



Aberdeenshire Conservatives Elections 2017

Supporting our communities
Champions of business

Introduction from Leader of the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party

Ruth Davidson MSP

This year's local government election in Aberdeenshire is vitally important.

Voters have a clear choice – electing strong local voices who will focus all their energies on improving local services or voting to go back to the divisions of the past.

Despite promising it would be a “once in a generation” decision, it didn't take long for the SNP to start demanding a second referendum on independence.

The Scottish people don't want another independence referendum, they just want government at all levels that gets on with the day job and delivers on the things that matter.

So, the Council elections in May will be an important opportunity for you to tell the SNP – we voted No to independence, respect that result and stop trying to put us through it all again.

Along with my team of MSPs, I am leading the opposition to the SNP in the Scottish Parliament. Every day we are challenging the SNP to get the government focussed back on the important issues; jobs, education and our public services.

A vote in May for the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party will help strengthen that message in your own community, in all of Aberdeenshire and across Scotland. The simple fact is that every SNP Councillor elected here on 4th May will use their position to agitate for another referendum, while every Scottish Conservative elected will oppose one.

We need to make our voice heard loud and clear. We said No to independence and we do not want another independence referendum. Let's focus on improving our local services instead.



Introduction from Conservative Group Leader Jim Gifford

For the first eight of the last ten years the Scottish Conservatives formed the administration of Aberdeenshire Council in partnership with others.

Those partnerships worked very well and delivered stable and effective governance for everyone in our area.

There were of course challenges but they were met head-on and overcome by a dynamic team of enthusiastic Councillors working in the best interests of the residents of Aberdeenshire.

The Conservative Team for this election on May the 4th is no different in attitude and we have a strong team of local people ready to represent the people in all 19 wards of Aberdeenshire.

We have a mixture of experienced Councillors, two Councillors still recovering from the excitement of winning two by-elections, and many new candidates who will bring to the Council a wide range of talents and expertise.

We are ambitious for Aberdeenshire and the people that we hope to represent.

We have a set of commitments in this document that build on the successes that we had during our time in administration while recognising the many challenges that lie in front of us.

We hope that the people of Aberdeenshire will recognise that ambition and give our candidates their support.



Your Scottish Conservative Team for Aberdeenshire

Manifesto 2017-2022

The 70 councillors elected in May will be operating under the Scheme of Delegation which has recently been agreed by Aberdeenshire Council. That Scheme of Delegation includes a new committee structure and we have organised our manifesto to reflect the work of these committees. In some, if not all cases, our six area committees will also have a role in the implementation and monitoring of local service delivery.

By the very nature of Councils, this is an extensive and wide-ranging document but our priorities for the next session of Aberdeenshire Council will be to:

- Deliver a world class “Gold Standard” education for every child. Raising attainment across the board, reducing the attainment gap, investing in our school estate and reviewing the Curriculum for Excellence
- Deliver an ambitious plan of house building for sale or rent across all tenures and investigate new and innovative ways of funding new-build housing. We need houses that are affordable, not just Affordable Houses
- Work with the Health and Social Care Partnership and the IJB (Integration Joint Board) to maximise opportunities from the Integration of Health and Social Care
- Promote an innovative and creative approach for alternative and cost effective delivery of Council services
- Ensure that Council Taxes are spent on local services. We will resist any attempt by the SNP Government to try another tax grab on our Council Tax money – Local Taxes for Local Services
- Ensure that Business Rates are spent on local services. We expect the SNP Government to make good on their promise that all Business Rates money collected locally stays locally - Local Taxes for Local Services
- Put economic success at the heart of our decision making – fully supporting the aspirations of the Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce (AGCC) Manifesto and ensure delivery of the City Region Deal projects
- Support delivery of World-class Infrastructure – Hi-speed Broadband, mobile coverage, quality roads & transportation projects – especially in our rural areas
- Resist the centralising agenda of the SNP Government and demand flexibility in decision making – Local Decisions for Local People
- Fight for a better deal for Aberdeenshire – we deserve our Fair Share of national finances, free from Government imposition

Aberdeenshire Council



Local Government in Scotland is under threat from the centralising agenda of the SNP Scottish Government. We believe in local democracy and we will defend Local Government in the face of this onslaught.

Our priorities will be to ensure that Local Government continues to be the organisation that delivers our local services and fight to ensure that we have enough money to do that.

We will fight to ensure that local taxation is never spent anywhere except where it is raised.

We will work with all levels of government to ensure that our voice is heard and that the North East of Scotland isn't ignored, as it has been too often in the past.

A common theme across all aspects of the council's work is a need to be left alone to do what is best for the people who live in our area. We have seen the centralisation of Police Scotland (including the proposed integration of British Transport Police), Fire & Rescue Services and Trading Standards. Current "consultations" from the Scottish Government show a similar centralising agenda on Planning and Education.

We need money to deliver the services that we all use but as important, if not more importantly, we need the flexibility to do what is best for this area without central government interference.

We want decisions to be made locally, in the best interests of our local communities – not imposed by Edinburgh.

We understand what the local part of Local Government means and we will always resist attempts by the SNP Scottish Government to remove that local decision making power from the council and the people that we serve.



Across all council services, we will be working to implement the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and make sure that our communities and residents benefit from this emerging legislation in every way possible.

In general, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Continue to work with Conservative colleagues in the Scottish Parliament and at Westminster to try and influence national policy to the best advantage of Aberdeenshire
- Always put our residents first – we will resist the centralising agenda of the SNP Scottish Government
- As the largest employer in Aberdeenshire, work to ensure that the council benefits from the new Apprenticeship Levy
- Work with CoSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) and the Scottish Government to ensure that Government policy benefits, or at least does not adversely affect, Aberdeenshire. We will also work with those same groups to ensure that Aberdeenshire can take full advantage of all opportunities that may arise from the Brexit negotiations and the process of leaving the EU



On finance, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Set an annual balanced budget with Council Tax set at the lowest possible level whilst still providing quality services
- Fight to ensure that all Council Tax collected locally is spent locally – there should be no more tax grabs to Edinburgh
- Set Council House rents at the lowest possible level whilst ensuring that our houses are of a high standard and well maintained but also making sure that new properties continue to be built
- Ensure that any charges for council services are set at the lowest possible level whilst still providing quality facilities and services
- Look for all opportunities for collaboration or shared services with other local authorities or other partner groups including sharing facilities
- Continue to seek out inefficiency and waste through detailed service reviews
- Use the Community Empowerment legislation to ensure that decision making is made at the lowest level possible. Financial monitoring must be transparent and robust to ensure that council objectives are achieved
- We will work to ensure that the council lives within its means. We must ensure that we are not building up problems in the future
- Support and promote Economic Development so that our local businesses have the best possible environment to help them survive and grow. Business Rates should be appropriate and at an affordable level and we will work to ensure that all money collected locally is spent locally



Business Services

This committee looks after many of the council's high-level, cross-service functions like IT, Communications, Legal & Governance and Human Resources. It also looks after Finance and the City Region Deal.

Aberdeenshire is the 3rd worst funded council in Scotland receiving over 12% less than the Scottish average and we will work to try and rectify that situation. For the first time in the history of Aberdeenshire Council, the current SNP Administration are over-spending our budget and we will rectify that situation.

While smaller than originally envisaged, the City Region Deal still provides a significant amount of money for investment and an excellent opportunity to work with the private sector to create employment opportunities across Aberdeenshire.

Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Support delivery of both phases of the City Region Deal and make sure that all projects are delivered as quickly as possible
- Work to ensure that Council Tax is determined, raised and spent locally
- Continue to campaign for a "Fair Share" of Scottish Government grant funding. Aberdeenshire only receives 88% of the average grant and we will work with CoSLA and the Scottish Government to get as a minimum a 90% floor on funding while working towards a wholesale re-appraisal of the distribution funding model
- Ensure that Aberdeenshire has the right facilities in the right places. We will ensure that all Council buildings are fit for purpose and quickly dispose of those not needed
- Make sure that the replacement offices for Gordon House and Woodhill House are designed to be what the people of Aberdeenshire need and are built where they are going to deliver the best possible services
- Promote a phased development of the Gordon House/HQ projects and ensure that options, appraisals, scrutiny and approvals are completed at each stage of the process
- Review the Council Asset Management processes to allow inclusion of options to lease buildings and facilities not just purchase
- Work to implement the Terms & Conditions review started many years ago
- Review the effectiveness of the Worksmart programme
- Work to reduce absence rates of Council staff
- Support Continuous Improvement and Best Value activities
- Continue to invest in IT and other technology solutions to improve service delivery

Communities

This committee looks after the larger matters that affect our communities – everything that the council does influences our communities, either directly or indirectly, but this committee has specific responsibilities.

With the formation of the Integration Joint Board (IJB), a large amount of Social Work and Adult Care Services are no longer directly under the control of the council but the Communities Committee will continue with a monitoring role of the IJB as well as monitoring the Adult Social Care services that remain with the council.

The committee monitor and scrutinise the performance of both Police Scotland and the Fire & Rescue Service who report to this committee as well as to the six area committees.

Housing and Lifelong Learning & Leisure matters relating to Leisure and Sport are also under the control of this committee although work is underway to see if putting Sport and Leisure facilities into some form of an arms-length organisation (ALEO) will be of benefit to the council and our residents.

For our Communities, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Work with community groups and social enterprises to help them take over council assets and services through the Community Asset Transfer process (CAT). We will work to make the decisions on CAT applications much quicker and help deliver projects more quickly
- Work with Community Councils and other Community Groups on all aspects of the Council's work. Through sensible consultation, we will ensure that our Communities get what they need not what the council thinks they need
- Consider using part of the Area Top-up budgets to support community events
- Through Community Planning Partners - NHS, Police, Fire Service and other voluntary groups - implement and take full advantage of Community Empowerment legislation
- Scrutinise the operations of the Police and Fire & Rescue Services to ensure that local priorities are satisfied
- Monitor the performance and effectiveness of the new Hard FM (Facilities Management - repairs & maintenance) contract



On Social Work, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Work with the Health and Social Care Partnership and support the work of the IJB and scrutinise all aspects of their work
- Ensure the needs of our elderly residents are met and that the most appropriate personal budgets and individual support plans are available for everyone receiving council funded social care
- Work with partners to support the Northern Community Justice Authority while working on the proposed changes to Community Justice Social Work
- Ensure that our local benefit payments system is fit for purpose
- Ensure that all councillors take their role as Corporate Parents seriously and that our looked after children get the support that they need and deserve

On Housing, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Be ambitious and commit to building more houses for social rent in the next five years than we have been able to achieve in the past 10 years. We need houses that are affordable, not just Affordable Houses
- Investigate alternative funding sources (e.g. Private Equity Funds, Pension Funds, Institutional Finance or shared equity schemes) in order to do that
- Expand the National Housing Trust – Council Variant scheme and deliver more houses through that process for general use but with key workers and retiring armed services personnel getting first preference
- Ensure that our housing allocations policy gives as much emphasis as possible to local residents – *Local Houses for Local People*
- Ensure that we get the 25% of Affordable Houses, as specified in national guidelines, within any housing development to ensure that more affordable homes come onto the market
- Work to bring empty homes back into use as quickly as possible
- Enable older people to remain in their homes as long as possible
- Help people to down size the property they live in, if they want to do so
- Work to provide sheltered and very sheltered accommodation as demand dictates
- Continue to work with Housing Associations to provide more opportunities for starter homes to get local people onto the housing ladder
- Continue to work with Private Landlords to improve the availability of affordable houses for rent



With our Police and Fire & Rescue colleagues Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Ensure that there is local input to our local Policing and Fire & Rescue Plans
- Monitor performance and service delivery across our council region and ensure that local accountability is maintained
- Liaise with the Police Scotland Board on all matters relating to delivery of policing in our area
- Liaise with the Fire & Rescue Service Board on all matters relating to the delivery of services in our area
- Campaign with MSP colleagues to maintain existing Police Officer numbers and campaign for a return to local/regional policing
- Continue to support and develop road safety initiatives like 'Safe Drive Stay Alive,' 'Pass Plus' and 'Driving Ambition'
- Work with Police colleagues to support initiatives that address anti-social driving focusing on the at-risk group of drivers 17-25 year olds



On Lifelong Learning & Leisure, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Support and promote Active Aberdeenshire to encourage participation in all aspects of sport and leisure
- Ensure our leisure centres provide top quality services to the public at reasonable and affordable prices - to encourage better use and wider participation in sport
- Support the development of a Sports & Leisure ALEO should that be the direction of travel that delivers the best facilities and services for our residents



Education & Children's Services

This committee not only looks after all aspects of Education and Lifelong Learning but is also responsible for Children's Social Work and Leisure facilities like libraries and museums.

In Education, the Conservative Group's policy for all Aberdeenshire's pupils whether they be following the early years, primary or secondary education curriculum is that they are entitled to be provided with a high-quality, world-class education. This in turn will ensure they have the best start in life to achieve their full potential resulting in a rewarding, satisfying and fulfilling career.

By providing a high quality of education at all stages our aim will be to meet the expectations and aspirations of pupils, parents, teachers, employers and of further and higher educational establishments. For Aberdeenshire pupils, the education provided in our schools should always be of the highest possible standard and we should aspire for the 'gold standard' - equipping them with the foundation skills, attitudes and expectations necessary to prosper in a changing society while encouraging creativity and ambition.

The SNP Scottish Government is failing our schools, our parents and our pupils. Despite the best effort of teachers and pupils, standards are falling and we cannot allow that to continue.

We will work with our MSP colleagues on the review of Curriculum for Excellence and work with our schools to raise attainment across the board whilst also working to close the attainment gap. We will also press the Scottish Government to bring forward the findings of The Rural Schools Commission. Their report has been "shelved" for many years and implementation would allow Aberdeenshire to improve the educational offering by giving us full flexibility over our school estate.

We believe that our schools, our communities and the council know what is best for our pupils and the education that they need. We will challenge and fight against the centralising agenda of the SNP Scottish Government and ensure that we have the flexibility to deliver the best possible education for our children and young people in the very best facilities.



On Education, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Support and promote the aspirations of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist's Position Paper – The Gold Standard, A world class education for every child
- Support services in all efforts to have every teaching post filled by the best possible teacher
- Continue to develop pre-school education recognising the importance of this stage and the value of early intervention
- Continue to provide support for children with special educational needs
- Continue to support the principles of 'getting it right for every child' (GIRFEC) with additional support being provided for 'looked after children'
- Make our highest priority that all our pupils are competent in the core skills of literacy and numeracy
- Ensure a high level of priority is given in raising the level of achievement including those of the results in national examinations
- Promote participation in activities including sport, art, music and drama
- Support investment in our teaching and support staff ensuring they have the resource to provide the best learning environment
- Promote giving head teachers the autonomy to manage their school ensuring the pupils demonstrate high standards of self-discipline, respect and responsibility
- Support enhancement of all school policies which eliminates physical, emotional, and cyber bullying. This will improve school environments making them more conducive to teaching and learning
- Encourage school - parent partnerships involving them in the education of their child and the life of the school
- Encourage schools to engage with businesses and the local community developing a wide range of opportunities for pupils and consequently widen their understanding and experience of the wider world
- Continue to support schools' involvement with North East Scotland College and our two universities - Robert Gordon and Aberdeen
- Continue to invest in the school estate to ensure that all our buildings are 'fit for purpose'
- Ensure that all our schools make best use of the new Attainment Fund monies that are allocated to them
- Develop a volunteering ethos in our schools. Voluntary organisations are the lifeblood of our communities and we will ensure that the Council works closely with partner organisations, bringing them into the decision-making process

- Minimise weather closures of schools
- Demand from the Scottish Government the flexibility to organise our school estate in the way that best suits the needs of our pupils and parents
- Investigate the emerging STEP Programme (improvement in physical and mental health through daily exercise) and, if appropriate, implement this to improve physical and mental health in our schools

In our Libraries & Museums, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Investigate innovative ideas to enhance facilities, improve access to all facilities and increase usage and visitor numbers
- Work with communities and other partners to investigate alternative ways of delivering these services
- Work with Visit Aberdeenshire and other partners to promote our museums as part of the tourism offering in the North East



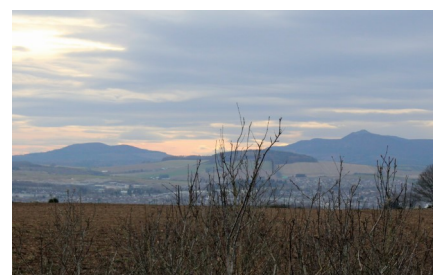
Infrastructure Services

This committee has a wide-ranging remit from economic development, planning and building standards and property through to roads, transportation and visitor attractions.

These aspects of the council's work are essential to the prosperity of the area.

We need good quality and sustainable jobs to produce the wealth that we need to pay for everything else that we do – if we don't have a strong and vibrant economy then we have nothing.

The businesses that create those jobs need world-class facilities in which to conduct their work and a world-class infrastructure to enable them to do that. They need connectivity that is second to none - whether that is links to the rest of the world through our airport or harbours or access to super-fast broadband and excellent telecommunications.



The region is still heavily dependent on the Oil & Gas industry and we must ensure that industry sector continues to operate for a long time to come. We also have important industry sectors like food & drink, agriculture, fishing and forestry which must be supported. Tourism is also an important and expanding industry sector and that must be supported and helped to develop.

The Brexit negotiations and the process to leave the EU will create opportunities for the North East and we must work to take full advantage of those opportunities.

On Jobs and the Economy, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Put economic success at the heart of our decision making – fully supporting the aspirations of the Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce (AGCC) Manifesto
- Work to ensure that the benefits of the City Region Deal are delivered
- Support and work in partnership with Opportunity North East (ONE) to develop the four key sectors in the Regional Economic Development Strategy-oil and gas; food, drink and agriculture; tourism and life sciences
- Ensure that Aberdeenshire is open for business by welcoming and encouraging new businesses and encouraging inward investment
- Ensure that Business Gateway delivers maximum benefit for the business of Aberdeenshire
- Lobby MSP colleagues and the Scottish Government to bring forward the ongoing review of Business Rates and quickly implement any changes that will benefit the business of Aberdeenshire
- Press the Scottish Government to deliver High Speed Broadband throughout Aberdeenshire (and hold the providers to account)
- Provide help and advice to Aberdeenshire businesses and deliver business support schemes such as “Support for Aberdeenshire Business”
- Champion modern apprenticeships, vocational qualifications and enterprise and entrepreneurship education
- Work with employers, North Scotland College and our two universities to ensure that our workforce is as skilled as possible
- Work to deliver the “Developing the Young Workforce” (DYW) Agenda
- Encourage education in transferable skills
- Deliver Regeneration throughout Aberdeenshire
- Encourage Town Centre Regeneration together with Conservation of our Heritage
- Support the continuation with free-parking periods in our towns and villages to support our town centre shops and businesses
- Support the Rural Partnerships to maintain vibrant communities
- Ensure the provision of low cost business starter units where there is demand
- Continue to support the Energy Industry and ensure that the Oil & Gas sector remains centred in the NE for as long as possible
- Ensure Aberdeenshire is recognised as a centre for renewable energy
- Support and promote the Peterhead Energy Hub



- Continue to support the food and drink industry towards further innovation, added value and quality
- Continue to support our Agricultural Businesses and Communities and ensure that we maximise all opportunities arising from the Brexit negotiations
- Continue to support our Fishing Businesses and Communities and ensure that we maximise all opportunities arising from the Brexit negotiations
- Continue to support our Forestry Industries
- Support the work of Visit Aberdeenshire, Visit Scotland and the tourist industry in promoting the region to the rest of the UK and the wider world
- Support industry to improve the quality of the Tourism offering in the North East
- Continue to encourage activity, sport and wildlife related tourism
- Support and encourage “Buy Local”
- Promote the development of Harbour Masterplans
- Review the delivery of the Energetica Corridor concept



On Planning, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Improve the effectiveness and timeliness of Planning and Building Control decisions
- Strengthen Planning enforcement against Planning infringements
- Ensure the use of Masterplans and Development Briefs on Development Sites
- Work to maximise the number of affordable homes that are delivered on development sites.
- Encourage sustainability in planning policy; i.e. inclusion of renewable energy systems and ensuring the highest standards of energy conservation for new buildings e.g. Passivhaus standards
- Work to retain the character of our local communities, improving the design standards of buildings and encourage conservation of our built heritage
- Continue to encourage sustainable development to enable people to live and work in the same area, and ensure new developments include provision for cycling and walking connectivity as well as ability to access public transport
- Support delivery of the new Local Development Plan
- Encourage developers to utilise the pre-application planning consultation process with planners and with Communities
- Promote high quality of design by encouraging unique development with an appropriate and local sense of place, particularly in major housing developments

On the environment, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Support and promote the aspirations of the Scottish Conservative & Unionist's Environmental and Climate Change Position Paper – Global Challenge, Local Leadership
- Continue to develop renewable energy projects on council properties to reduce energy usage in all our buildings
- Bring forward all planned flood alleviation projects as soon as possible and continue to work with our affected communities to ensure that they are protected and as resilient as possible
- Continue to review street lighting policies to maintain a sustainable and affordable service
- Encourage our communities to develop sustainable energy projects
- Work with services and our communities to improve our parks - combating the scourges of litter, dog fouling and vandalism through enforcement
- Continue to support the Countryside Ranger service
- Support the implementation of the council Carbon Budget



On roads and transportation, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Support the delivery of major transportation projects vital to the North East
- Push for the earliest possible completion of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route
- Push for the earliest possible completion of the dualling of the A90 Balmedie to Tipperty
- Campaign to have the dualling of the A96 completed ASAP
- Campaign for further A90 improvements including dualling from Ellon onwards and in particular, improvements to the Toll of Birness junction
- Seek solutions to the traffic congestion in and around Inverurie
- Campaign for early completion of the Laurencekirk Flyover
- Implement the A947 feasibility study as quickly as possible
- Work to capitalise on the benefits of the AWPR and to improve journey times on other transport routes including bottlenecks between Aberdeenshire and the City like the Bridge of Dee, Don and Haudagain roundabout
- Deliver Kintore Station
- Work to deliver a local rail service from Huntly to Laurencekirk via Aberdeen including lobbying for a new station at Newtonhill
- Lobby for investment in North East Transportation projects to upgrade the road and rail network
- Support Aberdeen International Airport to develop its route network



- Improve local transport services in partnership with NESTRANS and Transport Operators
- Maintain the high standard of road maintenance and Winter Maintenance
- Deliver Road Safety Initiatives to reduce accidents
- Implement the Aberdeenshire Council Depot Strategy
- Continue School Travel Planning and Safe Routes to School Initiatives
- Encourage shifts from car journeys to public transport, such as rail or Park & Ride
- Develop cycle and walking initiatives as part of the Core Paths Scheme



Audit

This committee operates very much away from the day-to-day operations of the council which allows it to challenge the work of all the other committees and council services.

They will scrutinise the work of the IJB, deal with the internal and external auditors and take audit responsibility for financial management.

To support this committee, Aberdeenshire Conservatives will:

- Support the work of Internal Audit and ensure that recommendations made are implemented timeously
- Support our External Auditors and ensure that recommendations from their Audit Report are implemented timeously
- Request investigations on any matter of concern and support requests for investigations made by the Council

In Summary,

Aberdeenshire Conservatives are ambitious for Aberdeenshire.

This manifesto is our starting point for delivering quality services across all aspects of the Council's work for the next five years and beyond.

We understand but do not underestimate the challenges that lie ahead.

We continue to face the perfect storm of rising demand for services and decreasing budgets. This is unlikely to resolve itself anytime soon but the Scottish Conservatives have an excellent track record of making the very best of difficult and challenging situations so we will continue to do that.

We are up to that challenge and look forward to delivering for the people of Aberdeenshire.