

Dear Kate,

Thank you for your letter/questionnaire of 18th April 2012.

I am standing as an Independent for Peterhead North and Rattray to address many of the issues you raise in your questions to candidates.

My published Manifesto:

I'm Stephen Calder – I've been a music teacher in Peterhead since 1977 although I worked for a few years as a Head of Music in schools in London. I'm well known in the community and have been active in many educational and social activities in the area.

Unlike some other candidates who claim to represent the "business community", I aim to represent the WHOLE community.

I've been greatly encouraged by the positive response I've had since announcing I would stand for Aberdeenshire Council. I've found this to be the most lively and exciting campaign in decades in Peterhead. Everybody has an opinion on what needs to be done and wants councillors who will do what's best for the community. There's certainly no apathy here – I meet lots of young people with great ideas and views.

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There's been a lot of promises about re-opening town centre shops, building 10 pin bowling alleys, indoor football arenas, cinemas and ice rinks. NOTHING about how it's going to be funded.

Aberdeenshire has a diminishing amount of money from central taxes – 80% of its funding comes from central taxation, only 20% from the Council Tax. To fund these projects would mean CUTS in teaching assistants in the classrooms (which the Council's already doing), CUTS for care for the elderly and wardens in sheltered housing.

I've made my pledges in my manifesto – no cuts in our education and social services care budget. Protect our children, our sick and our elderly. These are essentials for a decent caring society.

The Council can make savings without harming our basic services – energy efficiency measures, reduce the number of policy committees

– Area Committees could meet once a month instead of every three weeks for example.

We must protect the most vulnerable from being further disadvantaged by budget cuts.

Education

No cuts in provision for classroom assistants or increases in class sizes. In 2012-13 Aberdeenshire Council voted for a £1.235 million CUT in funding for primary school classroom assistants. Children only get ONE chance. Those who find difficulties in learning need solid support.

There should be a continued investment in music, drama and the arts, to enrich and widen the experience of students. Children should be taught HOW to think and to learn, not WHAT to think.

We need to maintain teacher numbers and extend community and life-long learning.

We need to look seriously to see if the school buildings in Peterhead and Buchan are all viable and fit for the 21st century.

Transport

We need proper maintenance of roads and pavements. We need to reduce road congestion by introducing car sharing schemes and protect rural bus services. We need to support planning policies that bring jobs closer to where people live – i.e. bring investment & jobs to Peterhead. We should end private monopolies in our public transport system.

Health & Caring Services

The Council needs to provide the best possible social work and other services to meet the needs of vulnerable groups and individuals - increasing provision for care for the elderly & infirmed in their homes, and for wardens in sheltered housing. We need help for those whose lives are ruined by addiction of alcohol or drugs. The test of any decent society is how it treats its most vulnerable people.

Peterhead Development Plan

Six years ago Aberdeenshire Council put out the local Development Plan for public consultation. It included a plan for expansion of our town westwards to increase the population by 50% from 18,000 to 27,000 over the next 20 years. The new development to the west of the town plans to include a new additional secondary school as well as primary schools, retail outlets and supermarkets. I responded at the time stating my concerns about the implications these developments had for the existing Town Centre. In the coming four years we need councillors who will scrutinise every application and proposal to ensure that the town centre is not adversely affected.

We need to look to the future for modern solutions to the town's problems – not always hark back to the past “when I was a kid...”. We will never get back greengrocers like Leslie's, electronic shops like Walter Allan's. Supermarket and on-line shopping are here to stay and part of modern living. This is a structural change in shopping habits we just have to live with.

We also have to realise that government austerity measures have hit people hard in their pockets. There just isn't the money going round there was a few years ago.

But what we must do is look to the future for a new kind of town centre – built on services and specialist shops which can't be catered for by supermarkets or on-line shopping.

We also need to look for encouraging industries of the future – especially in renewable energy projects. Peterhead can be at the forefront of this.

Local Democracy

In the last couple of weeks we've seen things which should worry anyone in Peterhead concerned with local democracy, the way it is conducted in certain quarters. Not just promises of grandiose projects that can never be delivered. But also the intervention by powerful interest groups hoping to influence our election. I call this the 'Elephant in the Room' in this campaign. Interest groups with the

finance to take out full-page local newspaper adverts hoping to influence our election.

If I am elected I promise I will REFUSE to be intimidated by tycoons trying to influence planning decisions. Each planning application must be examined on its merit – irrespective of how rich and powerful the applicant is. That goes for Donald Trump the same as anyone else.

People First

There won't be an overall majority of ANY party on Aberdeenshire Council after May 3rd. I will not support any budget which makes our community, people and public services poorer. I will not support cuts in our essential public services or jobs, or privatisation of our services. I believe our public services should be provided on the basis of need, not private greed.

Put the PEOPLE first. Care for our elderly and sick. Educate our young. Vote for a POSITIVE choice for Peterhead. Vote for a GENUINE independent who is willing to work with any other party for the good of our people.

Vote for Stephen Calder as your No 1 vote on May 3rd – the REAL independent.

As you can see from my Manifesto I fully support UNISON's campaign to protect public services, to oppose any privatisation of key council services. I will vote and campaign to protect standards in social care.

I will work to ensure that levels of payments for services for elderly and disabled people are not increased to prohibitive levels.

I believe all Council staff, as well as those working for Council subcontractors, should be paid the Living Wage.

I oppose the current Administration's cuts for classroom assistants in the current financial year - cuts I believe of around £1.23 million. I believe classroom assistants and support staff are not a luxury but an absolute necessity for the proper education of our children.

I believe the Council should do all in its powers to alleviate the effects of the Government's cuts in council tax benefit, housing benefit and working tax credits - hitting some of the poorest and most vulnerable in our society.

I do NOT believe it is fair for council staff to shoulder the burden for the crisis caused by bankers, speculators, and some of the richest in society. I do NOT support the current freeze on council workers' pay.

I fully support the Council negotiating a Green Workplace agreement with trade unions to help meet climate change targets.

As you can see, I'm 100% behind your campaign.

Yours sincerely and fraternally,

Stephen Calder

Independent Candidate

Peterhead North & Rattray