in school improvement for maintained schools – ensuring that schools that are not up to standard provide a decent education.

The Local Authority also has a role in how the school funding formula for maintained schools is set. We believe that this funding should take a long – term view and ensure those schools that face added challenges such as deprivation are given the resources they need. The Conservatives have supported a funding formula that has diverted resources away from urban schools which face additional challenges. We would seek to establish an “Excellence in Education” £1m fund, where schools in deprived areas could bid for specific projects to help their pupils overcome barriers.

As Northamptonshire grows over the coming years we will ensure that developer contributions for new or expanded schools are used effectively to provide school places in a timely manner rather than lag behind population growth.

Nationally the Liberal Democrats have introduced the Pupil Premium, extra money for the pupils from the most deprived backgrounds, and have brought forward plans to ensure every 2 year old from a deprived background gets free childcare. We believe that this is at the heart of tackling inequality at an early age and ensuring opportunity for all. We will spread best practice to schools across the County to ensure that money is benefitting the pupils it is supposed to.

The advice given to young people about their choices going forwards needs to be of a high standard, impartial, and tailored to the individual young person. Good quality advice must be available to all young people, not just those in education or training. Conservative cuts to Connexions have added to this challenge. The choices that young people make can shape the rest of their lives. We will hold schools to account in the advice they provide to young people – it must be tailored to that young person and their future, not just the interests of the school. We will support Connexions to reach young people not in education or training to ensure that all young people are able to access help in getting the right training, job or opportunity.

We support the principle of University Technology Colleges, but know that it is difficult for young people to get to Silverstone without adequate public transport. So we will extend our youth unemployment transport scheme to those young people attending the County's

UTCs. We will also work with colleges like Tresham and Northampton College to provide excellent choices and opportunities for young people in our county.

We will also support the University of Northampton's Social Enterprise programme, and ensure that it recognises the huge contribution that innovative social enterprises make to tackling climate change.

Finally, in order to cut carbon emissions and boost green growth, the County Council must invest in our infrastructure properly. We will step up the pace of the roll-out superfast broadband across Northamptonshire. For many businesses, particularly in rural areas, fast internet speeds will enable them to grow more quickly and cut the need for travel.

We will invest in our transport network – particularly cycle routes, footpaths and public transport to make it easier for local people to get out of their cars. We will work with Boroughs and Districts to implement new cycle routes and give priority to cycle routes and networks in planning applications where appropriate. We will make use of planning gain and the New Homes bonus to deliver the infrastructure the county needs.

The Liberal Democrats believe that this comprehensive package will get young people in to work, attract investment and green jobs and ensure access to good, local schools.

## **Support when you need it**

Looking after our most vulnerable citizens is one of the key tests of our society. Undoubtedly this is the area where the Conservatives' failure and inability to understand the lives of people who are struggling is most dangerous and damaging.

The recent shocking scandal of completely inadequate children's social services and child protection arrangements is unforgivable. We will immediately review process and systems and ensure proper funding is available to root out abuse of vulnerable people in our care. The Conservatives failure to protect children at risk of harm is completely unacceptable. We will place quality of care at the top of our priorities for the social care system in Northamptonshire.

We know that child protection is a job that involves working across a number of different agencies. We will make sure that information sharing between relevant agencies, such as the police, schools and social care is improved as a matter of urgency and is working properly. Senior officers and politicians will be openly held to account for the quality of these vital services.

Meanwhile, with their massive £19m cuts programme to "preventative services" the Conservatives have decimated the voluntary sector. Vital support to the most vulnerable in our community has been slashed. Meanwhile the Conservatives have ramped up charges for



services to vulnerable people, such as the elderly and disabled, to record levels in Northamptonshire, under their Orwellian “Fair Charging Policy”.

The Liberal Democrats have consistently argued that we would put more money into these services to protect the vulnerable and improve their lives, preventing them from being forced into more expensive care services, as well as ensuring that the voluntary sector plays a leading role in providing key services. These “preventative services” will be one of our top priorities for investment as they help the vulnerable and save money in the future.

We know that we need the expertise and experience of those who know how to give people the best support they can to live independent lives. We would investigate how more services, such as day centres for mental health, could be run by voluntary sector providers and ensure they have the support and resources to do so. This is in stark contrast to the Conservatives’ cuts programme.

The Conservatives introduced what they call the “Fair Charging” policy. The policy is grossly unfair, loading up ever more expensive charges on vulnerable people. This is a disgrace and the Liberal Democrats will immediately review increases in care charges made under this policy.

We know how hard life can be for carers and the huge contribution to looking after vulnerable people they make. We must ensure that carers are fully supported and we will do everything we can to make sure the Council supports carers, including investing £500k into carer support services.

There is much more that needs to be done for our young people who need the care of the Council. It is a tragedy whenever a family can not care for a child or young person, and we must do everything we can to ensure that children who are adopted, fostered or come into care are given a stable, loving environment where they can flourish.

Our first action would be to commission a survey of young people who have grown up in the care system in Northamptonshire to inform future policy. The people who know best where we can improve how vulnerable children are looked after are the people who have been through that system.

We would also promote “cared for” ambassadors – people whose job it is to champion the interests of our young people in care. Their welfare must be at the heart of everything we do.

There are also huge challenges in how we provide homes for children who need them. Firstly we must improve on the support offered to carers who are related to children. Many children stay with a relative when they need care, but we know from inspections that this is one of the weakest areas of the council’s support system. Considering that this means keeping a child with someone they know in a loving, supportive environment this is

completely unacceptable. We will make improving this support a top priority and would use our investment of £500k in carers' support to do this.

Secondly the Council is spending huge amounts of money of agency foster carers. There is no reason at all that children should not be looked after by "in-house" foster carers. For a fraction of how much we spend on agency placements we could run an all-year round foster carer recruitment campaign, massively increasing our placements and creating savings that can be used to help other vulnerable children. This would be cost neutral in the first year, and produce ongoing savings every year of £500k.

We would also investigate the use of in home support in some foster care cases as an alternative to taking children into care. For the cost of taking a child in to full-time care we could, where appropriate, instead provide other support. We would look also the "Troubled Families" programme to potentially provide some of this support and funding.

We must also speed up the adoption and fostering processes. Too many people who are willing to adopt or foster a child drop out due to the extremely lengthy process. We will ensure that the process is as quick as possible, whilst making sure that the welfare of the child and suitability of a foster home is paramount.

We will ensure that any out-of-area placements are minimised wherever possible and suitable. In too many cases children are taken away from friends and communities, against their interest, because the Council is unable to provide them with a local placement. We will also work hard to prevent children and young people from being moved around between placements and disrupting their lives unnecessarily.

We know that maximising every child's potential and ensuring they are given every possible opportunity to succeed requires us to invest in our young people. We will spend money saved elsewhere enriching the lives and improving the education of our looked after children, ensuring they can take part in extracurricular activities other families take for granted and are given extra one-to-one tuition to help them achieve academically. Too often they have been let down and ignored by a system that does not prioritise their interests enough. Our commitment to providing up to £1.5m to invest in the future of our looked after children is a clear demonstration of how important we believe a decent, well-rounded education for all children to be.

The new responsibilities for public health give new opportunity for local government. The Conservatives have simply failed to tackle drugs and alcohol problems in our communities. We will work closely with the police and the NHS to ensure that there are sufficient treatment programmes that get addicts off harmful substances and cut down on the damage done by drug and alcohol abuse. The Liberal Democrats believe that tackling the root causes of addiction and treating it as a public health problem is much more effective than treating addiction as a criminal justice problem.

We must also work hard to tackle health inequality. In the most deprived communities in Northamptonshire life expectancy is significantly lower than wealthier areas. We will deliver programmes that improve the health of those people who need that improvement most. Housing can make a massive difference to the health of residents so we would ensure that we work very closely with housing providers as well as the voluntary sector and the new Clinical Commissioning Groups.

There is also a clear need for community health grants, as demonstrated by the campaign to save Northampton Baby Cafe which the Liberal Democrats supported. We would set aside £250,000 from Public Health funds so that community groups can bid for funds to improve the public health of residents in their areas. The money would be allocated to groups that can demonstrate a clear need and a clear impact on health outcomes. We would be particularly interested in projects that tackle health inequality.

Services that everyone relies on in our communities, such as Children's Centres, libraries and buses, have been cut back and are threatened with further cuts. We will protect Children's Centres to make sure that every child and family gets the support they need.

The Conservatives "library review", which reports back after the election in May, could lead to the closure of libraries across the county. The Liberal Democrats believe that it is no coincidence that this review reports back after the election. We will not close libraries in Northamptonshire and will invest £250k.

Whilst County Connect offers a responsive service, it is very expensive for some people. We will look to see how we can drive down costs and keep fares down. Additionally the bus network has been hit hard by cuts. We will work closely with bus operators to establish any potential new routes and ensure that the money the taxpayer pays out is well spent.

## Safer Streets

The Conservatives have let down our communities. Their reckless cuts to streetlighting and PCSOs have made our county more dangerous. We have campaigned hard against their public safety cuts and will not accept measures that make our county less safe. We will switch lights back on where people live and work, costing £500k. It is simply not acceptable to plunge our county into darkness and leave people scared to go out after dark. We would also work with the Police and Boroughs and Districts to ensure that our streets are properly policed, restoring funding to PCSOs at a cost of £500k.

The Conservative Police Commissioner's decision to cut available funds for 45 full-time frontline Police Officers, whilst spending £800k on an office filled with political appointees is unacceptable. Only the Liberal Democrats have led the charge in opposing these bad choices – Labour members of the Police and Crime Panel voted for his budget containing these

measures! We will continue to hold him accountable to protect frontline policing and make our streets safer.

We do not support a full merger of the Police and Fire Service under the Commissioner. There is simply no mandate for what the Conservative Police Commissioner has suggested. We will look at ways to increase the efficiency of back office services but under the Liberal Democrats in Northamptonshire we will ensure the Fire Service is independent.

The Conservative cuts to fire prevention and road safety are dangerous. We believe that we must do all that we can to prevent fires and increase safety in our communities and on our roads. We will reverse the £400k cuts to fire prevention and work with District Councils to encourage all public sector buildings and new offices to be equipped with sprinkler systems as part of their planning conditions.

Speed cameras have been switched off and driving education slashed as the Conservatives forced the closure of the Casualty Reduction Partnership. Since then, the numbers of people killed on our roads has massively increased, doubling from 2011 to 2012. We will invest in road safety, and work with the police to ensure that every action is taken to reduce road deaths.

The environment in which we live is hugely important. Under the Tories in many areas, particularly the urban centres, roads, pavements and grass-cutting have been neglected. This has led to potholes, dangerous pavements and overgrown weeds on County Council owned highways, footpaths and verges. The Conservatives have simply not maintained the footpaths, roads and verges in urban areas properly. We will ensure that urban areas get their fair share of the money to fix our broken pavements and correct this Conservative neglect by investing £1m into repairing pavements and potholes. We will also replace individual broken paving slabs like-for-like to avoid a "patchwork" style approach which has left many areas of Northampton looking uncared for, only using tarmac when the whole pavement needs replacing.

The challenges posed by climate change, demonstrated so devastatingly by the 1998 floods, are real and growing. The County Council has a big role to play in leading the fight locally against climate change and its effects. We will be vigilant in ensuring our flood defences are able to withstand the sort of tragic events of 1998.

## Cut Tory waste

In the long term the Liberal Democrats believe that Northamptonshire would be best served by a single tier of government, consisting of 3 unitary councils covering Northampton and the South and the North of the county. Our long term aim would be to abolish the County Council, saving the tax payer millions and making for a clearer, more consistent and responsive form of local Government.

In the short term we will reform the way the council works and responds to local people, and will leave no stone unturned to cut waste and bureaucracy and Conservative vanity projects before raising taxes. In particular we will reduce the size of the cabinet to save taxpayers money, cut the pay of top Councillors and axe County Hall spin doctors.

The Conservatives at County Hall have a shocking record of financial failure – from the botched schools sites sales deal, to the £32m Carillion contract, to the £2.5m school meals overspend. They have wasted public money on lavish vanity projects and continue to spend millions on back office functions, spin doctors and bloated PFI deals. We would ensure that the Council spends your money on frontline services that people rely on and expect, and would renegotiate existing County Council PFI deals, totalling over £1bn, to get more money back for the taxpayers.

When the Conservatives voted through a new Councillors allowances scheme, the Liberal Democrats believed that those at the top should share the pain. We proposed cutting the £40k Council Leader's salary, £30k Cabinet Member salaries, Deputy Leader's salary, as well as the Leaders of the Opposition groups and other Special Responsibility Allowances. Sadly neither the Conservatives, nor Labour, backed the Liberal Democrats. We are determined reduce the bill for Councillors to taxpayers if we are elected to run the Council.

Presently the Conservatives are spending £3.4m every year on a Business Intelligence Division, £500k annual on the communications team alone, and hundreds of thousands of pounds more on advertising, publicity and photocopying. We will cut wasteful spending to reinvest in frontline services and the priorities that people want.

We will continue to work constructively with Local Government Shared Services (LGSS) which aims to save Northamptonshire taxpayers money. However over the last few years surpluses generated have not been returned to the local taxpayer but reinvested in LGSS. We will return annual surpluses to the County Council to be spent on local services. We will only agree to reinvest surpluses in LGSS if that reinvestment yields significant further savings, in excess of the amount reinvested.

Hard working council staff have suffered from job cuts, pay freezes and changes to terms and conditions. The Liberal Democrats have repeatedly spoken up for the lowest paid such as nursery nurses and carers, calling for those earning the least to be protected. We value the hard work that our staff contribute to our local communities. We will introduce a "Living Wage" of £7.45 per hour as soon as practicable, benefitting over 1000 low paid workers, and encourage other employers locally to follow suit.

The Liberal Democrats recognise that in times of austerity every penny spent must count. We are determined to invest in services that reduce costs in the longer term – whether that be our Solar Farm generating green energy and ongoing revenue, targeting support to help vulnerable people to help them and prevent them needing to access more expensive

services in future years, or ensuring our infrastructure is maintained and expanded properly, reducing costs done by quick fix solutions. Thanks to the Liberal Democrats in Government, Councils can now keep a share of business rate growth locally. We believe our detailed plan to get Northamptonshire working will lead to a significant increase in business rate growth, with more money to be reinvested in creating jobs and growth locally.

Finally, we will ensure the Council's operations are as carbon-free as possible, reducing emissions year on year, and generating further savings to taxpayers. We would look for planning controls to ensure that all new buildings approved by this council are geared up to provide Solar energy immediately or in the future. This will reduce residents bills, improve the sustainability of the buildings and reduce climate emissions.

Northamptonshire does however face tough times, and we would not be prepared to cut frontline services to the most vulnerable any further. We also know residents are facing a squeeze on their household budgets so we believe Council Tax rises are a last resort and would not put Council Tax up by more than the rate of inflation if they were necessary.

Meanwhile the Conservatives have ridden roughshod over the people, best typified by their dismissive and offensive attitudes to several people who have come to put their point to meetings of Council, such as the Corby street lights group.

The Liberal Democrats believe that power should be devolved to the most local level possible and that the people and the community should be able to exercise that power. The Conservative approach of "do what we tell you" and not listening to other view points is the antithesis of what we would do.

We would devolve power by establishing neighbourhood panels and local area committees with public forums for people to have a real say and engage with the Council. We would ensure that Scrutiny committees are not packed with supine back-benchers and chaired by administration lackeys. We know that by challenging policy we can ensure that the Council's policies are shaped by all and not pushed through by a thoughtless ruling elite without any challenge. In short – we believe in democracy and have nothing to fear from it.

Finally, we would use powers under the coalition government's localism act to review the way the council operates. We are no longer required to have an all powerful cabinet, and we could transfer more decision making to committees which includes back bench councillors with specialist knowledge.

*To support the Liberal Democrat campaign for the County Council elections contact us at 120-126 Kingsley Park Terrace Northampton NN2 7HJ email [northantslibdems@gmail.com](mailto:northantslibdems@gmail.com)*

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