

Pembrokeshire Alliance Group.

Putting the people of Pembrokeshire first.

This is an explanatory document outlining our policy objectives and vision for Pembrokeshire. We consider this document to be a discussion paper that will evolve further in the run up to the next County Council elections. We would welcome your thoughts, opinions and ideas.

About us

We are a constructive group of County Councillors who want to see Pembrokeshire County Council providing excellent quality services, prudent financial planning and good governance based on truly democratic principles. No other group in Pembrokeshire has a manifesto/guiding principles that focus purely on Pembrokeshire. We want Pembrokeshire to be seen as a beacon of good practice and ready to take a leading role within a modern Wales. We believe strongly that we must serve the people of Pembrokeshire to the best of our abilities with the needs of our communities central to all decision making.

We are not aligned to any political party. Councillors and supporters are permitted to be members of political parties providing they make their status clear at all times. We are as our title outlines an alliance of differing political shades who share common objectives for Pembrokeshire. We put Pembrokeshire before any political allegiance and want to see it remain a County run and scrutinised by its residents.

We are committed to upholding the highest standards of governance and are committed to the Nolan and Bell principles. We have outlined these in appendix 1.

Key Objectives

1. To run a County Council which is open and transparent, and which puts the needs of Pembrokeshire, and its current and future residents above the interests of Councillors, Council Officers, and the Cardiff and Westminster governments. As a general principle, to delegate more decision making power from the current Cabinet system to a larger number of Councillors and, where possible, to town and community councils. We want to see an end to the excessive pay of senior staff.
- 2). We want to encourage business, employment and all forms of economic activity especially our struggling town centres. There is no magic wand available but there is no doubt in our mind that the County Council has done very little in the last ten years to promote a vibrant economic environment.
- 3). We want to see the most vulnerable in our society given the protection and support they need.
- 4). There is an urgent need to provide affordable housing for our young people and we believe there are innovative opportunities to achieve this.

- 5). We believe in being inclusive, where all groups within the county have a voice and are given the right to be heard.

- 6). We want to see an end to the excessive pay of senior staff. A clear staffing policy with the interests of all Council staff at its centre. A balanced structure that properly remunerates all for the valuable work they do Pembrokeshire. Equally important is a sense of appreciation and of a job well done. We will seek to anticipate problems and work together constructively to find solutions.

- 7). To work with all parties to encourage growth in our economy. Capitalising on our many human and natural assets. We want all our children to have the opportunity of finding local employment commensurate with their abilities.

- 8). To formulate a fully integrated economic model for the county that plans for the future. One that builds on our obvious strengths but looks for diversification and partnership within all areas of our economy. The Council should be seen as a facilitator of economic growth within Pembrokeshire.

- 9). To encourage business, employment and all forms of economic activity in our town centres. We believe in town based regeneration schemes owned by the people of that town. We intend to provide an environment where the Council helps projects take off and grow. A council which acts as a critical friend, a provider of ideas and vigour. One that helps formulate plans and promotes their evolution over time. The Councils main role will be to make sure that all these plans fit together and integrate for the overall betterment of the county.

- 10). We believe strongly in community and promoting voluntary work, celebrating those many unsung heroes that make Pembrokeshire such a caring county.

- 11). Our education department and schools are experiencing difficult times. Our role is to promote good practice. Supporting where needed, guiding towards a future where we can all celebrate success and excellence. Our aims will always be for quality. Our children are the future and this County's future success depends upon them .

- 12). We intend to be proactive. This will lead to mistakes and times when actions do not work as anticipated. The ability to be honest will enable us to learn from these mistakes and make solid, meaningful and constructive progress.

Governance

To set up a County Council which is open and transparent, which puts the needs of Pembrokeshire residents above self interest?

To help create a positive management framework where policy decisions are taken not just by a few privileged Councillors but by the majority.

To have an equal, open and productive relationship with all stakeholders.

To formulate clear policies for Officers to follow and not simply do as they desire.

All cabinet members will present to the relevant scrutiny committee draft copies of their policy objectives on an annual basis. This will allow proper scrutiny to take place.

To redraft the Constitution of this Council to ensure that scrutiny is valued and proper democracy is actively promoted. We intend to ensure that our constitution goes far beyond that required by Welsh Government legislation. We will ensure that Councillors who are not members of a group are properly respected and encouraged to participate.

The present Committee structure will be replaced with something fit for purpose. Chairs will present reports at full council meetings and respond to members questions. This will allow all Councillors to have an input into each committee.

Overview should be replaced by seminars so committees can have the time needed to scrutinise policy thoroughly.

Committee meetings should be restructured so Officers are responding to direct questions rather than controlling events. Reports will not just be given. Each member of a committee will be expected to have read the Directors report so that proper scrutiny can take place. These meetings will in all probability be much longer than those in the past. Proper lunch and comfort breaks will be pre planned.

To eliminate patronage, we believe that Councillors should apply for all posts of responsibility in writing, explaining what they want to achieve. We want to see the most able and committed people filling these roles not the most loyal.

We believe fully in equality with shared responsibility and when times are hard equal accountability.

We fully believe in a sound financial structure that encourages sensible use of Council Tax and Government grants. The balance between services and costs will be complex in the next few years. There is no doubt that difficult decisions will have to be taken. We want to see proper consultation exercises with an emphasis on restructuring and rationalisation. Cuts will only be made in real services as a last resort. Long term security rather than short term gains will be our objective.

Economy

We want to see our Town Centre's given the help and support they need to thrive. We would achieve this by working much more closely with the traders, developers and shoppers. There is no magic wand available but there is also no doubt that the County Council has done very little in the last ten years to create a vibrant retail environment. Pembrokeshire Council has produced many fine words, but spectacularly failed to deliver.

Each of our market towns has a distinctly different character, with their own challenges and assets that have remained unrealised in the council's vision for the future. All areas will be treated equally with the intention of enabling them to realise their full potential.

Our rural areas are hampered by patchy access to broadband and mobile phone coverage, but despite this we have a wealth of small locally owned businesses and resourceful self-employed people. Our intention is to encourage rural diversification.

The county as a whole has huge tourism potential with its emerging food & drink sector, a wealth of heritage assets, a vibrant arts & crafts offer and a strong agricultural base. Yet once again, council policies have failed to fully realise this.

We want to level the playing field for small and medium sized local businesses, helping them compete better with bigger firms, safeguarding distinctiveness and keeping profits within the county wherever possible. This means creating a better business environment for financial stability, creativity and innovation. We want to help encourage and support new start up business.

We would work closely with groups such as the Federation of Small Businesses, identify start up units for small businesses established locally, and design a package of support measures for businesses in their first 5 years.

We also want to build on our heritage as a county of market towns, and develop a county-wide market strategy showcasing artisan producers of all kinds.

We want to see local town and community councils work together. There is a compelling need for urban and rural communities to work together rather than in isolation.

Affordable Housing

The issue of affordable housing within our communities needs addressing urgently. Present policies within the County and National Park have simply stopped developments taking place. We need innovative schemes like self build homes and community land trust projects using land that we have available. No such schemes are currently operational and we rely instead on housing associations supported by stealth taxes.

Ensuring a supply of good quality affordable homes in the right places, both to buy and to rent, suitable for young people, families and older people. Allowing flexibility by promoting diverse models of house building, including self-build and Community Land Trusts

Community Land Trusts offer an ideal legal framework for identifying potential housing sites, and for developing them to a high standard at low cost. A county-wide CLT could enable the county to provide the access to cheap housing, both for purchase and to rent, that our local young people need so badly. It could potentially also offer serviced plots for sale to self builders. We believe that self build schemes would be popular but realise that they will require support and we would work with partners to provide this.

General Policy

We will encourage all our children to view Pembrokeshire as an area of opportunity. To have vision and confidence to find their place within our community. We will work hard with all service providers to look after all their individual and diverse needs. To celebrate their success positively and to work carefully with others to solve problems early.

There are huge challenges in the areas of Education, Adult Social Care, Community Transport, Waste Management and Infrastructure. The Welsh Government exercises a great deal of influence in these areas and we are determined to ensure that we work constructively to obtain the best possible results in all areas.

These policy objectives have been put together rapidly and we would welcome public participation in refining them further. We do not have all the answers but we hope by the time of the next County Council elections to have carefully costed proposals to put to the electorate. We hope that people will read our objectives and decide to work with us to offer a real alternative administration. We will be looking for candidates for the next elections and urge those interested to get in touch.

It has been easy to view all politics within Pembrokeshire with a destructive mind set. We hope to change this. We ask you all to take a positive constructive stand with us. We want to move Pembrokeshire forward to be a beacon for others to follow. Our central tenant is to facilitate Pembrokeshire to become a place we can be fully proud of, where we celebrate its people, its economy and its institutions. Let's put Pembrokeshire in the news for the right reasons.

Pembrokeshire is a great place. We have so many positive and obvious resources. It is amazing that we struggle in so many ways. We intend to break away from this cycle of underachievement. We ask you to help us.

Appendix 1. Our Principles.

Abide wholeheartedly by the spirit and letter of the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by Lord Nolan in 1995 - selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership:

Selflessness – Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Integrity – Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity – In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability – Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness – Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty – Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership – Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example. Be guided by considered evidence, our real world experience and expertise, our constituencies and our consciences.

Be transparent and open in any links we have with a political party or pressure group.

Be non-discriminatory, ethical and committed to pluralism.

Make decisions transparently and openly at every stage and level of the political process, enabling people to see how decisions are made and the evidence on which they are based. Listen, consulting our communities constantly and looking for innovative solutions.

Treat political opponents with courtesy and respect, challenging them when we believe they are wrong, and agreeing with them when we believe they are right.

Resist abuses of power, patronage and promote democracy at every level.

Claim expenses, salaries and compensation openly so the public can judge the value for money of our activities.