

# Liberal Democracy In Action



**A collection of  
Liberal Democrat  
Achievements in  
Local Government**

**by John Miller**



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The Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) is responsible for promoting, influencing and supporting the campaigning activities and the local government work of the Party at all levels. Its independence within the Party is guaranteed by a governing body that is made up of councillors and campaigners elected by the membership annually. Funding is through membership fees, trading income and Party Grant.

The philosophy of ALDC is to motivate and enable local campaigners throughout Britain to take and use power to act as agents for change in their communities. The ALDC and its staff work within the Party to facilitate campaigning at every level, and to promote the values of 'Community Politics'.

In carrying through this philosophy ALDC seeks to attract the widest possible active membership, retaining both our unique independent role, and by working closely with the rest of the Party.

ALDC is based in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire. The political staff undertake a wide range of support and training for campaigners and councillors both on the telephone and in person. The staff also produce regular members mailings covering campaigning and council activities.

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# Liberal Democracy in Action

**F**or some years *Action to Build a New Local Democracy* has served as the ALDC guide for Liberal Democrats on authorities who expect to gain or continue in power or influence on their councils over the next term of office. It has set out the broad principles of Liberal Democrat policy with specific examples of how that policy has been translated into action and been carried out in practice.

Liberal Democrats talk a lot about ‘Not re-inventing the wheel’ and using best practice which has been tried and tested elsewhere to make changes which will benefit communities while eliminating as far as possible the snags and teething problems which are an inevitable part of change and new ideas.

This publication is about recycling of ideas it is not a blueprint of projects, which can be instantly applied. Every Council and community is different and will therefore require different variations on a theme to suit their specific circumstances.

The ALDC office handles enquiries all the time from councillors and activists who want to know whether something has been done before, whether it works or even just whether it sounds like a good idea. Sometimes ALDC can put them in touch with another council so that they can arrange a visit or give them a contact to discuss details and public response. *Council Achievements* is intended to help this process and to enable more councils to innovate successfully and make a difference where it matters – in their local communities

As a result of the Local Government Act 2000 and the new structures, which most councils have had to implement, I have tried to group the subject areas in a way which would be useful to Portfolio Holders.

*Many thanks to all those Liberal Democrat run or influence councils whose ideas and innovations are featured in this publication. Thanks also to those others whose schemes or ideas do not feature in this book for reasons of space.*

*ALDC's members magazine *Grassroots Campaigner* carries regular articles about innovations by Liberal Democrat Councils across the country.*

## Chapter I

# Re-engage with the Public

## Public Participation and Consultation

### *Kirklees - Opening up the council*

Under the old Labour regime there were no opportunities for members of the public to get involved. Liberal Democrats have changed that!

Council and Cabinet have open Question times when anyone can ask a question on any matter of concern. Public involvement in debates is also now allowed so that a debate on Special schools would include parents, union representatives and governors contributing.

Meetings of both Council and Cabinet are held in different parts of the area - sometimes the first council meeting there for 25 years!

Area committees have been set up of different sizes to reflect the different communities.

### *Kirklees - Consultation*

Residents had become very cynical about public consultation in Kirklees considering it a sham exercise when a decision had already been made. Now there is a process of open discussion -often a public meeting, followed by options being sent to every household. After the results of that consultation are sent there is a final chance for people to comment on the preferred option.

### *Stockport Citizens' Panel*

Like many other Lib Dem authorities Stockport has a citizens panel of 1000 people which has to be updated to avoid 'consultation fatigue' The panel was consulted for the first time late in 2002 on the budget for 2003/4 and its views will be reflected closely in the Lib Dem proposals. The Council's corporate consultation team also co-

ordinates work through the Local Access Forum, the Walking Forum, the Cycling Forum, the Disability Forum and the District Partnerships

## Area working and devolving Power

### *Stockport Area Committees*

The council now has eight area committees made up of two or three wards, which now have devolved powers over planning decisions as well as a delegated highways budget. More recently they have been given annual discretionary funding for local projects. There is an open forum and the public are allowed to address the committee directly.

South Somerset and Eastleigh are still the most advanced models of area working with dedicated area staff and disaggregated budgets as well as area offices which operate as one stop shops. Public participation is a successful feature and relationships with parish councils become closer and more co-operative.

### *Oldham area committees*

Oldham has now extended its six area Committees to include co-opted members from community organisations and parish councils who will all receive training. The committees have already become popular and well attended and recently the discretionary budget has been doubled to £275,000 with a view to increasing it later to £400,000.

### *Sutton*

As is often the case at the outset, even in Lib Dem groups, the proposal of area committees was contentious, with the usual objections of expense and bureaucracy. As is also usual the group and all

other parties later became unequivocally supportive. The case in Sutton however could not be justified on the basis of geographical size as in South Somerset and the memory of autonomous neighbourhoods in Tower Hamlets was not too distant.

Four committees were set up without the need to increase staff and because Sutton is a relatively small borough there was also no need for specific area offices. The benefits became apparent both internally where the members moved away from the departmental structure and externally with the increased participation in a public forum. The intention is now to develop ways to further increase participation through area committees and devolve more.

## **Sefton**

The area Committees in Sefton should become the decentralised powerhouses of South Somerset, Eastleigh and others after pressure from the Liberal Democrats in the shared administration. Other parties see them as little more than councillor's surgeries. Liberal Democrats see properly empowered area committees acting to dissolve the perennial tensions that exist between Sefton's diverse communities. Too often Sefton has polarised between Bootle in the South and Southport in the north.

It was important to make sure that all members were involved and informed of the changes and to ensure that all councillors have the opportunity of influencing the decision making process at an early stage.

# **One Stop shops and call centres**

## **Vale of White Horse**

Have opened a 'One Stop Shop' in Wantage, one of the Vale's larger towns to offer residents access to all council services in one place. This has proved successful and is being extended to the council's headquarters at Abingdon.

It represents a change in culture towards a customer orientated focus, whereby staff understand the needs of residents and work as their advocates rather than as council employees.

## **Sutton - Success of council's new call centre**

Within a month of its launch, Sutton Council's new Council Tax and Benefits call centre proved enormously successful in answering resident's calls. In its first month of operation 84 per cent of calls were picked up, in the past less than 50 per cent of council tax calls were answered. Prior to the introduction of the joint call centre, an external contractor dealt with council tax and business rate enquiries, while the council's own staff handled queries on benefits. However, the number of missed calls to the Council Tax office was the highest of any section within the council, so it was decided to set up a combined call centre, with posts transferring back to the Council from the external contractor to the new call centre. Furthermore by easing pressure on the main switchboard it has also resulted in a better service being delivered to all callers.

Other proposals were to increase involvement and make people feel better about living in Sutton by improving communication about changes, improvements and innovations in council services. This, combined with improved consultation, would result in a well informed community who would be able to access information and get help and advice from the introduction of 'One-stop shops'. At the present time there are 6 One stop info 'kiosks' on the street and in Libraries where people can easily obtain free Council information and advice. A private company who can also use them for other commercial information pays for the set up costs of £40,000.

## **Oldham One-stop shops**

In the past, when doing business with the council, people were often directed from one office to another. Oldham Council's new 'one stop shop' has enabled the public to have a range of issues dealt with from just one point.

It is run by specially trained staff to help people with questions about Council Tax, housing benefits, school uniforms, free school meals, financial support for students and school admission queries as well as queries about other council services.

## **Sheffield**

First Point was launched in March 2001 as the City Council's One Stop Shop. One of the group's visions for the Council was to create a Customer Centred Organisation.

The Councils' previous arrangements were haphazard and poorly set out. A member of the public having a query about the council would have problems identifying where to go to ask for help. There wasn't a consistent technology backing staff up - indeed in many cases there wasn't any technology at all.

First Point is based in Howden House. The building was specifically designed to accommodate the service. It consolidated all of the previous city centre customer services in one building, in one queue and with one technology backing up the customer services staff.

The vision for First Point was that it shouldn't feel like a traditional Local Government One Stop Shop. To work it had to take the best of the public sector, the best of the voluntary sector and the best part of the private sector.

## **Liverpool**

Twelve One Stop Shops are planned in Liverpool taking in every area of the city.

Currently there are six which allow people to get information about the Council and services in their own neighbourhood. They have dramatically cut waiting times and provide better service.

# **Community planning**

## **Salisbury - Really planning for Real**

Planners and community workers in Salisbury combined in a different way to develop local response and ideas for improving an estate. An extremely large three-dimensional model was constructed for the Bemerton Heath estate so that everybody concerned would be able to recognise their own house and street. This in itself was not unusual and was a technique used before, together with slides and maps. What was different here was that children from the local Woodlands school made the model and it toured the whole area not just in public buildings but also in shops like Spar.

People were invited to make their comments by placing a card next to the specific area on the plan so that others could see it before it was collected.

A local public meeting was then held to discuss the proposals for improvement and how they would be implemented.



## Chapter 2

# Crime and Community Safety

**F**ear of crime is more important than statistical evidence as far as most local people are concerned. Reports in the local newspaper of brutal attacks on elderly and young alike means that the fear itself blights people's lives and restricts their ability to play a full part in their communities.

Liberal Democrats believe that local councils can play a major part in limiting the opportunities for crime and making those communities safer. Partnerships between local authorities, the police and community organisations are the best way of developing effective and successful crime prevention strategies.

Liberal Democrats have led the way with their support of 'Watch' schemes extending the Neighbourhood principle to Shops, Pubs and Businesses but also encourage flats above shops as a deterrent to town centre crime. Many councils have also installed CCTV in Town Centres, other hot spots' and in car parks. It is important to balance the concerns about safeguarding civil liberties with the public demand for the prevention and detection of criminal and anti-social behaviour.

Crime diversion schemes in partnership with council youth services have been used to give young people positive alternatives to crime. Activities which are both physically and intellectually challenging are chosen by young people themselves, which often result in the emergence of hitherto unknown abilities and a consequent rise in self-esteem.

Initiatives to 'Design out Crime' have also been successful in conjunction with the police.

These can just involve the installation of gates with residents keys to prevent escape routes such as the Liverpool 'Alleygate' system or the re-design of the layouts and lighting on estates

Sheffield is the safest big City in England, an achievement of recent years. Sheffield First for Safety has led much of this work. A formally set up partnership between the council, police, probation service and other organisations, it places the City Council in a pivotal position in clamping down on crime.

### *Islington Crime Reduction Partnership*

Tough new measures to tackle anti-social behaviour on Islington's Council estates, particularly among teenagers, have been introduced across the borough following a successful pilot of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC's) and Parental Control Agreements (PCA's) by the Islington Crime Reduction Partnership.

The contracts - the first of their kind in the country - were created by the Partnership as a way of tackling anti-social behaviour caused by young people.

Islington Council Housing Department and Islington Borough Police first introduced the contracts in a pilot to tackle problems on estates and on the street. The aim was to stop the bad behaviour rather than punishing the offenders. The problems mainly centred around quality of life issues for local people such as threatening behaviour and harassment, racist behaviour, graffiti, criminal damage and sub-criminal behaviour which is common to these areas.

ABC's have proved extremely effective as a means of educating the parents and their children and getting the families to take responsibility and ownership of the unacceptable behaviour. The scheme can be used as part of an incremental approach leading to legal action in the form of possession orders or ASBO's should the bad behaviour continue. In each case there is a menu of options for further action available. This includes non-legal action such as diversion as well as legal action. Since February 2000, the scheme has been developed borough-wide with around 100 contracts signed up and to date there have only been two serious breaches of the contracts.

### **Oldham Crime**

The Oldham Against Crime Partnership has funded a state of the art £20,000 video van that will be sent to crime hotspots. Trained officers of Greater Manchester Police will use the van as a deterrent but also to gather evidence and information to prevent crimes and prosecute offenders. The bright yellow van will be very effective in areas with problems of anti-social behaviour.



### **Oldham - Crime prevention**

Following the success of previous initiatives and in an effort to reduce crime amongst youths, Oldham Council has recently promoted the Connexions Summer Plus scheme, which provides sport, music and arts projects for around 300 young people during the summer holidays in east Oldham.

The scheme cut crime by a staggering 66% in August and cost a fraction of the cost of dealing with the crime itself.

### **Sutton - Neighbourhood Wardens**

Feeling safer on the streets and in the home is a vitally important role for the council and in the northern wards of Wrythe Green and Wandle Valley a new scheme of Neighbourhood Wardens is being piloted. Working in conjunction with the police to reduce crime and disorder the wardens wear sweatshirts and mostly travel around by bike They

are not intended to intervene directly but as a reassuring and visible presence whose job it is to report abandoned vehicles graffiti and health and safety issues. There are 62 CCTV cameras in trouble spots with 24 hour surveillance to improve Community safety.

It is a partnership of traders, police and the council, which has acted both as deterrent and also as an aid to prosecutions, particularly with the sudden increase of car dumping.

### **Liverpool - "Alley gating"**

Liverpool City Council has installed more than 2,000 alleygates across the city with plans for another 6,000 in the coming years.

Alleygates block off access to the alleyways behind terraced housing so that only residents can get access and are proving very effective in cutting not just crime but also graffiti, flytipping and vandalism.

## Chapter 3

# Local Economy and Regeneration

**L**ocal jobs and local opportunities for small and larger businesses to thrive is quite rightly one of the key preoccupations of all Local Authorities. The council itself cannot directly influence the National economy although it is influenced by it but it can act as a buffer against unemployment by encouraging diversification, ‘growing’ it’s own enterprise with training schemes and starter business units.

Attracting inward investment is only part of the story - safeguarding existing industries and traditional ways of life are equally important.

Following the regenerative success of landmark schemes like the Tate at St Ives and the Eden Project large scale architectural developments have also been consciously used to redefine the identity and public perception of a city or community. Manchester and Stockport have both succeeded with partnership developments and more recently the Bath and Sheffield Millenium projects are still under construction.

The development of Farmers Markets and specific promotion for local producers linked to shops and restaurants have provided new outlets, local credit unions and LETS schemes have resulted in new ways of trading and saving.

Historically tourism has been vital to rural areas and support for small hotels and bed and breakfast operators with promotion and leaflets is essential. More recently, in areas badly hit, councils have set up special funds to help with recovery from Foot and Mouth and equally importantly Councils have consciously used their discretion on business rates relief to help maintain shops and Post Offices in rural communities.

Local skills shortages, or in some cases the redeployment of existing skills have been addressed by local council /business training programmes which will provide for future needs.

## Regenerating and reviving our cities and communities

### *Sheffield - Urban Regeneration Company*

Sheffield saw a major economic revival under the Liberal Democrats. An inward investment agency set up to attract new jobs is quickly seeing success. Unemployment is falling ahead of the national trend and the employment gap between different parts of the city - which has blighted Sheffield over the past two decades – is narrowing.

Sheffield is one of three cities piloting Urban Regeneration Companies. The URC forms a key part of the group’s drive to improve the economic status of the City.

Sheffield One is, in partnership with the City Council, spearheading the moves to create a new city centre. Not just another shopping arcade in the centre of the city but a significant natural part of the Centre, which exists 24 hours a day and which people can feel comfortable with.

The centre-piece of the £130 Million ‘Heart of the City’ project which will create three new public squares is the Winter Gardens which recently opened to public and critical acclaim.

## **Mid Suffolk - local grants**

Grants to village shops have been available through a project to support and refurbish essential village services in areas with a population of up to 5,000.

19 shops have so far received grants in the past two years and have reported an average increase in turnover of 33%, which in some cases has saved them from closure. The grants are up to £25,000 for internal improvements such as new shelving and are intended to enable shops, pubs and garages to continue in business at the 'heart' of village life.

## **Basingstoke - business partnership**

Basingstoke have not only attracted inward investment but also retained and developed the businesses they already have.

They have set up a Business Partnership to enable existing and incoming businesses to work more closely together. So often there is a perception that 'the Council', Fire services and Police operate in a way that hinders expansion and establishment of local enterprise and that they are frequently 'caught out' by infringements of planning or fire regulations. This local business partnership creates a new relationship working with companies to provide practical advice and information on any relevant legislation and early notification of forthcoming changes so that businesses can prepare well in advance.

It covers eight main areas of Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health, Business Rates, Trading Standards, Fire and Rescue, Social Services and Police with a 'hotline' and named people in each category.

## **Promoting Tourism**

### **Swindon**

Most people would associate day trip visitors with Blackpool or Scarborough but this expanding area involves a different sort of day-tripper. They are either business people visiting companies or families coming in to The McArthur Glen Designer Outlet or the Great Western Steam Museum. It may not be buckets and spades but it brings in £216 million per year to the local economy!

## **Salisbury**

It has been made easier for tourists to stop in Salisbury, with a dedicated drop off point run by one of the 'ambassadors' or car parking wardens, coaches then go off to the coach park, where there are 'comfort' facilities provided for the drivers. Coaches are then summoned when they are required to return to the pick up points. Adopting this method the City will not become overrun by tourists, but will be able to maintain growth with an acceptable balance.

What tourists and visitors say they like about the city is the ease with which they can move about and particularly the 'cafe culture', which exists around the historic market square. Traffic has been virtually removed from the area and some dozen or so pubs and cafes encouraged to provide outdoor dining facilities.

## **Portsmouth**

Towards the end of the last war around 23,000 men working in shifts had repaired and refitted nearly 3,000 ships and up to two warships and five submarines could be built in the base each year. The post war decline was such that the last ship HMS Andromeda was completed in 1968 and although there is currently some revival by Vospers it was clear that the City's economic dependence on the Navy was over and had to be replaced by other sources of economic regeneration. 'Sunny Southsea' was felt to be insufficient as a draw for the public and so Portsmouth was developed capitalising on its maritime history and the obvious assets of Nelson's Flagship Victory and HMS Warrior the first 'ironclad'. The Flagship still had 208,154 visitors in 2000, more than the total of the more recently added attractions of the Pyramids Resort Centre, sea life Aquarium and the D Day Museum.

Portsmouth has now grown from 1.5 million visitors in 1988 to 4.7 million in 1998 with a value of £178.5 Million, which in turn supports nearly 7000 jobs.

## **Cheltenham**

Cheltenham's history and economy has been as a tourist resort throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Shopping is the single most common reason and this generates some six million day visitors per year, who spend £150 Million. Since

the Second World War, it has built on its existing architectural and retail attractions with its Festivals of Music and Literature, and National Hunt Racing festivals, employing some of the 6,000 people who work in the tourist industry. As a centre for foreign visitors it has developed its educational potential through a number of recently established language schools.

## Regeneration in Liverpool

### *Liverpool Direct*



A unique partnership, worth at least £300m over ten years, between Liverpool City Council and BT will slash town hall red tape, improve customer services and at the same time safeguard hundreds of jobs.

The new organisation marks a first for local government in Europe and will see the first large-scale secondment of employees from the public sector to the private sector.

The new undertaking will be made up of all council ICT (Information Communication Technology) services and the council's call centre,

Liverpool Direct - the largest of its type in the country. These are set to be followed by Revenues and Benefits, Human Resources and Payroll later in the year.

The deal paves the way for continuous investment in modernising long-neglected services and achieving the council's ambition of putting the citizen at the heart of everything it does. In order to radically reduce waiting times and help resolve customer enquiries straight away, a new computerised Customer Relationship Management service will be implemented. New applications will be introduced allowing the customer to contact the

council how they want, when they want - by phone, fax, e-mail, interactive TV or face-to-face.

### **"New Co"**

Liverpool city council is to create a pioneering new company to help run services for other local authorities - creating jobs and bringing in revenue.

'NewCo' will use the expertise of the city council's workforce to offer consultancy, products and services to other councils and private companies.

It is estimated the new company will generate millions of pounds of extra income for the city council, create hundreds of jobs and raise Liverpool's profile as a leader of change in local government.

'NewCo' will be unique in local government and officials in Whitehall believe it could be a blueprint to drive up standards in councils across the country.

The city council will have a controlling 51% stake in the new company, whilst joint venture partners BT and Enterprise will each be offered a 10% interest in return for an investment of £250,000 - which will mean there is no cost to council tax payers in setting it up. Equity could also be offered to other private sector partners with which the city council has an existing relationship.

'NewCo' will offer a range of services, which will vary from using the highly successful Liverpool Direct to run call centres for other local councils to consultancy work. This will generate valuable income for the city council which will be invested in improving services.

By taking on the running of services for other councils they will create jobs and increase the amount of money they can spend on services. It will cost nothing because the money being used to set 'NewCo' up is coming from the private sector.

### **Anfield stadium**

More than 4,000 residents living near Liverpool FC's Anfield Stadium, after consultation, voted in favour of a proposed move by the club to Stanley Park.

Proposals included a comprehensive regeneration of the Anfield and Breckfield area and

a move to allow Liverpool Football club to build a new stadium at the car park end of the park. The proposed stadium would also include the Vernon Sangster Sports Centre and an Education Innovation Centre. A hotel and conference centre within the stadium is also being considered and the current ground will be used to create a public plaza or open space as part of a Village Centre. In every one of the 12 areas of Anfield and Breckfield in which the consultation was carried out there was clarity over the way they would like to see the area regenerated.

Transport proposals including more traffic calming measures, extensions to the residents parking zone, the introduction of park and ride schemes and bus priority measures were supported by 70% of residents. Leaflets outlining the proposals were delivered to nearly 19,000 houses in the Anfield and Breckfield area and a 12 page booklet explaining the proposals produced. Meetings with a number of groups took place and a postal survey of businesses conducted. As well as the individual household survey the study also involved Have Your Say days and a hotline in which residents could get information.

## **Architectural competition for Fourth Grace Prize**

Four renowned architects competed to design the Fourth Grace on Liverpool's renowned Waterfront. The Fourth Grace site as a once in a lifetime opportunity to make an architectural statement on Liverpool's waterfront that would be witnessed by the world. The Fourth Grace will complement the existing Three Graces - the Liver Building, the Cunard Building and the Port of Liverpool Building.

The project to build a Fourth Grace results from a partnership between Liverpool Vision, Northwest Development Agency, National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside, Liverpool City Council and Culture Company, and former site owners the Robert Smith Group. The development will not only be a significant factor in Liverpool's future but also to the region as a whole, making a considerable contribution to the region's economy, creating jobs, boosting investment and encouraging visitors to England's North West.'

## Chapter 4

# Environment and Sustainability

**E**nvironmental sustainability has always been at the heart of Liberal Democrat Policy, because a degraded natural environment damages personal health and quality of life but also impoverishes economies and weakens or even destroys local communities. Sustainability also means that Liberal Democrats will reshape the local economy to build jobs and wealth whilst protecting, not destroying the environment.

The Rio Earth Summit of 92 may seem a fading memory but the decisions made and positions taken through the development of Agenda 21 have had a very significant impact on Local Authority performance and attitudes.

Liberal Democrats have led the way in implementing and innovating sustainable policies for Local Authorities but it is not something, which councils can 'impose'. It is the responsibility of all citizens and communities to actively promote a more sustainable way of life, which is why those initiatives planned in consultation and partnership with the community, are invariably more successful.

Liberal Democrats also believe that environmental policy is not something, which can be bolted on to a policy programme as a desirable afterthought but that every action in small and larger ways contributes to the ultimate goal of sustainability.

Despite financial restrictions considerable success can be achieved where Local Authorities have responsibility for highways transportation planning and waste disposal where policy changes can make big differences to public attitudes and quality of life. Recycling and kerbside collection has the double benefit of increasing recycling rates in line with targets but also to encourage a change in attitude and awareness as far as the public is concerned. EMAS or an environmental audit of existing practices can lead to simply doing things in a different way, which can demonstrate to others a more environmentally sustainable approach.

Small-scale environmental enhancement schemes which clean up 'grot spots' and make them pleasant instead of unsightly and dangerous. Clearing the oppressive squalor of graffiti, fly-posting, litter and chewing gum transforms urban areas into people friendly places. Initiatives of this kind consistently come top of the list in public consultation and give a high profile demonstration of the Council's determination to make their communities better places to live and work. This is part of 'Walking the Talk' whereby The Council's 'green' activities are seen to be a reality rather than an 'aspiration'.

## Improving recycling

### *Eastleigh - recycling*

Liberal Democrat controlled Eastleigh Borough Council is rightly proud of the fact that it has the second highest recycling rates in the country and the highest rate for dry recyclables. This has been achieved by having alternate weekly collections of recyclable and non-recyclable waste, encouraging home composting through issuing over 15,000 home composters, having plenty of bring sites for glass, textiles and other recyclable materials and an on-going promotion and education campaign. However this means that the recycling targets set for them by the government; 33% for 2003/4 and 40% for 2005/6, are all the harder to achieve.

They have launched two major initiatives to ensure they achieve their targets. Until now garden waste has been collected separately but has not been

good enough quality for composting. This is all set to change following a successful bid to the Waste Minimisation Fund. A collection vehicle, a Rotopress RCV, has been ordered, which because of its cylindrical design ensures that when garden waste is delivered to Hampshire's composting facility the material is still in top condition.

Residents will be able to purchase a large re-useable sack for £12 a year, which will be collected on a set day 52 weeks a year. The scheme will be launched in May and is expected to be very popular – adding 8% to the recycling rate, but is not intended to discourage home composting and Eastleigh will still be providing home composters for those able to do that.

The second initiative will encourage more glass recycling. A vehicle has been ordered which will be able to pick up smaller sized collection bins, about 240l, the same size as their larger wheelie bins. These bins will be located in sites unsuitable for the large bottle banks and will be dotted around places people visit regularly such as local shops and open spaces. They will enable people to drop off smaller quantities of glass hopefully within walking distance of their homes when otherwise they might have just put the glass in their black bins at home.

Using Focus, campaigners asked for suggestions as to suitable sites for these mini-recycling centres and had a very good response. This scheme will be launched shortly and is expected to quickly see positive results.

Promotion and education has always been a key element of their success so last year it was decided to develop this further by setting up a project in one part of the borough to work with local people, community organisations and the parish council to encourage and develop new ideas for increasing recycling.

The project was launched at a well-attended public meeting and a working group set up supported by their Recycling Officer. The Community Waste Action Project (CWAP) represents one refuse collection round so the group is able to monitor the success of the project on an on-going basis. It is expected that lessons learnt can be applied elsewhere in the borough possibly with other communities following the CWAP formula.

## **Bath - zero waste**

Environmental Issues have always been centre of the agenda when even in former Bath City days the recycling levels were at 25% and after a reorganisational slump are back there again now.

The DLO does the domestic refuse collection but there is a kerbside recycling contract let through Avon FoE who has a weekly collection, which is sorted by Foe often on the van and in parts of Clutton by horse and cart! There are numbers of 'bring' sites at supermarkets and the future emphasis is on 'reduce and recycle' to minimise landfill. A proposal for an incinerator outside Keynsham was supported by conservatives and Labour but defeated by Lib Dems.

A Liberal Democrat motion at a meeting of the Council's Waste Management Sub-Committee led to the adoption of a "zero waste vision". This makes Bath & North East Somerset the first council to adopt such a vision. Zero waste is a utopian aim. Rather like the desire to have zero car accidents on our roads, it is an aim to be worked towards rather than a reality that is likely ever to be realised. Nevertheless, this 20-year vision will revolutionise our thinking and action on waste.

Zero waste puts the responsibility for materials entering the waste stream at the front-end of their life-cycle - i.e. with the manufacturer - rather than at the back-end of the product's life (with the consumer). The responsibility lies with the manufacturer to contemplate how the product will be recycled before he even sells it, rather than for the customer to worry about how to dispose of it many months or years later.

Thanks to a Liberal Democrat resolution, all council documents - including the quarterly newspaper delivered to every household in the district - are printed on recycled paper. Although this decision was made some time ago, it was studiously ignored by large parts of the council until taken up once more by a member of the Liberal Democrats and finally implemented in 2001.



## Sutton - recycling

**"You have led by example and I expect other authorities to emulate your good practice."**

**Environment Minister Michael Meacher, congratulating Sutton Council on their latest environmental award, April 2001**

The Council has now come through the setback and embarrassment of the incorrect calculation of the recycling figures and a full inquiry will be published. The fact remains that despite the recent setback Sutton is still one of the top recycling authorities in the country with about 33%. The error was largely because household waste had contaminated recyclables and therefore could not be sorted. To help the process in the future and avoid confusion, the council has now decided to change to a weekly collection of household waste in a brown wheelie bin with a fortnightly collection of recyclables in a green bin.

Sutton's successful green garden waste service has returned. Each household has received two clear LBS re-usable sacks and a calendar with collection dates. Garden waste will then be collected fortnightly from the kerbside and sent to a central composting site.

Up to a maximum of four sacks can be collected from each household per collection. The sacks last for the whole season but residents can purchase extra ones from the main council offices and from libraries at one pound each.

Sutton is one of the few London boroughs to provide free collection of garden waste and last year Sutton collected 3,274 tonnes of green garden waste which represented a 22% increase on the previous year's total.

## Vale of White Horse

Have reduced waste collected through a system of charging for green sacks to dispose of garden waste. The sacks cost 65p each and the policy has not been very popular with residents. However the amount of rubbish sent to landfills is down by 2.8% - against a national increase of 3%. This has been put down to the green sack policy by

officers and is regarded as a success although it is hard to sell and has been a PR disaster.

## Oldham's new 'Green Service' a hit!

Efforts to improve recycling and make the Borough cleaner through the new free bulky waste collection service are paying off. More and more waste items such as suites, chairs, cookers, beds, mattresses, washers, tables and carpets are being collected. Not only is this cutting down on illegal dumping of these types of items, it is also helping the Council raise recycling levels as white goods like cookers and scrap metal items will be removed from the waste stream for reuse.

## Lewes

Emphasis was given to establishing recycling centres of which there are now more than 130 throughout the district. In addition there is a Community Recycling Centre in Lewes where a team of adults with learning disabilities is employed through Brighton Social Services to sort plastic bottles and aluminium.

The recycling figure is 15.38% of household waste and 18.4% including white goods and the furniture repair and recycling scheme. There is also a successful home composting scheme with more than 3,000 compost bins sold to residents converting more than 900 tonnes each year. Other initiatives include spectacles for overseas, Tools for Self Reliance and a scrap store. Lewes works in co-operation with other authorities in the East Sussex Recycling Consortium to promote waste reduction. Lewes is one of the few authorities to have been accredited under the EMAS scheme and has an ongoing LA21 programme.

## Green energy

### Woking - local community energy systems

In 2001 Woking Borough Council gained the Queen's Award for Enterprise: Sustainable Development. This was awarded because of its energy services activities in the development of sustainable local community energy systems.

This was achieved through its environmental charter and energy efficiency policy in which the council has introduced a number of ground-breaking measures to protect the environment and

reduce pollution. The council has adopted a variety of energy and water saving techniques for Council-owned buildings; the revenue saved as a result of these measures is then re-invested in other environmental measures to further improve energy efficiency. The council has reduced energy consumption in its own buildings by 40% and has improved the energy efficiency of the Borough's public and private sector housing by about 17%.

Woking has a sustainable checklist developed with the local agenda 21 group; this checklist encompasses the main themes of sustainable development. This is a cross-cutting issue which involves all areas of the council.

In the new climate change strategy agreed in November 2002 Woking is investigating the integration of waste minimisation strategies, material reclamation facilities, anaerobic digestion and gasification techniques alongside combined heat and power. This should lead to a reduction in the need for landfill to at least nearly a tenth of its 2000/01 level by 2010/11.

Water conservation has run as part of this work and the council has introduced various water efficiency/conservation technologies in its own buildings including waterless urinals, swimming pool water reclamation and when Woking Park's Fuel Cell Combined Heat and Power (CHP) scheme is completed, approximately 633,000 litres of 100% of pure water will be generated every year as the clean exhaust of the fuel cell CHP.

Under the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) the council has implemented a number of public/private HECA schemes for private sector households, including free energy efficiency advice, insulation discount and tackling fuel poverty schemes. Over 7,500 households took advantage of these schemes in 5 years.

A photovoltaic roof is now being installed in the OAP accommodation at Brockhill alongside CHP technology. Its town centre pay and display machines are powered by off grid photovoltaic panels, and since their installation in 1997 they have never lost power.

Woking Borough Council has pioneered local authority production and supply of green electricity. The council has established a private wire network, which distributes locally produced electricity sold directly to consumers. Priors Croft comprises of 33 flats for the elderly and it was the first residential

area in the UK to receive hot water, heating and electricity supplied through private wires by an on-site CHP. There has been 100% take up on the scheme and this scheme alone saves 500,000kwh in energy conservation with a reduction of carbon dioxide emissions of 178.5 tonnes and 3.5 tonnes of sulphur dioxide a year. Residents save up to £130 on their heating bill each year. Payback is achieved for the council within eight years.

Since the success of this scheme there is a rolling programme to install these schemes to all OAP schemes and also to, where possible link in neighbouring facilities including day centres.

The Council has now set up an energy and environmental service company, which is wholly owned by the council called Thameswey Ltd. and this company, has set up an unregulated joint venture energy services company called Thameswey Energy Ltd. backed by a Danish company. The Council owns 19% of the company. This company provides green energy services to other local authorities, public bodies and the private sector using CHP networks.

Woking is also installing the first UK's fuel cell, which will support the Pool in the Park's heating and power systems and the lighting in the park. It will also provide energy to the leisure centre.

## **Waste management and disposal**

### ***Milton Keynes - tackling the incineration issue***

The word 'incinerator' strikes a chill into the heart of most Lib Dems and is guaranteed to raise the temperature all round. The issue becomes more acute when it arrives almost out of the blue in the form of a planning application only two weeks after taking control. It can easily divide the group or at the least so preoccupy them that Manifesto promises are put on hold while the arguments rage.

In the case of Milton Keynes it was a proposal with some 'Green' credentials but from a private waste company, which had a bad record and was not trusted by either councillors or public. Their past performance at their main landfill site had resulted in an existing and organised group called PALS (People Against Landfill Sites) who were ready to swing into full protest mode especially

because it was believed that Lib Dems were in favour. This rumour was not surprising considering that Labour Councillors surrounded the site.

After a special group meeting a statement was issued to the contrary, and the group started to work with protesters and local people. A packed Council meeting was stopped so that people could get into the chamber, a public meeting for 400 was held in a local church and then Bletchley Leisure Centre was booked for the planning meeting to accommodate 1000. The message was one of access and listening, which reduced hostility and turned alienation to advantage.



### **Liverpool - Bulky Bob's**

Liverpool have set up a new service ("Bulky Bob's") that collects bulky household waste from houses, repairs and recycles the goods and then supplies cheap furniture to new social housing tenants.

## **Keeping the streets clean**

### **Bath - Keep Britain Tidy Survey**

The Liberal Democrat budget in 2000/01 allocated an extra £75,000 to improve levels of cleanliness throughout the district. This resulted in a significant improvement in the levels of cleanliness; exceptionally high scores in the Tidy Britain Group survey confirmed this. These results can be attributed both to increased levels of street washing and a pro-active and co-operative role played by the Liberal Democrat spokespeople on both the client and the contractor sides of the council.

### **Sutton - Cleaning up the estates**

Following a Housing Best Value Review, Sutton Council is now focusing housing caretaking resources to give a better service to residents. The Council is investing in new mobile teams and providing more modern equipment to respond to the growing problem of clearing bulk refuse from Sutton's estates.

In the first six weeks of operation, the Mobile Bulk Waste Team cleared 78 tonnes of rubbish dumped on the estates.



### **Milton Keynes - Graffiti busting**

Graffiti is now being removed by the Council and by Parish Councils who have ordered free graffiti busting kits. Council has removed over 2,000 tags.

Private owners can have graffiti removed free and a special Graffiti-buster van and specialist equipment are on order to speed up the process and increase response rates.

A reporting hotline is being set up for graffiti, pavements, abandoned cars etc.

The Council is exploring measures to restrict the sale of spray paints to people under 18 and a summit meeting is to be organised to investigate other preventative action.

Community service offenders will be used to help remove graffiti.

### **Sutton - graffiti campaign**

Reports of graffiti sightings and requests for clean-ups have gone down since the start of Sutton's anti-graffiti publicity campaign, "Don't be tagged for life - graffiti is a crime", over two months ago. New initiatives include letters being sent to parents whose son or daughter has been seen in a large group of youths suspected of causing disturbances and anti-social behaviour. Sutton Police, among the partners in the campaign with Sutton Council and London General Buses, are also using strategically placed cameras sited across the borough to catch vandals in the act. The Mobile Graffiti Team cleans 40-50 square metres of graffiti a day from Sutton's estates, that's the equivalent in

length of over 20 football pitches cleaned since the service commenced.

## Protecting the green belt

### Winchester

One of the main environmental issues was the need to resist attempts by developers to build excessive numbers of houses on greenfield sites. The county structure plan had accepted 42,000 but the distribution would mean invasions of greenfield areas to the north and West. Consultation concentrated on infrastructure factors to ensure not only that the homes would have adequate jobs shops schools and leisure facilities but that existing villages and Towns would remain pleasant places to live in and work.

There was also significant pressure to get a larger proportion of 'affordable homes' through the local plan process. Partnership working with villages through 'Design Days' encouraged them to take responsibility for the environment in and around their own communities and identify improvement areas.

## Corporate approach

### New Forest

New Forest published a 78 page comprehensive report on the state of their local environment in 1998, which forms the basis of the Council's position and future policies.

Public consultation played a big part in the recycling strategy-it kept it simple. Dry recyclable material is collected at the same time as the normal waste but in a different sack. With only 80% of the district covered the total waste recovered meets the Government target of 25% and is expected to exceed 28% when the whole district is involved. Schools have been targeted as part of a heavy investment in education and promotion and many have taken up the offer of a Council appointed Environment science officer.

The District is also involved in one of the most innovative waste management partnerships in the country - collaboration between all District, Unitary and County Councils to develop an integrated strategy, which will allow local communities to recover and recycle up to 40% of their waste.

They have also had real success with Diana Maddock's Home Energy Conservation Act and have appointed a full-time HECA officer. The two HEC Action bids in 97 and 98 were successful and New Forest will lead the 99 bid for the whole of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

### West Berkshire

Their LA21 programme 'Share the Present, Shape the Future' was launched in '99 with the intention of involving the community in defining and pursuing sustainability objectives.

The environment of Newbury itself has been improved by pedestrianising Northbrook and Bartholomew Street. This was driven forward by the shop owners and the Kennet Centre who contributed £300,000. It has resulted in an improved 'footfall' of 11% and an increase in turnover of 15%. Lib Dems have had to resist Tory objections and pressure to provide an unnecessary car park.

Apart from the introduction of a kerbside collection of paper and glass for recycling and the development of a waste strategy the main achievement in this area has been the restoration of Greenham Common, formerly the high profile American air base.

### Liverpool - saving paper, saving money

Liverpool City Council has so far saved £100,000 - and scrapped enough files to fill a football pitch - by storing paper records on CDs.

## Chapter 5

# Transport - bicycles to buses

**W**herever we look at Britain's public transport system it is not a pretty sight. It is expensive antiquated and inefficient. It is also underfunded to the point where in some cases it has become dangerous, where accidents have occurred because of a lack of proper routine maintenance.

Liberal Democrats believe that a decent public transport system is fundamental to an equitable and environmentally sustainable society. That an efficient system will largely reduce dependence on wasteful and polluting private transport especially for commuting to work and for freight delivery.

Our policies are therefore intended to:

- Reduce pollution and global warming.
- Reduce congestion in towns and cities and return them to the people as pleasant living and working environments.
- Reduce unnecessary time lost in travelling and commuting and so increase economic performance.
- Reduce the risk of death or injury, especially to school age children.

Deregulation of buses has caused serious problems as the private companies compete for the most profitable routes and others are ignored and prices are so high that it's often cheaper for people to share a taxi! Late night buses are rare so people unable to get home are often tempted to walk or hitch a lift with all the risks obviously involved. Old-fashioned services are not equipped for people with disabilities.

Liberal Democrat priorities on local councils seek to increase use and improve social inclusion

in both urban and rural areas. They include Concessionary fare schemes, new partnership arrangements to sustain old routes and develop new ones, dial a ride schemes, Park and Ride, car sharing bus priorities, safer routes to school, increasing traffic calming and 20mph zones. They also include the development of a network of cycle paths and footpaths both for work and leisure.

Political opponents have often tried to suggest that the range of policies is 'anti car' which is quite wrong, they recognise the essential role of the car particularly in rural areas but discourage inessential use or excessive use which actively harms other people and the environment.

We believe that a properly maintained network of roads and pavements is essential to the safety welfare and economic prosperity of the community.

### ***Bath - tackling the traffic***

The City of Bath was not built for cars. However, surveys found that a large percentage of the traffic travelling through the north-south pinch-point in the city centre was through traffic, without business in the city centre. To combat this a priority access point (bus gate) was introduced, effectively cutting the north-south access through the city. The bus gate is a traffic light fixed to red during peak hours that can only be changed by the approach of a vehicle bearing a transponder. Some of the

vehicles that have transponders include emergency service vehicles, local delivery vans, taxis and buses.

Following a request made by Bath Liberal Democrats, an examination into the way staff are reimbursed for travel on official council business, was undertaken. Although it was revealed that the number of staff claiming the bicycle allowances is very small, it was believed that there was an opportunity here to encourage more to consider using an alternative mode of transport.

A motion from the Liberal Democrats has now given potential cyclists an incentive to leave their four-wheeled friend at home, and since October 1, 2001, the staff bicycle allowance has been 40p per mile - a rate comparable with that paid for other modes of transport. This allowance is also applicable to members.

In the Transport Bill Don had to argue the case with bemused ministers for special terms for Tour Buses!



### **South Somerset - taxibus service**

Yeovilink is a new 'taxibus' service designed to provide the safe and friendly service of a taxi for the price of a bus fare and operates Monday to Saturday evening to and from the surrounding villages into Yeovil. Passengers must be members of the scheme which is free and can then pre-book to travel on any of the set times but can be collected from their own front door.

### **Harrogate - traffic control**

Traffic control has been an essential consideration especially in the elegant centre, part of which is now pedestrianised. It has been the usual balance of enabling and encouraging shoppers by discouraging commuters and long stay parkers from the centre. However a new multi storey is providing 850 spaces with an overhead walkway to the town centre which will help both. Traffic flow will also

be further helped by computerisation and there is still some Free parking near the Town Centre! To enhance the attractiveness of Knaresborough for visitors a Park and Ride scheme operates between each end of the town. In the main town centres 38 CCTV cameras are in operation to promote community safety.

### **New Forest - Car Parking**

The problems of introducing car-parking charges into an area where they have always been free are obvious. To do it without alienating the public and undermining the viability of tourism and Town centres is difficult. To do it with the active political opposition of the newly Tory County Council is near impossible. The consultation, although it took 18 months, was claimed by the Tories to have been rushed and not handled sensitively and the District is now locked in an appeal struggle through GOSE against the County who refused permission in four towns and villages. NFDC has also had to move from universal charging to allowing permits for residents and commuters except in coastal areas and only charging visitors. This has however not had any adverse effect on the Town centres but left the District Tories with the difficulty of whether or not to include the £213,000 revenue in their opposition budget figures.

### **Sutton - car sharing and alternative fuel**

Although transport is generally good in Sutton changes in social circumstances has meant a big increase in car ownership. Ten Years ago only half the households had a car but now older people have been replaced by young families often with 2 cars. Parking has been decriminalised and 'residents parking' introduced in '96. It is currently at £25 a permit with no taper or restrictions on numbers. Cars and congestion remain a problem exacerbated by the tendency for families to buy a large car because they need the space for occasional weekends or to pack everything in for the holiday. To reduce the number of these cars sitting around the streets Sutton in partnership with Avis has introduced a 'Carshare Club'. A membership fee of £150 entitles people to rent an appropriate car by the hour or cheaply just when they need it. It is an EU funded scheme, which issues members with an electronic key, which automatically records the

hours and miles used. Statistically 6 cars are removed from the roads for every person who joins.

The council has also pioneered the use of electric cars including pool cars in the belief that it is the council's function to take risks and lead the way by example. It has done the same with LPG for buses, meals on wheels and even refuse vehicles, although the latter were less satisfactory. Both however were still on the road during the Fuel crisis! Bus priority has always been a problem because of the width of the roads for bus lanes but the group is now working on this and the plans to extend Hoppa buses as part of a package to improve public transport.

### **Winchester - Green Transport Week**

Their annual Green Transport Week is more than the Car Free Day type of gesture. It concentrated on alternative transport with petrol-gas dual fuel vehicles including their own environmental Health or dog warden vans which use LPG for short trips and automatically switch to petrol for longer ones. Buses have been a particular success with Park and Ride a reality and Solent Blue Line being persuaded to re-equip the main Winchester routes with £1million investment in new buses featuring low floor access, wheelchair ramps and low emission engines. Another extremely effective move has been to decriminalise parking and take over the functions itself. It is surprising how much sharper the 'wardens' are when it becomes a local authority concern!

### **West Berkshire**

Liberal Democrats have increased the amount of money spent on roads, compared with Berkshire County Council, introduced over 30 speed limit schemes in the villages with police co-operation and added a number of traffic calming measures. They have also increased the number of rural buses and continued to support the Readibus and Handybus schemes for transporting the elderly and disabled.

The council is working with Vodafone to introduce a "Green" travel plan for their employees and intend to bring in a "Green" commuting plan for their own employees in due course. It has also just been awarded £1.72M borrowing approval for a package of measures including safe routes to

school, better routes for cyclists and improvements to rural bus services.

### **Portsmouth**

Portsmouth like other authorities such as Canterbury and Winchester has decriminalised its parking and moved from 8 of the old Traffic Wardens to 44 of its own parking wardens. At the same time it has changed to residents parking in Fratton and around the main station to control commuter traffic which didn't just park for the day but quite often for a whole week while they were away on holiday! Fratton has led on the issue because of its own station and consequent parking difficulties. Lib Dems insisted on full consultation and emerged with a satisfactory formula whereby the first permit was free and the second was £50. This was a change from the initial proposal where the first was £25. A concession was also made that parking was free for the first six months from its implementation in June so the first review and charges start this December! In a seemingly 'retro' move meters were introduced for on street parking to a chorus of predictable protest from Tories against the 'March of the Meters' but more importantly the initial disquiet of the traders changed to support when they realised that 'turnover' increased significantly. Park and Ride in Portsmouth is as yet limited to the peak Christmas period when sites are 'borrowed' in the north of the city at Cosham.

### **Salisbury**

Integrated transport policy was to be a major plank in the thinking on the local environment. Park and Ride together with a change from long to short stay in central car parks and a team of 'ambassadors', or parking wardens, to reduce illegal parking and traffic congestion was planned. The ultimate objective was to make the city centre car free and pedestrian friendly.

### **Oxford**

The priority as in many counties is to redress the lack of maintenance funding of the last few years, which has resulted in several smaller rural roads being declared as 'failed'. The challenge is go beyond this to develop a transport strategy, which deals with the environmental, and congestion issues, which are made more difficult as a tourism centre.

The new Transport plan is looking for £90million of Government funding of which nearly 40% will be used for repairing roads and bridges. When the Government scrapped the dualing of the A40 a more innovative scheme was developed instead, at a cost of £9 million, for a new bus lane into Oxford from Witney to encourage people to leave their cars at home. It was expanded both ways after consultation revealed the obvious fact that the public would be more likely to use it if it was able to get them home as well! Major traffic changes had already been introduced to the centre of Oxford in '99, which included closure to through traffic and some daytime closure to general traffic. These restrictions however were combined with a bus priority route around the city centre and the new integrated strategy improved schemes for cycling and walking.

The results have shown a drop in off-street parking, an increased use of Park and Ride and corresponding reductions in air pollution.

### ***Dorset - Walking to school***

Dorset co-ordinates the hugely successful National Walk to School Week, which involved one and a half million children last year.



## Chapter 6

# Sport and Leisure

**W**ider opportunities for the creative use of leisure time are essential to stable, flourishing communities with facilities available for both professional and amateur use. Individuals should have the access and encouragement to develop their skills whether they are skateboarding, team games or training for the next Olympics!

The benefits to health and well-being are statistically proven but the contribution to personal achievement and self esteem are equally important. Obvious facilities include parks, sports centres, swimming pools, and playing fields. Less common but equally important are display rooms for artists and craft workers, childrens facilities in museums, art galleries and libraries and MUGA's (Multiple Use Games Areas) which are now supported through NOF (New Opportunities Fund). The maintenance and continuation of many of these facilities have been threatened by sustained lack of funding by central government and some councils have been forced down the the route of externalised management or Trust Status.

Liberal Democrats support Community Sports Plans, bringing together councils, schools and sports clubs to make best use of facilities and encourage 'minority sports'. We would also seek to develop sport in schools not just in dual-use terms but allowing greater provision of sport and physical education in the curriculum.

### **West Berkshire**

One of the needs identified when Liberal Democrats took control was the shortage of recreation facilities. They immediately undertook a programme which saw the restoration of the Corn Exchange which the Tories had left to rot; into a theatre, arts and conference centre. They repaired the swimming pool at the Northcroft Centre in Newbury, built a sports centre with a number of pitches at the Henwick field in Thatcham, built

swimming pools and leisure centres at schools in Burghfield, Hungerford and Thatcham and improved the leisure centre at Tilehurst. A Nature Discovery Centre was also opened at one of the lakes in Thatcham.



### **Vale of White Horse**

Have built three Leisure Centres where previously there had been poor provision of swimming facilities in particular. This was in response to a survey of residents, which clearly demonstrated a need for swimming facilities. The newest, a tennis and leisure centre in Abingdon, has far exceeded targets since it opened and is expected to have received a million customers within its first year.

## **St Albans**

In an area where the growth of private golf clubs and fitness centres seems endless the Council has insisted that its own facilities are available to all residents. The management of the Council's leisure facilities was privatised by the Tories, but the fixing of charges and the overall programming of the various facilities remains with the Council. Under Lib Dem control the Council has always been clear on its priorities at budget time when admission charges are discussed.

Activities which are mainly used by wage earning residents take the brunt of any price increases. Admission prices for juniors, OAP's and those on benefit are protected and subsidised. Prices for children's holiday activity camps are set so that it is cheaper for the third and subsequent children in a family to attend.

St Albans regard themselves as pioneers for swimming and believe that it is the most important of all the leisure facilities provided by the Council. Therefore as a positive move every year the cost of swimming and swimming instruction is held down to encourage all residents to learn to swim.

People with a disability should be able to enjoy all aspects of leisure. Jointly with the County Council St Albans has funded an officer whose aim is to help people with a learning disability integrate into the community through leisure.

## **Liverpool - Giving parks back to the people**

When the Liberal Democrats won power in Liverpool, one of their first acts was to save Penny Lane playing field, where England footballers Steve McManaman and Robbie Fowler had played as youngsters, from being sold off, as Labour had planned. They decided the best way to protect Liverpool's green heritage, and ensure it remained available for England stars of the future, was to give the playing fields to a community trust - run by the people of Penny Lane.

## Chapter 7

# Arts, Culture and Heritage

**Culture is one of our greatest assets. It is important to us all in our day to day lives but is also a link between our past, present and future. Cultural activities, interests and places play an essential role in enhancing the quality of life for both individuals and communities.**

Culture can bring communities together, it can evolve as a community evolves but it is created and developed by the people who live in it. Essentially it is about improving the quality of life for all, allowing people both to derive pleasure from it as well as to fulfil their own potential and broaden their horizons. The Arts and Sport make a huge contribution to our society. They play an important role in both education and the economy and are a means of promoting social inclusion.

Recent Governments have not given the arts and sport the priority which they deserve. Liberal Democrats believe that Local Authorities have a key role to play in partnership with other agencies in the provision of parks, sports centres, playing fields, museums and libraries as well as encouraging a wide range of cultural and artistic events.

Local Cultural Strategies enable local authorities to highlight the role of culture in promoting the well-being of the area but they can also be instrumental in providing a future framework for action and drawing in funding from National and regional agencies such as the Arts Council and RDA's.

Despite the fact that most arts activity is not a statutory function Liberal Democrat councils have long employed Arts Development officers to work with community groups in an advisory capacity to help with administration or grant applications rather than direct funding. Co-ordinating the work with other departments such as planning has enabled a wider range of locally based activities to develop and flourish.

### **South Somerset DC**

Has recently sanctioned £1.2M to refurbish its own theatre to improve rehearsal facilities and dance space. The work will later also provide an exhibition space for visual arts to link the restaurant and the auditorium and enhance the 'cultural experience'.

Somerset Districts have combined with the County in an established Somerset Arts Alliance which discusses more strategic arts issues common to all authorities and also initiates projects with combined funding.

Somerset Arts week has been such an outstanding success that it has now expanded to two separate weeks in the east and west of the county. During each week the artists open their studios or exhibition spaces to the public who visit this 'arts trail' with the aid of a detailed coloured guide. It has extended the tourist season to the end of September and significantly helped the local economy and the artists with marketing.

### **Sutton - Sutton Festival**

Sutton Festival, put together by Sutton Council, Sutton Arts Council, local organisations and churches, boasts a multicultural community event, catering for all tastes and interests. The event features a full day of entertainment with dancers, street theatre, craft market and music.

## Swindon

Swindon may not be the first place people think of in terms of arts provision but cuts proposed in this area have been one of the strongest campaigning issues for local Lib Dems. Even their own Tory voters were shocked at the suggestion that 12 libraries would be cut and rushed to sign the Lib Dem petition and write letters of protest. The outrage was such that the idea was rapidly 'revised' but not before Tory credibility had been undermined as only two years before they had pledged to keep libraries open!

This wrong footedness continued with Swindon Dance Studios. The Cre8 Dance group are nationally and even internationally known and a justified source of local pride. They are based in the Victorian Town Hall because of the robustness of the sprung floor. The threat of cutbacks and relocation had to be suddenly abandoned when it was found that there was no other suitable floor in the whole Authority area. In the old military adage "Order and Counter-Order means Disorder" and Lib Dems have campaigned vigorously to make people aware of the ineptitude of Tory decision making .

## North Devon - supporting the arts

North Devon owns two theatres in Barnstaple and Ilfracombe. Management of the theatres was placed with the charity, the Theatres Trust, in March 2000, bringing £200,000 a year of extra support from the Arts Council.

Improving Libraries. Liverpool's programme of extending library opening hours has led to an increase of more than 25% in library usage.

Artwave the month long festival of visual art co-ordinated by Lewes Council has become bigger each year since it began in 1994. there are now over 150 artists taking part in 78 venues.

## Chapter 7

# Social Inclusion

**S**ocial justice underpins inclusion. For people to have access to and the freedom to enjoy services and facilities they must first be treated fairly and on an equal basis. Discrimination, age, whether old or young or disability are all barriers to involvement which affect specific sectors of the community but poverty and ‘hidden poverty’ is more general and less easily identifiable.

The combination of age, fear and lack of money can reduce some elderly residents to virtual isolation and families may be denied access to facilities because of the cost of transport and entrance charges.

Liberal Democrats welcome the strength, variety and creativity that comes from living in a multi-cultural society where people are free to express their own cultural, sexual, religious political and other personal preferences. The strength of a community is built on the diversity of the individuals within it and Liberal Democrats will fight for the right of those individuals and communities to make their own decisions about the issues which affect their everyday lives.

### **Bath**

Social inclusion is another key element of the Liberal Democrat programme with huge discrepancies between affluence and poverty. High House prices have meant that some people can simply no longer afford to live there and caused an increase in the HMO’s which operate under voluntary accreditation. The HMO’s are also boosted by a large student population who cannot afford flats which have better financial possibilities because of tourism. To accommodate the students in other ways Lib Dems have managed to include polling stations on campus sites.

### **Sutton**

The Traverse Project was set up by the London Borough of Sutton with funds gained from a successful bid to the DTLR (now the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, ODPM). It aims to help adults with a learning disability living in Sutton to gain certificated vocational training, employment, and to travel independently. For many adults with learning disabilities travelling to places proves very difficult unless accompanied by a carer. The Traverse project uses technology to ‘travel train’ individuals allowing them to travel to training courses, or even a place of work, without supervision.

The initial training is based in the classroom after which the user is given a hand held computer containing a virtual reality computer program. The program uses prompts to show a clear visual picture of the route, acting as a memory aid.

The Traverse project also aims to help people move into employment by training them in subjects such as horticulture, retail, work skills and food hygiene.

### **Sheffield - Elders Congress**

The Elders Congress is another first for Sheffield in bringing the council closer to the people it serves. Most public organisations are concerned about the hard to reach groups - those people who need to use services but are distant from them. The

Elderly are one of the most prominent of these groups.

The Elders Congress will be elected from the 50+ group - a free to join mass subscription organisation for all those in the city aged over 50. It will aim to reflect, though without the bureaucracy and time commitment, the Council and its various different committees.



### **Islington Meals on Wheels**

Islington Council are giving elderly residents more choice and flexibility by giving them the chance to make use of a new meals on wheels service which delivers frozen meals fortnightly. (Microwave ovens are provided free to users as required.)

### **Sheffield First**

The Sheffield First Partnership was established in May 1999 replacing the City Liaison Group. It is now one of the leading cross sector partnerships in the UK. It embraces the major public sector organisations (City Council, Health Authority, Police etc), the voluntary sector and the private sector (ranging from local branches of multinationals to locally based companies).

SFP has been invaluable in delivering agendas which the City Council, for reasons of history, government rules and today's society, can't deliver on its own.

### **Bath - Polling stations on university campuses**

For most students living on campus at the University of Bath and at Bath Spa University College, voting was difficult due to the location of the nearest polling station. In the 1999 local elections, only 25 out of the 1,500 students registered to vote actually did so. In contrast, in the 2001 General Elections, after the Liberal Democrats introduction of polling stations on both university campuses, more than 50 per cent of registered students exercised their right to vote.

### **Cheltenham - Helping the community**

Churchill Gardens Playgroup was one of nine organisations based at the local resource centre which used to share space in a former church hall in the Winston Churchill Gardens. They were moved into the Resource Centre which proved a big success. They now provide all-day childcare and have 30 children on their books.

Sylvia Salmon is coordinator of Cheltenham Community Projects: "Although the first phase is at an end there is still work to be done. The partnership recently refurbished an old industrial building on Grove Street, which we moved into in April. The rent we pay will help fund other regeneration projects."

The area has in fact improved significantly over the past five years. Several streets have benefited from home improvement grants, a group of young people helped create a community garden, as a direct result of Winston Churchill Gardens having had a major facelift.

The partnership and the council will continue to work to support the area. Projects lined up include floral displays as part of the 'lower high street in bloom' scheme, the Winston Churchill Gardens fun day, and more work to tackle run-down and dilapidated buildings.

### **Mid Suffolk**

When Barclays Bank closed their branch in Debenham the village felt the loss of another of its key facilities. The building is now being re-opened as a rural learning and resource centre after the success of a partnership project led by the Debenham Village Association. Both Suffolk County and Mid Suffolk District have also helped

with support and grant aid. The library and resource centre will complement each other with the library contributing to running costs and the resource centre will include computers with internet access and email. There will also be technology training and self-learning aids available.

### **Bath - Support for disabled councillors**

Following the election of a Liberal Democrat councillor with severe physical disabilities, it came to light that the council had no real support facilities available for elected members with disabilities. While it was well geared to supporting staff with a disability, there was little interest in supporting councillors in this situation. Furthermore, it transpired that there is a hole in the law, and while an employer is obliged to support an employee, they have no obligation to support an elected official.

The election by the Liberal Democrats of a new, pro-active training officer has seen a change in that. After a series of meetings with Democratic Services and Personnel, the Council has agreed that an elected member with disabilities has the same rights as a member of staff with disabilities, including the right to support in fulfilling his or her role. Support assistants (paid at an hourly rate) and access to a taxi account have now been implemented for councillors with disabilities.

Also, other needs are now being properly assessed including access to rooms where meetings

are held and the height of desks in rooms where meetings are held round a table.

Having achieved these specific support services, the new training officer has been tackling more fundamental issues, including measures to encourage people with other disabilities, such as blindness and deafness, to stand for election. It is hoped this will spread into other areas of public life in Bath and North East Somerset including school governors, magistrates and quangos.

### **Bath - Devolving parish council liaison meetings to local halls**

At least four times a year there is a meeting for chairs and clerks of parish councils to discuss matters of concern with representatives of Bath & North East Somerset Council.

Although this goes some way towards bringing democracy to the lowest possible level, there remains a large area of Bath and North East Somerset that has no parish council or equivalent, namely the city of Bath.

The Liberal Democrats have therefore instigated a requirement that parish council liaison meetings are no longer held in a central location instead, they will be held in suitable parish halls around the authority.

### **Liverpool - its own minimum wage!**

Liverpool City Council and its trades unions reached a groundbreaking agreement that saw over 3,000 of the council's lowest paid workers receive pay rises of up to £755 a year.

The extra increases - to be paid on top of nationally negotiated rises - are part of the Liberal Democrat council's drive to eliminate low pay among its workforce. Women are set to be the biggest winners when the council introduces its own minimum wage.

Traditionally low paid workers such as care workers, caretakers, security staff, gardeners, kitchen assistants and cleaners are among those whose pay rose when the city council abolished its bottom two manual pay grades.

By April 2005 the minimum rate of pay for all council staff in Liverpool will be Grade 3 - currently £5.14 an hour - £1.04 more than the national minimum wage.



## Chapter 8

# Housing

**T**he division between haves and have-nots in society is continuing to widen as the house price explosion puts the prospect of owning their own home totally out of reach of more young people. At the same time the Conservative 'Right to Buy' legislation has seriously reduced the available housing stock held by local authorities.

Government cuts to the social housing budget have forced Councils to sell their housing to Housing Associations or other Social Landlords which has generally meant an increase in rent levels. A combination of this and other social and demographic factors have resulted in huge increases in homelessness and 'hidden homelessness'. In families and individuals living in unsuitable accommodation, whether hostels B&B, squatting or crowding in with friends.

The situation has a destructive effect on family life and at the same time is unsatisfactory and expensive for councils.

The implementation of the Homelessness Act has made it a Beacon Council Theme and moved the issue into the mainstream of social policy with the intention of phasing out the B&B option and requiring authorities to provide long term

accommodation for unintentionally homeless people in priority need.

In the draft Housing Bill the current inspection system for HMO's, which is always a balancing act between maintaining standards and making people homeless, is likely to be replaced by a licensing system and the pressure is now on to reform the Right to Buy legislation particularly in areas of acute social housing need. It is estimated that 13,000 social housing lettings will be lost in London and the South East and the cost of replacing them with affordable homes would be £1 Billion. This is important in towns and areas with particularly high housing prices where Councils are already having to take action to secure homes for 'Key Workers' like nurses and teachers who otherwise cannot afford to live in the area.

Liberal Democrats support a mixed economy in housing and have a good record of consultation with tenants and of partnership with Housing Associations but increases in rents have resulted in a higher proportion of tenants dependent on housing benefit.

Liberal Democrats have been innovative in finding solutions to housing problems through Self Build, Shared Ownership and Low Cost Housing Schemes. They have also made the best use of temporary or short-life housing opportunities, developed flats above shops and brought empty homes back into use.

### *Islington - cleaning up Labour's legacy*

Providing better housing services. In 1998, when Islington was being run by the Labour Party, the council had a backlog of £500m in housing repairs and some estates had not been painted for





twenty years. Since taking over, the Liberal Democrats have launched a new 24hr emergency repairs service and given council tenants the right to get repairs done and send the bill to the council, if the council fails to get the job done on time. Under Labour, Islington left homes lying empty between lets for longer than anywhere else in Britain. The Liberal Democrats have cut the time it takes to re-let a council property from 26 to 10 weeks.

They have also developed a 'Key Worker' scheme in 30 properties to Islington based teachers and NHS staff.

### **South Gloucestershire - Increasing tenant participation**

South Gloucestershire Unitary Council have developed a 'Tenants Compact', which has been successfully introduced to raise participation by tenants in the management of estates.

### **Cheltenham - Housing Arms Length Management Organisation**

Two years ago when the housing stock figure was closer to 6000 the tenants were balloted and two thirds of them rejected the proposal to sell the houses. the problem of long term maintenance remained and a new route was developed which did not require a ballot.

The council applied to the government to set up an arms length management company (ALMO) to manage council housing in Cheltenham. The government has already agreed to the idea in principle of conditionally allocating funds of £13.5 million for 2003 to 2005, with a further £12.7 million for 2005 to 2007. The funding will be used for a major programme of repairs and improvements to council homes, which is linked to an external assessment of housing services by the Audit Commission.

The new organisation, to be called Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH), is being established to obtain more resources for the upkeep of the council's 5,300 properties. The government has set 'decency' standards that all council homes must meet by 2010, but of course has limited the resources needed to achieve them. 85% of Cheltenham's housing stock was built before 1964, so to meet the targets in ten years time would result in a £26 million shortfall in resources. The only

way to close a financial gap on this scale is to form an ALMO. By changing the way council housing is managed, the council will benefit from government funding worth millions of pounds.

With Cheltenham Borough Homes, the council will retain ownership of all housing, and tenants will remain council tenants. CBH will be responsible for landlord services, such as repairs and lettings, while the government will provide the resources needed to modernise the homes to meet the national decency standard. This includes providing affordable warmth and insulation, major repairs, and new kitchens and bathrooms where required.

CBH will be managed by a board of 15 non-executive directors all of whom are volunteers. Five are council nominees, five are independent people with relevant specialist experience, and five are tenants, chosen to represent the whole of Cheltenham's 5,600 tenants and leaseholders and ensure the organisation delivers the services that tenants really want.

### **Sheffield - Choiced Based Lettings**

This involves a consortium approach between the Council's own Housing Services, private developers and Housing Associations. In essence it moves away from the council tenant being allocated council house approach.

This new approach is based on an Estate Agency model, with points being the determinant rather than money, and with all relevant agencies involved. It has already speeded up the letting of new properties and those tenants who have been involved have declared themselves to be delighted with the new system.

### **Bath - Elderly People's Homes**

Recent legislation designed to improve the standards of care available to elderly people has placed an enormous burden on Bath & North East Somerset Council. The provisions of the National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People meant that by April 2007, none of the council's own elderly persons homes would be acceptable. While a great deal of elderly persons' care in the area is provided by the private sector, Bath and North East Somerset currently runs eight homes, providing accommodation for up to 200 residents. (The Council also pays for 328 in

independent sector residential homes, and 400 in independent sector nursing homes.)

The dilemma facing the council was whether to close its homes and contract out all future care, or alternatively to build accommodation that met the required standard of the new legislation - even though this would cost an estimated three hundred thousand more.

Mindful of this additional burden, and in addition to the Council's formal processes, the Liberal Democrats engaged in a long process of consultation - with residents, their families, staff and trades unions. As a result of this the council resolved to maintain its in-house provision.

Where appropriate, public services in Bath and North East Somerset will continue to be delivered by the public sector - and not necessarily by the cheapest available means.

**New Forest**

It is no coincidence that a major issue for debate in the council is 'Second Homes' and their impact on communities in the district. With an estimated 3,500 empty homes ranging from second homes to derelict properties the Council's empty homes strategy is extremely important. It is now in its third year and has resulted in over 500 empty private sector homes in the district being brought back into use either by renovation grants or letting. In some cases owners have been encouraged to sell for owner occupation. This has been a major contributor to the fact that in 1998 the number of families forced to live in Bed and Breakfast accommodation was down to zero.

**Sutton**

In housing terms Sutton is more than Bromley and Croyden but less than Richmond and Kingston so although on the London Borough scale the 'nicer' bits are not too expensive it still means that renting is difficult, especially for single nurses and teachers. Like other boroughs 'hidden homelessness' is an issue whereby younger people are forced to live at home longer because they can't afford their own accommodation. One estate Durand Close has the highest density of under fives of any estate in Southern England! Sutton still manages its own housing stock including a 1930's 'garden estate' which is 50% sold under right to buy and 60's deck access estates where there are separate

negotiations with Housing Associations for huge improvements. LSVT was examined but because of the housing mix didn't add up especially after the tendency of right to buy to leave the authority with all the difficult stock.

One ground breaking venture in new housing and sustainability is the Beddington Zero Energy Project generally known as Bed Zed. It is a partnership scheme with the Peabody Trust and the BioRegional Group to integrate environmental, social and economic needs and bring together a number of proven strategies to reduce energy water and car use. It offers reasonably priced (three beds with roof garden at £185,000) accommodation, energy efficient design using solar power and water recycling and adjacent office space to reduce commuting. A local heat and power unit using waste wood which would otherwise go to landfill, heats both homes and offices but the flats should need minimal heating even in cold winters. Bed Zed is in fact one of the most coherent examples of sustainable urban living in the UK proving that innovative design on sustainable principles need not be either costly or 'spartan'.



**Harrogate**

Quality of life also means a home as well as a job and at prices or rents that people can afford. Harrogate, having identified suitable land, has worked closely with various Housing Associations on new developments to provide over 1600 affordable homes. At the same time in terms of housing need it has reduced its homeless Bed and Breakfast budget to zero by providing 6 hostels. The "right to buy" legislation here as elsewhere has resulted in the better housing stock being bought at bargain prices. Despite this, less well off owners sometimes have difficulty repaying mortgages and

neglect repairs. A survey in 1995 showed a backlog of £72 million of repairs in the private sector and the council has found £1 million a year to help them get repairs underway and also to improve standards and safety in bed-sit land.

## **Milton Keynes**

Milton Keynes is still under development as a New Town separately from the arrival of the new structure plan housing figures. The allocation of 70,000 'Prescott Homes' on top is causing real problems because already the houses are going up before the infrastructure is in place and schools and health provision are lagging behind. The Council like many others has an acute homeless problem with 1400 families in B&B and a real shortage of affordable housing. The Council still retains its housing stock of 14,000 homes plus 1500 in shared ownership.

The Labour legacy had left a £1.9M deficit in last years HRA and 2 section 114 notices in the last two years. They had also only managed 40% of priority repairs over the last three years as they pursued a deliberate low-rent policy.

## **Winchester**

In '94 despite the 'yuppie' culture and Winchester's proximity to London there were still 70 houses with earth closets. This has now been reduced to three whose owners insist that they don't want "they noo faangled things indoors, t'aint right". This can be set against a context where large numbers of houses were only converted to electricity in the late '70's.

This meant a promise of an extra £2 million to be spent on improving the housing stock and supporting Housing Associations in providing affordable homes. Winchester was in a fortunate position of having no serious maintenance backlog and being able to peg the rents at around the £50 mark so when the question of LSVT went out to the ballot an overwhelming 80% said 'No Thanks'.

## **West Berkshire**

West Berkshire faced heavy pressure from the Conservative Government to build on green field sites and is now resisting the same pressure from this Labour Government. A recent Inspectors decision has rejected a proposal for 1300 homes

on one site south of Newbury and insisted on 13 separate sites throughout the district. the issue is one of sustainability and infrastructure in an area with no 'brownfield sites' and a great deal of demand for higher priced housing.

The Tories with Liberal Democrat support sold the Housing stock and the Council finally became debt-free in 1993. The original £12 million housing receipt was used to supply some 250 additional dwellings for rent and the Council has subsequently constructed some 100-150 dwellings per annum in conjunction with housing associations, recycling the money received from the Housing Corporation. They have also provided some rural housing schemes under 106 agreements for local people in rural settlements such as Ashampstead, Lambourn and Mortimer and converted 100 former US Airforce houses to rented accommodation at Greenham Common.

## **Swindon**

The average two or three bed semi in Swindon is well over the £100,000 price band creating a problem for young people who want to buy their own house but especially for Teachers, nurses and other essential services whose salaries hardly allow them to buy at all.

Swindon still controls its own housing stock of around 12,000 homes and has built 1500 new Low Cost homes over the past 11 years . The majority of the old housing was built around the '70's but the last report put it mostly in good condition and escalating maintenance is not a problem. Neither is homelessness where there is now zero expenditure for people in B&B. The problem is where the houses are and more importantly where future houses will be! The Northern development area was the first expansion of the Borough with about 30,000 homes - approximately the size of Salisbury. This was followed by the west where there are now three council wards since 1973 but still the pressure continued.

The area of land between the M4 and the Town to the east of Junction 16 was always known as the Front Garden and became an almost sacred space owned by the County Council upon which no development would take place. It virtually became a litmus test of electability with all parties pledged to preserve it until Labour succumbed to financial pressures and the siren song of Bryant Homes. Lib

Dems have led a rear guard action to keep it by forcing agreement through the council that no development will take place until all other sites and brownfield sites have been exhausted.

## **Southwark**

Housing has always been the key issue in Southwark where a one bed ex council flat will command a rent of £150 per week privately as against a council rent on the same property of £60 per week. The authority still retains its housing stock of 50,000 properties which are mostly flats with more one or two bedrooms than three or four. Many of the houses especially in the leafier 'Surrey Docks' area have been bought and the new threat has been from 'Buy to Let' where the possibilities of a quick profit have been exploited by some. In the middle of the authority area is Faraday Ward which is almost entirely taken up by the Aylesbury Estate, the biggest in Europe with 3,000 homes and 8,000 people. It's a classic example of the 60's ideal of high density housing. As ward Councillor Ruth Bright has said "A lot of the case work is concerned with benefits but generally Liberal Democrats have fought hard to improve the way people are treated" As a result the tenants have learned that they can dislike the Conservatives but also be against the Labour run Council because of its waste and inefficiency. It isn't difficult with slow void turns and £20 Million in rent arrears! The Lib Dems therefore have support from all sectors of this multi-racial community and although the BNP have tried to be divisive their candidate in '92 only managed 1.4% of the vote. The benefits service was contracted out before the '98 elections and collapsed into chaos with a huge backlog and severe individual delays made worse by the recent verification framework. The contract expires in April next year and will inevitably be one of the major Council issues.

## **St Albans**

An important objective was to put an end to the indignity of bed and breakfast accommodation inherited from the Tories and instead provide temporary accommodation in Council-run hostels. This has been achieved by a variety of innovative ideas, the conversion of an old school site, mobile homes on land previously used as allotments and the use of redundant hospital property in the town.

The single homeless, a group largely ignored by central government, were identified as needing particular help. By providing the building and some core funding, the Council supports Open Door - a night shelter. In conjunction with Churches Together (an ecumenical body), the probation service the County Council and various charities, basic health support services and a bed are provided. The Council has also provided the land in the city centre for a purpose built 20-bed hostel for the single homeless.

St Albans was one of the first Councils to use its planning powers to insist that a percentage of social housing was included in any new private housing development. To date in conjunction with Housing Associations 159 dwellings have been provided as a result, with a further 93 dwellings under construction this year.

## Chapter 9

# Education

**L**iberal Democrats believe in unlocking people's potential and that the key to achieve this is Education. It is the most important means by which people are enabled to develop their skills and talents for a fulfilling life themselves and in turn to benefit their communities.

The freedom to live your life in a way that means you can make your own choices with the opportunity of career development are all based on a good education. Education is therefore the basic building block and the essential investment for individuals and society.

The value of early years education in improving a child's future quality of life has been proved conclusively. Liberal Democrat Councils have aimed to increase the opportunities for nursery and pre school education. They have also actively encouraged the integration of schools facilities and community needs. Community schools are committed to the widest possible public use of buildings and sports facilities. The new specialist school status should therefore be beneficial to school and public alike.

Local education authorities have suffered from underfunding despite government comments on 'passporting' pressure has therefore been put on other budget heads to maintain educational expenditure. Good education needs proper resourcing, good teachers need proper levels of pay and good results are more difficult with bad buildings.

### Turning round failing LEA's

Some of the poor CPA reports are the legacy of years of Labour neglect which are only now being turned round in places like Islington and Liverpool. Poor Ofsted results has sometimes meant Private Sector intervention and the lack of capital funding has also meant that Councils have no alternative other than expensive PFI to fund major new projects. Liberal Democrats would like to see greater freedom for local authorities to give them access to other ways of financing capital schemes by borrowing against assets or future incomes.

**"The progress that has been made [in Liverpool] shows that even the most disadvantaged education authorities can succeed with the right leadership."**

***Estelle Morris MP, School Standards Minister, 1st December 2000***

Under the leadership of the Liberal Democrats, Liverpool and Islington have succeeded in turning round their failing schools:

An Ofsted report on Liverpool in December last year said that "the rate of change and of improvement in the LEA has been rapid" since the Liberal Democrats took charge. GCSE grades in the city are now improving faster than the national trend.

Ofsted's report on Islington in March said a new partnership between the Lib Dem council and a private contractor had "turned the tide" and "a sense of purpose and optimism has been instilled." Applications for places in Islington secondary schools are up 8.5% on last year, the first rise in recent years.

**"Tide has turned in Islington LEA, says Ofsted"**

***Ofsted press release, 29th March 2001***

## **Sefton**

One of the major Lib Dem priorities over the years in this shared administration has been to maintain school spending against a budget which in real terms failed to increase in the Tory years. It has been such clear prioritisation which has been partly responsible for a harmonious and supportive atmosphere between the LEA and its schools and has meant that not a single school opted out.

## **Sutton - nursery education**

Lib Dem run Sutton's emphasis on early years paid off when a Sutton nursery school was picked as one of the 33 new Early Excellence Centres across the country.

Spencer Nursery School in Spencer Road, Mitcham Junction, offers a unique education with care service for three to five-year-olds and local families. Its successful bid at becoming an EEC means it can expand its services to become a fully integrated community resource and a beacon of excellence.

Spencer Nursery School has made the switch from being a traditional nursery school in 1997 to providing affordable education with care for 35 children today. The children attend full time for two to five days a week, parents paying only for pupils' extended care and three meals a day. The school also works with other agencies to provide training for parents and access to health services.

## **Swindon**

Despite Tony Blair's often quoted mantra of Education, Education, Education the record of Labour in Swindon had one of the most critical Ofsted reports ever published. It concentrated on the failures in Secondary education and put the LEA itself and two secondary schools into special measures. 54% of secondary schools needed 'some or much improvement' which was 10% higher than statistical neighbours and in terms of quality of education 36% were substandard with 50% judged to have poor teaching.

One example of inefficiency quoted a school with 450 on the role closed at short notice to save £454,000 with the pupils decanted into two other schools which supposedly had surplus places. When, however, it was realised that the calculations were wrong eight extra classrooms had to be added

to one of the schools at a cost of £4Million. Social costs were also ignored, in that the school closed was mainly white and the recipient had a high ethnic minority population so increasing racial tensions were a direct result.

Despite the action plan for the secondaries in special measures residents began voting with their feet and numbers dropped from feeder primaries from 33 to 19 as parents moved children into other areas even going as far as hiring a bus to take their children the 12 miles to Faringdon.

Lib Dems have joined the all party group and supported the interim Action Plan and the Local Strategic Partnership which will now put the management of the LEA out to tender to restore some credibility to future educational provision. Lib Dems have supported the establishment of the EPB but insisted on open meetings and the appointment of an independent Chair, they have recognized the necessity of outsourcing, where Labour was hesitant and negotiated new resources of £6m to schools in 2003/04, and the appointment of a new officer team.

## **West Berkshire**

Spending in W Berks is up to SSA and the council has passported the whole £3.9 million increase in SSA for the coming year, despite an increase in grant of only £1.1 million for all services. Since taking over education they have ensured that all 4 year olds have access to free early years places and have built new nursery classes at Tilehurst and Mortimer. They have worked to reduce all primary class sizes to below 30 and expect to achieve this next September. 21 new classrooms have been added to schools to replace 50 year old temporary classrooms and a new secondary school has been opened to serve north Newbury and West Thatcham.

A new Library has been built at Newbury partly funded by a grant from the former Berkshire C.C. This project has been dogged with construction problems, but which are expected to be resolved shortly so that the library will open in the summer.

## Chapter 10

# Social services

**M**ost Social services budgets are under real pressure and are being forced to overspend as the realities on the ground conflict with government 'estimates' of what should be spent. Childrens services account for 65% of this overspend.

Older people who account for just under 50% of total social care spending are becoming the victims of the squeeze on spending as councils to comply with budget restrictions have had to limit care to the most needy cases. Care at home for the elderly is in crisis because of a shortage of carers who are paid inadequately. The 6.8 million people who have often had to give up work to care for a friend or relative are not sufficiently supported with respite opportunities and tend to be exploited or taken for granted rather than given due consideration as a front line service. The huge financial contribution they make to the welfare of the country is not reflected in the carer's allowance and despite recent legislation such as the Carers Recognition and Services Act the principles involved are not being implemented because of lack of government resources.

Despite this local authorities struggle to carry out their responsibilities to families and children to enable them to lead the fullest possible lives.

Liberal Democrat Councils will work closely with families, involving them in decisions and wherever possible providing support to keep children and the elderly within the community in a family environment. Carers should also have the right to easy access for information, advice, benefits and support.

Liberal Democrat Councils will continue to develop community based services, including home helps, 'Silver Service' recruitment, care attendants, 'lifeline' emergency communication systems and 'handy person' repair and adaptation schemes.

### **St Albans**

Despite all efforts, people can still hit serious personal difficulties and rely on the support of the

Council. St Albans grants funds to a womens refuge where women in fear of abuse can rebuild their lives and support Relate and other counselling services. The Council has also taken the lease of a counselling centre for alcohol dependency and have helped provide security systems for the building and staff. SRB money has been used to provide a base where young people can be guided on how to apply for jobs, how to handle the interview and how to hold down the job when they get it.

### **Oldham - New Day Care Unit**

In Oldham the Social Services Department has recently opened a new unit, Laurel Bank, in Shaw with a state of the art care facility for older people on the ground floor. For some years the mental health service has been jointly run with health service partners, now the Pennine care NHS Trust. Oldham was the only one of the local authorities covered by the new trust to go in with an integrated service and a pooled budget.

The service users and staff of the day care unit have settled very quickly into their new building, which replaces very cramped and inadequate premises and will provide ten extra places.

### **Oldham - 'Capped' charging scheme**

The new charging scheme for home care services, imposed by the Government on local authorities has meant a major change for Oldham Social Services, which previously ran a simple voucher scheme with three bands of payment. Now each service user has to be individually means tested and concern was expressed that this would penalise people with modest savings.

The maximum weekly charge was therefore 'capped' at £99.00 which was as low as possible

and one of the lowest in the region. This amount is paid by the relatively few people who are assessed to pay full cost and require a high level of service. Neighbouring Labour Authorities have set much higher 'caps'. No elderly or sick person in Oldham is paying at a level designed to subsidise other people's care – which was the government's stated intention.

## **Swindon**

After a damning report on Social Services it was certain that the services were facing severe cuts which would fall mainly on the elderly and mental health sectors rather than children's services. The prospects were for the closure of two or three Older persons Residential Homes and the relocation of 90 people with the assumption that they would transfer to the private sector. With the closure of five private homes already this may not be easy and, as elsewhere, alternatives involving care in the home are already in crises because of a lack of care assistants. People on the waiting list would also have to wait considerably longer as the number of spaces available withers. With an ageing population and increased demand, the anxiety around closures among the elderly is a serious factor. The cuts will also affect people with learning disabilities, mental health problems and physical disabilities.

Lib Dems in their earlier Manifesto were pledged to reverse Labour's cuts in Social services and had been actively campaigning against the Tory cuts!

Helped by the failure of the Joint Review and significant management change Swindon moved to all party working with a group of Leaders and Spokespersons. After Lib Dem pressure the cuts are now off the agenda and the emphasis is now on working to deliver effective management – recruiting a new Director and Assistant Directors

## **Dorset - Carers Reference Group**

Dorset County Council has established a Carers Reference Group to involve carers in influencing and shaping services.

## **Sutton**

Expenditure has also been maintained for Social Services which is 15% over SSA. The pressure is increased here because a significant proportion of the budget is spent on discretionary services which are in themselves worthwhile and what the public want. There is for instance high expenditure on learning disabilities and special needs.



## Chapter 11

# E Government

**E** Government has been labelled by some authorities as ‘Easy Government’ but in others there is less obvious enthusiasm. The Government white paper ‘Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services’ is unequivocally enthusiastic and refers to ‘The transforming potential of e government’.

There is therefore a two speed system developing with some authorities in the fast lane and some deliberately slower although nobody has yet been accused of kerb crawling!

The slow lane is one of caution, limited by the acceptability of change on the part of public, officers and members. It is also aware of financial investment and would prefer to learn from others pioneering best practice –or costly mistakes!

The fast lane on the other hand is eager to develop the transforming potential of e gov to open new ways for the public to access information on the wider range of local government services and to improve communication with the people they serve.

Both styles will help to achieve a new level of participation, accountability and transparency which will should very positively change the public’s perception of local government away from its present bureaucratic remoteness.

E – government is therefore not a technological add-on but an integral part of the change and modernisation process to allow local government to engage rather than alienate.

### Sheffield - IT Kiosks

“Sheffield is emerging as this country’s leading city in pioneering digital services for its citizens and visitors” says Public Data Web, partners in developing the IT Kiosks across the city.



Sheffield City Council installed touch screen IT kiosks in council reception areas and in street based kiosks around the city as part of its answer to meeting the requirement to make all council services e-accessible by 2005. These IT kiosks provide free Internet and Email access to users, at no cost to the Council.

The vision was to provide free street based internet access for all, and for the kiosks to be recognised as the main access point for digital government, as well as local information.

Sheffield developed a public/private partnership to support the initiative which brought together a number of industry leaders. The funding for the roll out of the project was a combination of revenue streams generated from both traditional and touch screen based advertising. The arrangement with Dataweb means that the costs (Internet connection, the construction and installation of the kiosks, maintenance, CCTV monitoring of the kiosks etc) are covered by the private sector partner through advertising.

The city has benefited from better quality communication with its citizens, business partners and city centre traders. Partnership members, all of whom provide content or support for the initiative, include J C Decaux), Destination Sheffield, CSL Group, Westfield Health Scheme, Sheffield Health Authority, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive and Sheffield Star newspaper. Major city centre retailers including Boots, WH Smith and HMV have recently become involved. They are able to

operate e-commerce sites around the city centre using the touch screen technology.

Increased commercial applications have helped the Council to ensure the generation of additional revenue. A proportion of the money thus raised is being used to extend the network of kiosks into economically deprived areas, thus providing much needed internet access to the so-called 'information poor'.

The accelerated growth of PC/Internet technology makes service enhancements more and more commercially viable. The people of Sheffield are able to e-mail their local MP or councillor, or pass comment on a local or national initiative via the kiosks.

Of course, the successful take-up of any product depends upon the extent to which it was needed in the first place. Already, the city centre kiosks attract more than 2,000 hits per week. To ensure their ongoing usefulness, extra information and services are added continuously.

### **Sutton - contact centre**

Set up a contact centre supported by a customer relationship management system to deal with an increase of calls after the implementation of a new waste collection policy. Its success meant that it was extended through a geographic information system to allow staff to identify the location of incidents or sources of complaint. This in turn meant that it was easier to identify patterns of activity like anti social behaviour and crime hot spots.

Sutton has worked in partnership with Cityspace, the kiosk provider, for the last 18 months to trial nine information kiosks around the borough. As well as national services the kiosks are also used to provide information about local public services. These include Age Concern, crime prevention, Neighbourhood Watch and disability groups. Mencap will soon be online, as well as NHS Direct, Childline and Crimestoppers. A missing persons and homeless service will also be added.

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