



12 IDEAS FOR YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANIFESTO

Across the country, hundreds of Labour & Co-operative councillors are working to give local people a voice in their communities, and a say in how services are run. Putting our co-operative values and principles into practice is the key to transforming our communities, and ensuring fairer local economies where wealth and power are shared. As people up and down the country go to the polls in May 2022, these ideas offer councillors and candidates campaign ideas and issues for your local manifestos:

1. Put food justice at the top of the agenda

From campaigning on holiday hunger to community larders and co-operative allotments, the last year has focused minds on the issue of food justice. It isn't right that in one of the richest countries in the world, households struggle to put food on the table – and during the Covid-19 crisis this has only become more acute.

As well as supporting national action, we are asking councils to put in the building blocks to bring about change locally, by appointing a food champion and developing a food partnership. Councils across the UK have appointed a food champion and a growing number are consolidating Covid Support Groups into formalised networks and partnerships – use your 2022 manifesto to commit to joining their ranks.

2. Rebuild a fairer local economy

Covid-19 shone a spotlight on, and exacerbated, inequality. Deprived communities were more likely to be on the frontline working through this crisis, more likely to catch and die from the virus, and more likely to lose income and livelihoods.

After every crisis there is a window of opportunity not just to recover but to fix the root causes of the crisis. If we don't act now, we risk a return to the status quo where entrenched inequality ruins lives, slows growth and causes us to crash again sooner.

By embedding Community Wealth Building in an area's recovery, councils can ensure a whole-area approach to local economic development, by growing the local co-operative and community-owned sector and by keeping wealth in the community through buying from and supporting them.

3. Pledge to be a community co-operator post-Covid 19

Despite the pain and disruption Coronavirus has caused, communities across the UK responded to this crisis not with division, but with co-operation. We befriended neighbours, joined mutual aid groups, donated to foodbanks and more. We came together in solidarity.

We can learn from, and build on this experience. When life starts to return to normal, we must not lose this spirit of solidarity and community co-operation; nor can we return to crippling austerity and further erosion of vital public services. Councillors can commit to volunteering in their community,

shopping local, getting involved in local co-ops and supporting the causes that matter to their residents.

4. Unlock your high streets

High streets should be the beating heart of our community. They're the place we do our weekly shop, pick up prescriptions or grab a coffee. They form the backdrop to our social life, the stage for our community action and the centrepiece of our civic pride.

However, even before the pandemic hit, many high streets were struggling – and Covid-19 has accelerated this trend. To unlock the potential of our high streets we cannot simply tinker around the edges. Instead, we need to be radical, putting communities in the driving seat not to save their high streets but to change them completely for the better.

Councils have a critical role in helping communities to shape the local high streets, whether supporting and amplifying communities buying back empty shops through share offers as was done in Plymouth and Dumfries, working with landlords on meanwhile use for vacant premises, campaigning to list the community assets you love and value, or creating new community improvement districts to re-establish the link between communities and the levers that drive economic development as has happened in Possilpark, Glasgow.

5. Lead the fight against corporate tax avoidance

Billions are missing from our public purse because some companies choose to avoid paying their corporation tax – the same companies who have since benefited from taxpayer support through this crisis or who have asked for bailouts. This means that not only is less money available for the vital public services we all rely on, but that the smaller, local businesses in our borough/ city can't compete because it's not a level playing field. Councils can sign up to the Fair Tax Mark, and encourage others to do the same, as well as embedding fair taxes into their procurement requirements.

6. Protect retail workers and create safer communities

Retail workers have made a heroic contribution over the past years, serving on the frontline of this crisis. However, every day they face threats, abuse and violence, just for doing their jobs.

A lot of these shops sit in the heart of the community, and these instances impact on the workers and sense of safety in



the community. Your council can raise awareness of the issue, and work with police and crime commissioners, employers and unions like USDAW to develop community safety and policing plans that help tackle this issue.

7. Give private renters a voice

By the start of 2022 it is predicted that almost one in four households will be renting privately. These renters too often experience poor quality homes, insecure tenancies, punitive lettings fees and growing rents. During Covid-19, additional protections for renters were insufficient and short-lived. Many households were forced to lockdown in substandard accommodation.

By coming together renters can support each other on issues to do with renting, provide constructive input to new council policy and collectively campaign for better conditions. Your council can establish a private tenants' association to give private renters a voice and the ability to collectively organise for better conditions, or work with landlords and tenants to establish a lettings co-operative to avoid exploitation from private lettings agencies. Landlord licensing is an important tool that councils can use to improve standards in the sector – rewarding good landlords and forcing irresponsible ones to do better.

8. Support new co-operative and community-led housing

Co-operatives can play a role in helping to increase the supply of affordable housing, while also creating employment opportunities in the construction industry and stimulating economic growth.

You council can champion and enable new community land trusts and co-operative housing schemes by integrating them into public land disposal policies and planned developments; providing loans; and cracking down on unscrupulous developers by making all viability assessments public. You can also explore community-led models in social housing through letting tenants manage their own estates – as Rochdale Boroughwide Housing and Merthyr Valley Homes demonstrate. Evidence shows that when tenants have more of a say in how their estate is run, satisfaction is higher and services improve.

9. Support and invest in renewable community energy schemes

We face a climate emergency, and we all have a part to play in tackling it. COP26 is a wake-up call – that we need urgent action not words.

Community energy enables people to come together to control where their energy comes from, contribute to a sustainable future, generate local benefit for their neighbourhood, and create jobs and training opportunities for local people. Councils can provide seed funding and start-up loans, make working with the relevant departments easier for community projects and make leases to publicly owned land and roof space available for community energy schemes.

10. Promote and develop credit unions as an affordable alternative to payday lenders and commercial banks

A broken washing machine or new school uniform can be enough to push hard squeezed families over the edge. With rising energy prices and cuts to Universal Credit, even more families are at risk. Credit unions are community-based financial co-operatives, owned by members that offer fairer financial services for their members.

Councils can ensure they have payroll deduction for credit union saving for their own employees, and make this a requirement for private organisations tendering for public contracts too. You could also offer credit union accounts with an initial deposit to every child or commission the credit union to run financial education programmes in schools.

11. Encourage co-operative models in your local area.

The traditional models of top-down governance and economic growth are no longer fit for purpose. We are clear that in our borough/ city, decisions should be made closer to the people affected by them. One area is our social care system which this crisis has pushed to breaking point. The market in social care services incentivise a race to the bottom on quality and workforce conditions, a lack of accountability, and de-personalisation of services.

Councils can follow the example of Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire, Preston and Labour-led Plymouth by enabling the start-up of co-operative, employee-owned and participatory models, to deliver services that put people before profit.

12. End transport inequality by promoting community transport and not-for-profit bus operators

Local buses provide a lifeline for communities missed off the map of the commercial providers – ensuring people have an affordable way to travel to school, work, the shops, local amenities and vital services. The services we rely on have been tested to their limits through this crisis, with reduced passenger numbers and increased health and safety burdens.

Councils can support communities to set up their own people's bus service in areas underserved by the big for-profit providers and review planning and procurement strategies to ensure community transport gets a fair treatment. While transport is not always in the direct gift of the council, councillors can call for bus networks to be brought under public and community control, rather than private companies, and push for greater passenger voice in the governance of services.