

Independent Manifesto for the Isle of Anglesey

We are facing very lean times during the next Council term. Savings of £2.85 million have to be made this year and cuts of up to £10 million in the following two years. There will be less money, year on year, to provide essential services for the people of Anglesey.

The economic difficulties mean that individuals and families are also under great pressure from low wage rises, cuts in benefits and the threat of unemployment. Starting from this bleak picture the intention of the Isle of Anglesey Independent Councillors that subscribe to this manifesto is:

RATES – Attempt to keep Anglesey in the lowest quarter of council tax rates in Wales. We are currently the sixth lowest. Controlling the finances, setting and monitoring budgets, needs to be done in a business like way. The Independents have, since 2008, requested that the Council review their budgets from scratch (zero based budgeting). The Council have consistently said that they do not have enough resources to do this. We believe that all budgets must be reviewed periodically and will work with the Council to review them.

EDUCATION – Work with the education department to modernise education on the island to the highest standards. We currently have a recovery board in education following a critical ESTYN report. We will ensure that the recovery action plan is kept on track through regular monitoring from the relevant scrutiny committee.

In parallel with delivering on the action plan we will work with the Education Department and the public to produce an education modernisation strategy that can be delivered upon. The delivery of the strategy will take up to 15 years to complete but without this blueprint (which does not currently exist) we are going nowhere.

The budget for education in 2013/14 is £47.68 million, this is 37% of the Council's budget, and our biggest spend. Providing the highest quality education for our children is of the utmost importance to us and accordingly driving through the change required in this service will be our highest priority.

SOCIAL SERVICES – £30 million is spent on this service annually. The department has a new Director who has been tasked with transforming the way services are delivered. Financial pressures increase constantly on this department as the population of the Island get older. We will work with Social Services to ensure that all transformational changes proposed do not lessen the care currently provided, we will actively seek the input of all and ensure the voice of the people is taken into account by the Council.

HIGHWAYS – The severe winters over the last couple of years have caused havoc with the state of our highway network. This year the Highways budget has been cut and money put into general reserves. Because Transportation is fundamental to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Anglesey we will work with the Highways department on a repair and maintenance plan that can be delivered over the long term. We will ensure that future revenue and capital budgets are adequate to maintain our roads.

JOBS AND THE ECONOMY – Our core purpose is to run essential public services. In doing this the Council provides 3,300 jobs and pays £74 million in wages. The current economic situation means that jobs in the private sector are few and far between. We feel that at this moment in time it is imperative that these jobs are protected. It is a fact that the current economy on the Island is dependent on the public sector for jobs. Creating two Council's in North Wales could in many years to come save money but this would lead locally to job losses and a further weakening of the economy. Until the national political parties can reverse the global economic slow down and provide jobs in the private sector we will oppose any plans for reorganising local government.

As part of the affordable priorities saving program the Council's trainee scheme was cut back, we feel that this was a false economy and that it has led to over use of agency staff. We will work to create professional traineeships for school and college leavers.

We believe that, with proper investment, there are opportunities to drive forward economic development on Anglesey and release the potential of the island's workforce. The independent administration actively encouraged the Apprentice Menai scheme to give local young people the skills and experience needed to progress. It was also the vision and enterprise of an independent administration that developed the energy island initiative, which has the potential to position Ynys Mon as one of the most competitive regions of the UK.

Taken together, this means that there is a potential £25billion inward investment package that will create several thousand high quality and sustainable jobs on the island. An independent administration will continue to fight to ensure that this investment is brought to Anglesey, not shared out across Wales to satisfy the demands of a national political party.

PLANNING – Planning has been a hot topic on Anglesey in the past. Over the last four years a number of improvements have been made, one being that Councillor's can not call departure applications (ones that go against policy) into committee and then overturn them. Working to a consistent planning development policy gives a consistency to decision making. Our current policies date back to 1993 and 1996. We will work to ensure that the policy we are now developing is delivered on time in April 2016 as scheduled.

CAPITAL BUDGET AND THE CORPORATE PLAN – The capital budget is the money used for major new or renewal projects and the corporate plan is the Council's priorities over the next four years. The corporate plan needs to be more tangible and easier to understand and the capital budget needs to be a long term strategic one that underpins improvement plans on the Island.

The plan must tell the people what the Council is going to achieve in terms of how many new schools will be built, how adult care is going to be improved and how many miles of road we will resurface. The capital budget must be clearly linked to this plan. We will ensure that Council is never again in the position of being unable to allocate £1.2 million earmarked for residential homes because the programme was still under review (this was the position in the last report on capital spending).

USE OF AGENCY STAFF AND PROCUREMENT – I have consistently challenged the Council on the over use of agency staff, especially in the Finance department, where agency accountants costing twice as much as Council accountants have been employed for over three years. We estimate that this reliance on agency staff has cost in the hundreds of thousands of pounds. We will continue to challenge this misuse of public money until it stops. In the past the Council has not been able to report accurately on the use of agency staff as they weren't on the Council payroll system or recorded in the personnel system. As the Council now has a new human resources system we will request that the use of agency staff is recorded in this and that costs are published in an open and transparent manner.

Procurement regulations have meant that many contracts let by the Council go to companies from outside the Island. The last high profile example of this was the school grounds maintenance contract. We feel that procurement staff must develop ways of packaging contracts so that local companies can bid for and win work commissioned by the Council. We will work with the economic development department to maximise the amount of Council contracts that can be won by local companies.

JOB EVALUATION – In 1997 the NJC Single Status Agreement tasked councils with ending the historic pay discrimination in local government by reviewing their pay and grading structures to make them equal pay proofed. The 2004 NJC pay implementation agreement set out a timetable for the completion and implementation of pay and grading reviews by 1 April 2007. This work started in Anglesey in 2001; unfortunately it has still not been completed. This has led to a situation where there is a very large disparity between the pay of ordinary workers and senior management. The latest implementation date for completing job evaluation is 2014. We will monitor progress on this work closely until implementation. Job evaluation is on the draft corporate risk register, a piece of work that is also yet to be completed.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY – As mentioned above the corporate risk register is an important document that is yet to be completed, it's a tool that identifies and tracks major risks and weaknesses. The Welsh Audit Office Corporate Governance report of 2009 that led to intervention by the Welsh Government stated that the Council's accountability framework was lacking. The report was critical of the Council's scrutiny arrangements. In response to this the council increased the number of scrutiny committees from 2 to 5. The senior management team have suggested that the new Council should reduce this number to 2 again. The critical CSSIW report on children's services in 2011 and the ESTYN report on education both happened while the Council was in intervention and being run by the Welsh Government. The work carried out by the Council carries a tremendous amount of responsibility and for this reason the Independents will ensure that the accountability framework is reviewed regularly so that risks and weaknesses are handled appropriately.

LEISURE AND LIBRARIES – At £2.9 million, this is a small but incredibly important budget which is only 2.2% of the revenue budget. Two of the Council's corporate objectives are: create an Anglesey where people are healthy and safe and where people achieve their full potential. We feel that leisure centres and libraries are essential to achieving these corporate objectives; accordingly we will protect and enhance these assets where possible.

CARBON REDUCTION – In June 2012 the Commissioners recommended that the Council's Energy and Water Policy for Council Buildings included a clear statement outlining the Authority's commitment to reducing carbon emissions by 3% and energy and water usage by 5% per annum, they also recommended that the Council published progress on achieving these goals. We will ensure that these targets are reviewed annually and the results published.

MODERNISATION – Many of the business processes used by Council are old fashioned and need modernising. A common complaint is the lack of consistency in the time taken to answer letters and requests for service. Most Councils now have customer relationship management systems to track their performance in responding to requests from the public. Modernising the way the Council deals with the public will be an important priority.

TOPICAL ISSUES – Our main priorities will be education, social services, and running the other core services efficiently and in a business like way. There will always be topical planning issues like wind turbines and pylons that the Council will need to make decisions on. We will listen to our communities and develop policies that protect our landscape from industrial structures.

This manifesto is local and relevant to the position the Council is in today. It's based on my experience of being a member of the Authority for the last five years. It's not a generic manifesto written by a party research assistant.

Ieuan Williams, Benllech