



Labour
CHESHIRE EAST

MANIFESTO 2019

A COUNCIL FOR THE MANY NOT THE FEW

Cheshire East Council needs a new start and a new administration to re-build its reputation. The last four years have seen EIGHT criminal investigations swirling around the Conservative-controlled Council, including the involvement of the police's Organised Crime Unit, the long term suspension of the top 3 officers of the Council at a cost of over £1M, and scandals around Conservative councillors.

Labour is the only Party that can deliver the changes necessary to make Cheshire East a great place to live and work. The Labour Party offers a message of hope; that residents should be proud to live in Cheshire East and staff should be proud to work for their Council.

Labour Councillors have achieved a number of significant results while in opposition

- ✓ Exposed the deliberate and systematic manipulation of air quality data.
- ✓ Prompted an external review of culture & bullying at the Council. The review concluded that over 200 staff had experienced bullying in the previous 6 months.
- ✓ Spearheaded action on fly tipping.
- ✓ Led on the group reviewing regulation of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- ✓ Prompted the removal of council tax discounts for empty properties. This led to an increase in income of £3M a year and a reduction in the number of empty properties.
- ✓ Advised of weaknesses in the Local Plan while there was still time to fix them. (The advice was ignored by the Conservatives and we are now left with a Local Plan that is ineffective in stopping speculative housing applications on greenfield sites.)
- ✓ Improved the whistleblowing procedures.

We will achieve so much more if your votes put us in control of Cheshire East Council.

Labour will work for a good life for the many not the few. We will support communities and protect our beautiful Cheshire environment.

Labour will put people before profit.

Don't let the Conservatives destroy Cheshire East for short-term profit for the few.

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1. HOUSING & PLANNING

We will protect communities and the green fields of Cheshire East from speculative housing applications that make millions for a few people and cause misery for many.

There is a clear party political difference over planning policies. Labour proposes building more council houses and would let local government planning determine the style and location of homes (starter homes and bungalows on brownfield sites). The Conservatives have let loose private developers, allowing them to build on sites where they can make the greatest profit (executive style houses on greenfield sites in Cheshire). The result of this approach can be seen in Sandbach, where permission has already been granted to build 3,200 new homes – an increase of 40% in the size of the town. Without proper local planning, the Conservative policies have let private developers make millions and have left local communities to try to deal with the resulting infrastructure overload.

The Local Plan

In July 2017 Cheshire East Council brought forward a Local Plan that was supposed to bring housing development under control, but because the Council cannot reliably demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply, the Plan carries little weight at appeals and has proved ineffective in stopping speculative housing applications on greenfield sites.

The Local Plan demands that at least 1800 new homes be built in Cheshire East each year, but a recent government consultation suggests only 1142 homes a year are needed. In July 2017, the Labour group called for work to start on a new Local Plan, but the Conservatives rejected this and are refusing to refresh the Plan to take advantage of lower housing targets put forward by the Government. Under the Conservatives, speculative property developers are laughing all the way to the bank, while local communities are left with overloaded infrastructure and loss of green fields.

New Home Owners

We will support those who own their homes, including leaseholders, who are currently unprotected from rises in 'ground rent' from developers or management companies. A Labour government will give leaseholders security from rip-off ground rents and end the routine use of leasehold houses in new developments.

Private Rented Homes

Labour supports responsible landlords who treat tenants in a reasonable manner. Labour Councillors have led a Council working group looking into the problems caused by rogue landlords and would like to see the recommendations implemented so that we have stable communities living in safe and decent accommodation. Situations where 20 people live in one house on insecure short term tenancies can lead to anti-social behaviour, with overflowing bins and fly-tipping.

Your Labour Council will:

- Introduce a scheme to build Council houses in urban and rural areas to provide genuinely affordable housing.
- Work with social landlords to develop brownfield sites.
- Work to ensure that a variety of new homes are built that meet the needs of residents.
- Ensure developers make appropriate contributions to the infrastructure needed for new development.
- Make developers pay to deal with air quality problems that their developments will make worse.
- Introduce a registration scheme for landlords in areas where there are particular problems. This will include a “rent with confidence scheme” to give tenants better information.
- Introduce an inspection scheme for Houses of Multiple Occupation working with Cheshire Fire and Rescue service to ensure that homes are not overcrowded and have adequate facilities, including refuse disposal.
- Refresh the Cheshire East Local Plan with lower housing targets, ensuring that a 5-year supply of housing land is maintained.
- Reduce the number of empty properties by increasing council tax on long term empty properties and using Empty Property Management Orders to bring homes back into use.
- Promote high quality, well-insulated, energy-efficient homes that meet the needs of the residents of Cheshire East.
- Tackle land-banking by lobbying Government for a change in the rules to allow councils to charge council tax on unbuilt properties with planning permission, and also to give councils the power to compulsorily purchase land earmarked for housing where the owners are not bringing the land forward for development.
- Lobby government to give leaseholders security from rip-off ground rents.

2. TRANSPORT

Roads

The state of the roads has worsened as routine maintenance has been cut back. This short-term policy has led to increased spending on emergency pothole repairs. What has made the situation worse is that the outsourced contract means that the private contractor only fixes the pothole they have been contracted to fix and leaves other nearby potholes to grow. In fact, as the private contractor is paid per pothole repaired they have a financial incentive to make lots of visits to fix individual potholes.

Car Parking

A review of car parking charges across the borough is planned and the Labour Group support this, as the current situation seems unfair. Careful thought needs to be given as to how car parking charges can promote vibrant town centres rather than just being a way to raise revenue.

Car parking is also an issue in urban streets and one which requires a number of well thought out innovative schemes to tackle the problem. Residents only parking schemes are only one way of dealing with the issue.

Rail

Crewe station will be an HS2 hub station, receiving 7 high speed trains an hour. HS2 is an opportunity to improve the connections to major cities in the country. The Labour Group will continue to promote this transport innovation, recognising the need for all areas of the County to be able to access the benefits of HS2. However, there are other developments which are equally important to residents and which are needed to improve people's daily lives, like the Mid-Cheshire rail link.

Buses

The Labour Group have consistently opposed cuts to bus services. We will look to improve connectivity between the principle towns and develop a more integrated transport system, as well as encouraging the use of public transport.

Cycling

Cycling is a sustainable means of transport and Labour supports the development of safe cycling routes for all. We would look to support the development of new routes and improvement of existing routes.

Your Labour Council will:

- Review expensive outsourcing contracts for road repairs and maintenance.
- Maintain or introduce free parking schemes where this is needed to promote town centres and local communities.
- Implement a fair car parking charge regime across the borough.
- Seek innovative solutions to the problems around parking on residential streets and congested roads.
- Promote cycling on safe cycling routes to improve health, reduce congestion and improve air quality.
- Review the current bus strategy to improve the service to residents.
- Embrace the Labour Party policy to provide bus passes for young people.
- Consult with local communities, including town and parish councils, about all aspects of transport policy.
- Undertake work to improve the East/West connectivity in the Borough and ensure Macclesfield has a link to HS2.
- Press for the development of the mid-Cheshire rail link.
- Work with government to promote Crewe as an HS2 Hub and to gain the maximum benefit for all Cheshire East residents.
- Work through the Constellation Partnership to ensure that the wider regional economy benefits from HS2 in Crewe.

3. HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

Care for Older People

Huge pressures have been placed on care services as a result in the growth of an ageing population, increases in demand, and the imposition of huge, and generally unfair, cuts by the Conservative government. The top-down reorganisation of the NHS, which the Conservatives promised they would not do, is resulting in a privatisation by stealth, which will lead to deterioration in services as companies tailor their performance to the needs of their shareholders and their profits. It will severely hamper the delivery of joint NHS and Local Authority services to meet the needs of an ageing and vulnerable population.

The Labour Group will work towards a more accountable social care sector where the quality and delivery is controlled directly by the Council. We want to see a system that puts people before profit. A system that supports every individual and values the role of carers.

Mental Health

The Labour Group recognise the increasing pressure on local mental health services and the impact of cuts to funding. There must be an increase in funding for this service from the Council and the NHS. We will ensure there are no further cuts to Council services.

Air Quality Management

Cheshire East is a diverse Borough where there are areas of affluence as well as areas of nationally recognised deprivation, but air quality is something that affects all residents. We will ensure there are Air Quality Action Plans in place in all identified areas of poor air quality and will make sure that the plans are implemented.

Your Labour Council will:

- Adopt the Ethical Care Charter
<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2013/11/On-line-Catalogue220142.pdf>
- Increase investment in respite care and establish an “in-house” dementia respite service.
- Increase support for mental health services, putting mental health on a par with physical health.
- Maintain a well qualified social work team to carry out assessments of those applying for services and establish a specialist advice service for carers.
- Increase the current number of Carer Assessments to ensure that carers are supported in their role.
- Ensure effective scrutiny arrangements for Health and Social Care delivery.
- Encourage closer working between Leisure Centres and the NHS through initiatives such as exercise on prescription.
- Promote opportunities for people to engage in physical activity and sport and develop healthy lifestyles.
- Work to strengthen the relationship between local commissioning groups and Cheshire East Council to improve and develop services.
- Ensure air quality action plans are drawn up and implemented.

4. EDUCATION & YOUNG PEOPLE

The Labour Group recognise that education is a journey for life; one that should offer life-enhancing opportunities that expand people's horizons.

Schools

The Government has systematically reduced the Council's role in education. A local council cannot now build a new school without a private enterprise as a sponsor. When these restrictions are combined with the flood of speculative housing applications of the borough the result has been over-subscribed schools in some areas.

Children's Centres and Nurseries

A strong Labour campaign thwarted Conservative plans to close Children's Centres in Cheshire East, but many remain under threat of reduced funding. We will support Children's Centres and early care provision.

Children's Services

The Conservatives have systematically attacked and closed Children's Centres in Cheshire East. The short-sighted approach of removing early intervention provision for vulnerable children has led to an increase in expensive later intervention and to more children being taken into care. We will invest in early years provision and we will offer support and training to the social workers who deal with these vulnerable children and their families to ensure the best outcomes.

Special Needs Pupils

The Labour Group want to see a service for children with Special Needs that ensures their individual needs are met in the most appropriate way. There is a shortage of Special Needs provision and we would pressure Government to assist the Council in building appropriate facilities in the Borough.

Post 16 Education

Education for young people over 16 is also important and something that the Labour Group wants to see high on the agenda. We want to ensure young people have access to a variety of educational and apprenticeship options as well as a good career advice service.

Your Labour Council will:

- Plan ahead to ensure all children have a good local school to attend.
- Protect the remaining Children's Centres.
- Review the cuts which have been made to school bus services.
- Encourage road safety training in schools.
- Safeguard good child mental health facilities.
- Ensure pupils with special educational needs have the right school placement and increase local SEN provision in Cheshire East.
- Work to eliminate the need for looked after children to go out of area.
- Build on already existing initiatives to support lifelong learning for adults and young people.
- Develop quality apprenticeship schemes and an appropriate advice service.

5. COMMUNITIES

Cheshire East is blessed by the strength of its many communities. Each town and village is a community with its own sense of pride. Labour puts people before profit and will work to protect communities and local community facilities. Communities need the right facilities to thrive. We will listen to residents and assist them in developing the facilities and activities that they want to build strong and resilient communities.

The regeneration of the principal town centres is underway but we want to ensure that town centres truly reflect the needs and interests of the residents. We want to see well planned places that have flourishing businesses and a vibrant night life.

Labour is tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. We will work with the Police service to make our Borough a safer and more pleasant place to live. Fly tipping and dog-fouling is a persistent nuisance that is high in many people's priorities. This is anti-social behaviour and is not acceptable.

Your Labour Council will:

- Work with the police authority to restore the number of PCSOs supporting and protecting local communities and adopt a tough attitude to persistent Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Increase the number of wardens and monitor and publish prosecutions for dog fouling and fly tipping.

- Scrap the rubble charges at council tips for residents' household waste.
- Promote the appropriate redevelopment of town centres.
- Provide support to communities to secure the appropriate facilities.
- Invest in appropriate facilities to protect vulnerable residents.
- Protect and enhance existing parks and open spaces so that residents can enjoy the amenity.
- Protect libraries which are important community assets.
- Support charities seeking to make a difference to the lives of vulnerable residents.

6. INDUSTRY & THE ENVIRONMENT

Cheshire is renowned as a green county with beautiful countryside. We will work to promote Labour's Industrial Strategy, whereby the public sector makes strategic investments to catalyse the private sector to innovate. We will adopt this approach, setting two initial missions - one focused on outputs related to the green economy, and one focused on the inputs necessary to make the UK an innovation nation. Cheshire should be at the heart of a new innovative green economy.

<http://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Richer-Britain-Richer-Lives-Labours-Industrial-Strategy.pdf>

Climate change is the greatest challenge facing our generation and a Labour Council will meet this challenge.

Re-generation of our principal towns is very important. As a Labour Group we want to see an holistic approach that not only sees the re-generation of the town and urban areas but benefits the wider community. This will be the engine for major improvements in all aspects of residents' lives.

We will promote and support new entrepreneurial businesses in areas where business growth is needed. We will encourage multi-national businesses and national chains to establish themselves in the Borough whilst supporting small local businesses to grow.

Your Labour Council will:

- Promote Cheshire East as a GREEN borough and encourage green technology businesses to come to Cheshire East.
- Lobby Government to give more power to local communities over fracking applications.
- Improve recycling rates (which have stalled).
- Remove charges at recycling centres which deter residents from recycling responsibly.
- Promote a “spend local” policy to encourage local business.
- Give new entrepreneurial businesses two years without paying business rates.
- Promote regeneration as a means to improving the Borough wide community.
- Insist on high environmental standards in all new housing developments with emphasis on preserving and enhancing nature.
- Encourage sustainable means of travel.
- Protect wildlife in Cheshire East and preserve green spaces for the benefit of all.
- Reduce energy consumption across the Council.

7. YOUR COUNCIL

Council Tax

The Conservatives in Cheshire East increased council tax by 5.99% in 2018. Labour-run Cheshire West and Chester Council increased council tax by only 4.99%.

Across the country Labour councils are run more efficiently and more prudently than Conservative councils, with lower average council tax.

Your Labour Council will:

- Adopt a prudent approach to council spending.
- Increase the council tax on long term empty properties to 200%.
- Reduce the existing eight-week council tax exemption on empty properties.
- Work with neighbouring councils to ensure that more of the business rates revenue collected locally stays in the region.

Openness & Transparency

Under Conservative misrule, Cheshire East Council has been beset by scandals. There has been a string of revelations as the Council has lurched from crisis to crisis. The Head of Internal Audit was (allegedly) bullied and forced out of the Council after instigating an enquiry into contracts awarded to the then Conservative Leader's personal physiotherapist's company and has not been replaced.

Millions of pounds have been spent making staff redundant, then millions more spent on temporary staff to do the work. This was not only wasteful, but has also engendered a culture where staff are in fear for their jobs. For too long the statement 'our staff are our most important asset' has been used as a trite phrase, while experienced staff have been 'let go' or paid to leave. When valuable staff leave, the organisation is poorer for it, but because the value of staff has not been measured it has not been treasured.

An independent survey has found that more than a third of staff did not believe that the Council would properly deal with any complaints they raise. Some staff reported they felt bullied and demoralised.

We want our staff to enjoy working at Cheshire East Council and to be proud of their work. We want Cheshire East Council to be a place where all people are shown respect and where challenges are invited and welcomed. A Labour-run Council will work with staff to enhance the working environment and improve efficiency.

At present, the Council is dominated by the majority group of councillors who not only make the decisions but also scrutinise them to see they are sound. Good practise suggests that scrutiny should be led by members of the opposition. We would like to see more transparency and openness in the decision making process rather than decisions being made by a small number of Councillors. The Council should have a Chairman rather than a Mayor and there should be an overhaul of Councillors' allowances, which could make a substantial saving.

Your Labour Council will:

- Implement all the recommendations of the Local Government Association cultural review.
- Work with unions to support our staff.
- Value our staff based on the Council's investment in their experience and training and report that value annually, so that the impact of the loss of good staff is measured.
- End the practice of large severance payments to senior staff who leave with a gagging clause.
- Strengthen and improve Council recruitment procedures.
- Appoint a strong Head of Internal Audit, with guarantees of independence from political interference in their work.
- Ensure public consultations are resident friendly and resident feedback is listened to.
- Appoint opposition councillors to chair scrutiny committees.
- Review Councillors' special allowances.
- Promote town Mayors and abolish the Cheshire East mayoralty (saving £100,000p.a.).
- Reform the Council Constitution to give a greater role to backbench councillors.
- Review meeting times to allow working Councillors more flexibility to attend.
- Review electoral ward boundaries to reflect changes due to new housing.

Labour values and principles put people first. There is a clear choice on 2 May 2019: a Conservative-led council spiralling out of control, lurching from scandal to scandal, or a new Labour-led administration who will clean up Cheshire East and deliver a council for the many not the few.