

2011



BUILDING A BETTER BOROUGH

**The Labour Party Working for You in
STOCKTON-THORNABY-BILLINGHAM-YARM-EAGLESCLIFFE-
INGLEBY BARWICK & THE VILLAGES**

**STOCKTON ON TEES LABOUR PARTY
Manifesto Local Elections May 2011**

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Labour manifesto for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Introduction

Building A Better Borough

Labour-led Stockton-on-Tees Council has made excellent progress in improving local life over the past four years.

We have invested in early years and schools helping our young people to aim higher and achieve more.

Major investment in new housing and refurbishment means more local people now live in quality, affordable homes.

We have worked with the private sector and regeneration agencies to help keep people in work and maintain employment in tough economic times.

Older people, those in poor health and the most vulnerable in our community have benefited from our partnership working with the local NHS to provide quality care services.

We have modernised the way we work, and invested to improve services such as our Care for Your Area and Enforcement teams. Sound financial management means Stockton Council can deliver value for money, genuinely local services in your neighbourhood,

Labour investment in public services

The combination of a Labour government and Labour-led council has brought major investment in our NHS, the police, schools, colleges and universities - making a huge difference to the local quality of life and raising people's expectations.

We have made a good start in building a better Stockton-on-Tees. We know more must be done to ensure a prosperous and sustainable future.

But we face a further, new, challenge. The Tory-LibDem government has cut the Council's budget by a massive 28 per cent over the next four years. These cuts will affect services and our plans for the future. The police and fire service, hospitals and primary care trusts, colleges and universities face similar drastic and immediate cuts.

We are determined to keep Stockton-on-Tees moving forward, and to do our utmost to protect services in the face of these cuts.

This manifesto spells out our aims for the next four years. It is an honest, open and realistic assessment of what the council can achieve at a time of unprecedented budget reductions.

Listening to learn what you value most

Because it has managed its finances in a business-like and prudent way Stockton-on-Tees Council is better placed than most to meet these challenges. We have listened to your views on all aspects of the Council's services and local life - and we will continue to do so. We are committed to working innovatively and in new partnerships to maintain your valued, high quality services and facilities and plan for a brighter future for our borough.

Please take a look at our plans to protect our communities and continue building a better Stockton-on-Tees Borough.

Section One

The Place To Be - For Living And Working

Labour's vision is to continue physical regeneration and drive economic growth across the Borough even in these tough times.

New housing developments across the Borough have given people better homes and living conditions, for example in Parkfield, Hardwick and Mandale in Thornaby. Despite the Coalition cuts to social housing budgets, we have worked with private sector developers to encourage more affordable homes. And by transferring the council's stock of 10,000 homes to housing association Tristar (now known as Vela Homes), it means tenants can benefit from a £140 million programme of refurbishment over the coming years.

Thornaby town centre has been transformed; Billingham is soon to enjoy the re-opened Forum after a £19.5m refurbishment; and we have launched exciting plans to revitalise Stockton High Street.

Our Enterprise Gateway scheme and Communities Fund made a real difference in helping people find jobs, and getting the unemployed back into work. Now the Coalition has scrapped both the Future Jobs Fund and the Working Neighbourhoods fund - but Labour is determined to find solutions. We recently helped persuade major employer Nifco to stay in Stockton, and it is expanding the workforce.

Our manifesto aim is to make the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees an even better place to live and work. If elected, a Labour council will focus on these priorities:

A vibrant Stockton Town Centre

- focus on leisure and culture to attract more visitors and boost the local economy
- re-opening the Globe Theatre to create a major venue – hosting star names and business events
- transform the high street: creating Infinity View - a plaza and new pathway to the riverside, adding car parking, building a new performance space and improving the entire public realm
- continue to invest in world-class live cultural events and festivals
- restoring historic buildings
- working with private, public and third sector partners to maximise all investment opportunities from eating and drinking venues, to retail

Support development of Billingham and Thornaby town centres

- investing in major facilities where we can - such as re-opening Billingham Forum
- improving transport and car parking to encourage town centre visitors and retail
- working with partners to attract new office and retail investments
- continue to work with Stocklands at Billingham Town Centre

Improve transport across the area

- invest in the Tees Valley Major Bus Scheme to provide more affordable and green and sustainable transport
- redevelop the Southern and Northern Gateways - straightening up Riverside Road, and giving people better and quicker access into Stockton Town Centre
- creating a sustainable transport network across the Borough, covering everything from cycling to electric car charging points, public transport to car parking
- ensure our transport network meets the needs of local people and supports regeneration and economic growth

Economic stability and growth

- a clear focus on the importance of our process industries across Teesside
- research and identify key opportunities for diversification to create new jobs
- create the environment for business to succeed with better transport, infrastructure and facilities to attract staff
- encouraging SME growth through innovative schemes such as business incubator units and our successful retail subsidised start-up schemes in Stockton town centre
- continue partnerships regionally across Teesside, and wider to attract new investment and help retain and grow businesses here

Caring for the Environment

- build on our vision for a cleaner, greener Stockton which leads the UK in waste minimisation
- continue to upgrade our excellent parks and green spaces
- help tackle climate change by looking to reduce the Council's carbon footprint as we prepare for potential changes in our services and how we deliver them

Better homes for all

- attract more private sector investment including affordable homes
- refurbish social housing to a high standard
- aim to attract HCA funding by working with approved social housing providers, and maximise the New Homes Bonus
- make as many affordable homes available as possible, through use of S106 agreements and bringing empty homes back into use
- develop a fair and consistent Tenancy Strategy, and recognise the need for flexibility
- minimise the impact on tenants of the savage cuts in Housing Benefit
- help home owners hit by Government cuts to stay in their own homes
- work more closely with private landlords, and help tackle both under-occupancy and overcrowding in properties

Section Two

A Healthy And Happy Borough

We have made progress, working in genuine partnership with the NHS and organisations in the private and third sectors, in improving people's health and well-being.

Our adults' social care services have received their best ever inspection results. The council is performing well at caring for the most vulnerable in the Borough. New services to safeguard those at risk, and tackle drugs and alcohol problems have made a real impact. We have built new high quality Extra Care homes, to help people live more independent lives. But with people living longer – and more demand than ever on social care - we are facing major funding cuts. The NHS itself is under real threat. Our council must be innovative and proactive in ensuring we look after those who need support the most.

Crime rates have almost halved over the past seven years here. Working with the Police and others, innovative council services such as the Neighbourhood Enforcement and Anti Social Behaviour teams have reduced crime, from drugs and alcohol abuse, domestic violence to vehicle theft and burglary of buildings, which has gone down by a massive 76 per cent.

The Labour-led Council has invested in leisure and cultural facilities to make the Borough a happy and attractive place to live. Residents enjoy some of the finest arts and cultural activities in the entire North East. Our commitment to the likes of ARC - Stockton Arts Centre, and SIRF (Stockton International Riverside Festival) Billingham Forum Theatre and the Billingham International Folklore Festival - established as leaders in their field nationally – has been recognised with increased funding from Arts Council England.

We have invested in leisure facilities, boosting Splash!, refurbishing Billingham Forum, and now redeveloping Stockton Central Library to ensure residents enjoy 21st century facilities. Despite the huge cuts to council budget, we have been able to keep libraries, museums and leisure facilities open, and introduce innovative new ways of working.

Our manifesto aim is to improve the health and well-being of all our residents – making the borough of Stockton-on-Tees even a greater place to live. We will focus clearly on our priorities

Improve Health and Well-Being

- work with the NHS and other organisations in the heart of our communities to encourage healthier lifestyles
- focus on improving life expectancy in particular by tackling the main killers: cancer, heart and cardiovascular diseases
- develop joined-up approaches so we are working together most effectively to support those with mental health needs, to tackle drugs and alcohol abuse, and to drive stop-smoking programmes
- aim to maintain affordable sports and leisure opportunities in the face of budget cuts

Deliver excellent Adult Social Care Services Including:

- giving people flexibility, choice and control over their care by continuing to offer personal budgets to more adult social care service users
- increase people's independence to stay living in their home for longer through telecare, telehealth and re-ablement
- aim to develop more independent living facilities such as Extra Care housing
- more support for carers to look after family and friends, as our population grows older
- protect frontline adult social care services in the face of major funding cuts
- commission innovative new services to bring vulnerable people out of residential care into supported living
- develop innovative new ways of working with the third sector, so community and voluntary groups play a major role in looking after people at a local level, helping them live happily in their communities

Outstanding Leisure and Culture

- investing in our outstanding arts and culture offer, including ARC, SIRF, the Stockton Weekender, The Georgian Theatre, and of course The Globe
- introduce a year-round programme of free events and festivals as we regenerate the High Street and establish Stockton as a major festival town
- maintain access to sports and leisure activities across the Borough

Safe and Strong Communities

- do everything possible to ensure the continuation of Neighbourhood Policing
- retain the Neighbourhood Enforcement Service and the Anti Social Behaviour Team
- prioritise anti social behaviour, identified as the number one priority of residents
- consult directly with residents to establish their priorities in the future, and base our action plans on what they say
- support a strong and thriving third sector so it continues to make a real difference in our communities
- maintain our work on Adult and Children Safeguarding, aiming for the highest possible standards

Section Three

A Great Place To Grow Up

Educational facilities have improved significantly, with new and refurbished schools and Early Years provision, and young people's achievements have gone up under Labour.

Last year was the best ever for pupils across the Borough's schools, with a record 52.9% achieving A*-C grades in their GCSEs. Across the Borough, we have launched Thornaby Academy, and North Shore Health Academy, despite the government's spending cuts, and invested in primary and secondary schools in the borough.

We have invested to improve classroom and learning facilities for all ages. Sure Start centres have provided young children with a better start in life.

We are committed to doing everything we can to look after the most vulnerable children and young people, and our progress in improving safeguarding was reflected in the results of a comprehensive inspection undertaken by Ofsted.

In recent years Stockton Riverside College has expanded with outstanding new facilities, programmes and courses to support the learning and development of all parts of our community. Durham University's extended Queen's Campus, also on the regenerated North Shore, includes world-class study programmes and the renowned Wolfson Research Institute for Health and Well Being. Along with the outstanding progress made by Teesside University, this all offers local young people outstanding further and higher education establishments on their doorstep. The Coalition's unfair decisions to cut EMA, cut the university teaching budget, and introduce trebled tuition fees of up to £9,000 per year, will hit our young people and their prospects.

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat government's decision to cut Building Schools for the Future funding has deprived many of our schools of the capital investment they need. They have made huge reductions to Sure Start budgets.

Our manifesto aim is to improve the opportunities for all our children and young people, keeping them safe and helping them achieve their full potential. We will focus clearly on our priorities:

- maintain our drive to improve the academic achievements of our children and young people
- continue to support the Tees Valley Music Service and lobby to ensure the funding remains in the future.
- always commit to provide a safe and secure environment for our most vulnerable children and young people, despite drastic Government cuts. Appoint an Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board and two Lay Members
- protect Sure Start centres and services as best we can in the face of major cuts
- establish a Youth Parliament and Shadow Children's Trust Board to ensure children's and young people's voice are heard by the Council and all its partners
- consult and work with those affected to ensure our Youth Services benefit those who need them most, in the face of major government budget cuts
- support our schools through the major budget cuts imposed by the government, and maintain as much local authority support as we can
- work with children and young people and their families to do all we can to help provide opportunities for education, training and employment

Section Four

Excellent Services – Real Value For Money

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's services have continued to improve. Under a Labour-led administration, strong financial management has meant the council delivers real value for money. We have achieved major savings through efficient and innovative new ways of working. However, the Council faces unprecedented cuts from the Tory-LibDem government.

Through strong leadership and sound financial management, the Council has been able to protect many of the frontline services that are having to be cut in other parts of the country.

Council tax has been frozen for 2011-12. Investment in areas such as regeneration of Stockton High Street, refurbishing Stockton library and improving customer service, are continuing.

Independent experts have looked at how we deliver services, and provide value-for-money, and recognised the Council for its efforts. The Association for Public Service Excellence named Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council as 'Overall Council of the Year in Service Delivery' in 2010 – a fitting reward to the hard work and commitment of staff.

There is more to do. Our Manifesto has made clear the need to further improve services, and invest where we can over the coming years.

But during times of recession - with the North East hit particularly hard by the Coalition government's policies - the workload for all Council's service areas will continue to increase.

Labour is committed to do all we can to protect services and communities, and to be the voice for local people in tough times.

Our manifesto aim is to continue to focus on strong financial management, providing value-for-money, and ensuring the council's services continue to help those who most need support. Our priorities include:

- maintaining core and frontline services whenever we can, and finding innovative ways to continue to do so
- control costs and be as efficient in everything we do
- involve residents in the big decisions through full consultation
- commit to those in our society who need our support most, in times of huge cuts to the Council's budget

Ends