

The majority of people have a number of limited expectations of local government. They are concerned about the availability of affordable housing, the maintenance of roads and parks, support for the local economy, youth projects and sporting activities, the provision of playgrounds and libraries and the protection of the environment.

They also want proper planning and development that is transparent. They do not want the irrational, anarchic and developer-driven economic and planning development we saw during the Celtic tiger period and that played such a critical role in crashing this economy.

They want a real say in setting those priorities. They want real influence, not pretend influence or fake consultation, on a weekly and monthly basis.

Yet even modest expectations for sensible local government are repeatedly dashed. In most other European countries people expect more from their local governments. They want these bodies to be responsible for the delivery of such services as education, health, public transport, economic development and waste collection.

Yet despite much rhetoric in the government policy statement, the Irish legislative framework leads to centralisation, lack of democratic participation and growing corporate control.

There are a number of reasons for this.

First, local councils are dominated by unelected managers and the powers of elected councillors have been systemically reduced. Henceforth, these managers will be called CEO and the name itself reflects the growing influence of a corporate culture on local authority decision making.

People Before Profit rejects the myth that this culture leads to a more efficient delivery of services. Quite the opposite often occurs as the example of the Poolbeg incinerator shows. Here an unelected Dublin City manager ploughed ahead with a wasteful project in partnership with the engineering firm, RPS, who gained considerably from this misadventure. More generally, the unelected top managers are increasingly in thrall to consultancy companies such as PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) which specialise in leaching off public spending to boost their profits.

Second, local councils need resources to carry out their tasks. Yet they are being systematically starved of finance. This Government imposed a 9% cut in the local government fund in 2011 and another 9% cut in 2012. There has also been a steady decline in local authority staff with a reduction of over 9,000 posts since 2000. The most recent attempt to cover for this shortfall by taking 3,000 people onto the forced labour scheme, GATEWAY, which pays only €1 an hour for 22 hours work, will not improve matters.

The long term government plan for local authority funding is based on a neoliberal model whereby the customer – not the citizen - seeks reduction in their property taxes by cutting or privatising public services. This framework, Fine Gael hopes, will lay the basis for the electoral mobilisation of the upper middle sectors of the population from fear that rising taxes will cut into their property values. It is a recipe for a nasty Thatcherite style society.

Third, the culture among the wider political elite promotes a highly centralised system that allows little room for genuine local democracy.

Despite these obstacles People Before Profit councillors will nevertheless press for the following:

1. No Water Charges – Mobilise the community to resist.
2. A new funding model based on allocation from a central fund.
3. Full transparency and democratic oversight of council budgets.
4. Cut out the consultants – stop outsourcing of services.
5. Cut the salaries of the unelected CEOs and subject their decisions to democratic scrutiny. End the junket culture.
6. Full transparency on all commercial dealing between the councils and private firms.
7. Tackle the housing crisis – build more social houses: introduce rent controls.
8. Reverse the privatisation of local services.
9. A differential rates system based on corporate size and profit.
10. For long term strategic planning that re-vitalises town centres and creates social space that encourage community sentiment.
11. Local Authorities should promote and develop the cultural life of their areas.
12. Local authority facilities should be opened to all those in struggle for social justice
13. Turn waste ground and derelict spaces over to community gardens and facilities.
14. Remove the formalities – open up the councils to the digital age.
15. Protect Our Environment – develop natural resources and amenities in the public interest.
16. Oppose all racism and discrimination.
17. A Platform for People Power.

1. No Water Charges – Mobilise the community to resist.

People Before Profit are totally opposed to water charges. It is a double tax and a waste of resources to spend an estimated €1 billion on metering when the money could have been spent on repairing a leaking piping system.

It is also wrong that the resources of local authorities have been transferred to an agency like Irish Water which is being set up for long term privatisation.

People Before Profit councillors will organise local community meetings to resist the charges.

2. A new funding model based on allocation from a central fund.

A share of overall taxation needs to be allocated to local authorities according to the number of residents in each area and with some weighting for social disadvantage.

Ireland needs a proper wealth tax, effective taxation of profits rather than tax loop holes and a progressive income tax system so that there are adequate resources to centrally fund councils.

It does not need another local tax or property tax which is deeply discriminatory against particular areas and individuals who have little income but find themselves living in high banded areas.

Control of this share of overall taxation that is allocated to local authorities should be vested fully in elected representatives.

3. Full transparency and democratic oversight of council budgets.

The most recent Local Government Act 2013 states that council budgets must be published by early October.

People Before Profit will push for open public forums where both the general public and representatives of civil society organisations will be invited to attend and scrutinise the proposed budget.

We want an end to the system where councillors, except for the chosen few from the establishment parties, only see the draft budget a couple of days before it is voted on.

Where budgets are agreed democratically and councils come under threat of dissolution, we shall also seek to mobilise the local citizenry to defend them. The recent bullying threat by Phil Hogan, for example, to disband Donegal County Council should in our view be met with the whole mobilisation of people power.

4. Cut out the consultants – stop outsourcing of services.

The four main global accountancy firms have increasingly developed consultancy wings. These claim to have a particular expertise in ‘helping’ councils make a transition to a more efficient ‘business model’ that is modelled on private enterprise.

We reject such biased claims.

Instead of purchasing advice that produces banal reports based on business speak jargon, we shall rely on the expertise of council staff and the democratic participation of citizens.

5. Cut the salaries of the unelected CEOs and subject their decisions to democratic scrutiny. End the junket culture.

The Dublin City Council manager receives a salary of €175,721 a year. Not only is this morally unacceptable at a time when his own staff have experienced significant pay cuts, it also breeds an elite culture that shows little sympathy for the real suffering of the majority.

People Before Profit councillors will press for reductions in these top salaries. We shall use mechanisms by which elected councillors have scrutiny over appointment of officials to favour those candidates who – after due consideration of their wider policies – donate part of their salaries to local community schemes.

We shall also oppose the junket culture in which councillors get thousands of euros every year to attend conferences, most of which provide no benefit to local authorities or communities.

We are opposed to a system whereby councillors who are chairpersons of Strategic Policy Committees can earn an extra €6,000 a year and will demand that these allowances be scrapped.

We are entirely opposed to profiteers who set up conferences for councillors as a device for milking the public purse. We shall scrutinise and reveal any such activity.

At present an informal arrangement exists whereby elected councillors are effectively cajoled into backing managers’ plans by getting more favourable treatment on clientalist work. We shall expose any discriminatory treatment of councillors – whatever their views – by managers.

We shall also seek to gain a democratic majority for using the powers under the Local Government Act to make managers more accountable. In particular we shall make full use of the provisions whereby the chief executive will also have an obligation to report on the implementation of policy determined by the elected council.

Where the elected council is not satisfied with the report of the chief executive or the actions contained therein, they may adopt, by resolution, a statement outlining their reasons for this view. The chief executive has 14 days in which to provide a comprehensive response indicating what new actions will be undertaken or why no alternative course is available. On foot of this report, or otherwise, the elected members can request the chief executive to advise on the review of policy, or the implementation of policy

6. Full transparency on all commercial dealing between the councils and private firms.

Under the guise of commercial secrecy, the dealings between council officials and private firms have become less transparent. In particular, the growing use of Public Private Partnerships have led to the over use of 'commercial secrecy' rules.

We shall demand that any firms wishing to conclude commercial agreements with local authorities shall both respect union rights and be willing to be totally transparent on these agreements.

7. Tackle the housing crisis – build more social houses: introduce rent controls.

The biggest single task of any local authority is to be an effective provider of housing for those in need. People Before Profit councillors will challenge the current model of not building council houses which has led to a housing crisis. This model sees Local Authorities relying on the RAS (Rental Accommodation Scheme) and long term leasing arrangements to house those in need of accommodation. This is effectively a subsidy to landlords. While this did manage to provide much needed housing at the beginning of the crash, it is now part of the housing crisis as landlords pull out of these schemes because they can make more money by renting privately and refusing to be tied into Joan Burton's unworkable rent caps.

We shall

- A) Demand that the local councils invest in social housing and commence an emergency house building programme.
- B) Press for a change of law so that councils are given powers to control rents. In the meantime, we shall use every possible bye-law to regulate the housing market.

- C) In the interim, demand an increase in the rent caps for social welfare recipients based on surveys of local rented accommodation.
- D) Oppose the policy of leaving council apartments and houses vacant under the pretext that the internal furnishing be removed because of insurance. We shall promote a policy of immediate use of council property based on indemnity against insurance claims.
- E) The recruitment of more maintenance staff to repair social housing and the creation of direct labour units..
- F) The use of some 30,000 unoccupied dwellings that are in local areas to house those on the waiting list.

8. Reverse the privatisation of local services.

The privatisation of waste collection has been a disaster. There has been a growth in illegal dumping, due mainly to rising levels of poverty, which poses a health hazard. Charges for waste collection are rising and in some case collection bags are getting smaller.

Waste collection must be brought back into public ownership and the charges phased out. Councils must also establish proper, publicly run re-cycling services.

Clamping is a further example of the absurdity of privatising services. The recent attempt of Dublin Parking Services to set a target of 21 clamps a day for each of their patrol staff shows how a profit driven system is based on stress rather than sane traffic management. This company need to be brought under public ownership and a sane parking policy implemented.

9. A differential rates system based on corporate size and profit.

The heart of many cities and suburban centres is being destroyed both by the presence of large retailers on outskirts and by the effects of austerity.

People Before Profit councillors have proposed a progressive rates system which would see small struggling businesses getting a reduction in their rates while large profitable corporations would pay more.

We also propose an end to the upward only rents policy.

10. For long term strategic planning that re-vitalises town centres and creates social space that encourage community sentiment.

Larger retail chains favour development on the outskirts of towns which rely on greater use of cars.

We shall seek to reverse this policy by scrutinising such planning applications.

In particular towns, we shall also favour one or two hour free parking in order to discourage the flight of shoppers to the outskirts where parking is free.

Where there is any application for any large corporate development, we shall demand that developers fund proper notices to inform the surrounding public and enable people to attend public forums to question them and vote on possible outcomes.

11. Local Authorities should promote and develop the cultural life of their areas.

Urban space is not just for selling and buying. As neoliberal capitalism gnaws away at communities and tries to turn everything into a commodity, local authorities have a vital role to play in promoting a cultural life in their area.

They should help fund theatres, galleries, concert halls and other cultural centres and provide public spaces for social interaction beyond pubs and alcohol.

12. Local authority facilities should be opened to all those in struggle for social justice.

People Before Profit supports the campaign for a living wage. We also support resistance to cuts in public services and community centres.

Where there are legitimate struggles for social justice, People Before Profit will favour the opening up of council facilities to assist people to organise. Instead of denying activist groups access to libraries, spaces or halls under the pretext of 'public liability insurance', councils should assist the creation of spaces to enable people to organise.

13. Turn waste ground and derelict spaces over to community gardens and facilities.

During the Celtic Tiger almost all public space was taken over for commercial purposes. After the crash, there are many vacant or derelict buildings. There is also much 'waste space; as development ceases.

People Before Profit will press for the formation of community gardens on all suitable spaces. These give new opportunities to both grow our own food and build up a community spirit.

We see no reason why major buildings in towns are left empty and shall demand that, even on a temporary basis, they be turned over for community facilities

14. Remove the formalities – open up the councils to the digital age.

The procedures by which meetings are conducted are foreign to many. The use of a highly formal language and procedure creates obstacles to the involvement of the citizenry. Much of the real business that is submitted by democratically elected councillors is never reached at council meetings while the business submitted by the manager and the chairperson is always reached. We need to turn meetings around so that councillors business is dealt with first.

Meetings of the local council should be broadcast and accessible to the wider public. The votes of councillors on individual issues should be clearly recorded and made available to the public.

There should be a transparent tracking system for people to input complaints, suggestions or grievances.

15. Protect Our Environment – develop natural resources and amenities in the public interest

Encouraged by successive governments over recent years, local authorities have ignored the views of the public and favoured the interests of private developers when it comes to the development of local amenities and natural resources. They have supported the private profit-driven exploitation of resources and public assets. The public are always the last to know when it comes to development plans in their own local area. This must stop. The protection of our local environment and the needs of local communities must come first.

We will demand:

- * Real public participation and proper environmental protection in the planning and development of local areas.
- * The establishment of open, public, community and environmental forums to guide local planning and development.
- * Environmental, economic and social cost-benefit analysis of all development proposals

* The provision of adequate public open space – including, community and youth facilities, public forests, urban meadows and walking areas in all development plans and proposals.

16. Oppose all racism and discrimination

There is a growing tide of xenophobia and racism across Europe as right-wing parties tries to scapegoat migrants for an economic crisis cause by the financial elite. Migrants to Ireland also report a rise in racism. Minorities like the Traveller community are discriminated against. Refugees and asylum seekers suffer under the system of ‘direct provision’.

People Before Profit councillors pledge to champion the rights of minorities and to stand up to racism and discrimination, including institutional racism.

17. A Platform for People Power.

Given the constraint on local councils by the centralised state structures, People Before Profit fully recognise that it will be difficult to use councils to pursue our wider political agenda.

We pledge however to act always as community representatives that seek to mobilise people power to pursue issues that affect our communities.

We shall call open meetings and assemblies where appropriate and use all our political skills to advance the struggle to create a better society.

PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

MANIFESTO FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Water

Kaweah Delta Water
Water Agency Kern Water Bank Authority
Boswell Company Water Department Long Beach Water
Department of Water and Power Metropolitan Water District of
Water Utilities Orange Cove Irrigation District Otay Water District Orange County Water District Padre Dam Municipal
Water District Panoche Water District San Diego County Water Authority San Diego Water Department British academics
from the Public Services International Research Unit San Francisco Public Utilities Commission San Jose Water Company San
Luis and Delta-Mendota Water Authority Santa Clara Valley Water District Serrano Water Storage District Solano Irrigation District
Southwest Water Company Tulare Lake Basin Water Storage District Tulare Lake Drainage District Turlock Irrigation District Vallecitos Water District
Valley Center Municipal Water District Vista Irrigation District Walnut Valley Water District Westlands Water District Aurora Water Colorado Springs Utilities
Denver Water Metropolitan District Commission D.C. Water and Sewer Authority Washington Aqueduct Aqua America - Florida Hialeah Department of Water
and Sewers JEA (formerly Jacksonville Electric Authority) Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department Orlando Utilities Commission St. Petersburg Water
Resources Department Tampa Water Department Miami-Petersburg Department of Water and Sewers Atlanta Bureau of Drinking Water Elbowah Water and Sewer
Authority Aqua America - Illinois Aurora Department of Public Works Chicago Department of Water Management Illinois American Water Rockford Department of Public
Works Aqua America - Indiana Indianapolis Water Des Moines Water Works Kansas City Board of Public Utilities Louisville Water Company Baton Rouge Water Company
Jefferson Parish Water Department Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans Shreveport Office of Water and Sewerage Aqua America - Maine Anne Arundel County
Department of Public Works Baltimore Bureau of Water and Waste Water Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission Boston Water and Sewer Commission
Lynn Water and Sewer Commission Massachusetts Water Resources Authority KWI North America Detroit Water and Sewerage
Department Holland Board of Public Works Lansing Board of Water and Light
Mississippi Water Department Saint Paul Regional Water Services
Jackson Department of Public Works Aqua America - Missouri St. Louis
Water Division City Utilities of Springfield Metropolitan Utilities District City
of Nashua, New Hampshire Pennichuck Corporation Aqua America - New
Jersey Atlantic City Municipal Utilities Authority East Windsor Municipal Utilities
Authority Freehold Township Water And Sewer New Jersey American Water
Newark Department of Water and Sewer Ocean County
Municipal Utilities Authority Trenton Water Works United Passaic Valley Water Commission
York American Water Buffalo Water Authority Water Aqua America - New
New York City Department of Environmental Protection Water and Sewer
Rochester Bureau of Water and Lighting Syracuse Water Commission
Department of Public Works Yorkers Water and Sewer Authority
Aqua America - North Carolina Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities
Durham Public Works Department Greensboro Water Resources Department Raleigh
Public Utilities Department Winston-Salem Forsyth County Utilities Division Aeron Public
Utilities Bureau Aqua America - Ohio Greater Cincinnati Water Works Cleveland Division of
Water Columbus Department of Public Utilities Toledo Department of Public Utilities
Oklahoma City Department of Utilities Portland Water Bureau Aqua America - Pennsylvania
Erie Water Works Philadelphia Water Department Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority
Autoridad de Acueductos y Alcantarillados Aqua America - South Carolina Charleston
Water System Arlington Water Utilities Aqua America - Texas Austin Water Utility Corpus
Christ Water Department Dallas Water Utilities El Paso Water Utilities Fort Worth Water
Department Houston Department of Public Works and Engineering San Antonio Water
System Salt Lake City Department of Public Utilities Burlington Department of Public
Works Aqua America - Virginia Fairfax County Water Authority City of Falls Church Department
of Public Works Loudoun Water, serves the unincorporated areas of Loudoun County City
of Manassas Utilities Prince William County Service Authority Virginia American
Water Company City of Fairfax Utilities Seattle Public Utilities

Blwater
Vivendi California Department of
Water ANC Water Resources East
Bay Municipal Utility District Escondido
Utilities Fallbrook Public Utility District Fresno
Irrigation District Friant Water Authority Friant
Water Users Authority Glenn-Colusa
Irrigation District Goleta Water District
Golden State Water
Company
Grassland Water District
Hayward Water District Helix
District Irvine Ranch Water District
Conservation District Kern County
Kings River Conservation District JG
Department Los Angeles
Southern California Gasworks
Water District Padre Dam Municipal
Water District Panoche Water District San Diego County Water Authority San Diego Water Department British academics
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IT'S A HUMAN
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