

Labour sets out its stall for the Council elections

✘ Today we publish a letter from Councillor Andrew Burns, Labour Group Leader, The City of Edinburgh Council.

We are running a liveblog with the Labour group on [Monday morning at 10a.m.](#) You can get involved on the day, or you can send us any questions [by email now](#). The new candidates will be introduced at a press conference tomorrow morning when the Labour Group's 'manifesto' called Moving Edinburgh Forward will be produced.

Moving Edinburgh forward

Edinburgh is a mere six months away from the next Local Government elections, which take place on Thursday 3rd May 2012.

On that day, every voting-resident of Edinburgh will have their chance to pass judgement on the previous 5-years of the current SNP/Lib-Dem Coalition that has run Edinburgh Council.

I'll leave that judgement for residents to make in due course, but here I want to outline some of the thoughts that Edinburgh Labour has for moving our city forward.

There is no doubt that the next few years will be exceptionally tough for local government, yet looking towards the local elections I and my Edinburgh Labour colleagues are determined to engage with residents on the kind of Council they want to see. Unlike the Lib-Dems and SNP who pushed ahead with the Alternative Business Model scheme we want to have a full and proper consultation. So on Thursday of this week, we'll launch a public consultation document on our ideas.

Central to our vision for moving Edinburgh forward, Edinburgh Labour wants to work towards being a Co-operative Council.

I do recognise that day-to-day challenges will remain, whether they are debates on how we actually deliver public services or on the completion of major infrastructure projects. But striving towards being a Cooperative Council could radically alter the way we – citizens and politicians – approach how we deal with, and solve, the challenges which will continue to face our city.

At their best public services have a fundamentally positive impact on the lives of individuals and communities. High quality and responsive public services can improve the quality of a person's everyday life, empower communities and maximise life chances. However the public sector can only continue to make this positive difference if it responds to two major challenges we now face.

The first challenge relates to the type of relationship we need to create between citizen and public services.

Increasingly communities and the state are recognising that the public sector cannot “do it all” and that citizens need to be part of the solution to the challenges our increasingly complex and diverse communities face. Underpinned by co-operative values we want to forge a new relationship locally between public services and citizens. This new relationship will enhance the way in which public services are provided and will ensure that they are increasingly designed around the needs of our citizens.

The second challenge is how we can deliver services which meet local need in a period of tighter funding. The recent severe recession has opened up a huge hole in the nation’s finances. Councils will be expected to do more with less. However, we recognise that it is all too easy to get distracted by meeting savings targets and balancing the books without thinking of the wider social costs. In Edinburgh we are committed to ensuring that any decisions we take around financial savings must be guided by a clear set of principles and values. I want to outline some of that thinking here, but space constraints do mean I can only scratch the surface of our proposals. Much more detail will be contained in the document we launch on Thursday.

However, we all know that too often this council says ‘consultation’ when they’re just not listening, and already have their mind made up. It is time to work alongside local communities – they usually know best. So we’ll find a genuine way to collaborate with communities, giving local people more control of the services they use – and the places where they live – by putting council resources in their hands. A new ‘petitions committee’ will also allow citizens to highlight their priorities, with the city budget set transparently.

Secondly – we'll press the Scottish Government to let Edinburgh keep a bigger share of our local businesses rates. We'll lobby for fairer funding for Edinburgh housing and other needs. And we'll spend our time doing what the city needs, not chasing centrally-set Government targets.

Thirdly – if Edinburgh Labour is the largest party on the Council next year, we will get the city moving forward again and involving every party in Council decisions, and ensuring positions on powerful scrutiny committees are allocated properly, with members of the public invited to attend. We'll make officials accountable to the city's needs, not to rules made to suit them or the Government.

And fourthly – we'll insist on breaking down barriers and bureaucracy because the resulting slowness exasperates individuals and businesses alike. We will to stop the tick-box target culture and focus on what people really want, empowering frontline staff to have a say in budget decisions, squeezing value from every penny. Above all, we'll not shrink from real city leadership.

This idea of a Co-operative Council draws inspiration from the values of fairness, accountability and responsibility that have driven progressive politics in this country for centuries. It is about putting the resources of the state at the disposal of citizens so that they can take control of the services they receive and the places where they live.

In key policy such as childcare, energy and housing, we've

seen co-operative and mutual solutions work elsewhere, and we believe they can work here too. Yet, the Co-operative Council is also not just about changing the Council, it is about building more co-operative communities and realising that, for too long, the council has stood in the way rather than supported this development. A Co-operative Council seeks to do things with its community rather than do things to the community.

I hope, as a first step, residents will look at our detailed document when it's launched on Thursday. We will listen to all the feedback received and ensure that our local manifesto for next year's elections reflects the discussion we have over the coming months.