



CHAPTER NINE

# **OUR VISION FOR MORE OPEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

# OUR VISION FOR MORE OPEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

## Labour believes in open, transparent, accessible government.

We believe that councils work best and achieve better results when they engage with the communities that they represent. To be meaningful, this engagement must reach out to all residents and communities, regardless of background, not just those with the time and energy to make themselves heard. The summer of 2020 saw the Black Lives Matter movement's expression of frustration in a number of protests and demonstrations. Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Councillors have a responsibility to reach out and listen to views from all of our residents, including minority voices.

Wiltshire Labour is committed to making local government more open and inclusive, more ambitious and productive, and more innovative and forward looking. We believe that Wiltshire Council has a duty to play its part in bringing people together and creating a shared ambition for the future of Wiltshire

## LABOUR WILL

- Make Council business more transparent and minimise the amount of decision-making conducted behind closed doors.
- Remove barriers to public participation in Council business.
- Build social impact as well as financial impact into all decision-making
- Improve the quality of public engagement and consultation, making it genuinely meaningful and inclusive.
- Trial the use of Citizens' Assemblies to improve the engagement of residents in the democratic process.
- Encourage more participation in the democratic process, starting with school visits to promote better understanding of local democracy.

# OUR VISION FOR MORE OPEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

## HOW WE CAN DELIVER MORE OPEN GOVERNMENT

Labour will make local government more transparent by:

- Opening up more meetings to the public and minimising the amount of business conducted behind closed doors.
- Encouraging public attendance and engagement at council meetings, and making public attendees feel welcomed.
- Holding more meetings around the county, in town halls, community halls, schools or libraries.
- Avoiding the use of formal language, acronyms or procedural red tape to make Council business more meaningful to local people.
- Ensuring that Council meetings and material are accessible for people with disabilities.
- Continuing with making Council meetings available online following the lifting of lockdown restrictions.
- Allowing the public to propose agenda items for Council meetings.
- Making sure that all decisions take account of social impact as well as financial impact. This means taking account of the impact of a decision on people, taking care to include the impact on women, BAME citizens, other minority groups and the most vulnerable members of our community.

Labour will make sure that Wiltshire Council improves the quality of real engagement and consultation to reach out to and genuinely work in partnership with residents from all backgrounds.

This will require both traditional and social media to engage in two-way dialogue with residents, and the involvement of communities in decisions and funding choices affecting their local area. We will seek to involve people and organisations with expertise onto working parties.

We recognise that to have credibility, Wiltshire Council must ensure that consultation is genuinely meaningful. This means engagement needs to happen early and offers real choices. We will strive for best practice and seek to learn from other councils.

We will also trial the use of Citizens' Assemblies in which members of the public are selected at random to take part directly in the democratic decision-making process.

A healthy democracy is dependent on electing councillors who represent the breadth of their communities. Many councillors are comfortably retired and don't have enough understanding of the challenges faced by single parents, families just managing or by the most vulnerable in our communities. Very few are women, and still fewer are from ethnic or other minorities or have disabilities.

It is important that these voices are heard and properly represented. We believe that Wiltshire Council has a role to play in encouraging people to participate in the democratic process, at county, town and parish council levels. A starting point should be to undertake school visits to promote better understanding of local democracy with the next generation.