

Mebyon Kernow –
The Party for Cornwall

Putting
Cornwall
First

**Manifesto for the 2013
Cornwall Council Elections**



It is a difficult time for local government in Cornwall. Funding cuts from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition mean that, between 2011 and 2015, Cornwall Council will lose £546 million in spending power. This is having a devastating impact on the ability of the unitary authority to deliver services, and this is already adversely affecting the elderly, the young, those in need, and the ordinary working people of Cornwall.

Councillors from the Coalition parties are largely in denial about the harm being caused by the policies of their own parties. In February, a modest 2% increase in council tax was proposed to partially off-set the massive damage being caused by cuts from their government. But Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors – in order to please their MPs with a “no council tax increase” headline for their election leaflets – teamed up to vote through yet more damaging cuts to adult social care, children’s services and localism, cutting over 100 jobs.

It is shameful that the Coalition parties are more interested in taking instructions from head office and playing political games, rather than serving Cornwall.

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall is different to the mainstream London-based political parties. We are based here in Cornwall, we have no vested interests and are not funded by big business. We also have no political masters in London to please and we will always fight for what is best for the people of Cornwall.

In the elections to Cornwall Council on May 2nd, please use your vote to demand a better deal for Cornwall by electing Mebyon Kernow councillors.



Party Leader
Mebyon Kernow –
the Party for Cornwall

1. Working to restore faith in local government

Local government must be founded upon the bedrock of public service and MK members have an extremely proud record of working hard for their communities.

Mebyon Kernow believes that local government should serve the best interests of local communities and help residents take charge of what is happening in their towns, villages and parishes. But it is a sad fact that local government is increasingly just an agency of central government, applying London-centric diktats (public sector cuts, privatisation of public services, unsustainable planning policies, etc) onto the people of Cornwall.

The imposition of the unitary authority on Cornwall by local Liberal Democrats and the last Labour Government further ripped the heart out of local government, when locally accountable district councils were replaced by the unitary authority.

Cornwall Council is dysfunctional and increasingly over-centralised on Truro. Localism is a sham and there is a lack of parity in service provision across Cornwall, putting numerous town and parish councils under terrible pressure.

- MK councillors will each be a strong and passionate champion for their local area and Cornwall as a whole.
- MK councillors will work hard to re-establish confidence in local government by seeking to provide good quality public services across the whole of Cornwall, in each and every community.
- MK councillors will strive to protect the best interests of town and parish councils in their dealings with Cornwall Council.
- MK councillors will continue to campaign for greater self-government for Cornwall and a new democratic settlement. This will include a legislative Cornish Assembly, at least four principal authorities and properly empowered town and parish councils.

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2. Protecting public services

The present economic crisis was caused by an over-heating housing market, the failure to regulate the financial sector, a credit bubble and irresponsible lending. But the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition is wielding an ideological axe to turn a crisis caused by the private sector into a crisis for public services throughout the United Kingdom.

The savage cuts of the Coalition are having a devastating impact on local government, the National Health Service, policing and a wide host of public bodies, while their determination to privatise public services, healthcare and education is destructively undoing the very basis of British society.

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Cuts to local government have been disproportionately high and will equate to a massive £546 million drop in spending for the period 2011-2015. But these have been “supported” by the Conservative leadership of Cornwall Council who

have failed to robustly oppose central government cuts.

Central government and big business are circling and using the cuts as a cloak to privatise local government services. The Conservative-led Council has rebranded itself as a commissioning authority. It even attempted a “joint venture” privatisation of a massive range of council services including benefits, council tax, payroll, IT support, libraries and one-stop-shops; before proceeding with a smaller privatisation. All these proposals were resolutely opposed by MK.

- MK councillors will continue to stand up for Cornwall and strongly oppose the excessive and damaging cuts of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition.
- MK councillors understand that, in these difficult economic times, Cornwall needs decent public services more than ever to support one and all – including the young, the elderly, the sick, the less-well-off and those in search of work.
- MK councillors will continue to oppose the sell-off of council services, and will seek to protect publicly-owned land from “asset stripping.”
- MK councillors will continue to oppose the privatisation of National Health Service and other public services, as well as the academisation of both mainstream and specialist education, and introduction of unaccountable “free schools.”

3. Winning fair funding for Cornwall

For too many years, Cornwall has had a raw deal from Westminster. Hospitals, schools and our vital public services have received less funding than other parts of the United Kingdom. This situation has been greatly worsened by the cuts of the Coalition government.

Mebyon Kernow is demanding a Commission to investigate (i) the full extent of Government under-funding of Cornwall and (ii) the needs-based funding requirement for Cornwall, just as the recent Holtham Commission (organised by the Welsh Assembly) found that Wales is under-funded by £300 million a year.

- MK councillors will continue to pressure central government and London-based political parties to back our call for a Commission to ensure Cornish communities get their fair share of central government funding to fund our vital public services.

“Mebyon Kernow is demanding a Commission to investigate the full extent of Government under-funding of Cornwall.”

4. Protecting the less-well-off and the vulnerable

Mebyon Kernow is committed to a just and fair society. We believe effective public intervention is needed to combat poverty, tackle social deprivation and fight for the disadvantaged, and to tackle ills in Cornish society, such as social deprivation, unemployment, low wages and poor housing.

But the damaging impact of the Coalition's savage cuts on communities, families and individuals, cannot be over-stated. Cuts to local government and welfare are disproportionately high and falling hardest upon the poorest in society, who are struggling to make ends meet.

Funding for social care, social housing and basic community services have been slashed while changes to council tax benefit / housing benefit entitlements, will further hurt those that can least afford it.

The Coalition is undermining the fairness traditionally seen to be at the heart of British society. It is sacking police officers, teachers and health workers, cutting benefits for the disabled and forcing thousands to rely on food banks, while giving tax cuts to millionaires and wasting millions on nuclear weapons.

- MK councillors will fight to protect funding for programmes and initiatives which seek to protect and enhance the living standards for those in need and the less-well-off.
- MK councillors will work with local community groups and support the vital work of the voluntary sector in Cornwall.
- MK councillors will continue to campaign for a living wage for local workers and support initiatives to increase the wages for the lowest paid at Cornwall Council, which would be met by reductions in pay for those at the top.
- MK councillors will continue to campaign for an end to the inequitable council tax and its replacement with more progressive local taxation based on income, with the rich paying their fair share.

“Effective public intervention is needed to combat poverty, tackle social deprivation and fight for the disadvantaged.”

5. Safeguarding the Cornish economy

Mebyon Kernow is committed to improving Cornwall's economic performance, helping people to provide a better future for themselves and their families, whilst protecting our exceptional natural environment.

But the Cornish economy continues to lag behind that of the rest of the United Kingdom. Recent improvements were underpinned by EU funding, but since the economic downturn Cornwall's economic performance has slipped back faster than other parts of the UK. Cornwall's GDP is now 72% of the EU average (latest available figures for 2009). This is a lower than Slovakia and Slovenia, and also does not yet record the adverse impact of the cuts of the Coalition.

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Mebyon Kernow believes that Cornwall Council needs to play a major role in securing much higher levels of both public and commercial capital investment to improve the skills and productivity of the local workforce, infrastructure, housing stock and public services.

Particular commitments include increased local production to meet local needs, more value-adding processes within Cornwall, the greater use of natural resources, investment in Green technologies such as energy efficiency, investment in high technology industries such as research into renewable energy projects, and the enhancement of higher education facilities within Cornwall.

- MK councillors will challenge Cornwall Council to develop a long-term strategy for a sustainable economy to deliver prosperity for Cornwall.
- MK councillors will lobby central government to ensure significant match-funding for investment from EU structural funds.
- MK councillors will fight to ensure that economic development is controlled by democratically elected politicians, not the unelected and unaccountable Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership.
- MK councillors will also oppose all plans for regional pay presently being promoted by central government and other bodies.

6. Delivering pro-Cornwall planning policies

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall supports well-balanced planning policies which protect the Cornish countryside, while allowing appropriate developments that meet the needs of local communities (ie. proper local-needs housing).

But the approach of central government with their “presumption in favour” of development is turning Cornwall into a “developers’ paradise.” They are sanctioning unchecked and damaging development, with developers lining up to ride roughshod over local communities.

The Conservative leadership of Cornwall Council has refused to stand up to central government on this issue and has itself actively promoted a number of large-scale unsustainable developments.

MK councillors were at the forefront of the campaign for the Cornwall Local Plan to have a significantly lower housing target for the next twenty years (2010-2030), than the 48,000-54,000 housing units variously proposed by council officers. The majority of Conservative, Independent and Liberal Democrat councillors finally voted for a housing target of 42,250 housing units for the

next twenty years, higher than the figures supported by MK councillors.

Mebyon Kernow councillors have also consistently opposed unacceptable developments such as the incinerator at St Dennis and the “park and ride” expansion to the east of Truro, as well as excessive levels of growth in Bodmin, Camborne, Falmouth, Newquay and St Austell.

- MK councillors will press for the Cornwall Local Plan to be revisited and revised to include stronger policies to protect the best interests of local communities.
- MK councillors will continue to argue for a lower and more sustainable housing target, with development geared to principally meet local needs.
- MK councillors will continue to argue for planning policies that protect the Cornish countryside and town centres, from out-of-town developments.

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7. Delivering proper local-needs housing

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall believes that local families have a fundamental right to good quality housing, both for purchase and rent, in their own communities and at a price that is truly affordable.

But an out-of-control housing market means house prices in Cornwall have rocketed, leaving a clear mismatch between local wages and house prices. Private rented properties have become extremely expensive and getting a “council house” is but a distant dream for the many thousands in housing need.

What is more, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government has massively slashed investment in affordable housing, replaced the social rent model with a new “affordable rent” model that sets rents at 80% of the inflated cost of private sector rents, reinvigorated the “right-to-buy” of council houses and made regressive changes to housing benefit arrangements for single people.

Mebyon Kernow is campaigning hard on this issue and is challenging central government for a major rethink of its approach to affordable housing. It is also campaigning for legislation to stop and then reverse the spread of second homes.

- MK members believe that the planning system should focus on helping provide local-needs affordable housing – not large amounts of open market housing to benefit speculative builders.
- MK members consider that small-scale housing developments dispersed across Cornwall, which meet local need, should be prioritised.
- MK members will focus on the development of council houses as a priority, and also support initiatives to increase the number of proper affordable homes through registered providers, charities and Community Land Trusts.

“MK is campaigning for legislation to stop and then reverse the spread of second homes.”

8. Protecting the Cornish environment

The threat of climate change is the defining issue of modern politics and the world is facing serious environmental threats. All nations around the World must meet this challenge head-on and put the issues of sustainability at the heart of decision-making.

Mebyon Kernow understands that unsustainability is truly global. It must be tackled through action at worldwide as well as local levels.

Cornwall Council needs to develop an Environmental Action Plan to set out actions to reduce greenhouse emissions and develop a truly sustainable, low-carbon economy across the Duchy. MK is particularly determined to make Cornwall more self-sufficient, with greater resilience in terms of food production, energy production and supply networks.

MK is also campaigning to protect Cornwall's green fields from inappropriate and unsustainable development.

- MK councillors will continue to campaign for a Green New Deal for Cornwall that creates high-quality jobs in environmental sectors through initiatives such as an enhanced programme of home insulation, green electricity through renewable energy schemes and the development of a green integrated transport system.
- MK councillors will continue to support moves to build a decentralised and sustainable economy which provides local needs as locally as possible, invests in local food production, and reduces levels of long-distance travel and dependence on imports.
- MK members will continue to argue for a zero waste strategy, which invests in the radical reduction of waste and the increased re-use and recycling, eliminating landfill and incineration.

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9. Making Cornwall Council democratic

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall is committed to open and inclusive decision-making at all levels of governance.

The unitary authority has 123 elected councillors, but most key decisions have been taken by ten councillors on the governing Cabinet. Many of these have not been in the best interests of Cornwall or even in-line with the views of the wider Council.

Too many “informal” meetings have also been held behind closed doors, with the majority of elected representatives and all opposition councillors excluded.

In December, Mebyon Kernow councillors put forward a proposal for the Council to adopt a “committee” system of governance. This was voted down by the majority of majority of Conservative, Independent and Liberal Democrat councillors, who opted to continue with a revised form of Cabinet governance.

- MK councillors will continue to campaign for a more democratic Cornwall Council and the introduction of a more collegiate committee form of governance.
- MK councillors will strive for greater openness at all levels of Cornwall Council and for all formal meetings to be held in public.
- MK councillors will seek to rein in the power of senior officers of Cornwall Council.
- MK councillors will also support the promotion of participatory democracy events in local communities.

“MK is committed to open and inclusive decision-making at all levels of governance.”

10. Winning greater recognition for Cornwall

Mebyon Kernow exists to win greater recognition for the historic nation of Cornwall and the rights of its people. It is leading the campaign to win greater powers for Cornwall through the creation of our own legislative Cornish Assembly.

MK members work hard to protect Cornwall's unique identity, its language, traditions and its distinct constitutional position. They have been instrumental in numerous campaigns including those for increased signage in the Cornish language, and for the Cornish people to be protected through the Framework Convention on National Minorities. They have also played leading roles in the fight against Coalition plans for a Devonwall parliamentary seat and the "Pasty Tax."

- MK councillors will represent the only political party campaigning for the recognition of Cornwall as a distinct national community for all forms of governance and administration.
- MK members will support increased investment in the Cornish language (Kernewek) and all aspects of Cornish culture and heritage.
- MK members will continue to call for a full Inquiry into the Duchy of Cornwall and Cornwall's ambiguous constitutional relationship with the Crown, and the contradictions between our constitutional status and current administrative arrangements.

"Mebyon Kernow is leading the campaign to win greater powers for Cornwall through the creation of our own legislative Cornish Assembly."







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