



Labour committed to investing in the borough

The Labour group is looking to retain control of Enfield Council and build on its best-ever election result four years ago

BY SIMON ALLIN,
LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Enfield's Labour group plans to support residents hit by the cost-of-living crisis and deliver "ambitious" investment in the borough if it retains control of the council.

Labour aims to boost skills and the local economy, while it is already helping residents with a core council tax freeze as other household bills increase.

Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service ahead of the launch of the group's manifesto, council leader Nesil Caliskan criticised the Conservative government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic and the "disgrace" of the 'partygate' scandal.

She said: "At a time when we are stuck with the Conservatives nationally, we need a Labour council that is going to stand up for Enfield residents."

"I think we have demonstrated as Enfield Labour over the last couple of years, particularly with the pandemic, [that] we stepped up for Enfield residents and are there for them and their families when the Conservatives aren't. We will continue to do that, alongside some ambitious plans to deliver investment in the borough."

Cllr Caliskan said the Labour administration had frozen core council tax and would maintain its council tax support scheme, which is designed to reduce bills for those on low incomes. She added that the group was "really committed" to supporting skills and the local economy, highlighting the provision of a construction skills academy and film academy at the Meridian Water regeneration zone.

The Labour leader said her group's manifesto would also include pledges aimed at keeping Enfield safe and tackling serious youth violence following a decline in police numbers during the past few years.

Pledges for young people include maintaining the summer university programme, which offers a range of free courses and activities during the summer holidays, and supporting special educational needs provision.

To deliver a "cleaner Enfield" the group plans to maintain free bulky waste collections – after they were reintroduced last year – and speed up the rollout of CCTV



Labour councillors and candidates, including leader Nesil Caliskan (back row, fifth from left)

cameras to catch fly-tippers.

Another key pledge will be focusing on "general investment in the borough". This will include a £1 billion programme to build 3,500 more affordable homes by 2035, 40% of which are set to be family-sized units with three or more bedrooms.

The Labour leader claimed her administration had "gone beyond" pledges in the 2018 manifesto, and a promise to "keep council tax as low as possible" had been kept despite rises in previous years.

Cllr Caliskan said: "We kept it as low as possible with our objective of making sure council finances

were robust, that we were financially sound [...] and also, we did it on the back of Covid and the government not fully funding us as a local authority – having experienced £700 million of cuts.

"Had we had better funding settlements, we would have frozen or even reduced council tax."

The 2018 manifesto also contained a pledge to "finalise a new recycling site in Edmonton". Cllr Caliskan said a recycling centre was soon set to open at Edmonton EcoPark, and Labour would also look for additional facilities in the borough.

Opposition councillors have frequently

accused the Labour administration of "not listening" to residents on key issues such as the move to fortnightly waste collections and the introduction of two new low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs). Following a consultation on waste collection changes, the council chose the option least favoured by residents. In addition, the two LTNs were made permanent despite majorities of respondents to public consultations saying

the schemes had a negative impact on them.

In response, Cllr Caliskan said her administration did listen to residents and was responding to their concerns over the need for afford-

able homes, the cost of living crisis, crime and other issues. The Labour group leader described traffic schemes as "difficult to implement" and said they had to be adapted to the local area. She added: "We have to follow process and the law, which means you try something out, and then you do the consultation, and you allow people the time to provide that feedback."

In response to the feedback, Cllr Caliskan said the council was introducing exemptions for blue badge holders and carers, replacing bollards with cameras to improve access for the emergency services, and was proposing to reopen one of the

roads in the Fox Lane LTN.

In the years since Cllr Caliskan took over leadership of the council shortly following the 2018 election, a number of councillors have quit the Labour group to serve as independents, or have joined other parties, with some subsequently claiming there was a democratic deficit within the Labour group and that differences of opinion were suppressed.

Cllr Caliskan said the borough had a large Labour group and that the party was "built on people debating" and "having different views". She added: "Political parties are entities where people debate and they work things out, but ultimately we have collective responsibility, and we vote on things as a Labour group and we adhere to that collective responsibility."

The leader said Labour group meetings had become more frequent under her administration, adding "we have more engagement in our Labour group than we have ever done".

The council's draft Local Plan, published last year, has caused controversy over proposals to allow more than 6,000 homes to be built on Green Belt sites. At the same time, only half of the 10,000-home target planned for Meridian Water was included in the Local Plan, which covers the period up to 2039, because City Hall was said to be unlikely to permit the extra 5,000 homes on industrial land in the near future.

Despite this, Cllr Caliskan said Meridian Water was a 20-year plan that was "updated every single year", adding "we have to renegotiate with the mayor of London to release that strategic industrial land, and that is the right and proper thing to do."

She denied the Green Belt proposals were designed to make up for a shortfall at Meridian Water and claimed building on brownfield sites and small sites would not be enough to meet the borough's housing target.

Cllr Caliskan added: "People don't want skyscrapers. If you don't want skyscrapers, then you have got to look to build lower-density, family-sized homes with equitable space. So the choice is skyscrapers or nice homes in green space near train stations."

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