

WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL - SAFE IN LABOUR'S HANDS

MANIFESTO 2017-22

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ASKING WEST LoTHIAN COMMUNITIES FOR A VOTE OF
CONFIDENCE TO LET US CARRY ON THE GOOD WORK FOR
ANOTHER TERM

INTRODUCTION: WEST LOTHIAN LABOUR DELIVERS

West Lothian Labour believes that council services are at the heart of people's lives and we will always protect them.

Too often local councils are represented as bureaucratic and out-of-touch spending too much money and delivering too little. But that is not a picture we recognise in West Lothian where Labour Councillors are proud of the work we have done to improve the lives of the people we serve in what has become an increasingly fragile financial situation. Since we regained political control in 2012 from the SNP we have worked every day to improve the services the council provides, to treat our workers with respect and delivered our last manifesto.

Every day the poorest, most vulnerable in our communities are cared for by Labour Councillors making sure their services are in place of a high quality; every day our children are looked after, educated and prepared for adult life; every day young people are given the opportunity to work or go into further education; every day families are given new homes - or housing for the future is being planned and built. All the while our council strive hard to keep the basics right from bin collections to street lighting, road repairs to recycling, protecting our environment and infrastructure.

So, we are proud to highlight that West Lothian children's educational results are the best they have ever been with improvement year on year for the last three years.

Proud to have built hundreds of new council homes to a very high award winning standard for West Lothian families.

Delighted to have made sure our workforce has been paid the living wage or better, protected it from redundancies and been joined by dozens of apprentices in training for the future.

While at the same time building schools for the future with a £100 million-pound investment plan, £87 million of which already built or contract committed. Bringing together local services and facilities to build Community Partnership Centres all over West Lothian. A GOOD record a PROUD record that we want your support to continue.

All this is being done despite the fact that there has been £1.4 billion worth of cuts to council budgets since 2011, of which £100 million has been cut from West Lothian resources.

The First Minister promised voters she would be a champion of the poor and the working class. Instead, she has become the nation's Minister for Cuts. Between 2010 and 2015 the Tories cut Scotland's block grant by almost 5 per cent. But the SNP government has gone further, cutting council funding by 6.8 per cent. Deliberately taking more money from councils than the heartless Tories. This year the cuts to local government will amount to £327 million and that means £9 million from West Lothian.

Of course, councils could always do more and could do things better. But they have been starved of the financial support needed to help their communities leading to the loss of 7000 jobs across Scotland just in the last year - thanks to the SNP government which has have been in charge for 10 years now obsessed by one thing while they forget about the day job.

Experts are predicting another £1bn worth of government cuts to council budgets over the next ten years which could see vital public services not just cut, but axed as more jobs are lost. On top of that the SNP government refuses to scrap the unfair council tax. One of Labour's priorities is to scrap it and replace it with a fairer tax that would see 80 per cent of households paying less.

Scottish Labour's fairer tax plans are the only thing which can stop both the Tory and SNP governments' austerity cuts and ensure the survival of high quality public services.

West Lothian Labour is also committed to fighting the SNP's centralist agenda which is removing control from local communities for the services they need and use; destroying the link between local taxation and local spending. We support the European Charter of Local Self-Government which ensures community empowerment – having local democracy as close to people as possible.

As a Labour Council, we opposed Fracking in West Lothian as we are convinced that this technique would be an environmental danger and disaster for our communities. We will continue to oppose it along with our Labour Members of the Scottish Parliament.

Local councils are in constant financial crisis. Only Labour wants to invest in public services and the workers who provide them, to ensure all of us have access to the good quality services we value.

John McGinty

Labour Leader of West Lothian Council

CARING FOR SOCIETY

That we're living longer is the success story of our NHS. But as a result, hundreds of thousands of families are under increasing pressure to care for elderly relatives which, sadly, can become increasingly difficult as they get more frail.

Which is why West Lothian Labour Council have been working closely with the Lothian Health Board to integrate NHS care with our own social care services. In this bringing together of Health and Care Services. West Lothian were the trailblazers that agreed a Partnership Approach years ago, which is now being rolled out and formalised all over Scotland. We believe Prevention should be the Partnerships watchword and should permeate through all its policies and approaches.

However financial cuts have left the new Partnerships increasingly struggling to help those in need. Innovative solutions have been required and again West Lothian has been in the lead:

- In West Lothian Labour introduced 'REACT', a new service specifically designed for over 75s. It offers an alternative to hospital admission as well as supporting early discharges from hospital and provides rapid assessment of adults in their own homes. The team can also treat medical conditions which can be managed at home, providing the care and intervention required to support people to stay out of hospital.
- On mental health policy, Labour is committed nationally to securing a system of 'ask once, get help fast' and plans to improve mental health in young people by ensuring every secondary school pupil has access to counselling services.
- Despite funding pressures imposed by the SNP government our council are finding unique and innovative ways of engaging with the public about the importance of good mental wellbeing.
- St John's Hospital is **our** Hospital and West Lothian Labour alongside our communities will defend it, support it and campaign for increased facilities for **OUR** hospital. We rose to its rescue recently with a magnificent campaign involving thousands of local people that underlined how important children's services in the hospital are to the community. The ward was saved and functions well today but we shall remain vigilant. Our population is expanding and we will want our hospital to keep pace with the demands and needs of our people.
- We believe that the Health Service should be democratised and we will campaign for more and more accountability locally

We also want to help eradicate the need for food banks with a comprehensive review at what we could do to help alleviate poverty and the by-products of poverty i.e. poor health, poor nutrition and homelessness.

- An Eradicate Poverty Taskforce will be convened to study and report within 6 months on a programme for the council conjunction with other public service providers, voluntary groups and social enterprises. This programme is to be presented to the council and when agreed actioned and reviewed annually.

BEST START FOR OUR CHILDREN

A successful future as a community is dependent on the investment we make in our children. Investment as the grow, play and learn. That's why our children's Education has been the top priority for West Lothian Labour. Investing in staff and their development, investing in classrooms, and investing in new school buildings. From nurseries to further education, West Lothian Labour are delivering for children, and we will continue to do so. The focus on education has paid off with the best ever recorded exam results three years in a row. These results are at all levels and all abilities with West Lothian transforming the results of children from the most deprived backgrounds. Moving from a low base to being amongst the top three councils in Scotland

Yet under the SNP government, the attainment gap between children from the richest backgrounds and those from poorer backgrounds has grown wider. Shockingly, more than 6,000 children in Scotland leave primary school unable to read properly.

We know that educational disadvantage does not begin in the classroom – there's a 14-month learning gap between children from the most deprived areas and those from the least deprived before they even set foot in school. So, investment in good quality childcare and early years' education is vital to help children achieve their full potential.

We are developing excellence in learning and teaching and we reject the SNP cuts and its approach of focusing on bureaucratic structures in its relentless pursuit of centralising services and removing control from councils and parents.

The Scottish Labour Party's fairer tax policies would have enabled more money to be spent directly on education from nursery right through to higher education; investing in all-age, year-round, flexible and affordable childcare, increasing teacher numbers and classroom assistants, restoring bursaries for poorer students at university and fully-funding those for college students. Alas they refused to stop the cuts and we will have to manage with less resources.

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in all-age, year-round, flexible and affordable childcare, increasing teacher numbers and classroom assistants, restoring bursaries for poorer students at university and fully-funding those for college students. Alas they refused to stop the cuts and we will have to manage with less resources. As investing in our future through our children's education is a key priority and as such we have delivered the following:

We believe that local libraries are places of inspirations, knowledge and enrichment for children and wider the community. They are important aspect for learning and we have protected them from the threat of closure and help them to modernise by equipping them with new technology and web-based learning.

We will not be resting on our laurels:

- We will start a programme to introduce computer tablets for pupils at the start of their school career to support them through their education.
- West Lothian Labour will be building on our current strengths by backing and expanding our breakfast club's programmes in schools.
- Holiday meals schemes will be integrated with play and sport activities
- We will establish a Childcare Co-op with nurseries and parents to expand affordable childcare provision during school terms and create school holiday options for those that need that support.
- Early Years Services will be reviewed to increase coordination between all public services involved with a specific remit to focus on children from the most deprived households
- Services for our most vulnerable and poorest children including those who are disabled, in care or coming out of care shall be reviewed to match our provision against best in class.
- Support the establishment of more Community Sporting Clubs and help them with developing first class facilities, encouraging a wide range of sporting and keep fit activities. As well as, creating leadership programmes for our young community champions. We shall harness the expertise that exists in West Lothian to spread and share the knowledge, best practice and high quality standards to every community.
- The free music tuition which covers over 2300 children will be maintained although West Lothian is one of a few authorities that provide this service and we don't see it as a luxury. This enhances lives and creates opportunities and produces national and international stars.

IMPROVING SERVICES, CREATING JOBS

The impact of SNP and Tory cuts is clear – fewer options for school leavers, less job security for those in work and wage stagnation. Across Scotland unemployment increased by 14,000 from August to October 2016 to 145,000 and employment as a whole also fell over the same period by 40,000.

The Scottish unemployment rate at the end of the year was 5.3 per cent – above the rate of 4.8 per cent for the rest of the UK.

With up to £1bn of further cuts to come, the SNP's latest local taxation policy will strip even more from councils' budgets and undermine the principle of local accountability and quality public sector services. But Labour does not believe that cuts and more cuts are the way back to prosperity SNP and Tory austerity has failed to deliver and we deserve better.

West Lothian and other Labour councils across Scotland are leading the way as Living Wage employers - making up three quarters of those accredited by the Living Wage Foundation - ensuring their staff are paid more than £8.45 an hour.

West Lothian Labour councillors have also found new ways to improve the lives of the people they employ and represent. Many of our councils look to each other to adopt best practice and ensure that the ethos of good quality public service is maintained.

Scottish Labour has endorsed Unite the Union's call to help councils find ways to deal with historic debts which are costing more in interest payments than the original loans to ensure that more public money is available to spend on creating jobs and improving services instead of constant cuts.

And Labour councils including West Lothian across Scotland are pursuing City Deals to attract millions of new investments into their areas to create economic growth.

Jobs create prosperity, reduce poverty and inequality and we need more of them in West Lothian as the global economy keeps delivering surprises in our area as investment decisions are changed or modified. Every second week there is bad news about West Lothian companies and not enough good news to counter it.

- That's why we pledge to establish a Jobs Taskforce to create the right conditions for job growth, making West Lothian even more attractive to employers and entrepreneurs. The Jobs Taskforce shall be the responsibility of a senior councillor who shall report on the Taskforce activities and proposals to the Council Executive.

INVESTING IN COMMUNITIES

It is sadly no longer the case that people have the same bond with their local councils that was enjoyed by previous generations. But local decision making is key to local democracy and restoring trust in the delivery of local services. That's why we are going to introduce a brand-new way of taking decisions that will give everyone an opportunity to have their say, listen to their neighbours and learn about the issues and decide what happens.

We are committed to bringing about Local or Town Assemblies in every electoral ward in West Lothian which will meet to discuss and agree their view on major issues that every Council faces like the annual budget. Every community organisation and every individual in each major community which will be based on the nine wards that make up the West Lothian Council will be encouraged to come along and join in. We believe that this will make a much better basis for decision making and will strengthen our community. Matters that can be devolved for discussion to towns and wards will be those such as major investments in that area, local service improvements and local bus subsidies. They will be on the agenda and we shall ask community councils in the ward to help us bring these Assemblies about and ensure they are representative. This is about strengthening our communities by devolving responsibility to them, providing them with the information to help them make informed decisions.

The current Local Area Committees will be scrapped but local performance information will be made available to the new area assemblies.

Scottish Labour and their sister party the Scottish Co-operative Party also want to see more of Scotland's councils become truly co-operative. Councils in Scotland are the biggest in Europe and so they will show the way by devolving services to real communities.

There are opportunities for councils to develop energy plans in partnership with communities and social housing providers and to use co-operative models. And we support the opportunity for community groups to buy land for regeneration projects or food growing or the creation of community green spaces. Communities have also seen their link with their local police service broken, again thanks to the centralising efforts of the SNP.

To drive devolution forward at a faster pace we have two further new initiatives:

- We will establish an Energy Coop in West Lothian involving local communities and investigate switching programmes for residents and energy storage and generation schemes to capture the benefit for communities instead of the greedy Big Six energy corporations. This will add to our efforts to tackle fuel poverty with a Collective Switching initiative which helps groups of residents join together to get cheaper fuel bills
- We will establish a Community Ownership Bureau to expand community trust based schemes all over West Lothian and provide support and advice to those schemes.

BUILDING HOMES

Housing has, and always will be, a Labour priority. It was Labour's Housing Acts which demolished hundreds of thousands of slum homes and rehomed millions. But Scotland's housing shortage has turned into a housing crisis under the SNP. There are over 150,000 people on council house waiting lists and almost 60,000 homes are overcrowded. Housebuilding across Scotland has not recovered from pre-crash levels of 25,000 homes a year. Just 16,000 were built in the year to March, and at current rates completions in the social sector will have to double if the SNP is to hit its target of 35,000 homes for social rent. The government will not deliver on housing unless it works in partnership with local councils. And without new homes our young people are locked into the private rental sector with ever increasing rents and house prices. Labour believes that everyone deserves a safe, warm, comfortable home. A good home is key to our wellbeing and life chances; it can cut the attainment gap, improve our health, is vital for our mental health and will help Scotland achieve a fairer society. Public sector house building is key to supporting the construction industry, providing jobs for young people, and regenerating our towns and cities. That is why West Lothian Labour has made House Building a top priority since we were elected in 2012. Our aim was to build council homes in every ward in West Lothian and we have achieved our aim.

- Hundreds of Council homes have been completed and let to West Lothian families and hundreds more homes are being constructed now.
- We want to do more over the next ten years and we have set a target of 3,000 homes but we know it will be difficult. There are all sorts of Scottish Government restrictions on what we can borrow and what land we can use but we are determined to succeed so we are thinking outside the box
- Accordingly, we will establish a Homes for West Lothian Partnership with the all Housing Associations in the area to create a coordinated strategy of land assembly, finance, construction planning and targeted provision of homes based on need. The partnership will engage with construction partners to plan development and training and generate apprenticeships for our young job seekers. We need to invest in the future skills of our community. We shall campaign for more support from the Scottish Government to enable a bigger and better programme
- We will monitor private rents and practices in the sector and establish a West Lothian Fair Rents Fair Landlords Charter and ask landlords to sign up to the charter.
- Lettings Policy will be reviewed to bring about a more community sensitive scheme.

GETTING PUBLIC TRANSPORT SORTED

Scottish Labour want buses to be run for the benefit of communities, not simply the private profit of a few wealthy individuals. We want to see democratic control of transport and municipal ownership of buses. We will support regulation of Scotland's buses to give local communities and Council's greater say over the services they need and want.

We will also support the demand for a publicly-owned not-for-profit company be established to run Scot Rail in the interests of passengers rather than profits.

The government hasn't done much for car drivers either. Anyone using Scotland's roads will know how dangerous and costly potholes can be. West Lothian addresses the issue of potholes and surface damage on our roads spending our budget as wisely as we can. We set aside money every year to fund winter spreading programmes but we need proper levels of investment in resurfacing our roads and improving access to, from and around West Lothian for industry and services. In Scotland, only one per cent of all trips are made by bike and 23 per cent are made on foot. As well as wanting to provide good quality, affordable public transport we also want to see more investment in active travel, not just to improve people's transport choices, but to improve people's health and wellbeing, and make our communities safer.

Communities in West Lothian will get an opportunity to shape their local bus services through our innovative Local Assembly proposals where they will be asked to help design the services that are subsidised by the council. The Council's investment in these bus services vital to residents in our towns will become the community's investment.

Car Parking is becoming an urgent problem in every community and needs to be tackled to support retail and community facilities and remove nuisance and inconvenient for neighbours. A comprehensive parking improvement programme will be established to take a holistic view and take action to alleviate these problems.

Roads across Scotland are crying out for investment, West Lothian has a comprehensive list of maintenance and resurfacing that needs to be undertaken but we are starved of funds. Scottish Government seems to be ignoring this vital infrastructure. We will keep backing on their door until they wake up and pay attention.

PAYING FOR GOOD PUBLIC SERVICES

Scottish Labour does not believe that Tory austerity must be pushed down to local services by the SNP government. They could stop the cuts but they refused to listen or support Labour's proposals. Because of the different, fairer decisions Scottish Labour would have made on tax spending on public services in Scotland would increase in real terms. A 50p top rate of tax for those earning more than £150,000 a year as we proposed would ensure we can invest extra resources in our services, particularly social care to help the most vulnerable and elderly in our communities. Scotland has income tax powers in the Scottish Parliament now they could have done it but they choose to continue austerity cuts.

Scottish Labour is committed to, and will continue to campaign for, a basic rate of income tax one pence higher than that set by the Tory UK government – though no-one earning £20,000 or less will be affected. And we will use that extra income to massively improve our education system from nursery right through to higher education. In Scotland, we can and should make fairer, more progressive, choices to protect our public services and those who work to deliver them.

COUNCIL TAX

It is time for the hated council tax to go, in fact way past time. The SNP promised to scrap it and has failed and at the same time changed the calculator to increase council tax payments for many households this year. West Lothian under Labour promised to freeze council tax for our five-year term. We kept that promise, we think it's important to stand by your promises and keep your word. However, working families are increasingly feeling squeezed due to the cuts to working benefits, increased food prices and rising unemployment - we feel it was the wrong time to ask those already under pressure to contribute more.

Labour would have introduced a fairer system which would mean 80 per cent of households across Scotland will pay less than they do today. Tourism taxes, devolution of the Crown Estate, and a land value tax could unlock over £150m for councils, and spur on economic growth, creating jobs and improving services.

SUMMARY

The choice voters face at this election is continuing with a well-run Labour Council that is delivering for its communities, or a nationalist council focused on constitutional change, massive council tax and rent hikes and a destructive reorganisation of the Council designed to entrench nationalist power in the hands of SNP activists.

Don't risk a nationalist council - keep services safe with Labour.

West Lothian Labour recognises that council services are at the heart of people's lives and will always put protecting services to people at the forefront of everything Labour Councillors do.

The nationalist government in Holyrood has imposed huge cuts to local government budgets, removed local council's ability to keep decisions local and refused to scrap the unfair council tax. Despite this, West Lothian Labour has delivered on our pledges at the last local council elections. We have:

- Frozen the council tax for 5 years since 2012
- Almost completed building 800 new council houses
- achieved West Lothian's best ever educational attainment results
- introduced 'The Villages Improvement Fund'
- delivered new partnership centres and business gateways for local communities and many other improvements to local facilities
- introduced far-reaching improvements to environmental services such as 'skinny bins', food waste bins and new glass re-cycling points
- used the Council's powers to tackle poverty and deprivation
- worked closely with the police resulting in a reduction in crime and enhanced community safety
- improved the protection for the vulnerable among our older people and enhanced services to the very young.

Labour knows there is more to be done but we have made progress. A vote for Labour will ensure the Council stays focused on improving the quality of life for the people of West Lothian. A vote for the nationalists will result in a council focused on supporting a second referendum and playing politics with people's lives.

WEST LoTHIAN LABOUR'S TOP PLEDGES

In an age where many people are cynical about politics and politicians West Lothian Labour believes that clear, honest pledges give people the chance to measure our success and hold us to account. We want to restore faith in local democracy-which is why we list our top ten pledges without gloss and hype. It's the 'it does what it says on the tin approach'.

HEALTH:

Labour started the NHS and it is our proudest achievement. However, under the nationalists and the Tories, our NHS is in trouble and too many local people find it difficult to get a GP appointment that suits them.

Working with the NHS and our community planning partners, Labour will set up a **West Lothian GP Service Task Force** to improve access to GP services for people in West Lothian, and Labour will oppose any attempt to downgrade services at our St John's Hospital.

COUNCIL TAX AND COUNCIL RENTS:

Things are still tough for many families, and many workers are still getting below inflation pay rises or for too many, no pay rise at all.

Labour kept its promise to freeze your Council Tax for the full 5 years of the Labour Administration, and this year we have frozen Council rents too. **Labour promises to consult you before deciding future levels of Council Tax and Council Rents.**

Scottish Labour's policy programme prioritises abolishing the unfair council tax and would see 80% of households paying less under a new system. The nationalists refuse to scrap the council tax.

HOUSING:

Scotland continues to face a housing crisis with too many families struggling to get on the housing ladder and long lists for Council Housing. Labour is delivered the biggest ever Council Housing Programme in West Lothian comprising 1000 new Council homes across all 9 Council Ward areas.

Building on this programme, and working with housing partners and home developers, Labour will establish the **West Lothian New Homes Partnership with the goal of delivering 3000 new homes for West Lothian in the 10 years ending in 2022, the majority of which will be new West Lothian Council Houses.**

EDUCATION:

The future of our children is our top priority. Under Labour, West Lothian has invested **£87 million in** improving our schools and nurseries in the last 5 years and West Lothian kids have achieved their best ever exam results three years in a row. We don't want all that hard work to be squandered by the nationalists.

Labour will build on the achievement of the last 5 years by working with parents to give our young people the best possible start in life, building on the work already done, **we**

promise to extend investment in improving our school and nursery IT infrastructure and buildings with a programme of £150m by the end of the next Council Administration and Labour will start a programme to provide a **computer tablet for children at the start of their school career** to support them through their education.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT:

Lots of people rely on public transport to get to work, see family and friends, or make important appointments like visiting hospital. The SNP have consistently refused to give local people a say in how these services are run and defended deregulation of local bus services first introduced by the Tories.

Labour promises to pilot a community led West Lothian Bus Service to run town and rural bus services more successfully in the future, putting the passengers first, and Labour promises to freeze the price of concessionary rail travel for the full 5 years of the next Council term.

COMMUNITY:

We want a **Council which not only listens to our citizens but which involves them directly in how money is spent in their area and services run.** Labour held the first ever Charrette's in West Lothian in Whitburn and Fauldhouse, worked positively with Community Development Trusts in Fauldhouse, Linlithgow, Whitburn, West Calder and Kirknewton etc., and has provided direct financial support to West Lothian's Credit Unions and Foodbanks. Making West Lothian communities more affluent is essential so an **Eradicate Poverty Taskforce** will be convened to study and report within 6 months on a programme which will be presented to the council for action. Another strand to our programme will be a pledge to **establish a Jobs Taskforce** to create the right conditions for job growth, making West Lothian even more attractive to employers and entrepreneurs. **Reducing the cost of energy** will complement our efforts with an Energy Coop dedicated to saving our community money and generating income

Labour has introduced the broadcasting of West Lothian Council meetings from summer 2017 and **we promise to introduce the first ever West Lothian Citizens Question Time**, annual public town hall meetings where senior councillors and council officers will take questions directly from members of the West Lothian public.

Labour wants wide spread real community engagement so will replace Local Area Committees introduced by the nationalists with new people power **Local Area Assemblies**, with increased powers and the goal of devolving £3m of Council spending to be decided directly across these new assemblies over the Council term.

'Parents need **childcare and nursery services that are both flexible and affordable.** Labour will continue to roll out and extend a new, flexible approach to childcare, and **we will consult with parents and partners about future childcare service needs** to meet our goal of delivering 50 weeks of affordable and flexible early years provision that covers the working day from 8am to 6pm.'

We pledge to introduce this manifesto programme in West Lothian Council if we are returned to power on the 4th of May 2017



All Labour Candidates 2017

**VOTE LABOUR FOR PROGRESS
IN YOUR LOCAL SERVICES**

Published by Donald Stavert on behalf of the West Lothian Labour Party all at 43 Bruce Street, Bathgate, EH48 2TJ