

Change is coming to Somerset West and Taunton



**Make it a
change for the
better**



**Thurs 2nd May
2019**



 **Labour**

Change is coming: make it a change for the better

From April we will have a new, much bigger local council.

On May 2nd you can choose who will represent you for the next four years.

On 2nd May electors have a chance to choose a new Somerset West and Taunton Council that puts the needs of its residents at the heart of what it does. The policies outlined in our manifesto have been designed by local people for local people.

All too often the voices in grass-roots communities, from Exmoor National Park to the Somerset levels, have been neglected. We can, and will do better, given the chance. Every Labour councillor will work with their community to build an inclusive and forward-looking new council focused on supporting health, well-being, creativity, opportunity and prosperity.

When they were in government Liberal Democrats supported the Conservatives to impose their austerity regime on the country. For nine years Councils across the country have been starved of essential funding, and the people who have suffered the most are the poorest among us. Universal Credit is making things harder for many, and still the cuts come.

For too long the councils of West Somerset and Taunton Deane have been controlled by people who've lacked vision and ambition for the area. Decisions have been made over the heads of the people they were supposed to represent. We have seen council services cut, including public toilets closed and public seating removed, while money is earmarked for lavish vanity projects.

There is no magic wand to bring back the services we have lost straight away, but Labour councillors will test every future policy against its impact on those who are most in need.

The most important aid to making change happen is knowing how things work now. It helps to know who to contact with individual problems and, where possible, to work with others on issues that have a wider impact.

We will

- Make it easier to find information about the council and how to make your voice heard
- Consult and involve communities in council decisions that affect their lives
- Establish constructive links with groups representing local interests and concerns

It takes less than a minute to vote on 2 May- but it could make all the difference.

To register to vote or to arrange a postal or proxy vote, you can call the council's Electoral Registration office on 01823 358692. They can complete the form with you by phone or send you a form to complete yourself. If you are online go to <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>. You will need to give your National Insurance number and date of birth.

Our plans for a better Somerset West and Taunton

How we will enhance the quality of life, health, and wellbeing

The Somerset West and Taunton area is home to a large and growing older population among whom loneliness and isolation often undermine quality of life. Isolation can also affect the quality of life and opportunities for young people and families who lack private transport.

We will work with organisations and community groups to identify how the council can help reduce social isolation and promote mental health.

We will

- Help promote public health initiatives to encourage more active lifestyles and healthy eating.
- Liaise with and lobby local GPs to optimise their use of social prescribing
- Signpost local organisations that provide practical help and support, such as credit unions and village agents
- Encourage community activities
- Promote and implement measures to improve the Somerset West and Taunton environment and local transport (see section below)

Shared experiences such as music, theatre, films, arts and crafts and local sporting events help to bring communities together and are important in fostering inclusion and wellbeing.

We will

- Support opportunities for people of all ages and in rural as well as urban communities to participate in and develop creative and sporting activities and skills
- Support access to library provision in all parts of Somerset West and Taunton.

How we will invest in our children and young people

After years of freezing Council Tax the Conservatives at County Hall have cut services for children and young people to the bone. Many of our children who need it are without support from professional youth workers. A Labour-led council will appoint a cabinet member for young people to ensure young people's voices are listened to.

We will

- Host an annual 'Young People's Forum' bringing together young people and organisations that work with them in order to identify and develop practical action plans to address priority needs
- Establish a Youth Council elected by forum members to scrutinise and advise the new Somerset West and Taunton council on policies that will enable young people to flourish
- Invest in and extend key prevention and support services for children, young adults and families such as the One Teams, and lobby the County Council to reinstate the original family support service 'GetSet'.
- Raise social mobility and aspiration by extending the work of the Opportunities Areas programme.



How we will work towards a decent home for all

A decent home is a basic right. Without it families and individuals cannot achieve their full potential. Security, decency, affordability and sustainability are the driving principles of our housing policy. Labour councils across the country are doing everything in their power to tackle the housing crisis caused by a succession of bad government policies. Labour councillors in Somerset West and Taunton will do the same.

Council and social housing: We will

- Keep Taunton Deane's pre-merger housing stock in council ownership
- Use council borrowing powers to invest in more council homes across the area, using local builders and suppliers wherever this is a financially responsible option
- Lobby government to let councils decide whether to sell council homes and to invest any 'right to buy income' into building more homes
- Investigate alternative fast-build options such as modular homes
- Ensure repairs services are speedy and effective
- Encourage Housing Associations to provide more genuinely affordable homes, including supported and extra care housing
- Support non-profit groups, such as Community Land Trusts to build homes for social rent by providing assistance in kind and low cost council owned land.



Private ownership and tenancies: We will

- Define local housing 'affordability' as a benchmark for landlords and private developers
- Establish a compulsory register of licensed, approved private landlords to incentivise decent standards in the sector
- Create a rent deposit scheme applicable in cases where landlords have approved status
- Explore all avenues to reduce empty homes and maximise council tax levied on empty and second homes
- Provide supportive conditions for self-build and custom-build housing projects

Action on homelessness: We will

- Undertake a rigorous housing needs assessment to include 'hidden' as well as street homelessness
- Work with local charities that are tackling "rough sleeping" and wider homelessness problems
- Urgently work to end the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless people.

How we will secure the future for Somerset West and Taunton

Supporting jobs, the economy and skills

Workers in rural Somerset are among the lowest paid in the country, yet the cost of transport, food and fuel is higher in rural areas like this. Labour councillors will take all steps within their powers to support low paid workers and their families, boost the local economy and create a job market to attract and retain our young people.

We will

- Work with local schools, colleges and businesses to encourage innovation and create highly skilled jobs to boost the local economy
- Set up a local award scheme to recognise employers who provide fair pay and equal employment opportunities
- Support provision of good quality apprenticeships and vocational training and lobby for the reinstatement of Further Education for all age groups.
- Source council supplies and services from local providers wherever feasible, and require prospective council contractors to pay employees a living wage.
- Encourage the development of low carbon industries and enterprises to provide “Green Jobs”.
- Repurpose empty shops and sites to support the local economy and communities
- Ensure that the council provides a supportive, productive working environment and at least a living wage.
- Make a concerted effort to encourage inward investment.



Developing a sustainable infrastructure

Planning committees have let developers off the hook time and again. New developments are allowed to spring up without the promised infrastructure to support community life - such as community spaces, bus services and meeting quotas for social housing.

A Labour-led council will take a strategic approach to planning that also responds to the needs of individual localities. We will work with bus companies and users, cycling campaign groups and pedestrians to develop sustainable, reliable, affordable and people-centred transport links, balancing the provision of public and private transport as appropriate to local needs.

We will

- Insist that developers fulfill their infrastructure obligations, including pedestrian and cycle- friendly routes and electric car charging, schools and GP services
- Ensure developers provide the social and affordable homes quotas specified in planning consents
- Retain community-owned assets for their social value to the community unless no social purpose can be identified
- Prioritise the use of brownfield sites for new developments
- Require new-build housing to use energy efficient construction and energy generation such as solar water heating, air or ground source heat pumps and photo voltaic panels.

How we will protect our environment and tackle climate change

Labour councillors will ensure that the ‘shadow’ council’s Climate Emergency declaration is backed up by a robust strategy, with action plans for reducing carbon emissions and responding to global climate change. We will work with the Local Government Association and other councils to fulfil the ‘Climate Local Pledge’ and monitor the new council’s progress and achievements.

Working in collaboration with environmental and transport lobby groups we will develop and evaluate policy proposals with the aim of making Somerset West and Taunton carbon neutral by 2030. As a priority we will develop a 5-year local sustainable transport plan to reduce reliance on fossil-fueled vehicles, encourage walking, cycling and use of public transport, embedding these criteria into infrastructure planning for new housing developments.

We will:

- Monitor and publicise air quality levels
- Encourage the establishment of community energy co-operatives
- Campaign and vote to prevent fracking
- Invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency technology for all new housing developments and in district energy systems where possible.
- Argue the case for disinvesting pension and other funds from carbon intensive industries
- Seek to reduce single use plastic and improve levels of plastic recycling
- Encourage provision of sustainable drainage systems in developments of more than two houses
- Encourage the development of community gardens
- Work with the Environment Agency and other partners to identify vulnerable sections of our coast and protect those areas where there is risk of erosion.

Labour councillors will lobby the County Council to dedicate more funding to promoting safe and sustainable access and mobility across the new council area.

We will

- Promote and support the establishment of a Bus Users' Group
- Lobby the County Council to improve the reliability, affordability and accessibility of public and community transport, including real-time and on-board audio and visual information systems
- Support and develop car clubs, community transport groups and moped schemes
- Prioritise safe walking and cycling, establishing safe pedestrian and cycle routes and extending the Steam Coast Trail cycle path.
- Support the switch from diesel and petrol cars to electric vehicles and move towards charging points in public car parks and new housing developments.

How we will reclaim our County Town

Labour councillors will actively promote and support the early establishment of a single Town Council within the current unparished area boundary.

We will work with local communities to identify projects that celebrate the town's heritage and increase its contemporary appeal, maximising its value to those who live there and increasing its attraction for visitors.

To make the change vote Labour on Thursday, 2nd May

Somerset has suffered too long under Conservative rule in government, at County Hall and in District Councils. Somerset West and Taunton people deserve better.

To find out about your local Labour candidate/s go to:

<https://www.tauntondeanelabour.org.uk/candidates> or call 0800 861 1642

