

Conservative attacks answered

What have Lib Dems done at Cornwall County Council?

1. Kept Council Tax £175 below average – and in the bottom 20% nationally.
2. Cut waste, saving £20 million which we've put into front line services.
3. Increased funding for Adult Social Care by 48% (£38 million) since 2005 – with further £7million to come next year
4. School tests at 11 and GCSE results are improving every year.
5. Put £16 million extra into affordable housing to build twice the number of affordable houses last year as were built in 2005 – and we're going to double it again next year.
6. We will provide 10p parking for the first hour – which we pioneered in Caradon - across Cornwall to keep out town centres alive and allow local shopkeepers to compete with out of town stores.
7. Saved Newquay Airport when the Government shut RAF St.Mawgan, saving 3500 Cornish jobs
8. Increased recycling from 25% to 37%.
9. Won £85.5 million of extra funding for Cornwall.
10. Moving to one council for all of Cornwall will mean £70 million of savings over the next four years to improve services and cut your council tax in real terms.

Council Tax

The Conservatives criticise the Council Tax level in Cornwall – yet it is lower by £175 a year than the national average, and lower than most Conservative County Councils.

Despite criticising us for increasing Council Tax, the Conservative document shows that council tax in Cornwall still remains amongst the lowest in the country – in fact their figures show us even further below the national average than ours do (their document actually suggests in the small print Cornwall council tax is £255 below average – we only put the figure at £175 as we use figures based on what people actually pay, rather than bandings).

Only the Liberal Democrats have pledged to cut council tax in real terms over the next four years. We know that we can deliver this because of the savings made from the switch to one council for all of Cornwall. They say only that a future Conservative government will freeze council tax for two years – but cannot tell us where the money will come from, or what happens then. In fact the Cornwall Conservatives leader (Cllr David Currie) told the Western Morning News on 4th May launching their campaign for Cornwall Council that they “**can't make detailed promises**”.

The Conservatives won't say what they will do - but claim that Cornwall Council receives “generous funding” from the Government. In fact Cornwall Council's grant

from Government is only £377.45 for each person in the County – compared to a national average grant to Councils of £548.98 a person. This shortfall of £171.53 per resident means Cornwall Council misses out on more than £92 million every year compared to the national average. Yet the Conservatives consider the current settlement “generous”! In fact the Government admits that Cornwall should have received an extra £16.6 million this year and £6 million more last year to meet even the Government’s low assessment of Cornwall’s needs. So we promise the Lib Dem battle for fairer government funding for Cornwall continues – the Conservatives in contrast have surrendered the argument even for the extra £16million the Government admit we need, let alone the £92 million shortfall compared to the national average.

The Liberal Democrats are also the only party to have promised to freeze Councillors’ allowances. At a time when everyone is tightening their belts it is only fair that Councillors commit to a freeze in their allowances too.

Liberal Democrats have delivered £175 a year lower bills than average, have pledged a further real terms cut in council tax, will freeze councillors’ allowances, and will campaign for fairer Government funding. None of these pledges are matched by the Conservatives. The Conservatives do it is true criticise us for not using Objective One and Convergence funds to lower Council Tax – but this would be illegal.

Adult Social Care Services

The Conservatives assert that “in 2006 Cornwall County Council cut the adult social services budget by £2m”. This is not referenced – probably because the facts tell a different story. In fact, we have increased the budget for elderly and disabled people by 48% (£38 million) since 2005, and we have earmarked another £7 million increase for next year. The service had below the national average funding in 2005 – now it is up to the national average, and more is planned. And Council tax is now £175 below the national average – Lib Dems have delivered increased service *and* lower bills.

The Conservatives complain Cornwall does not provide care at home for adults with low or moderate needs. In fact low Government funding means 76% of all councils (including most Conservative and Labour Councils) are only able to provide care for adults with substantial or critical needs. Two councils only provide care for those classed as having ‘critical needs’. In contrast Cornwall’s Liberal Democrats have guaranteed to maintain support for those with substantial needs *as well as* those with critical needs, and to increase the funding for this.

Here are a few things that the independent national Commission for Social Care had to say about Adult Social Care in Cornwall:

- “The use of non-residential intermediate care is noticeably higher in Cornwall”¹
(I.e. there is more support to keep people at home when they wish, rather than be forced into care)

¹ PERFORMANCE SUMMARY REPORT of 2007-08 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL CARE SERVICES FOR ADULTS SERVICES FOR CORNWALL COUNTY COUNCIL. p.3

- “The council and its partners have given top priority to strengthening adult safeguarding arrangements in Cornwall.”²
- “Commitment to training staff in adult protection has been substantial”³
- “The commitment and engagement of the council's portfolio holder for health and social care remains strong and active.”⁴
- “Budgets are managed and monitored effectively, with clear accountability is and support for budget holders.”⁵
- “Significant efficiency gains have been achieved during the year in spite of the tight financial climate.”⁶
- “The percentage of older people provided with a service within four weeks from an assessment improved slightly, and remains better than many other councils.”⁷

Children’s Social Care

The Conservatives make a lot of criticism of Children’s services in Cornwall.

This is what the latest review by Ofsted (the national inspectorate) says about Children’s Social Care in Cornwall:

- “The council’s capacity to improve its services for children and young people is adequate and its management of these is adequate. It has a clear and compelling vision, shared with partners, for the development of children’s services in Cornwall.”⁸
- “Major strengths are the wide ranging and systematic assessment of need, the quality of leadership at senior level, the strength of working relationships between partner agencies and the commitment to common goals.”⁹
- “There is clear determination to enable young people and their families to voice their opinions and play a part in the development of services.”¹⁰
- “Foster carers are now much better trained and placement stability generally is improving. Levels of adoption and special guardianship are comparatively very good. Educational provision is good, as is support overall for care leavers. Young people are increasingly able to have a say in decisions about their care.”¹¹
- “Services for children and young people are adequately managed and have a satisfactory capacity to improve. Leadership at senior level is very good and there are effective working relationships between the main public services. Measures taken to assess local needs are good.”¹²

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid p. 4

⁸ Ibid p7

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Cornwall Joint Area Review of Children’s Services p.5

[http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/la_download/\(id\)/5026/\(as\)/JAR/jar_2008_908_fr.pdf](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/la_download/(id)/5026/(as)/JAR/jar_2008_908_fr.pdf)

¹² Ibid p4

Schools

The Conservatives say GCSE performance at our schools is lower than some other areas of the country, which is true – it has always been so. What they don't say is that since the Liberal Democrats took control, GCSE performance at Cornish Schools is getting better every year.¹³

School	% of 15 old pupils achieving 5+A*-C (and equivalent)			
	2005	2006	2007	2008
Cornwall	55.7%	57.1%	58.1%	61.2%

The Conservatives also don't mention that as a result of national funding formulas which they introduced when in Government, and still in place under Labour, Cornish schools receive £490 less per pupil than the national average – nearly half a million pounds less for a typical Cornish secondary school each year. Only the Liberal Democrats are committed locally and nationally to reform these unfair funding formulas.

The Conservatives claim:

“Performance at KS2 in both Mathematics and English is just below the average for England.”

Ofsted say:

[There are] “Improved standards at the end of Key Stage 2 that are now in line with national averages.”¹⁴

The Conservatives claim:

“School absences are slightly above the average for England and for counties.”

Ofsted say:

“Strategies to improve attendance and reduce exclusions have had a marked impact and sustain an improving trend. Unauthorised absence is lower than in similar councils whilst attendance overall is now close to the national picture. Exclusions have fallen steadily each year and are now significantly lower than those found nationally.” *and* “The attendance at school of looked after children is higher than found in similar councils and nationally.”¹⁵

Ofsted go on to say that:

“The proportion of young people in education, employment or training is higher than for similar areas and nationally.”¹⁶ and that there are “high success rates in most further education college provision.”¹⁷

¹³ http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/cgi-bin/performanceables/group_08.pl?Mode=Z&Type=LA&Begin=s&No=908&Base=c&Phase=1&F=1&L=50&Year=08

¹⁴ Ofsted Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Cornwall County Council 2008 – letter to Dean Ashton, Head of Children's Services p. 5
[http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/la_download/\(id\)/4798/\(as\)/APA/apa_2008_908.pdf](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/la_download/(id)/4798/(as)/APA/apa_2008_908.pdf)

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid p 6

¹⁷ Ibid

Affordable Housing

Cornwall County Council did not have responsibility for providing or building housing (that was your District Council). But we knew that housing is one of the key issues for local people. That is why between 2005 and 2008 Cornwall County Council gave nearly £16 million to District Councils to enable them to provide extra affordable housing. Cornwall is now building twice the number of social houses every year than were being built in 2005 – homes affordable and earmarked for local people. .

Our opponents say it could take 20 years to house all of the people that they have on their waiting list. That is *if* houses continue to be built at the same rate. We're going to double it again next year.

Cornwall's affordable housing crisis stems from a legacy of low affordable house building and selling off council housing by the Conservatives. Only the Liberal Democrats have set out a specific plan to do something about it.

Council waste and bureaucracy

The Conservatives complain the Council is providing “bottled” drinking water) for our employees. In fact in 2005, before Lib Dem control, it cost Cornwall County Council over £70,000 to provide drinking water for 7,000 employees (it is a legal duty to provide drinking water, and in older buildings the plumbing is unsafe for this and would be hugely expensive to replace). By changing the way in which this water is provided (it is now plumbed in through a central system) we have **more than halved that cost**. Today the cost of providing clean drinking water for over 7,000 employees has dropped to just £20,000 per year – a Lib Dem saving of £50,000 every year.

The Conservatives also complain about the cost of laying a new carpet in County Hall. The previous carpet in the Long Gallery (the heavily used public area) was carpeted in 1966 (when the Council was independent/conservative run) at a cost then of £30,000. In 2006 the original carpet had become threadbare. An estimate of £70,000 was rejected by the Lib Dems. A rigorous procurement process cut the cost to £17,000 – not much more than half the original cost in 1966, yet delivering the quality to last another twenty to thirty years.

The Conservatives complain about the decision to publish a monthly newspaper (at no extra cost to taxpayers). It is designed to better inform residents about what the council is doing, offer Council jobs to local people, increase accountability and improve access to council services. Every Conservative, Labour and independent County Council in England also produces one. It is funded from the money previously spent on job adverts and public notices in newspapers. **It therefore does not cost the council tax payer any extra**, and ensures *every* household in Cornwall sees the job adverts, public notices and essential information on services they use, not just those buying a weekly local newspaper.

Fire Services

When we were elected in 2005, Liberal Democrats inherited an under-funded Fire Service in real difficulties.

The Audit Commission Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment of Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority stated that in 2005, before we took control: **“The level of resources available to the Fire Authority threatens the delivery of its future plans and is limiting opportunity for further improvement.”**¹⁸

It went on to say that:

“The Fire Authority is not making the most of its workforce. It is not utilising its retained workforce effectively and morale and retention is a serious issue.”¹⁹

By 2009 the Audit Commission said people management policies were improving and sickness absence was down.²⁰

This year the total number of fire incidents reduced from 8,373 to 7,535 and of these, the number of primary fires reduced from 1,266 to 1,009 and secondary fires from 892 to 782.²¹ This shows that our increased investment in fire prevention programmes are working – and that our firemen are getting to the scene and stopping fires from spreading.

60 per cent of fire service performance indicators are now in the top 25 per cent for similar authorities. But there is still more to be done. A significant number of performance indicators are still in the lowest 25 per cent.²² We have appointed a new Fire Chief, and are increasing funding again, to address these issues.

Newquay Airport

The Conservatives complain about the costs and implementation of keeping Newquay Airport open when the Government closed RAF St. Mawgan. The fact is that the Liberal Democrats put in the funding to keep Newquay Airport open, saving 3500 Cornish jobs.

The temporary closure of Newquay Airport in December 2008 was to allow the completion of essential safety work, at the end of a multi-million pound programme to meet civil airport standards required when the RAF pulled out.

Since then we have seen the airport go from strength to strength, and it is now the fastest growing regional airport in the country with growth this financial year of 15%

¹⁸ Audit Commission *Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority* July 2005 p. 4

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Audit Commission *Comprehensive Performance Report Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority* January 2009 p. 5

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

- a stark contrast to the 4% decline seen across the country. 40% of the people who come through Newquay airport are business users, essential to Cornwall's economy.

Had the Liberal Democrats not stepped in, the airport would have closed.

Waste policies

The Conservatives complain that Cornwall does not recycle sufficient local household waste.

In fact, Cornwall was well below the national average before we took control, now it is fast improving. When we took control of Cornwall County Council in 2005 the Council's recycling rate was 25% - far below other shire counties. Now we recycle 37% of our household waste.²³ This already exceeds the government target of 30% and we will increase this to at least 45% by 2013. In 2006 we won a £45 million Government approval to transform Cornwall's waste management and make it more environmentally friendly.

Only the Liberal Democrat manifesto for Cornwall Council pledges to introduce weekly recycling to every home as soon as waste contracts allow – we have already done this in Restormel.

Creativity and Arts

The Conservatives also complain about the arts and library service.

In fact Council funding helps provide opportunities for over 23,348 young people and 1,060 volunteers to participate in the arts. Throughout the year a total audience 464,306 was able to benefit from taking part in the arts in Cornwall thanks to the companies we supported.

In 2006/07 CCC invested £233,125 in arts activity across Cornwall, this brought to Cornwall £11,410,675 of additional funds from other sources. This means that for every £1 the Council put in an additional £49 was levered in at no extra cost to local tax payers.

Over the last year we have had over 3 million visits to libraries across the county. The number of library visits is at it's highest since 1999.

Cornwall under the Liberal Democrats – Unitary Authority bid

One of the main criticisms launched against the seven Councils in Cornwall in the past has been lack of consistency, and huge waste through duplication of bureaucracy. Cornwall is one of the physically largest counties in England, with a spread out rural

²³ <http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=2922>

population. Seven different district councils has made consistency of service delivery across the county difficult, and meant huge costs in bureaucracy.

Now, by moving to a single Council for Cornwall everyone in Cornwall will have access to the same services, bureaucracy is being slashed, £70 million will be saved in just four years, and so Council Tax can be cut in renewal terms and front line services improved for everyone.

Savings breakdown

These are just the administrative savings of each department in the Council over only the next two years in millions of pounds:

Department	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Procurement	1.110	1.400	2.850	5.750
Finance	0.000	1.500	2.900	2.900
HR	0.000	0.211	0.491	0.560
IT	0.000	0.953	1.810	1.810
Revenues & Benefits	0.000	0.300	1.781	2.077
Transactional Savings	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.814
Insurance Costs	0.000	1.400	1.400	1.400
Democratic Services	0.000	1.800	1.800	1.800
Electoral Services & Elections	0.000	0.140	0.300	0.300
Legal	0.000	0.500	0.500	0.500
Property	0.000	0.200	0.200	0.200
Chief Exec Policy & Performance	0.000	3.100	3.100	3.100
Capital Financing and Interest Receipts	0.000	0.500	1.000	1.000
Customer Services	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.196
Public Health and Protection	0.000	0.750	0.750	0.750
Economic Development / Tourism	0.000	0.300	0.300	0.300
Environmental Management	0.000	0.300	0.600	0.831
Housing	0.000	0.300	0.300	0.300
Planning and Regeneration	0.000	0.250	0.450	0.450
Public Transport	0.000	0.100	0.100	0.100
Adult Social Care	0.000	0.280	0.280	0.280
Children, Schools and Families	0.000	0.182	0.182	0.182
Fire Service and Community Safety	0.000	0.170	0.170	0.170
Strategic Transport	0.000	0.180	0.180	0.180
Waste Management	0.000	0.484	0.484	0.484
Culture, Leisure and Arts	0.000	0.340	0.340	0.340
Property Rationalisation across Cornwall	0.000	0.000	2.900	2.900
TOTAL	1.110	15.640	25.168	29.674

The Conservatives claim we have over-estimated the savings associated with One Cornwall and under-estimated the costs of transition. But they have failed to reference this. We had to present our case for one Council to the Government, and the National

Audit Office who considered it objectively and fairly and made sure that it would benefit Cornwall financially before approving the change.

We notice not one of our opponents, despite their criticisms, is proposing a return to seven different Councils for Cornwall, and all the waste and duplication that involved.

The courage to create a single Cornwall Council

means

fewer bureaucrats and councillors

which

saves tens of millions of pounds

and that means

we can invest more in local schools, affordable homes, transport, help for elderly and disabled people,

and

we can cut your council tax in real terms over the next four years.

We promise lower tax *and* better services.

That's what we call our fair deal for Cornwall.