

Welsh General Election 2011

Welsh Liberal Democrat Manifesto



Wales **CAN** do better



Welsh Liberal Democrats

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In 2009, the National Assembly for Wales unanimously passed a Measure designed to promote, encourage and safeguard the highest standards of conduct in the public office of Assembly Member.

Welsh Liberal Democrat candidates undertake to do all that they can to support these principles and maintain public trust and confidence in those elected to this important office.

**If you require this manifesto in
an alternative format, please
contact us on**

(029) 2031 3400

or

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Wales **CAN** do better

Dear friend,

This election is the most important one that Wales has seen since the introduction of devolution 12 years ago. The Welsh people have voted to endorse and strengthen devolution in the referendum but they also want it to work better.

A new era of devolution must now begin. This election is about the kind of government that Wales needs. No more excuses. The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that Wales deserves better.

We live in challenging times. When every family and business is having to make every pound stretch that little bit further. Wales needs a government that does the same.

Instead we have a Labour-Plaid administration that has turned waste and incompetence into an art form.

We cannot carry on as we are:

- A widening gap between rich and poor.
- A weak economy, underfunded schools and an NHS that costs more but delivers less.
- In uncertain times, people are right to demand better of their government.

I believe that the people of Wales are increasingly ambitious.

We have businesses who are ambitious for a new economy for Wales, but a Government who is letting them down.

We have teachers, parents and children who are ambitious for excellence but Government that is letting our schools remain underfunded and underperforming.

We have doctors and nurses who are ambitious to make the Welsh NHS the best in the world, but a Government wasting money.

We have people up and down Wales are ambitious to go green, but a



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Government that is subsidising pollution and ignoring the needs of rural areas.

And we have communities everywhere in Wales that are ambitious for the change they can deliver for themselves, but are frustrated by restrictive Government rules.

These are the people who know that Wales can do better. They need to be given the chance to deliver on their ambition.

Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that the Welsh Government can rise to the challenge. We will be relentless in ensuring that there is value for money, spending better and rooting out waste.

And by putting faith back in those people who are ambitious for our country – the entrepreneurs and teachers, the doctors and farmers and the community leaders, we can make sure that, as a nation, we are as ambitious as they are.

When we do that, we will be ready to help build a better Wales.

Because Wales Can do Better.

Best wishes,



Kirsty Williams

Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats



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Our priorities



Better use of **OUR** money

The Labour-Plaid Government has spent more money on economic development than any other part of the UK but Wales is the poorest part of the United Kingdom and we're still falling further behind. The source of our economic problems continues to be low skill levels and a lack of investment in and by private business.

Gordon Brown and Labour failed us by deregulating the banks and refusing to take serious action on banking profits and we have been let down in Cardiff too. The Welsh economy has underperformed and the gap between rich and poor has grown. The result of this economic mismanagement is rising unemployment and a private sector that is far too small. We believe that private investment, alongside public investment, can also stimulate growth.

Welsh Liberal Democrats will focus on tackling the skills gap and making sure that Wales is a good place to do business. We can reshape the economy of Wales and our work and investment will start immediately.

Welsh Liberal Democrats will:

- Root out Government waste so that the money we do spend makes a real difference to you and your family.
- Create jobs and improve our economy by offering companies £2000 for staff training if they provide jobs to unemployed young people and set up an Innovation Programme to invest in the infrastructure a prosperous economy needs.



Better education for **OUR** children

Welsh schools and education system were once the envy of the UK. Now, international comparisons shows that that Wales' results in reading and maths have fallen significantly behind and that Welsh students are falling behind their counterparts in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Education is the key investment we can make in all our children. It is the route of out poverty and the way to ensure that everyone can reach their full potential. Ultimately, it's how to make our economy strong, and narrow the gap between rich and poor.

Our schools will only improve when we give teachers the tools and training they need to inspire our children. At the moment, pupils in Wales get £604 less per year spent on their education than in England. We will start by giving education the financial priority it deserves and giving our teachers more and better training.

Welsh Liberal Democrats will:

- Tackle the spending gap, providing more money for schools by targeting additional money at the 80,000 pupils who need it the most so that schools can afford to invest in the things that really matter, such as smaller class sizes or one-on-one teaching.
- Invest in new training and development opportunities for teachers, driving up standards and challenging our teachers so we deliver for our children.

Better NHS that delivers for **YOU**

Wales' NHS has been expensively reorganised by the Labour-Plaid government. But they have failed to tackle the waste of resources. Although we spend more per head on the NHS than England, we put up with worse results – longer waiting times, slower ambulance response times, lower standards of cancer treatment.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats will always be guided by the founding principles of the NHS – providing free care, when you need it, regardless of your ability to pay. Building on those principles, we will tackle the inefficiencies of the present organisation to achieve higher standards of care.

We will reform the way health care is delivered by focusing on prevention and local service delivery. We will strengthen the link with social care and, if you need social or nursing care, we will allow you to decide what best suits your needs.

Welsh Liberal Democrats will:

- Cut your waiting times by cutting waste. We will improve healthcare by switching ineffective spending in the NHS to the frontline.
- Improve care and support for the elderly and vulnerable by ensuring you can choose the care you want, when you want it.



A better future for **OUR** environment

The Labour-Plaid government has failed to deliver for our environment. It has wasted £8 million of our money subsidising the 'Ieuan Air' north-south airlink, but has failed to invest sufficiently in sustainable rail and bus transport. Progress towards providing Wales with safe, affordable green energy for all has not gone far enough. Wales has the second highest CO2 emissions compared to the size of our economy and 200,000 more households falling into fuel poverty since 2004.

Going green must be an option for everyone, not just those who can afford it. We will help people to make their homes more energy efficient, cutting carbon emissions and fuel poverty. Renewable energy must be the focus of the next Government, and sustainable transport must be promoted.

We will take action to reduce Wales's ecological footprint by 75% by 2050. We will accelerate the drive for renewable energy, promote community power-generation schemes, and develop passenger-friendly sustainable transport.

Welsh Liberal Democrats will:

- Radically overhaul the energy efficiency of an extra 12,000 homes by doubling the money available for tackling fuel poverty.
- Unleash a new era of renewable energy production by encouraging the use of offshore tidal and wind resources and promoting community renewable energy schemes.
- Scrap the wasteful 'Ieuan Air' airlink between North and South Wales, and prioritise green transport, including rail and bus travel.



Better politics, putting **local people** in charge

Devolution was meant to give more people the chance to be involved in running Wales, not just move power from London to Cardiff Bay. Too much power in Wales is hoarded by a centralising political elite. Devolution has had its successes but it's becoming too much like Westminster; too distant from people and with too much control over our communities.

Wales can harness the knowledge and experience of our people and finally use the ideas to help change our country. The more power we give to our urban and rural communities, the more problems can be solved through local action.

We will empower local decision-making by freeing Councils from the bureaucratic rules imposed on them by Ministers, and giving local people more influence over their communities' future.

Welsh Liberal Democrats will:

- Make sure your council can deliver for you by cutting restrictions that stop them innovating and acting in the best interest of local communities.
- Enact a new law to give your community more power over local decisions on housing, culture, the environment and local services.



Better use of our **money**



Economic Development and Business Support

At the moment, economic power is not spread across Wales evenly. Too many jobs and too much money is based in just a few areas of Wales and we haven't seen a 'trickle-down' effect. After twelve years of devolution this has got to change. It is no good for Wales if all the large companies simply move all their profits down the M4 and, likewise, it is no good for communities across Wales if all the profits simply travel to one or two areas of Wales.

There are two main problems with the economy – our skills levels are not high enough and our economy is not fit for the 21st century. So we will have two priorities – improving skills for everyone and making sure that we have innovative companies to compete with the best in the world.

If we want to spread jobs across Wales, we need to make sure that businesses everywhere can grow. This means we need to ensure that companies in all parts of Wales, especially small businesses, are able to prosper. We believe that these small companies will define the economy of the future and we will support them.

Creating jobs in a diverse and vibrant economy

We need to build an economy that is based on high technology and world class innovation.

To create new jobs we need to ensure that Welsh scientists have the support to develop great ideas and business have the freedom to expand markets and re invigorate manufacturing.

We will promote innovation, science and technology in our economy by:

- Delivering more money to help create an economy fit for the 21st century. Our Jobs and Growth Innovation Programme will include increasing the number of patents, establishing business mentoring schemes and upgrading old manufacturing sites for new jobs.
- Offering 5000 training grants (worth £2000 each) a year to new businesses that set up in Wales and take on young unemployed people.



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- Promoting scientific innovation and employment by creating a pooled budget for commissioning scientific research, and addressing the gender imbalance in scientific professions by encouraging more women to train as scientists and engineers.
- Supporting science and research by protecting overall investment in science in real terms, emphasizing excellence and cutting inefficiencies to ensure that science funding is effectively used for research and development, and working more closely with universities, the UK research councils and the European Commission to increase research income to Wales.
- Deliver a detailed manufacturing strategy that outlines steps to support this sector in Wales, and integrating it with our Jobs and Growth Innovation Programme to ensure funding.
- Cutting red tape for businesses by introducing a 'one-in-one-out' rule whereby no new regulation is brought in without other regulation being cut by a greater amount.
- Requiring the Department for the Economy to regularly assess the impact of its policies on small businesses.
- Streamlining inspection of businesses by co-ordinating and minimising the number of visits. We'll also target repeat offenders and inspect compliant businesses less, with the aim of co-operative compliance rather than prosecution.

We will stimulate economic growth by freezing business rates for a year while we introduce reforms to:

- Avoid the scenario whereby improvement of premises increases their value and therefore their business rate.
- Change the role local authorities should have in collecting and retaining business rates, to address local needs.
- End huge rises in business rates when values increase and costs go up between years as happened to many B&Bs recently.



- Extend business rate relief to help more community facilities such as post offices, pubs and independent shops.
- Determine whether Wales would benefit from adopting the same business rates accounting arrangements with the Westminster Government as Scotland and Northern Ireland do.

The quality of infrastructure in Wales is poor; ignoring this will keep Wales poor. Without the networks necessary to compete in the modern world, Wales will not be able to deliver the businesses need to improve our economy.

We will improve the infrastructure for the Welsh economy by:

- Establishing a Welsh Stock Exchange to give Welsh businesses greater access to capital. We will provide the seed funding necessary to kick-start the Exchange, which will promote Wales as a place to do serious business, and will enable those businesses that are unable to access the London Stock Exchange to generate the finance needed to expand and create jobs. This will be funded from our Jobs and Growth Innovation Fund.
- Investing in broadband by bringing in investment from private sources. We will classify broadband as a utility for planning purposes, so all new developments are designed to accommodate any future broadband provision. Access to new broadband facilities is essential in a modern economy but also tackles inequality.
- Using some of the money for broadband to establish 'wi-fi towns' which will allow visitors free access to wi-fi in the area. We'll fund this initiative for three years, and then the local community will take over the funding. The towns that will benefit from this initiative will be based on current access to wi-fi.
- Re-negotiating the whole Arriva Trains Wales contract to improve the quality of services.
- Making the case for electrifying the Valleys Lines to begin in 2014 ensuring the right rolling stock is available.



- Re-opening closed stations such as Bow Street, Carno and Towyn & Kinnel Bay and seek powers over the maintenance of railway stations, so we can require all new stations and major refurbishments to improve accessibility, safety and act as a community hub.

A new Welsh economy would support all types of business. We want to see more social enterprises, mutuals and co-operatives. Diversity in our economy will lead to greater security in the event of another economic downturn. We will pass a law improving the position of social enterprises and community development trusts that will strengthen their position, exempt them from business rates and make it easier for social enterprises, mutuals and co-operatives to tender for Council and Welsh Government contracts. We will also provide support with tender applications.

Attracting visitors to Wales

Tourism is an economic driver and should be treated as one, we will put tourism back into the economy portfolio. Tourism brings in over £6 billion to Wales every year and supports 172,000 jobs. It is a central part of the Welsh economy but with the right support could grow further and help fuel a sustainable economic recovery.

We will promote Wales to visitors by:

- Prioritising the marketing of Wales as a tourist destination to new overseas markets rather than other parts of the UK in order to develop a more sustainable tourist base.
- Making St David's Day a public holiday and global celebration of Wales, raising international awareness and encouraging people to visit for the day and to buy Welsh products.
- Developing a major events calendar that is specifically tasked with bringing events to all of Wales that are broadcast in new markets. We will bid for the Tour de France and a major American Football game.



- Promoting off-season activities and assisting in creating a wider range of winter activities across Wales in order to reduce seasonal variations in tourism.
- Investing in broadband and wi-fi and ensuring that rural destinations and transport are coherently advertised.

Regeneration & Housing

The Welsh Government has failed on regeneration – their attempts to build affordable homes have been condemned by report after report because they have not delivered improvements and they have fudged the figures on housing.

Our prosperity is not spread across Wales evenly. We want to ensure that every part of Wales is able to benefit from economic improvements in the way that they haven't in the past.

We want to ensure that every community can turn itself into a modern community, whether rural, urban or suburban. We'll put councils back in the driving seat for regeneration, allowing better control of how the money is spent and putting local priorities first for regeneration.

Building communities, supporting people

Every report is clear – Communities First has not lifted people out of poverty. The Welsh Government has exercised too much control without tangible results. Communities can only help themselves if the skills and knowledge of people who live there are used more effectively.

We will put local communities back in charge of their future by:

- Scrapping Communities First and passing the money to local authorities so that community regeneration is responsive to local need and more accountable to local people.



- Reforming local authority funding so that deprivation is fairly recognised. Currently, deprived Local Authorities receive large sums through grant funding for regeneration, we'll make sure they don't lose out.

It is looking likely that Wales will qualify for another round of European funding to assist poorer regions. If this is the case, it will be a shocking indictment of the economic policies pursued by Labour and Plaid Cymru in government. If we do re-qualify, we will more effectively targeting these resources at areas that will really help improve the Welsh economy, such as skills and promoting new businesses. One of our priorities will be establishing Economic Development Zones, which will help businesses set up in deprived areas by allowing the preferential business rates, and incentives for training and capital investment. We will supplement this with the money that Wales will receive because the UK Government has set up Enterprise Zones.

We will make it easier for councils to improve the physical environment of their communities by introducing Tax Increment Financing. This will allow local councils to fund large-scale regeneration projects by borrowing against the future income from business rates and council tax generated as a result of the regeneration.

Strong and prosperous high streets and town centres, with small, independent shops, help ensure economically active communities.

We will protect and renew them by:

- Allowing councils to develop town centres, funded from future business rates income.
- Giving councils more powers to require an impact assessment of large supermarket developments.
- Supporting Liberal Democrats in the UK Government in keeping Post Offices open.
- Freezing business rates for a year while we reform them completely.
- Ensuring better bus stops and more information for visitors on public transport.



Better chances through better housing

There is a problem with access to affordable homes in Wales. This contributes to the appearance of run-down communities. We recognise the efforts made by the UK Government to encourage banks to lend more money to people looking for a mortgage. We will complement this here in Wales.

We will only tackle the affordable housing crisis by increasing the number of homes in Wales, so that prices come down and more homes are available.

We will increase affordable housing by:

- Bringing empty properties back into use with a Wales-wide Empty Homes Programme that will assist councils and housing associations to make use of empty homes and allowing use of the Social Housing Grant to turn empty properties into homes for rent. We will empower councils to increase council tax for owners who allow their empty properties to become a blight on the community and increase the powers available to councils to return them to use, including streamlining Empty Dwellings Management Orders.
- Bringing more private money into housing by working with the housing associations to restart the Welsh Housing Investment Trust.
- Protecting any new social rented housing from being sold under the Right-to-Buy scheme for a minimum of twenty five years in areas where this is needed.
- Setting a minimum level of affordable housing in any new development if the market supports this measure, by strengthening local authorities to use planning agreements to do this.

However, we still need to make best use of our current housing stock.

We will also ensure fairer access to housing by:

- Changing the way in which second homes are categorised in the planning system to give you a say over the number of second homes in your area, so that communities and councils can control the number of second homes.



- Putting in place a key workers scheme using both HomeBuy and Low Cost Ownership schemes to help those on low incomes in both urban and rural areas get onto the housing ladder.
- Reforming housing tenure so that people who move from Council houses to social housing do not lose out.
- Promoting the development of Community Land Trusts (non-profit, community-based organisations that provide housing to increase sustainable and affordable developments).
- Providing additional rights to owners of park homes, especially those who are seeking to sell their home..

We also have plans to ensure houses in Wales are energy efficient. Details can be found on page 45.

Equalities

We want everyone to have an equal stake in the better Wales that we are trying to create. We will respect diversity and empower all individuals. Existing inequalities, whether direct or indirect, let us all down. We all benefit from a level playing-field.

You will not lose out on the grounds of age, gender, disability, religion, race or sexual orientation. Difficult economic and financial times are not an excuse to let equality slip. We must continue to promote equality whatever the circumstances.

Equality runs though all aspects of our manifesto, but our specific commitments to improve equality and promote diversity by:

- Improving the impact assessments of government policies on women, particularly financial and economic policies which often leave women behind.
- Address the lack of women in senior positions in government by establishing a mentoring scheme that will provide training and mentoring to women.



- Creating a programme of good practice for people in working the public sector because not enough are trained in working with disabled people. We will encourage similar schemes in the private sector. This will include teaching people about access issues, how to use hearing loops, visibility issue as well as other concerns of disabled people.
- Improving the information available to people claiming benefits to ensure that they are claiming what they are entitled to. We believe that many people are living in unnecessarily difficult conditions because access to welfare is complicated and people are unaware of what is available.
- Promoting a Wales-wide initiative to support and welcome migrant workers and encourage integration with the local community, based on the successful model of the 'One Wrexham' initiative introduced by the Welsh Liberal Democrat-led council in Wrexham.
- Ensuring equal access to services for refugees and asylum seekers and ensuring that children and young people seeking refuge or asylum are not ignored.
- Encouraging public services, especially the health service, not to make assumptions about sexual orientation.

Despite the good work that the National Assembly has done in promoting gender balance, women and members of minority ethnic communities are still excluded from public life. It's time we got to grips with this problem. So we will ensure that the work is done to identify the challenges facing people from accessing public life. We'll also promote take-up of the Access to Public Life Fund to people in Wales.

Providing rights for the Welsh language

The Welsh language deserves to be protected and supported so that everyone in Wales can benefit from it. We believe that it is essential that everyone in Wales has the rights and opportunity to make use of the Welsh language and that people who use Welsh should be afforded the equality to do so.



We will develop a specific rights-based approach to using Welsh by amending the Welsh Language Measure to:

- Ensure the independence of the Commissioner by making sure they are appointed by the National Assembly, not the Government, and allowing greater scrutiny of the Commissioner's budget by the Assembly.
- Provide for compensation to be awarded to people who suffer financially through the failure of an organisation to comply with the standards.
- Reform the Advisory Panel so it reflects the diversity of Wales.

We'll also ensure that the expertise in the Welsh Language Board is not lost when it is replaced by a Commissioner. We believe there is a particular need to ensure that its role in promoting the Welsh Language is retained.

However, the Welsh language cannot only be protected by legislation; it needs to be made a living language in all areas of Welsh life.

Other policies in this manifesto that will give Welsh the sustainable future it deserves include:

- Supporting the editorial independence of S4C within the new funding arrangements, but ensuring governance reforms and developing links between S4C and smaller production companies.
- Cutting the amount of regulation regarding establishing Welsh-medium schools and ensure that decisions about school reorganisations are never taken for political reasons.
- Changing the way in which second homes are categorised in the planning system to give you a say over the number of second homes in your area and helping local people stay in local homes.
- Passing a Community Bill of Rights, which will arrest the decline of communities. Our Community Bill of Rights would strengthen the powers local authorities and community councils have to ensure that they can thrive despite economic and social changes.



A better education for our children



Education

Welsh exam results are worse than elsewhere in the UK, there is too little support for children from deprived backgrounds, there is a spending gap of over £600 per pupil each year and our teachers are being forced to do more and more of what the Government tells them, when they should be teaching. It's no wonder that Wales is lagging behind in skills, education and achievement.

The underfunding of and lack of priority given to our schools is the greatest scandal of devolution. But worse than that, it has left children with no aspiration to succeed in life and cemented the inter-generational poverty we now see across Wales. We can break this link. Investment in our education system is the best way to break the cycle of poverty, poor health and a cheap economy forever. So we will ensure that education is treated with the respect and priority it deserves.

A child's life chances are determined at an early age and education is not simply about who we send to university but who aspires to go in the first place. Investment in schools is the best way to ensure everyone has an equal chance at high-class jobs and a strong career.

Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that schools are the start of that chance, a good school will allow a child to reach his or her potential – it can give our children the chance to succeed. With better resources, more support for teachers and system that works for all abilities, we can close the performance gap between Wales and England. We will focus relentlessly on giving every child a good start and on making sure teachers have the resources and freedom to teach.

Allowing schools to succeed

Schools face too many restrictions and too much control from the Government. We believe that schools know what our children need in order to thrive, so we will give them the freedom and resources to ensure they can deliver.



We will give schools the freedom to innovate and deliver what is best for their children by:

- Tackling the spending gap, providing more money for schools by targeting additional money at pupils who need it the most. We will do this by establishing a pupil premium that will target £2,500 at each of the poorest children in Wales. The money will stay with the child so the schools can invest in the things that really matter, such as smaller class sizes, one-on-one teaching or tackling poor discipline.
- Reducing the bureaucracy for schools and phasing out the many prescriptive ring-fenced grants.
- Creating a new, streamlined National Curriculum, that will ensure that children learn key intellectual and life skills and knowledge, whilst giving schools more flexibility over how these subjects are taught.

The management of schools by local councils is vital to ensuring that they are able to provide first-class services even when pupil numbers are falling.

We'll ensure that best framework for schools by:

- Formalising partnerships between local secondary and primary schools to help the transition for pupils from primary to secondary education and ensure schools are able to plan for the future; including using more specialist transition teachers and ensuring the early years of secondary schools offer a better balance of pastoral and academic teaching.
- Expanding the availability of training for new governors to make sure they have the skills to contribute fully.
- Ordering a full review of how our schools are held accountable. We'll ensure that this looks at issues of local accountability, appropriate leadership for governing bodies and whether single governing bodies would be appropriate for catchment areas.



The highest standards for teacher and pupils

The quality of schools in Wales depends on the quality of the teachers. We believe that the Government must do more to ensure that teachers are able to succeed.

We'll make sure that every teacher is able to teach to the highest standard by:

- Updating the initial teacher training course to ensure it is fit for purpose.
- Scrapping the General Teaching Council for Wales and investing the money in a Quality Teaching Programme, to provide up-to-date training and professional development for teachers and head teachers and to encourage high-fliers to become teachers.
- Guaranteeing teachers the right to an unpaid sabbatical year if they want to pursue academic study.
- Making it possible for schools to pay good teachers more and providing advice and support to schools which tackle poor teaching performance.

We can't create a better Wales if only some of our children are able to take advantage of a good education. We believe that every child in Wales deserves the opportunity to flourish.

We'll ensure that schools are a safe and productive environment for all pupils by:

- Finally issuing rules to make sure all schools produce healthy food, using powers in a Welsh Liberal Democrat law that has already been passed.
- Urgently developing specific Homophobic Bullying Guidance, in recognition that this form of bullying is more difficult to tackle through normal plans.
- Strengthening the powers available to teachers to tackle bad discipline in the class room.



- Cutting the amount of regulation regarding establishing Welsh-medium schools and ensure that decisions about school reorganisations are never taken for political reasons.
- Rolling-out a programme of special educational needs testing across Wales, aiming to identify children who have learning, communication or other difficulties early on.
- Commissioning research to begin the process to ensure that children with complex needs who are due to attend special schools in England can have access to schooling here in Wales. Close proximity to families and communities improves the quality of life for children.
- Expanding the duty on councils to provide school transport to include provision for disabled pupils.

Higher and Further Education

Beyond compulsory education

Further Education is going to be essential to increasing the level of skills in Wales. Vocational courses are the backbone of many professions and help tackle poverty and reduce economic inactivity. In the pursuit of this goal, colleges face too many burdens; they have consistently been top of the Government's list for cuts and at the same time have been expected to deliver key training arms of their response to the economic downturn.

We will make sure colleges can help their students thrive by:

- Ensuring people have the right to study their first level 3 qualification (A level or equivalent) for free, regardless of their age. We will prioritise this within European funding programmes, if we qualify again.
- Reforming the 14-19 funding arrangements to ensure that there is equity of funding for FE colleges and other education providers. We'll review the way funding is split between schools and colleges to ensure that FE colleges get a fair deal.



- Reducing the burden on colleges by auditing what inspection and data collection they need to carry out their jobs and scrapping the rest. This will lead to more money and staff time for teaching.

Higher Education will drive the new Welsh economy and provides for a distinctive presence overseas. The next few years will be challenging for Welsh students but we will maintain our commitment to ensuring that quality university education is available for everyone. Our approach to Higher Education has always been guided by this principle and the next Assembly will be no different. As well as mitigating circumstances for current students, we want to focus also on who aspires to go to university and how we can raise expectations of young people across Wales. We will ensure that everyone who wants to access universities to have the chance to do so, and we want Welsh universities to be free to compete with the best universities in the world.

We will strengthen Welsh universities by:

- Introducing a Welsh Students' Charter that guarantees students receive adequate levels of service. This will ensure strong levels of teaching, support and access to facilities for students, helping them to make the most of the university experience.
- Paying any additional tuition fees or graduate contributions above the present level for students from Wales, wherever they choose to study in the UK.
- Ensuring that everyone has access to higher education by paying the fees and living costs of looked-after children and establishing a mentoring scheme for children from underprivileged backgrounds.
- Developing equity between full- and part-time students by ensuring fair access to grants. We recognise the importance of part-time study to economic recovery and personal development.
- Ensuring that resources are used effectively to support excellent research in Welsh universities, and working with universities so that Wales continues to produce world-leading research in the sciences, social sciences and humanities.



- Reforming the bursary regime to incentivise science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects as well as tackling financial hardship.
- Guaranteeing that university governance will remain free from direct government interference, and working with universities to strengthen higher education in Wales through partnerships that deliver genuine benefits for teaching, research and the student experience, whilst maintaining the distinctive identities of institutions and their academic independence.

Learning throughout life

Learning is not just about traditional schools, colleges and universities. People of all ages should be able to learn new skills in their community. Learning for people outside of further education and higher education will ensure that everyone in Wales can be ready for work and contribute to a stronger economy whilst improving their own lives and communities.

We will promote lifelong learning by:

- Redistributing resources across the lifelong learning sector more effectively, giving greater resources towards the over-25s. As the Welsh population gets older, to ensure that everyone has access to new learning, we will need to rebalance how much money we spend on older people who want to undertake community learning.
- Providing a flexible curriculum, working with colleges and other groups, to ensure that people have access to a wide range of academic and vocational subjects, including humanities and social sciences.
- Ensuring that there is greater cross-departmental co-operation in delivering lifelong learning by giving the Minister for Education a remit to pursue Adult Community Learning across the whole Government.



Heritage, Culture and Sport

A strong cultural life in Wales is good for our nation and good for our economy. Too few people are able to access arts, sports and our heritage, even though we know that doing so is good for their health, education and the local economy.

Heritage, sport and the arts improve our economy in two ways – they generate business directly but they also help create a strong Welsh brand which helps define Wales on the world stage and attract people to our country. But the way to improve the way that Welsh cultural life thrives is to make sure that as many people as possible take part in it. By including more people in our heritage, arts and sports we improve their quality.

So we will ensure that we improve access to heritage, sports and the arts and we'll nurture the artists and sportspeople of tomorrow so that they can continue to contribute to the culture of Wales. By doing so we will also give a much needed boost to our economy.

Protecting our past

Making sure that our past is open to the people of Wales means that everyone in Wales, and visitors from elsewhere, can access our rich heritage. It is funding and promoting Wales' history that leads to a greater sense of Welshness and how we identify ourselves. This has economic benefits too.

We will make sure everyone can explore our heritage by:

- Giving local councils the power to protect buildings with a social or community significance, such as historic pubs like the Vulcan Inn in Cardiff. We will allow the protection of buildings that are of importance for social and cultural reasons and strengthen the powers available to local councils to protect buildings that meet local criteria for listing.
- Supporting all the current Welsh bids for UNESCO World Heritage status, including the Newport Transporter Bridge and Merthyr Tydfil's Cyfartha industrial heritage area.



- Developing a programme to capitalise on Wales' industrial heritage. This will generate direct tourism but will also develop a strong sense of place which is essential for community development.
- Specifically requiring Cadw and other bodies to make provision for visitor travel arrangements when restoring our heritage. There is no point having our heritage in place if the people of Wales cannot get there to experience it.
- Working with major Museums to ensure that items which are not on display can be loaned out to other museums in Wales, ensuring that community museums have access to new pieces. We'll also encourage loans from other major museums in UK and abroad as well.
- Developing a coherent signing and information system, so that communities can easily promote their heritage to others. For example, we'll make it a priority to signpost places like battlefields and encourage communities to signpost local attractions.

Improving our future

Sport can play a vital part in community life and in improving public health. It also plays an essential role in the cultural and national life of Wales. We believe that to ensure Welsh sporting success in the future we need to invest in the sportsmen and women of the future, using their skills to build up sport for the future.

We will unleash Welsh talent by:

- Investing in grassroots sports, particularly in schools. We'll encourage links between schools and local sports clubs in order to make sure that all children who want to partake in sports get the opportunity to do so and ensure that teacher training builds up the ability of teachers to teach sports and physical literacy.
- Increasing the number of coaches working with sports clubs in Wales by promoting the opportunities available to public sector workers and encouraging the private sector to do the same.



- Outlining plans elsewhere in this manifesto to protect green spaces and to ensure greater protection of our countryside. Access to green spaces for activity is essential for well-being and promoting activity.

Investing in culture and the arts is great for our economy and helps create our calling card to the world. We'll make sure that the artistic and cultural diversity in Wales is developed for the next generation of artists, because we can only ensure high-quality art for the future if we nurture the artists of tomorrow, whether they work in traditional or digital arts.

We will ensure that grassroots and new artists receive support by:

- Giving strategic direction to the Arts Council to invest more of their money into smaller festivals and up-and-coming artists, musicians and writers. We will also instruct the Arts Council develop a programme to ensure that arts and cultural events move towards sustainable business plans.
- Develop Arts Quality Standards, similar to those developed for libraries, so that the Government and councils can drive up the standard of arts provision in communities.
- Ensuring children have access to some arts provision by maintaining arts in our proposed curriculum reforms.
- Establishing an Arts & Sports Investment Trust, which would be a self-funding organisation dedicated to leveraging more private investment into smaller Welsh arts and sports. The organisation will develop contacts between smaller artists and sportspeople for sponsorship opportunities and ensure that there are alternative arrangements available for people who are having difficulty attracting funding.
- Supporting the editorial independence of S4C within the new funding arrangements, but ensuring governance reforms and developing links between S4C and smaller production companies.

A better **NHS** that delivers for you



Health

For a whole series of treatments, Wales is dropping further and further behind. We have lower survival rates than the European average for cancer and several other medical conditions. Life expectancy can also vary by nearly 20 years, depending on where in Wales you live.

Despite this poor performance, the Labour-Plaid Government has refused to investigate the claim by an NHS Finance Director that £1 billion of the NHS Wales budget is “not being used optimally” – in other words wasted. That huge sum could be spent more effectively to provide urgently needed better treatment.

They have introduced a centralising re-organisation, which gives the Minister unprecedented control over the way the NHS operates. The reorganisation also led to thousands of pounds being wasted on protected salaries for NHS managers for years ahead. We believe that a Government should develop the overall performance framework and that local bodies should implement in a way that suits their local area.

Wales needs a more localised service for the majority of healthcare needs. Health and social care organisations need to work together more closely to manage patients’ needs as they change, for example as we grow older. And much more needs to be done to reduce illness and accidents in the first place.

Improving outcomes by improving the NHS

Healthcare comes in three main forms – when you suffer a sudden illness or accident, when you are referred by your GP for planned treatment, and when you need long-term care. We would require the parts of the NHS to work together more closely to improve care in each of those situations.



Our plans include:

- Cutting your waiting times by cutting waste. We will improve healthcare by switching ineffective spending in the NHS to the frontline.
- Using local facilities, such as small hospitals and health centres, to provide 24-hour GP and nurse-led care to treat minor injuries and illnesses, so avoiding long waits in the A&E departments of major hospitals and unnecessary long ambulance journeys. Paramedics could be located at these local facilities to treat patients and to respond quickly to emergency calls. Instead of closing local hospitals, we would seek to use such facilities wherever possible to provide better service – while also reducing costs.
- Requiring hospitals which keep patients waiting in ambulances for long periods to pay the cost of providing extra ambulances to meet other patients' emergency needs. In this and other ways, we will resource and enable the Welsh Ambulance Service to match the faster response times achieved in England.
- Funding the Air Ambulance to provide a full, seven-day-a-week service for the first time.
- Providing a single telephone number for non-emergency illnesses and accidents to enable you to get the right treatment first time – whether in your own home by a GP or paramedic, by your going to a local healthcare facility (in your own vehicle or by non-emergency ambulance), by giving you an appointment with your own GP or by a nurse advising you on home-treatment.
- Implementing, as a priority, a National Comprehensive Cancer Plan, using money currently in the NHS budget to fund the most effective medicines and therapies. Better facilities will help cut waiting times and improve patients' quality of life.
- Keeping people out of hospitals by introducing self-referral to health professionals such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists and using these professionals more effectively in diagnosis and treatment. We will consult all those involved to ensure a smooth implementation of self-referral.



- Trialling a radical programme of healthcare, successfully developed in New Jersey, based around a network of doctors, nurses and social workers who will work with the neediest patients in their area to reduce regular hospital visits and improve those patients' access to more appropriate, and less costly, treatment.
- Increasing the take-up of the most effective medicines by ensuring the newest drugs are available. This will be funded by streamlining the medicine approval process by merging the functions of NICE, the All-Wales Medicines Strategy Group and local formularies.
- Ending the damaging ban on using private money in the health service – it cannot be justified in difficult financial times. We reject conventional PFI but health bodies should be free to use private sector money when necessary if they can prove it is better value and better for patients. This will ensure that more money is available to improve hospitals across Wales.
- Getting to grips with our hospital maintenance backlog, prioritising repair or replacement of the most risky buildings and ensuring access for disabled people to all NHS facilities. We would also use every such opportunity to intensify the use of NHS facilities to meet a wider range of needs.

Improving wellbeing across Wales

Moving NHS resources into preventing ill health or the need for medical treatment in the first place has two benefits: people live longer and healthier lives and the NHS saves money.

We will promote community care and public health by:

- Spending money on preventing the need for hospitalisation. Early intervention is better for patients and, when elderly people enter hospitals, their stays often become lengthy and debilitating. So we will invest in projects to reduce the number of elderly people suffering slips and falls by preventive measures and ensure swift home treatment when they do occur.



- Recognising the important role of good housing and even leisure facilities, so we will combine different public sector budgets and even private sector resources to achieve the greatest effect. Innovative ways of promoting improved diets – important in reducing health inequalities – will also be one of our high priorities.
- Developing and implementing strategies for earlier diagnosis of sight and hearing problems. This will include raising awareness of hearing and sight problems in schools and workplaces. These actions will be another aspect of our emphasis on prevention, because early diagnosis improves lives and saves money.
- Supporting the new Mental Health Measure and ensuring that it works well, with effective scrutiny of how it is used. We will also provide better leadership of Mental Health Services by appointing a director of Mental Health within the Government.
- Targeting a mental health awareness campaign at employers, to address the high levels of unemployment amongst people with mental ill-health.
- Focusing the attention of healthy people on the importance of organ donation and improving the rates of donation by establishing an opt-out programme for organ donation.

We want a modern NHS – which is cost-effective, efficient and delivering better services. The more money we save by cutting inefficiencies, the more we can spend on delivering the best possible services for you and your family.

We will prioritise frontline care by:

- Establishing an Office for Health Spending to act as ongoing, independent and expert assessor of the effectiveness of NHS expenditure. It will be required to monitor rigorously how each LHB and Trust spends its budget, holding them accountable to an agreed set of outcomes. With its assistance, Ministers must ensure that NHS funds are used to optimal effect.



- Developing an outcomes framework, encompassing NHS, public health and social care, so that all services are focused on achieving the best outcomes.
- Negotiating a Compact on Cross-border Health Provision with the Westminster Government to ensure that there is a consistent approach to treatment for Welsh and English patients. In many parts of Wales, the nearest specialist hospital is in England and the border must not stand in the way of securing the most appropriate treatment.
- Making sure that hospitals are seen as the last resort – prevention and community treatment should be where most healthcare takes place. We will prioritise investment in community facilities to ensure that people get better treatment and at a lower cost.
- Improving collaboration between social care and the NHS. We will promote joint projects with a single management and budgeting structure to commission and deliver social and community care. We will also encourage the establishment of social enterprise provider models to match the best in Britain.
- Developing a Welsh ‘locum bank’ to save money on hiring locums from agencies and making it easier for the health service to fill temporary gaps in provision.

Dignity and security in social care

We also need to bring our social care system into the modern age. We believe that social care must ensure people are looked after in ways appropriate to their needs and maximising their independence.

We will improve social care by:

- Rapidly increasing the use of Personal Budgets for care services – allocating a budget that people can control themselves. They can then decide how to spend this to meet their care needs and achieve agreed outcomes, in line with a personalised support plan. The allocated budget may be taken as cash (a direct payment) or as a service managed on their behalf. It can be used to design and purchase support from the public, private and third sectors, increasing people’s autonomy over their care and support.



- Making the regulations regarding direct payments and individual budgets more flexible, allowing people to employ family members or invest in non-medical equipment if they can demonstrate it will improve their individual circumstances.
- Establishing a Welsh Home Improvement Lending Agency with charitable status to facilitate equity release loans to enable home owners, in conjunction with care and repair agencies, to access capital to carry out adaptations and repairs to their home.
- Extending the use of shared budgeting and collaborative working between the NHS and Social Services in order to reduce “bed blocking”.
- Promoting not-for-profit “extra care” nursing homes in which nursing care packages can be pooled so as to employ better trained nurses to care for residents.
- Fully implementing the Carers Measure that requires carers to be given quality advice. We will prioritise the needs of children who have caring roles and ensure that our policies on health and social care have to pass a carer’s audit.

Social Justice

Welsh Liberal Democrats are committed to reducing disadvantage, increasing social mobility and decreasing poverty. Some people are held back by a fear of unsafe streets, some by debt and some because they have been left vulnerable.

We have such a passion for making sure that the poorest and most disadvantaged in our society have access to the same opportunities as the rest of Wales.



Communities that serve everyone

Crime - and fear of crime - hurt the most vulnerable. Some people are scared to leave their homes at night. Most policing issues are not devolved to the National Assembly, but we can play our part in tackling drug abuse, improving safety and making sure the police listen to people's concerns.

We will make Welsh communities safer for everyone by:

- Rationalising existing substance misuse programmes to create a National Treatment Taskforce, within Government, to provide leadership on substance misuse. Their first task will be carrying out an Impact Assessment of drugs policy to ensure that treatment options are based on scientific evidence. We will also treat substance misuse issues as a public health issue rather than a criminal issue.
- Implementing the 'Scores on the Doors' scheme, which makes it compulsory for places selling food to display their food hygiene rating on the premises. This will enable consumers to decide for themselves where they want to eat.
- Working with the police to tackle hate crime, including training police officers to recognise and report this crime and ensuring that as many victims as possible come forward.
- Continuing to press for the devolution of policing and justice by producing evidence to support the case. Devolution of policing could allow for better, Welsh solutions to Welsh problems.
- Closing the legal loophole that allows 'approved inspectors' to decide if a building is compliant and ensuring that this role is undertaken by local councils. This which will improve the enforceability of building standards, as has happened in Scotland.



We will protect local post offices so that everyone in a community has access to them by giving as many people as possible the opportunity to access Government services through their local Post Office, making it easier to access services and keep Post Offices open. We will encourage local authorities to do the same.

Protecting the most vulnerable

Some people are losing out because they have not been equipped to manage their money and this is especially true in the current economic climate. People who are struggling with finances are often some of the most vulnerable in society.

We will make sure that everyone has the power to manage their own money by:

- Increasing the availability of free-to-use cash points, including locating them in all Post Office and working to ensure the availability of £5 notes.
- Ensuring that all children receive basic lessons in financial literacy, as part of our curriculum reforms.
- Working with credit unions and other lenders to develop a microfinance model along the lines of the model in Glasgow, which could offer small loans to people or businesses that need a small amount of credit.

Too many people, are suffering from domestic abuse.

We will tackle this problem by:

- Improving the information available to schools on domestic violence, healthy relationships and the unacceptability of gendered violence.
- Implementing a national domestic abuse training strategy for professionals delivering frontline services, including doctors, nurses, teachers and social workers.
- Ensuring that the strategies for tackling violence against men and violence against women are kept distinct and evidence-based.



Wales **CAN** do better

It is an outrage that in Wales, today, someone's life chances are decided by where they were born. And still too many children face too much difficulty early in life.

We will take steps to protect our most vulnerable children by:

- Reaffirming our ambition to eliminate child poverty. We'll focus on lifting families out of poverty through more effective measures such as improving education for poorer children, improving the health service and tackling poverty that affects families as a whole.
- Lobbying for increased power for the Children's Commissioner to work on non-devolved issues. Children in Wales should have a single point of contact.
- Extending duty of care to 21, regardless of whether or not a child stays in education.
- Rationalising the number of bodies that deal with safeguarding children – there are currently 154 in Wales. We'll also place the emphasis on implementation of existing policy rather than more reviews.



A better future for our environment



Energy

There has not been enough action to tackle the Welsh ecological footprint – the damage that we have on our environment. We rely too much on dirty energy and our homes and transport systems create too much pollution. As well as this, there has not been enough support for ordinary people to “go green” – even though they are often the people who need the help the most. If we don’t start making progress now, Wales will be lagging behind other countries in its environmental responsibilities.

Preventing disastrous climate change is not only an environmental necessity but has added benefits for the economy. Everyone has their part to play, but the Government has a key role in making it easier for us to reduce our impact on the environment.

We will reduce Wales’ ecological footprint by 75% by 2050. We’ll also set an achievable benchmark target and make much of our work in the Assembly based on stabilising the ecological footprint. This will be done partly through making our energy use cleaner and partly through reducing how much energy we use.

We will cut expenditure on non-essential services, including moving money from awareness-raising schemes to schemes which have a definable impact on reducing carbon emissions. We will merge the Forestry Commission Wales, the Environment Agency Wales and Countryside Council for Wales, to achieve closer working and cost-savings.

Cutting down on carbon use

We will tackle the twin barriers to going green – too much dirty energy and too much energy waste. We’ll begin by tackling fuel poverty, funding more improvements to people’s homes and stopping climate change from hurting the worst off in society. We’ll also make sure that communities and individuals find it easier to generate their own, clean electricity.



We need to get to grips with rising levels of fuel poverty and address 25% of environmental damage is done by housing. That is why there is a need to tackle the emissions from people's homes as a priority.

We will make sure the Welsh housing stock is fit for the future by:

- Ensuring that people eligible for the Green Deal are offered information on that programme and that people who are either highly fuel poor or living in off-gas areas are the focus of Welsh Government fuel poverty programmes. This will allow people to access money for insulation, new heating equipment such as boilers, cavity-wall insulation and other items.
- Delivering an additional 12,000 warmer homes by doubling the money available for tackling fuel poverty.
- Providing accurate data on fuel poverty for planning and ensure good information is available across the public sector and to consumers.

We will back up our fuel poverty plans by:

- Removing the requirements for planning permission for small-scale microgeneration or Combined Heat and Power in private homes.
- Continuing the roll-out of smart meters, giving people the chance to effectively monitor their own energy use and reduce their energy bills.
- Making all new public sector buildings energy efficient by 2015, including micro-generation where appropriate.

We will require the Welsh Government to take the lead in cutting carbon use by:

- Setting targets for reducing carbon use for all Welsh Government departments and quangos, and publishing performance figures.
- Requiring that any reorganization of public services – including the relocation of health services and the closure of schools – is assessed for its impact of carbon use resulting from changed travel patterns and new uses of buildings.



- Publishing a Carbon Budget alongside the Budget every year so that people can tell what impact our plans will have on the environment. We'll also add a carbon impact assessment to all our new laws, so that we can assess their environmental impact. And each year, we'll push for the National Assembly's Sustainability Committee to publish an environmental audit of the Government.

Ramping up renewable energy

Our target is to be half-way towards removing carbon from the Welsh energy supply by 2025. We will draw up a detailed and deliverable plan for achieving this target to be published by 2015, but we can start take action now by increasing investment in renewable energy.

We will lead a green revolution in Welsh energy supply by:

- Providing support and advice for community energy schemes by setting up a Community Energy Wales organization, to be owned by the community energy sector, following the successful model of Community Energy Scotland.
- Encouraging the use of offshore tidal and wind resources by offering incentives to companies to install only the highest generating equipment.
- Issuing a formal statement that the Welsh Government supports renewable and community energy projects as a priority and opposes both new nuclear power because of its detrimental impact on human health and its long-term unsustainability. We will also oppose new carbon-based power that does not have appropriate capture and storage built in.
- Revising TAN 8 to ensure that we can increase the amount of energy produced from wind as well as positively engaging communities with renewable energy in their area. We will also ensure that money from new wind developments goes to community organisations or community councils and not local authorities, where possible, so communities can directly benefit from wind production.

- Use our Jobs and Growth Innovation Programme to ensure that we have the facilities available to create green jobs in Wales as we expand renewable energy.

Transport

For years, the Welsh Government has prioritised the wrong sort of transport and they are even giving money for an aeroplane to fly from Cardiff to Anglesey. At the same time, buses and trains are too old, too slow and too difficult to use. It's far too hard to make the decision to help the environment by going green. Most people in Wales just don't have that choice.

We need to make it easier to use public transport, so that it can be used every day by everyone.

A good rail infrastructure will allow us to improve the economy but also help reduce pollution. And in rural areas, we need imaginative ideas to ensure that there are alternatives to the car. Travelling by public transport should be commonplace, not a luxury.

We will transform the way we plan and fund our transport infrastructure – cutting the number of organisations responsible and making sure we fund public, not private transport. We will also make sure public transport is accessible, with action to make trains accessible to everyone and make sure rural and poorer areas aren't left behind.

Leadership for green travelling

The Welsh Government has not prioritised accessible public transport.

We will provide much-needed leadership on green transport issues by:

- Rationalising the number of organisations with responsibility for transport. All of the local transport responsibilities of local authorities should be transferred to Joint Transport Authorities, each represented and owned by two or three neighbouring local authorities with common transport network interests.



- Establish the feasibility of introducing a Wales-wide Oystercard, working with Arriva and bus companies to ensure that people can travel around Wales easily. We will also investigate the cost of ticket prices on buses and trains to see how we can lower prices for users.
- Investing in rail transport by, renegotiating the Arriva Trains Wales contract to improve train frequency and quality, beginning to electrify the Valleys Lines and re-opening closed stations. We have set out more detailed plans in the economy section.

Sustainable transport for every community

Community transport is an essential element of promoting easy access to sustainable forms of transport.

We will promote a new approach to community transport by:

- Scrapping the subsidy for the North-South airlink. We will also rule out subsidies for other airports or airlines in the next Assembly.
- Improving the coverage of bus routes in rural and poorer areas by re-regulating the buses, so that local authorities can ensure that all of their communities are served.
- Working with the UK Government to develop a reciprocal agreement for using Welsh bus passes in England (and vice versa).
- Reviewing the Local Transport Services Grant to ensure that money is spread fairly across Wales.
- Requiring the new Joint Transport Authorities to plan for Community Transport in their programme of work.
- Implementing three-year budgeting for community transport schemes and ensuring prompt payments.



Agriculture and Rural Affairs

Rural areas are some of the poorest in Wales, but the economy here is too often overlooked by politicians, who don't think that rural Wales matters. Farming is crucial to the Welsh economy, but it is also the start of hundreds of other businesses that are found across rural Wales.

The Government in Cardiff Bay is too remote from most of rural Wales and so far has not offered the right kind of support to rural businesses. Boosting these businesses will boost the rural economy which will be crucial in spreading sustainable economic growth across Wales.

So we will make it easier for farmers and rural businesses by reducing restriction and planning conditions that make modernisation difficult. If we give farmers and agricultural businesses the chance to succeed they will rise to the challenge.

A sustainable rural economy

Farming is at the heart of the rural economy, and we believe that it needs support from Government. Unfortunately, in recent years, the Government has only made things more difficult for agriculture. We will give farmers the freedom to succeed.

We will improve agriculture by:

- Reforming the Glastir programme. We will re-open applications for the programme and ensure that as many farmers as possible have access to the scheme, as well as setting a realistic target for the number of applications. We will ensure that any additional changes to the scheme are open to existing applicants.
- Ensuring the effectiveness of the Glastir programme by implementing a robust monitoring of the impact of the scheme on farmers and the environment. We'll ensure a report on Glastir is debated by the National Assembly each year.



Wales **CAN** do better

- Relaxing planning restrictions that make it easier for farmers to convert disused buildings on their land into commercial facilities – providing an alternative income for farmers and more business space for local business. This will also help ensure that business is spread across Wales.
- Reforming the farming advice service so that it is more individualised and ensuring that advice is offered on sustainability as well as profitability. We will use this service to promote take-up of small energy facilities on farms.
- Streamlining inspection of farms by co-ordinating and minimising the number of visits. We'll also target repeat offenders and inspect compliant businesses less, with the aim of co-operative compliance rather than prosecution.

As well as farming, rural areas support a whole range of businesses, small and large, that allow rural communities to prosper.

- Supporting the Food and Drink Industry, which is often made up of small, successful businesses in local areas. Specifically we will reform the planning system for small breweries and distilleries to make it easier for them to expand and we will create a labelling scheme for food and drink that identifies quality food and drink as Welsh. We'll also order a full audit of True Taste Wales to ensure it is marketing Welsh food effectively.
- Reducing the planning restrictions on small-scale biomass facilities, so that we can encourage their growth, benefiting local economies and helping to meet our renewable obligations.
- Providing support and advice for small shops and businesses in rural areas on developing online trading to diversify their income streams and increase sustainability.

Strong and prosperous high streets and town centres, with small, independent shops, help ensure economically active communities.



We will protect and renew them by:

- Allowing councils to develop town centres, funded from future business rates income.
- Giving councils more powers to require an impact assessment of large supermarket developments.
- Supporting Liberal Democrats in the UK Government in keeping Post Offices open.
- Freezing business rates for a year while we reform them completely.
- Ensuring better bus stops and more information for visitors on public transport.

Tourism is vital to the economy of rural areas, our plans to boost rural tourism can be found on page 16.

A countryside for everyone

The countryside and landscape belongs to everyone. We must increase opportunities for people to get involved in how they are run.

We will improve public interaction with our countryside by:

- Making National Parks democratically accountable, allowing a proportion of the park boards to be elected. We will also give them the power to promote economic development in their area.
- Passing a Community Bill of Rights which will arrest the decline of rural communities. This would address issues such as providing affordable housing, giving communities more power to run services, developing community assets and reforming community councils.
- Funding the Air Ambulance to provide a full, seven-day-a-week service for the first time.
- Delivering greater community involvement in the management of forests and woodlands in Wales, enhancing the social and economic contribution of forests to the local area.



Conservation in the modern age

We will protect our countryside, enhance biodiversity and ensure continuing enjoyment of our landscape by:

- Using existing Government programmes, such as agricultural subsidies and regeneration programmes, to increase the amount of tree cover in Wales. We'll also ensure ancient trees are recognised for their natural value.
- Creating a new listing status to protect green areas of particular importance or value to the community.
- Creating a new designation of 'Natural Parks' to recognise the environmental significance of areas such as the Cambrian Mountains. This designation, as in France and Italy, will promote economic regeneration through community enterprise, ecosystem services and sustainable tourism, whilst avoiding burdening landowners with the regulations associated with National Parks.
- Tackling flooding across Wales protecting areas that flood easily from having additional development and protecting coastal areas from erosion by revising TAN 15.
- Ensuring Marine Development Plans are developed in the Assembly term and developing a partnership approach for fisheries management.

Better politics, that puts local people in charge



Political reform

We need to change the way we do politics in Wales. The Government is still able to make sweeping decisions in private – over important issues like how they spend our money and how they write our laws. The National Assembly doesn't have the power to scrutinise the Government or hold it to account. Too often Ministers ignore the National Assembly.

Wales needs a clean, open and fair system of politics. Involving more people in decision-making increases faith in politics and leads to better decisions on the issues that affect you and your families.

A better Welsh Government

We will improve the way the Welsh Government works by:

- Restoring faith in the Ministerial Code of Conduct by making sure it is policed by an independent body. This will end the situation where the First Minister is in charge of complaints against his Government.
- Publishing details of every item of expenditure over £25,000, as the UK and Scottish Governments already do.
- Establishing a Civil Liberties Forum, to ensure the Welsh Government respects people's human rights and privacy. With new powers, the Government will address issues like data protection, cross-service working and centralism which make this development necessary.
- Presenting the annual budget in a way that can be easily understood by politicians, civil society and the public. The current format simply isn't good enough; we'll make it clear how much is being spent on which services. We will also publish an annual carbon budget.



We also want to ensure that there is a constructive relationship between the Governments in London and Cardiff Bay. It is in everyone's interest to ensure close working on financial and legal issues for Wales and to ensure that there is dialogue about how non-devolved matters will affect people in Wales. Welsh Liberal Democrats are in a good position to strengthen this relationship.

A stronger National Assembly

The National Assembly must be a real arena for scrutiny, good law-making and voicing people's concerns, rather than a confirmatory body for the Government.

We will restore power to the democratically-elected National Assembly by:

- Giving a committee the power to call back Ministers who fail to answer questions properly or consistently make major Government announcements outside of the National Assembly.
- Making sure that major appointments to Quangos and bodies that scrutinise the Government are made by the National Assembly and not the Government.
- Improving the legislative process by ensuring that we have pre-legislative scrutiny and produce white papers more often and make a clear statement on what the aims of each piece of legislation will be. This will also ensure that we can put more detail into the law itself, reducing the need for unaccountable secondary legislation.

The Yes vote in March, giving the National Assembly direct law-making powers, will force politicians to accept responsibility for their actions. We need to use these powers to prove that Wales can deliver, within a strong United Kingdom. The National Assembly needs greater powers from the UK Government to deliver for the people of Wales, being accountable for their decisions.



We will continue to make the case for reform of the Barnett formula by:

- Campaigning for a needs-based formula.
- Developing the financial accountability of the National Assembly. We believe that tax-varying powers, similar as being proposed for Scotland, will give the Welsh Government more opportunity to improve Wales and act as an incentive for economic success.

We will also examine whether new areas of responsibility, such as powers regarding policing or large-scale energy generation can deliver improved results for the people of Wales. Specifically, we will make the case for powers over larger energy projects and policing and justice. The unique composition of these issues in Wales means better solutions can be delivered by an effective Welsh government.

Local Government

In the last few years, local authorities have seen their ability to deliver services for local people eroded by a plethora of spending restrictions and legal and bureaucratic requirements. They now have very little power to make decisions in the interest of local communities and the cost of complying with these requirements is substantial. Stronger local Government can deliver better results for local communities.

We can increase local Councils' freedom by reducing the complex rules and financial decisions that hold them back. Freeing up local Councils from central Government control, so they can make the best decisions for their communities.

Giving freedom to local democracy

Local councils are trapped in a thicket of orders from the Welsh Government, which means they are not able to deliver change for their people. We believe that it is only possible to improve councils by giving them the freedom to meet their own standards and deliver their own priorities.



We will give local Councils more freedom to make the financial decision to deliver local change by:

- Reducing the complexity arising from specific grants and significantly reduce their use. We anticipate that there would be only a handful of grants to local authorities, rather than the 60 available at the moment. We will be able to make a substantial saving by reducing expensive administration costs.
- Reviewing the cost of delivering services in deprived and sparsely-populated areas, by commissioning a technical report and reforming the Revenue Support Grant accordingly. We'll also review other costs that make it difficult to deliver services..
- Introducing Tax Increment Financing, which will allow local Councils to undertake big regeneration projects, paid for out of future business rate income. This will ensure we can modernise our communities even when there is less public money available.

We will give local councils more legal freedom to make decisions in the best interest of their communities by:

- Giving local councils more freedom in how they deliver local services by introducing a power of general competence.
- Auditing the number, cost and effectiveness of statutory duties on local authorities with the aim of reducing them substantially. There will be no more statutory duties without identified funding, and this funding will merge as soon as possible with normal council funding.
- Reducing the burden of audit and monitoring on local Councils, which is currently one of the toughest in the Western world. Councils currently spend over £50 million per year just complying with overly-stringent inspection regimes.

Strengthening local democracy

Devolving political and economic power away from the Welsh Government is crucial to ensuring strong local democracy. The Welsh Government's role in this is to ensure effective management and accountability.



We will improve the way local authorities are organised by:

- Introducing fair votes for unitary and community councils, by using the Single Transferable Vote system.
- Repealing the powers that allow Ministers to merge councils by decree without proper consultation with local people.
- Establishing an independent audit into the best and worst practices of open government, aiming to spread best practice across Wales.
- Encouraging joint appointment across sectors and councils, and working with Councils to explore the possibility of merging some services to make savings in the short-term.

We will empower local Councillors to speak up for their residents by reforming the Code of Conduct to end frivolous complaints. Councillors should be able to speak up for local residents confidently and the Code of Conduct should be amended to reflect this.

Communities

Local communities are at the heart of Welsh life – but they are often unable to influence issues that have a significant impact on their residents. More and more, decisions about what happens in each community are being taken by Cardiff Bay. This frustrates local ambition and ignores local needs.

Decisions should be made at the most local possible level – making sure that people whose lives are affected will have the biggest say on what will happen. Our plans hold true for urban areas and rural areas alike – every community is different but has the same right to decide its future.



Empowering communities for success

We will allow local communities to flourish by:

- Passing a Community Bill of Rights, which will arrest the decline of communities. Our Community Bill of Rights would strengthen the powers local authorities and community councils have to ensure that they can thrive despite economic and social changes. For example, the Bill of Rights will give them the power to take over facilities that local Councils are selling off, object to unwieldy planning applications and limit the number of second homes in an area, improve access to public buildings in the community and reform community councils.
- Introducing a 'Community Right to Buy' which would enable community organizations to register an interest in land or buildings that were designed for public use so that if the property comes up for sale they have first refusal, subject to a community ballot. Property purchased could be useful for community facilities, affordable housing or small-scale employment units, subject to planning permission.
- Strengthening the role of community councils by encouraging them to be set up where they do not currently exist and by allowing them the right to run certain local authority services that are best delivered at a community level.

The planning process in Wales is too often distant from local people and communities are denied a say in decisions that have a huge impact on them.

We will give communities and people control over their composition of communities by:

- Reforming the planning process by focussing on the twin aims of making it quicker and to increasing local voices in the process. We'll order a technical review and act on its findings.
- Introducing greater penalties for people who use retrospective planning applications as a loophole in the planning process, including the right to halt and speed up removals of properties without planning permissions.



- Giving councils more powers to require an impact assessment of large supermarket developments to ensure that we can protect town centres and high streets.
- Reforming the system of Local Development Plans to be far less stringent and bureaucratic and giving local Councillors influence over individual application and requiring sustainability issues to be part of Local Development Plans and to be accounted for in planning decisions.

Transforming urban communities

Urban communities are often forgotten when we consider our legacy for future generations. There has been a huge change in the make-up of urban communities in Wales in recent years.

We will give urban communities the chance to make themselves sustainable by:

- Developing plans, similar to those from the Liberal Democrats in the UK Government to restrict “garden-grabbing,” by designating gardens as greenfield sites in planning law so they cannot so easily be built over.
- Introducing a new planning class use for HMOs, and allowing Councils to remove permitted development rights for this new class use in defined areas. This would mean that houses in these identified areas would require formal planning permission in order to become a House of Multiple Occupation, recognising that a wide range of households come into this description.

Value for money

Taxpayers’ money is being wasted by a Government that is not committed to best value for money. It complains about being underfunded but is not willing to make tough decisions to ensure that money is being used more effectively. We will crack down on waste and ineffective spending in order to make sure that there is more money available for frontline services and to promote economic growth.



Better service for less

We will review of every line of Government expenditure, making sure that every pound that the Welsh Government spends can be justified as essential to tackling the challenges facing Wales. Each Minister will have to justify why each budget line is a priority and prove it delivers outcomes. We cannot run Wales in this decade using the spending plans of the last decade – that’s just not good enough. And if we can save money from wasteful or inefficient programmes then we can invest this money in programmes that have a real impact.

One in every three pounds the Welsh Government spends is on procurement.

We will make sure that we get the best value for money by:

- Developing a formal protocol to ensure that small businesses have a chance to compete for contracts. This will include reducing ‘bundling’ and ensuring that access to information is available. We’ll also reduce the size and complexity of application material.
- Introducing a central database of companies that meet the Government’s requirements on sustainability and equality so that these forms do not need to be completed every time. This will save both the Government and businesses money.
- Making “Targeted Recruitment and Training” standard in all Welsh Government contracts, so that we can increase the number of jobs and apprenticeships created by Government. We’ll also ensure that the apprenticeships are sustainable by promoting the Shared Apprenticeship Model.
- Ensuring that each tender is assessed on its sustainability as well as its cost.
- Strengthening the role of Value Wales in promoting best practice across all of the public sector in Wales.



European funding should be used on strategic and economically essential projects. Unfortunately, currently it is often spent on projects that do not meet these criteria.

We will ensure the remaining European money is spent correctly by:

- Focusing on strategically essential projects that will promote the potential for Welsh economic growth. We have identified low skills and the need to promote modern businesses as central to this strategy.
- Streamline the project approval process in order to speed up decisions.

We will improve the efficiency of Quangos' backroom functions to reduce duplication costs. Some estimates suggest that we could save up to 10% by ensuring collaboration on backroom functions.

We will place an immediate moratorium on protected salaries in the public sector. People should only be paid for the job they are doing.

Supporting the voluntary sector is crucial because it provides services across Wales for some of the poorest and most vulnerable. We'll improve the rules so that the voluntary sector spends more time delivering services and is in charge of itself.

We'll support the voluntary sector by:

- Working to ensure that voluntary sector organisations are not overburdened with audits and inspections, establishing a single inspection process that can be carried across local authority areas.
- Moving towards a legacy-culture in funding, with a greater use of endowments, where money is more sustainably used.
- Ensuring volunteer time is effectively counted in match funding bids.

We will deliver more private money into Welsh public services through new and innovative public private partnerships. We will reject the costly and unsustainable PFI model but believe that other models can increase money in the system whilst maintaining value for money.



Responsible and credible finances

Welsh Liberal Democrats have always produced fully-costed manifestos. This has never been as important as it is in the current economic climate. The figures below outline the savings which we would make in order to fund our commitments that require additional funding to be allocated to specific departments and fund our priorities for the next term. We have also outlined in our manifesto a programme of driving value for money which will ensure that existing programmes are providing better outputs and also provide new money for other programmes we may need to implement.



Revenue

	in £millions			
Spending	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Pupil Premium ¹	33.645	84.113	134.531	185.049
Training Grants	0.000	10.000	10.000	10.000
Innovation Programme	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000
Increasing access to Higher Education	0.000	1.500	1.500	1.500
Air ambulance	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500
Camden Clinic	0.000	1.500	1.500	1.500
Freezing business rates	0.000	39.850	0.000	0.000
Office of Health Spending	0.300	0.300	0.300	0.300
	54.445	157.763	168.381	218.849
Savings	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Over-budgeting for UK Government emergency budget	56.770	0.000	0.000	0.000
Bringing reserves to recommended levels	0.000	94.600	162.000	162.000
Scrapping Ieuan Air ²	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.350
Rolling ring-fenced grants into Revenue Support Grant	0.000	38.185	38.185	38.185
Reducing inspection burden on local authorities	0.000	15.000	15.000	15.000
Merger of environmental bodies	0.000	10.000	15.000	15.000
	56.770	157.785	230.185	230.585
Contingency	2.325	0.022	61.804	11.686

Notes:

1. Pupil Premium: In order to account for the overlap between the financial year and the academic year, we have followed standard accounting practices and apportioned the cost for each individual school term in the financial year for which it relates.
2. Scrapping Ieuan Air: We will seek to end the subsidy as soon as possible, but given the contractual obligations imposed on the next Government, we have only accounted for money available as a result of terminating the contract.



Capital

in £millions

Spending	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Fuel Poverty Scheme	0.000	18.500	18.500	18.500
Air Ambulance	5	0.000	0.000	0.000
	5.000	18.500	18.500	18.500

Savings	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Existing Capital Flexibilities	50.448	50.449	50.449	50.449

In addition to the detailed costings above, we have further spending commitments for which full figures are not available from the Welsh government. The first is our programme of investing in high quality teaching. This is funded from three sources, and will begin when we have completed the necessary legislative arrangements. Due to no decision having been made over the future of the General Teaching Council for Wales, it is not possible to plan beyond the existing financial year.

Spending

Investing in High-quality Teaching	£10 million per annum
Retaining functions in DCELLS	£3 million per annum
	£13 million per annum

Savings

Scrapping the GTCW	£6.2 million per annum
Improving planning of teacher training	£5.8 million per annum
Ending GTCW fees reimbursement	£1.2 million per annum
	£13.2 million per annum



Wales **CAN** do better

Our plans for reforming the healthcare system in Wales would also have a significant impact on the funding of health service in Wales. We will be seeking out waste and inefficient spending in order to re-invest in cutting waiting times and improving frontline services. We believe that these savings will be made in four broad areas; tackling bureaucracy, investing in preventative care, promoting community and local services (particularly for unscheduled care) and breaking down the barriers between health services and social care. Our vision for the health services is outlined in our manifesto, but we envisage there would be gradual, but substantive, upheaval in the way that health care is financed. Our proposed Office for Health Spending will lead the way on identifying these savings. Since all the savings found in the NHS will be directly invested in frontline health services, they do not appear in our costings.

Finally, we are committed to rooting out wasteful spending or inefficient government programmes so that we can invest in additional programmes to support our priority areas.

