

STRIKE BACK WITH



Manifesto 2023

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STRIKE BACK WITH PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

Introduction:

Even in winter 2020, before the soaring costs of energy, over half of low-income households across the North had turned the heating down or off because they could not afford it. Food banks are seeing new users every week, and people in deprived areas are most likely to have poor mental health. These problems are rooted in a class system that supports the wealthy few.

The legacy of conflict and our institutionalised communal politics makes the lives of working-class people from all communities harder, as public funds are carved up along sectarian lines rather than where they are needed most, and the role of paramilitaries in communities goes largely unchallenged by those in power.

Despite most of the talk being about the division between the two communities, the biggest divide is between the rich and the poor. Just look at the gap in life expectancy: those in the wealthiest area can expect to live up to 7 years longer than those in the poorest parts of the region.

As the cost-of-living crisis deepens, tens of thousands of workers from all communities are being forced to strike for fair pay and in defence of basic services, including our Council workers.

Socialist councillors, fighting for change

In times like these, we urgently need a radical change of direction in local politics. We need more services, not less, and the kind of politics which prioritises people over corporate agendas. We need socialist Councillors who will support workers and communities, fight for local services, and challenge wealth inequality.

This means challenging the power of the Tories and the Stormont establishment who rule the roost in Council chambers across the North.

People Before Profit believe that real change in society comes from people power and the power of organised workers fighting for their shared interests. We believe that these struggles are also the best way to unite people across the communal divide - and we commit to using our election platforms to build and champion them.

Since being elected in 2014 and 2019, People Before Profit councillors have delivered real gains for working class people, continuing a long record of community organising and action to save local services.

We have consistently opposed the neoliberal, corporate agenda of the big parties and Council management, which is turning our cities into havens for developers and the tourism industry, while local communities are priced out and left behind.

We fight for the rights of workers, and for marginalised and oppressed people to have an equal share of our towns and cities. We have championed striking workers, migrants, women, the Irish language community, the LGBTQ community and defenders of our environment.

STRIKE BACK

Our vision for local Councils is one which delivers on the needs of working class people in all communities, via first-class public services. We want our Councils to be leaders in workers' rights and working conditions, hubs for trade union organising. Our workers, paid fairly for their vital jobs, should be enabled to deliver the safe, clean, accessible and vibrant city our communities deserve. And most importantly, there would be more democracy for ordinary people, more of what you want to see, decided transparently, and based on needs. We would roll back on the scourge of corporatisation, privatisation, outsourcing, and neoliberalism which has seen our local Councils as centres for developers and big business. It's time to put this situation to rights, and to deliver the kind of local Councils we need.

If this is the kind of Council you want us to fight for in your community, then vote for your local People Before Profit candidate.

A SOCIALIST VISION FOR LOCAL COUNCILS

Improved and inclusive services for all

Increasingly, ratepayers are forced to pay more but get less in terms of services. Many residents feel that our streets are becoming dirtier and major Council services have been cut and prices have been hiked, such as leisure in Belfast.

Councils need to invest in quality accessible public services. They should not rely on private for-profit companies who inevitably hike prices and reduce workers' conditions to save money.

- Expand cleansing services, including more staff, public bins, and Quick Response Vehicles to reduce missed bin collections and keep communities clean.
- Expand recycling provision and move towards a Zero Waste Economy.
- Stop price hikes on Council services such as leisure and pest control, which price working class people out of services already paid for by their rates.
- Expand disability support services in leisure and community centres.
- Oppose the closure of local leisure centres and support the delivery of outdoor publicly owned gyms.
- Address the neglect of alleyways, including the transformation of these spaces into clean, safe and useful community spaces.
- Expand provision of free public spaces in communities and town centres.

End outsourcing and privatisation - take services back into public control.

In Belfast, the big parties outsourced leisure services to a London based organisation called GLL. This was done against the wishes of trade unions who represent leisure workers and was accompanied by £105 million of ratepayers' money for 'leisure transformation'. Instead of transformation for the better, this has brought price hikes year after year, job losses, complaints about health and safety, and deteriorating conditions in some centres.

Recycling services have also been outsourced to Bryson. Despite the litany of complaints and problems, there are no immediate plans to bring this service in-house. In other areas of cleansing, jobs are not replaced when workers retire or leave, with Councils instead favouring the use of a private alternative for maintenance, for example.

Millions of pounds are also spent unnecessarily every council term on the use of private consultants. Since 2019 millions have been spent in Belfast alone. This is part of the corporate agenda of the big Stormont parties who prioritise big business and tourist developments over the services needed by our communities.

People Before Profit will seek to:

- Bring all council services back into public control, including leisure and recycling.
- Block the privatisation of other Council services.
- End wasteful expenditure on private consultants.
- Re-invest money which is currently being funnelled to the private sector into our Council workers and services.

Challenging the communal carve-up in Council chambers

Council chambers often replicate Stormont's communal carve-up where Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party pose as polar opposites, but then work together behind the scenes to carve up public funding in a way that is not open or transparent. The distribution of funding for advice services, community groups, and community investment programmes are good examples.

Where we once lived in an 'Orange State' controlled by the Unionist Party, we now live in a sectarian state, where the big parties unite to control and carve up funding streams. They then use these as a powerful tool to maintain community dominance. Working class people across the board often lose out.

People Before Profit challenge the communal carve-ups. We view ourselves not as unionists or nationalists, but as socialists who strive to offer a voice for working class people from all communities. We believe that public funding must be distributed in a fair and open way, that allows maximum participation, democracy and the opportunity for all in our society to benefit from public funding opportunities.

- End the communal carve up of funding streams.
- Democratise community funding through open and transparent processes.
- Ensure funding is allocated on the basis of need, primarily.
- More rigorous standards for councillors declaring interests, for example as landlords, board members, or financial beneficiaries.

Supporting our Council staff - making our Councils centres of trade union organising

Council workers provide a crucial public service. They keep our communities clean and safe, run our community centres, parks, cemeteries and various other services. But they are overworked, underpaid, and deserve much better especially during this cost-of-living crisis. Disgracefully, they were forced to take strike action for fair pay.

People Before Profit supports trade union demands for inflation busting pay rises and if elected, we will continue to be the loudest voice for this. We will continue the work we have done to ensure Councils reduce agency employment. We will champion the expansion of Council employment as well as better terms and conditions for staff, including increased trade union rights and addressing the concerns of BAME members of staff.

- Inflation busting pay rises for frontline council workers.
- End the unnecessary use of private agencies for staff, ensuring all Council workers have a proper pensioned contract and improved conditions.
- Reduce the pay disparity between low-paid council workers and directors in council.
- Address the concerns of BAME staff about lack of diversity and disparity of treatment, including the appointment of a BAME member of staff as race and diversity champions in local councils.
- Turn council chambers into champions of trade union organisation and collective bargaining.
- Introduce Workers' Rights and Social Justice Week to all local councils.

Housing and a fairer and more democratic planning process

While our local councils have no control over most housing issues, they have some control over planning, but our planning process is broken. It favours developers and wealthy elites who view cities as a mechanism for making further profit.

Private rental accommodation and hotels are being prioritised over social housing, community and green space, and public amenities. Local people are being driven out of cities by gentrification and soaring rents and they will become dead zones except for tourism.

Democracy should be at the heart of our planning process. We reject the sell off of public land to private developers and fight for public land to be used to build social housing as well as community spaces which are free, green, and not dictated by free market economics.

We believe local councils should have a greater role in determining where and how much social housing is built, and the price of local rents. These kinds of local powers would enable local needs to be met and protect renters.

People Before Profit would regenerate inner city council property and land, allowing ordinary people to live in the city. We would stop the historic character of our built heritage being sacrificed for-profit developments like office space and private apartments.

- Build public housing on public land.
- Enable local councils to ring-fence land for local housing and force developers to prioritise the building of social housing.
- Enable local councils to freeze and cap local rent prices to affordable levels.
- Resist the sell-off of public land and gentrification that forces working class people out of areas.
- Respect built heritage and strengthen environmental and ethical procurement concerns during the planning process and penalise developers who flout environmental and ethical policies.

People and Planet Before Profit

We wish to make local Councils a shining example of respect for our environment. We will treat the climate emergency with the seriousness it deserves. We will ensure there is a right to clean air. Currently, nitrogen dioxide levels in parts of Belfast and particulate levels in parts of Derry City are unsafe and among the worst in these islands. We want more monitoring stations and rapid action where limits are breached. We also seek to expand green spaces and walking spaces to compliment people's health and planet. Reduce carbon emissions; prioritise public transport to reduce car usage; expand the rail and cycle networks.

- Expand green spaces and the planting of biodiverse flora in inner-cities to improve air quality and enrich the landscape.
- Open up local areas and the Belfast Hills to walkers and cyclists, including the installation of more benches.

- Monitor air quality across our cities and take action to improve it.
- Improve the quality of water in local 'blue' spaces to aid local fauna, particularly birds.
 - Expand the provision of biodiversity education initiatives in public spaces across towns and cities, encouraging residents from a young age to learn about and protect local flora and fauna, and increase biodiversity.
- Reduce the Council's use of harmful chemicals such as glyphosate to kill weeds, which impacts biodiversity.
- More community allotments to develop biodiversity and encourage local gardening.
- More free, public water fountains in areas of heavy footfall in the city, to help end dependence on bottled water.

Stop the rate hikes - implement a fairer system

The establishment parties present ratepayers with a false choice every year: They tell us that we must pay higher rates to fund services but at the same time, they reduce services, outsource them, and prices go up. This is because they run the councils on a neo-liberal basis.

Rates should be used foremostly to provide the best public services possible, but currently councils funnel millions into private consultants, recruitment agencies, outsourcing, and more. We don't not believe this neoliberal agenda is what ratepayers deserve or need.

People Before Profit challenge these unjust rate hikes and we fight for a reformed rates system. The payment of rates must be linked to higher earnings and profits. Those with the broadest shoulders should carry the highest burden. Rates for households and small businesses should be reduced while raising rates on large corporations like Tesco in order to improve local amenities and services.

- Oppose unjust rate hikes.
- Reform the rates system to link it to high earnings and profits.
- Close rates loopholes such as the millions uncollected by providers of student accommodation.
- Tax developers who sit on derelict land.
- End wasted corporate expenditure.

Who lives here belongs here – migrants are welcome here

We are anti-racist champions and proponents of diversity. Councils should welcome people from all communities and backgrounds and do more to ensure our towns and cities are accommodating and accessible. We will welcome migrants and refugees and stand against racism wherever it rears its ugly head.

- Work to create cities of sanctuary.
- Provide a welcoming environment for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers/, including investment in more local services to help newcomers in our local communities.
- Oppose the Tory hostile environment policy and work to ensure our councils aren't responsible for the local implementation of it locally.
- Reject Reject the racist hard border that prevents migrants travelling across this island
- Support the right to remain for asylum seekers, migrants and refugees, and oppose the holding of asylum seekers in hotels and detention centres.

Arts and Culture

We want our communities to have greater access to art and culture. We want galleries, artists' studios and cultural spaces to open late and run public events, publicly funded and with proper support for the artists involved. This scheme would be coordinated by the local authority in cooperation with the cultural sector.

The lack of publicly run, subsidised artists' studio spaces in city centre locations has a difficult impact of the important work of artists and other creatives. People Before Profit value artists and their work and would use vacant sites to create arts studios that encourage community participation.

- Create monthly late open culture nights with fair pay for artists and public funding to ensure accessibility.
- Open publicly run artists' studios.
- Treat artists and other creatives as workers with the same rights as any other, and work with art based trade unions to improve conditions for artists in our cities.

An Ghaeilge

Tacaíonn PBP le cearta teanga. Chuaigh gníomhaithe s’againn ag máirseáil agus i mbun agóide ar son Acht Gaeilge agus tá úsáid leanúnach bainte ag ár n-ionadaithe as an ardán acu leis an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn agus le polasaithe forásacha a bhrú fríd chomhairlí áitiúla.

Bhí muid ar an chéad pháirtí le rún ar son Acht Gaeilge a chur os comhair Chomhairle Cathrach Bhéal Feirste.

Go rómhínic, cuirtear bac ar iarrachtaí an Ghaeilge a chur chun agus leagtar béim ar na seanmhiotais sin a chuireann in iúl go bhfuil an teanga ‘seicteach’ nó ‘deighilteach’. Ní bhacann PBP leis na páirtithe sin a ba mhaith leo leanstan le himeallú na Gaeilge.

- Tacaigh le polasaí Gaeilge cuimsitheach a fhorbairt ar chomhairlí áitiúla atá bunaithe ar a bhfuil de dhíth ar phobal na Gaeilge, a chaitheann leis an Ghaeilge mar theanga bheo bheathach, agus a sheachnaíonn cur chuige atá dírithe ar an turasóireacht nualioibrálach amháin.
- Troid ar son theacht phobal na Gaeilge ar a dteanga, comharthaíocht ar gach seirbhís de chuid na Comhairle agus fáil ar sheirbhísí trí Ghaeilge san áireamh.
- Déan cinnte de go mbíonn Comhairlí ar thús cadhnaíochta maidir le dul i ngleic le héadulaingt i leith na Gaeilge, éadulaingt atá fréamhaithe go stairiúil sa deighilt agus sa tseicteachas.
- Dean cinnte de go mbíonn teacht ag Gaeilgeoirí i gceanntracha comhairle ar mhaoiniú d’ócáidí Gaeilge a chuireann an teanga chun cinn, Seachtain na Gaeilge san áireamh.

An Ghaeilge

People Before Profit support Irish language rights. Our activists have marched and demonstrated for an Irish language act and our elected representatives have consistently used their platforms to promote the use of Irish and to push forward progressive policies through local councils.

We were the first party to introduce a motion of support for an Irish Language Act on Belfast City Council. Moves to promote Irish are too often met with obstructionism and myths about the language being somehow ‘sectarian’ or ‘divisive’. People Before Profit have no truck with those parties who would continue the minoritisation of the Irish language.

- Support the development of a comprehensive Irish language policy on local councils which is rooted in the needs of our Gaeilgeoirí, treats Irish as a living language, and avoids a solely neoliberal tourism-based approach.
- Fight for accessibility for Gaeilgeoirí to their language, including on signage across Council services and the ability to access services through Irish.

- Ensure Councils take a lead in tackling intolerance to the Irish language which has historically been rooted in division and sectarianism.
- Ensure Gaeilgeoirí in council areas can access funding for Irish language events which promote the language, including during Seachtain na Gaeilge.

A city for LGBTQ+ and women

People Before Profit have a long history of support for the LGBTQ community; we are proud to have several out candidates standing for election this year. We campaign for full and free access to contraception and abortion services within the North, as well as Relationship and Sexuality Education that is fit for the 21st century. We oppose the two-child policy which is forcing some to have abortions they might not want.

As elected councillors we will:

- Demand that any workplace that receives a council tender is LGBTQ+ friendly.
- Ensure that there are publicly run facilities that provide full and free sex education for young people.

Reject paramilitarism.

People Before Profit councillors will oppose any support for paramilitarism. Unfortunately, the state and local institutions, led by the big parties, have failed to tackle paramilitaries, instead rewarding them with funding and normalisation. We will expose all attempts to offer state funding to community fronts for paramilitary organisations.

We reject the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill because the Tory government is permanently removing any chance of truth justice and accountability.

1. Support the disbandment of all paramilitaries, including state paramilitaries.
2. Expose instances whereby local council or government funding is being awarded to community groups with links to paramilitarism.
3. Support council initiatives to help local communities move on from the coercive control of paramilitary gangs.
4. Support local campaigns for justice from bereaved families.
5. Oppose the Tory amnesty for soldiers, state actors, and others involved in the murder and maiming of innocent people.

Drugs and Alcohol

There were 212 drug-related deaths registered in Northern Ireland in 2021 and 351 deaths from alcohol. There is a far higher usage of prescription drugs, including antidepressants, in the North compared to Britain. Dual diagnosis drug and alcohol problems make recovery from addiction more difficult.

People Before Profit believes that these issues cannot be brushed under the carpet. Instead of defining them as criminal issues, they are primarily health issues.

- Increased funding for detox and other centres that help end addiction to alcohol
- Increased access to safe injection points and pill testing centres across towns and cities to reduce deaths and infection, and the amount of drug paraphernalia on our streets.
- Support a strategy of decriminalisation of drugs along the lines of the Portuguese model, allowing for drug addiction to be treated as a medical issue rather than as a criminal issue.
- Promotion of education to replace criminalisation as a method of deterrence for young people.
- Controls on the Pharma Industry to reduce the abuse of prescription drugs.
- Tackle the inequality, deprivation and oppression that create the material conditions for problematic drug use and profiting criminal gangs.
- Support the use of medicinal cannabis for pain management of chronic conditions.

Vote For Radical Change

A new approach is needed. The failed politics of the North means that working class people in both communities are being hammered by a cost-of-living crisis. Huge rates increases means they will be hit even harder.

The Tories are inflicting austerity and cuts across the board while locally the main parties engage in a communal carve up which pitches one community against another. The actions taken by workers in recent months offers a better way forward. By uniting and fighting and striking back workers have made gains. By fighting together, they can also stop huge hikes in their rates.

People Before Profit is the only party that stand full square behind those who have taken to the picket lines and who want to fight back together. Our councillors have stood with striking workers and provided a voice for them in the council chambers and in the media.

By voting for us you can strike back at the ballot box and elect councillors who will be a voice for all those battered by the cost-of-living crisis and the sectarian antics of the main parties.

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