

The Progressive Partnership for Powys

The elections in May 2022 have seen a huge change to the composition of Powys County Council. Progressive parties all gained seats, demonstrating a desire from the electorate for Powys County Council to change direction, culture and values.

Progressive political parties in Powys all fought the election on their own distinctive policies, and we will each seek to implement those policies over the coming five years. While there are differences, we find that there is much on which we agree that gives us a firm foundation for a shared administration that builds a stronger, fairer and greener future for our county.

Our progressive partnership for Powys builds on what we have in common to offer a shared programme for a new administration of Powys Council.

Our 7 key priorities

- Tackling the cost-of-living crisis, poverty and the housing emergency
- Tackling the climate and biodiversity emergency
- Securing the best start in life for young people
- Developing prosperous towns and villages
- Supporting vulnerable people
- Connected Communities
- Running an Open & Democratic Council

Tackling the Cost of Living Crisis, Poverty and the Housing Emergency

The cost-of-living crisis is impacting most on the poorest people in Powys, amplifying an unequal position. Prices to rent or to buy are rising beyond the means of thousands of young people, while the elderly are particularly hurt by rising energy and food costs.

We will raise the Council Tax charge on second homes and support changes to second homes legislation to remove loopholes that enable too many second homes to be treated as businesses.

We will use the review of the local development plan to maximise the opportunities for new social and affordable housing to be built in the right places, ensuring sustainable development in both towns and villages across Powys. We will continue to build high quality Council housing and take opportunities to purchase empty properties to tackle housing need.

We will seek to drive up standards and improve housing quality in the private sector. We support the formation of a Private Sector Housing Tenants association.

We will form a child poverty task force to work across all the public services to alleviate the growing crisis of child poverty in our communities.

We will work to expand the Welsh Government Flying Start programme in Powys so that more children and families benefit from early help and support.

We will enable programmes that use council assets (buildings, land or finance) to increase our communities access to more affordable energy, food or transport.

We will ensure that Powys County Council becomes an accredited Living Wage employer to help ensure our staff can meet the basic costs of living.

Tackling the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency

While slower to emerge, the climate and biodiversity emergencies are no less damaging in the long term than the housing and cost of living emergencies. Taking meaningful action as soon as possible will not only minimise the negative impacts in Powys but will make it much easier for communities to change to a more sustainable way of living.

We will actively engage with other stakeholders and consult with the public in developing a climate emergency strategy for the whole county; and invest in enabling its implementation. We will use the council's assets to show clear leadership in achieving a target of net zero carbon emissions from Powys Council by 2030 and implement a five year programme to decarbonise council vehicles.

We will invest in our council homes to make them warmer and greener, with the energy costs more affordable for our tenants.

We will promote good energy efficiency standards in all housing, ensuring that independent and impartial advice is available to all householders and landlords to retrofit their homes.

We will use Council assets to promote community owned energy schemes, retrofitting our buildings to minimise energy consumption and maximise energy generation.

We will decarbonise our supply chain as we procure goods and services.

We will ensure that Council staff and councillors have the resources to continue to work from their home or local neighbourhood wherever possible, cutting time spent on travel and reducing vehicle emissions.

We will ensure that Powys Council's landholdings are managed sustainably to promote biodiversity, low carbon food production, carbon sequestration and catchment water management.

Our major rivers are in decline due to pollution. We will press for an end to untreated sewage entering our rivers and ensure the proper management and regulation of agricultural and industrial waste; and will support our county farm tenants to develop appropriate waste and manure/slurry storage facilities.

We will ensure that a review of the council's development plan takes full account of the climate and ecological emergencies in determining planning policies.

In determining planning applications, we will take steps to enable the cumulative impact on the environment of an over concentration of any particular form of development can be a valid consideration.

We will promote our county as a leader in sustainable tourism. Powys offers places to visit and enjoy a holiday while doing minimal damage to the environment.

We will explore the use of 'cut and collect' management of roadside verges to promote biodiversity.

Our landscape holds immense potential for both supporting wildlife and sequestering carbon, all within a vibrant land management economy. We will actively support partnerships and programmes to increase woodland cover, with the appropriate trees in the appropriate places, such as unproductive land within the farmed landscape.

We will support projects that manage our soil and watercourses to reduce flooding and increase carbon sequestration as part of a viable farming economy.

We will ensure that climate literacy is promoted in our communities, and partner organisations, and that climate literacy is better embedded across councillors and council staff.

The best start in life

We face a demographic drift of young people moving away from Powys, and particularly from our most rural communities. We need to ensure that through all the services that Powys Council provides, and through our partnerships with others, we can secure the education, training, jobs and affordable homes that young people need if they are to stay in our rural communities.

We will review the schools re-organisation programme and establish a new model of primary and secondary school organisation which provides a more sustainable future for our schools and communities.

School staff and pupils are more important than school buildings. We will carry out a cost/benefit analysis to ensure that the enormous costs of all new buildings can be fully

justified at a time of rising building costs and interest rates and will initiate a full audit to understand how build costs spiralled on recently completed projects

Too many young people leave our county for their post-16 education. We will work in close partnership with the Further and Higher Education sectors and work-based learning providers to optimise the use of new technology to ensure increased opportunities for post 16 education and training are available without the need to travel outside the county.

Youth Services can do much to support young people in areas which lack a wide range of youth facilities. Young people need places where they can meet in safety and comfort. We will re-invest in the county youth service and support others working with young people.

We will continue to encourage the use of the Welsh language in Powys, both through increasing opportunities for use of Welsh in schools to encouraging further opportunities for the use and learning of the language in any aspect of life.

We will look to actively support our schools as they implement the new Welsh curriculum, and engage with HE and FE providers as they develop courses and modules, to provide the educational pathways that support this progressive plan.

Developing Prosperous towns and villages

Powys is a county of small towns providing a focus of services for wider rural communities. Locally owned and run small businesses are at the heart of thriving towns and villages, contributing to a circular economy creating local and sustainable jobs.

We will work with Town Councils and local trade forums and local people to produce place plans that offer a long-term vision for the future of town centres, informing planning decisions and attracting investment into our towns.

We will review Powys Council's parking policies to provide opportunities for parking promotions on particular days to attract more shoppers and visitors into our towns.

We will develop a town centre first strategy to help ensure Powys has thriving high streets. We will use what powers the council has to require owners to tackle empty and neglected town centre properties to promote town centre regeneration.

We will support the development and revival of town centre markets as anchor destinations in our communities.

Where town and community councils want to, we will explore the devolution of relevant services to ensure that they are more responsive to local needs. We will look to update the economic development plan for the county, and the Mid Wales growth Deal to ensure they actively support this progressive plan and that they achieve a viable and vibrant transition to a low carbon, circular economy based on the human, capital, financial and natural assets of

our rural county and take full advantage of the opportunities presented by funds such as the imminent shared prosperity funds.

When looking to finance both the council and wider programmes to consider fair finance solutions and investments that optimise not only the idea of a Powys-pound effect, but which actively help transition the economy to a fairer one.

We will look to embrace a more dynamic approach to our public procurement to ensure we spend our limited resources to best support our communities, enterprise and businesses.

Undertake a full appraisal of how the Powys Farming Estate can be better utilised to support its farming communities alongside contributing to this progressive plan for Powys.

We will undertake a review of the council community asset transfer guidance to ensure it is pro-active and more responsive to our communities needs rather than the councils.

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Supporting vulnerable people

We are aware of the huge pressures being faced by both Childrens Services and Adult Services in Powys by rising demands following covid and the cost-of-living crisis while human and financial resources remain limited. Early in our administration there will be full and open transparency of the pressures faced by our service to enable a plan to be developed to recruit the staff and secure the other resources we need to provide the standard of service our vulnerable people have the right to expect.

Powys is the only county in Wales that shares its boundary with a Local Health Board. There is an urgent need to increase the integration of primary health and social care services to improve efficiency and outcomes for vulnerable people, and we propose to work at pace with Powys Teaching Health board to develop the most seamless integration of health and social care that we can. There should be no silos that create unnecessary barriers between health and social care.

We will extend the health hub concept, currently being developed in Newtown, to bring together GP surgeries, local NHS services and social care in one place in each major town in Powys.

We recognise the growing mental health crisis so we will work with health board and partners to establish more support and better access to services through streamlined trauma-aware pathways for vulnerable people and carers.

Day centres and daytime opportunities are an important service for many people. We will work with partners to co-produce proposals for an enhanced return of day centre provision and daytime opportunities where it can be provided with appropriate, modern and fit for purpose facilities.

We will work to secure community plans to tackle anti-social behaviour and drug dealing, which increase fears and insecurity in many of our communities. We will actively support law enforcement agencies to address drug dealing and county lines operators who exploit people with drug dependencies.

Substance misuse is a prominent health issue. We will work with the health board and partners to develop better local support services, using a trauma-informed and public health-based approach to supporting people with substance dependency.

Connected communities

Powys needs a joined up, sustainable and affordable transport and communication system that properly connects people and communities.

We will co-ordinate with other transport providers to ensure we have joined up services that enable easy physical interchanges and co-ordinated timetables.

We will review the council's procurement strategies to ensure community transport, such as operated by PAVO gets fair treatment and push for a strong passenger voice in the delivery of services.

We will invest in the Active Travel network to provide safe alternatives to car travel, and work to ensure that public rights of way are adequately maintained and signposted.

We support the drive to low carbon transport fuels, including the introduction of electric buses, moving freight from road to rail and community owned electric car schemes that make the transition to electric vehicles more affordable.

Properly maintaining our roads is central to good and safe connectivity. We will review our road maintenance programme to find ways of securing better ways of maintaining many of our deteriorating roads.

Broadband connectivity is vital to enabling people to continue to live and work in rural communities. We will encourage investment in better broadband throughout Powys.

A Democratic & Open Council

We will work together to change the Council's culture so that residents and communities can regain confidence in our democratic institutions. We will put residents and communities at the heart of all we do and work in the best interests of Powys.

Instead of avoiding direct engagement with local people, we will embrace it. Ward councillors and community councils will be kept fully informed about plans being developed for their area at the beginning of the process when local knowledge can make for better decisions, not as an afterthought in preparing the report to Cabinet.

We will improve the way Powys council works with town and community councils. We will ensure that every community council can, if they wish, meet online with a member of Powys Council's Cabinet at least once a year to share issues and concerns.

We will promote online public participation in council meetings and trial an online public question time for cabinet members.

In line with recent legislation we will commence the public consultation process on whether the Council should propose that the next elections to Powys Council in 2027 are conducted by the Single Transferable Vote and provide the council with an opportunity to debate and vote on the option.

Everyone has a part to play and no-one has a monopoly of good ideas. We will involve all councillors in our plans and work in partnership with councillors who are interested and who want to help us move Powys forward.

The challenges ahead

The Council faces huge financial pressures. Despite the best efforts of the Welsh Government to shield Local Government funding, settlements from Westminster have a big impact on Powys council's services. Rising energy costs, rising interest rates, and increased demand on our services due to the cost-of-living crisis that will place huge pressures on the new administration's ambitions for the council. These add to the ongoing need to thoroughly review the high level of capital borrowing, which places significant debt on future generations, most importantly the commitments made in the council's forward capital programme.

The Council does not operate in isolation. Decisions by the Welsh and the UK governments have a big impact on the council's services. The new administration will seek to avoid increasing the burden of council tax on household finances, as the Liberal Democrat and Labour groups did in the final budget debate of the old administration. We must balance the need for well-funded services with the need to avoid adding to the burden of hard-pressed council taxpayers faced with the cost-of-living crisis. We will always be open about this and we will always engage with councillors, residents and communities on our budget proposals. We will review the assumption of the Medium Term Financial Strategy of the last administration, that embeds a 5% increase year on year for the next 4 years.

The costs of living, housing, care and climate crises cannot be solved by Powys Council alone, but also their local impact cannot be tackled without a council that understands these challenges and is willing to take them on.

A council that can better collaborate and co-produce solutions- one that can openly and willingly form partnerships with its communities- is a council that can maximise the inward investment of both public and private funds and do more with the limited funds available.

There is a great deal we can achieve in partnership with others. This programme is dependent on effective co-operation between progressive political parties and individuals. Our programme will require wider co-operation with those responsible for the whole range of public services throughout Powys and beyond our borders in Wales and England. We look forward to working with you to deliver and develop our ambitious Progressive Programme for Powys.

Councillor James Gibson-Watt

Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrat Group, Powys County Council

Councillor Matthew Dorrance

Leader of the Welsh Labour Group, Powys County Council