



2018 Liberal Democrat manifesto for Birmingham

A city that is clean, green and safe

1. **Cleaning and greening our city, collecting the waste and protecting the environment**
2. **A safer city**
3. **Building our communities - power to the people**
4. **A city that works - homes and jobs**
5. **A healthy and happier city for families and children**
6. **A city that works – transport issues**
7. **Keeping house – internal reform and management of the Council and its finances**

Our Lib Dem Plan for Birmingham

CLlr Jon Hunt - Lib Dem group leader

The May 2018 election is the first of its kind for Birmingham City Council and is crucial for the future of the city. On May 3rd voters have a chance to say that it is unacceptable to live with third world levels of rubbish on the streets. Too many streets are unkempt and uncared for and do not feel safe. We are offering an alternative. We want a Birmingham that presents ourselves to the world - which is coming to us in 2022 - as a clean, green, safe and caring city.



Liberalism made Birmingham a great city in the 19th century - and a renewed Liberal Democrat party in the city is fighting this election with fresh ideas, a fresh manifesto and a strong and diverse team of campaigners, of all ages, working across the city.

Many of our candidates have direct experience of working with the homeless and that is reflected in our commitment to tackle this problem that, also, blights our city.

During hard times for our party, Liberal Democrat councillors have been retained in Birmingham because they work hard for their neighbourhoods all the year round. We want a Council that supports our communities in all their diversity - enabling people to be happy where they live. For too long we have lived with a Labour administration that has paid lip service to what ordinary people want - and yet has remained obsessed with grand designs and political games rather than tackling those problems. In this manifesto we set out radical plans to make those waste collection and street cleaning services accountable to local people and to put real financial power in the hands of local communities.

It is not enough simply to say these are good ideas. Our plans need Liberal Democrat councillors. We need the votes in the Council chamber - but we also need councillors committed to serving their communities throughout the year.



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Summary – 14 to Fix

- 1/** Clean up our city – we will reverse cuts to street cleaning, ensuring that crews work with local communities to build pride in neighbourhoods.
- 2/** Clean up our city - We will set targets for prosecuting flytippers, providing the necessary resources until the problem is dealt with, and incentivising householders to use legal means to dispose of bulky waste
- 3/** Green up our city – we will set and meet demanding recycling targets, bringing levels past the 2012 achievement of 30% and significantly beyond the present 23%
- 4/** Make our city safer – we will work with the police authorities to enhance the role of PCSOs and restore neighbourhood policing teams based in communities. We will fight for sufficient funding for police services.
- 5/** Provide basic services – we will reform the waste collection services, bringing in external partners and increasing community influence on how the service is delivered.
- 6/** Build our communities – we will put serious financial power and power to make change in the hands of local communities.
- 7/** Build our communities - We will ensure that land that is available for housing gets housing, meeting demanding targets for new homes.
- 8/** Make our city happier – we will reverse cuts to parks budgets, placing them at the heart of our communities
- 9/** Make our city happier – we will ensure that nobody needs to sleep rough on the streets of our city
- 10/** Strengthen support for families – we will provide the support needed to keep families together when they are let down by the housing sector, getting tough on poor private landlords and ending the need to use bed and breakfast for those who lose their homes. We will fight for sufficient funding for schools and social services.
- 11/** Strengthen support for families – We will fight for sufficient funding for schools and social services.
- 12/** Build our communities – we will take the necessary steps to ensure that bereaved families in Birmingham have ready access to non-invasive CT scanning.
- 13/** A city that works – we will keep the city moving, improving the quality of road maintenance and pressing for the introduction of a Brummie bus ticket.
- 14/** A city that works – we will support high quality apprenticeships and training.

Sections

- 1/** Cleaning and greening our city, collecting the waste and protecting the environment
- 2/** A safer city
- 3/** Building our communities - power to the people
- 4/** A city that works - homes and jobs
- 5/** A healthy and happier city for families and children
- 6/** A city that works – transport issues
- 7/** Keeping house – internal reform and management of the Council and its finances

1/ Cleaning our city, collecting the waste and protecting the environment

Liberal Democrats will galvanise Birmingham – the Council, the councillors and the people – in a major campaign to clean up the city and reform refuse collection.

Making these proposals work depends on a Liberal Democrat administration of the city – but also on active Liberal Democrat councillors in local wards. We would bring back some local initiatives that have been axed by Labour over the last five years, partly it seems because some of their councillors were too lazy or important to work with residents to ensure clean and safe communities.

Here are measures we will take:

- We will restore two free household collections for bulky rubbish per year.
- We will bring back special street collections. In Liberal Democrat wards, our councillors will ensure residents are well aware when this is happening and that those with disabilities can get assistance to move items.
- We will protect and restore street cleaning budgets. Labour currently plans to remove £1.5 million a year from these budgets by 2022.
- We will aim to restore free garden waste collection by 2020
- We will issue all households with green bags this autumn and in 2019 so they can pick up leaves from their properties and from the pavement and verge outside. Many residents used to do this – but stopped doing so when charges were introduced.
- We will slash the annual renewal charge for the brown green waste bins to an administration fee of £10 for 2019, prior to reintroducing free collections in 2020.
- We will reform the refuse collection services and street cleaning services by introducing sector tendering, making them accountable to local people and local councillors.
- We will require refuse collectors to pick up all rubbish that is correctly put out on the day of collection. No more refusals because the bin lid is open. We will take action when householders dump waste outside their homes daily, initially seeking to educate but fining when warnings are ignored.
- We will retain weekly refuse collections of general waste.
- We will introduce communal collection schemes, where there are mixtures of shops and flats and in other appropriate circumstances.
- We will extend selective licensing of landlords citywide. We will expect landlords to ensure tenants know when refuse collection day is and how to dispose of waste. We will prosecute landlords that allow the contents of properties to be dumped all over frontages and roadsides.
- To boost recycling further: we will introduce pilot schemes
 - to test the benefits of food waste recycling and a points systems to reward good recycling.
- We will give significant budgets to the city's 69 new wards, both in revenue and capital. We will make councillors overseeing these budgets accountable for developing and supporting services and community activities that help reduce flytipping, prevent antisocial

behaviour, dangerous driving and crime and restore activities for young people as well as providing support for the elderly.

- Ward councillors will be able to use this budget to purchase special street collections at a discounted rate.
- We will halt the programme of budget cuts in parks – ensuring that young people have access to play space and that parks are kept clean and tidy.
- We will retain superloos.

Tackling flytipping

We have proposed serious investment to tackling flytipping. This includes purchasing surveillance cameras and ensuring that flytippers are prosecuted for offences on all open land, whether or not it is owned by the Council.

At the moment the Council has no targets for flytipping prosecutions. It undertakes about 4-8 a month. We will set targets for prosecutions with a view to prosecuting all major incidents of flytipping. We will maintain those targets until flytipping becomes a rare event.

Sector tendering

This section gives more detail on our plan for sector tendering of waste services. Contracts will be let in three lots, corresponding to three zones in the city managed.

- The contracts would be based on the city's three main existing depots: Holford Drive, Lifford Lane, Redfern Road. The Montague Street depot, which handles city centre services, would be bundled into one of the other contracts.
- Contracts would be let for up to eight years. This is the lifetime of a collection fleet, allowing contractors to purchase or lease new fleet. This is short enough to keep contractors "on their toes" and focused on providing a high quality service – so they can win future contracts.
- This would not be the first contract arrangement of its kind in the city. Housing repairs are managed by three different companies and contracts are let every five years.
- Under Liberal Democrat plans, the new council wards would be grouped in area committees (which would also oversee ward community chest budgets). The contractors would meet regularly with these area committees to discuss improvements to services – in the same way as housing repair contractors regularly meet ward-based Housing Liaison Boards. We would also expect good liaison with local "clean and green" groups, as is found in Moseley ward or in the Handsworth Helping Hands organisation.
- Contractors would be required to comply with the city's business charter for social responsibility. That would see apprenticeships and opportunities for young people introduced into the fleet and waste service.
- Companies would bring expert management into the city. For some time city services have been running on "shallow management" with very little in-house expertise.
- Companies would be able to bid to run the enhanced services that a Liberal Democrat administration would want to introduce. This includes free garden waste collection services and potentially piloting food waste collection services.
- We'd relax the current draconian rules on collections so that contractors knew their primary

duty is to keep the streets clean.

- Under trade union legislation the contractors would set their terms and conditions of service in negotiations with unions. That would reduce to a minimum the risk of a city-wide dispute affecting all three contractors or against an employment policy set by the city council.
- There would also be a reduction in the risks of equal pay claims against the Council.
- As we want to expand recycling services and reinstate street cleaning budgets, there would be significant extra jobs created as part of the process.

2/ Safe streets

Liberal Democrats successfully piloted a resolution through the Council expressing alarm at the collapse of neighbourhood policing in the city. In spite of that, the Labour Police and Crime Commissioner has pressed ahead with the closure of local police stations.

These stations are not just about providing a front desk for the public. They also provide a base for neighbourhood teams, which need secure locker space for uniforms and equipment.

We propose that the Council will continue to engage with the Commissioner on the following proposals:

- That police community support officers be given greater autonomy and their own career route – allowing some PCSOs to become team leaders and organise police community engagement. West Midlands Police should also ensure PCSOs have the full range of powers available to them.
- That West Midlands Police invest in the 101 service to make it customer-friendly. That includes much improved communication with neighbourhood police teams (enhanced by the enhanced role of PCSOs).
- That the Council work with the police to find secure local bases for neighbourhood teams so they can spend a full day in the areas for which they care.
- That the Council strengthens its own response to a range of antisocial behaviour.

This needs to be done through

- Housing
- Flytipping enforcement
- Planning enforcement
- Licensing enforcement

We will also enable a series of measures to enable local communities to take action against dangerous drivers, using enforcement and prevention. These are set out in the following sections.

3/ Power to the People

The 2014 report by Lord Kerslake highlighted the disconnect between Birmingham City Council and its neighbourhoods. It followed the Labour Council's decision to dramatically reduce and then remove community chest funding. For one year only it was replaced by the Local Innovation Fund.

Our alternative proposals envisage allocating significant revenue and capital funds to neighbourhoods. We will also support local people power initiatives.

Here is how our localisation plan will work:

Budgets will be allocated to each ward, based on whether there are one or two councillors. These budgets will include a capital budget to be spent over the four-year term of the council (allowing time to work up schemes and ensure they are cost-effective and deliver the expected outcomes).

Revenue budgets will be available to develop local services and to make grants to local organisations. We will enable councillors to develop "small grant" schemes as ready access to sums of about £500 can often make a huge difference to local organisations.

Councillors will be expected to present proposals to a properly publicised ward forum.

For the first time we will allow a proportion of the community chest revenue to be embedded in mainstream budgets. This would, for instance, enable capital funding to be used to introduce speed enforcement cameras or for environmental wardens to be employed.

The decisions on the budgets will be ratified by area committees. In the event of an area committee blocking proposals for political reasons, ward councillors will be allowed an appeal to the city cabinet.

The council website will maintain a clear and publicly viewable database of projects supported by ward councillors.

Ward councillors will be expected to explain to the area committee how their proposals support:

- Activities for young people
- Support for the elderly
- Safer Streets
- Cleaner Streets

They will have access to discounted prices for special street collections – but as in the past they will be expected to organise these by notifying residents and encouraging mutual support for frail residents who have difficulty moving items. Councillors that book special collections with poor take-up will lose discounted rates.

Area committees:

These will oversee community chest budgets and will build a strong relationship with waste collection and street cleaning contractors, ensuring they are working with ward councillors. They will also work with the local housing department. Because of boundary changes, it will no longer be possible to have 10 committees aligned with Parliamentary constituencies. After taking control of the council we will publish draft committee compositions - but give councillors with "border" wards flexibility to seek to belong to a neighbouring district. This will enable councillors

to create area committees based on real geographical areas.

As part of this we will ensure that area committees have facilities such as libraries at their heart – enabling them to take an active role in developing these facilities and encouraging their use.

Parish and community councils

We support their development where local communities want them. We will work with parish and town councils to ensure that revenue they raised is used to deliver effective local services, such as parks, village greens and enhanced library and community facilities.

Neighbourhood planning:

Balsall Heath was a national pilot for the programme – but, unlike in other cities, such as Leeds, there has been little further take up in the city.

This is hardly surprising when the present Council leader dismissed it as “the tail wagging the dog.”

We will support properly established local neighbourhood planning forums.

We will ensure that planning forums are allowed to have input into the city’s development plan. That would enable published plans to propose changes to the development plan.

Planning

We have proposed significant extra investment for planning enforcement. We would review the planning committee’s consultation procedures and the thresholds for contesting disputed cases. In particular we would strengthen the department so it cannot be “bullied” by those who use threats of expensive appeals to bend the rules or ride roughshod over communities.

We will lobby for legal changes to enable a community right of appeal against decisions in parallel with the rights held by developers.

We would make planning independent of the regeneration and economy directorate, aligning it with licensing, to ensure that committee members and officers can take an independent view of schemes proposed as part of regeneration schemes.

Petitions

We will reduce the current high thresholds applied to public petitions – halving them.

That means that 10,000 signatures from Birmingham residents secures a debate in full council (or a hearing at scrutiny if the petitioners prefer).

5,000 a hearing before scrutiny.

Example – the scanner campaign

Liberal Democrat campaigners organised a petition of 10,000 signatures for a CT scanner service to be provided for the bereaved with a view to speeding up post-mortem investigations and release of bodies. The petition was submitted in December but still has not been discussed by councillors – and Labour decided not to bring it to a city council debate.

In response to this petition and long-term concerns expressed by many in the city, we will take the necessary steps to ensure that bereaved families in Birmingham have ready and low-cost or free access to non-invasive CT scanning, releasing capital funding to support the development of a service.

4/ Homes and jobs

Rough sleepers and homelessness

Our action plan would mean the council would:

- Conduct a proper count of rough sleepers, working with homeless charities and outreach teams to identify the full extent of the problem and ensure there is adequate overnight accommodation;
- Develop a co-ordinated approach between all partners working to support rough sleepers, the hidden homeless, as well as those vulnerable to becoming homeless
- Increase the current out-of-hours provision to provide more support and extend support to areas out of the city centre;
- Introduce a Housing First policy across Birmingham, where rough sleepers are offered a home and support to tackle the causes of their homelessness, help them become self-sufficient as well offering mental health and physical health support
- Reform the Council's housing policies and look to provide high standard temporary accommodation rather than forcing people into substandard and out-of-town Bed and Breakfast accommodation. We have proposed a £5 million investment in facilities to house the short-term homeless.

The Liberal Democrats are also calling for better and proper regulation of hostels, homes of multiple occupation and private landlords, improving the standard of homes across our area and giving tenants more security of tenure.

We will also use the current powers the Council has to bring more empty homes back into use and ensure new properties are built to a high environmental standard and there are a significant number of affordable homes.

Private rentals:

The quality of this sector varies enormously. Some major lettings agents have failed to sign up for the local voluntary charter of good practice.

We would seek to extend selective licensing to more than 20% of the city, ultimately covering the whole city – and would focus it on neighbourhoods rather than as present on whole wards. This would help ensure that tenants are provided decent homes in decent neighbourhoods.

We will lobby for reform of rental legislation to ensure greater security of tenure for tenants.

Building homes

We support the city's programme of investment in municipal housing. It was kick-started through Liberal Democrat involvement in running the city before 2012. We would look for the implementation of zero-carbon standards to reduce energy use and support combined heat and power schemes.

Out of date planning policies are holding back private development.

We would have a presumption that brown-field land is available for housing.

However in return we would expect private developers to show:

How they are investing in community facilities in their developments. That includes retail premises as well as play facilities for families.

We would also prioritise investment to increase the energy efficiency of the existing housing stock to reduce tenants bills and cut carbon emissions.

Jobs

The city needs to build effective partnerships with businesses, along with the West Midlands Combined Authority.

On the one hand, sometimes the WMCA has gone for the “quick win” of putting money into poor quality employment schemes, such as warehousing. On the other hand, the City Council has over-zoned, discouraging business initiative. Public support should be linked to training, apprenticeships and access to employment projects.

Commonwealth Games

We recognise that Birmingham has stepped in to save this important international event – and that it builds on a sporting legacy of which we are proud.

We see Birmingham as becoming The Commonwealth city. It has become hard to find venues for these games because of several factors, including excessively high costs and restrictive contracts on sponsorship. We will lead a programme of reform to enable these games to remain a truly international event.

Within Birmingham, it is proposed that there is a fringe “urban games” event. We want to see a broader festival involving the whole city and its many parks, creating a true legacy of local Commonwealth games spin-offs in parks that can be held annually.

We will monitor and control the finances closely and expect other authorities in the West Midlands to contribute according to the benefits they can expect. We achieved a commitment from the existing Council leadership that this should not impact basic services – but this has been changed to a commitment it will not impact council tax. And in reality this is happening as many basic services will see reductions in funding while extra income is diverted from the business rates.

5/ Healthy and happy families and children

We have already set out proposals that would:

- See local councillors investing in youth facilities;
- See private developers required to invest in facilities.
- Reverse cuts to budgets to local parks
- Place libraries at the heart of communities

We will maintain the council's investment in children's services and support the new Birmingham Children's Trust.

We will continue the council's programme of working with schools and encouraging and supporting those that remain with the local authority. We are deeply concerned that changes in funding formulae introduced by the Conservative government are putting pressure on the budgets of local schools and we will actively lobby against this.

We would test a holiday club scheme providing the equivalent of school meals for children in deprived areas.

School travel has a wide-ranging impact – but initiatives should encourage walking and cycling to school as a significant counter to child obesity problems. They should also ensure safety for children by rolling out school safety zones with 20mph limits. We set out more detail in our transport and communities sections.

We believe that development of skills is a crucial challenge for Birmingham.

We would investigate the interface between schools and the further education sector, ensuring that all young people have opportunities that build on their talents and interests.

We want to encourage a vibrant city centre arts and cultural scheme. We will introduce a presumption that cultural venues should not be replaced with housing.

We are also deeply concerned about the state of social services, and its impact on health services, and will continue to press government for a single national funding arrangement for social services, capable of providing a service that ensures vulnerable people can live safely at home.

The state of mental health services for young people in the city is a scandal. We will work with the NHS to achieve radical improvements.

6/ Keeping moving – transport issues

- **Public transport**
- **Congestion**
- **Parking management**
- **The state of the roads**

Public Transport

The city is a constituent member of the West Midlands Combined Authority and we expect it to play a key part in shaping policies of Transport for West Midlands.

We will therefore press for the introduction of a Brummie ticket, allowing low cost travel within the city, as has been done in other parts of the region.

Reopening rail lines remains a priority for us. It creates significant extra space for movement in the city. We are studying the Mayor's latest proposal for Moseley and King's Heath but believe that at best it is a short term solution that will only allow limited use of this line.

We would seek investment in 21st century technology for managing the transport network, aiming to make it ready for driverless vehicles and enabling systems that ensure, for instance, efficient use of traffic light junctions. Where driver behaviour is poor, this will include the use of high-tech enforcement cameras. We will investigate the use of mobile enforcement cameras enabling rapid action to tackle hotspots.

We will run "switch off your engine" campaigns at busy junctions, introducing count-down signs as funds allow.

Birmingham's City Centre and its local centres

We will halt Labour's programme of removing public toilets.

We will resume the programme, apparently abandoned after Labour took control in 2012, of making the city centre a friendly place for people using public transport. Grand Central has met all expectations – except that there is very poor access for those using city centre bus stops and very poor signage. Similarly the new Metro, in spite of a £1 short-stop fare, fails to provide ready access to the station for those accessing the city centre by bus.

All this requires highly visible signing and way-marking.

We will use whatever powers we have available as a landlord and a city council to deter the establishment of premises that prey on the vulnerable close to bus interchanges eg instant loan businesses and fixed odds betting terminals.

We will review busking rules to identify zones that can support high quality street performances. It is a great pity that Centenary Square is being filled with water – a project we have consistently opposed.

Congestion

The city is under significant external pressure to tackle problems of emissions. Introducing zones and charging poses significant technical and equity problems and we wish to avoid this.

We think that proposals should first of all tackle two pinchpoints:

School travel City centre

We would therefore support investment in school bus services (which were significantly expanded under Lib Dem leadership in the former Centro). We would also encourage schools – and give them incentives - to participate in school travel schemes and work with the Council and the police to tackle bad behaviour on the highways by a minority of parents.

Under these plans, parents should be enabled to deliver children to uncongested points – and children taken to school by “walking bus.” Schools that fail to participate could see extensive parking restrictions.

As part of tackling congestion, we would put an end to free on-street parking in the city centre in the evenings. However we will consider schemes to provide reduced parking rates for low energy and low carbon vehicles.

We will encourage cycling and welcome the Council’s belated decision to focus cycling investment, granted by the 2010-2015 coalition government, on proper cycle routes. Our investment in parks will ensure cycle routes are maintained.

We will refocus the current faltering policy on 20mph limits, ensuring that zones are rolled out around schools. These “safety zones” could, at some sites, include banning motor vehicle access at certain times of day where schools are situated on side roads.

Parking management

The city’s hidebound approach to this has made it hard to establish resident parking schemes and flexible parking arrangements.

We would support resident requests for parking permit schemes, eg around schools.

We would also encourage the use of single yellow lines that limit parking periods eg to two hours or specific times. One benefit of this will be to improve the detection and management of abandoned vehicles. At the moment a vehicle can be parked on the highway for months before anything done. Secondly they encourage the idea that highway space is for visitors - whilst established residents should invest in their own provision for parking, such as by using rear garage space.

We would issue passes to carers to allow them limited parking on double yellow lines and in resident parking zones.

These new policies will aim to expand the options available to local councillors, who will be given oversight of substantial capital budgets.

The state of the roads

The contract with Amey was a joint venture involving a Labour government and a Lib Dem-Conservative council. It delivered a number of benefits, including a clear policy on tree replacement.

Unfortunately was only just under way when Labour took control of the council and has been characterised by neglect. Effective contract and performance monitoring – and listening to local councillors and communities - would have highlighted the emerging problems rapidly. Large sums of money were wasted in putting tarmac in the wrong places.

We will work with Amey to get it back on track. We will also institute effective performance monitoring at Cabinet level.

7/ Keeping house – internal reform and management of the Council and its finances

We have already here set out proposals for:

- Sector tendering of waste services
 - Area committees
 - Ward budgets
 - Roads management accountability
- together with some of the challenges facing funding of social services and schools.

We believe that under Labour the city cabinet has failed in its duty to monitor the basic services the Council provides – street maintenance, refuse collection and street cleaning. This neglect has worsened under three successive leaders.

At present the city has four, laudable priorities: health, children, jobs and housing.

We would add a fifth entitled **street services**, recognising that this is the measure of how the city delivers services over which it has total control.

That will be monitored at cabinet level through key performance indicators.

The existing four priorities we will recognise as requiring significant working with partners, including the regional mayor, the NHS, the new children's trust, schools, colleges and the private sector.

To tackle the city's finances we will expect an annual achievement of modest productivity savings, set at 0.5% a year.

We will retain the currently agreed plans for Council tax increases. That means we would not take the opportunity – retained by the Labour leadership – of putting an extra 1% on planned Council Tax increases next year.

We are concerned that Council Tax is currently increasing at a rate greater than inflation and we would explore opportunities for reducing some of the planned increases during the four-year lifetime of a Council. But this must not happen at the expense of basic services. There are some signs of "green shoots", for instance in increased income from business rates, but there is no evidence yet that the Council can generate the in-year surpluses needed to peg Council Tax rates without cutting basic services.

We will restore financial accountability to cabinet members, ensuring their portfolios align clearly with the city's management structures. This will ensure that councillors are responsible for preventing financial waste.

We will implement the policy, agreed by the Council in March this year, that the number of scrutiny committees should be expanded to ensure realistic workloads – and the chairs should be allocated proportionately to all political parties.

This requires active participation in scrutiny committees by backbench councillors. We will publish attendance records, enabling councillors to add information about the extent of their participation in scrutiny investigations.

We will reconsider the current, new contract for transmission of Council meetings to reintroduce proper bookmarking, allowing the public to share "snippets" from meetings – currently prevented.