

Liberal Democrat Achievements in Local Government



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Foreword from Councillor Joe Harris and Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader and Deputy Leader of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group

Welcome to our latest edition of Liberal Democrat Achievements in Local Government.

Liberal Democrat councillors work tirelessly for local residents, improving our communities and campaigning for real change to people's lives. Our thanks to all of our councillors, and whether you are part of a large group running the council or the only Liberal Democrat on your authority - you are all making a difference!

May 2025 saw even more Liberal Democrat councillors elected. It is the seventh year in a row we have increased our numbers, with 370 wins and a net gain of 163 seats!

We have more than 3,200 councillors and lead 75 councils, either in outright control or partnership with other parties or groups. In addition, we provide the Deputy Leadership of a further 14 councils, giving a total of 89. Forty-three of these councils are majority led by the Liberal Democrats.

This booklet showcases just some of the achievements of Liberal Democrat councillors, both when running councils and from opposition. There are also many more achievements we hope to share another time.

Our thanks to everyone who contributed to this booklet. If you have a success story

from your area and would like it to be featured in a future edition, or our weekly email, please contact our Liberal Democrat team at the Local Government Association (LGA).

To find out more about the LGA Liberal Democrat Group visit our page on local.gov.uk/political/lga-lib-dem-group or follow us on social media at:

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**Councillor Bridget Smith
and Councillor Joe Harris**



Foreword from Ed Davey MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

What sets our party apart from the others is our deep commitment to community politics. We believe that it is through local government - where people come together to make decisions about their local area - that we can make the biggest difference to people's lives.

The achievements celebrated in this booklet show that Liberal Democrat councillors and campaigners across the country are putting that belief into practice, every day.

Our local champions are the bedrock of our party, and their tireless efforts have once again yielded truly remarkable results.

The 2025 local elections were a turning point. For the first time in our party's history, we won more votes than either Labour or the Conservatives. It was a momentous achievement. From the villages of Shropshire to the market towns of Cambridgeshire and the suburbs of Oxfordshire, voters have put their faith in our local teams to deliver a better future for their communities.

Our success is not an accident. It is the result of years of hard work, of listening to local people and standing up for what matters to them. Your hard work has not only delivered new Liberal Democrat run councils but has also sent a clear message to Westminster: The British people are ready for a new politics, one focused on decency, competence, and putting local communities first.

As we look towards 2026, the opportunity before us is immense. The shifts we witnessed in May's elections have laid the

foundation for even greater success. The old politics of Labour and the Conservatives is failing, and the public is looking for a credible, effective alternative. That alternative is us. We are the party winning seats, gaining councils, and demonstrating that Liberal Democrats are the only ones truly capable of holding power and making a real difference in people's lives.

This booklet is a tribute to that success. It showcases the incredible work of our councillors and the positive change they bring to their communities. It is a testament to what we can achieve when we work together. Let's use this momentum to build on our achievements and make 2026 another historic year for our party. Thank you for everything you do and thank you to the LGA Liberal Democrat Group for sharing this fantastic set of achievements.



Ed Davey, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

A devolution deal and a growing economy

Durham County Council

Durham County Council has delivered a devolution deal that has provided the biggest per person investment fund in the country, with the then Liberal Democrat leader of the council at the heart of it.

They took the bold decision to join forces with their neighbours, to deliver devolved powers and finance to the region from national government. To date, over £100m of investment for County Durham has been secured, much more than might have been possible under any other deal, or worse still, doing nothing.

The council invested £63m in NETPark Phase 3, a scheme developed, procured, and delivered during the administration, this was achieved in partnership with the private sector on a self-financing basis to the highest build standards

The business parks managed by Business Durham are almost fully occupied, and the first rural business premises investment, the conversion of Rookhope School, is under way with prospective tenants lined up.

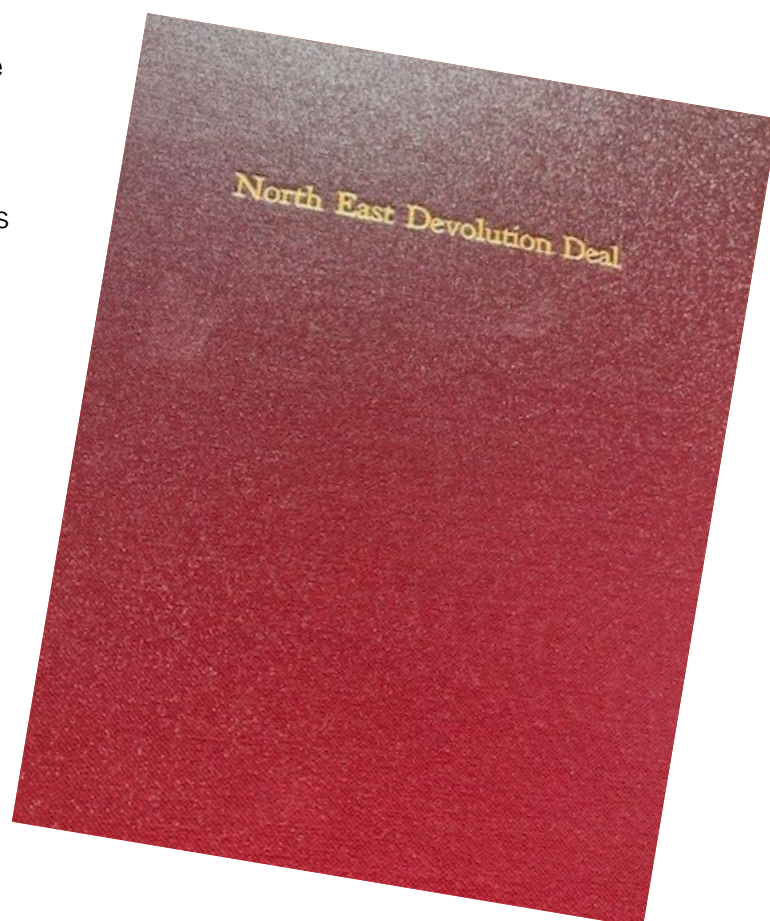
They have taken the Aykley Heads site to the market to secure a joint venture partner and delivered further investment at Jade Business Park, as well as opening a new business park, Station Place.

For the first time the GVA (Gross Value Added) for the county has increased, starting to close the gap between the local area and the England average.

All of this has been achieved whilst facing inflation issues, a cost-of-living crisis, recovery from the COVID pandemic, Brexit and unprecedented and unfunded demand pressures in social care.

The council invested

£63m in NETPark



Employment and Skills Taskforce

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

A comprehensive approach to employment and skills by Hinckley and Bosworth Council is supporting young people, building partnerships and helping business.

The Liberal Democrat run council launched the Employment and Skills Taskforce in 2017 in order to maximise employment and skills opportunities.

The Taskforce has brought together the right partners to drive the agenda and deliver skills and employment programmes at a locality level, often using local experts.

The 'Pathways to future jobs career' events are an example of the direct support in which the council organised 'careers speed networking' for Hinckley and Bosworth secondary schools in 2019 at MIRA Technology Institute (MTI).

More than 80 students, aged 12 to 14, attended, benefitting from careers advice in one-on-one, five minute networking sessions with professionals from 40 local businesses. The success has continued, with the MIRA Technology Institute running yearly cross-border career speed networking events for the past five years.

Annual Teen Tech events at MTI enable students from local schools to participate in workshops offering an insight into the exciting high-skilled engineering and technology industries.

Local businesses highlighted the importance for students being aware of high skilled engineering opportunities as early as possible. Working with Primary Engineers, the council funded training for 17 primary schools, seven early years providers and two secondary schools, to help train 50 teachers.

This training has enabled teachers to deliver engineering projects in the classroom while being partnered with a professional engineer for support.

'Working with Us' is a scheme for apprenticeships and training showcasing local government careers. The council developed a careers guide giving an overview of the type of work local people could be involved in and how a council career could develop. Apprenticeship case study videos were also produced. They feature council employees talking about their experiences, giving first-hand account of what an apprenticeship can lead to.

Officers frequently attend careers fairs throughout the borough, including visiting a local primary school, and have engaged over 400 students so far. More events are planned.

The council asks that proposals for major developments submit a Local Employment and Training Strategy (LETS) through formal planning Section106 agreements. An example is the IM Properties Hinckley Park development. The outcomes included:

- an employment and skills charter
- a schools construction careers event
- local schools engaged and site visits organised
- a meet-the-buyer supply chain event
- participated in local labour initiatives
- worked with the local Department of Works and Pensions to run sector-based Work Academy Programmes involving a short training course with work experience and guaranteed interviews for completers.

Waterlooville town centre regeneration

Havant Borough Council

Waterlooville was labelled a ‘dystopian zombie drama’ by the Daily Mail in 2024 and regeneration professionals cited it as a textbook example of town centre decline. There were 24 empty units, neglected streets, and little community engagement.

However, just a year later, the transformation tells a very different story. Under Liberal Democrat leadership and with strong community collaboration, Waterlooville has undergone a remarkable revival. There are now fewer than 10 empty units, footfall is increasing and media coverage has turned positive.

The turnaround began with a £150,000 Vacant Shops Scheme started by the previous administration. In May 2024, the incoming administration appointed a Liberal Democrat councillor as Assistant Cabinet Member for Thriving Waterlooville.

They worked closely with the council’s Regeneration team to boost the initiative, creating a fast-moving project that quickly delivered results and succeeded in injecting new life into the high street. Crucially, it built confidence with key stakeholders and a property owner invested in a long-neglected area of the precinct. The first newly completed flats above the shops are already visible signs of change.

There’s also an £650,000 public realm improvement plan – designed in consultation with residents. It will bring greenery, modern seating, and a fresh identity to the town.

A new Waterlooville Business Association has been launched, offering regular meetings and marketing support. Community engagement has grown through initiatives like the independent Facebook group Waterlooville Matters, providing regular updates and local insights.

This regeneration effort aligns with four Liberal Democrat strategic goals:

Better Local Economies – Waterlooville has seen a significant drop in vacant units and rising foot traffic, boosting local trade.

Delivering for Local Residents – public consultation directly shaped investment decisions, and a new vision for a cultural venue is in the pipeline.

Tackling the Housing Crisis – around 30 flats are being developed above shops, with further residential schemes being explored.

Building Healthier Communities – green spaces, cleaner streets, and better public infrastructure are creating a more pleasant environment.

Waterlooville’s recovery showcases the power of targeted investment, community engagement, and strong political leadership. While credit is shared among many, the Liberal Democrats have played a leading role in making regeneration a reality.

The Green Enterprise Partnership

‘Go Green Scheme’



London Borough of Sutton

Small businesses in the London Borough of Sutton can get a 70 per cent business rate rebate and help save the planet, through the Liberal Democrat run council’s pioneering and innovative use of business rates relief which supports businesses to reduce their emissions.

Small businesses are important. They employ around 60 per cent of the workforce in the UK - and generate a third of territorial greenhouse gas emissions.

Businesses with a rateable value between £12,000 and £50,000 can apply for a business rate rebate equivalent to 70 per cent of their business rates bill, provided they agree to spend that money reducing their carbon footprint and work towards net zero.

So far, 128 businesses have been supported in the first phase of the programme. Businesses are benchmarked by a professional partner and must have action plans to halve their carbon emissions by 2030 and achieve net zero by 2050.

128 businesses have
been supported

This is an incredible opportunity for small businesses - around 93 per cent of which in Sutton are classified as ‘micro’ - where they receive both a significant business rates discount and are then able to invest that saving into improving their business.

Supporting residents back into work

Mole Valley District Council

The Employment and Skills Hub in Liberal Democrat run Mole Valley District Council has played a vital role in helping residents secure employment, develop skills, and access vital support.

The Hub hosts regular job fairs and drop-in advice sessions, providing tailored support on employment, cost-of-living challenges, and accessibility needs. Through partnerships with local organisations and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), these services have had a significant social impact, valued at approximately £4.6 million between 2021 and 2024.

The Hub collaborates closely with Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership (SLLP). This partnership ensures a continuous focus on skills development and employment opportunities, including hosting job fairs in Dorking and Leatherhead. Looking ahead to 2025/26, the Hub will support the second year of a youth-focused project – funded by DWP – and introduce a new initiative aimed at helping economically inactive individuals as part of Surrey’s WorkWell programme. Additionally, the Lifelong Learning Partnership will develop a new project through a bid to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to further extend employment support.

A key priority remains helping those who face additional barriers to employment, such as older adults and individuals living with disabilities. The Hub also provides targeted support to 18-24-year-olds, helping them to access training and sustainable employment opportunities.

Thanks to ongoing efforts, the Hub’s impact in 2024 includes:

- Referred seven residents seeking to start their own businesses.
- Supported 314 residents in their job searches (target: 350).
- Helped 120 individuals secure employment following support (target: 130).
- Made 613 referrals to additional services (target: 500).

These impressive results demonstrate the effectiveness of the Hub in building pathways to meaningful employment and economic independence. With continued collaboration and new initiatives, the Mole Valley Employment and Skills Hub remains dedicated to supporting residents at every stage of their employment journey. Its ongoing work ensures our community remains resilient, skilled, and inclusive.

Responsible financial management

Mole Valley District Council

In 2023, Liberal Democrat run Mole Valley District Council embarked on an ambitious journey to reshape its customer service and digital capabilities. Recognising the vital need to improve resident experiences, increase efficiency, and reduce operational costs, the council approved a comprehensive Customer Service and Digital Transformation programme.

With an initial investment of £242,000 for the 2023/24 financial year the programme focused on four strategic pillars:

- service transformation
- digital by choice
- customer engagement
- people development.

These efforts have already resulted in significant achievements, including better service delivery and cost savings, which support the council's broader goal of sustainable growth and efficiency.

Despite these positive outcomes, financial hurdles persist. During 2023/24, the council achieved £691,000 in savings, contributing to a total of £2.3 million in cost reductions driven by targeted investments.

In the following year, 2024/25, savings reached £1.91 million, despite setbacks such as delays in asset sales, which contributed £1.27 million in revenue. Nonetheless, the council maintained a balanced budget, with a £500,000 underspend, demonstrating prudent financial management.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, the council anticipates a financial gap of approximately £319,000. Addressing this shortfall will require innovative efficiencies or additional revenue sources.

During 2023/24,
the council achieved
£691,000 in savings

Dorking Halls: A historic venue prepares for a bright future

Mole Valley District Council

Dorking Halls stands as a beloved landmark - an iconic concert, performance, and cinema venue that has hosted countless events for generations. As the largest public performance space in East Surrey, it comfortably seats over 900 people in its main hall. Originally built in the 1930s and later modified in the 1990s, the venue is a cherished part of our community's cultural fabric.

Recognising the importance of maintaining this historic site, the Liberal Democrat administration at Mole Valley District Council launched a multi-million-pound refurbishment programme aimed at modernising and ensuring the safety of the building. The project focused on vital upgrades to the mechanical and electrical systems, with particular attention to the main hall's original 1930s ceiling, which was at risk of collapse.

Phase 1 of the restoration required the Halls to close for an extended period during summer 2024. Although the closure resulted in a temporary loss of income, the subsequent winter and spring seasons in 2024/25 saw record engagement from the community, helping the venue recover much of its lost revenue.

Looking ahead, the decision has been made to postpone Phase 2 of the works until summer 2026. This allows the council to seek the best value for money on remaining contracts while ensuring the ongoing safety and enhancement of Dorking Halls.

Meanwhile, efforts to breathe new life into the nearby Pippbrook House continue. This Grade 2* listed historic building has undergone essential roof repairs, and plans are underway to bring its accessible areas under the management of Dorking Halls. This 'pilot' initiative aims to transform Pippbrook House into additional community spaces and small venues, revitalising this treasured but underused building for local events and activities.

The future of Dorking Halls and Pippbrook House promises a vibrant and sustainable role for these historic landmarks, strengthening our community's cultural and social life for years to come.

Record engagement
from the community,
helping the venue
recover much of its
lost revenue

Reviving a community: The story of the Leatherhead Community Hub

Mole Valley District Council

Tucked away in north Leatherhead, a once-overlooked building has become a thriving focal point for local residents. What was previously an underused and tired community centre has been transformed into the Leatherhead Community Hub - a vibrant, welcoming space offering everything from advice clinics and preschool education to community meals and film nights.

This transformation didn't happen overnight. It's a story of grassroots energy, local government collaboration, and a community determined to create something better.

Since the closure of the local children's centre in 2019, families, young people, and older residents had few accessible places to meet, learn, or seek support. Charities and public services struggled to find suitable, affordable spaces to work from.

Local residents and Liberal Democrat District Councillors recognised this gap - and decided to do something about it.

In 2020, a group of community members worked to transform the former North Leatherhead Community Centre into a multi-use, community-led facility. That same year, they secured a five-year internal repairing lease from Mole Valley District Council for part of the building. Their efforts quickly gained traction, recognising the group's impact, the council proposed a 25-year lease for the entire building in 2021. The longer lease would open doors to other funding and give long-term security.

Thanks to a successful crowdfunding campaign, community donations, and grants from the council, the building underwent a dramatic makeover. The outdated interior was reimaged with a new café area, kitchen, cloakroom, and a warm, inviting reception space. Volunteers repainted walls, fixed fixtures, and helped build furniture. Upgrades to heating and cooling systems followed.

The result was not just a refurbished building - it was a rebirth. Since opening in March 2022, the Leatherhead Community Hub has quickly become a cornerstone of life in north Leatherhead.

What was previously
an underused and tired
community centre
has been transformed
into the Leatherhead
Community Hub

Involving people in their future

Portsmouth City Council

Too often, regeneration especially of deprived areas has ignored the most important people: those who live there.

The huge Somerstown estate in Portsmouth is the part of the city people are most scared to go to. Yet those who live there talk of a strong sense of community.

The past three decades have seen various regeneration plans not be delivered, increasing resentment among local residents.

So, when two blocks - Leamington and Horatia Houses - had to be taken down as the concrete in them was at real risk from a gas explosion - the Liberal Democrat administration did things differently.

It set up a panel of local people to devise the plans. The only red lines were that there should be more council homes than before, and it must be viable. It was also made clear that the new scheme should enable people of all backgrounds to move there.

Over two years, the panel worked with external architects and local ward councillors on the plans at its monthly meetings.

Community consultation formed part of fun days for local people, moving the scheme forward while instilling a sense of community. Attendees commented on the latest version of the plans and their feedback was given to the panel.

Over time, the panel dealt with thorny issues such as the height of the new blocks, the balance between car parking spaces and active travel and how the new development could be safe and welcoming for new people.

The scheme - 577 new homes - including nearly 50 more council ones than before - community and green space and a handful of car parking spaces - was approved by the council's planning committee last year. This makes it 'shovel-ready' for the government's new £39 billion programme for social and 'affordable' housing.

577 new homes -

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The four-day week

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Liberal Democrat controlled South Cambridgeshire District Council became the first local authority in the UK to pilot a four-day working week for desk-based staff.

The trial was introduced to tackle significant recruitment and retention difficulties, reduce reliance on agency staff, and improve overall service delivery.

An initial 3-month trial ran from January to March 2023, followed by an extended second phase from March 2023 to March 2024. During this period, officers were expected to complete 100 per cent of their work for 100 per cent of their pay, but in 32 hours over four days instead of 37 over five. The trial was independently evaluated by the Universities of Cambridge, Salford and Bradford using 24 performance indicators alongside staff wellbeing surveys and a public consultation.

The four-day week has been a huge success. Results showed that 21 of the 24 performance indicators were maintained or improved, including nine which improved. These included:

- Percentage of calls answered by the contact centre.
- Percentage of council house repairs complete within 24 hours.
- Average number of days taken to update housing benefit and council tax support claims.
- Percentage of planning applications (both majors and non-majors) decided within target or agreed timescales.

The health and wellbeing of officers dramatically improved. When comparing this year's survey (February 2025) to the survey before the trial was announced (August/early September 2022), Wellbeing Specialists, Robertson Cooper, commented that some of the most dramatic improvements were for health (+16 per cent), with physical and mental health increasing by 15 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively. National benchmarking showed employee commitment improved from -4 to +5 and intention to stay at the council leapt from -2 to +10.

Posts that had previously been difficult to appoint to especially in planning and waste were filled and staff retention improved. Reduced agency usage helped contain costs, saving local taxpayers over £399,000 a year.

Council services remain available for residents Monday-Friday, with emergency services available 24/7 and the council's contact centre opening hours were extended to include one evening each week.

It is clear from the council's experience that, with careful design and oversight, a four-day week can revolutionise workforce productivity, employee wellbeing, and service delivery in local government.



Achieving 'Outstanding' from 'Requires Improvement'

Durham County Council

Durham County Council achieved 'Outstanding' for the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families. It's a dramatic change from the 'Requires Improvement' grading inherited from the old Labour administration in 2021.

The Inspection found senior and political leaders in Durham were ambitious, purposeful and influential, they are unrelenting in their pursuit of doing what is right for children and families, resulting in consistent improvements and the delivery of high-quality services for children and families.

These bespoke services,
such as the emotional
well-being and early
help offer, have made
a considerable
difference to children
and their families

The Inspectors said:

'There is a strong relationship between the Leader of the Council (Liberal Democrat), the lead member for children's services, the chief executive and the director of children's services.

Their collaboration and unstinting focus on 'getting it right for children' is truly influential. Together, they have successfully created a culture in which children and the workforce come first. This is leading to an outward-facing and innovative service that is meeting the needs of children and families to a high standard.

Leaders understand the service well. Their comprehensive self-evaluation is accurate and reflects the areas for development identified during the inspection. Leaders have not stood still and have been proactive in developing provision to address need and further enhance services for children...'

New services were introduced across all areas of practice. These bespoke services, such as the emotional well-being and early help offer, have made a considerable difference to children and their families.

Free school meals auto enrolment

Durham County Council

Auto-enrolling children for free school meals helped over 2,000 more pupils access school lunches each day and boosted education funding in County Durham by around £5 million.

Across County Durham over 23,000 pupils receive support through claiming free school meals, saving parents, on average, £450 per child per year.

The Liberal Democrat Leader and Cabinet which led the council at that time knew there were more eligible children missing out of free school meals - and took action.

During summer 2024, the council's Poverty Action Steering Group and the Child Poverty working group carried out an auto-enrolment pilot for free school meals by re-using data the council already held.

Local Council Tax Reduction information was used along with the latest school census data to help identify families with school age children who were likely to be eligible for free school meals but not claiming them.

Working with the Department of Work and Pensions to identify the appropriate legal gateway and with a data protection impact assessment in place, the pilot started.

A letter was sent in August 2024 to the families offering a three-week 'opt-out' window for an eligibility check rather than an 'opt-in' requirement. At the end of the 'opt-out' period eligible children were auto-enrolled for free school meals.

The outcome was that 1,727 families were identified as eligible, with a total of 2,254 extra children benefiting from free school meals. Just 16 families chose to opt out.

This increase in eligibility has also generated an extra £3 million pupil premium for schools across County Durham. In addition, schools will also be eligible for an estimated additional £2 million through the mainstream funding formula.

They didn't forget home educated children either. Although not eligible for free school meals, the families were sent an outcome letter with more details on what support was available such as welfare assistance, 'fun and food' schemes during school holidays and Household Support Funding.

Uniform Swap Shop

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

Liberal Democrat run Hinckley and Bosworth Council ran its first Uniform Swap Shops project in the summer of 2024. School Uniform Swap Shops were set up in local co-ops and community venues across the borough to help families prepare for the new school term.

Residents were encouraged to donate good quality school uniforms that were no longer required.

The Uniform Swap Shops helped families across the borough with the rising cost of living and cut down on clothes going to landfill, supporting our Climate Change and Biodiversity strategy.

During the summer period there is often an increase in families needing to access food banks or struggling to pay priority debts due to the mounting cost of school uniforms.

To facilitate the donation and distribution of used school uniforms, collection and drop-off points were established at nine locations across the borough. These points allowed families to donate uniforms they no longer need and take any items they require, without the obligation to donate in order to receive.

The Uniform Swap Shops initiative was a collaborative effort with key community buildings and the local co-ops, ensuring a comprehensive service for all families in the borough. Over 50 schools in our borough were represented across the nine locations. The project was promoted through schools, social prescribers, and social media.

Assessing the impact of this project presents challenges. There was a near 4 per cent reduction in foodbank usage across the borough compared to the same period in the previous year, when the swap shop was not in operation. It's a promising indicator, although cannot be directly attributed to the swap shop's influence.

The Uniform Swap Shop also ran a successful social media campaign to boost project awareness. One Facebook post alone generated 11,500 impressions and over 600 engagements. Following on from the success of the summer campaign, a further Easter Uniform Swap Shop was held throughout April 2025 and was a resounding success. Running for the first time during the Easter period, the initiative supported families across the borough in managing the rising cost of school uniforms. With nine locations representing all schools in the borough, the swap shop reached a wide range of communities. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the value and impact of the initiative.



Sutton's innovative parenting programme

London Borough of Sutton

Sutton Council has been delivering an innovative parenting programme to children and families, including to those parents whose children have additional needs, since 2022.

Since the scheme was launched by the Liberal Democrat run council, over 400 parents have attended an in-person parenting course with another 500 accessing the online offer. Sutton Council is also proud that 149 parents have completed an autism parenting programme.

As part of the Innovative Parenting Programme, the council has been delivering parenting courses to male prisoners at HMP High Down. The positive impact of the programme for dads taking part was clear to see when the council met the prison Governor, staff and prisoners to present certificates. The successful programme is also now being delivered at the women's prison, HMP Downview.

Since the scheme was launched by the Liberal Democrat run council, over **400** parents have attended an in-person parenting course with another **500** accessing the online offer

Strengthening Youth Council's role in local government



Milton Keynes City Council

Listening to the local Youth Council, led to Liberal Democrat councillors in Milton Keynes to call for young people's role in Local Government to be strengthened.

Following a Liberal Democrat motion to Milton Keynes City Council, Youth Councillors, including the Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor, are now able to ask questions at full council and Cabinet meetings - helping to further empower young people in local democracy.

The Liberal Democrat team called for dedicated time for Youth Council members to engage with Cabinet Members. While public questions are already received at both full council and Cabinet meetings, there had previously been no specific provision for the newly elected Youth Council to participate in these discussions.

The motion, which was passed unanimously, also urged the council to explore ways Youth Councillors' views can be embedded in policy development. It also called for the Government to lower the voting age to 16.

The motion was taken to full council after Liberal Democrat councillors listened to the thoughts and experiences of Milton Keynes Youth Council. The Youth Councillors are not only ambassadors for the council, but also for Milton Keynes as a whole, so it is only right they are involved in shaping the city's future.

By giving them a voice at meetings Youth Councillors can now help create policies that truly benefit them. The Liberal Democrat team on Milton Keynes has long championed youth involvement in local government, having previously secured the appointment of Milton Keynes' first ever Youth Mayor.

Free holiday activities make a difference

Mole Valley District Council

Free holiday activities provided by Mole Valley District Council saw nearly 1,200 children and young people take part last year. The scheme was launched in 2021 by the Liberal Democrat run council, providing enriching experiences during school breaks.

Despite ongoing financial challenges, the council has not only maintained but expanded the programme, ensuring more children can take part. The aim is to help everyone find something they enjoy, regardless of background or ability.

Mole Valley's scheme offers a diverse and accessible range of activities, starting with traditional sports in its park and extended to include arts, nature-based activities, and a broader selection of sports suitable for all ages.

For the youngest children, leisure centres offer free soft-play sessions - perfect for active play and socialising. Older children and teenagers have a variety of options, including judo, gymnastics, multi-sports, golf, pickleball, skateboarding, swimming sessions, as well as creative pursuits like bushcraft, painting, drama, dance, collage, and DJ-ing. There really is something for everyone, encouraging active lifestyles and creativity.

Working with partners, the programme's modest annual cost of around £25,000 delivers enormous benefits - especially for families in areas more affected by the rising cost of living. Many children and families would otherwise find such activities out of reach. Through this initiative, the council is making a real difference.

In the summer of 2024, the Holiday Activity Programme saw a fantastic turnout, with over 1,190 participants enjoying a wide variety of events. The feedback from children and parents was overwhelmingly positive.

The success of this programme has also allowed the council to adapt in challenging circumstances. When the Surrey Youth Games were cancelled, the council worked with local sports clubs to allocate the remaining funding - originally intended for the games - as bursaries for talented young athletes. This ensured that talented children continued to receive support and opportunities to develop their skills.

Through these initiatives, Liberal Democrat run Mole Valley is demonstrating that investing in young people and community activities pays dividends, creating positive memories, fostering skills, and supporting those most in need.

Children's services, the journey to good and beyond



Westmorland and Furness Council

Hard work embedding a whole Children's Services Approach through their 'Ambition for Every Child' strategy', delivered alongside 'business as usual' has helped Westmorland and Furness Council achieve an Ofsted rating of 'Good'.

Before the Liberal Democrat run council invested in a year-long significant transformation and change programme, the council was rated as 'Requires Improvement'.

The council adopted a strategic approach to driving improvement across the service and this was achieved despite the difficult and challenging environment of major change, financial resources and major upheaval for staff.

There is now a well-informed, engaged, motivated workforce and the right culture and values for Children Services to really make a difference to young people's lives.

The council has also been developing Family Hubs and a Family Help service. The first Family Hub was launched in Barrow and this service has gone from strength to strength.

Following the approval of a new Family Help Strategy, work has been completed to bring some key support services back in house - establishing a holistic in-house Family Help Service for Westmorland and Furness.

Greener Chelmsford: climate and ecological action

Chelmsford City Council

In 2019, the Liberal Democrat team campaigned to create a ‘greener, fairer and more-connected Chelmsford’ and have worked hard to do that ever since. They turned that campaign slogan into the city council’s strategy – ‘Our Chelmsford, Our Plan’:

At the first full council after the election, the Liberal Democrat Group proposed a motion to declare a climate and ecological emergency, and followed that up with an action plan to improve the local environment and make the council carbon neutral by 2030.

A signature policy has been the pledge to plant one tree for every resident (185,000) over ten years. This has required bold leadership and financial commitment to purchase land and seedling trees. The Liberal Democrats are embedding into the Local Plan a commitment to improve biodiversity by 20 per cent on the largest development sites.

Chelmsford City Council has also established a colony of black bees on the roof of the civic centre, in the heart of Chelmsford city centre. Bees help crops that we rely on for food. The city council is helping the bees by creating ‘Space to Thrive’.

Rooftop hives are especially beneficial to bees, as they can travel freely to feeding areas nearby, such as Central Park, unencumbered by obstacles.

Through their ‘Species-Rich Grassland’ policy Chelmsford City Council is creating richer habitats for pollinators year-on-year, reaching every corner of the district.

You can find out more at Chelmsford city life website case study called ‘Giving nature space to thrive in Chelmsford all year round’:

citylife.chelmsford.gov.uk/posts/giving-nature-space-to-thrive-in-chelmsford-all-year-round



New Big Bin collection service

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

Liberal Democrat run Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council introduced a new 1100 litre wheeled bin collection to support residents to get rid of their large waste responsibly and reduce fly tipping.

The Street Scene Services team focuses not only on removing litter and fly tipping but also on reducing it at source through enforcement and providing residents with waste removal services. They generate £350,000 per year from bulky and miscellaneous waste collections, and house clearances for our housing repairs service.

Fly tipping remains a stubborn problem, and the team were increasingly doing bespoke quotes for residents to remove larger volumes of waste. They therefore needed a solution to support residents to dispose of their waste responsibly and to standardise this offer and developed the Big Bin service. The service specifically targets those who are having a clear out and have too much waste for one trip to the tip, but not enough for a skip. It is also ideal for people who don't have a car, or space for a skip and would therefore be more likely to use unauthorised waste collectors and inadvertently have their waste fly tipped.

Launched in November 2023 the service consists of a £60 payment for a 1100l wheeled bin, plus 2 x 240l recycling bins, sacks for textile recycling and a sack for small WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) for one week. A 600l bin was introduced for those with smaller requirements or narrower access, and a garden waste variant was introduced in September 2024 following resident's requests.

Residents can pay more to have two sets of bins, and to keep them for an additional week. A 25 per cent discount is also available for those in receipt of certain benefits. The additional recycling bins and bags are available free of charge and are well used. Full details are on council's webpage hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk/bigbin.

Residents are directed to the online booking form to reduce admin costs, but a telephone booking is available for those without IT access. A database sitting behind the booking form also manages most of the admin needed, organising delivery schedules etc.

The first social media post achieved unanimous positive comments, hundreds of shares and reached nearly 30,000 people. They had 31 bins booked in the first two weeks. Since then, bookings have ranged from 13 - 34 per week, this directly corresponds to the amount of promotion done via social media posts, articles in the resident's newsletters, attending events and vehicle signage.



Leading the way on climate and sustainability

Huntingdonshire District Council

Practical steps like solar installations, LED upgrades, and low-emission fleet trials helped Huntingdonshire District Council, a joint administration of Liberal Democrats, Labour, Independent and Green Party, reduce its operational carbon footprint by nearly 19 per cent since 2019, cutting 692 tonnes of CO₂.

The flagship Net Zero Villages programme has supported rural communities with over £250,000 to install heat pumps and solar panels in local buildings – helping lower energy bills and reduce emissions. This approach is already being hailed as a model for rural climate action.

Four of the district parks now hold Green Flag Awards, including the first-ever award for St Neots' Riverside Park. These accolades recognise high standards of management and care, with major improvements made to accessibility, facilities, and natural habitats.

The council has also been recognised in National Climate Action Scorecards for integrating net zero targets into its financial and operational planning.

The flagship Net Zero
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Funding for local flood response groups

Milton Keynes City Council

The Liberal Democrats on Milton Keynes City Council were successful in securing a £10,000 funding boost to support areas affected by flooding.

The £10,000 which was put forward as an amendment to the Labour budget for 2025/26 supports Local Flood Response Groups. The money is being used to offer training sessions to community groups helping residents develop robust flood plans for their area.

A strong local flood plan will ensure residents are well-prepared for potential flooding and can provide immediate local support to those affected by flood emergencies. Additionally, having a well thought out flood plan will allow community groups to access more funding from the Environment Agency for essential flood resilience measures.

This is a great example of how a small amount of funding and community action can make a real difference. The flood groups not only alert residents, but they also help with closing roads and delivering sandbags to those in need.

This is a great example of how a small amount of funding and community action can make a real difference



Newport Pagnell Flood Group



Milton Keynes City Council

Milton Keynes was hit with a downpour which led to flooding and caused widespread disruption across the city on 23rd December 2020. Areas such as Newport Pagnell, Stony Stratford, New Bradwell, Olney, and Lavendon were badly hit and high river levels on Christmas Eve led to road closures, property damage, and distress for local residents.

In September 2024, Newport Pagnell was hit yet again with heavy rainfall.

Local Liberal Democrat councillors who have consistently campaigned for proactive measures to protect homes, streets, and roads from the devastating impact of flooding, and since, have formed a local flood group.

The Newport Pagnell Flood Group is made up of local councillors and dedicated volunteers who alert the emergency services of any potential flooding and provide lightweight defence bags.

The active flood group works closely with Milton Keynes City Council's Flood team, Newport Pagnell Town Council, and the Environment Agency. This has been instrumental in educating residents and raising awareness on flood risks and practical intervention measures.

Changing the payment system for optional garden waste collection

Mole Valley District Council

A new flexible approach by Liberal Democrat run Mole Valley District Council is giving residents more choice about joining and renewing the optional garden waste collection service. It's making better use of staff time and resources too.

As part of the council's transformation project, a key goal was to make the renewal process more efficient. Previously, staff spent significant time contacting residents via emails, letters, and phone calls, especially during the summer months when most renewals are due.

The new system, which around 60 per cent of customers have signed up to as it's rolled out, also aims to cut the number of bins emptied when payment has stopped, preventing unnecessary collections.

To access the updated service, residents create an online council account. Letters were sent out in advance to explain the change and highlight the benefits of digital registration. Individual support remains available to assist with the transition for residents with low digital confidence.

Collection crews also now have in-cab data indicating which bins need emptying and which should be removed if payment has stopped.

Once fully implemented, residents will receive automated renewal notices one month before their renewal date, along with reminders if payment isn't received within the first two weeks. When the entire registration and renewal process is fully automated, only minimal personal support will be needed.

This new system represents a significant step forward in making garden waste collection more streamlined and sustainable. It reduces administrative workload and enhances convenience for residents.

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Sustainable projects for a climate emergency

Mole Valley District Council

Since declaring a Climate Emergency in 2019, Liberal Democrat run Mole Valley District Council has made significant strides toward a greener, more sustainable future with the ambitious goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2030.

Key Initiatives and Achievements

- The Carbon Trust's carbon audit established the baseline emissions. The council switched to a green energy tariff, reducing their overall carbon footprint.
- A dedicated Sustainable and Climate Change Officer was appointed to lead local efforts. The council set up an Environment Forum and a Cross-Party Working Group to develop the Climate Strategy and Action Plan, guiding ongoing initiatives.
- Changes were made to land management, including amending the mowing regime to support ecological health. The council's procurement policies were updated to ensure future contracts align with climate goals, aiming for net zero by 2030.
- In July 2022, a motion was passed urging the Surrey Pension Fund to reach net zero emissions by 2035. The council also strives to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals, embedding sustainability into its core policies.
- Mole Valley declared an Ecology Emergency in July 2024, broadening efforts to combat ecological crises and preserve biodiversity.

Community and Local Action

Grants facilitated eight local community projects, including solar panel installations at Ashted Memorial Hall, new double glazing in community halls, and conservation of community gardens.

- The October 2024 draft of the Local Plan features:
 - Zero Carbon Homes initiative for new large housing developments
 - Electric Vehicle Charging points mandated for new homes
 - A 20 per cent net biodiversity gain requirement for new development.
 - Mandatory Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)
 - Policies to enhance recycling, waste reduction, and Green Belt preservation.
- The plan promotes protection of local nature reserves, including initiatives like the 4Bs Biodiversity Project, and aims to respect landscape character in developments.

Transport and Water Conservation

- On-Demand Electric Buses: The 'Connect' service launched in North Mole Valley and has expanded in Surrey, including Caterham, supporting sustainable local transport.

Improving recycling collections

Rutland County Council

Concerned that recycling rates were too low and around 40 per cent of what was in the residual bin was food waste, Liberal Democrat led Rutland Council took action.

It was believed that recycling was being put in the residual bins due to lack of awareness of what could be recycled and lack of capacity when there were missed bin collections. There had also been growing complaints about bins being missed, a problem caused by the older refuse lorries increasingly breaking down

The council took the opportunity to tackle several problems at the same time.

It bought a complete fleet of new waste collection lorries. In-cab technology was installed to assist with service monitoring, green bin collection (chargeable service) and serviced households. At the same time, the council stepped up communications to encourage greater recycling. As a result, recycling rates are up, and bin collections have become more reliable.

The council is now introducing a weekly food waste collection. The increase in recycling and reduction in residual waste has provided the funding to maintain the fortnightly collection of residual waste along with reducing the size of the residual bin.

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Keeping streets clean

South Cambridgeshire District Council

South Cambridgeshire District Council is making it simpler for residents to help keep streets clean, thanks to new QR code stickers being rolled out across its maintained litter and dog waste bins.

Each bin that the Liberal Democrat run council is responsible for will now display a new sticker featuring a QR code.

It's another big step
in making street
care service quicker,
smarter, and even
more connected to
our residents

Residents can simply scan the QR code with their smartphone to instantly report issues like full bins, directly through the website. For those without a smartphone, the sticker also provides a phone number for quick and easy reporting.

This initiative is part of the council's ongoing commitment to enhancing street care services and making it easier for residents to report issues quickly and conveniently.

It's another big step in making street care service quicker, smarter, and even more connected to our residents. And with the council's new website tools, it's easy to check exactly when bins are emptied, and sweepers are due - it's never been easier to stay informed and keep communities clean.



Schools Climate Assembly

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

Stockport Liberal Democrats could never be accused of not taking the climate crisis head on. In 2019 the council declared a climate emergency, and has developed a cross-party 'Climate Action Now' steering group that runs throughout the work now being undertaken

However, when trying to encourage people to join the cause, it can often feel overwhelming.

People can feel powerless when it comes to climate change and that they cannot make the difference. It's vital, therefore, to empower younger generations to never be daunted by the scale of the problems ahead, and to think how to secure a safer, greener future.

Stockport Schools Climate Assembly summit does exactly that. The council has allowed young people to learn about, propose, debate and vote on climate action ideas. Giving them real life experience of how to make a difference in their local environment.

Schools explore the issues facing the planet in a series of lessons designed to be flexible for each school and discuss and finalise a list of ideas to be submitted. A shortlist of the best ideas is created, and those ideas are debated in the council chamber. The winner is voted upon by students, and work begins by the council and schools to make it a reality. Previous achievements have been to make eco-friendly period products more accessible in schools and to support community gardens.

Climate denial remains with us, so it's critical that we never believe we have 'won' and settled the debate over climate change. To give young people the confidence to boldly stand up and advocate for their principles is invaluable.

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Towards being a carbon neutral town

Watford Borough Council

Watford Borough Council is pushing forward with its ambitious plans to become a carbon neutral town by 2030

Backed by the government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, £892,000 will be invested in sustainability works at Watford Palace Theatre, Orbital Community Centre, and Harebreaks Community Hub.

The works will significantly reduce the carbon footprint of each building, cutting energy use, removing reliance on fossil fuels, and supporting the Liberal Democrat run council's wider climate goals.

At Watford Palace Theatre, improvements will cut the theatre's carbon emissions by around 75 per cent, saving nearly 1,300 tonnes of CO₂ over 20 years. The upgrades include replacing gas boilers and chillers with modern, energy-efficient air source heat pumps that provide both heating and cooling. The building will also gain loft insulation, heat recovery in the ventilation system, and upgraded radiators and coils to work efficiently at lower temperatures.

The Orbital Community Centre will see reductions in emissions by over 80 per cent, saving around 450 tonnes of CO₂ over 20 years while Harebreaks Community Hub will have emissions cut by around 90 per cent, saving close to 800 tonnes of CO₂ over 20 years.

Previous successful energy efficiency upgrades across the town have taken place at Watford Leisure Centre - Woodside, Fullarians Rugby Club, the Town Hall, and Watford Colosseum.

£892,000 will be invested in sustainability works at Watford Palace Theatre

Nature recovery

Westmorland and Furness Council

Putting strategy into action has helped Liberal Democrat run Westmorland and Furness Council become a leading authority for nature recovery.

Through the Cumbria Local Nature Recovery Strategy, for which the council is the responsible authority, it is maximising the joint effort of local groups and communities to do what they can for nature and with it, building successful partnerships and embedding community working.

With the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain, a team of ecologists is providing expert advice to council planners so that all developments provide a 10 per cent uplift for nature.

The council has assessed the potential for improving conditions for nature on its land and has started implementing some of this through schemes such as Planting for Pollinators and One Tree per Resident.

Planting for Pollinators, linking with Cumbria Wildlife Trust, ensures native wildflower mixes are planted in parks and open spaces, connecting habitat corridors for pollinator species. This year 14 sites will be planted across Westmorland and Furness, with community groups and schools leading the planting days and ten-year management plans.

The One Tree per Resident project was created in response to the climate and biodiversity crises, aiming to create greener spaces, enhance biodiversity, and help tackle climate change. The project aims to plant a quarter of a million trees over five years, one for every resident.

A new Community Tree and Hedgerow Planting grant scheme was launched to boost community involvement in tree planting, ensuring Westmorland and Furness reaps the benefits of more trees and hedgerows. The initiative supports communities across the area to plant one tree, or one metre of hedgerow equivalent, for every resident, bringing long-term benefits to people, wildlife, and the environment.

So far, around 42,000 trees and hedgerows have been planted across Westmorland and Furness through community-led initiatives and partner organisations, supported by grants for community orchards and micro woodlands.

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Net Zero journey

Westmorland and Furness Council

Working to achieve carbon net zero by 2037, Liberal Democrat run Westmorland and Furness Council is working with partners, suppliers, local businesses and communities to rethink the way they approach carbon reduction.

Major projects include the construction of a 2MW solar farm in Barrow, installing almost 3,700 solar panels - saving around 507 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year and the retro-fit of Voreda House, the UK's first council office building to achieve Passivhaus EnerPHit accreditation.

It's all part of the council's five-year Carbon Management Strategy and Climate Action Plan and significant progress has already been made in the first year.

A new Fleet Decarbonisation and Replacement Strategy supports the vehicle replacement programme for the number and type of vehicles from fully electric, hybrid and green fuel alternatives. The council is also trialling converting its newer vehicles to HVO biofuel, cutting emissions by up to 90 per cent.

Decarbonisation is now included in the commissioning of major projects. Contractors must produce a carbon reduction plan showing how they will minimise carbon emissions and provide measurable targets.

The council was awarded bronze accreditation from the Carbon Literacy Project with

365 officers and councillors trained to date. The training will continue to be offered to all councillors to support the ambition of the council to achieve silver accreditation during 2025/26.

Other projects include the Greening Business Scheme (an extension of the Greening Eden Business) which has supported 29 businesses to reduce their carbon footprint, saving the area over 450 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent annually.

The Green Doctor scheme supported 531 households with energy efficiency measures to help reduce fuel bills and cut carbon emissions.

And, along with local businesses and community groups, the council is part of the Innovate UK Rural Net Zero project, looking at how a circular economy, green finance and the decarbonisation of the food systems can help support the area they serve to become net zero by 2037.



Top performing district council for their work on the climate crisis



Winchester City Council

Climate Emergency UK has scored all UK councils on their performance in addressing the climate crisis, with Liberal Democrat run Winchester City Council awarded a score of 68 per cent overall (up 19 per cent compared to 2023) being the top performing district council.

The Climate Action Scorecard system was devised by Climate Emergency UK to rank councils on how they're tackling climate change. It makes an assessment based on seven areas:

- building and heating
- transport
- planning and land use
- governance and finance
- biodiversity
- collaboration and engagement
- waste reduction and food.

The council scored particularly highly in the categories of Buildings and Heating as well as Planning and Land Use, reflecting its work to increase the energy efficiency of its buildings and housing stock and the carbon reduction policies in its emerging local plan.

Collaboration and engagement was also recognised as a particular strength of the council - visible in the collaborative work it is doing with partners, businesses and organisations to be a carbon neutral district by 2030.

The work doesn't stop here, the council has plans in place to reduce carbon emissions even further with a food waste recycling service, and a nature improvement plan to increase biodiversity launching in the autumn of 2025.

Support for women and girls: local taxi drivers invited to become White Ribbon Ambassadors

Milton Keynes City Council

Milton Keynes City Council receives a high proportion of complaints from women regarding inappropriate behaviour or language by taxi drivers towards female passengers.

Although not all taxi drivers are offensive to women, there is a percentage that are. Women and girls have the right to feel safe in Milton Keynes and as a licensing authority the city council should do all it can to address this.

The Liberal Democrats proposed a motion to full council to launch a new White Ribbon scheme in a bid to solve the problem. Local taxi drivers are invited to become White Ribbon Ambassadors and display special White Ribbon stickers in their vehicles to show that abuse of women is not tolerated.

As a result, Milton Keynes City Council has now resolved to ensure that all new applicants and taxi license holders understand that verbal, physical, and emotional abuse is not tolerated. Mandatory safeguarding training for drivers will be improved so that it includes domestic abuse and equality training.

All drivers licensed by the council undertake mandatory training to ensure they have a better understanding of the abuse suffered by children and vulnerable adults prior to obtaining their license.

The city council will also encourage all those passengers experiencing abuse to report it. Milton Keynes City Council will also work with operators to encourage their drivers to promote the White Ribbon campaign and write to Transport for London and other local authorities whose drivers operate in Milton Keynes to encourage them to take a similar approach.

This example is not only good practice but also shows what Liberal Democrats can do in opposition.

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Transport initiatives

Oxfordshire County Council

Politically bold and innovative transport policies of Liberal Democrat led Oxfordshire County Council have attracted widespread attention and made a positive difference for residents.

- A programme of 20mph speed limits in communities across Oxfordshire has been rolled out. Over 300, about 85 per cent, of all towns and villages in the county applied to take part. The results are safer streets and potentially lowered insurance premiums. It's a popular and successful policy helping to save lives.
- The School Streets programme introduced car-free zones around school gates at nine schools, so far. They encourage walking and cycling to school, improve safety, and boost social interactions across the school community.
 - The first schemes required lead-in periods staffed by volunteers, which was challenging, before moving to enforcement by automatic number plate recognition technology. It is planned to go straight to camera enforcement for new schemes. Council officers are reviewing every school in the county for suitability and the council is also working with private schools, which generate a significant amount of traffic too.
- A fleet of 159 zero-emission battery-electric buses has been introduced in central Oxfordshire, in partnership with bus operators and the government. It's the highest number of electric buses per capita of any county. The scheme required the council to commit to improving bus efficiency by reducing congestion, already a key commitment in the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.
- Free bus travel is available for asylum seekers, allowing them to contribute and engage in their local communities. It's been achieved through partnership working and is a small policy the Liberal Democrat team on the council is particularly proud of.
- The Liberal Democrat run council continues to invest, financially and politically, in holding down Park and Ride fares, and youth bus tickets, in response to the national fare cap hike from £2 to £3 and is looking at creative ways to make better use of Park and Rides to support the hospital and education sectors in Oxford.

All transport policy is health policy. Embedding sustainable travel choices at an early age gives young people better outcomes, better physical and mental health, greater resilience and independence and enhanced social and educational opportunities.

Freeing road space from cars makes buses run better and makes walking and cycling more attractive, which gets more people out of cars. It's a virtuous circle. And it works.



Boosting buses

Portsmouth City Council

Portsea Island's geography, three roads on and off the island and high population density makes it vulnerable to congestion and pollution. Before COVID, 40,000 people commuted into Portsmouth every day, while 30,000 commuted out. Three out of every five of those trips involved the car.

Bus usage is low - a third of nearby Brighton and Hove for instance - vehicles get caught up in the congestion. Getting from Paulsgrove in the north-west of the city to the centre took 13 minutes by car and 43 minutes by bus.

The pandemic wiped out the gains seen in the previous decade, so in 2021, the Liberal Democrat led council set up an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators.

This led to the council applying to the Bus Service Improvement Programme. Clear political visions - the Cabinet member for Transport was the only one to lead these presentations - Portsmouth showed how change would cut congestion and tackle the climate emergency.

As a result, it got the biggest settlement in England, £48.1 million, spent on more bus lanes, making sure all bus stops had real time information, greener vehicles and improving services.

Christmas Day, regular weekend night buses and better evening services for subsidised routes happened for the first time. Buses available 24/7 to help people using the local hospital also came in.

Fares were cut for deprived people and teenagers, alongside free buses on key dates, such as Small Business Saturday.

The results are stunning: Portsmouth is the only part of England where bus usage is back to pre-COVID levels. A million more journeys every year. The only route between Paulsgrove and the seafront - subsidised for decades - needs council cash no longer.

It is also having an impact: pollution is down on key routes, and it is easier to get round the city. All down to a clear vision and ambitious milestones.

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Digital dynamic rural transport

Rutland County Council

Radical and innovative change has helped Rutland County Council provide a public bus service to 20 villages for the first time – and they're free until March 2026 to help encourage passenger take-up.

The council, which is led by the Liberal Democrats, chose to tackle the looming issues of a deficit in the transport budget related to both heavy subsidy of public transport fixed routes and overspend on school transport.

Using money from a successful Levelling Up Fund bid to improve local bus services and Bus Service Improvement Plan monies, Rutland invested in a fleet of new minibuses, including some electric ones. In place of three heavily subsidised fixed routes, a new demand-responsive service was introduced in two phases in March and August 2025.

Residents contact the call centre either via an app or via the telephone to say where they want to be picked-up from and where they want to go to. They can specify an arrival time or a departure time. The pick-ups and drop-offs are to designated bus stops, so it is not a taxi service.

The call centre plans the route including all the appropriate bookings and confirms the time. In theory buses can be booked up to an hour before departure but the new service has proved to be so popular in the first phase that it is often fully booked!

Beryl Bikes Green Loop



Watford Borough Council

Watford Borough Council was the first district council in the country to launch a bike sharing scheme in partnership with Beryl Bikes. The scheme was later enhanced by the introduction of e-bikes, making Watford the first council in the country to offer electric bikes as part of the service.

Despite this innovation, the town still faced challenges with cycling infrastructure. Many residents and visitors found it difficult to easily cycle across Watford due to a lack of joined-up routes. Local cycling groups such as Spokes and Watford Cycle Hub suggested creating a circular cycling route to improve connectivity and encourage more people to cycle. This was included in Mayor Peter Taylor's 2022 mayoral manifesto.

Working closely with cycle groups, the Liberal Democrat run council developed the Green Loop, a 6.5-mile circular route that surrounds Watford town centre.

The Green Loop connects existing walking and cycling paths and links key locations including schools, shops, parks, and heritage sites. By creating this joined-up network, the project makes it easier and more enjoyable for people to walk, run, or cycle around the town.

This initiative has made a real difference by actively promoting healthier lifestyles and greener travel options, helping to reduce car journeys and improve air quality. It has also provided local residents with more opportunities for leisure activities, allowing them to explore Watford's parks, green spaces, and heritage sites. The successful rollout of this scheme has received national recognition for its ambitious vision and strong community engagement, winning both the RTPi Digital Planning Award and the LGC Future Places Award.

Enhanced bus routes



Westmorland and Furness Council

Westmorland and Furness Council committed £1.7 million of Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus funding from the Department for Transport to support bus services across the area in 2024/25 for up to one year, under the leadership of the Liberal Democrats.

From Spring 2025, communities have benefited from significant bus service improvements that provide better access to employment, education and essential services. The hope is that this short-term funding will create a commercially viable network of self-sustaining bus routes.

A total of 11 new bus routes are running across the area until Spring 2026, directly addressing needs highlighted through a community consultation process and delivering vital connections for residents and visitors.

The funding will also keep nine existing bus services running until November 2025 which were originally restored or enhanced earlier this year by the council.

Vast improvements to the frequency and timings of services will also be introduced right across the areas of Eden, Furness and South Lakeland.

One of the supported routes is the 105 Greystoke service, with the funding enabling the North Lakes Primary School bus route to be reinstated, providing children and young people with a reliable way to travel home.

Cambridgeshire Quality of Life Survey and Poverty Commission

Cambridgeshire County Council

Having taken control of Cambridgeshire County Council in May 2021, the Liberal Democrats wanted to make sure they were putting their commitment to evidence based practice into practice.

To inform decision making about what the priority areas for the council should be they commissioned the Cambridgeshire Quality of Life Survey for the past three years.

The Quality-of-Life Survey provided lots of really useful and interesting information about what is important to different groups of local residents. A key finding was that the cost-of-living crisis was having a huge impact across Cambridgeshire. This was not a surprise but was also something that should not be ignored.

As a result, the Liberal Democrat leadership set up the Cambridgeshire Poverty Commission. The Commission is a group of Cambridge residents who have deep knowledge of the poverty in our area, either through lived experience or work or both. The commission was set up in autumn 2024 and their report and recommendations were launched in June 2025. The report can be found on the Cambridgeshire County Council website: cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/poverty-strategy-commission#final-report-1-0

The report has many excellent ideas, but a key piece of learning is that there is so much councils can do to help those in poverty by making the services we already offer more accessible to those who need them most. This should not be hugely costly but will require real effort from multiple partners.

You can find more information on the Quality of Life Survey on Cambridgeshire County Council website: cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/quality-of-life-survey



Food poverty

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

The cost-of-living crisis has led to a rapid decrease in the level of disposable income available to individuals and households alike. When income is tight food is typically one of the first expenses to be cut. Liberal Democrat run Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has created the role of the Food Poverty Officer to take a strategic and sustainable approach to tackle food poverty.

The officer works closely with emergency and non-emergency food provisions and offers guidance and support to ensure long-term solutions. By understanding the underlying factors contributing to food poverty in Hinckley and Bosworth Borough, the role aims to create a more effective and lasting change by addressing the root causes and providing comprehensive support to food provisions, services and residents alike.

A key challenge has been to reduce and prevent food poverty levels through a holistic approach that tackles its complex causes, while providing support to those currently experiencing it. The solution lies in adopting a comprehensive approach going beyond emergency food aid to focus on long-term strategies such as improving financial behaviours, access to services and affordable food.

Since coming into post the Food Poverty Officer has mapped and communicated with all official and non-official food provisions both inside Hinckley and Bosworth borough as well as those bordering.

This, along with data collection and sharing, has highlighted the current needs for residents, volunteers and food provisions, allowing different streams of support to be created.

Support has been provided to 16 emergency and non-emergency food venues, including foodbanks, pantries and a community fridge. In addition, more than 35 external support services such as Women's Aid, Falcon and Probation Services have been engaged and informed about wider avenues of food assistance. This wider support includes education on sustainable food options, a guide to free and affordable hot meals, out-of-area food mapping and a temporary accommodation food guide.

Support has been
provided to **16**
emergency and
non-emergency
food venues

Warm Welcomes

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

Declaring a cost-of-living emergency and implementing a 'Warm Welcomes' project was one of the positive responses of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council to the cost-of-living crisis.

The Liberal Democrat run council rebranded the warm spaces scheme as 'Warm Welcomes' providing everyone who attended with a free, warm, welcoming and friendly space. The offer at each venue varied but always included the opportunity to meet other people and have a hot drink.

More than 60 venues throughout the borough give much more than a warm space, they provide scope to combat social isolation and for residents to connect with others, feel part of a community, access services, receive practical support and advice as well as learning new skills.

Through evaluation forms and a celebration and networking event held in May 2024 the project has continued to develop.

Following the appointment of a Warm Spaces Support Officer the project has seen significant growth in outcomes, in 2024/25.

- **42** Warm Welcome provision grants of **£1200** awarded
- **62** Warm Welcome venues promoted
- **252** households supported to take up energy efficiency measures
 - Over **125** Warm Welcome sessions were provided every week with 16,000 visits by residents supported by 287 volunteers
- At least **9907** volunteer hours
- **3974** episodes of households receiving support, examples include hot meals, emergency food parcels, community pantries, community fridge's debt advice, wellbeing support, energy efficiency advice and warm packs.

42 Warm Welcome
provision grants of
£1200 awarded

Welfare Support Service



Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

The Council's Welfare Support Service is the first point of contact for residents in financial hardship in Liberal Democrat run Hinckley and Bosworth. The service provides debt, benefit, and money advice on the phone or, if necessary, in residents homes.

The service is free, impartial, and confidential and aims to work holistically with residents to ensure that people get the help they need. Residents can self-refer to the Welfare Support Service or be referred by another agency or team within the council.

The authority declared a Cost-of-Living Emergency in August 2022, and the Welfare Support Service was formed to help those originally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and later to support those struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.

The service was formed using external funding through the UK Share Prosperity Fund and Cadent.

The Welfare Support Team works closely with other agencies, and the goal is to maximise their incomes and connect them with appropriate services, whether through financial aid like grants or other support such as mental health and wellbeing services.

In 2024/25 the Welfare Support Service helped 1,617 people experiencing financial hardship and demand is rising.

Water company social tariffs

Portsmouth City Council

The Liberal Democrat leadership of Portsmouth City Council met with Southern Water to discuss a social tariff project. Using the council tax support information, they have identified just over 5,000 Portsmouth households as eligible for Southern Water's social tariff.

These residents will now be automatically transferred over to their social tariff saving each household in the region of £177 per year from their bills. Letters will be sent to these households shortly to notify them.

This partnership will see a total reduction of £886,000 for residents across Southern Water bills in Portsmouth.

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£886,000 for residents

A district offer to health

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council was the first district in Leicestershire to develop a Community Health and Well Being Plan, identifying five key priorities

- housing
- cost of living
- mental health
- supporting carers
- learning disability/special educational needs.

For each priority a delivery group was established with a lead assigned to develop supporting action plans. Collaborative working is critical, and the council leads the Hinckley and Bosworth Health and Well Being Partnership, with partners including the NHS and Public Health.

The Liberal Democrat led council has taken a number of initiatives including:

JOY platform for social prescribing - The Neighbourhood Mental Health Leads, on behalf of NHS commissioners, are responsible for the JOY platform, which is central to our mental health action planning. JOY is designed to bridge the gap between primary care and local community service providers, making it easier to connect patients with the services they need.

Between May and August 2024, 785 referrals were received by the local social prescribing team via JOY, showing that housing, finances, mental health, loneliness and isolation are the key areas of support requested. Early results of using JOY also showed a 37 per cent reduction in non-medical GP visits.

Steady Steps falls prevention programme - The council delivers a comprehensive falls prevention program with 253 targeted, older people participating in supervised sessions on a weekly basis (Oct '24).

Supporting our young Carers - Feedback from young carers confirmed there is a lot of support information available. However, accessibility and the vast array of advice was daunting to young carers. To help, the council is creating a new digital Young Carers Resource pack. It will be hosted on a local platform with all information linked for easy access.

Increasing physical activity levels is an essential tool in supporting people to live healthier, happier lives and the council has changed the way it works. Healthcare professionals no longer need to clinically sign off referrals for people to be active.

The changes eased pressure on the system and helped people to be more accountable for their physical health. A broader suite of physical activity opportunities is on offer, including guided walks, steady steps, community classes, beginner sports sessions, and supported leisure centre schemes.

Since the new process started over 238 referrals have been received with 178 triaged into physical activity interventions (for example, Escape Pain exercise referral programme, cardiac rehab). The remaining 60 were signposted into suitable community physical activity provisions.

Housing and Respiratory

Illness project

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

A countywide initiative delivered through the Lightbulb partnership to tackle respiratory illness risks from poor housing conditions is being led by Liberal Democrat run Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.

The project aims to tackle damp and mould issues, significant contributors to respiratory conditions, by bringing together housing and health services and encouraging early interventions in order to reduce the prevalence of serious illness associated with damp and mould.

Poor housing conditions and issues such as excess cold, damp and mould can exacerbate respiratory illnesses such as asthma. Hinckley and Bosworth Council has focussed on a number of initiatives:

- Establish a consistent framework across Leicestershire to identify and address damp and mould hazards early.
- Promote coordinated action between housing services and health to prevent respiratory illnesses.
- Consider and mitigate underlying factors such as fuel poverty and poor home insulation.
- Use of the JOY App, a national tool designed for Social Prescribers has been adapted for this project, allowing referrals and linking clients to necessary local services quickly. This ensures swift action is taken to improve living conditions and, subsequently, residents' health outcomes.

Bespoke training for health and housing practitioners will be delivered, focussing on identifying housing-related health risks and managing referrals to appropriate services. Along with that the project is aiming to reduce fuel poverty and improve insulation in homes.

Bespoke training for health and housing practitioners will be delivered, focussing on identifying housing-related health risks

Stop the revolving door between health and social care: joining up the care

Rutland County Council

Significant improvements in Adult Social Care have been made by Rutland County Council through integrating services, adopting innovative approaches to staffing, and enhancing collaboration with public health and care providers to support prevention and early intervention, along with enhanced day-care provision for people with complex needs, implementation of co-production groups and support for carers.

- **Innovative front-door services** - Contact and Response teams provide qualified advice and work with the in-house care provider to reduce unnecessary hospital or care home admissions, including end-of-life care at home.
- **Social Prescribing** - RISE (Rutland Integrated Social Empowerment Service) Social prescribers are health professionals based in Rutland GP practices assisting patients with their non-medical needs.
- **Carers** - the council supports carers, through carer assessments helping them to understand how caring may affect their wellbeing and considering what support may be needed. There is also the Admiral Nurse service of specialist dementia nurses, they provide free, expert advice, understanding and support for families caring for someone with dementia.
- **Timely hospital discharge** - discharge planning begins on admission, utilising the Discharge to Assess pathway to reduce hospital stays and improve patient experience by assessing care needs in familiar environments.
- **Effective reablement outcomes** - support at home focuses on regaining independence and preventing falls. Rutland exceeds the national target.
- **Staying at home** - once people are home, the main goal is to help them stay there, identifying and agreeing the right services and equipment needed to meet short-term and long-term needs.
- **Community Support Services** - the council offers personalised care and support packages for adults and young people with learning disabilities or autism in and around Rutland, attracting out-of-county referrals, and supporting those with direct payments and health funding.
- **Co-production groups** - these collaborative teams involve both service providers and service users (such as carers) working together to design, develop, and improve services.
- **Longer term intervention** - working with public health to develop the link between health and care through supporting people to delay the consequences of disease via primary prevention and self-care.

London Cancer Hub



London Borough of Sutton

10 years ahead of the curve!

When austerity was at its height, Liberal Democrat run Sutton Council imagined a £1 billion pound masterplan to create a world leading cancer research and treatment hub just outside the town centre.

Sutton was already home to the world-renowned Royal Marsden Hospital and the Institute of Cancer Research. The council identified redundant NHS land near to these two institutions and working alongside other partners including the Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust and the Harris Academy developed a regeneration plan that when completed will make Sutton, and the capital, home to the world's largest cancer life science district.

It worked, and with a three-quarters of a billion-pound investment in 2023 from Aviva Capital Partners. Aviva and its delivery partner Socius to develop c1m square feet of commercial life sciences and ancillary space for new and growing businesses.

The London Cancer Hub is now a key part of London's Growth Plan, is expected to add £1.2 billion annually to the UK economy and create up to 4,000 local jobs. The London Cancer Hub and wider district is already discovering cures for cancer and creating jobs and opportunities not only for Sutton residents but for all of London. This is a great example of the progressive actions taken by a Liberal Democrat council.

Technology Enabled Care in Somerset

Somerset Council

Technology Enabled Care (TEC) has been a significant asset for the residents of Somerset, empowering them to live safely and comfortably in their homes. Through innovative solutions such as remote monitoring and assistive devices, TEC has enhanced the quality of life for many by providing timely support and intervention.

Examples of TEC range from 'Robo Cats' providing comfort and support to residents to using smart tech to provide to aim communication and allow carers respire to devices which play personalised messages to remind residents with memory issues what they should be doing.

Four care homes in Somerset have just been fitted with the latest smart technology that detects when a resident falls, alerts on site staff and then helps the staff to understand how the fall occurred in the first place.

Each home has the lighting in ten of their resident's bedrooms and bathrooms. When a resident starts to sit up in bed (for example, if they are getting up to go to the toilet during the night) the light senses this and brightens enough for them to see where they are walking to. When they enter the bathroom, the light senses movement and turns on so they can see the facilities.

If a resident falls in their room, the new lighting records how the fall happened in the first place so steps can be taken to prevent this occurring again. This technology will hopefully reduce the amount of ambulance call outs and hospital admissions due to falls. The ambition is to one day utilise technology like this in people's own homes in the community.

A range of other innovative products are also currently being tested at the Yeovil Independent Living Centre.

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Delivering a new medical centre

Wealden District Council

A brand-new purpose-built medical centre to serve the Polegate and Willingdon area has been given the go-ahead, subject to planning consent, by Wealden District Council, currently led by the Liberal Democrats.

The medical centre will be built on the council-owned Hindslands site and has the support of local doctors and the Sussex Integrated Care Board.

The Polegate and Willingdon Medical Centre will offer space for two GP practices, an on-site pharmacy, accessible facilities, and ample parking including accessible bays and an ambulance drop-off point.

The building will meet high NHS and environmental standards. Current plans are for a three-storey building, with consulting and treatment rooms across the ground and first floors, with staff offices and administrative space on the top floor, with lifts and stairs ensuring full accessibility.

Overall, the design of the centre focuses on accessibility, patient comfort, and efficient delivery of healthcare services, creating a future-ready facility for the Polegate and Willingdon communities.

The council is now working on the next steps, which include submitting a reserved matters planning application and continuing with the design work.

The new medical centre will provide quicker access to doctors and better care for residents of Polegate, Willingdon and the wider catchment area.

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Connected Chelmsford: theatre upgrade



Chelmsford City Council

In 2021, Chelmsford Liberal Democrat Group decided to invest in upgrading the city council’s 60-year-old theatre. The project involved remodelling all the ‘front of house’ areas, to dramatically improve the theatregoer experience. All three refreshment areas were extended, which has increased retail turnover. One of these now operates as a café Monday to Saturday for passing trade from nearby shops and the station, and for council staff to use.

As with all building refurbishment projects, major challenges were encountered (and structural problems uncovered) along the way (including shortage of tiles when Ukraine was invaded). The group faced substantial criticism from the Conservative opposition for a “vanity project”.

However, the bold decision has paid off. Since reopening, it has had a series of former West End shows coming to the Main Stage, and the smaller studio theatre has a regular string of more niche performances, including the live streams from the National Theatre.

It wasn’t just a rebuilding project but included a full rebranding, which has fed through into every aspect of theatre operations. This and all the new events have led to a substantial increase in turnover, and last year the theatre broke even for the first time in its history, helping to balance the council’s finances.

Connected Chelmsford:

Make Space for Girls

Chelmsford City Council

Research shows that public spaces are used by boys and young men much more than young women. So Liberal Democrat run Chelmsford City Council has launched the Make Space for Girls project. The charity Make Space for Girls campaigns for more consideration of girls, young women, and gender diverse young people in the design of parks and public spaces.

The city council has worked with a range of partners, including pupils from local high schools, and secured funding from the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

So far, one project has been completed and another is ongoing. The completed project worked on new seating and social space in Chelmsford's Central Park. The next project has been designed in partnership with Broomfield Parish Council and will create a new social space on Angel Meadow.

You can read this case study on the Chelmsford City Life website:

citylife.chelmsford.gov.uk/posts/student-designed-social-area-our-place-opens-in-central-park

The charity Make Space for Girls campaigns for more consideration of girls, young women, and gender diverse young people in the design of parks and public spaces

New pickleball and tennis courts



Gosport Borough Council

Liberal Democrat run Gosport Borough Council has invested £1.8 million in new sports facilities this summer, including what are thought to be the first purpose-built, free to use, public outdoor pickleball courts on the South Coast.

Pickleball is booming in popularity in the UK, due to the ease in which new players can pick up the sport and the fact it can be played by all ages and abilities. Two to four players play on a badminton-sized hardcourt using paddles to hit the ball over a tennis net.

The Gosport Pickleball Club has been going from strength to strength. Founded during the COVID pandemic, the club has almost 100 members ranging in age from 20 to over 80, including wheelchair users.

The Liberal Democrat run council is also updating its tennis offer with the outdated tennis courts being transformed into four full size, asphalt double tennis courts.

There will be new nets for the tennis and pickleball courts. The pickleball courts will be separated by new fencing. The renovation will also include ramps with handrails at each entrance for easy access.

Protecting Liverpool 8's African Caribbean Centre

Liverpool City Council

Liverpool 8's African Caribbean Centre has served the city's African Caribbean community since the 1970s and is a beloved community asset with an active and vibrant events calendar.

The centre is run by a charity with a board of trustees but the land it sits on is owned by Liverpool City Council. The future of the African Caribbean Centre was threatened when the Labour run council looked at using the site for a new school.

The land didn't fully meet Department for Education's site requirements and the report considered by the council's ruling Cabinet did not give a list of alternative sites - just that they had been considered and rejected by officers.

The overwhelming community support for the centre forced the Cabinet to make a last-minute amendment to the report, making a weak promise to the community that the council would try to protect the centre.

Councillor Carl Cashman, Leader of Liverpool Liberal Democrats, reached out and met with community leaders from the African Caribbean Centre to listen to their concerns and discuss what he, as an opposition leader, could do. Liberal Democrat councillors 'called-in' the Cabinet decision so it could be reviewed.

Members of the African Caribbean community were encouraged to register as public speakers when the 'call-in' was

considered. At the meeting the Liberal Democrat committee members also raised the key issues on behalf of the community, to amplify their concerns and give support.

As a result of the "call-in" the centre secured protection and there was an apology from the Cabinet over the way they handled it. Councillor Cashman met with officers to discuss the issue and remained in contact with the Centre's Trustees throughout the process.

Members of the Liberal Democrat group also met with the Muslim community to listen to their concerns and understand the need for the new school.

Liverpool Liberal Democrats then used a motion to a full council meeting to secure further protections. The application that was submitted to the Department for Education protected the centre on its existing site whilst also delivering a much-needed school in Liverpool 8.



Self-Access Library

Opening Hours

London Borough of Sutton

The Liberal Democrat run London Borough of Sutton has kept all of its libraries open, increased opening hours and usage and saved £400,000 by investing in self-access technology. The libraries now have 11,000 new members.

All eight of Sutton's libraries now open from 8am to 9pm six days a week and 9am to 6pm on Sundays. The libraries now have staffed and self-access times. This means there are staff available at peak times and at other times library members can access libraries themselves.

There was a clear choice last year: Sutton could do what other councils were doing, close the libraries and sell off the buildings; or it could take the brave and bold choice to invest in self-access technology.

Freedom of Information requests sent to every library authority in the UK and Arts Council England data show the country has lost one in 20 libraries since 2016, either by closing them completely or moving them over to volunteer-run groups. About 950, a third of those remaining, have had their hours cut and at least three councils have at least halved their provision since 2016.

Sutton's libraries remain open and are being used more than ever, including Rhyme time and Storytime sessions for young children and parents. Family Hubs are hosted in the main libraries and provide help and advice for local families.

There are now over 80 community groups - ranging from Tai Chi and calligraphy classes to dementia support, chair yoga, Scrabble and reading groups - all making full use of the spaces and extended opening hours in Sutton's Libraries.

The opposition said it would lead to trouble in the libraries. The biggest problem was when some young people got access through an unauthorised door. Security was called and the children were found... studying!

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Library of Things



Milton Keynes City Council

Milton Keynes' first Library of Things Scheme, helping with the cost-of-living crisis, has officially opened thanks to the city council with the help of local partners.

Promoted by the Liberal Democrats, the Library of Things aims to support the city's most vulnerable residents to save money and reduce waste by renting DIY and household items for free.

Working alongside Foodbank Xtra and local charity providers, the city council has purchased a limited number of items that will be available for residents to borrow.

Not only is borrowing more cost-effective, but it is also more sustainable as it helps to reduce clutter and allows residents to borrow things they need for one off jobs and items they would only use on a seasonal basis.

Local residents can borrow items for up to 1-2 weeks for free, including a wet and dry vacuum, pasting table, dehumidifier, and wallpaper steamer for the DIY jobs.

For crafting and sewing there's a sewing machine and user guide and for party kits, the Library of Things offers cake baking kit, party plates and cups, karaoke machine, and sports activity kits.

A fold-away buggy, travel cot, and inflatable bed are available for use for babies and children and for pets, there are small and large pet carriers.

The new borrowing scheme supports Milton Keynes' City Council's ambitious plans to provide help and support for residents impacted by the cost-of-living crisis and ensures Milton Keynes is on track to becoming a sustainable city.

The Library of Things is a pilot scheme which could be expanded if it proves successful.

Revitalising Sports and Leisure

Mole Valley District Council

Mole Valley is proud to offer two major sports centres - Leatherhead Leisure Centre and Dorking Sports Centre - that serve as vital hubs for health, fitness, and community engagement. Until 2023, these centres were managed separately by different operators, which led to challenges, especially at Leatherhead.

The Leatherhead Leisure Centre, the larger of the two, had low customer satisfaction, declining memberships and was in need of repair.

Recognising the importance of revitalising these facilities, the Liberal Democrat administration took decisive action. In November 2023, a new, combined management contract was awarded to GLL, a leading sports and leisure operator. This partnership has already seen significant investment - several million pounds - directed into upgrading and modernising both centres, with a particular focus on restoring Leatherhead to its former prominence.

To facilitate these improvements, the council agreed to underwrite the dilapidation costs for Leatherhead, ensuring the new operator could proceed with essential upgrades. The council is currently in the process of recovering these costs from the previous management. Thanks to these efforts, the centres have experienced a dramatic turnaround. Customer satisfaction has soared, memberships are rising, and Leatherhead is now regarded by GLL as their 'flagship' centre within their entire national network.

Looking ahead, there are plans for further enhancements at both centres, developed jointly by GLL and the council. These plans aim to keep the centres at the forefront of community sports facilities, providing excellent spaces for fitness, recreation, and social activities.

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Investing in sport



Wealden District Council

A brand-new Community Sports Hub, located on the outskirts of Hailsham, is being delivered by Wealden District Council and is due for completion next year.

The project is costing £16.7 million, with the council, currently under Liberal Democrat leadership, providing funding of £13.2 million and the remainder made of a grant of £3.5million from the Premier League, the FA and the Government's Football Foundation via the Charity's Hubs programme.

The Sports Hub building has recently been completed and will house the community café and meeting space, changing rooms and toilets - including a Changing Places toilet facility.

When finished the Hub will offer high-quality sports and community facilities which can be used all year-round. The Hub will include two floodlit full size 3G pitches, four dual use floodlit netball/tennis courts and two padel tennis courts plus other community facilities such as a café and meeting space, skate park, a children's play area and a perimeter pathway around the site

The site once finished will be operated on a not-for-profit basis by the charity Leisure United and managed by The National Football Trust. It will be a new partnership arrangement involving the council and any surplus income generated from the facility will be reinvested into local grassroots sports.

Improving leisure facilities

Worcester City Council

Worcester Liberal Democrat Councillors Mel Allcott, Jessie Jagger and Karen Holmes were instrumental in securing the first pump track in Battenhall Park. They have also been involved in securing a destination pump track for Perdiswell.

Work is expected to begin this year and be developed with co-design with young people and community consultation.

In another project, the Liberal Democrat team has also arranged for all the board and signs in two divisions of the Northwick Heritage Trail to improve residents' enjoyment of this much-loved trail which starts just outside the suburbs of north Worcester and follows the scenic River Severn to the hamlet of Bevere Green.



Supporting veterans



Milton Keynes City Council

Former service-personnel in Milton Keynes will be able to use their Veteran Card to vote in future elections thanks to a Liberal Democrat councillor.

Issued by the former government, anyone who was in the Regulars or Reserves for the Royal Navy, Army, Royal Air Force or Royal Marines is eligible for a Veteran Card.

The card is issued by the government, but it was not on the list of accepted forms of ID for voting in elections, despite applicants needing to provide their National Insurance number, dates of service, and a photograph.

Milton Keynes City Council's Armed Forces Champion, Liberal Democrat Councillor Paul Trendall, called on the city council to write to the Deputy Prime Minister to ensure the Veteran Card could be included as an acceptable form of voter ID at future elections.

In reply the Government has committed to adding the Veteran Card to the list of documents that are accepted at polling stations.

Creating a legacy on the super-fast track to local government reorganisation

Mole Valley District Council

Council across Surrey are on an exceptionally rapid 17-month timetable to shadow elections for the formation of new Unitary Authorities in May 2026 and while there is much to be done, the Liberal Democrats running Mole Valley are focused on leaving a legacy and safeguarding local democracy.

One of the key priorities is to protect and properly manage community assets. The council has an ambitious process of logging and updating every single asset owned by councils and parishes - from the iconic Dorking Halls to the beautiful Leatherhead War Memorial.

And there are records to be clarified too. Ownership of Dorking Caves, for example, and other records show that both parishes and the district council may hold ownership details that conflict or overlap. When land is owned by the council but the building on it is owned by a parish - and vice versa - it's crucial that this information is accurately recorded now.

Having clear records allows the council to assess each asset's condition and plan the necessary upgrades to ensure they are well-maintained before any handover to new structures or authorities.

Mole Valley has also allocated over £1 million from strategic Community Infrastructure Levy funding (CIL) to improve its playgrounds ahead of change to unitary councils in Surrey. They're doing the same for their commercial and operational assets. To ensure these efforts are sustainable, the council has established community assets as a dedicated part of the Cabinet portfolio and included it in the Annual Plan to give community facilities equal importance.

Mole Valley has also launched a Community Governance Review. Currently, about half of the district - mainly rural villages - has Parish Councils while urban areas like Leatherhead, Dorking, Ashted, Fetcham, and Bookham, rely mainly on district ward councillors and Residents Associations.

Mole Valley believes the Community Governance Review is vital because it provides residents with an opportunity to shape how their communities are represented and gives them a voice now and into the future in protecting local discretionary services and cherished community assets.

Championing remote participation for fairer local democracy

Worcester City Council

In Worcester - as in councils across the country - outdated laws banning remote attendance at formal council meetings have excluded councillors with caring responsibilities, disabilities, and long-term health conditions. This has a disproportionate impact on women and parents of young children, creating a structural barrier to inclusive and representative local government.

From opposition, the Worcester Liberal Democrat Group helped lead and amplify a growing national campaign for change. The Group Leader, who was pregnant at the time, became the first in Worcester City Council history to take paid maternity leave while serving as a political group leader - it also brought national attention to the need for modern, family-friendly democratic processes.

The Liberal Democrat motion asking Worcester City Council to lobby the government to amend the law so that councils had the freedom to decide whether to allow remote or hybrid attendance at formal meetings, won unanimous cross-party support. The Group Leader also raised the profile of the issue through media coverage and direct engagement with members of the House of Lords.

The Worcester Liberal Democrat Group was also helped by Liberal Democrat Deputy Leader, Daisy Cooper MP, whose advocacy in Parliament helped secure a ministerial commitment to review the law.

Councillors from across the country have contacted Worcester Liberal Democrats for advice and support, and they have shared toolkits, templates, and strategic guidance to help them pass similar motions in their own authorities.

Worcester is proud to be at the forefront of a movement reshaping local democracy to better reflect the real lives of the people they serve.



Tackling the Housing Crisis with Compassion

Dacorum Borough Council

Liberal Democrat led Dacorum Borough Council is tackling the housing crisis with compassion... and a strategy. It's an ambitious, people-centred approach to housing-led regeneration that tackles crime, brings life back to neglected estates, and creates safe spaces for families to thrive.

It's not just policy - it's restoring hope to places long-forgotten.

The council has delivered award-winning new developments with warm, low carbon, energy efficient homes residents can feel proud of.

It's also working directly with households to tackle long outstanding repairs. Some were living in damp, unsafe conditions, worrying about their children's health. They felt they had no voice. A new standard of care and response has been introduced.

For older residents wanting to downsize, the council now provides hands-on help, incentives, and offers fully decorated new homes that are easier to manage. Older residents feel valued and respected and they're freeing-up larger homes for families. It's a smart housing policy with a heart.

There have been two rounds of retrofit funding, and a third has started, helping to insulate homes, replace old boilers, and cut fuel costs. It's good for the planet, and a boost for families facing rising bills.

Dacorum has also set about renewing its existing estates - improving cleaning, communal areas, green spaces and safety. Treating shared spaces with respect, gives people a sense of pride in where they live, children can play safely, and neighbours feel a sense of shared ownership again.

Why this matters - every housing policy has an emotional and economic impact. As Liberal Democrats, we believe local government must act with compassion and competence. This work shows that you can deliver change - if you listen, act, and lead with integrity.

It's not just policy -
it's restoring hope to
places long-forgotten

Build!



Eastleigh Borough Council

Councils can play a major part fixing the housing crisis by getting actively involved in building homes of all tenures themselves.

That's what Liberal Democrat run Eastleigh Borough Council has been doing for more than ten years, working in partnership with developers to speed sites up and deliver infrastructure early, through to buying up land and building them ourselves from small town regeneration schemes to large greenfield sites.

How to do this? Make contacts, talk, fix problems. When a developer had a poor scheme with a bad access, the council bought an adjacent site, got them onboard, changed the access, doubled the number of homes and speed of building and secured a new Country Park.

When another stalled a key development of 1400 homes due to affordable housing finance, the council lent the cash to build a school early and pre-purchased homes for our market rent portfolio, to improve viability.

At the biggest scheme One Horton Heath the council bought the entire site that would have lost affordable homes if left to volume builders, spent five years delivering infrastructure first including major roads, drainage, utilities and green spaces including 2000 new trees for a gas-free community of 3000 homes, new school, local centre and sports pitches with 35 per cent affordable housing, and 30 per cent council owned market rent homes with lifetime tenancies.

It can be done, just get on and BUILD!

Strengthening tenant engagement and accountability, implementing the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 was introduced to improve living standards for social housing tenants by strengthening regulations and expanding the powers of the Regulator of Social Housing. A key part of the Act was the Transparency, Influence, and Accountability Standard.

To meet the Standard, Liberal Democrat run Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has implemented the following.

- **Tenant Influence and Scrutiny Panel** – a panel of eight tenants was formed to scrutinise the housing service’s performance and governance, providing tenants with direct involvement in service improvement
- **Charter for Tenants** – developed in partnership with the Tenant Panel, the Charter outlines commitments to transparency and accountability in housing services. It ensures that tenants have a formal mechanism to hold the council accountable
- **Communication Strategy** – focusing on delivering clear, accessible, and diverse communications across digital and traditional platforms, ensuring tenants are well-informed and engaged
- **Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)** – the council partnered with Housemark (a data

and insight company for the UK housing sector) to conduct annual TSM surveys. This data helps track service performance and guide improvements. Action planning is as a direct result of tenant feedback

The implementation of these initiatives has led to several positive outcomes:

- The TSM survey revealed that 82.5 per cent of tenants were satisfied with the housing service. Compared to the Housemark median of 72.5 per cent.
- Over 175 tenants have registered for various engagement opportunities since November 2022.
- The Tenant Influence and Scrutiny Panel has begun actively scrutinising the Housing Service, reviewing communications, and providing feedback to improve service delivery.
- The Communication Strategy has improved access to information for tenants through newsletters, events, and digital platforms, such as the newly launched ‘MyHousing’ online portal.
- Engaging tenants in the development of the Charter for Tenants and the Communication Strategy ensured these documents were directly informed by tenant priorities, resulting in higher levels of satisfaction and buy-in.

A Local Plan that delivers more than housing

Mole Valley District Council

With 80 per cent of Mole Valley District Council area designated as Green Belt or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, creating a high-density Local Plan was always going to be challenging.

Despite these hurdles, Liberal Democrat run Mole Valley District council worked hard to craft a plan that balances environmental protection with the needs of its residents, delivering much more than just new homes.

The council was determined to protect the Green Belt, losing only 128.50 hectares (0.65 per cent) in the adoption of the Local Plan. This careful approach means the council preserved the valuable green space that makes Mole Valley such a special place, even as new developments are planned to meet local needs.

Importantly, the Local Plan isn't solely about housing. It prioritises a sustainable future with numerous benefits for residents and the environment, including:

- **Affordable Housing** – 40 per cent for most larger sites, including social rented options with clear tenure and clawback arrangements.
- **Gypsies and Travellers** – provision of new pitches on large housing sites.
- **Shopping Frontages** – retained despite national policies suggesting change.
- **Character and Design** – strengthened policies to preserve local character
- **Locally Listed Buildings** – over 230 new designations to protect heritage

- **Local Green Space** – 27 new areas protected
- **Zero Carbon Homes** – all new large developments will incorporate sustainable design
- **Electric Vehicle Charging** – one socket per dwelling to promote cleaner transport
- **Parking Standards** – minimum requirements, supporting accessibility.
- **Biodiversity** – aiming for a 20 per cent Net Gain – double the nationally prescribed 80 per cent
- **Community and Infrastructure** – new or expanded schools, primary care facilities, open spaces, children's play areas, and early years' facilities
- **Community Hubs and Transport** – upgrades to transport infrastructure, flood defences, water capacity, and wastewater treatment.

Putting together this comprehensive and ambitious Local Plan was no easy feat, especially amid national government turbulence and policy uncertainties. Yet, the Liberal Democrat council's dedication to balancing growth with protection ensures we are creating a sustainable, resilient, and vibrant community.

Homelessness and housing strategies

Mole Valley District Council

The increasing challenges of housing affordability, family breakdowns, and domestic abuse have contributed to a rise in people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. In response, Liberal Democrat run Mole Valley District Council has developed a comprehensive Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy focused on prevention, support, and sustainable housing solutions.

The housing department prioritizes preventing homelessness before it occurs, working hand-in-hand with services including housing, health, probation, adult social care and children's services.

To assist those in urgent need, the council has expanded its emergency housing provision by securing grants, encouraging developer contributions, and creatively repurposing underutilised council-owned properties. Maintaining accommodation within the district is a key priority to ensure individuals remain close to essential support networks, education, and employment.

Thanks to this proactive strategy, Mole Valley has comparatively low numbers of homeless individuals. The council also provides valuable guidance on support systems for care leavers and initiatives like the Homechoice scheme, which offers deposit guarantees and access to pre-screened tenants, making private rentals more accessible.

The council transferred its housing stock to Housing Associations in 2007 and is no longer a registered provider. However, it continues to actively explore opportunities to increase affordable housing, especially family-sized homes at social rent levels.

The Empty Homes Policy encourages owners to revitalize vacant properties through grants and incentives, helping to increase the district's housing stock and support local housing needs.

The council's strategy aligns with local development plans, which specify that 40 per cent of units in larger new developments will be affordable. Several approved schemes are expected to progress in the coming months, contributing to our long-term housing goals.

Affordable homes delivered at record pace

Huntingdonshire District Council

In just two years, nearly 1,000 affordable homes have been completed across Huntingdonshire District Council.

In 2023-24 alone, 494 affordable homes were delivered - representing nearly 40 per cent of all new housing built, well above the council's long-term policy target. These include social rent and shared ownership homes, ensuring a range of options for local families.

Key projects include the transformation of Huntingdon's Station Quarter, where 178 high-quality, 100 per cent affordable homes are now being built on a site originally earmarked for market sale. Across 2023-24, council-led partnerships enabled the development of over 700 homes, including 450 social rent units.

This level of delivery places Huntingdonshire District Council, a joint administration of Liberal Democrats, Labour, Independent and Green Party, among the best performing councils in the region - meeting and exceeding the district's annual affordable housing need of 404 homes.

In 2023-24 alone, **494**
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Generating more council homes

Portsmouth City Council

There are about 2,000 Portsmouth people on the housing register. As a densely populated island city where space is at a premium and private rents well exceed income, building council homes cannot be the only answer.

When the Liberal Democrats resumed running Portsmouth in 2018, one of their pledges was 'homes for the homeless'. As it became clearer that the city's constraints restricted building opportunities, that led them to come up with a model for buying homes sold under the Right to Buy on an industrial level, for the homeless and those on the waiting list.

£100 million of Public Works Loans Board borrowing - £20 million a year for five years - was added to 1-for-1 receipts from these Right to Buy homes to provide a fund that has bought back more than 600 homes.

It was crucial that this plan stacked up financially. The model arrived at means the total rent exceeds the borrowing cost.

In the last year or so, more of the homes being bought have been housing the increasing numbers of people needing temporary accommodation.

Despite that, the temporary accommodation crisis hit Portsmouth as it has hit so many other places. However, having this model meant the council could agree quickly to borrow a further £31.2 million over to buy 200 flats to ease the pressure, saving the council an estimated £6 million a year by 2027/28. Already the council has cut nightly temporary accommodation costs by a third.

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Carbon neutral council homes

Somerset Council

The first new council houses in Minehead are a development of 54 zero carbon neutral homes which have been funded by Liberal Democrat run Somerset Council.

All of the homes will be zero carbon, ensuring they offer low energy bills for customers.

The completion of the construction of the new homes is being managed by Homes in Somerset on behalf of Somerset Council through its Housing Revenue Account.

The mix of 54 houses and flats for affordable rent and has been shortlisted for Michelmores Property Awards 2025. The awards have long-championed sustainability and innovation, place social, environmental, sustainable and economic values.

The first new council houses in Minehead are a development of **54** zero carbon neutral homes which have been funded by Liberal Democrat run Somerset Council

Empowering self-build and housing diversity

South Gloucestershire Council

As housing challenges continue to grow, Liberal Democrat led South Gloucestershire has embraced self-build and custom-built (SCB) housing as essential solutions to meet the varied needs of residents.

The commitment to self and custom-build housing began in 2013, with a Self-Build Task and Finish Group investigating how the council could encourage self-build housing, fund projects, and provide residents with more housing options.

A Self-Build Officer role was created in 2017 to actively manage SCB plots, engage with developers, and guide individuals through the process. It is required that five per cent of plots in developments of 100 or more homes be allocated for SCB. This ensures self-build projects are integrated into larger developments, with plot sizes set at 108 square metres (gross internal area) to control costs and make them affordable

Self and custom housebuilding empowers residents to have a direct say in the design and construction of their homes, providing tailored solutions that standard housing developments often lack.

This diversity in housing options empowers individuals and supports small and medium-sized businesses in the construction sector. Supporting SCB aligns with the council's values of sustainability, community engagement, and economic growth. By providing serviced plots, the council enables self-builders to create homes suited to their needs while boosting the local economy.

Developments in South Gloucestershire like Charfield Gardens and Blackberry Park demonstrate how self-build can create vibrant, sustainable communities, particularly benefiting first-time buyers, low and middle-income groups, and downsizers.

Providing modern accommodation for adults with learning disabilities



St Albans District Council

St Albans has lacked sufficient modern accommodation for adults with learning disabilities. The Local MENCAP charity had aged accommodation, not suitable for more independent living. It also had insufficient capacity for local need. It owns a site capable of expansion and modernisation but had been stumped for over ten years about how to accommodate their residents as the changes were made. The private sector was unable to produce any affordable option.

Liberal Democrat run St Albans District Council funded four social housing homes on an ex-garage site, funded by the anticipated sale of seven houses to the private sector to recoup the build costs. These were unsold at the point when the council met with the charity's Chair to discuss their problem. It became clear that offering a long-term lease to Harpenden MENCAP for the seven

properties could be affordable if rented at a break-even rate (the cost of the extended debt servicing), and with a contribution from Hertfordshire County Council for the adaptations necessary to meet the residents' need.

As a result, 17 residents are extremely happy in their new homes. Their parents are extremely relieved and can visit them readily given their close location. Harpenden MENCAP can now progress the redevelopment of their established local site to increase capacity for this vulnerable group. The taxpayer picks up no greater cost than if they were accommodated piecemeal over a much wider area. Public ownership of housing and land assets plus an innovative approach to collaboration has broken through this log jam in an area with such high land and hence housing costs.

New examples straight to your email inbox every week!

If you are a Liberal Democrat Councillor on an LGA member authority then you should be getting a weekly email from the LGA Liberal Democrat Group with at least one good practice example in it. Let us know if you have any problems accessing this and if you have more good practice examples so we can tell other Liberal Democrat Councillors!

Please send us any case studies, to **rob.banks@local.gov.uk**, so that we can include them in the weekly email and maybe for inclusion in the next edition of Liberal Democrat Achievements in Local Government.'

Finally, thank you to everyone who contributed case studies for this publication and Councillor Alan Connett who edited them.



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