

Putting Class Back Into Politics



WORKERS PARTY MANIFESTO

 Local Government Elections 2023 

Putting Class Back Into Politics

We have all lived through difficult and challenging times in recent years.

The cost of living, rising energy prices and political turmoil: a lot has been changing, but not everything.

Our commitment to a better, fairer life for all has remained constant over the years.

That is a view shared by many.

That is why the Workers Party is standing candidates in these council elections.

Now, more than ever, socialists like us need to take a stand on behalf of working people in defence of our health, education and other public services and to fight for jobs, fair wages, housing, a healthier environment and a much, much better quality of life.

If, together, we don't make that stand then who will?

Not Sinn Fein, Not the DUP nor indeed any of the major parties.

Only a party for working people, a **Workers Party**, can deliver on those goals.

The only things that the major parties have offered to working class people are Flags, Culture Wars, Unemployment and Poverty.

They have all shown their contempt for working people, their families and the everyday problems that they face.

It's time for them to Move Over!

It's time for real change.

It's time to deliver on Health, Housing, Education, Childcare and all the other priorities in life.

It's time to put Class back into politics.

Only the **Workers Party** can promise that, and we are committed to helping people to realise their full potential and secure a better future and a better quality of life for working people and their families.



Why Big Issues Matter

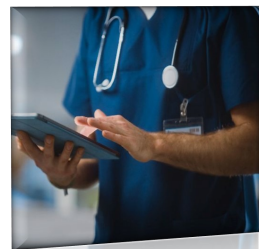
When we go to the polls on 18 May it will be to elect representatives to run our local councils

Local services matter, and we set out a number of our priorities in this manifesto, but the bigger issues are also important.

You can tell a lot about the way that political parties will deal with the local issues by the way they handle the big ones.

All of the large parties have failed, and failed miserably, at the expense of working people and their families.

Health



We now have the longest hospital waiting lists ever. People wait in pain for a consultant appointment or a life changing operation.

Patients can't go home because there are no care packages to support them.

More and more NHS services are handed over to the private, profit making, sector. Staffing levels are not safe and healthcare staff workers have been forced to go on the picket line in search of a decent wage.

Education



25% of our children leave school with low or no qualifications.

We are no closer to securing integrated education than 25 years ago. Education has been made into a commodity. Students are leaving university in debt.

From primary school to third level, children, pupils and students are being failed by the larger parties in Northern Ireland. Opportunities and futures are being squandered.

...and what they tell us

Housing



Public housing programmes have all but been abandoned.

The Housing Executive has been devalued and down graded, thousands of young people are being forced into the high rent, less regulated, private sector and people without any accommodation are dying on our streets.

Strategic planning of housing has been replaced by a policy of sectarian segregation. The major parties continue to cynically exploit and fail to deliver on one of the most basic of human rights.

Childcare



Childcare services are in crisis: parents are being forced to give up work and the benefits of children's early years development are being wasted.

The bigger parties have failed yet again.

Parents in England Scotland and Wales can avail of 30 hours childcare, free of charge, each week in term time, but not in Northern Ireland.

The lack of affordable, flexible and accessible childcare impacts on the development of many young people at an early age and that disadvantage can stay with them for life.

These are just four key areas in which the major parties have failed. Failed because their efforts are directed at securing and building their power blocs. Failed because they are contemptuous of working class people - until they want their votes.

Only a Socialist programme can deliver for working people and their families.



The Daily Reality

Forget the sound bites, the promises, the rhetoric and the political razzamatuzz

These are the realities of life for thousands of working class people and their families

At least 25% of the population is living in **poverty**:

10,000 children

220,000 working-age adults, and

40,000 pensioners

As many as 50% of households are in **Fuel Poverty**,

At least 15,000 people here are officially **homeless**.

There is a **crisis** in education, in health and in social care.

Benefits are being **cut**.

More people, particularly women, are dependant on **insecure**, part-time employment and often **zero hours** contracts.

More people than ever, who are in employment, need benefits to top up the money they earn in our **low wage economy**.

Workers Rights are **eroded** and **undermined**.

Workers who kept the economy and our society functioning throughout the pandemic face real time cuts in their take home pay with **below inflation** pay offers.

The Socialist Alternative



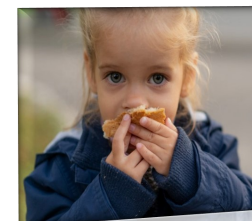
Working class people - employed, unemployed, young people and pensioners - have never been more marginalised from the major issues which effect all our lives.

Income differences between top earners and those on the lowest wages are now higher than at any time since records began.

Thousands of people - many of them with jobs - are living on or below the poverty line.



Low-pay and precarious employment, the dismantling of work-place rights, the privatisation of public assets and restrictions on trade union freedom, compound and intensify those problems.



Children go hungry, homes go unheated.



In this election the Workers Party is prioritising, unapologetically, these issues and presenting the socialist alternative to misery, poverty, social exclusion and second class citizenship.



Public Control of Energy

'Heat or Eat' isn't a slogan, it's the grim and stark reality facing thousands of local families.

We are living through one of the worst cost of living crisis in recent memory, one that will have long term and very serious implications for health and wellbeing.



Yet, against that background the six big energy companies made a combined profit of more than £600 million.

Any economic system that imposes crippling and unbearable financial burdens on ordinary working-class people and uncaringly sees them go to the wall while pricing basic necessities beyond their reach must be challenged and overturned.

All the main political parties support and perpetuate this 'free market' free for all. They have no intention of facing up to the multi-national energy companies because they play an important role on their behalf.

We are constantly drip fed the myth that these are 'international matters' that no one has any control over - they just happen and, while its regrettable, we can't do anything about it. Wrong. We can.

If we are to break free of this economic stranglehold, and all the misery, hardship and poverty it imposes, then the answers lie in bringing energy resources from private ownership into public control and the establishment of a socialist economy.

Councils can and must play a leading role in advocating this change

Health & Social Care

The principle of NHS services publicly funded and free at the point of use is far from safe and secure.

The break up and sell off of the NHS remains a real and present danger, and it is not only the Tories in Westminster that pose the threat.

Much closer to home the orange and green Tories at Stormont are equally prepared to facilitate profit taking from people's ill health, exclude those who cannot afford to pay and promote the alleged benefits of private medical health insurance.

Under successive Executives, and successive Ministers for Health, health and social care services here have been run down systematically.

Waiting lists are the longest on these islands, people medically fit for discharge remain in hospital because there are no care packages to support them at home.

Health and care staff remain underpaid, undervalued and under threat.

Councils should be active advocates for the NHS, its services and its staff.



Housing & Homelessness

Society has a responsibility to deliver affordable, publicly owned housing.

In recent years though, we have witnessed the deliberate and calculated run down of the public housing building programme, the dismantling of the Housing Executive and the handing over of its responsibilities to the private rented sector.



Councils should be to the forefront on issues of Housing and Homelessness.

All councils should appoint a Housing and Homelessness Development Team, headed up by a senior council official and should campaign pro-actively on:

The reinstatement of the Housing Executive as the lead housing agency

A priority programme of high quality, affordable public housing

Homes built and allocated on objective need

Use of government owned land to build

An end to unacceptably long waiting lists

- An end to the dependency on unscrupulous private landlords**

Education

There has never been a justification for the apartheid-like education of our children.

There is no justification for it now.

The Workers Party is fully committed to a system of integrated, secular education at all levels.

The first five years of a child's life are the most formative, yet we have no comprehensive early years education strategy in place to ensure that every child gets the best start in life.



Academic selection at 11 continues to determine children's futures, despite having been abandoned more than ten years ago

Every teenager should have the unhindered option to pursue third level education at university, college or in a vocational setting.



Education is an investment in all our futures. Tuition fees should be the responsibility of the state - not the individual. Student grants should be available to all. Finance should never be used as a barrier to deny opportunity.

The policy of student loans and thousands of pounds of tuition fees effectively debar many working-class students from entering university.

Our Councils should be in the vanguard of those demanding educational change and progress



Mental Health

In any 12-month period in Northern Ireland, one in four people displayed symptoms of mental illness.

Ulster University's Bamford Centre

Factors contributing to these rates include persistent levels of deprivation in some communities and the legacy of Northern Ireland's troubled history.



The Workers Party is calling for a minimum 30% increase in funding for Mental Health, Learning Disability and Children and Family Services in Northern Ireland and the development of a service models which are considerably less dependent on hospital based delivery.

Suicide rates more than doubled in the last decade. The suicide rates in the most deprived areas are more than three times higher than in the least deprived areas:

Cuts to public services, welfare reform, redundancies and a lack of opportunities will compound these problems.

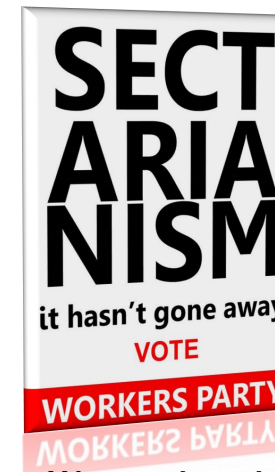
Home treatment and crisis response teams need to be prioritised and resourced to maintain people in the community and support service users in their recovery.

Similar services also need to be developed for pregnant women and mothers, children and young people, people with a learning disability and older people.

Councils can play a significant role in campaigning for and supporting the structural, financial and social changes need to achieve better mental health outcomes.

Sectarianism

The political institutions in Northern Ireland reflect and perpetuate sectarianism and segregation. The number of 'Peace Walls' has actually increased since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, but where are the serious plans to tackle sectarianism?



Some 'peace walls' can be demolished immediately. There are a number located in non-residential areas, there are a number that are simply not needed. An immediate start to bringing down the walls can and must begin now.

Flags, marches and culture wars dominate much of the political discourse, but the real discussion has to be about the type of society we live in and the kind of values it upholds.

We need to signal our real commitment to an integrated society with a strong and transparent programme for integrated housing, integrated education – including integrated teacher training – and a programme to start dismantling our 'peace walls' now – not in ten years time.

Local Councils continue to reflect the vested sectarian interests of the main political parties.

That stranglehold must be broken. Only a commitment to socialist citizenship can facedown sectarianism, bigotry and division.



Prioritising our Elderly and our Young

All Councils can make a major contribution to supporting an aging population by assisting in the design of age friendly council areas to ensure maximum participation, safety, accessibility and inclusion.

Age-friendly towns and cities should adapt their structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with a range of needs and capacities. As well as identifying and adopting international best practice our local councils should:



Support older people to stay connected and able to access the information they require

Create person-centred, age-inclusive health, social care and wellbeing services

Develop housing plans that meet older people's individual needs

Maintain public spaces and buildings accessible to all ages

Ensure that older people are respected and included in city life and connected to their communities

Provide and support activities available where and when older people want

Work to ensure older people have access to all available forms of transport and are confident in getting around in towns, cities and rural environments

Councils across Northern Ireland should adopt and embrace a Young People's Programme and Youth Forum designed to enhance personal development and a sense of belonging and value by allowing children, young people and teenagers to play an active citizenship role in the community.

The provision of a safe and secure environment which allows them to build skills and contribute to society.

Making available the opportunities to acquire digital and transferable skills like problem-solving, critical-thinking and communications

The allocation of a section of council budgets to Youth projects

Supporting the campaigns for Votes at 16, free university tuition and debt free graduation



Vocational training schemes and apprenticeships and the security of the National Living Wage

Identification and adoption of international best practice in youth services and participation.

Affordable, accessible and flexible childcare services

Unhindered access to health, mental health and social services



Racism

Whether verbal abuse, graffiti or personal attacks racism is wrong

Local Councils should take the lead in hosting robust public discussions about the type of society we want and the values it holds.

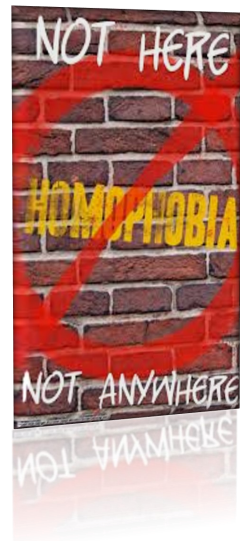


But in the end the principles are very clear and very simple:

Racism is wrong. It will always be wrong.

Homophobia & Transphobia

The hurt and damage inflicted by racist and sectarian attacks are no less real when the targets are member of the LGBT+ community.



Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people are full citizens of Northern Ireland, contributors to this community and have every right to expect the same level of protection, support and legal safeguards as everyone else.

Councils should ensure that message is loud clear, repeated and reinforced.



Women

The Workers Party is Pro-Choice and recognises that women have the right to control their own bodies, including their fertility, and to pursue all reproductive choices.

This is fundamental to any reasonable concept of gender equality, and strongly condemn those who engage in anti-choice harassment and abuse.

Councils should be champions of choice and protectors of women's rights

Misogyny

Thousands of women are daily subjected to abuse, discrimination, marginalisation, physical, financial and sexual abuse and even murder.

For many that could be an uncomfortable conversation but if we are serious about the abuse of women then it is one we need to have.

The ruthlessness of zero hours contracts, the exploitative nature of much part time employment, the so called 'glass ceiling' and the continued marginalisation of women and girls and their exclusion from many aspects of political, social, economic and cultural life – is just as threatening, and should be met with the same outrage resolve, as online abuse and threats.

Councils have a responsibility to focus on all forms and sources of misogyny.



Bill of Rights

The Workers Party is committed to the primacy of a secular democratic society based on principles of equality and justice.

Our local Councils should also endorse that position and lobby in pursuit of this long overdue piece of legislation.

The purpose of a Bill of Rights is to establish and guarantee the relationship between citizens and the state.

It should form the cornerstone of democracy as the guarantor of the civil liberties of all citizens and of the political rights of all political parties, groups and individuals prepared to work through the democratic process.

Votes at 16



If Northern Ireland is to be a fully participative democracy the involvement, and active participation of 16 and 17 year olds is essential to that process.

Of course this has to be about more than extending the franchise. Unless young people critically assess the nature of society and use their votes and their voices to challenge sectarianism, segregated education and inequality and work actively to replace our current social and economic system, then this initiative will compound our problems not help to overcome them.

Environment

Our global and our local environments have been severely damaged by over production and the relentless pursuit of profit.

Both of course are key characteristics of the capitalist economy.

Much as people want to, and should, take responsibility for their impact on the environment, It is a cynical myth to suggest that individual actions alone can turn this crisis around. They cannot.

This human created, crisis is a direct product of capitalism, the multi-national organisations and the corporate tycoons.

Everyone who is genuinely concerned about the current and future environment must look beyond the attempts to put all the responsibility onto individuals and their life styles, and instead focus on the need for a fundamental social change to production for need rather than for profit.

Councils can play a significant role in that struggle

Animal Welfare

All Councils should sign the “*Five Freedoms*” adopted by the World Organisation for Animal Health and national societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals. The Workers Party opposes hunting with dogs, trail hunting and all blood sports. We are opposed to the use, possession and sale of snares and to puppy and kitten ‘farms’

Councils should also support a review of the need to have a Zoo in Northern Ireland.



Economy & Jobs

Secure and well paid employment is a fundamental prerequisite in the battle against poverty.



Capitalist economies depend on a level of unemployment, low wages, zero hours contracts and other types of precarious employment to maximise their profits.

Northern Ireland continues to be marketed to multi national companies as a low wage economy.

This kind of economic strategy erodes employment rights, devalue employees and foster uncertainty and insecurity. Women are frequently subject to low pay, insecure and often part-time employment, a situation made worse by the unavailability of accessible, flexible and affordable childcare.

Councils can play a major role in securing permanent well paid jobs and working conditions by adopting sets of employment principles which don't allow for zero hours contracts, which underpin the right of workers to join a trade union, promote a living wage, factor in childcare support, apprenticeship schemes and return to work training and support.



Transport & Travel

Transport and travel play a major role in social inclusion, mental health and well being.

Councils should engage with the Departments of the Environment, Infrastructure, Economy and Communities, the community and voluntary sectors and other relevant bodies to formulate a planned approach to comprehensive, accessible, integrated and subsidised public travel in their areas.



Amongst the objectives Councils should seek to prioritise are:
subsidised travel for all school children, students and apprentices
three day subsidised Tourist Passes for use on public transport

dedicated and integrated cycle routes

extended pedestrianised zones

wheel chair and mobility impaired accessibility, and

obstruction free pavement areas



Workers Party Council Candidates



Lily Kerr
Belfast Castle

Fiona McCarthy
Belfast Oldpark

Patrick Crossan
Belfast Collin

Ursula Meighan
Belfast Black Mountain

Nicola Grant
Newry

Tony Walls
Belfast Court

Patrick Lynn
Belfast Botanic

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