



CHAPTER THREE

EDUCATION AND YOUTH SERVICES

EDUCATION AND YOUTH SERVICES

The Labour Party wants to make Britain the best place to grow up in. A Labour council in Wiltshire will work hard to ensure that every child in Wiltshire, from all backgrounds, has a fair chance and fair access to pre-school education, to technology, to transport, and to further education. And we'll campaign for increased school funding and greater investment in our children's future.

Labour also pledges to rebuild Wiltshire's youth services, which have been decimated by cuts under the Conservative government.

The Coronavirus pandemic did not create the problems of educational disadvantage, but it has exposed and exacerbated them. Wiltshire Labour will work to repair the damage and suffering. We will listen to young people, and start investing time and effort into making Wiltshire a better county to grow up in.

LABOUR WILL

- Ensure that all children and young people have access to appropriate Information & Communications Technology (ICT).
- Campaign for the Government to increase school funding and improve the accountability of Multi-Academy Trusts to their local communities.
- Ensure that there is sufficient provision within Wiltshire for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, to enable them to attend schools and colleges as close as possible to their home communities.
- Extend support to 16-19 years-old students with their travel costs.
- Support the development of continuing education in Wiltshire, both in the Further and Higher Education sectors.
- Take action to recruit and support more child-minders in the county and review the support that the county gives to all registered childcare providers.
- Maintain and, where possible, extend the provision of services through Sure Start Children's Centres.
- Begin the process of rebuilding youth services in Wiltshire.

SUPPORTING OUR SCHOOL CHILDREN

The Coronavirus pandemic has exposed how many of our most disadvantaged children have struggled with inadequate ICT equipment over the past year. The various government pledges to support these families came to very little and the resulting attainment gap for disadvantaged children has grown wider. This is not acceptable.

All our children, whatever their background, have the right to the same educational opportunities. We'll ensure that all children receiving free school meals are provided with a laptop. We'll do this by establishing a scheme to recycle redundant laptops from local businesses and organisations and will fund additional purchase of laptops to make up any shortfall. We will also work with Internet providers to establish a package of free Internet access for these pupils.

A Labour council in Wiltshire will campaign on behalf of our young people through national channels as well as locally. Spending per pupil has fallen by 8% in real terms since 2009-10. We will campaign for the government to redress this shortfall – investment in our children's future shouldn't be done on the cheap.

41% of schools in Wiltshire are now "academies". This means that they sit outside of local authority control, do not have to follow the national curriculum and can be run as a commercial business. Wiltshire's academies perform less well, with 69% rated as good or outstanding, compared to 83% of those under local authority control.

Labour will support our locally maintained schools to improve and remain accountable to the communities that they serve. We will resist further academisation of our education system.

We will further campaign for the Government to respond to issues raised within the July 2019 Ofsted report into Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) - specifically, the evidence that MATs lack proper accountability to the local community or to Ofsted. MATs should be accountable to their communities for the education they provide.

We will ensure that children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) are supported within the most appropriate environment to their needs, either within mainstream schools or, where appropriate through local specialist schools. We welcome the decision of Wiltshire Council to open the new three campus Silverwood School. This reversed an original plan to close Larkrise School in Trowbridge and St Nicholas School in Chippenham and to move all provision in the area to a new build at Rowdeford School.

We will ensure that community assets and playgrounds are retained for children and young people, and not sold off and closed for good (as the campaign to save Oxenwood and Braeside outdoor education centres made clear).

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SUPPORTING POST-16 EDUCATION

In a rural area like Wiltshire, there is little point in saying our young people have a “free” education if they have to pay the cost of their travel. We’ll lobby national government to properly fund this. In the meantime, we’ll extend the existing discounted travel-card system with bursaries to support disadvantaged students.

VAT is a poorly applied tax in education because it discriminates between different categories of 16 to 18 institutions for no good reason. Under existing rules, colleges - unlike schools and academies - are required to pay VAT on their purchases. We’ll lobby national government to provide consistency on financing of post-16 colleges and sixth forms by abolishing VAT charges.

Labour will champion further investment in Wiltshire College building on recent improvements made to campuses. We will also work with the Swindon & Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership to expand the availability of Higher Education in Wiltshire, through the further development of Wiltshire College’s offering and potentially through partnership with an existing university institution to establish a local campus, including continuing education support to young people with disabilities or with special education needs. This will provide local students with more options to study in Wiltshire rather than having to move away from home, and extend the availability of life-long learning within the county.

Labour is committed to providing continuing education opportunities that are accessible and meet the needs of all communities, ensuring that disabled people have access to educational opportunities that support life aspirations, independent living and career opportunities.

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CHILDCARE

Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, Wiltshire had already lost a quarter of its childminders in the previous five years. Recent decisions to end the childcare business grant for new childminders, the registration delays at Ofsted, unnecessary bureaucracy, and lower income levels caused by reduced government funding, are combining to put more and more people off the profession. The number of childcare providers in the county is likely to further fall once the temporary support put in place during the pandemic ends.

Lack of adequate childcare further disadvantages the children who most need pre-school care and makes things so much harder for working parents. To allow families financial security and avoid entrenching disadvantage from the earliest age, all children should have access to pre-school and wrap-around childcare.

We will take action to urgently recruit more child-minders and support them through the process of getting established.

In 2010, Wiltshire had 30 Sure Start Children's Centres covering 22 towns in the county. By 2019, this had been cut to just 12 covering 10 towns, a reduction of 60%. Labour believes that these are a vital service making a significant contribution to supporting the parents of young children and are committed to maintaining, and, where possible, extending the services provided.

YOUTH SERVICES

Wiltshire Council used to employ 150 youth workers and run 24 youth centres - this staff number has been vastly reduced by cuts since 2014 and all of the youth centres closed. The Conservatives have left local young people without a much-needed source of support. It's time to put that right.

A Labour council in Wiltshire will rebuild our youth services by subscribing to the Local Government Association's vision for youth services, which follows 6 core principles:

1. A Youth-led focus
2. Inclusivity, equality and diversity
3. Respect
4. Quality, safety and well-being
5. Empowerment
6. Positivity

We will work with young people and partners to ensure that we genuinely respond to their wants and needs and we will make sure that we include the quieter voices and those who are harder to reach. This work will also include the local voluntary and community sector, faith groups, schools and employers, involving leadership from young people from the very start to ensure that their experiences help to shape the vision.

We will maintain support for existing youth projects through Area Board Grants, but we will also implement creative methods of funding new projects, outside the traditional model of local authority provision. The Local Government Association has recommended the seed funding model, whereby councils have "...an opportunity to invest smaller amounts in core funding for groups so that they can access further funding, and to coordinate funding bids, supporting smaller organisations to come together to deliver work that can contribute to the wider vision."

In other areas, we will seek to improve the use of existing Wiltshire Council and community assets, an alternative to financial support that can help us rebuild our youth services. We will find creative ways to share assets, such as buildings, funds, or facilities, or even volunteers and staff, between the council, community organisations, and private partners. We will use the council's role in the community as a tool to help secure investment from Wiltshire's private sector, to facilitate the rebuild of our much-needed youth services.