



ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP

**RECOVERY, RESILIENCE AND RENEWAL:
Meeting the Challenges in Aberdeenshire.
A Manifesto for a Changing World**

May 2022

FOREWORD

MEETING THE CHALLENGES WE FACE IN A CHANGING WORLD

As we go into the 2022-2027 Council term, we face, as a council and as a community, some huge challenges. It is a situation that can with every justification be called unparalleled; we will all have to work closely together if we are to weather this perfect storm – public and private sectors, our communities, residents and businesses. The impacts will not, I greatly fear, be short-term and so the task in front of us is of a magnitude we have not seen before.

For the past two years we have been working to cope with the challenges thrown up by the pandemic and whilst we are currently free from lock-downs, there is no foretelling future developments. We must make the transition into a world where we learn to live with Covid, minimise the impacts on our society and take forward new ways of living and working.

As we make that transition, we have the war in Ukraine thrust upon us. This has already had an impact on the Council and on Aberdeenshire. The Council has a good track record of responding to the needs of refugees from conflict and will again respond to support those fleeing the war in Ukraine. The economic and financial impacts of the conflict will undoubtedly be felt, on supply chains and on the cost and availability of essential commodities. At this stage it is not possible to be certain about how long these impacts will be felt but they are real and they will affect the way we deliver services and the scale of some of them, while increasing the demand for services.

In the background we still have the economic and social impacts of having left the European Union and the political questions around the future of our key energy sector as we move away from dependence on oil and gas towards renewable energy.

And underlying all of this is climate change, the consequences of which are already upon us and are being felt right across Aberdeenshire. Responding to the immediate effects while working hard to achieve a net zero position will take leadership by the Council and strong partnership and co-operation across all spheres of government, all agencies, business, communities and individuals.

I am pleased to set before you the Aberdeenshire Council Liberal Democrat Group's Manifesto for the coming Council term. It is ambitious and yet achievable; realistic in its approach and firmly grounded in our collective experience and knowledge. And it builds on the strong foundations that Liberal Democrat Councillors have created since the Council was formed 27 years ago.

Cllr. Peter J. Argyle, Group Leader. April 2022

Aberdeenshire Council Liberal Democrat Group

RECOVERY, RESILIENCE AND RENEWAL

Meeting the Challenges in Aberdeenshire

A Manifesto for a Changing World

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

That local government is an essential part of an effective liberal democracy is at the core of our belief and philosophy. We also recognise that the challenges facing this key sphere in the governance of Scotland means councils are under pressure in a way never before experienced. Instead of decisions being taken locally, based on local solutions and local priorities, there is an increasing weight of centralised, 'one-size-fits-all' imposition on local discretion and freedom.

As Liberal Democrats we are deeply concerned at this shift of power within Scotland; at the relentless diminution of the right of locally elected representatives to take those key decisions which most closely effect the people to whom they are accountable.

In the very challenging circumstances of 2022, the enhancement and liberation of local government should be the priority for all who believe in the paramountcy of local decision-making, in the direct accountability for those decisions and the fundamental relationship between those elected and the people they serve.

We are acutely aware that the economic situation in 2022 is impacting not only on our tenants but on many people across Aberdeenshire. We are committed to supporting people facing the challenges of homelessness, fuel poverty and all the impacts of the rising cost of living. We will; work with all partners to tackle the disastrous impacts of poverty and inequalities. Tackling Poverty and Inequality is a fundamental part of our work.

This shift in balance is particularly stark in the proposals for a National Care Service, proposals that will sweep a wide range of services, until now the responsibility of local councils, under the direct control of Scottish Ministers. We will continue to oppose this in principle, while at the same time seeking to work with the Scottish Government and our partners to deliver radical improvement to care services in Aberdeenshire.

As we urge a relationship based on trust and respect between the spheres of government in Scotland, so we will continue to foster and develop a relationship based on a genuine partnership with the communities we serve. None of us are immune to the challenges and difficulties of these times; we believe in the empowerment of communities, in supporting them to become more resilient and enabling them to recover from the effects of covid and the economic storms, to become renewed and strengthened to face the future with confidence.

As Aberdeenshire will always be our priority, we will work in a positive way with MPs and MSPs representing our communities, regardless of Party. We will continue to develop sound and respectful relationships with partner agencies and with our neighbouring councils. We will seek to foster stronger ties with the voluntary sector, recognising the vital role it has in the Aberdeenshire community.

We will always seek to have an open and transparent relationship with the communities we serve. We will communicate frankly and openly on the shifting balance between local and central government, on those things we are empowered to undertake and those we are not and where our ambition for change is fettered by a lack of authority. We will continue to explore and develop means for council and community to work together to deliver solutions. We will always be clear about our capacity to deliver.

Through all of this we will seek to defend the North East and Aberdeenshire in particular. We will work tirelessly for a fair deal for councils in Scotland and for a fair deal for Aberdeenshire.

These are difficult times for communities in Aberdeenshire, for our residents and for our businesses. These are difficult times for all councils and Aberdeenshire Council faces many challenges. Nonetheless, we believe that through an approach based firmly on open and respectful partnerships, we can all work together to face these challenges. We can recover and grow more resilient so that Aberdeenshire is renewed and can take its place with confidence and hope in a rapidly changing world.

Resilient and Empowered Communities

Aberdeenshire Council exists to provide the best possible services to its residents and businesses, to visitors to our area and to all who stand in need of its support. Liberal Democrats are committed to ensuring that all services are delivered in a way that is not only fair, transparent and accountable but are also delivered in a genuine partnership with communities in all parts of Aberdeenshire. Much has been done to engage and empower communities; we recognise there is more to be done.

All of us in Aberdeenshire are facing challenging times, arising from the impacts of climate change, from the social, economic and cultural impacts of the Covid pandemic and from the uncertainty facing our major industries. Aberdeenshire Council has key roles in supporting individuals and businesses through these challenging times. We must support communities in adapting to and mitigating the immediate effects of climate change, while playing a leadership role in the move to net zero. We must assist communities to recover from the many impacts of Covid-19 and to live with it now and in the future. We must actively support the industries and businesses of Aberdeenshire and the North East through a time of massive change.

Liberal Democrats also recognise the Council's vital role in keeping the needs of the North East in front of other spheres of government, ensuring Aberdeenshire is treated fairly and not forgotten amidst competing claims and demands.

Liberal Democrats recognise the vital importance of local government empowered to act with real autonomy, where decisions are made fully in line with the principles of decentralisation and subsidiarity. We recognise the principles of community engagement and empowerment. We all need to work together to achieve the resilience we need to face the huge challenges ahead of us.

Economically Strong Communities: *For many years the Aberdeenshire economy remained robust, underpinned by the energy sector in particular. Significant change has occurred, and greater change is coming; Aberdeenshire Council must be fully engaged with our partners in the private and public sectors to support the transition away from reliance on oil and gas into other energy developments. However, we must recognise that demand for oil and gas will continue for many years; policy should be based on reducing that demand rather than simply, even naively, demanding an end to production and supply. We will work with the private sector to encourage and nurture a pragmatic yet rapid, effective and evidence-led transition. We will continue to lobby UK and Scottish Governments to ensure the North East of Scotland maintains its key role in energy, making full use of the experience and expertise available here in the development of vital new technologies.*

Liberal Democrats also recognise the importance of other sectors, including Tourism, Farming, Fishing, Forestry, Life Sciences and Food & Drink, to our economy. None of them are immune to the challenges facing us, from Covid and from the impacts of the UK leaving the EU.

Providing secure foundations for the Aberdeenshire economy is of course essential. We will continue to develop the successful work already underway to protect, enhance and repurpose our town centres in a changing world and extend this to smaller villages and settlements across Aberdeenshire.

We support the linking of the Economic Development and Planning services under one Head of Service and the opportunities thus created for increased partnership-working and synergy. While we recognise the Planning Act of 2019 has led to significant change, we are also aware there is more change to come. We will continue our support for local decision making and policy setting, and resist attempts to increase Scottish Government influence over matters that should be locally determined. We will encourage the closer working within the new Planning and Economic Development service and the positive ethos and approach taken in working with applicants and in ensuring plans are delivered.

We will:

- Develop the Council's partnerships with the private and public sectors in promoting the strengths of Aberdeenshire and the North East to all spheres of Government, lobbying for recognition, support and inward investment.
- Work with partners to improve Aberdeenshire business' access to European and world markets and in particular support businesses as they address increased

bureaucracy in exporting. We will take all possible steps to reduce the burden of bureaucracy arising from Council processes.

- Actively encourage the early transition away from oil and gas into other energy while recognising the continuing importance of the North Sea in that process of change. Transition is for everyone, not just oil and gas producers.
- Support the development of Carbon Capture and Storage projects in Aberdeenshire.
- Continue to promote Aberdeenshire as an excellent place to live, visit and do business, encouraging inward investment and new, home-grown enterprises.
- Work with partners to develop proposals for a Free Port in the North East of Scotland.
- Maintain and enhance our relationship and participation in Opportunity North East (ONE) in the delivery of the City Region Deal.
- Build stronger relationships with business organisations including Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce, Elevator, the Federation of Small Businesses, town centre business groups and BIDs.
- Continue our active participation in and support for, VisitAberdeenshire, recognising the vital importance of Tourism to our economy, the growth of 'staycations' and the need for public and private sectors to work together to promote and enhance the Aberdeenshire offering.
- Develop, with partners, opportunities to promote and facilitate adventure tourism in Aberdeenshire.
- Work to improve the provision for, and proactive management of, motorhomes in Aberdeenshire.
- Develop the Council's relationships with the Fishing industry, both catching and processing sectors, and support fishing businesses as they adapt to the new demands over certification, exporting and accessing markets.
- Explore opportunities for extending the Council's involvement with, and support for, the agricultural and forestry sectors.
- Continue to improve opportunities for small and medium enterprises to access the Council's procurement processes.
- Continue to work with Elevator and other partners to encourage and nurture business start-ups and diversification, aligning this with our industrial portfolio and schemes for grants and other direct support.
- Press for greater pace in the delivery by Scottish Government and its contractors of high speed broadband, fit for the 2020s and beyond, across Aberdeenshire.
- Work with Scottish and UK Governments to secure the maximum benefits from funding streams designed to replace lost European funds.
- Seek every opportunity to build partnerships with European neighbours, through membership of the North Sea Commission and the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions.
- Continue to support Rural Partnerships, Development Trusts and other community-led economic development organisations, assisting them to become self-sustaining as they deliver important projects and services for communities.

- Continue, through Planning, to ensure there is a proper balance between the needs and aspirations of communities and the needs of businesses in Aberdeenshire.
- Support the implementation of the new Local Development Plan, ensuring it is kept up to date and that all Councillors recognise the primacy of the Plan when making decisions on applications.
- Continue to ensure that appropriate infrastructure is maintained and delivered in line with community needs and expectations, keeping pace with the impacts of new housing and other developments.
- Work with developers to ensure that plans, once approved, are delivered timeously and properly.
- Continue to press for better design in developments of all kinds, for a genuine sense of place and greater respect of local vernacular.
- Improve our communication and engagement with communities on all Planning matters, in particular on Place Plans and in the preparation of Local Development Plans.
- Work with developers and agents to continue the improvement of the planning system in Aberdeenshire, including greater use of planning agreements and pre-application discussions, to meet Council and Scottish Government targets.
- Explore opportunities to press for radical change to the system of Appeals in Scotland, recognising that the current system is a major barrier to community engagement in Planning.
- Support the work of Environmental and Heritage planners in protecting Aberdeenshire's valued and precious landscapes, biodiversity and built heritage.
- Continue to support the Aberdeenshire Architectural and Landscape Design Awards as a means of giving significant recognition to successful and sustainable design in its setting.
- Continue to give full and proper consideration to the landscape impacts caused by development, including major developments. We will seek to ensure that landscape impacts are minimised and mitigated.
- Ensure our residents' views on issues relating to landscape impacts are taken into account.

Resilient Communities: *Climate Change is happening; its impacts are being felt across Aberdeenshire. Whilst we must all do everything we can to work towards net zero, we also have to find ways of mitigating the effects already felt, particularly around flooding and storms. Longer term modelling also suggests that drought is likely to be more prevalent, together with more frequent and intense storm events during the winter months. Aberdeenshire Council will work with all partners to do everything possible to keep our communities safe and enable communities and individuals to take steps themselves. Resilient communities, where plans and preparations are made and kept up to date, will be better placed to face the challenges ahead, whether from climate change, pandemic, or natural disasters of any kind. It is also recognised that much of the infrastructure,*

particularly urban surface water drainage, is - and will be - inadequate to meet the demands placed upon it. This is the responsibility of Scottish Water and very significant investment will be required to improve what is, in many places, nineteenth or early twentieth century infrastructure.

We will:

- Continue to work with all partners to develop sustainable flood mitigation and prevention measures, working on a catchment basis to provide the best possible flood protection to vulnerable communities.
- Work with SEPA and the Scottish Government to implement Local Flood Risk Management Strategies and continue to work with partners to secure funding for Aberdeenshire schemes.
- Work closely with Scottish Water, SEPA and the Scottish Government to ensure drainage infrastructure is significantly improved to cope with a changing climate and more frequent intense rain.
- Increase the support, advice and guidance that can be offered to householders in Potentially Vulnerable Areas, including the provision at cost of individual property protection equipment.
- Ensure that there is an effective programme of gutter and gully cleaning in our settlements.
- Through Area Managers, work with all communities to develop local resilience plans to be implemented in any emergency, not just flood.
- Continue the work already underway with partners including the Cairngorms National Park Authority, land managers, NatureScot and SEPA on developing natural flood prevention schemes, through restoration of flood plains, appropriate tree planting, peatland restoration and other catchment-wide projects.
- Actively explore with partners options and projects for mitigating the effects of drought in future years, to protect the viability of private and public water supplies. We will consider the potential for water retention/storage schemes.
- Seek to identify specific funding opportunities to support communities as they respond to the challenges of Climate Change.
- Work with Scottish Government and Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks to strengthen very significantly the resilience of the electricity supply network to reduce the impact of storms on our communities.
- Work closely with the Scottish Government and BT Openreach to ensure communications networks are resilient in times of storm. There are particular concerns over the replacement of analogue telephone lines with digital lines dependent electricity.
- Support communities in the development and implementation of their Resilience Plans.

Safe Communities: *Liberal Democrats recognise that there is growing concern across Aberdeenshire over Road Safety and the behaviour of a minority of motorists, both within settlements and on roads between them. There are also growing demands for individuals to be able to walk or cycle safely, for children to be able to walk to school; for an environment where active travel is not only safe but seen to be safe. Communities no longer wish to have to endure the blights of litter and dog fouling, of graffiti and general anti-social behaviour. We are committed to working at reducing these harms, through example, encouragement, education and, with Police Scotland, by enforcement.*

We will:

- Work proactively with the Scottish Government and other partners to deliver an effective and co-ordinated 20 mph speed limit within all of our settlements, covered by Aberdeenshire Council policies and Scottish Government guidance.
- Seek to maximise the Aberdeenshire share of any funding provided nationally to implement 20mph limits.
- Continue to review all speed limits within settlements, in the context of the introduction of Aberdeenshire-wide 20mph limits, seeking where possible to reduce limits and reduce actual traffic speeds through other interventions.
- Actively explore with Police Scotland and the Scottish Government more effective means of enforcing existing limits, developing innovative ways to increase enforcement on the ground which would increase the likelihood of speeding being detected, as well as lobbying for significantly increased penalties for persons convicted of speeding within settlements.
- Continue to work with schools and community groups to develop the road safety message by approaches, including encouraging more children to use active travel to get to school which reduces the amount of traffic around the school gate.
- Monitor the recently approved Aberdeenshire Council policies and procedures on road safety to ensure they meet the needs of communities and all road users.
- Devise innovative ways of encouraging dog owners to clear up after their pets, sharing effective measures from other areas. We will also invest in greater enforcement through enabling and training Council staff.
- Use all available means to strengthen anti-littering messages and work with schools, communities and groups to encourage the basic idea that littering is not only anti-social and wrong but expensive. We will also invest in enforcement as a way of enhancing that message.
- Build on the work already underway to address issues created by gulls in urban areas, in coastal and inland communities. We recognise the concerns of our residents over the health, environmental and safety issues and will work with partners, including the business community and the Scottish Government, to tackle these issues with clear long term strategies.

Proud Communities: *Liberal Democrats are aware of the high value residents place on the appearance and cleanliness of their communities. Well maintained public open space is a key part of this but it extends to more than clean streets and tidy parks. It encompasses safe and pleasant play areas, with equipment of high play value; it encompasses well maintained street furniture, appropriately placed; it encompasses planning policies that encourage good design for new development and action being taken on empty or derelict premises; it encompasses the development and implementation of policies and actions to make our town and village centres viable, attractive and strong enough to face the challenges of the future.*

We will:

- Develop and enhance existing Town Centre First policies to both protect and promote our town and village centres, not just through retail and business developments but by enhancing their social and cultural offering, repurposing empty premises and by encouraging greater co-operation between existing town and village centre businesses.
- Give early consideration to the impact of short term lets in Aberdeenshire, particularly in communities where this sector is demonstrating significant growth.
- Continue the review of Conservation Areas across Aberdeenshire and work with communities to raise awareness of the importance of the built heritage.
- Develop the new relationship with the North East of Scotland Preservation Trust in restoring important local buildings, as well as working with other groups seeking to sustain or enhance local built heritage.
- Develop the Community Impact Assessment approach as a key tool in understanding the needs of and challenges faced by, our communities.
- Empower communities, through Participatory Budgeting, Community Asset Transfer and Place Planning, to become more involved in the improvement of their town and village centres.
- Recognise the need for some communities to have greater support than others in developing this agenda.
- Develop schemes to enable community groups to undertake voluntary work, safely and in partnership with the Council, to maintaining parks or graveyards, litter-picking or making improvements to the appearance of their communities.
- Ensure our streets and open spaces are clean and maintained to a high standard while recognising the budget and resource challenges that exist. We will work to deliver these services on a more local basis, through Area Committees.
- Support actively the delivery of the commitment to introducing Participatory Budgeting into decision-making in Landscape Services.
- Increase the amount of biodiversity in parks and open spaces, through appropriate, well-planned tree planting and use of wild flowers, only in consultation and engagement with communities.
- Continue to engage Councillors as Champions for particularly threatened species or habitats and additionally as Champions to encourage biodiversity in public spaces.

- Seek to engage communities in the use of specific government grant funding for community-based projects, where timescales allow. We will continue to lobby for greater flexibility in the use of such funds, particularly an end to the imposition of unhelpful timescales by the Scottish Government. We will continue to call for multi-year funding streams to be utilised and committed on a multi-year basis.
- Continue to enable all our residents to access the countryside, particularly by removing barriers for those for whom access to the countryside is difficult.
- Promote the Outdoor Access Code to residents and visitors so that those enjoying Aberdeenshire's outdoors leave no trace of their enjoyment.
- Develop the existing positive relationship the Council has with the Cairngorms National Park Authority on environmental, access and Planning issues, as well as in preparing and delivering the new National Park Partnership Plan, 2022-27.
- Continue to work to ensure that our path network, including core paths and long-distance routes, are maintained and where possible, enhanced. We will work with community groups and other partners to achieve the best possible networks across all of Aberdeenshire
- We will complete the final section of the Deeside Way east of Aboyne and work with partners to take the Deeside Way through to Braemar. We will continue to develop; and improve the Formartine-Buchan Way and other long-distance routes

Inter-connected Communities: Liberal Democrats recognise the vital importance of delivering the best transport infrastructure across all of Aberdeenshire and of doing so in strong partnerships with others. There will be huge changes taking place in the next few years in the way we all travel, and these changes will lead to new demands for infrastructure, for new approaches to public transport and real development of active travel. The drive to decarbonise transport will have many impacts, both for the Council directly, through its fleet operations, and for our residents and businesses. Whilst use of electric powered vehicles is becoming more widespread, other fuels are being developed, principally based on hydrogen, which could become more viable in the medium or longer term. The UK is significantly behind northern Europe in the establishment of a robust electric vehicle charging infrastructure; much will have to be done to close that gap, particularly through the installation of accessible on-street EV chargers, in residential areas as well as in town centres.

Electric bicycles have already increased the amount of active travel and this must be nurtured and supported through the provision of charging points and, importantly, through the provision of safe routes for cycling and walking. Again, the UK is massively behind northern Europe in the provision of dedicated cycling and walking ways; very significant investment will be required to deliver change at the scale and pace that is needed and that is currently beyond the means of local government. A re-allocation and re-prioritisation of government capital funding will be required to enable Councils to deliver what is needed.

Public transport has been severely impacted by Covid; counter-intuitively perhaps this gives a once in a lifetime opportunity to rethink radically how public transport is provided, particularly when considered as part of the Net Zero agenda. Both bus and rail transport

must be fit for the twenty-first century rather than the nineteenth or twentieth. Demand Responsive Transport has real potential to deliver an effective public transport network in a rural area such as Aberdeenshire, when combined with fixed timetable services on major routes. But more innovative approaches will be needed. Liberal Democrats are committed to enhancing rail services, through the development of new stations as well as potential new lines.

At the same time Aberdeenshire Council is responsible for a road network extending to over 3000 miles and including 1500 vital, yet aging, bridges and other structures. We have invested additional funds in road and bridge maintenance and will sustain this into the future. We are proud that our roads are amongst the best in Scotland but more is needed to improve the standard and effectiveness of the network, including the vital work of winter maintenance.

All of this will require resources; people and money. Care will be needed to ensure proper prioritisation and allocation of budgets. But we are committed to delivering the fundamental changes that are urgently required.

We will:

- Work with Nestrans and Aberdeen City Council to deliver the policies and priorities within the new Regional Transport Strategy, to ensure Aberdeenshire has a transport system that is in every way fit for the 21st century.
- Work closely with Transport Scotland to deliver a modern, integrated transport system, particularly with regard to rail. We will continue to seek the timely delivery of Aberdeen-Inverness enhancements and press for the promised reduced journey times between Aberdeen and the Central Belt, combined with improved reliability.
- Continue to lobby for additional stations, building on the success at Kintore to deliver a new station at Newtonhill.
- Support the Scottish Government's proposals for decarbonising the railways in Scotland by 2035.
- Work with Nestrans and the Scottish Government to test further the business case for a rail link from Dyce to Ellon and the potential of a rail link to Peterhead and Fraserburgh.
- Continue to lobby for Inch Station to be made fully accessible, building on the work already done.
- Build on the work already done on DRT to explore and develop innovative and effective ways of delivering bus transport throughout Aberdeenshire, particularly in rural areas, with the aim of significantly increasing patronage and accessibility, and reducing the number of private cars on our roads.
- As Covid limitations allow, maintain Area-based Bus Forums with the active participation of our private sector partners.
- Work with young people to find solutions to their public transport needs, whether for education or employment.
- Continue to work to deliver the long-delayed transport interchange in Inverurie.

- Work with Transport Scotland to ensure the early delivery of the grade separated junction on the A90 at Laurencekirk. We will continue to press for improvements to the A90 north of Ellon, particularly at the Toll of Birness, before the work already completed becomes out of date. We will campaign for significant improvements on the A90 to Peterhead.
- Continue to support the upgrading of the A96 by the Scottish Government.
- Speed up the design and delivery of safety-led improvements to the A947, working with both UK and Scottish Governments as required to ensure funding is available.
- Continue to make effective use of council resources to keep our road network in the best possible condition, through both planned and reactive maintenance. We will work with other councils to develop new, innovative and cost-effective techniques to speed up the process and to make repairs more permanent.
- Deliver the established and agreed long-term programme of bridge maintenance, while responding flexibly to unanticipated bridge losses arising from flooding or other means.
- Continue to deliver and where possible, enhance, effective winter maintenance throughout Aberdeenshire. We will continue to promote and facilitate the provision of grit-bins at appropriate locations and develop new ways of keeping them filled. We will continue to improve the information on winter maintenance available to our residents.
- Build on the work already done to recruit volunteer snow wardens as a means of enabling communities to do more to assist themselves, particularly in times of heavy or prolonged snow.
- Work with partners to increase opportunities for walking and cycling, recognising that safety is a primary issue in active travel. We will lobby actively, through COSLA and through MSPs representing Aberdeenshire, to bring about a change in Scottish Government capital funding to enable the Council to extend its network of dedicated cycling and walking ways, separated from roads, both within and between communities.

A Responsive and Effective Council

The past five years have held many challenges and the next Council term will be no different. The demands and consequences of climate change are tangible and real. The political picture in Scotland is growing more complex, while at the same time the demands placed on local government and the services it provides are growing. There will be greater pressure on financial resources and these climate, political and financial challenges are likely to result in ever increasing difficulties for our budget setting and service delivery. In addition, the restrictions and immense challenges resulting from Covid-19 are likely to be with us far into the future. Aberdeenshire Council must be increasingly effective and efficient; must always seek to be flexible and innovative in the management of its funds, in the delivery of its services and in adapting to a zero-carbon world.

Aberdeenshire Council has worked to build a strong relationship with its communities; we will continue that work with pace and determination, empowering our communities, engaging with them openly and listening to their voices – all voices, not just those that are loudest.

Councillors have a vital role in scrutiny as well as in setting policy direction. We will continue to encourage and develop a proactive scrutiny role for all councillors as we explore innovative ways of funding council services.

Our commitment to Carbon Budgets and to tackling and mitigating climate change will be a dominant theme; innovation and responsiveness to new ideas will be essential if we are to meet the targets we have set and develop resilient communities and businesses.

We will:

- Build on our record of sound, responsible financial management, financial planning and financial control.
- Develop the Medium Term Financial Strategy, based on longer term aims and ambitions which are clear, evidence-based and sustainable.
- Deliver a proactive and innovative approach to the Carbon Budget and give greater emphasis to the development of policies that will enable the council and our community to meet ambitious targets.
- Ensure that all Council services are aware of their responsibility to contribute towards Aberdeenshire Council's leadership role in reducing carbon and other climate-impacting emissions, in mitigating the effects of climate change and finding innovative ways to deliver on our commitments and the commitments of Government.
- Ensure that all Councillors recognise the importance of their role in scrutiny in Area and Policy contexts and their responsibility to take an active part in scrutiny activities, including training.
- Support all Councillors to perform their roles effectively and efficiently, through the provision of training, essential equipment and the services necessary for effective remote working as well as office-based activity.
- Maintain our firm commitment to the principles and practice of Area working in Aberdeenshire, through the development of Area Committees, Area Teams and the enhancement of service delivery within Areas and to Area priorities.
- Protect the independence of the Audit Committee and ensure it is properly resourced to deliver its important functions. We will work to develop the relationship between the Audit Committee and Policy and Area Committees through improving the flow of communication and reporting.
- Give priority to IT and Connectivity, developing new approaches and encouraging new and better solutions for council staff, Councillors and services. The IT Service must become more proactive, working towards SMART targets and outcomes.
- Be innovative and responsive to the needs of our staff in a 'Covid-world'. We will continue to recognise the vital importance of Council staff and vital need to support

them in a changing world of work. Aberdeenshire Council will always seek to be a good employer but will also seek to go beyond that.

- Continue to ensure we have the right people in the right places to deliver locally and effectively, whether from office or from home. We will seek to ensure that our staff can work from home effectively without 'living in the office'.
- Work to deliver community-facing and community-based services effectively and seamlessly, including improved partnership working with agencies and the voluntary and community sectors.
- Develop and deliver our Office Strategy in light of the changing world of work, to meet the needs of our staff now and into the future. We also recognise the impact decisions on this can have on communities and so will give careful consideration of this within the Strategy.
- Maximise the skills and abilities that exist within our staff and seek to develop these further through effective training and continuous professional development. At all times we will recognise and support our staff's role in the most effective and efficient delivery of services.
- Continue to maintain and develop our focus on Equalities, within the Council and in the delivery of all services and within all our communities.
- Raise awareness and understanding of the importance of local government within Scotland and the high value of the services we deliver. We will always seek to enhance the role of the Council; we will not support policies or proposals that reduce or diminish the role of local government.
- Continue to work for the reform of local government funding and for the development of a modern, transparent, effective and fair formula for the distribution of funding in Scotland.
- Campaign for a fair system of local taxation, including Business Rates, that is local in its setting, collection and accountability. In all these matters we will press for greater local control and a rapid move away from the system of centralised rate setting, 'cap's and redistribution of receipts.
- Communicate effectively with our communities, residents and businesses to ensure that all are fully informed and aware of the work of the council, the challenges we face and the balance between local and central decision-making.
- Listen and respond to our communities, ensuring that all voices have the opportunity to be heard equally. We will seek to involve more of our residents in open and transparent conversation on the issues we share in common.

RESILIENT AND EMPOWERED YOUNG PEOPLE

Liberal Democrats have a firm and long-standing commitment to education, to young people and to partnership working. We are proud of what has been achieved by Education and Children's Services and by our schools. We are proud of the high quality education offered to

young people in Aberdeenshire. We are committed to raising standards yet higher and to giving stability to Education at a time of change.

We recognise that the Covid pandemic has had very significant effects on our young people and on our school staff; not only in the way education has been delivered but also on young people's mental health. We are committed to increasing the support given to our young people to help them overcome these challenges and to develop as strong and resilient individuals. We will continue to support all school staff as they deliver these vital services.

Education is about more than schools. We will build on the strong relationships we have developed with the universities and colleges in the North East and develop closer links with employers.

Liberal Democrats also recognise the importance of education for adults and for those who may have been left behind in the past.

We will:

- Give high priority to raising levels of attainment in all Aberdeenshire schools, to raising the levels of achievement including in the results of national examinations.
- Facilitate discussions with young people, their parents and carers, teaching and support staff, further and higher education and employers, to contribute to the national discussion on changing and improving the way our young people are assessed in school and by external examinations.
- Support and enhance the early years provision for our children across a range of settings and engage with parents and carers as we recognize the vital important of early intervention and support.
- Work in partnership with parents and carers to ensure that children are ready for transition stages in nursery, schools and for their future careers.
- Identify and address barriers to attainment to enable all young people to reach their full potential. We will give priority to ensuring all our pupils are competent in the core skills of literacy and numeracy.
- Support services in all efforts to have every teaching post filled by the best possible teacher. We will work to improve teacher recruitment and retention and invest in our teaching and support staff.
- Ensure that achievement is recognised while maintaining and improving the focus on attainment to develop fully rounded individuals, well placed and equipped to move into the world of work.
- Develop and expand links between schools, colleges, employers and the local community. We will work with businesses and organisations such as the Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation (OPITO), the Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Business, Elevator and Rotary to build on the successful relationships already established.
- Strengthen and broaden the Foundation Apprenticeships that are offered through our schools.

- Build on the positive relationships with colleges and universities so that our young people have access to the best opportunities to develop to their full potential.
- Enable our young people to broaden their education by taking online courses with E-Sgoil, local colleges and the Open University.
- Give greater support to the transition from school to College, University and employment.
- Continue to modernise and invest in the school estate and consult with residents to ensure that it is fit for purpose and in the right places to serve our growing school rolls and our communities.
- Continue to support the principles of 'getting it right for every child' (GIRFEC) with additional support being provided for looked after children and those children with special educational needs.
- Promote participation in activities, including sport, art, music and drama and support Youth Work across Aberdeenshire.
- Recognise the excellent work done by Youth Forums and Youth Councils in Aberdeenshire and involve them more closely in the work of the council.
- Continue and enhance the regular discussions between the young people of Aberdeenshire and Councillors so that everyone's views can be heard on a wide range of issues including their education, health and concerns about the environment, both locally and the wider world.
- Working with head teachers, ensure that all pupils demonstrate high standards of self-discipline, respect and responsibility.
- Support the development of robust school policies which aim to eliminate physical, emotional and cyber bullying. This will improve school environments and make a positive contribution to tackling the issues around mental health among young people.
- Enhance the mental health support that is available to our young people through school counsellors and online support services such as Kooth and Togetherall.
- Ensure that all our schools make best use of the new Attainment Fund monies that are allocated to them.
- Strengthen the volunteering ethos in our schools. Voluntary organisations are the lifeblood of our communities and schools have a key role to play in their development and sustainability.
- Ensure that the right support is in place for every child in Aberdeenshire.
- Give careful and appropriate support to children with physical and/or emotional difficulties that affect their lives and learning.
- Build on the Corporate Parent Role to ensure that all looked after children's voices are heard and that our looked after children get the support they need and deserve. We will ensure that all councillors take their role as a Corporate Parent seriously.
- Expand our network of Foster Carers and promote our adoption services, ensuring that they have access to the training and support they need.
- Work with partners to ensure young carers get as much support as possible.
- Support the views of young people as contained in the separate Youth Manifesto.

CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

Positive health and well-being is achieved in many ways. It is more important now than ever before to strengthen partnership working across the public, private, voluntary and independent sectors to ensure the maximum support and service provision to our residents across Aberdeenshire.

We must learn from the challenges of recent years and drive forward the redesign and transformation required to meet people's needs. In doing so, we recognise that a trauma-informed approach will be required to be able to understand the extent of the stress and adversity faced and the risk of poorer long-term outcomes without proper support.

It is essential to listen to local voices and those with lived experience. Inclusive and meaningful engagement and communication with our communities will be crucial in developing and improving services which are tailored specifically for individuals and families.

It is important to create a safe and secure environment where people can thrive and lead their lives as independently as possible. We must respect the rights and dignity of everyone.

We Will

- Support the delivery of the Strategic Plan for Health and Social Care.
- Work with the Health & Social Care Partnership to reduce health inequalities. and unmet need in social care across Aberdeenshire.
- Ensure unpaid carers and volunteers are recognised and supported in their crucial roles.
- Promote appropriate access to General Practice and Primary Care services.
- Support the development of Secondary Care Hubs to bring services to local communities.
- Continue to invest in Mental Health services.
- Promote Strategic Needs Assessments to identify local needs.
- Monitor the outcomes of the Dementia and Autism Strategies.
- Support adults who have disabilities to live as independently as possible.
- Develop robust transition arrangements for those moving from children to adult services.
- Work with services to reduce drug and alcohol related deaths, developing and enhancing the delivery of Mental Health interventions and programmes, including the mis-use of alcohol.
- Promote the recruitment of staff in all aspects of health and social care.
- Prepare for the introduction of a National Care Service.

Liberal Democrats are committed to providing the best possible housing for those in housing need in Aberdeenshire. Much has been done to improve significantly the quality and quantity

of our housing stock, as well as tackling the issue of homelessness. Aberdeenshire Council is seen as a good and effective landlord, one that works in close partnership with its tenants, involving them in the decisions which effect their lives.

We Will

- Continue to deliver good quality affordable housing across all tenures.
- Work in partnership with our tenants to enhance their participation and scrutiny.
- Keep the rental strategy under review and work to sustain tenancies.
- Deliver the 30 year Business Plan.
- Continue to deliver the Housing Improvement Plan.
- Support the delivery of the Energy Efficiency programme across the housing stock and work towards our Net Zero targets.
- Work collaboratively to tackle fuel poverty.
- Continue to work to reduce homelessness through the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.
- Ensure Sheltered Housing and Very Sheltered Housing meet the needs of tenants.
- Work with private landlords and landowners to bring empty homes back into use at an affordable rent.
- Support the Re-settlement programme for those fleeing their homes as a result of war.
- Promote partnership working to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- Support the delivery of the Community Safety Partnership delivery plan.

Culture and Sport play a significant part in the lives of many people across Aberdeenshire. Liberal Democrats are determined to increase the opportunities for all our residents to participate actively in sporting activities, as well as making cultural opportunities more widely available. We greatly value our Library services and are committed to improve the quality and availability of Libraries, exploring innovative and effective ways of delivering this key service. We are also committed to improving our Museums, increasing awareness of them and improving access.

We Will

- Support the delivery of the Culture and Sport Strategy.
- Encourage our residents to Live Life Well, Live Life Outdoors and Live Life at Home
- Continue to promote the innovative delivery of Library services.
- Celebrate the cultural heritage of Aberdeenshire through enhanced Museum, Arts and Music venues.
- Promote participation in physical activities.

- Continue to work in partnership with Clubsport Aberdeenshire and Community Sports Hubs.
- Support the continuation of the Pitch Users Strategy.
- Promote local initiatives through Participatory Budgeting.
- Develop the Long Term Conditions Programme to provide physical activity opportunities for those who are older, recovering from an illness or have long term health conditions.
- Review membership schemes and affordability to improve access for all.

We are acutely aware that the economic situation in 2022 is impacting not only on our tenants but on many people across Aberdeenshire. We are committed to supporting people facing the challenges of homelessness, fuel poverty and all the impacts of the rising cost of living. We will; work with all partners to tackle the disastrous impacts of poverty and inequalities. Tackling Poverty and Inequality is a fundamental part of our work. Early intervention is a key priority; we will be bold and ambitious in our response to the needs of those people who are disadvantaged, in our support to those facing poverty and in protecting residents from the effects of deprivation.

We Will

- Continue to work to reduce poverty and inequalities.
- Support steps being taken to prevent children and families falling into poverty.
- Ensure services and policies are in place to support those who are unemployed move back into employment.
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- Continue to invest to provide much needed support and assistance to those that need it.
- Work to ensure there is access to affordable credit.
- Support people to maximise their income through employment.
- Support the Lived Experience Forum and encourage participation.
- Embed a right's based approach.
- Raise awareness and work to reduce stigma.