

Kingston - the Best Place: Safe, Green... ...and **SUCCESSFUL**

The Liberal Democrat Manifesto for Kingston 2010



Kingston is one of London's safest and greenest boroughs – with schools and social services that are the envy of the country. That's not happened by chance. For more than a generation, by developing a partnership with local people, Liberal Democrats have worked for improvements in council services and for a borough of which we can all be proud. With you, our vision has been a borough where people of all ages feel safe and can grow and develop in ways they want.

This year's manifesto reflects the changing times. We are making 10 firm commitments to the borough residents.

We seek your support for another term to continue the good work with and for the people of this wonderful riverside borough.



Kingston the Best Place: Safe, Green and Successful

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Introduction

Liberal Democrats have run Kingston Council for the past eight years. Working with you, we are immensely proud of what we have achieved in this time: despite being handed one of the lowest government grants in London, we have transformed an area blighted by years of Conservative neglect into *the* safest, greenest and healthiest borough in the capital.

Local Liberal Democrats had the vision to invest and innovate; we delivered a ‘clean sweep’ of our streets, led a recycling revolution and opened a world-class theatre in the heart of the Kingston community. This year, when Council Tax was set at its lowest increase in Kingston’s history, the borough was rated as having some of the best education, social care and recycling services in the country – and we were recognised as having the strongest working relationships with our local police, voluntary sector and business community.

But, for whoever is elected to run the Council for the next four years, things will not be able to continue as ‘business as usual’. Public finances are under enormous strain, at the same time as many local residents face their own financial struggle and this will have an impact on the economic health of our high streets and local shops and businesses. There has already been an increase in demand for housing, care and social services putting further pressure on council finances.

So this year’s Liberal Democrat manifesto reflects these changing times. Instead of offering voters a shopping list of pledges and promises – we are stating 10 firm commitments to our residents.

We believe the people of this borough face an important choice in such a difficult economic climate. Inevitably our opponents will offer short-term cheap gimmicks, pretending that local authority spending can be slashed while dismissing the consequences. They see spending on elderly, disabled and vulnerable residents – as well as the costs of keeping our town centres safe and vibrant – as “non statutory” and therefore easily disposable.

Local Liberal Democrats however, do not want to go back to the dark days of dirty streets, overflowing classrooms and run down high streets. We don’t believe these are the things that residents want, and that we can defend and continue the progress of the past eight years in an efficient and affordable way.

10 good reasons for you to vote Liberal Democrat in the 2010 elections

Kingston is the Best Place because we will:

- continue to pursue our vision of a green, safe and prosperous borough with strong, healthy and thriving communities in which all residents have access to high quality housing, jobs, education and the services they need
- protect front line local services; particularly in social care, education, leisure and the environment
- keep local finances in check; delivering responsible budgets and Council Tax as low as possible without threatening our quality of life or reducing services at the expense of the most vulnerable in our community
- work with our partners to become one of the most sustainable boroughs in London; tackling climate change is a political priority and we seek to set a clear and consistent lead in promoting a sustainable and green Kingston. We will be environmentally responsible and continue to work to understand the impact our actions have for future generations
- defend our social housing: the government's 'negative subsidy' system is complex, unfair and unjust; our tenants deserve modern, decent homes with proper kitchens and bathrooms and they want repairs to their estates carried out as and when they are needed. We will pursue every opportunity to increase the supply of affordable housing
- work closely with all our voluntary and community sector and business partners; ensuring, together, the smart and sustainable use of resources to the greatest possible benefit to our residents
- encourage the innovation and creativity of Neighbourhoods; that listen to and involve residents and put our communities at the heart of decision making; we will support community initiative such as farmer's markets, independent retailers, 'pop up' shops and galleries and Neighbourhood festivals
- maintain our place as one of the safest boroughs in London where residents do not fear crime and we will work hard to preserve the current levels of police out on the beat – under threat from the Conservative London Mayor
- ensure that every child has a place in a quality primary or secondary school maintaining class sizes and Britain's highest academic attainment
- defend local health services from government cuts, campaign to retain Kingston Hospital A&E and Maternity units, ensure the best redevelopment of Surbiton Hospital and keep Kingston's health and care as some of the best in the country

ENVIRONMENT – our local response to climate change

Climate change is the most serious threat that faces us today, and it is happening much faster than we previously thought. Scientific evidence indicates that we all need to take responsibility and act now

Liberal Democrats take environmental issues very seriously. Locally we promised to continue to put the environment “at the heart of everything we do” and will continue to pioneer initiatives such as:

- introducing a borough-wide energy strategy
- the world record for the longest walking bus – with Debra the Zebra
- biodiversity action plans
- environmental community grants
- environmental groups sitting at the strategic partner level
- promoting individual ‘*can do*’ initiatives for local people, schools and businesses
- gaining fair-trade borough status
- a ‘green festival’ fortnight every year
- promote, and where possible extend, park and ride services like the Christmas scheme that attracts over 50,000 people
- developing strategies on climate change, energy and green spaces
- eco-foot printing workshops and the healthy green homes pilot

Not surprisingly our mantra these days is ‘*reduce, re-use and recycle*’. Everyone knows how we have changed the way we deal with waste and the huge impact that has had. Astonishingly the Conservatives have opposed these improvements and if they had their way we’d recycle a lot less and pay high landfill taxes for damaging the planet.

Kingston is now one of the best performing councils in the country as we are recycling and composting nearly half of all our waste. We collect 10 different materials from 50,000 homes across the borough including food waste which we compost instead of sending it to landfill. Food waste gives off methane – 21 times more damaging than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas when it is put in landfill. We are now one of the first London Authorities taking the next step as we roll-out a recycling service tailored specially for residents living in the 19,000 converted houses and purpose-built flats in the Borough.

Our recycling is turned into a variety of new products:

- Paper is pulped, de-inked and turned into newsprint and cardboard
- Glass is crushed and mixed with raw materials before being melted in a furnace and then moulded into new bottles or jars or used as sand in the construction industry
- Cans are shredded, melted and turned into new drink cans
- Plastic bottles are washed, melted and turned into plastic pipes, fleeces and new bottles

- Local food waste goes to an industrial composting facility and is turned into a peat-free, high quality compost product

Thanks to the continuing efforts of local people we expect to be well over the 50% this year sending less to landfill than we recycle, saving huge sums of money in landfill tax and fines – and helping to save the planet. This successful and popular change in council services, with all the benefits to the environment, was consistently opposed by local Conservatives.

Landfill Tax is increasing at a rate of £8 per tonne per year; currently it costs Kingston nearly £250,000 per year. Working in partnership with Croydon, Sutton and Merton boroughs we are joining together to stop household rubbish ending up in landfill sites. We have made it clear to waste contractors that we need modern and technically advanced waste treatment facilities and we have taken a firm line that outdated technologies such as old-fashioned mass-burn incineration are not acceptable in Kingston as they are visually intrusive and release high levels of polluting and smelly gases. Liberal Democrats have helped to win £225 million from central government because of the way we work and plan together!

It won't stop there. Working with local partners, such as Save the World Club, we're reducing carbon emissions and helping residents reduce their carbon footprint and promoting walking, cycling and public transport in order to save on car trips and reduce traffic congestion at the same time.

And unlike some senior Tory councillors who deny the reality of global climate change, we signed up to the *'Nottingham Declaration'* pledging to tackle the local causes of climate change and to prepare our communities for its impacts. We are already leading the way on cutting carbon emissions working with the Carbon Trust to achieve a low carbon Kingston. Local Liberal Democrats are keen to find creative and innovative solutions to drive infrastructure improvements and deliver greater energy efficiency in everything the Council does. A key element within our Energy Strategy is 'carbon accounting': using a market based approach to identify, manage and cut emissions. 61% of the electricity purchased by the Council is 'green', 31% is CHP (combined heat and power) and only 8% comes from conventional sources. At Hugh Herland Sheltered Home for the Elderly, for example, solar water heating combined with a high efficiency boiler and improved insulation has reduced carbon emissions and halved the annual gas bill. We have a dedicated Greening Business officer to help small and medium sized businesses reduce their local carbon emissions and energy costs.

Moreover, the week before world leaders met at the United Nations climate change summit in Copenhagen we formally signed up the 10:10 campaign which aims to reduce UK carbon emissions by 10 per cent in 2010.

Our 'clean sweep' campaign has seen litter, graffiti and abandoned cars removed. Every piece of racist and offensive graffiti is removed within 24 hours.

Over the next four years we will:

- work with our partners to become the most sustainable borough in London; tackling climate change is a political priority and we seek to set a clear and consistent lead in promoting a sustainable and green Kingston providing information, advice and assistance in changing daily routines, behaviour and understanding that can cut everyone's costs and reduce our carbon footprint
- increase the proportion of purchased and generated energy from renewable and clean alternative energy sources, in our buildings, and encourage others to do the same
- further develop a local research and development network involving educational institutions, businesses and the voluntary sector to gather local evidence and implement best practice
- create a more robust energy base for Kingston; with initiatives such as small scale renewable energy, for example - solar heating, photovoltaic panels, heat networks, ground source heat pumps, or combined heat and power plants that will reduce demand on the national grid; a Liberal Democrat Administration will actively favour achieving the lowest carbon energy sources that are available
- press ahead to further develop and encourage 'green growth' policies in planning, purchasing decisions, and partnerships with energy suppliers;
- ensure that the Council's Energy Strategy is implemented and develop strategies relating to saving water
- respond to fly tipping - maintaining our vigilance to keep our streets and open places a pleasant place to live and play
- we will continue to campaign for a reduction in food and other packaging and wholeheartedly support measures to reduce plastic bag use, continuing to campaign for a total ban on non sustainable bags in favour of biodegradable and long life alternatives
- continue to reinvest savings from landfill tax and from the sale of our landfill credits for environmental benefit
- continue to take animal welfare seriously such as our campaign to ban the sale of battery farmed dogs from locally licensed pet shops; we will also ensure the highest standard of animal welfare at Chessington World of Adventures and further ensure that any animal products sourced by the borough are from ethical suppliers
- further develop the partnership with the Voluntary Sector to secure a permanent home for the Kingston Environment Centre run by Save the World Club and investigate partnership funding that will deliver improved service level agreements in the future involving other environmental groups

A SUSTAINABLE PLACE

Liberal Democrats believe that there is a huge opportunity to get out of this recession by going green, strengthening the economy, saving money, creating new jobs and improving the quality of people's lives

The economic slowdown presents Liberal Democrats with new challenges but also opportunities. Receiving fewer planning applications gives us the opportunity to take a more active role in shaping and strengthening our strategic plans and focus on planning and improving all our localities for our residents. It will be important that we not only encourage development but also help ensure that it is of a universally high standard and helps create successful and sustainable places.

The construction and use of buildings contribute nearly half of the UK's CO2 emissions. All new buildings will need to be low carbon within a decade as Building Regulations progressively tighten starting with a 25% reduction in CO2 emissions for all new buildings from October 2010. Existing buildings need to reduce CO2 emissions by 2050.

It is possible to achieve significant reductions in carbon emissions from buildings just as we did when we built Chessington Community College which is an amazing school in an environmentally creative building. The huge Building Schools for the Future Programme will involve all key users in the design of the buildings and facilities.

Over the next four years we will:

- stop 'garden grabbing' for new houses
- preserve the suburban character of Kingston and stop the explosion of flats spreading out from our district centres
- ensure value for money for local taxpayers by making commercial property developers pay for the costs of council staff time in preparing their planning applications
- expect developers to engage more with all stakeholders during the pre-application process
- prioritise quality of place; providing adequate training is provided for officers and committee members to ensure our policies reflect this in a Place and Green Spaces Infrastructure Strategy
- put the community at the centre of place-shaping user engagement; ensuring residents are engaged in the design of any new public buildings
- work with our partners to take a more active, across the board role in shaping our areas; and use the development process to attract investment and strengthen communities

- work towards regenerating our centres, improving streets and open spaces; making sure we work with developers to create well designed urban extensions or finding sustainable and creative new uses for historic buildings
- encourage the development of low carbon areas
- expect high standards of energy performance from sustainable design and construction of new and existing buildings
- ensure that any new-build housing development provides some of its own energy from renewable resources
- protect and enhance buildings and spaces which are valued for amenity, biodiversity, architectural or heritage reasons
- continue to work with development partners to revive the run down parts of our town centre to provide a good mix of retail, housing, community facilities and open space when the economic upturn makes the development viable

HIGH QUALITY PARKS, GREEN SPACES AND ALLOTMENTS

Parks have a vital role to play in tackling climate change and its effects. They also add greatly to residents' enjoyment of a place

Our parks and green open spaces across the borough are highly valued as three out of four people visit a public green space at least once a month and more than a quarter do so at least three times a week. Safe and attractive parks with good play and sports facilities and quiet areas are particularly important to families with children, older people and those without gardens. Parks also help foster community life and local involvement – through friends groups, community activities and volunteering.

Significant progress has been made since the adoption during 2008 of our Green Spaces strategy covering a ten year period. We are proud that Fishponds Park, Churchfields Recreation Ground, Canbury Gardens and Manor Park have achieved Green Flag status one year ahead of schedule. A planned programme of maintenance of Wayside Gardens throughout the borough was introduced providing improved efficiency and cost effectiveness by introducing a Design, Plant and Maintain model that was successful on many schemes including Cromwell and Cavendish and Manorgate and Wolverton Home Zones, North Parade, Coombe Lane West, Manor Park Community Centre and Eagle Wharf.

Turning to allotments, Liberal Democrats enthusiastically support these small plots which act as 'green lungs' in our urban landscape and allow for the production of local, environmentally sustainable food. Allotment gardening is increasingly popular in Kingston. Many local people want to grow their own organic fruit and vegetables – and enjoy spending time actively outside.

In 2008 we launched a ten year Allotment Strategy to improve the availability and local management of 1200 plots on 23 sites across the borough which has resulted in 99% of plots now let that were previously dormant. 11 sites are run through

individual allotment voluntary management committees allowing them to plough any profits back into the site to improve facilities.

Over the next four years we will:

- continue to oppose parking charges in Richmond Park
- seek Green flag status for a further four parks for 2012
- continue work on our allotments to encourage self-management and clearance of sites to bring overgrown areas back into production
- work creatively to meet local demand particularly where allotments are over-subscribed. We will look to use new planning laws to open up additional plots, as well as looking into the possibility of rolling out of 'portable allotments' and alternative garden spaces for community use
- work with Community Services to provide facilities on our allotments for use by people with physical and learning difficulties

FUEL POVERTY – No one should be left out in the cold

There needs to be an urgent national programme to insulate all homes and deliver the fastest possible growth in renewable energy. We all want lower fuel bills

Increases in fuel prices can lead to increases in fuel poverty and therefore affect the ability of some people to keep themselves warm. Around 5% of people living in Kingston spend at least 10% of their income on fuel and whilst some are families living on estates, there are also people living in larger older houses that find it difficult to insulate and keep warm. We can improve the lives of the poorest in our community by improving energy efficiency. There is a government strategy to reduce pollution from housing by 29% by 2020 and lots of talk about loans for households to install home insulation and solar panels. We want to see Kingston Council at the heart of making homes more energy efficient to help people cut their fuel bills further and faster. In 2009, under the social Housing Energy Savings Programme, we received a £970,000 grant to improve energy efficiency in council properties and have recently installed cavity wall insulation in Cumberland House. We are now using thermal imaging to reveal which properties need cavity wall insulation the most and will then target those homes for further energy efficiency measures.

Over the next four years we will:

- promote schemes and loans that allow homes to become more environmentally friendly targeting help at those who need it most and help householders overcome the financial barriers such as upfront costs that prevent most people from benefiting from 'greening' their homes
- broker agreements with developers to improve energy efficiency where the community have been fully consulted and want a green solution
- lobby for freedoms to unlock the job-creating potential of the low-carbon economy

- for those who want additional help with energy saving we will promote the use of smart meters

AIR QUALITY

Liberal Democrats understand that European air pollution and emissions deadlines must be met whether to protect public health or prevent climate change and are committed to support research into the health effects of key air pollutants including their combined effect

Poor air quality has serious impacts on the health and well-being of local people and wildlife. Under the Conservative London Mayor and his Labour predecessor, levels of pollution and vehicle emissions across London have become so dangerous that we are on course for a £300 million fine from the European Union for exceeding legal limits for airborne pollutants. In 2009 we invested in new filtering technologies which completely eliminated the mercury content from the emissions of Kingston crematoriums.

As well as scrapping the western Congestion Charge zone, Boris Johnson dropped phase three of the capital's Low Emission Zone and refused calls to commit to low emission replacements for these schemes. The Conservative Mayor has hiked up the fares on public transport, encouraging Londoners away from buses and tubes and back into their cars.

Kingston's Lib Dem Member of Parliament and Liberal Democrat Councillors Rolson Davies and Vicki Harris have been leading the local 'clean air campaign', demanding the re-instatement of the air quality monitoring station on the A3 near the Tolworth roundabout. They also successfully fought off a large development from the Tesco supermarket chain in Tolworth, because of the impact on car congestion and pollution in the local area. Liberal Democrats understand how big the problem of air pollution is with local, regional, national and international action needed.

Over the next four years we will:

- work with TfL and lobby to ensure the UK complies fully with air quality laws for dangerous Air Pollution by the 2012 Olympics in London
- support a widespread information campaign to improve people's understanding of the dangers of poor air quality and the part they can play in improving it
- make sure all planning guidance will be used through existing legislation to take air quality impacts into account for all planning decisions
- ensure the reduction of emissions in any older diesel vehicles in the Council's fleet is vital
- continue to support the Liberal Democrat led campaign to oppose building a third runway at Heathrow or other airports which would further reduce air quality

GREEN TRANSPORT

Liberal Democrats believe improved local transport is the key to a greener, cleaner and healthier borough

Because of generations of under-investment in public transport infrastructure for Kingston from both London and national government, many residents still have little option but to rely on car journeys to get to their places of work, study and leisure. As a result, local people suffer unreasonable levels of pollution and congestion on our roads.

Liberal Democrats have been campaigning for the re-zoning of Kingston and Surbiton train stations to make the cost of rail travel fairer and more affordable – the Conservative Mayor has hiked up the cost of Oyster fares by 20%, adding hundreds of pounds to the annual costs of travelling for residents who use buses. The Mayor's Transport for London policy has meant that local accessible transport services for elderly and disabled people have been cut, and Countdown facilities at bus stops have been removed.

However, in the past eight years local Liberal Democrats have made improvements in the local availability of sustainable travel options for residents.

- We invested in borough-wide cycle parking, especially around schools and train stations, as well as road safety training and cycling promotional schemes
- We have encouraged and supported the expansion of dedicated cycling lanes and networks
- Kingston is now sixth best biking borough in outer London
- We established the Council's Climate Change and Sustainable Travel Group – which among many other things, runs schemes to encourage sustainable school travel plans, 'walking buses', and the work of Debra the Zebra: the borough's Walking to School mascot.

We are fortunate to have some of the most beautiful parks and riverside views in the capital. Our wide and popular choice of local schools, neighbourhood shopping areas and community amenities means that walking is already popular. We believe we can encourage this healthy and environmentally sustainable trend by keeping the streets clean and safe. We have worked hard to keep crime and disorder, as well as the fear of crime on our streets low. We have invested in street cleansing, street lighting and pro-active Neighbourhood Rangers to ensure that residents of all ages and genders feel safe walking, cycling and using public transport in the borough.

Over the next four years we will:

- use planning powers to encourage more cycling lanes, especially segregated ones and a better transport infrastructure and the setting up of charging points for electric cars across the Borough

- help residents feel safer cycling on the borough's roads, and also want more options to promote cheap and green transport alternatives over polluting vehicles
- extend the availability of car clubs by increasing the number of parking bays throughout the borough
- use the funding that has been allocated to us to look into ways in which we can further develop our cycling facilities as a Biking Borough, promoting cycling aimed at providing facilities best suited for the community
- encourage more safer walking routes into town centres to the Thames and Hogsmill, improving walking surfaces, crossings and relocating or removing street furniture and other obstacles

HOUSING – Negative housing subsidy and rent increase leave tenants with gloomy outlook for decent homes

Liberal Democrats campaign for decent housing for our tenants, a fair and transparent system of housing finance and a rapid end to a discredited and unfair system of taking money away from our poorest and vulnerable residents

In reality if all the rents from our 6,400 tenanted and leaseholder properties came to Kingston Council, over the last 4 years we would have had a staggering £23 million that we could have put towards raising the standards of our tenants' homes. Instead 31p in every £1 of rent collected has been going to the government along with the sale of council properties under the right to buy scheme introduced by the Tories which did not allow councils to invest the proceeds in local housing.

The government's 'negative subsidy' system is complex, unfair and unjust and now makes a profit for the national taxpayer at the expense of Kingston council tenants paying out less than it receives! Over the next year it will create a deficit of £1.2m in the HRA.

Our tenants want and deserve a modern decent home with decent kitchens and bathrooms and want repairs to their estates carried out as and when they are needed and yet 32% of the housing stock does not meet the Government's own Decent Homes Standards and without additional investment this will reach 43% by 2015.

Liberal Democrats have fiercely campaigned to unlock these funds for our deserving tenants who cannot understand why it is their rent is not spent entirely on their housing needs or on the needs of their local community. We also campaigned against the government's scandalous guideline rent increase of 6.2% which was finally halved – it is difficult to understand how the government's rent policy and subsidy system support the goal of halving child poverty. In April rents will go up by an average of £1.20 per week

Lib Dem Council Leader, Cllr Derek Osbourne, wrote to John Denham the Minister for Communities and Local Government last year urging him to address not only house building programmes but to genuinely enable us to bring our current stock in line with Decent Home Standards. And, at such a time as this, when our local economy needs all the stimulus it can get, much needed investment could be a vital lifeline for construction trades and make an enormous difference to the quality of life of many residents.

The government has put off reporting back on their Review of the HRA Subsidy, so that any changes are delayed until after the General Election. The central proposal is to allow local authorities to buy their way out of the negative subsidy system – Kingston will be allowed to keep all rent income but only after having compensated government for its loss of future payment streams. And the debt we are obliged to take on is uncertain. We will continue to lobby government as we think there should be a cancellation of historic debt and we have set up a new Strategic Housing

Partnership Board to ensure we look at all options for greater investment and local control in social and affordable housing projects.

Stock Transfer

Over the period of the last four years we set up a Cross-Party Member Group to look in detail at a Stock Transfer of council properties to a housing association. And whilst this solution is most commonly adopted to securing housing investment our tenants told us that they value their council tenancy and are still reluctant to change landlord. The Liberal Democrats remain committed to only taking this forward if there is clear evidence that residents would be likely to support it in a ballot. Working with our tenants, a creative solution must be found to bring investment to our housing stock to stop further deterioration of our estates.

Providing affordable housing options

For the first time in almost two decades, the Council has been able to build new affordable homes. The old Ely Court site has now been rebuilt. Acclaimed as one of the most sustainable developments achieved so far in the borough all 27 dwellings, from a five bedroom family home to one bedroom flats are fitted with an innovative heating system designed to run fully on electric power significantly reducing CO2 emissions and some can be adapted for wheelchair users.

Liberal Democrats have also created opportunities for new build affordable housing in Kingston through land swaps and by transferring land to Registered Social Landlords to build new homes. In the past four years this has provided 68 affordable homes at Crown House and more individual homes along Kingston Road, New Malden.

In addition, we bid for funding and in January this year Kingston received excellent news with a further £800,000 grant towards the cost of building 8 modern and energy efficient family homes on the site of Yew Tree House in Old Malden.

Recognising that in the economic downturn repossessions, mortgage arrears and unemployment are increasing demand for social housing and with growing waiting lists; Liberal Democrats believe that there is a strong case for Kingston Council to play a more direct role in building new homes.

Homelessness

In March 2010 we held a Conference in Kingston on Rough Sleeping to produce a strategy to tackle the issue in SW London. Together with our local and sub-regional partners we looked closely at the reasons that might lead a person into rough sleeping and sought to find ways to stop long term rough sleepers from returning to a life on the streets and to identify good practice. The outcome of the Conference was a credible action plan for 2010 and integration of that action plan into the South West London Housing Partnership's sub regional policy.

Over the next four years we will:

- lobby to allow Kingston to keep all the money raised through rent and sales of all our council owned housing (not only new build) to reinvest in meeting the Decent Homes Standards and all the housing needs of our communities
- work with the government and agencies to make it easier for Kingston to borrow against future rental income to invest in new housing and build new homes at every opportunity
- campaign to allow Kingston to access mainstream funding for house building on the same basis as housing associations and private developers rather than making them bid for separate pots of funding
- work closely with our tenants and leaseholders to provide the particular locality or estate solutions that they want
- target housing finance to front-line service delivery and housing repairs away from expensive old fashioned systems and bureaucracy
- investigate the viability of a Trickle Transfer of property when it becomes vacant by looking to find a partner or partners to receive the property perhaps through a new vehicle in a way which is tailored to Kingston's local circumstances and benefits our tenants
- identify all the opportunities provided for 'hidden homes' in the disused and under-used storage areas and spaces on our estates and use them to create new, affordable, good quality living spaces for local people
- develop a comprehensive Private Sector Housing Strategy for Kingston to ensure that the private sector is closely involved with the provision of a range of housing and that all opportunities presented are taken to bring empty homes back into use
- welcome the new Tenant Services Authority approach to tenant participation and will work with all our tenants to achieve a shared approach to managing and monitoring the provision of housing services. We will implement the Residents' Compact and work with our tenants to develop it to cover the much wider obligations for co-regulation in the TSA framework

EXCELLENT EDUCATION – More school places

We are immensely proud of our success: Liberal Democrat Kingston now has the best performing local schools in the country.

- Kingston's exam results are excellent – eight out of 10 children leave our primary schools achieving Level 4 or above in both English and Maths, the highest performance in the country
- Our secondary schools now have the highest level of attainment ever reached in Kingston, with 79% of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C, that's 10% above the national average
- Local truancy rates are consistently amongst the lowest in the country;
- Kingston is one of only ten local authorities to have its Children's Services rated as 'excellent' by OFSTED
- Our child protection and safeguarding, childcare, schools, children's social care, and provision in the learning and skills sector are some of the best in the country
- We have expanded and improved support services for children and young people with disabilities. One of our proudest achievements has been opening the Moor Lane Centre in Chessington in February 2010. This brand new facility provides integrated service for children and young people with disabilities: an 'one stop shop' offering medical, social and educational support for local families and carers
- Last year's leading independent guide to the UK's top schools, the *Good School's Guide* which is traditionally known for listing private and grammar schools featured seven state schools from Kingston upon Thames
- Because local Liberal Democrats are committed to the success and well-being of every young person in the borough, not only have we invested in excellent education services for all, we have also worked hard to support and encourage children from challenging and chaotic backgrounds

It's not always been like this; in 1994, Kingston Liberal Democrats inherited a local education authority which was drowning from Tory neglect. There were excellent schools in Kingston for those who could afford fees or pre-entrance exam tuition, but for the rest of Kingston's pupils – they had to suffer the largest classes in the country, buildings gutted of their canteen facilities to save money, and an enthusiastic programme of selling off sports fields.

It has been our primary objective to invest in and transform local schools, so that every child and young person can access outstanding education services irrespective of parent's ability to pay.

When it came to rebuilding a new school in the South of the Borough, local Liberal Democrats relished the opportunity to bring excellence in education to Chessington. We had a straightforward focus on making sure that the new-build Chessington Community College had classrooms and learning environments which would encourage and inspire pupils to fulfil their potential.

The state of the art new building was opened for the start of the academic year 2008, being the only one of 100 'Pathfinder' schools in the country to be delivered on time and on budget. It was built with a 'green heart': a biomass boiler was installed as well as a rainwater harvester, solar powered technologies and temperature operated vents. 15% of the College's power needs are now met using features which generate renewable energy locally. The Liberal Democrat Council also believe that school environments should be fun and healthy, there is a multi-use games area in the sport's hall with the highest climbing wall of any school in the country.

Expanding our schools

Kingston, like most London authorities, uses population forecasts provided by the Greater London Authority to plan the future capacity of local schools. Two years ago it was revealed that the GLA's projections had failed to anticipate the unprecedented and unpredicted rise in Kingston's local birth rate (23% increase from 2002/3 to 2007/8), the effects of the recession on the number of households opting out of private education, or the numbers of new families moving into the borough attracted by the reputation of local schools. As soon as the Liberal Democrat Council realised the mistake, we intervened to build temporary classrooms across the borough so that every four year old needing a place in a local school could be offered one.

We are now making significant financial investments in the permanent expansion of primary education in order to tackle the unprecedented and unpredictable rise in demands for local schools. The Council has guaranteed 450 new schools places (15 forms of entry) in time for the start of academic year, 2011.

Along with the Council's local planning and investments, Liberal Democrat politicians have been at the forefront of lobbying Government, campaigning for money for borough primary schools to meet the increased demand:

- As a member of London Council's Children and Young People's Forum, Kingston Executive Member, Tricia Bamford, put pressure to get this on the agenda resulting in the comprehensive document '*Do the maths: Tackling the shortage of primary school places in London*' (2009);
- Working with the Lib Dem MP we secured an Adjournment debate in Parliament on this subject and met with the Schools Ministers to secure improved funding arrangements for our borough primary schools

Building Schools for the Future – Secondary Provision

Because of our outstanding management of the re-building of Chessington Community College, the campaigning of local Liberal Democrats and the quality of our joint submission with Croydon Council – Kingston was chosen to be the first 'good or better' performing Council in the country to be accepted into the national Building Schools for the Future (BSF) investment programme.

Our successful bid means that the borough's secondary education services will receive over £300million from Government sources, money which we have prioritised to spend on a new secondary school in the north of the borough in time for 2015, when the increased pupil population in local primary schools transfers to secondary-level education. Additional BSF funding will be used later to transform classrooms across borough so that every child has the opportunity to be educated in environments fit for 21st century learning.

Over the next four years we will:

- ensure that the excellent progress made on gaining entry into the Building Schools for the Future programme is maintained and that a new Secondary school for Kingston in the north of the borough is delivered as well as providing extra places in our existing schools whilst maintaining and improving their performance
- through the Building Schools for the Future programme and the Primary Capital Schools Programme - ensure that children are educated in buildings designed and operated to the highest environmental standard which will in itself educate young people for a sustainable life
- build at least 1 new primary school as well as increasing the number of places at some of our existing Primary schools. We will continue to lobby Government so that adequate funding is provided to do this in response to the growing population
- we will also lobby to secure investment to improve our primary school estate so that our schools are fit for the 21st century
- continue to work to close the attainment gap between those children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from more well off backgrounds
- continue to work to eradicate child poverty
- continue to develop the participation of CYP and encourage consultation so that our services for CYP are the best they can be
- continue to develop links with the Voluntary Sector so that appropriate services are delivered to CYP
- continue to develop our links with our health providers to ensure that the services for CYP continue to improve and are fully accessible
- continue to develop commissioning arrangements so that CYP services provide excellent value for money services
- work with our partners to develop and improve services such as transport and respite care
- continue to strengthen our Safeguarding arrangements including the development of a Member's panel to ensure comprehensive scrutiny
- continue to develop our Corporate Parenting role so that the life chances of our Looked After CYP are improved
- employ the same high aspirations and commitments to every local pupil when permanently expanding school places to meet the increased demand
- lobby for local involvement and control, not top down management from Whitehall; all schools should be free to work creatively to get the best from all our children, instead of being distracted by government initiatives and gimmicks;
- support parents and governors in resisting the loss of our schools to wealthy business men and special interest groups who are able through Government rules to buy control of our new schools
- pledge to ensure class sizes remain at 30 or below
- lobby for the abolition of student fees as we believe a University education should be free and everyone who has the ability should be able to go to University and not be prevented by the cost. We will scrap tuition fees for full and part-time students taking their first degree

GOOD RANGE OF EASILY ACCESSIBLE CULTURAL FACILITIES

Liberal Democrats believe that the arts are confidence-building, self-affirming and identity-forming and should be valued for themselves in a civilised society. We also value the huge contribution the arts can make in other areas such as the economy, community cohesion, crime prevention, health and education

Our Cultural Strategy for the last four years shows a solid record of achievement and progress on its key objectives:

- Kingston is now in the top ten nationally for engagement in the arts
- residents have been encouraged, especially young people, to get involved as participants and as volunteers in cultural activities
- the Rose Theatre has put Kingston on the cultural map
- we have improved literacy by supporting the development of reading in children, young people and people with basic skills needs and in families
- we have maximised partnership opportunities presented by the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Cultural Olympiad and the Rose Theatre ensuring opportunities are available to all sections of the community across the whole borough
- we have participated in cultural activity relating to heritage, literature, arts and sports; we have made a strong case to encourage and develop residents' creativity in the performing arts and media based art forms
- we have signed up to the Rose Theatre's *New Deal* which has provided thousands of free theatre tickets for local schoolchildren and disadvantaged families and set up an International Youth Arts Festival which hosts community plays and events with local young people

Kingston Town Centre is one of the drivers of the borough's economy and during the day time the town has a good mix of local shops, pubs and restaurants. We know that residents wanted more than just night clubs in the town centre at night so we were pleased to see the Rose Theatre open its doors in 2008. Recently Kingston and the University were awarded a purple flag for cultural excellence.

According to an Arts Council report a theatre like the Rose Theatre can generate £11 million a year to the local economy and despite the recession, when restaurants and shopping centres around the country have been closing and seeing trade fall by as much as 20%, Jamie Oliver's restaurant has opened just over the road from the Rose and the number of shoppers spending money in Kingston actually increased slightly despite the recession.

To make sure this cultural and economic centre could build its audience and develop we, along with the University, negotiated a short-term deal to help them develop fantastic creative opportunities for residents and to provide a vehicle for young people from diverse backgrounds to come together and share experiences. Community activities have included culturally diverse events such as Sakoba, Dance For All, MeWe, Global Arts' Bollywood events and support for Kingston Carnival. In addition, the benefits have also included:

School Ticket Scheme

Over 4650 free tickets have been issued to school children for 10 productions including Babe, The Sheep Pig, The Gruffalo, Miss Julie, Skellig, Treasure Island and Midsummer Night's Dream. Under privileged families are specifically targeted by the Family Support Service for tickets.

Schools benefiting from the New Deal have included: Our Lady Immaculate, St Andrew's and St Mark's Junior, St Matthew's Primary, Tolworth Infants, Tolworth Junior, Burlington Junior, Coombe Boys Secondary, Corpus Christi Primary, Holy Cross Secondary, Malden Manor Primary, Malden Parochial Primary, Robin Hood Primary, Castle Hill Primary, Ellingham Primary, Lovelace Primary, St Pauls' C of E Primary, Chessington Community College, Tolworth Girls School, Fern Hill Primary, St Joseph's Primary, St John's Primary, St Luke's Primary, St Paul's Junior, Tiffin Boys, Tiffin Girls.

Engaging young people - Kingston's first International Youth Arts Festival: This event took place last summer with over 3000 attending to see 40 young people from Kingston schools and the University take part in Pendragon a spectacular musical theatre performed in front of Prince Edward. Another highlight was a performance by the Young Zulu Warriors from South Africa when funds raised went to a charity caring for orphans and abused children.

Education and learning experiences

- Centre of Excellence for the Spoken Word allows Kingston Music and Arts Service to host events at the theatre providing children with an opportunity to perform to a large audience with professional musicians and ensembles
- Kingston Readers' Festival – more than 500 children attended
- Theatre space provided to run a youth drama group for young people between 11 and 18 who live in the borough.

The Rose Theatre has also been named and recognised as being important in changing the town at night leading to a reduction in crime and anti social behaviour. The Conservative Opposition have consistently opposed funding for The Rose but would have had no substitute for the opportunities for our young people, the strengthened economy and employment for Kingston during a recession and would still have Kingston descending into a youth drinking den at night.

KINGSTON'S HERITAGE

As Liberal Democrats we are fully aware of our responsibility in preserving our heritage. It is important to us not only to preserve but also to enhance this Royal Borough. To that end, we are proud to support the efforts of Kingston's Parish Church in its ambitious project not only to refurbish the Grade I listed church but also to develop its site as a heritage centre and extended outreach facilities for poorer and vulnerable members of our communities.

We are pleased to have attracted Lottery Funding for our Eadward Muybridge collection housed at Kingston Museum. He was one of the great pioneers in photography and the development of cinema. The exhibition, in this anniversary year, has been transferred to Washington, USA and will be at the Tate in autumn.

We have invested in our Museum and are pleased with the joint partnership working with Kingston University. We have secured a licence for Kingston Library for research into family history.

We have developed our partnership working in our Libraries with Kingston College and Kingston University, whereby Kingston residents have access to those libraries as well.

We have developed our Heritage Service at the North Kingston Centre through our partnership link with the Surrey Comet.

Over the next four years we will:

- remain committed to ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality cultural experiences and is given the opportunity to express themselves creatively
- continue to develop the International Youth Arts Festival as a means to strengthen the economy of the town and attract funding from the Arts Council
- investigate ways to highlight the town's important Saxon history to attract more jobs, visitors and investment
- continue to develop the Muybridge legacy to create greater opportunities for education and tourism
- support the Parish Church in its development as a heritage and outreach centre as well as an important religious centre
- support water based activity on the River Thames especially the thriving mix of canoeing and sailing clubs
- encourage a greater understanding of local history and heritage through outreach programmes to schools

SPORTING AND PLAY OPPORTUNITIES

Research has established that the social and mental health benefits of physical exercise are vitally important and participation in physical exercise amongst adults in Kingston is high relative to other London boroughs. Participation in exercise has been rising amongst our young people too with 92% of our children and young people reaching government targets and this includes our special schools. We have encouraged physical exercise through the Cycling Strategy and Good Going a scheme which encourages cycling and walking for health, fitness and leisure as an alternative to travel by car.

One of the biggest assets of the borough is the River Thames. We have committed to providing greater access to the river through the leasing of Ravens Ait as a water sports centre and continuing support for Albany Sailing Base and rowing and sailing clubs from the voluntary sector.

Last year, Kingston was awarded £1.5million by the Government's Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to significantly upgrade 20 community play areas in parks and housing estates across the borough – and to create four new, larger 'destination parks'.

Liberal Democrat Kingston is delighted that our bid to the Playbuilder funding scheme was successful. We are using the opportunity to invest in local parks and playgrounds, making sure they have good quality equipment, and are well-lit, safe and fun to use!

Equally, we have made high quality renovations to our football and cricket pitches allowing the English Cricket Board to have the confidence to promote cricket in the Borough. As a result there is a greater demand for use of bookings from teams to use our facilities.

We want local play areas to be fully accessible to children and young people with disabilities, but are still open and enjoyable for all. We also want to build on our success with Jubilee Way Playscape: encouraging the involvement and engagement of the young people in the key decision making and planning of this exciting project.

Liberal Democrats believe that to grow into healthy adults, young people need positive things to do in their communities which helps develop their social skills, self-confidence, as well as keeping them busy and "out of trouble".

For this reason:

- Kingston was one of the first areas in the country to publish a Play Strategy and nominate a Play Champion
- we received Big Lottery funding towards improving play at Dickerage Adventure Playground
- we transformed a disused tennis court in Tolworth's Jubilee Way into a popular play space with climbing apparatus and a skate bowl and opened a

new adventure play and sports facilities. Playscape was designed with the help from local young people

- we substantially upgraded and renovated Green Lane Recreation Ground in New Malden
- we secured funding to offer free swimming for local children as well as the over 65s in our community swimming pools, the Kingsfisher and New Malden Centre one of only a few London Boroughs to do so
- part of the improved service to Moor Lane will include opportunities for leisure when a new fully accessible 'Destination Park' will be created in consultation with users in the near future
- working with Roehampton University, 75 children and young people with disabilities or special educational needs attained level 4 in PE in Year 6

We have worked closely with the Olympic Delivery Authority LOCOG, TfL and Go south Go to ensure that Kingston gets as much as possible out of the London Olympics. We have had discussions with several teams about hosting pre-Olympic training facilities and we have accredited facilities here. Through our work with TfL on improving cycling facilities and cycling rates they have worked with us to secure that the Olympic road cycling race comes through the Borough, rather than the originally intended North London route. We are also working with LOCOG to ensure that Kingston school children are involved with Visits from Olympic athletes to inspire them.

Over the next four years we will:

- protect or re-provide our leisure facilities for our residents
- continue to ensure that participation levels in sport and physical activity remain among the highest in the country
- fight to ensure that Kingston gets the most out of the Olympics and seek to deliver the cycling road race for the Borough

ONE OF THE BEST PLACES TO LIVE, WORK AND VISIT

We all want to live in a safe, attractive and environmentally sustainable neighbourhood, to be able to get high-quality health treatment when we need it, to send our children to a good school, to enjoy good leisure facilities and to be able to travel easily to work, to the nearby shopping centre or to see family and friends.

According to the Audit Commission Kingston is performing well with an overall score of 3 out of 4. According to the Government's first ever Place Survey, residents of Kingston are some of the most satisfied in London.

- 85% of residents are “very satisfied or satisfied” with life in the borough; this figure is among the highest in London
- 66% agree that it is an area with good community cohesion, where people of different backgrounds get along well together

There is no room for complacency; we will continue to ensure that service delivery is at its best and that residents can influence local decisions. We promise to listen to you and act on local concerns.

ONE OF THE BEST PLACES FOR HEALTH AND CARE SERVICES

Kingston is a healthy area to live in and statistics show high participation in sports, good health of residents with easy access to open spaces for recreation and exercise

People in Kingston live longer and are generally healthier than the average for England but there are significant pockets of need and under-achievement. The disadvantage of some groups relative to the majority presents us with real challenges to close achievement gaps, support vulnerable groups, improve social cohesion and inclusion and increase participation.

Local Liberal Democrats believe that the Council should work for every member of our community. We are fully committed to the improvement and protection of services on which elderly, disabled and vulnerable residents rely. As an Administration we have fought off cuts to accessible transport and the Freedom Pass scheme. We have worked closely with the local National Health Service to bring health and care services into our communities, and have campaigned tirelessly against the closure of essential services at local hospitals.

The Government's Annual Assessment of Adult Social Care and Adult Safeguarding Annual Report praised Liberal Democrat Kingston for “performing consistently well” across all service areas and recognised that our adult services are also “continuing to improve”.

Elderly Care – improving provision for the most vulnerable

As our population rises the demand on local services will continue to increase at a time when the funding available nationally for public services is likely to decrease. In Kingston we were one of the first social services to introduce personal budgets for adults who can choose how to buy the help they need and ensures that individuals in need of care remain in their homes in the community as long as possible. In addition Members of the Council have now joined the NHS Kingston Board in order to make sure there is more accountability of the PCT. We remain committed to a democratically accountable Primary Care Trust.

Local Liberal Democrats believe that the Council should work for every member of our community. We are fully committed to the improvement and protection of services on which elderly, disabled and vulnerable residents rely. We have five day centres for adults with learning disabilities or older people. Amy Woodgate House, Newent House, Devon Way Chessington, Crescent Resource Centre and the Causeway Centre. Additionally, we also financially support the Voluntary Sector Centres. Day Centre clients are picked up in the morning and returned in the afternoon.

Last year the Council opened the new Amy Woodgate Specialist Resource Centre in the heart of Chessington. As an Administration we have been committed to ensuring that, despite financial pressure we opened a purpose built, 42 bed state of the art care and nursing home providing first class, quality care to people living with dementia. Our innovative work and steadfast commitment has been warmly praised by the Chief Executive of Age Concern.

As we look to the future, this government's plans on health care for elderly are in disarray and making promises to vulnerable people that can't be delivered is grossly irresponsible. The Liberal Democrats wants to see a cross-party agreement on social care to sort this problem out once and for all. The personal care at home bill will result in significant additional unconfirmed costs for RBK. Labour's pledge for personal care at home is going to be much more expensive than ministers claim, while the Tories' proposal will help only the limited number of people who need to go into a care home and have a spare £8,000.

For those in need

We have a number of voluntary sector day-care providers in the borough as well as our own centres. Some older people find that this is their only way to 'have a trip out' or they value the ability to go somewhere for a hot meal and take part in activities which are put on. Some of the buildings are in need of major works to bring them up to a standard which is expected of these facilities in today's age.

Over the next four years we will:

- introduce programmes for all who are in higher care need to have access to facilities and support and continue to give the individual choice through the personalisation programme; choice is already uppermost in our mind
- look critically at our 'in-house' low level residential care services and explore the efficiencies that can be made by more integrated work with the Third Sector and non profit making providers

- examine ways in which we can provide modern day facilities in a cost effective way

Preventative Care Needs

We believe in keeping our community healthy and active in later life and want to plan policies that can be directed toward those over the age of 50; providing easier access to leisure facilities, advice on healthy living, dietary information, help to give up smoking etc., and will look to measures which can be taken by individuals themselves to help them live a healthy and active life - activities to keep the mind active as well as the body. Activities such as volunteering, exercise sport, bowls, chess, and education classes. Prevention not only saves costs in the longer term but also assists individuals to remain in their own homes as they get older and rely less on statutory providers thus ensuring their continued independence.

Over the next four years we will:

- introduce a programme which we call '50 Not OUT' for those with no care needs or have lower needs
- work with local employers both to secure benefits for our residents and to help work them to create 'active retirement plans' for their staff.

Support for Carers

There are many carers in our borough who look after family members or friends who themselves need support in what they do. We recognise that the work that they do saves the council and health partners vast amounts of money and time and we must ensure that we give them the support they deserve. We also recognise that a large number of carers are young people and are at risk of losing out on 'being a child'.

Over the next four years we will:

- aim to work much closer with the Kingston Carers Network and similar groups to ensure that adequate support is put in place
- propose a named councillor should champion this cause in a similar way to our champion for older people and the disabled, to ensure that there is a direct link and voice into the Council.

INFORMATION AND ADVICE

While many of the activities mentioned above overlap with information and advice, there is a need to be mindful of the times we live in and that the older generation are more computer literate.

Over the next four years we will:

- expand the information made available via the RBK web site and set up a regular e-mail bulletin from the Council to allow any partner or third sector provider to publicise activities or events. Residents may subscribe to our 'What's New'_site at no cost and they will be provided directly with information and advice on current issues which may affect them and also details of activities and events which may be going on in the Borough. This facility will also be made available to smart phones as well as an application (App) directly to the RBK web site.

WORKING WITH THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

The voluntary and community sector, also known as the ‘third’ sector is the intermediary space between Kingston’s businesses and the Council where the community takes ownership of service delivery

This is a timely opportunity to reflect on what has been delivered and what continues to be delivered by our wonderful hardworking voluntary and community sector organisations a lot of which are funded by the Liberal Democrat Council in Kingston. Kingston has long been a significant funder enabling hundreds of organisations to provide a range of services and support that directly impact on the quality of life across the borough.

We have set up a Voluntary Sector Board which has been tremendously successful and has brought strategic voluntary partners to the table to ensure everyone works together. This has recently become a part of the strategic planning structure as a sub-group of the Sustainable Communities Partnership. We have introduced 5 year funding for some of our voluntary organisations such as Age Concern, Milaap, Alfriston and KVA to allow them to plan strategically over a longer period of time and we will include other key groups. We also introduced grants for environmental groups to help them make progress on climate change, recycling and waste minimisation.

Recession has produced huge increases in demands for a wide range of our voluntary sector groups as well as Council services as the down-turn affects residents’ lives, jobs, and their families. This comes at a time when there is less and less money available to address these extra needs. We work closely with all our partners from the voluntary and business sectors to ensure that together we use resources in the smartest way for the greatest possible benefit and as sustainably as possible.

A priority remains to house our Voluntary Sector organisations particularly those dealing with frontline advice into one building in town centre. Public funding should not have to go on private rents but help to deliver high quality services. We want Kingston to become a place that has created an environment for a thriving third sector.

Over the next four years we will:

- enable Kingston Volunteer Centre to move into the heart of Kingston Town to ensure that volunteering is given the necessary profile and investment that it now requires and work with the Third Sector to provide a base for voluntary groups to work from with facilities for a public drop-in
- provide support, advice and development services for our local organisations to remain effective in the service delivery market place; we believe it is vital for all Kingston’s voluntary organisations to have access to local support, advice and development services

- encourage relevant grant funded organisations, based on an open bidding process, to adopt a commissioning approach. Under this new approach, services would be commissioned from voluntary and community sector providers on the basis of identified priorities developed from a comprehensive analysis of need across the borough. This would not affect one off project grants to support local events
- carry out a local survey to ensure that there is an environment for a thriving Third Sector and significantly revise our own Voluntary Compact across the partnership which will underpin all other policy and practice when working with the Voluntary Sector. Further, a Statement of Value will make clear what it is we are investing in and that it complements the aims of the strategic partnership
- work with our partners to set up a Research Fund to ensure some of the most fragile organisations in the borough can become the generators of innovation and project development
- engage with the Voluntary Sector and their communities in the whole process of LAAs from the initial identification of the target through to its negotiation and performance management
- enlarge the Voluntary Sector Board to include more strategic groups; to give them a direct voice in the direction of the work with them. Due to the different nature of some of those groups we will ensure that only strategic Borough issues are addressed. A Partnership Board for the Third Sector

SAFE AND SOUND – One of the safest boroughs in London

The Liberal Democrats are the only party committed to putting 3,000 more police on the beat by scrapping ID cards, and have the best record of cutting crime in Lib Dem controlled council areas.

Kingston is now one of the safest boroughs in London and our partnership with the Police has delivered some of the lowest crime figures in London. In the past year, Kingston saw a 15% cut in overall violent crime which was the largest reduction anywhere in London. Over the past few years crime has reduced by 25% and violence against people in the town centre has reduced by a staggering 45%.

Whilst fear of crime in the borough is as much of a problem as crime itself, residents are now going out in the town centre at night and at weekends due to initiatives such as taxi marshals, street pastors and a town centre manager working through the night. We have celebrated the introduction of award winning schemes such as 'Best Bar None' and 'Behave or be Banned' which have been introduced with over 20 local partners in the Safer Kingston Partnership to promote best practice in pubs.

The award of the Purple flag from the Home Office and Association of Town Centre Management recognises excellence in managing town centre at night and follows the award of the Green Flag by the Audit Commission for exceptional performance for partnership working to make the town centre safe, attractive and vibrant. All thanks to the strong partnership between the police, Kingston First, Kingston Council and local businesses.

Our police officers are well respected members of our community and for many years we have worked with them to ensure Kingston is a safe community. One issue that is often raised is the visibility of officers on the street as this helps eliminate the fear of crime. The Safer Neighbourhood Partnership means local 'bobbies' in every ward but in February this year, Boris Johnson cut both the amount of money given by the Mayor to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) from his share of the council tax (£16.4m) and he will take 455 front-line police officers off the beat across London despite him saying he would make crime-fighting his top priority.

Over the next four years we will:

- work with the police to ensure that a Neighbourhood Watch is set up for every street in the borough that wants to be in a scheme
- ensure that our streets continue to be safe; a high priority remains to remove fly-tipping and graffiti within 48 hours of being reported
- work with the police to ensure that the imposition of Tory cuts has as little effect on beat officers as possible and that priorities are set particularly for areas that attract the largest footfall of members of the public and areas of particular concern to the public

- enable resources to be directed to the needs of young people who should be encouraged to tell us what they want
- continue to oppose the introduction of ID cards and campaign for the money to be used for more police on the beat

NEIGHBOURHOODS – 15 years of Neighbourhoods – handing power to the people

A Liberal Democrat Administration introduced the role of ‘Neighbourhoods’ to Kingston Council back in 1994, despite strong Conservative opposition

The Liberal Democrats were amongst the very first to introduce Neighbourhoods and Neighbourhood Committees as a way of bringing power and decision making closer to residents. The aim was simple – to stop decisions being made in a remote Guildhall with little chance for residents to have their say. And this is not just about informing residents but also about meaningful consultation and genuine partnership.

With the local ward councillors making decisions about their areas in front of and with the participation of local citizens we can make sure that decisions are open, honest and transparent.

The borough’s four Neighbourhoods are: Maldens and Coombe, Surbiton, Kingston Town, South of the Borough. Each is controlled by councillors of the area, so three have been run by the Liberal Democrats – and one, Maldens and Coombe is run by the Conservatives.

Neighbourhoods:

- are the planning and highways authorities
- are responsible for libraries, community centres and parks
- employ Neighbourhood Rangers who are able to sort out local problems on the spot
- encourage people to join in debates at meetings (barring legal restrictions on some items)
- encourage residents to join in debates at meetings
- form working parties of residents, officers and councillors to solve local problems together
- are developing Community Plans bringing in the police, NHS, and Transport for London
- any decision can be called in for scrutiny by 100 citizens – that includes children

Some of the notable achievements made by devolving power and budgets to our Neighbourhoods have included:

- **South of the Borough – Hook Centre**

Ward councillors decided to replace a dilapidated building on Hook Road, Chessington with a stunning community hub, housing a library, meeting rooms, café, IT learning suites, children’s centre and a recording studio for local schools and bands.

- **Tolworth – Jubilee Way, Playscape**

Working with an environmental charity, Jubilee Way Playscape is a most exciting adventure play area for children and teenagers which incorporates a

skateboard park. Lottery money and funding from Toyota UK was used for this project

- **Kingston Town – The Ancient Market Place**

In consultation with residents, councillors renovated the area in front of the Kingston Market House. The flat bed fountain has become a popular aquatic playground for children on hot days

- **Surbiton – Cycle Parking at Station**

Working with TfL and South West Trains, provided 200 bike spaces for daily commuters. A survey by the London Evening Standard recognised the facilities as the second best in London and is the simplest, most convenient way to reduce car pollution and local congestion

As Liberal Democrats we want the council to be more innovative, and more open and accountable to you.

Here are just some of the Neighbourhood grants awarded in 2008/9 which supported fantastic local initiatives:

- £750 towards to the cost of Cambridge Road Estates fun day in the summer of 2008
- £750 to Kingston Race and Equalities Council (KREC) towards the cost of the Kingston Carnival
- £675 towards the cost of music equipment for the Oxygen youth club
- £570 to 'Connaught Opera' which puts on concerns for elderly people in local care homes
- £750 towards the costs of subsidising coaching at Tolworth Gymnastics Club for children from low income families who have been talent spotted in local schools

But people want more so:

Over the next four years we will:

- create a network of local partnerships that entitle local people to consultation and participation on the services that are of most immediate impact on them
- create local business forums, residents' forums and tenant and leaseholder forums to involve people in matters that concern them
- co-opt key local partners as advisory members on to the Neighbourhood Committees
- Work with residents and Safer Neighbourhood Teams to encourage Residents Associations and Neighbourhood Watch Committees
- give greater time to developing partnerships with local police and health and other local service providers to open them up to local citizen scrutiny
- create Neighbourhood Environment Forums to investigate ways of greening our streets and promote local initiatives for tree planting and creating community green space, looked after by the community itself
- through Neighbourhood Grants encourage local community events

A BOROUGH THAT GIVES VALUE FOR MONEY

Labour has borrowed massively to avoid a depression – we know that money needs to be repaid. Either the economy needs to grow by more than ever before or we need to reduce what we spend. As Liberal Democrats we want to rebalance the tax system cutting taxes for people on low and middle incomes which we will pay for by cutting reliefs and closing tax loopholes that benefit the wealthiest

Around 5% of residents would not have to pay a penny in income tax under Lib Dem Fair Tax. The average income in Kingston for those in the private sector is £32,500 – someone earning this figure will pay £5,205 a year in tax under Labour and Tories. Under the Liberal Democrat fair tax plans they will pay just £4,500, that's £705 less tax each year.

The Council Tax system is itself unfair. In Kingston many people on low incomes, including many retired people, are paying more than they should have to afford because the tax they pay is tied to the value of their property, which might be high, and not their income, which might be low. The system was devised in a panic when the discredited Poll Tax system caused widespread unrest – and it shows.

However that is the system within which we have to operate.

The system is made even more unfair by the method that the Government uses to give money to councils to support services. This leads to massive unfairness as Kingston are made to pay for a greater proportion of their services than other councils. How can it be fair that residents of Kingston get less than a third of the grant per head of population of Tory-run Hammersmith and Fulham and about half that of Wandsworth?

Each year Kingston Council has to ask residents for more money because we have to raise nearly three quarters of the budget from Council Tax when the London average is less than half. This year the Council Tax increase of 1.9% will be lowest since 1994 and for the third year running lower than the pension increase and inflation. So if tax is not to be even higher we must deliver services in different ways and make them ever more efficient. We are now delivering massive efficiencies to the tune of £13 million over three years through the One-Council One-Kingston change programme which concentrates tax spending on services not bureaucracy.

We can only take efficiency so far and these days we can achieve far more working with others: the business community, the voluntary sector, the police, the primary care trust and other boroughs across a range of issues from youth crime to adult social care and waste management. Partners are the key to our success but that does not mean that we want to control the police or health services. By planning our services together we can make sure that spending is more efficient, less expensive and gives people the services they want.

WORKING WITH LOCAL BUSINESS

Every year Kingston collects £75 million in tax from local businesses all of which we have to hand over to central Government. The Government returns only £35 million to spend locally. The rest is distributed around the country.

We have successfully been shortlisted under the Sustainable Communities Act with our proposals to keep more of the business rates to be spent on investment in services and developments that contribute to local economic and social sustainability such as public transport, better parking, and helping young people into employment.

In partnership with local businesses, the university and others we have played a part in creating the first ever Business Improvement District in Britain which has now been extended for another 5 years in a successful ballot. Businesses now pay an additional amount of money to invest in our town. The results achieved by the 'Kingstonfirst' partnership speak for themselves with sales in shops up nearly 40%, violent crime down nearly 40%, graffiti gone within 24 hours, business cardboard recycled and a range of night time initiatives to make our streets clean and safe and get our four and half thousand night clubbers home without bother to residents trying to enjoy a good night's sleep.

We have and will continue to campaign against Boris Johnson's unfair extra tax on Kingston business to pay for Crossrail his North London transport projects. It is blatantly unfair that Kingston business has to pay for this with no possible benefit while businesses in Maidenhead, who are actually getting a station, pay nothing.

RECESSION

The recession presents the biggest challenge for a generation, unemployment is continuing to rise and Kingston Council faces a triple whammy of squeezed funding, declining income and greater demand for essential services. A low-carbon economy will create green jobs that would save carbon and reduce fuel poverty too.

As a borough we suffer 'leafy Kingston syndrome'. The economic pressures on the Council and the difficulties faced by our residents and local businesses are often ignored. But Kingston is suffering in the economic downturn like everywhere else. Liberal Democrats believe it is important we have a bespoke local response in order to keep our town centres vibrant and local workers in their jobs.

As the local effect of the recession has meant particularly high levels of managerial unemployment, the Council has focused on providing active support for residents who are unemployed or at risk of redundancy. In our dedicated programme of "responding to the recession" we have introduced schemes such as:

- The Council paying all invoices within 10 working days to help the flow of cash into small and medium-sized businesses
- Working with Job Centre Plus to create apprenticeship schemes, work trials and work experiences placements in the Council and wider community
- Running employment support services, such as 'Kingston Executive Futures' which is tailored to the needs of managers and professionals who are out of work
- Jobseeker boot camps which are helping hundreds of graduates prepare for employment
- Credit Crunch Seminars providing a helpful forum and advice sessions for struggling local firms
- helping provide the 'GoGreen Plus' business support package which gets local companies to reduce their costs whilst also reducing their impact on the environment
- Supporting Kingston Town Centre through Kingston First and the expanded 'Business Improvement District'
- Promoting improvement schemes in Tolworth and Surbiton district centres
- Providing helpful information to both businesses and residents affected by the economic downturn on the Council's website
- Publishing a local business directory
- Using money from the Future Jobs Fund to create new jobs which benefit the local community for long-term young unemployed people

We have also helped run an employment initiative called Graduate2business, in partnership with Kingston University, the local college and Chamber of Commerce. Graduates living in the area are being provided with first-rate employment advice and actively supported in finding and applying for jobs. We are also helping set up paid internships in local companies.

The project has been tailored to the needs of local graduates and businesses, and seems to be making a real difference to residents who are struggling in the economic downturn. Graduate2business is one example of how Liberal Democrats believe that working together as a borough we can achieve a great deal to keep our local economy buoyant and local people in employment or training.

Our locally-run recession busting schemes seem to be working well. At 3.4% unemployment in the borough is well below the national and even London average. And despite the retail sector being particularly badly hit in the credit crunch, the number of people visiting Kingston Town Centre actually increased by an impressive 3.9% last year. We delivered a 'credit crunch help' seminar for local businesses, paid invoices early and encouraged take up of 'small business relief'.

Future of Kingston Town

Shopping patterns change and two things have happened in retail, which is the most important part of Kingston town economy. First there has been an increase in shopping through the internet and, second, there is a demand for more modern shops. We have to make sure that we maintain the success of the local economy into the future. As a result we are exploring with a developer how to change the most run down area of the town between Eden Street and the Relief Road to make the

area more welcoming and vibrant and to get the buses off Eden Street and into a modern bus interchange.

But any development must be more than about shopping. We must bring more people in to live in the centre, providing good quality private and affordable housing. We must make sure that we take the opportunity to create public squares and open space for people to enjoy. We must make sure that we create opportunities for community gain such as the development of a voluntary sector building. Above all we must ensure that any development is environmentally sustainable possibly including waste to energy technology to provide cheap sustainable energy.

Over the next four years we will:

- take One Council One Kingston forward; making sure we meet and increase our savings to invest in services of value to residents and keep the council tax as low as we can
- continue to set all Directors challenging targets; only allowing spending on things which bring real benefit to residents. There will be no increase in staffing unless there are clear means to pay for the increase without resorting merely to more taxation and where the extra staff will deliver service improvements taking into account the fast changing needs caused by extra service demands in the recession
- ensure that capital investment will only be made where not to do so would cause damage to services; or where extra investment improves services or brings economic benefits
- seek greater control over the learning and skills training in our area; taking responsibility away from quangos not answerable to anyone and targeting training where it can be of most value locally
- continue to work with local businesses to protect them from the effects of the recession wherever possible, cutting through Government red tape to make sure they get the help they are due and to preserve local jobs;
- we will support local shopping areas in New Malden, Surbiton, Tolworth and Chessington as well as ensuring that Kingston Town centre continues to flourish
- seek new powers to allow Kingston Council to transform empty shops on a temporary basis for community use during the recession
- campaign for greater powers to retain a proportion of business rates for investment in local priorities; that benefit local business and local people
- build on our award winning success in diversifying the night time economy so it has more to offer than drinking
- campaign against unfair charges on local businesses imposed by Boris Johnson to pay for Crossrail
- continue to work with the police and health and other public sector partners and those responsible for direct services; ensuring services are delivered in the way the residents want and need rather than to fit the convenience of bureaucracies
- support and inspire our local groups and the voluntary sector to bring forward ideas that can bring about improvements for their communities; delivering services through the voluntary sector where that brings greater benefit to residents