

Central Bedfordshire Council Elections  
May 2023

# Labour's Manifesto

**LABOUR FOR A FAIRER  
GREENER CENTRAL  
BEDFORDSHIRE**



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# Introduction

## For a fairer greener Central Bedfordshire

Labour's ambition is to make a positive difference and to change the trajectory of Central Bedfordshire Council.

The people of Central Bedfordshire deserve better than they have experienced after over thirteen years of Conservative government and many more years of Conservative control of the Council. Hope can replace fear and despair. Investment in public services can replace cuts.

The Council can and must both act and speak up for the communities and businesses in Central Bedfordshire. It can and must show leadership in addressing the climate emergency.

A Labour Council can and must foster the conditions for a fair and successful local economy and must address poverty especially child poverty, inequality, and inequity across Central Bedfordshire.

A Labour Council will act to make these objectives reality. Labour councillors will represent their communities and electorates; and always pursue these objectives

This is the time for change. It is time for a Labour Council.

Our programme as set out in this manifesto is based on:

- Our Labour Party values.
- Our national Party policies.
- The experience and achievements of successful Labour councils across the country.
- Our knowledge of Central Bedfordshire communities, environment, and businesses.
- The impact of the cost-of-living crisis, and its hurtful effect.
- Our conversations with residents, young people, charities and community groups, businesses owners and managers, community leaders and trade unions.

A Labour Council will have to work within the constraints that it will inherit on election and those set by the Westminster government. While we look forward to working in partnership with a Labour government led by Keir Starmer in the very near future, we will always put the interests of Central Bedfordshire first.

As long as there is a Conservative government, we will seek to minimise the impact of its harmful policies.

A Labour Council will be financially prudent. We are committed to ensuring that the Council tax is not increased above the annual rate of inflation for each of the four years until the next election. We will seek to reduce Council tax when and if this is possible without further damage to already underfunded services.

We recognise that the communities, towns, and villages of Central Bedfordshire have varying characteristics, profiles, needs and aspirations. A “one size fits all” approach is not appropriate. We will work with local communities, town, and parish councils to ensure that the Council’s activities and services reflect local needs and choices as far as possible.

Our policies and resource allocation will be entirely focused through our residents, communities, and businesses not through an organisational piecemeal approach. For example, services and support to children and young people, or elderly people will be people centric not provider shaped.

As a community leader with a democratic mandate, a Labour Councillor would foster partnerships with others such as the NHS, the police, the Fire and Rescue service, the Environment Agency, and others to ensure that local residents have their fair share of quality services from these bodies. Co-ordinated programmes and pooled resources will be fundamental to achieving our goals and those of local communities. Advocating for residents, communities and businesses will be a core role and activity.

A Labour Council will campaign to form the new Council administration, but should we fall short of being the majority on the Council we will still promote our policies and hold the administration to account.

A Labour group, a Labour leadership and cabinet and individual Labour councillors will

- Always put the interests of local people first (ward councillors will champion their communities).
- Be transparent in all that they say.
- Communicate with the public.
- Listen to and consult with communities, residents, businesses, charities and community groups, and trade unions.
- Involve stakeholders in decision making and service reviews.

Above all we will strive for a **fairer, greener Central Bedfordshire**.

## **Our key pledges**

A Labour Council would:

### **Be financially prudent**

We would review every budget and all expenditure to ensure that every pound spent:

- Offers value for money
- Addresses the community's needs
- Contributes to addressing climate change
- Ensures equity and equality of outcomes
- Recognises the different needs and priorities of communities across the district.

## **Prioritise the climate emergency and greening Central Bedfordshire.**

We will take steps to make the council carbon neutral by 2030, and use the council's planning powers to:

- Protect green spaces in and between villages and towns
- Require all new building in the district to be energy efficient.
- Prevent avoidable road traffic associated with developments.
- Encourage investment in renewable energy generation.
- Encourage and support walking and cycling as viable modes of transport.
- Protect and enhance public transport especially bus services.

We'd also ensure that the council's:

- Buildings are energy efficient and host solar and other energy generation systems.
- Fleet does not create tailpipe emissions by 2028 at the latest.
- Suppliers are as local as possible.
- Contracts require contractors and suppliers to demonstrate how they address the climate emergency, and in particular, and how their activities contribute to the council's sustainability commitments.

## Protect critical council services

We'd aim to:

- Minimise the impact of government funding cuts on adult and children's social care and education and increase expenditure on these as resources allow.
- Prioritise services for the most vulnerable and poorest.
- Involve service users and communities, and staff in service design and monitoring.
- Work in partnership with the NHS, police, fire and rescue and other neighbouring local authorities to maximise value for money across total spending and as resources allow shift resources to preventative services.
- Address the needs of the different communities across the district including those in rural areas.

## Champion fairness and equality

A Labour council would:

- Establish a Fairness and Equality Commission.
- Build council homes across the district.
- Support and partner with the voluntary and community sector to provide support to those struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.
- Support and introduce advocacy services to work with communities.
- Champion SEND and other specialist services; and as resources allow, invest in services such as Sure Start.
- Work with and encourage other local public bodies to do the same.
- Involve residents, business representatives, trade unions, the VCS and local town and parish councils in the council's strategic decision making.

## **Support the local economy, local businesses, and jobs.**

We would use the council's spending to support local businesses, and partner and co-ordinate with the NHS, education services and others to do the same to:

- Work with businesses, trade unions and bodies such as the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to encourage investment across the district.
- Use the council's planning and economic development powers and its estate to facilitate investment, inclusive growth, and decent well-paid jobs.
- Foster a renaissance of town and larger village centres.
- Foster the establishment and growth of local social enterprises.
- Expand the council's apprenticeship programme.
- Support and encourage skills development programmes.

It is an ambitious programme, and its implementation will be subject to the available resources – these are limited because of thirteen years of Conservative government cutting financial support to the Council and because of the poor financial stewardship of the Council by the Conservatives over several decades.

## **Enhancing communities, democracy, and equality**

### **A sustainable local economy and environment**

Labour is committed to creating a vibrant local economy and a sustainable environment with a range of housing provision. We will lead by example and intend that Central Bedfordshire Council will become an exemplar "green council".

## A green Central Bedfordshire

It is our goal to make Central Bedfordshire a national leader in environmental and economic sustainability; by working to fulfil our current needs, lay foundations to meet future challenges, and playing our part to secure our climate's future. As such environmental protection and the climate emergency will be the foundation of CBC's decision-making process under Labour administration, and reflected in every policy, budgetary, strategic, and service decision we make (*See later section: Action on the Climate Crisis*).

## Sustainable economic development and jobs

Local employment opportunities are vital for residents, and thus there is a critical need for high quality well-rewarded jobs across the district. The Council has a range of powers to pursue policies that promote economic growth and development locally. Further to this, the Council has opportunities to negotiate with stakeholders such as central government and local and national business to advance these goals.

We recognise that the traditional approaches to economic growth, including inclusive growth strategies, have tended to leave people behind and have often failed to create long term sustainable communities. Economic development that goes unaccompanied by strengthening local community ties and support networks is fundamentally brittle; resilient local communities enable their residents to better withstand economic shocks and cost-of-living crises, both individually and collectively.

Therefore, we will draw inspiration from Preston City Council's model of community wealth-building to:

- Seek to promote, through preferential spending, the use of local suppliers when procuring goods and services for use by the Council's anchor institutions; in so doing, foster investment in local supply chains and improve local economic competitiveness.
- Invest directly in Council staff, both through building skills through training and establishing staff pay at least the Real Living Wage as set by the Low Pay Commission.
- Encourage our Council staff to spend and save money on local high streets and through local Credit Unions.

- Use the reach of CBC anchor institution assets to foster local economic development, such as through investment in the local cooperative economy in preference to multinational concerns where feasible.
- Explore asset transfer to community or private sector interests where this best serves the interests of the wider community.
- Support the growth of alternative models of economic governance to give citizens greater control over their economic future. This can mean the development of new co-operatives as well as other ways of helping people feel ownership of assets and decision-making processes.

We will also:

- Work with the Local Economic Plan and other regional and sub-regional bodies to encourage and facilitate inward investment to the district.
- Support local small businesses and start-ups as well as co-operatives and social enterprises by the provision of affordable accommodation, requiring suppliers to install fast, reliable, and affordable broadband internet infrastructure, using business rate discretion prudently; and working with local education and training providers to develop the right skills among the local workforce.
- Invest in communities and developing community resilience and social capital.
- Explore the use of innovative economic solutions, such as Universal Basic Income or a four-day work week, to give local residents greater power over their own lives and economic activity
- Ensure that local infrastructure and planning policy addresses employment requirements, proactively using its planning and other powers to persuade local employers, of all sizes, to
  - offer quality apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and professional development
  - pay the Real Living Wage
  - end “zero hour” and similar contracts
  - recognise and engage constructively with trade unions
  - be good corporate citizens.

We will work with town councils, chambers of commerce, and trade unions to address the future of our local town centres. All stakeholders have a perspective to offer on town centre regeneration and as such it is important to take their views into practical consideration.

We recognise that the opportunities to achieve this programme will be much greater, when pursued with the support of the next Labour government in Westminster. Nevertheless, a Labour-administered Central Bedfordshire Council will use its powers to further these goals to the fullest possible extent, whether or not Labour is in power nationally.

## **Tackling poverty and inequality**

Central Bedfordshire on most national indices is a relatively wealthy district but these headline indices hide some harsh reality. There are some of the most deprived wards in the region in this district and poverty is increasing. This is the case with in-work poverty and child poverty. This situation is unacceptable, and the current Conservative Council has not taken this social crisis seriously enough. Labour will be very different.

Government policies such as Universal Credit and introducing PIP assessments have made matters worse. The Conservative Council has not challenged the Government nearly enough on this.

We will make addressing poverty and inequality a priority in accordance with our socialist values and principles. We will take action immediately but when there is a Labour government, we shall be able to do more.

Immediately a Labour Council will establish an Equalities Commission chaired by an independent expert. This commission will include local citizens, representatives from local voluntary and community groups including Citizens Advice, anti-poverty experts from outside the district and councillors. It will be required to:

- Review poverty and inequality and their causes across the district.
- Recommend actions and policy changes for the Council and for others.
- Produce an action plan for the Council.
- Report within a year with interim reports with plans for action.

In addition, we will:

- Introduce and apply a rigorous equalities assessment for every policy and budgetary decision being considered by the Council.
- Provide additional support to key local voluntary and community groups such as Citizens Advice, food banks and advocacy groups.
- Challenge and urge the DWP and others to provide responsible, reasonable, and accessible services for people living in the district.
- Encourage all employers in the district in all sectors – private, voluntary and community and business - to pay the Real Living Wage and move away from precarious employment practices.
- Join other councils to lobby governments on this agenda.

## **Housing, strategic development and local planning**

We believe that every individual and every family should have a warm, affordable, and secure home. Homelessness remains a perennial social ill locally and nationally and is exacerbated by a crisis in the cost of living that forces too many to choose between heating their homes and feeding themselves. We have also seen the growth of “market rent” and “buy to let” housing markets, and consequently a crisis in access to affordable housing for many local people, especially younger people.

A Labour Council in Central Bedfordshire will seek to meet the requirements for housing and development as prescribed by the national government, but to maximise the benefit to local communities in our approach to those targets.

We will make housing a key priority for Central Bedfordshire. We will strive to ensure that every child in the district has a good quality home, where they can thrive and where their families can live well as part of a strong local community. We will work with local civil society groups, housing associations and the NHS to combat homelessness. We will take a holistic approach to tackle all facets of the issue, and thus we will ensure that our housing service works closely with other services including advocacy, mental health, and addiction services.

Our goal will always be the provision of good quality long-term housing for all local residents; however, where necessary, we will seek to develop the Council's stock good quality temporary accommodation and support services.

We recognise that there is an urgent need for more housing in Central Bedfordshire's towns and villages, but we recognise that a strategy that goes no further than “build, build, build” is incomplete. Labour's administration will

include a range of criteria in its planning decisions for housing developments, including:

- Significant social housing to rent and affordable housing to buy.
- Supporting investment in schools, leisure and recreation facilities, health services including local clinics and surgeries, roads, and public transport.
- Be sustainably planned and built, with the right mix of housing, retail, and business sites.
- Be appropriate for their location and local communities.
- Include employment opportunities.
- Protect green space and avoid urban sprawl

We will prioritise effective public consultation by Central Bedfordshire Council before major planning permission is considered. We will also ensure that the Council rigorously enforces all planning conditions and building regulations.

In support of these social housing goals, we will build new council homes, taking advantage of the Government's relaxation of the controls and the Council's ability to borrow capital to build. This will be a strategic priority for a Labour Council and thus we will actively identify sites for immediate building. Meanwhile, we will explore the most effective means of implementing such a scheme, such as through the use of the Council's Housing Company.

Labour will pursue all housing options including:

- Shared ownership, part ownership and part rental arrangements.
- Housing co-operatives.
- Upgrading the Council's existing housing estate through more responsive management.
- Local authority led development for renting and purchase.
- Mixed housing of owner occupation and renting in all developments.
- All new housing being fully accessible at least to lifetime homes standards.

- Integrated specialist supported housing schemes.
- Appropriate development of brown field sites such as Henlow Camp.
- Set an example for tenant rights, with tenant led decision-making, in all social housing and fostering this wherever possible in the private rented sector.
- Sensible local regulation of privately rented accommodation as far as the law allows.
- Use the Council's land and its capital resources to purchase land for housing development; and where necessary to purchase housing on the open market so as to use it for social housing.

We believe that the current planning approach seems designed to benefit developers, not local communities. This will change with a Labour Council. We would enforce Section 106 conditions on all developers and use our planning powers to shift developer behaviours.

We will use the proposed area committees to shape local planning and involve town and parish councils more actively and effectively than is currently the case. We will also ensure effective consultation with neighbours and other stakeholders.

## **Diversity and equality**

A Labour Council would strive to drive racism and discrimination on the grounds of gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, or faith out of the district/Any of the nine protected characteristics as recognised by the Equality Act (2010)? We would partner others in civil society and employers to ensure that there was a concerted and co-ordinated commitment to equality for all.

Our approach will ensure that the Council:

- Complies fully with its legal duties and goes beyond where this is desirable.
- We will aim that services, employment practices and other policies and actions promote and enhance equality and fairness including equal life chances

- Undertakes equality assessments before taking any policy or financial decision
- Reviews equalities impact on a regular basis.
- Encourages other employers and service providers in the district to do the same
- Only procures from contractors that meet these equality standards

## **Traveller and Gypsy communities**

Labour is committed to human and citizen rights for all members of our community including Traveller and Gypsy communities. We will fulfil our legal obligation to provide services, support, and pitch sites - both permanent and transit sites across the district. We will liaise with neighbouring local authorities to ensure that there is a coordinated sub-regional approach to these important issues.

A Labour Council will enforce planning conditions and will take appropriate action where there are illegal pitches but believe that the most effective and correct way of doing this is to start with the provision of official sites, access to education and health services and effective consultation with the traveller and gypsy communities, and their representatives.

## **Action on the Climate Crisis**

We will recognise and act in response to the Climate Crisis. This means responsible use and planning of resources, including energy, water, and waste management, plastic use reduction, and facilitating a rapid transformation from a fossil fuel burning economy to a renewable energy economy.

## **Policy and strategy for a sustainable Central Bedfordshire**

Labour is committed to creating a vibrant local economy and a sustainable environment with a range of housing provision. We will put the environment at the core of our planning and development strategies. We will lead by example and intend that Central Bedfordshire Council will become an exemplar council in this respect.

We acknowledge the Central Bedfordshire Sustainability Plan, 2020-2030, and will ensure that commitments made are rigorously progressed. In particular, we expect the Council to show measurable carbon savings in its own buildings and will monitor these closely.

In line with national Labour Party policy and the actions taken by many Labour local authorities a Labour Central Bedfordshire Council would place environmental protection and enhancement at the heart of its programmes. This would be reflected in every policy, budget decision, place shaping activity and service. We would adopt a sustainable procurement strategy with policies to ensure sustainability in the supply chain.

## **Central Bedfordshire estate and facilities**

A Labour Council will demonstrate responsible environmental management of its own buildings and infrastructure. In particular we would:

- Ensure the Council minimises waste, use of energy, water and other resources.
- Set environmental improvement targets in these areas.
- Regularly publish progress against these targets, (including numerical carbon reductions).
- Seek ongoing advice from appropriate environmental experts and practitioners.

In addition, we will:

- Enable flexible working, including more home working and less travel for Council staff where practical.
- Gradually replace the Council's fleet with electrical vehicles.
- Install more vehicle charging points.
- Invest in high standards of insulation in all existing buildings and as standard in any new build including Council housing and schools.
- Install solar energy where feasible on all CBC properties, and for this to be standard on all new buildings.
- Be carbon neutral by 2030.

## Wildlife and land management

Labour is committed to protection and enhancement of the natural environment, and a Labour Council will:

- Protect wildlife and fauna supporting the Council's network of country parks and smaller open access areas, work in partnership with landowners to secure their participation in wildlife and fauna protection.
- Invest in its farm estate to enable tenants to farm to the highest environmental standards; and introduce this as part of their tenancy agreements on a phased basis
- Continue tree planting and management

## Leadership and communications

A Labour Council would use its leadership, and sustainability communications to influence, encourage and enable:

- The public to understand that there is a Climate Crisis, enable them to be more environmentally aware and to adopt behaviours that are aligned with the Council's environmental targets.
- The wider public sector to adopt behaviours that are aligned with the Council's environmental targets.
- The promotion and support for public transport, walking and cycling, whilst recognising the transport needs of people living across the district and those that rely on cars.
- Continuing support for the Central Bedfordshire Council and Green Business Network sponsored 'Sustainability Award'.

Our approach to environmental sustainability will be at the core of our programme for sustainable economic development and environmental leadership. Furthermore, we would lobby government to legislate around planning to enable councils to require private developers to implement environmental protection and improvement measures.

## Progressive use of resources

### Securing value from every pound of council tax and every pound spent

A Labour Council would ensure that it uses the Council's financial resources to deliver efficiency, effective services, and equity whilst maximising impact on the quality of life, opportunities, and equality across Central Bedfordshire, and on addressing the climate emergency.

We recognise that families face a cost-of-living crisis and therefore will not seek to increase council tax or charges for services above the current inflation levels and wherever and whenever possible seek to reduce these and keep any necessary increases below inflation levels.

We believe that the Council's staff are critical to the success of the Council and its services and that the services funded by the Council deliver for the people of Central Bedfordshire. Comprehensive strategic budget and service review.

Central Bedfordshire Council's financial position is grim. Over twelve years of Conservative Government has led to massive reductions in financial support to the Council by well over forty percent. The Government has in effect ended all its revenue support grant (RSG) by 2020 though some limited specific grants have been retained.

The Council's financial reserves are relatively low and are far too small to compensate for this loss of central government grant. That said the Conservative Council administration has too often cut deeper than even the Conservative Government required. The Council's Conservative administration has cut services and done so in ways that have often disproportionately affected the most vulnerable and younger children. It has imprudently cut back on preventive services.

We will ideally reverse these cuts and look to increase expenditure and investment in critical services, addressing poverty and supporting the local economy. However even with a Labour Government, this ambition could be hard to achieve. In the initial years of a Labour Government the financial position for the Council will be heavily constrained. We will not back away from hard decisions and will focus on the needs and aspirations of our community. A Labour Council will steward the Council's financial resources prudently and in accordance with the law.

On taking office in Central Bedfordshire, we will inherit a Conservative budget and service profile based on decades of Conservative administration. We'd seek to change this profile, to shift resources to meet our socialist objectives and the policies described in this manifesto and above all to ensure that we secure effectiveness, efficiency, equity, greater equality, and a comprehensive programme to address the climate emergency across the district. Sadly, we recognise that in the short term the Conservative Government will force a Labour-led Council to make some more cuts – We will focus on how and where to protect critical services and ensure fairness. We will prioritise funding to meet the objectives and needs of local communities. Our budgeting will be shaped by our values and our commitment to the people, communities, and businesses of Central Bedfordshire.

We would involve local citizens and other stakeholders including staff, trade unions and voluntary and community groups in all such budget decision-making.

A Labour administration will take two immediate steps:

- Introduce an urgent budget within the first two months following the election to address the most pressing needs and pressures in services and communities.
- Instigate a comprehensive strategic review of the budget its impact on services and communities with the aim of targeting expenditure to maximise impact and equity based on our guiding values, principles and the key pledges set out above. Setting a budget and service plan up to the next elections in 2027.

This comprehensive review will:

- Be strategic and be driven by Labour's values, principles, and policy pledges, not vested interests or the historic legacy.
- Address the entire Council budget, and every service and budget line.
- Be challenging.
- Involve stakeholders including staff and their trade unions, the voluntary and community sector, local businesses representatives and those using services.

- Be subject to consultation with communities and local citizens (see the manifesto section on enhancing democracy).
- Consider national and global economic and environmental considerations.
- Be mindful of national policy, legislation, and public expenditure plans; and potential future changes to these.
- Be co-ordinated as far as possible with other local agencies including the NHS, police, and fire and rescue service.

We propose that this review will be completed within six months so as to shape the Council's budget for 2024-2025.

## **Public services for the people and answerable to the people - Service delivery in the public interest**

We believe that public services should be efficient, effective, and equitable. They should meet need, address inequality, address the climate emergency, invest for the future and be sustainable. We further believe that public services not only deliver outcomes for their direct users but also should have a collective benefit for the community, local economy, the environment, and the securing of wider public policy goals.

A Labour Council in Central Bedfordshire is committed to:

- Public services being high quality and cost effective, and to innovation and excellence.
- Involving staff and service users and their respective representative bodies in policy and operational decision making and to establishing mechanisms for this which are practical and efficient.
- offering choice to service users where this is not detrimental to the interests of the wider community.
- The default for all public services being in-house, publicly owned, and publicly managed.

- Bringing outsourced services back in house as soon as is economically and operationally viable – this will mean reviewing all existing contracts and terminating some possibly and waiting for others to reach their end date.
- When services are outsourced ensuring strong and effective contract management and holding contractors to account and full transparency.
- Only ever outsourcing when there is strong public interest for so doing and following intensive stakeholder consultation – we would establish transparent criteria for assessing the public interest.
- Establishing partnerships with voluntary and community sector bodies for the provision of specialist services, and information and advocacy services establishing shared arrangements with other local authorities and public bodies where this is operationally and financially advantageous.
- Adopting service levels and standards for local places in consultation with the proposed area committees – service delivery based on the principle of subsidiarity we recognise that achieving these policies will be challenging given the financial situation, the legacy which will be inherited, demand pressures for services such as adult and children’s social care and the legal framework.

This will not prevent us from being bold and resolute, and we will be open about any constraints with the public and stakeholders using the proposed stakeholder forum (*see previous section: enhancing democracy*) to share issues and explore solutions.

## **The Council as an exemplar employer**

Employees are the Council’s most important resource and deserve to be respected and well rewarded, we will:

- Introduce the Real Living Wage and require all contractors and suppliers to do the same so that they can meet international legal labour market standards including recognising trade unions.
- Recognise the role and contribution of trade unions and offer them facilities time.

- Establish an Employee Forum (*see previous section: enhancing democracy*).

Mindful of recruitment and retention issues we will:

- Introduce an internal talent strategy to promote career progression and ensure the Council has an effective workforce.
- Invest in staff development and leadership development.
- Enter into arrangements with social housing providers including its own housing provision to provide homes for new recruits and key staff.

A Labour Council will exemplify best employment practice and encourage other private and public sector employers in the district to do the same.

## High quality public services

Our policies and pledges for the Council's services are driven by our values and pledges. They are also driven by the needs, aspirations and rights of the people who live in Central Bedfordshire. We will implement these as resources become available and we will use our strategic budget review to enable us to prioritise expenditure.

### Adult social care

The crisis in social care is one of the greatest social challenges nationally and in Central Bedfordshire. The Conservative Government has consistently refused to fund social care adequately. Consequently, it has placed enormous financial pressure on service users and their families, and on local authorities such as Central Bedfordshire Council.

Labour's national priorities:

- "Tackling the crisis in social care is a priority for Labour. Our plans for social care will address the immediate crisis in care, double the number of people receiving publicly funded care, and stop people with dementia being treated unfairly by the care system.

- Labour's National Care service will move towards greater public provision of social care. Local authorities will become responsible for planning, designing, delivering, and evaluating care services within national frameworks.

For too long social care has been subject to competitive market tendering. We are clear that markets have no place in social care and will end this practice as quickly as we can. Although social care is connected to health care and the NHS, we believe that it is a critical public service in its own right – a service which defines our civilised values and our human rights.

A Labour Council will approach social care from the rights, needs and choices of those requiring the service and their carers. We will establish forums for younger service users, for older people and for carers. These forums will work with service providers from the voluntary and community sector and the private sector, social care professionals, the NHS, and political leaders to review and propose changes to, Council policy and practices, the Council's assessment system and eligibility criteria for services, service design and delivery including:

- Social work
- Day services
- Domiciliary services
- Residential care
- Therapy and related services
- Aids and adaptations

We will review how the Council procures services from the private and VCS sectors and how it funds this provision.

We will establish integrated health and social care planning and delivery based on local democratic accountability, playing a key role in the Bedfordshire, Luton, and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Service (BLMK ICS) in order to make the best use of resources.

We will review relationships and joint provision with social housing providers, we will support advocacy services for those who require them and assure their independence.

We will extend personal budgets and support people to live in their own homes as long as they wish. A Labour Council will address the people's needs in a holistic fashion and ensure that adult social care is integrated with:

- Housing services and provision

- Public transport
- Economic development and employment policy
- Leisure services

We will ensure that it complements NHS services with no service user falling between services or being required to pay for services which otherwise could be secured from the NHS free at the point of use.

We will wish to move away from services which separate disabled and older people from society and wider community services. Our approach will be to strengthen a social model of service and to challenge any service which is based on a medical and/or institutional model of care. Specifically, as resources allow, a Labour Council will:

- Aim to take most services back into public management.
- Ensure that external service providers treat their service users and staff fairly, including paying the Real Living Wage and employing staff on decent terms and conditions.
- Promote and support both staff and service users to establish co-operatives.
- Work closely with and support service delivery by the voluntary and community sector.
- Work closely with the inspectorates and regulators such as CQC to ensure that all provision in the district is good or excellent.
- Fund private and VCS providers financially in ways that meet full costs plus.

Ultimately without a Labour Government a Labour Council will have to move forward prudently and will do so following full consultation with all stakeholders. We will work closely with the NHS across the district, with the aim of influencing and shaping our NHS services. Where appropriate, we will try to move to a greater integration of health and council services, whilst retaining local democratic decision making and accountability. Specifically, we will press the NHS to:

- Improve mental health services for adults and children significantly including community and acute services so that they are in the top decile for England.
- Integrate community NHS services with social care services.
- Ensure that there are adequate and accessible primary care services including GP clinics across the district.
- Ensure that hospital services are of the highest quality, are accessible and do not have long waiting lists.
- Work with the Council on a progressive public health agenda.
- Be open in its decision-making.
- Be subject to democratic accountability through the Health and Wellbeing Board and Labour's proposed Local Public Accounts Committee (***see the manifesto section on enhancing democracy***).

## Public health and wellbeing

As the country suffers through the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, it is essential that Central Bedfordshire Council makes a renewed commitment to protecting the living standards of its residents.

People deserve the freedom to control their own lives, and a Labour Council will commit to giving residents the highest quality of life possible, across the following areas:

- Giving children and younger people the best start in life, to maximise their chances and opportunities.
- Empowering communities to develop healthy and sustainable resources and places which promote a healthy standard of living and help prevent ill-health.

A Labour Council will place a strong emphasis on improving key public health metrics including:

- Conditions linked to substance abuse, obesity, and smoking
- Improved Early Years services and family support
- Access to green space and leisure services

- Greater access to services to support Mental Health

The diversity of our county means that single solutions to complex problems are not always appropriate. A Labour Council will work with communities to understand what support is most effective.

## **Arts, heritage, culture & libraries**

Everyone in Central Bedfordshire deserves the chance to access well-loved and protected arts, culture, leisure, and library services. A Labour Council will protect libraries and other leisure and cultural facilities, seeking to enhance services to ensure they remain popular and accessible. This will include:

- Placing local libraries at the heart of our communities by protecting their opening hours, growing the range of material available, and allowing them to be used as hubs for the local community.
- Consult and introduce innovative solutions which will allow rural communities to access library and cultural services.

A Labour Council will be one which understands that the residents of our county should have a direct stake in the services that they use. While keeping in mind the need to ensure value for money and budget prudently, a Labour Council will seek to return leisure services to direct Council management where possible.

Where housing, community or industrial developments are pursued, we will demand an appropriate level of leisure, library and arts facilities are provided.

And we will protect and support our Country Parks and seek to open up access to public spaces for everyone. This includes working collaboratively with local Parish and Town Councils to achieve this.

## **Children's services, young people and education**

Labour is committed to addressing child poverty, including, as resources allow the introduction of a free meal for all school children and ensuring that all children from families in poverty receive free meals in the school holidays. As resources allow, we will aim to reverse cuts to children's services, which have gravely suffered as a result of the pandemic and have been mistreated by the Conservative council. We would strive to:

- Restore Sure Start centres and services delivered both by the Council and in partnership with schools, and the voluntary and community sector groups.
- Fund and extend support and services for SEND
- Reinvent the delivery of SEND services across Central Bedfordshire, ensuring that parents and carers accessing the services are listened to and that their needs are being considered in any decisions being made. Cases to be dealt with on an individual basis and not “one size fits all”.
- Extend parent support services especially for new parents.
- Improve support to new and existing parents, including seeking to persuade the NHS to improve face to face health visitor appointments and to deliver antenatal and postnatal drop-in sessions to satellite sites, ensuring that they can be accessed by all communities in Central Bedfordshire.
- Create high standards for child protection with well-resourced services (and where necessary working in partnership with neighbouring local authorities)
- Ensure that funding for child protection services is adequately resourced and;
- Every child having the highest standard of education from nursery to post-16.
- Bring academies back into a local authority accountability framework.
- Every school having empowered governing bodies with parent and staff governors and student governors in secondary schools.
- Review the current school three-tier structural organisation with the involvement of parents, headteachers and school professionals but only moving to change when this is educationally advantageous and affordable.

A Labour Council will also aim to introduce Labour's National Education Service policy as far and ensure that Central Bedfordshire is ready to implement that policy when there is a change of government. We can do this by supporting our maintained schools, to improve performance and for all schools to reach the Ofsted level of good or outstanding. We'll aim to invest in school infrastructure to ensure access for all.

For post-16 education provision, we will aim to work in partnership with local colleges and schools, promoting high-quality apprenticeships and enhancing social mobility across the district.

We will try to review and improve on waiting times for referrals made to CAMHS and Paediatric Service assessments, for Central Bedfordshire. (Current waiting time for ASD assessment is 33 weeks in Central Beds, as of June 2022. A child's mental health referral is 4 weeks).

All of the above will be pursued in consultation with families and young people.

## **Refuse collection and management**

A Labour Council will, subject to the availability of resources and the ability to end or change existing contracts, wish to adopt the highest affordable and possible standards of recycling. This will mean:

- Across the district there will be weekly bin collection – alternating between recycling and general waste collections – and extending the range of items and forms of separation of materials that can be recycled through the household collections.
- Introducing more glass and other neighbourhood based recycling facilities and maintaining these to a high standard.
- Offering collection services for bulk waste.
- Reviewing charges for commercial waste to support local SMEs.
- Promoting recycling via household collections.
- Robustly enforcing fly tipping regulations whilst reviewing the operating hours and collection facilities at local waste tidy tips.
- Opposing inappropriate planning applications for land fill and incinerator plants.

- Monitoring existing plants and press the Environment Agency to ensure operates comply with regulations and their licences.
- Enforcing air pollution regulations.

Labour will review waste collection, disposal and management including provider contracts to ensure value for money, maximise recycling and achieve high environmental standards.

## **Public transport and roads**

Labour believes that the citizens and businesses of Central Bedfordshire are entitled to and benefit from decent public transport and a good safe road network.

The Conservative Government has stripped local government of many of its previous powers in respect of public transport and in particular bus services. We will use what powers and resources available to improve bus services in both the urban and rural areas of the district. We will use our influence to shift the attitudes, services and facilities provided by private sector bus providers and train operators. We will promote less reliance on cars, more walking, cycling, and wheeling, and a greater use of public transport and this links to both our public health and strategic economic objectives.

Labour will:

- Aim to reverse the cuts made to the evening bus services and pursue improvements to make bus services a viable option for commuters across urban and rural areas of Central Bedfordshire.
- Pursue an integrated transport network linking different modes of travel to provide seamless journeys both within and outside Central Bedfordshire.
- Address the current cycle network within Central Bedfordshire which is fragmented and relies on shared use with road traffic by aim to filling in the current gaps and further expanding the cycle network across the district.
- Provide a safe environment for cyclists with dedicated cycle lanes separate from road traffic wherever possible.

- Support step-free access improvements at train stations across Bedfordshire, liaising with the Department for Transport and Train Operating companies to ensure equal access for disabled and elderly people and those with young children; and if necessary, making small capital contribution to support construction.
- Press the Government and rail operators to ensure that train services are affordable and reliable – though as long as there is a Conservative government success may be limited.
- Consider, as resources allow the introduction of free or cheap fares for young people, unemployed people, and other disadvantaged groups.
- Protect and encourage take up of bus passes and other travel passes.
- Review car parking to promote more environmental use of cars and support retail high streets; and ensure that there are secure cycle facilities at rail stations, in retail areas, etc.
- Enforce planning conditions so that developers financially support local transport needs.
- Extend 20mph speed restrictions in all residential areas and other areas where there are significant numbers of pedestrians such as outside schools, in high streets, etc.
- Introduce a programme of highway improvements to fill in potholes and introduce better street lighting and other safety initiatives.
- Protect and enhance public rights of way and access including public footpaths and work in partnership with community groups and landowners whilst enforcing right of access.
- Partner with Parish and Town Councils on these agendas.

## **Environmental health and consumer protection**

A Labour Council would ensure that it met its statutory duties in respect of environmental health and would seek to work with local businesses to ensure that all businesses and public places handling foodstuffs in whatever form would aim to have the highest possible food safety and environmental health standards.

A Labour Council would crack down on businesses which were not meeting their legal obligations.

We would strengthen consumer protection and ensure that the trading standards service is adequately resourced. We would seek to develop partnerships with local business organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses and local chambers of trade, and with organisations such as Citizens Advice to ensure that consumers in Central Bedfordshire understand their rights and have assurance of not being ripped off.

We would use our planning and any other powers available to us to reduce and control the proliferation of betting shops across local high streets.

***Labour will champion a fairer, greener Central Bedfordshire.***



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