



Local Election Manifesto

Leicester - 2019

***Fighting for a No-cuts
Socialist Alternative***

Standing in the election as Socialist Alternative

Key Pledges:

- **We will make no cuts in Leicester's services by using reserves and borrowing powers.**
- **No to privatisation: Council services that have been 'outsourced' should be taken back in-house.**
- **We will use the mayoral and council positions to build a campaign, like the one that saved Glenfield Children's Heart Centre only even bigger, to force the money we need from the government to keep services running.**
- **Build 1,000 more council homes per year as a step to solving Leicester's housing crisis.**
- **Invest in public transport. For a massively improved and council owned bus service as part of improving the environment. Reverse cuts in bus services.**
- **Organise a referendum on scrapping the mayoral system by the time of the following election. Let's include the people of Leicester in decision making. In the meantime, we want a Mayor who lives on a worker's wage.**
- **Use the role the council has in the local NHS to fight to increase the number of beds and capacity in local hospitals and to oppose cuts and privatisation in the NHS.**
- **Reverse cuts in welfare rights. Campaign to reverse cuts in benefits and scrap Universal Credit.**

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Introduction

Over years devastating government cuts have affected councils. But instead of standing up to the government, Leicester's council and city mayor have been meekly passing on these cuts

The cuts have in particular hit the most vulnerable. When homelessness is rocketing, hostels and homelessness services have been cut and council house building has been almost non-existent. When there has been a dramatic rise in people being forced to go to foodbanks, often because of cuts in benefits, welfare rights services are being cut. Cuts have been made to youth services, family centres, voluntary services, libraries, community centres and many others.

At the same time Leicester is a city where there has been rising poverty. 41% of children in Leicester - more than 34,000 - are living in poverty. We need a council that fights for the people of this city.

No cuts

As socialists we believe there is an alternative. We would take a stand and refuse to implement any Tory cuts in Leicester by proposing a legal no cuts budget. This is possible if the council used some of its millions of pounds in reserves and borrowing powers to maintain services. This would allow time to build a city-wide campaign against cuts and link up with other authorities across the country to force the much needed money from the government.

People power saved the Glenfield Children's Heart Centre. Similarly, a massive campaign led by the Mayor and councillors could save our services.

We did not stand candidates in the last general election because we support the anti austerity policies Jeremy Corbyn proposed. However where local Labour councillors and Mayors carry through Tory policies we believe we have to make a stand.

Refs <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jan/24/ive-absolutely-had-enough-tory-mp-embarks-on-anti-austerity-tour>
<https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/revealed-shocking-number-leicester-children-1118691>

A no cuts Budget

We support the following statement that has been sent to all candidates in this election: It explains in more detail how a no cuts budget is possible.

Dear candidate,

As you will no doubt be aware, the current government has been drastically slashing the funding it gives to local councils. The ongoing government cuts, if not resisted, threaten the very existence of local services. Even Tory authorities like Northamptonshire have been pushed to the brink of bankruptcy with more councils likely to follow.

Leicester City Council's figures show a decrease in government grants from £289 million in 2010 to £171 m in 2019. This is at a time when social care costs have risen significantly. The policy followed by Leicester's Labour council and executive mayor has been one of complying with these cuts whilst complaining about funding reductions by government. The result has been a cut in non-social care spending from £192m in 2010 to £102m in 2019.

With more cuts planned by the council by 2020/21 it will mean that since 2010/11 there will have been **"a cut of 62% in real terms"** (LCC General Fund Revenue Budget 2019/20 to 2021/22. Draft report for 20th February 2019)

This cannot go on! These cuts have particularly hit the most vulnerable. When homelessness is rocketing, hostels and homelessness services have been cut and council house building has been almost non-existent. When there has been a dramatic rise in people being forced to go to foodbanks, often because of cuts in benefits, welfare rights services are being cut. Cuts have been made to youth services, children's centres, voluntary services, libraries, community centres and many other services.

We believe there has to be resistance. It would be possible to set a legal (i.e. balanced) no cuts budget, using reserves and prudential borrowing powers. The council has different types of reserves. It has General Reserves of £15 million kept for emergencies sometimes referred to as "a rainy day." It has a "managed reserves strategy" which has effectively meant cutting spending by more than necessary to balance the budget in previous years in order to partially reduce the level of cuts in later years. Under current plans this will be gone by 2020.

But it also has "Earmarked Reserves" of £166m. Of these some are "ringfenced" (£35m) for purposes such as health and education spending and cannot be used for other spending. This leaves £131m in earmarked reserves that are not ringfenced. Some of this it would be necessary to keep in reserves, **but some of it is useable to prevent cuts whilst maintaining a balanced budget.**

For example, the managed reserves strategy could be extended, reducing cuts in the next four years to zero by transferring some of these earmarked reserves into managed reserves

Earmarked reserves may be created or dissolved by the city mayor. "When an earmarked reserve is dissolved, the City Mayor shall determine the use of any remaining balance." (ibid)

Clearly a strategy to use reserves to assist a no cuts budget can only be temporary. **What is key is that it would buy time in order to build a massive campaign in Leicester to force extra funding from the government.** If the council led a campaign that went to the people of Leicester to ask their support to defend local services and the council workforce to ask for their support to defend jobs and conditions, a huge groundswell could be created.

The campaign to save the Glenfield Children's Heart Centre, although an entirely different issue, was successful because it had massive support and got the active involvement of large numbers of people. The government is in crisis, in fact previously having to find extra funding for Northern Ireland in order to keep

its majority in Parliament. More recently Theresa May has promised funding to certain constituencies in an attempt to buy support from some MPs for her Brexit deal. Imagine the impact of a campaign led by the council which was able to link up with other councils around the county in a similar position!

We can start this debate by getting as many candidates in this election to sign a simple statement in support of a no cuts budget. Will you? It would be a joint statement and not necessarily linked to any one party. Please get in touch if you want to discuss this further or are prepared to sign up to it.

- ***Government cuts have slashed funding to the city, as they have for local authorities across the country. But unless councils like Leicester make a stand, continuing cuts threaten the very existence of local services. As candidates in the local election in Leicester, we would support a legal 'no cuts budget' by extending the 'managed reserves' policy to reduce cuts to zero for the next four years. Using reserves and borrowing powers to maintain services whilst balancing the budget, we could buy time to build a massive campaign to pressure the government for more funding. We would also call on other councils to follow suit.***

Ref <http://www.cabinet.leicester.gov.uk:8071/documents/s100211/General%20Fund%20Budget%20Report%202019-20.pdf>

Housing

For a massive programme of council house building

Meeting Leicester's Housing Needs Now

There are currently 6,000 on the city councils housing waiting list.

"The [Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment 2017](#) identified that Leicester's net affordable housing need is 786 additional affordable housing homes per year to meet current and future demand from households who cannot afford to enter the private housing market. The city's average annual new supply of affordable homes has been less than a quarter of this need over the past 10 years."

Here follows some of the major projects that are currently being undertaken by Leicester City Council alongside what the Socialist Party believe is necessary:

Labour City Council has committed to:	Leicester Socialist Party will commit to:
Giving away three acres of land (worth £1.35 million) to a private developer to allow them to build 52 so-called affordable homes. (<i>Leicester Mercury</i> , September 28); and giving a Housing Association 28 acres of unused land (for just £1) to allow the construction of 300 so-called affordable homes (i.e., not council homes).	Not giving away land to private developers, but instead using existing council-owned land to build council homes.
Borrowing £21 million and using £7 million from the Council's Housing Reserves to construct 300 houses over the next three years, of which 210 would be council homes (50 to be built this year) and 90 would be sold to the private sector.	Borrowing £100 million to construct 1,000 council homes in the coming year. ¹
Asking private sector landlords to be fairer to their tenants.	Banning all letting agency fees; enforcing compulsory landlord registration to ensure standards, and then introducing rent controls to end the landlords' and bankers' racket.

In addition, there are concerns in some areas that private speculators are buying family homes in order to subdivide them into single units. Whilst we recognise the need for homes for single people, we do not think it should be at the cost of local people being unable to obtain family homes in their own neighbourhood. The council should use its planning powers to keep the right balance between family and single accommodation and use the expansion of council housing to ensure there is no competition between different groups. Homes for all!

¹ Peter Soulsby boasted that the construction of 273 homes that have been built in recent years by Housing Associations "would have cost us £29 million to build ourselves," that is, approximately £100,000 per home. ([Mercury, September 27](#)).

Transport

Public ownership and subsidised fares

The Socialist Party campaigns to take our buses back into council ownership, and campaign for that now! We stand for a fully-integrated, subsidised public transport network in Leicester.

Subsidies to bus routes have been cut by the Labour council, with many bus routes finishing at 6.00pm. People are being forced to use cars as bus services are being cut or are becoming less frequent. Taking buses out of the hands of private companies would cut costs for passengers, allow services to be integrated with other forms of public transport, and would reduce congestion and pollution in the city. It means that subsidies can be used to improve services rather than aid the profits of private companies.

We believe buses within the city should be brought back into council ownership. We campaign for that now!

Leicester was named as the 8th worst city in the country for air pollution, by a World Health Organisation study in 2018. It is also the 8th worst city in the UK for traffic congestion. An affordable, efficient, reliable public transport service would reduce people's reliance on cars.

We say that the emphasis should be on subsidising public transport, not penalising car use – congestion is already costing Leicester drivers more than £1000 a year each. We fear a workplace levy would be passed on by companies to workers, hitting real incomes.

We support the carrot not the stick approach. If our buses were much cheaper, better and more reliable then it would encourage more drivers to use them to get into the city centre

The proposed road building programme to link Putney Road West, with Saffron Lane and Aylestone Road is estimated to cost £5m. This money would be better spent subsidising public transport services in order to reduce demand on Leicester's roads.

New roadbuilding projects should be a last resort, as they increase demand for road use and quickly fill with traffic, rather than easing congestion.

National and international campaigning

The Socialist Party stands for increased investment in renewable energy to cut greenhouse gas emissions. This would create skilled jobs and provide clean energy. No to fracking. We need to move away from fossil fuels in order to protect our planet for future generations.

Solidarity with students across the world, taking strike action against climate change. Young people are seeing the need for urgent action. If catastrophic climate change is to be stopped, a deep cut in greenhouse gas emissions is required, which will require radical, socialist change. 70% of greenhouse gas emissions are caused by just 100 private companies – it is not enough to rely on individual choice or the free market.

Sources

Environment

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/100-companies-responsible-71-per-cent-greenhouse-gas-emissions-global-warming-climate-change-shell-a7834031.html>

Transport

UK's most polluted towns and cities revealed - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-43964341>

Congestion in Leicester is costing drivers £1000 a year

<https://www.leicesterm Mercury.co.uk/news/motoring/congestion-leicester-costing-drivers-more-2551776>

Cuts to Leicestershire bus budget - <https://www.leicesterm Mercury.co.uk/news/local-news/cuts-subsidised-bus-budget-approved-2116429>

Buses in Crisis report - [https://bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/Buses In Crisis Report AW PDF 09.12.13.pdf](https://bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/Buses%20In%20Crisis%20Report%20AW%20PDF%2009.12.13.pdf)

Local Transport Plan for Leicester - <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/177828/local-transport-plan.pdf>

Secure Jobs, Decent Wages and benefits

The Labour Council have:

- Failed to show active solidarity to any workers taking strike action.
- Kept cutting jobs, while publicly ridiculing the socialist request to investigate how to set a legal no cuts budget that was made in 2017 by UNISON (the primary trade union for City Council employees). The no cuts strategy is also officially supported by the Leicester and District Trades Union Council (the body that represents trade unions in the city).
- Cut welfare rights services to the bone, whilst the roll out of Universal Credit (which affects those in work as well as those not in work) will continue to hit many people across the city. Use of foodbanks in Leicester has rocketed. At the same time the council has implemented the 'Bedroom tax' and cut local Council Tax support.
- Failed to fight for tax justice in our city, despite having signed-up to the Towns Against Tax Dodging campaign. Worse still, the council allows ruling-class property developers and private equity groups to profit from gentrifying our city. They also continue giving hand-outs to hugely profitable corporations like Travelodge who received £10 million to build another hotel.
- Failed to engage with the trade union movement to fight to demand a living wage of £10 an hour for all workers, and to make any significant efforts to support workers in opposing the existence of sweat shops in our city.

We will:

- Stand alongside striking workers on picket lines, and actively work to encourage union membership. This would include assisting workers in gaining trade union recognition agreements, like for example at anti-union workplaces like Samworth Brothers, the largest food manufacturer in Leicestershire.
- Stop cutting council jobs, and instead create new positions to expand public service provision in our city, whether this be in the welfare rights services or in the planning department to allow the Council to speed-up the implementation of our mass council house building program.
- Set-up a minimum wage enforcement program modelled upon a successful local enforcement project that the Council ran between 2001 and 2005.
- Using the Towns Against Tax Dodging campaign as a starting point, we would build support for clamping down on those big businesses that engage in tax avoidance.
- Use elected council positions to launch a high-profile public campaign on the streets and in the media, in coordination with the trade union movement, to popularise the idea of rejecting austerity by setting a no cuts budget in our city.
- Campaign against cuts in benefits and the scrapping of Universal Credit. Not move to evict from council homes people who are in rent arrears as a direct result of the introduction of Universal Credit and the Bedroom Tax

Healthcare

Saving the Glenfield Children's Heart Centre and opposing real cuts in local hospital capacity.

The NHS was designed to be a comprehensive, universal health care system, available to all, free at the point of use and paid for through general taxation. Subsequent Tory, Liberal-Tory and Labour governments have chopped up, sold off and privatised the NHS. Private Finance Initiative (PFI) payments have caused crippling bills for our hospitals, resulting in cuts: fewer A&E departments, longer waits for treatment, the “postcode lottery” of health inequality. The Socialist Party campaigns to reverse cuts and privatisation and also end NHS prescription charges and nationalise the big pharmaceutical companies which are ripping off our NHS.

Leicester has fought back. We defeated plans to get rid of the Glenfield Children’s Heart Centre, the only specialist unit of its type in the East Midlands, by holding mass rallies, by involving trade unions, and by making it clear to NHS bosses that there was huge public opposition to their plans. Together with other campaigning groups, the Socialist Party played a central role in this campaign.

The population is rising and needs for NHS treatment grows as the population gets older. Yet Leicester General Hospital is now under threat of closure as an acute hospital – plans are to move facilities to the Leicester Royal Infirmary and Glenfield. But hospital bosses have not made any provision to increase the number of hospital beds to meet future demand – they want to put the burden of care on to families and for people to be treated in their own homes. This is not acceptable for many isolated, elderly people, and for people who do not have their own transport. There are no plans agreed for how this extra community care can be delivered or funded.

UHL’s highly detailed pre-consultation business case for reorganising acute services has been kept secret. Opportunities for meaningful change to plans through later formal public consultation will be limited. The public need to know what the details of the hospital plan are and what the details of the wider NHS plans for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland are before University Hospitals Leicester trust seeks approval of the pre-consultation business case from the Department of Health.

Cuts to community healthcare and the proposed closure of district hospitals in Melton Mowbray, Lutterworth and Hinckley will mean more demand on Leicester’s hospitals. Even with present capacity, each winter there have been queues of people in ambulances waiting to be admitted to the Royal Infirmary, due to a lack of beds.

The council could use its powers to stop these plans. Councillors have a key role to play in the NHS locally through the Health and Wellbeing Board and local scrutiny committees. These scrutinise the decisions of the NHS locally and could play a role in preventing cuts from taking place and could ultimately “call in” unacceptable plans to slash services. Councillors should not merely noddled through without any protest.

Demand on our hospitals has been made more acute by the council selling off care homes, a move, which the Socialist Party campaigned against – we would restore council run care for the elderly. The private sector is expensive, and its focus is on making a profit rather than providing the best care possible. The lack of council-run care homes means elderly patients remain in hospital, because they have nowhere else to go.

Socialist policies are the only solution to health inequality – currently people in wealthy parts of

England have a life expectancy 20 years more than people in poorest areas of the country

Sources

Health Inequality in England - <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2017/07/13/understanding-health-inequalities-in-england/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-38031468> – plans to close Hinckley, Rutland and Lutterworth hospitals and downgrade Leicester General

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/nov/23/revealed-companies-running-inadequate-uk-care-homes-make-113m-profit>

UNISON branch guide to council decision making <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2013/06/On-line-Catalogue213663.pdf>

Democracy

Mayoral System

We opposed the City mayoral system when it was brought in without asking the people of Leicester: It centralises too much power into the hands of one person.

- We would push for a referendum on abolition of the mayoral system by the end of the next term of office.

In 2011 the city of Leicester elected an 'executive' City Mayor. This one person has more power over council services than all the 54 equally democratically elected councillors.

The previous system, where the councillors elected their own leadership and had more power to make decisions, was replaced without asking the people of Leicester. In other cities a referendum was held to decide on the change, most deciding against. But we did not get the opportunity to vote.

Yes, the executive mayor is an elected position, but in the four-year term of office they can virtually do what they want. The councillors are relegated to 'scrutinising' decisions. It is true that his decisions can be overturned, but only if two-thirds of councillors agree. But why should one individual have so much power anyway?

It is far harder for people to lobby and influence the all-powerful Mayor than their local councillor. It means less check on decisions, such as which organisations will benefit from the sale of council land or buildings for £1 for example. It means when services are cut, people in local wards have less of a say.

Local Government is under attack from cutbacks. It is also becoming more like the US system, where many cities are run by 'big personality' mayors, supervised only by elected 'boards' who meet once a year to hand out contracts for public services to private providers. Its far easier, in such a system, for one person to take unpopular decisions to cut services – or to favour big business interests.

Removing the City Mayor position in itself will not solve all the problems, for example cuts in services. But it at least gives us a more responsive system to local people's needs.

Too much policy comes down from above. This is linked to the concept of "trickle down" economics. One example of this is the Mayor's relationship with business. Last year for example, Leicester City Council decided to spend £10 million to help Travelodge open a new hotel above the Haymarket Shopping Centre.

Given the massive profits raked in by Travelodge, why is Leicester's Mayor giving £10 million of the city's cash to them to build yet another hotel in Leicester?

Peter Soulsby says it is an investment which the city will benefit from in the long run. But in the short run services are being decimated. 6,000 people are on the council housing waiting list and people are sleeping on the streets!

Maybe that money could be put to better use?

- We would establish a community forum to involve local people, trade unions, tenants and community organisations and the council workforce to discuss the best way to provide services in Leicester. Let future council budgets be people's budgets.

Workers wage

We believe elected public representatives should not be cut off from the living standards of the people they are meant to represent. The average wage in Leicester is around £23,000 a year.

If people stand for election because they want to improve the lives of people in the city, financial reward should not be a motive.

- Steve Score, Socialist Party candidate in the city mayoral elections has pledged to only live on the wage of an average Leicester worker if elected. The city mayor takes home over £70,000 at the moment. The current basic allowance for every council member is £10,556 and the city mayor has a 'special responsibility allowance' on top of £60,047.

Ref <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/181914/members-allowances-scheme-2018-2019.pdf>
<https://www.payscale.com/research/UK/Location=Leicester-England%3A-Leicestershire/Salary>

For a mass movement against austerity!

We want a campaigning Mayor and campaigning councillors.

The council's role is not just to administer local government but to fight for the people of the city. Austerity and cuts in government spending have hugely affected us. When 41% of children in the city live in poverty something has to be done.

Councillors have a platform that can be used to help build a movement.

We want to build a mass campaign against cuts locally to force the money we need from the government. But is it true that the government has no access to the resources to help councils out? We do not think so.

While carrying through austerity the Tory Government has presided over a growing gap between rich and poor. Last year the wealth of the UK's richest 1,000 people rose by 14% to a record £658bn.

Working class people have to pay the price of economic crisis under this system of private profit - capitalism. The Socialist Party stands for a fundamentally different kind of society. We think the wealth of society should be harnessed to meet the needs of all rather than enrich the tiny few.

Join us to fight for a world where democratic planning and solidarity replaces the suffering and division under capitalism.

socialistparty.org.uk