



**TUSC background briefing note**

# **Could councils implement the policy pledges in Labour's 2019 Manifesto?**

The Covid crisis has revealed many things about our society – including how the vast wealth that's there in what is still the fifth or sixth richest economy in the world can be drawn upon to serve public needs when sufficient pressure is applied.

Since the start of the pandemic the government of Boris Johnson – despite being based on Margaret Thatcher's 'the free market rules' ideology – has made U-turn after U-turn against the background of growing anger and public outcry.

So many things ridiculed before as impossible or not realistic have been enacted, even if often in a limited and incomplete way. At the start of the spring lockdown the government in effect nationalised the railways and other forms of transport to keep the system going. Over the course of one weekend councils were instructed to provide accommodation for all those living on the streets.

The founding policies of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) included the call for massive increases in funding "for quality public services" organised "under democratic public ownership and control". The Johnson government's measures have certainly not been of this character, with private contractors siphoning off a hefty slice of public money for their own profit. Meanwhile, homelessness is rising again and private companies are still embedded in the transport system.

But nonetheless the measures have demonstrated that when under pressure even a government of the rich can be forced into making huge concessions in the interests of ordinary people. And the scale of the intervention cannot be doubted. There has been the biggest ever increase in public expenditure outside of wartime.

## **Labour's 2019 Manifesto**

The December 2019 general election saw the publication of the most radical Labour manifesto since 1983, under the heading *It's Time For Real Change*. While still limited in many areas it gave a glimpse of what policies are possible. It was accompanied by a costings document, *Funding Real Change*, or 'the grey book'.

The initial yearly cost of additional resource spending for the entirety of Labour's 2019 Manifesto totalled £82.9 billion. There was a further proposal for a £150 billion social transformation fund, to be spent over five years, including £75 billion to help build 150,000 new homes each year and replacing, upgrading and expanding schools, hospitals, and care homes.

At the time of the general election the Tories and their media friends ridiculed this as unrealistic and unaffordable. Yet eleven months later, as recorded in the November 2020 spending review, £283.9 billion had been spent by the government to tackle Covid-19 to that point. It is a fact: Johnson and Rishi Sunak's public spending has already far exceeded that proposed by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell!

Can it be financed? Yes. Even the Financial Times was forced to concede in early December that "introducing a one-off UK wealth tax of five per cent on net assets above £500,000 would raise more than £260 billion for the country's coronavirus-ravaged public finances". The money is there – but what is required is a fight to get it spent on democratically controlled public services for the post-Covid challenges to come.

### **The role councils could play**

While Labour lost the 2019 general election it is a fact that 10.26 million people voted for it, only the second time Labour had polled over ten million votes since 2001 (2017 being the other time, also under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership). In other words, millions of people were prepared to back substantial increases in public spending even before the Covid crisis showed how realisable it is to do so. Why can't that support be re-mobilised now – with Labour-led councils in the frontline?

Labour leads over 120 councils, with a combined spending power greater than the state budgets of 16 EU countries. The 2019 Manifesto pledges – still not officially repudiated as Labour policy by new leader Keir Starmer – included many policies that would radically improve people's lives that local councils have the legal powers to implement now. Now – not after a general election, or new legislation passed, but immediately, today.

This TUSC briefing lists some of those policies, and the relevant national costings from the grey book. The point of this is to show what could be carried out by Labour-led councils now, using their reserves and borrowing powers to temporarily finance them, while launching a mass campaign locally and nationally – building the pressure – for funding from central government.

How councils could use their powers to temporarily maintain a 'balanced budget' while fighting for proper resources from the government has been explained in previous TUSC documents, including *Preparing a No Cuts People's Budget*, available from the TUSC website at <http://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/355.pdf>. But what is most needed is the will to fight.

What is clear, confirmed by the Covid crisis, is that the question is not, 'Is the money there?' – but how can a campaign be won for it to be spent on the policies and public services we need. This briefing document is a contribution to that debate.

27th January 2021

# Labour's 2019 Manifesto implementable local policy pledges

Below are some of the policies from Labour's 2019 manifesto that councils have the power to adopt immediately, while demanding the national funding support that the Covid crisis has proven to be there.

The figures from the grey book, which are only indicative as they sometimes include costs for other national policies under the same heading, give an idea of what funding would be needed to implement the policies across every council, including Tory-led ones.

## Work and Pay

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*Our most valuable assets are the dedicated people who work in our public services, but under this government their pay has been cut in real terms. Labour will restore public sector pay to at least pre-financial crisis levels (in real terms), by delivering year-on-year above-inflation pay rises, starting with a 5% increase, to reward and retain the people who do so much for us all.*

*We will bring in a Real Living Wage of at least £10 per hour for all workers... We will end insecurity and exploitation by ending zero-hours contracts and strengthening trade union rights.*

*Labour will tackle excessive working hours. Within a decade we will reduce average full-time weekly working hours to 32 across the economy, with no loss of pay, funded by productivity increases.*

### **...what councils could do now**

Labour councils could immediately ensure a year-on-year above inflation pay rise to begin to restore lost pay as promised. They could ensure that any work undertaken by or for Labour councils is done by workers paid at least £10 per hour. They could end the use of zero-hour contracts by Labour-led councils and by any company undertaking work for them.

They could provide facilities and public support for trade unions fighting in their local authority area for such standards in the private sector.

Labour councils could immediately reduce the working week for their workforces with no loss of pay.

### **What the Greybook says:**

Public sector pay catch-up cost: £5.3 billion. .

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*We will put farmers, fishers, food producers and workers at the heart of our plans for delivering healthy food locally. We will support local food networks, expand access to farm holdings and ensure rights of union representation for all food and agricultural workers...*

*That local authority trading standards departments and other consumer protection agencies have the resources to enforce those rights and standards...*

*We will keep restrictions on Sunday trading in place and review unpaid overtime.*

### **...what councils could do now**

Councils have powers through trading standards to resist the extension of Sunday trading and the working day.

Labour councils could seek agreement from the union representatives in a given store before allowing variations to opening hours. This would ensure that these are in the interests of workers in the store, who would be empowered to demand overtime payments and other concessions from employers as part of any agreement to work additional hours, with the council refusing to grant any extension without such agreement.

Labour councils could also their planning powers to object to new premises proposed by food companies that do not recognise unions.

## **Public services**

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*Public services must also be accountable. Labour will end the current presumption in favour of outsourcing public services and introduce a presumption in favour of insourcing. And we will stop the public getting ripped off by taking back all PFI contracts over time.*

*We will act to bring services – from bin collections to management of local leisure centres – back in-house within the next parliament, improving service quality, saving money and ensuring the people who deliver vital local services are treated decently.*

*We will ensure libraries are preserved for future generations and updated with Wi-Fi and computers. We will reintroduce library standards so that government can assess and guide councils in delivering the best possible service.*

*We will repair the damage the Tories have done to our social fabric, with a £150 billion Social Transformation Fund to replace, upgrade and expand our schools, hospitals, care homes and council houses.*

### **...what councils could do now**

Labour councils could immediately end outsourcing and return all outsourced and privatised services to council control, restoring them to an even better standard of service than before. All closed libraries, schools and care homes and other key services and

assets to communities could be reopened and fully funded and updated to meet the needs of local people. And PFI contracts could be scrapped immediately – rather than “over time”.

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*Labour follows the social model of disability – it is not people’s condition or impairment that disables them, but society’s failure to adapt to those conditions and impairments. We are committed to removing the barriers constructed by society and ensuring that disabled people can participate fully and equally in our society.*

*Ensure that severely disabled people without a formal carer receive extra support to enable them to meet the extra costs they inevitably face.*

### **...what councils could do now**

Labour councils could act now to provide the very best support and facilities to help all those less able be part of society and their community by investing what is necessary in disabled services and support.

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*We will introduce a £1 billion Fire Safety Fund to fit sprinklers and other fire safety measures in all high rise council and housing association tower blocks, enforce the replacement of dangerous Grenfell style cladding on all high-rise homes and buildings, while introducing mandatory building standards and guidance, inspected and enforced by fully trained Fire and Rescue Service fire safety officers.*

### **...what councils could do now**

Labour-led local fire authorities could enforce tomorrow the policies on cladding and fire safety the Manifesto argued for in December 2019.

### **What the Greybook says:**

“Funded from the £150 billion over five years for our Social Transformation Fund”.

## **Health and care**

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*A Labour government will build a comprehensive National Care Service for England. We will provide community-based, person-centred support, underpinned by the principles of ethical care and independent living. We will provide free personal care, beginning with investments to ensure that older people have their personal care needs met, with the ambition to extend this provision to all working-age adults.*

*We will also invest in other social care packages to reverse the damage done by Conservative cuts and provide additional care packages to support both older people and working-age adults living independently in their own homes. Our investments in social care services will enable us to more than double the number of people receiving*

*publicly funded care packages, improve the standard of care provided to them, and remove the distinction between health and care needs.*

*Nearly one and a half million people work in the care sector, but there are over 100,000 vacancies. Labour will invest to end the social care crisis, end 15-minute care visits and provide care workers with paid travel time, access to training and an option to choose regular hours. We will increase the Carer's Allowance for unpaid full-time carers.*

### **...what councils could do now**

Social care in Labour-controlled authorities could be transformed if they adopted the approach of their own Manifesto – and they have the legal powers to start today.

#### **What the Greybook says:**

Introduce free personal care for over-65s and fill existing projected funding gap – £10.8 billion; Additional funding through Revenue Support Grant – £5 billion.

## **Schools and education**

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*We will reverse cuts to Sure Start and create a new service, Sure Start Plus, with enough centres to provide a genuinely universal service, available in all communities.*

*Labour will radically reform early years provision, with a two-term vision to make high-quality early years education available for every child.*

*Within five years, all two, three and four-year olds will be entitled to 30 hours of free pre-school education per week and access to additional hours at affordable, subsidised rates staggered with incomes.*

*Labour will also work to extend childcare provision for one-year-olds and to ensure that childcare provision accommodates the working patterns of all parents.*

*We will 'poverty-proof' schools, introducing free school meals for all primary school children, encouraging breakfast clubs, and tackling the cost of school uniforms.*

### **...what councils could do now**

A radical approach to early years care could be implemented instantly by Labour councils. And they could introduce free school meals to all primary school children too, including during holidays.

#### **What the Greybook says:**

Early Years Education: expand free tuition through supply-side funding model, increased funding rate, reopen Sure Start centres, fund for adapting foster homes for disabled children – £5.6 billion.

Schools: raise three-year spending increase from 2019-20 to £25 billion, introduce an arts pupil premium, extend free school meals to all primary pupils and other additional funding – £5.5 billion.

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*A new teacher supply service will tackle the waste of funds going to private supply teacher agencies thanks to the government's failure to recruit and retain experienced teachers.*

*Bring back the Education Maintenance Allowance as the Welsh Labour Government has done.*

*Labour will make lifelong learning a reality, giving everyone a free lifelong entitlement to:*  
• *Training up to Level Three* • *Six years training at Levels Four to Six, with maintenance grants for disadvantaged learners.*

*We will introduce additional entitlements for workers in industries that are significantly affected by industrial transition. We will make sure training delivers the right skills by giving employers a role in co-design and co-production of qualifications.*

*We will restore funding for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses and restore and expand the Union Learning Fund, giving workers the right to accrue paid time off for education and training.*

### **...what councils could do now**

Labour councils could establish now their own teacher supply service with proper rights, contracts and pay for supply teachers.

Already some councils have introduced a local replacement for the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for 16-18 year olds in education – it could be done so across the board. As could the other measures promised in the 2019 Manifesto

#### **What the Greybook says:**

Skills and Lifelong Learning: restore Education Maintenance Allowance, equalise 16-19 funding with key Stage 4, Union Learning Fund – £1.4 billion.

Lifelong Learning Commission recommendations: free Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4+ with maintenance grants, restore ESOL funding – £3.3 billion.

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*Sport must be accessible and run in the interests of those who participate in it and love it.*

*At least 750 youth centres have closed since 2012. Too many young people now have nowhere to go, nothing to do and no one to help them with their problems. Labour will build a properly funded, professionally staffed National Youth Service, and will guarantee every young person has access to local, high-quality youth work.*

### **...what councils could do now**

Every council could stop the sell-off of playing fields and sports facilities to developers and private leisure companies, and invest in sports and recreation facilities and services.

Empty high street shops, for example, could be taken over and transformed into sports facilities and spaces for all sections of society.

Every Labour council could re-open closed youth centres and restore lost youth services, starting now to put into place the foundations of a genuine national youth service.

#### **What the Greybook says:**

National Youth Service – £1.1 billion.

## **Transport**

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*Labour will ensure that councils can improve bus services by regulating and taking public ownership of bus networks, and we will give them resources and full legal powers to achieve this cost-effectively, thereby ending the race to the bottom in working conditions for bus workers. Where councils take control of their buses, Labour will introduce free bus travel for under-25s. We will increase and expand local services, reinstating the 3,000 routes that have been cut, particularly hitting rural communities.*

*Labour will deliver improvements for rail passengers by bringing our railways back into public ownership, using options including franchise expiry. This will enable us to make fares simpler and more affordable, rebuild the fragmented railways as a nationally integrated public service, cut the wastage of private profit, improve accessibility for disabled people, ensure safe staffing levels and end driver-only operation. Our publicly owned rail company will steer network planning and investments.*

### **...what councils could do now**

Local authorities have powers to intervene in the provision of bus services, which can be used to ensure they are run in the interests of local people. They can introduce free bus travel schemes for under-25s now.

Labour council representatives on regional rail transport boards, when they are in the majority, could implement now the Manifesto promises on accessibility, safe staffing and the ending of driver-only operation.

## **Housing**

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*We will take urgent action to protect private renters through rent controls, open-ended tenancies, and new, binding minimum standards. Labour will stop runaway rents by capping them with inflation, and give cities powers to cap rents further.*

*We will give renters the security they need to make their rented housing a home, with new open-ended tenancies to stop unfair, 'no fault' evictions. We will make sure every property is up to scratch with new minimum standards, enforced through nationwide licensing and tougher sanctions for landlords who flout the rules.*

*We will fund new renters' unions in every part of the country – to allow renters to organise and defend their rights.*

### **...what councils could do now**

Labour councils could use their existing powers to compulsorily register private landlords and set-up council-run lettings agencies, as the means to tackle repair standards, high rents, over-occupancy, extortionate letting fees, unfair evictions etc for private rented homes. They could fund and support renters' unions now.

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*Labour will end rough sleeping within five years, with a national plan driven by a prime minister-led taskforce. We will expand and upgrade hostels, turning them into places where people can turn their lives around. We will make available 8,000 additional homes for people with a history of rough sleeping. We will tackle the wider causes of homelessness, raising the Local Housing Allowance in line with the 30th percentile of local rents, and earmarking an additional £1 billion a year for councils' homelessness services.*

*Labour will deliver a new social house building programme of more than a million homes over a decade, with council housing at its heart. By the end of the parliament we will be building at an annual rate of at least 150,000 council and social homes, with 100,000 of these built by councils for social rent in the biggest council house building programme in more than a generation.*

### **...what councils could do now**

In the March lockdown over the course of one weekend councils were instructed by the government to end homelessness. Labour councils could repeat that now, making sure those suffering on the streets were given immediate decent and comfortable accommodation and support to transform their lives.

And to begin to tackle the wider causes of homelessness Labour councils could use their borrowing powers for capital spending to begin a mass building programme of eco-friendly affordable council homes now.

### **What the Greybook says:**

Funding to tackle homelessness – £1.1 billion.

From the five-year £150 billion Social Transformation Fund, £75 billion will be set aside to build 150,000 new council and social homes a year within five years.

## **Climate change and the environment**

### **What the Manifesto promised...**

*Just as the original Industrial Revolution brought industry, jobs and pride to our towns, Labour's world-leading Green Industrial Revolution will rebuild them, with more*

*rewarding, well-paid jobs, lower energy bills, and whole new industries to revive parts of our country that have been neglected for too long...*

*We will expand distributed and community energy, and immediately and permanently ban fracking. We will support energy workers through transition and guarantee them retraining and a new unionised job on equivalent terms and conditions.*

*Labour will review and improve protected area designations, from National Parks to local nature reserves and urban green spaces.*

*We will provide an extra £5.6 billion in funding to improve the standard of flood defences and respond to the increased risk of flooding.*

*We will embark on an ambitious programme of tree planting, with both forestry and native woodland species.*

*Land is a public good, but it is not a common asset. In 1979, 20% of land was owned by the public sector. Today, that has halved. Green Belts protect one tenth of our land and offer conservation of some of our natural environment. Introduced by Labour in 1947 to provide access to the countryside, they are threatened by developments. A Labour government will maintain agricultural and rural structural funds but repurpose them to support environmental land management and sustainable methods of food production.*

### **...what councils could do now**

In drawing up local Climate Emergency plans Labour councils should set targets based on the carbon footprint not just of council-run services but capturing total emissions for the local area, giving a real picture of what needs to be done to tackle the climate crisis.

Councils can ensure that they buy green energy for their premises, that their pension funds disinvest from fossil fuels, and that they oppose all fracking applications within their council area.

Councils have powers over emissions from buses and taxi licensing and road building schemes. They have responsibilities for road maintenance and for creating safe and usable cycle routes. They can create electric vehicle charging points and use their powers through park and ride schemes, school buses and pedestrianisation schemes to reduce transport emissions.

Councils indisputably have capital borrowing powers, which they could use to fund tram networks, electric charging points and a widescale home insulation energy efficiency programme. And park improvements, nature reserves, sports facilities, local farmer food markets, and tree planting.

Councils have powers in enforcing environmental standards in public and private housing and buildings – and can stipulate energy efficiency standards above building regulation requirements for new builds and social housing programmes. In setting conditions for procurement and contracts with suppliers they can ensure good employment conditions, union recognition, service standards – and environmental and ethical practices.