



# ***The Croydon Assembly***

# **Manifesto 2016**

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## Be part of the Croydon Assembly!

The Croydon Assembly provides a voice for the local community, trade unions, campaign groups and anti-austerity parties to speak out against the attacks on their living standards, public services and rights.

We are also involved in planning for a fairer, more democratic, more equal future.

Working Groups discuss the creation of new policies for housing, education, the economy, the environment, the NHS, welfare, pensions and representation.

An initiative of the Croydon TUC, our Assembly has met three times – in November 2014 and in June and November 2015. All three were well attended with prominent, national speakers leading off a full and open debate.

Now we are presenting our Manifesto, bringing together the views and policies of our working groups to provide us with a guide, not only to defend our communities, but to build a fairer more democratic society.

Please join us and take part in the work of the Croydon Assembly, so that together we can show that another way is possible.

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## Introduction

Our first draft manifesto, published in November 2015, was in response to a general election that saw a Conservative government come to power with the support of fewer than 25% of people entitled to vote.

Despite this lack of a democratic mandate, the Tories have launched a fierce onslaught against working people. An emergency budget has brought more austerity, harsher attacks on public services, continuation of wage freeze, further cuts in benefits, particularly for the disabled, and a planned reduction in tax credits for most families.

The government has pushed ahead with new laws to weaken the ability of trade unionists to take strike action in defence of jobs, wages and working conditions and to limit the funds available to the unions for organisation and political work. The Housing Bill spells the destruction of social housing and takes away the right of tenure for existing tenants.

A systematic weakening of a publicly-funded National Health Service continues apace while the scapegoating of migrants, Muslim and other communities is official policy. Attacks on state education are mounting.

The role of the Croydon Assembly is not only to oppose government actions, but also to mobilise our communities by discussing, planning and proposing alternative policies that put people before profit and aim for a fairer, more democratic society.

We were encouraged by the hundreds of thousands who rallied to the debates in Scotland over independence, and to the mass movement that sprung up around Jeremy Corbyn's campaign for Labour leader.

We saw how the government was forced to retreat over tax credits. Disabled people are fighting back against vicious attacks on their living standards. Older people are refusing to allow the Tories to play the generation game, of alienating youth from pensioners. Across the country citizens are opposing the closure of libraries and struggling against cuts in local services. The widespread support given to junior doctors indicates the determination of all communities to defend the National Health Service.

The Croydon Assembly must join with similar organisations, springing up across the country, contributing to that fight back, but also participating in the debate as to a society and democracy that will represent and answer the needs of our communities.

Our manifesto provides a guide to campaigning for a new way forward. We cannot afford to wait until 2020, in the hope that another general election will come to our rescue. The devastation inflicted by then will be hard to repair. We should work with others to remove the Tories as soon as possible.

Ted Knight

Chair, Croydon Assembly

## Thanks

Thanks to Croydon TUC and affiliated trade unions, in particular the Communication Workers Union and the National Union of Teachers, for the support, funding and services provided to the Croydon Assembly.

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## Democratise the UK economy

Eight years after the crash, the UK economy remains unbalanced, undemocratic and unequal. The financial sector still predominates over purposeful economic activity and the banks are largely unreformed. A new housing bubble could induce a repeat of the financial meltdown.

The UK is more unequal than ever before in its history after six years of enforced austerity aimed at transferring the burden of the crisis on to the back of those least able to afford it. The wealthiest 10% of households held 56% of all net financial assets in 2008. By 2014 the proportion of the nation's wealth in the hands of this group had risen to 65%. Meanwhile, zero hours contracts, public sector pay freezes and cuts in benefits leave most working people poorer than they were before the crash.

Various private-owned hedge funds, corporations and super-rich individuals inevitably acting in their own interests, now control economic affairs. So we need to democratise our economy from top to bottom if we want to create a more equal, fairer society. We need democratic economic rights created by government. These should include:

- Government borrowing to invest in infrastructure in the public interest. Projects should include a million new council homes, a major expansion of renewable energy and the building of a high speed rail network. These plans will create employment, increase tax revenues and save on social security spending
- A land value tax. In the UK today, over two-thirds of the land is owned by just 0.3% of people. Since the value of the land is created collectively, resultant land values should be collectively captured through an annual tax set at a proportion of its value.

Taming the global financial system is an essential prerequisite of building a more stable economy which acts in the public interest. We should campaign for:

- The Bank of England to have a new role as a public investment bank under democratic control, with a focus on creating full employment. The Bank of England could also offer finance to public institutions for investment
- Nationalising the entire high street banking sector (through swapping Treasury bonds for shares) to create a co-operative banking system

Tax evasion and tax avoidance costs the UK about £120 billion a year, which could pay for a whole range of public services now being slashed by the Tories. At the centre of this web of tax havens is the City of London run by the undemocratic Corporation of London. Businesses get 32,000 votes while the 9,000 residents get the usual one vote each. It is time its powers were abolished.

Tax avoidance by global corporations undermines government finances all over the world. Ikea, for example, is accused of avoiding over £770 million in taxes. Google cut a ludicrous deal with the Treasury which left the corporation laughing all the way to the bank.

We should:

- Take on the UK's tax havens – the crown dependencies like Jersey and the Cayman Islands. These corrupt island nations could be stopped by the UK, their sponsor, at any point
- Work with other countries to pass laws requiring country-by-country reporting or to act through larger bodies like the EU to create true global standards to stop governments being robbed of their tax revenues.

We should also consider some form of capital controls. If we elect a government, shouldn't it control our currency rather than billionaire speculators or the equally unaccountable bond markets?

The US economist James Tobin advocated a tax on speculative financial transactions to make them unattractive. This has since been rebranded as the Robin Hood tax. Today, a group of nations is trying to build global agreement for a financial transactions tax to deter speculative activity. A number of EU countries support the initiative. Croydon Assembly says:

- The UK government should back the Tobin Tax plan so that speculators are deterred from speculating against the currency or engaging in risky financial transactions that helped create the 2008 crash.

If we aspire to a new democratic economy it must be accompanied by a new set of democratic rights, including the right to public or co-operative ownership.

We should campaign for:

- Alternative models of public ownership. When the railways are brought back into public ownership they could be managed by a tri-partite board consisting equally of national and local government, rail workers, passengers and industry representatives
- The right to buy-out. Corporate owners often make decisions in their interests that are in direct conflict with the public interest and the

workers' interests. So workers should be given the right to buy too. If workers can raise the necessary funds they should have the right to buy out owners (with government subsidies to encourage)

- The right to co-operativise. Another option would be to give workers the right to cooperativise their company – in other words to transfer the company from private ownership to co-operative. This could operate through a majority vote of workers. Current owners could be compensated by the issuance of Treasury. Day-to-day operation would be managed co-operatively by the workers.

Socio-economic inequality has been rising to unprecedented levels, with a massive increase in wage differentials – the top 1% now receiving 14% of national income with workers' wages falling by over 5% since 2010 – and a corresponding increase in wealth disparity. Such inequalities damage social cohesion, increasing crime and mental ill-health, stifling opportunities for the poorest.

We demand such inequalities be tackled by:

- redistribution to the poorest households and ending the poverty trap, which may include providing a Citizens Income
- a more progressive income tax structure and progressive corporation tax
- effective laws against tax avoidance, with stiff penalties enforced
- a Living Wage for all employees and an end to zero hours contracts
- a maximum earnings ratio of 10:1 within organisations.

## Creating local jobs and affordable housing

The local economy is being fundamentally changed by developers and public expenditure cuts. The luxury shops proposed for the new Whitgift Centre, the reduction in office jobs and the conversion of office blocks to housing, means that there are fewer opportunities for new businesses to get started. While the Croydon Tech City movement has been creating lots of digital businesses, they are small scale employers.

A large number of people go out of, and a lot of people come into Croydon to work. There has been a growth of low paid jobs. The welcome Living Wage policy of the council is counterbalanced by the reduction in 600 jobs from the council's workforce because of the government cuts in funding for the year from April 2016. The Croydon Assembly calls for a fundamental change of direction on the local economy.

### **Construction and green industry jobs**

Local authorities should:

- Only work with private sector companies which pay at least the Living Wage, recognise trade unions, not use zero hours contracts, and support skills development programmes such as apprenticeships
- Only use building contractors which recognise trade unions, have not been involved in blacklisting trade union activists, pay trade union recognised wage rates, fully comply with health and safety requirements, and have apprenticeship programmes that take on local young people
- Establish direct labour building departments to carry out local housing and public service building projects with in-built apprenticeships
- Be required to adopt a public plan showing the types of construction job skill sets needed in approved building developments, the timetable when they will need to be utilised in the construction phase, and the number of local people who will need to be trained or re-trained for those jobs.

The government should give priority to job creation in the green industries, including in manufacturing solar panels and increasing waste recycling, including commercial waste, and increase support to the development of social enterprise.

The high streets of Croydon are increasingly dominated by betting shops, fast food shops and other shop uses which local people oppose. Croydon Council Labour Group should:

- Withdraw the council from its closed partnerships with private developers and end the growth of the Croydon corporate state
- Regularly consult with the local labour movement, community and voluntary organisations to discuss what the local economic and housing needs and priorities are
- Establish district committees of councillors and local community representatives to oversee the work of council officers and the budget for each district centre, with priorities on protection and promotion of local employment schemes
- Undertake an urgent study into the particular problems faced by the groups most prone to unemployment with a view to positive assistance to helping those who can into work, especially in the construction, digital and green sectors
- Undertake an urgent study on the skills needed by young people to fill a range of vocational and professional jobs
- Negotiate for the ring-fencing for its residents of jobs being created in Croydon
- Undertake a publicly-open scrutiny review into the economic effects of the Croydon Council Urban Regeneration Vehicle (CCURV) project with a view to either turning it to more positive uses as a vehicle that will provide employment workspace that is affordable to SMEs, start-up and social economy businesses, or to wind it up.

### **Meeting local housing need**

Homelessness is on the increase. London now has 50,000 households living in temporary accommodation. There was a 77% increase in homelessness acceptances between 2010 and 2014, reversing a decline that had been in evidence since 2005. A report for London Councils found that the likely cost of temporary accommodation across London in 2014/15 was close to £663m. Councils had to stump up just over one quarter of that cost, or £170m from their own funds.

Unsurprisingly, London has seen the largest growth in rents anywhere in the country since 2007 with rents 34% higher than their pre-recession record. Between 2007 and today the average Londoner has seen rent rise from £966 to £1,295 a month. Young teachers are spending more than half of their take-home pay on housing, and high prices combined with several years of pay freezes

mean almost one in 10 in London are still living with parents after five years in the profession.

Few doubt that the anti-council housing measures in the Housing Bill currently going through Parliament will worsen the situation for Londoners. Nearly 113,000 council homes could be sold off across England to help finance the government's plans to extend the right-to-buy scheme. Councils will be expected to sell-off the most expensive homes when they become vacant to fund the extension of the right to buy to 1.3 million housing association tenants. This could cost councils £1.2bn a year and make it impossible to replace lost homes.

If household income exceeds £40,000 in London or £30,000 outside the capital, social housing tenants will be expected to pay at or near market rents. If they are new council tenants, the local authority will be required to give them a fixed term tenancy of between two and five years instead of a permanent one.

In Croydon, most of the new homes being built, especially in the developers' new tower blocks in the town centre are not meeting local housing needs. They are also not affordable. Legislation should be amended to make it a requirement that all new housing developments submitted for planning approval have to show how they meet local need as assessed by the relevant local authority. VAT should be abolished for renovation projects to give a level playing field with new build.

There should be more provision for new build housing designed for the needs of the elderly and disabled, with elderly and disabled people being consulted on the design. We should campaign to:

- Ensure that any proceeds of 'the right to buy' are invested in building new homes on a one to one basis
- Give the owners of local authority, social and affordable housing a right not to sell
- Create a fund that enables local authorities to assist non-residential business users of former housing to move into office space above shops or into empty office blocks, and to release the buildings back into housing use by the authorities.

Owners of empty housing should be forced to bring them back into use or have them compulsorily purchased at a low price if they have been empty for a year or more other than due to absence due to work or sickness.

## ***Protecting Tenants***

We should campaign for:

- the introduction of a national private landlord and lettings agents' licensing scheme, end subsidies for buy-to-let, re-introduce private rent controls, end short-term rental contracts, and empower local authorities to purchase without compensation properties owned by landlords found guilty of infringing repair requirements and tenants rights
- The reintroduction of security of tenure for private, local authority, social and affordable housing tenants
- Rent controls for private tenancies and end the enforced rises in council and social housing rents.

## ***Planning Laws***

Planning legislation should be amended to:

- Improve the ability of local communities to be involved in decision making and to appeal against decisions they oppose, including major developments, loss of open space and school playing fields
- End the conversion of offices to residential without planning permission to ensure that room sizes meet planning requirements
- Increase the enforcement powers of local authorities in respect of infringements of planning legislation by enabling them to refuse to validate planning applications until any enforceable infringements are rectified, supported by adequate funding
- Improve the levels of internal and external noise insulation in residential blocks of flats.

## ***Action by Croydon Council***

Croydon Council Labour Group should:

- Regularly consult with local labour movement, community and voluntary organisations to discuss what housing needs and priorities are
- Establish district committees of councillors and local community representatives to oversee the work of council officers and the budget for each district centre with priorities on the nature of house building, conversion and extensions.

## **A national plan for education**

Dogma driven policies of the established political parties, constant meddling, changes in the curriculum, and an oppressive inspection system have created an environment in education that is detrimental to the future of this country.

We propose the creation of a National Plan for Education that establishes a clear framework for the provision of a service for all stages of life from infancy to full maturity. It will define the roles and responsibilities of all educational establishments from pre-school to adult institutions. Particular attention must be paid to ensuring that the welfare and well being of pupils and students is safeguarded.

- The school health service must be restored to prominence
- Regular health checks including dental examinations and other services such as counselling should be rights in schools and colleges
- Furthermore, free school meals and milk should be made available as part of the commitment to welfare and safeguarding.

### ***Democracy in education***

Our demand recognises that responsibility for implementing the National Plan at a local level will rest with a body representative of relevant stakeholders and will include elected council members, teachers, parents and students.

- Essential partners with the Department of Education must include the local authorities and the trade unions, not only those representing teachers, lecturers and support staff, but those involved in industry and commerce
- Pupil and teacher involvement should be increased so they see that they have a role and can make a contribution.

Our demands for action will restore the trust and confidence of teachers, pupils and students, parents and local authorities that successive governments have systematically undermined by the application of free enterprise, neo-liberal policies.

Our coherent National Plan provides a wider vision of learning opportunities allowing for each person maximising their potential. Meritocracy will replace the entrenched privilege that is hampering progress.

### ***Increase funding***

To underpin our proposals for change there must be a substantial increase in funding for education. The country currently spends proportionally far less of GDP on education than countries like Cuba and Venezuela in Latin America and Finland in Europe. Spending on defence in particular should be diverted into education to match the priority given by the three countries referred to. Higher levels of investment will:

- Rectify the damage caused by the government cuts that have hit all sectors of education from early years provision through to the post-16 sectors
- Allow for new buildings, improvement of existing buildings and better provision for sport and the arts
- Enable a reduction in class size so that pupils and students can benefit from a greater amount of individual attention that teachers will be able to provide
- Restore adult education as lifelong learning opportunities.

### ***End the school places crisis***

The mismanagement of education has created a shortage of school places in many parts of the country. Government policies have resulted in widespread distress and anxiety. The right of parents to have their offspring taught in the nearest school to their home has been curtailed.

- Local authorities' power to finance the building of new schools to cater for rising demand must be restored
- The key function of local authorities to ensure that sufficient numbers of school places are available in every community must be reintroduced.

### ***Teacher shortages***

Along with the provision of enough school places to meet demand, the shortage of teachers must be addressed. The decline in the number of applicants who wish to join the profession and the number of those who leave teaching at early stages in their careers must be reversed.

The current workload on teachers (60 hours a week for many) is placing strain on teachers and adds to the discontent arising from inadequate pay and pension arrangements. These are deterrents to those considering entry to the profession.

- Measures must be put in place that cut bureaucracy and end unnecessary accountability measures
- A fair system for rewarding teachers for their professional commitments both for their salaries and pension rights should be restored
- The right of every child and young person to be taught by a qualified teacher should be safeguarded. All those who enter the classroom should have undergone a training route that equips them with the skills and knowledge to properly educate pupils
- Only when there is proof of this should the qualification to teach be awarded. Furthermore, those who teach need to update and develop their skills and knowledge throughout their career
- Improved arrangements for teacher training should be made. We should give back university education departments their former role in preparing entrants to the profession
- Schools should be able to acquire supply teachers from a central local pool, cutting out fee-charging agencies.

Carefully structured courses providing graduate and post-graduate qualifications in education have been replaced by “on the job” schemes. Participants are often not properly prepared for facing classes of pupils. There is an urgent need for this to be addressed.

### ***Access to education***

Within the post-16 sector, colleges and universities have suffered financially as part of government policy. This has led to courses no longer being available and employers imposing zero hour contracts, casualisation and fixed term contracts on staff.

- Access to education at the post-16 level if we are to achieve our aims must be without restriction
- Financial support for post-16 students at sixth form colleges and at universities must be made available
- Restrictions introduced by the Blairite government, since extended, that place high fees and debt creating loans rather than grants place obstacles for many. This is intolerable.

### ***Inclusive Education***

Inclusive education is one of the fundamental ways we can eliminate disability discrimination and build a society that values everyone regardless of impairment. We endorse the demands of the Alliance for Inclusive Education which are:

- All disabled learners have the legal right to attend mainstream courses in mainstream educational settings
- All disabled learners have the legal right to individualised support
- Educational buildings to be made accessible to all disabled learners
- All mainstream courses curricula are accessible to and inclusive of disabled learners
- All educational assessment and accreditation are inclusive
- Disability equality training is compulsory for all educational professionals and staff.

### ***End fragmentation***

State education in Britain has been fragmented with the introduction of academies and free schools. The franchising of schools, the outsourcing of education services and the restrictions on local authorities driven by free enterprise dogma of successive governments has made schools less inclusive and accessible. We call for:

- The integration of existing academies and free schools along with the public schools into an all encompassing state education system
- All schools to be community schools so that the segregation of pupils on the basis of religion will no longer occur
- Ending the privatisation and fragmentation of the education service.

### ***Accountability***

Current practice imposes on schools a narrow system whereby schools are made accountable via the limited criteria arising from testing and results, leading all to become exam factories. This stifles creativity and flexibility within schools and creates competition rather than cooperation between schools.



We advocate a new approach to accountability:

- Local authorities will replace Ofsted and will be charged with supporting schools in their development, encouraging accurate school and college self-evaluation and the sharing of good practice amongst them
- Parents, teachers and community representatives have to be involved in the process at a local level with a remit of ensuring that high quality provision is made in every setting.

## **Free the National Health Service from market forces**

Our National Health Service is in crisis. The Tory government is imposing a new contract on junior doctors who have taken strike action to defend the NHS. Staff morale is at an all-time low. Many trusts are running a massive deficit, largely due to the costs of Private Finance Initiative funding. Contracting out and privatisation is undermining the whole concept of universal.

Croydon Assembly says that the National Health Service (NHS) must be publically accountable, publically funded through general taxation with publically-provided universal comprehensive health care, free at the point of need. To achieve this, we have to:

- Remove all private healthcare from the NHS
- Ensure that the National Health Service is free from all “marketisation”, both internally and externally
- Provide a publicly-owned pharmaceutical manufacturing corporation which would supply a range of generic medicines for the NHS and work with universities to research new drug treatments. This corporation would sell generic medicines for profit, but at a reasonable cost to developing world countries, to help alleviate suffering
- End hospital closures and increase bed provision to meet the national need
- Compulsorily renationalise without compensation all NHS premises, for NHS use. Then and only then, cancel any Private Finance Initiative (PFI) or Public Private Partnership (PPP) related debt
- Expand primary care services for example general practitioners, dentists, district nurses and occupational physiotherapists
- Scrap all fees and prescription charges
- Bring back into NHS employment, with NHS pay and terms and conditions, all medical, clinical, admin and clerical and ancillary staff, currently employed by private contractors

- Maintain and promote world class training of new doctors and nurses, ensuring adequate funding with proper agreed terms and conditions
- Renationalise social and nursing care for everyone who needs it, without means testing, including those in nursing homes and those with debilitating conditions.

To ensure that the National Health Service, the finest creation of any nation, remains the best and most cost-effective health service in the developed world and as a matter of immediate need there needs to be a massive injection of funding up to at least £30 billion over the next 10 years.

## Defend universal benefits and rights for disabled people

### **Universal Benefits**

Because of the low level of state pensions, universal benefits – available to all over state pension age and not means tested – are essential to maintain the living standards of pensioners and to keep them active, independent, warm in their homes, healthy and involved in their communities. We demand:

- The government upholds the principle of universal benefits as a right – maintaining and safeguarding the winter fuel payment, national free bus pass, free prescriptions and free TV licence.

### **State pension**

The state pension is a right earned after a life time of work, paying NI and it is **not** a ‘benefit’. Britain's pension is amongst the least adequate in the developed world with 1 in 5 older people living below the official poverty line of around £175 a week before housing costs. We demand:

- The state pension is fully indexed to rises in the cost of living
- A basic state pension above the poverty line, set at 70% of the Living Wage.

### **Social care**

Older and disabled people do not enjoy the same life chances and opportunities to choose where, how and with whom they live and to take part in community life. Investment in adequate social care support has many benefits including preventing or delaying admission to hospital and enabling convalescence at home after any hospital treatment.

Yet services have been drastically cut due to reduced government grant and are failing those most in need, leaving people without the support they need to live independently and placing informal carers under great stress. With the closure of the Independent Living fund the UK is in breach of its duties under Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities and the right to independent living. We demand

- A national tax-funded system, free at the point of use, to ensure everyone has tailored health and social care support to enable independent living, regardless of impairment

- Restoration of funding to social services, sufficient to fulfil their responsibilities by maintaining adequate staff levels, with training, good pay and conditions
- An end to sanctions and forced treatment
- More support for informal carers
- Protection under the Human Rights Act in care homes to include self-funders
- Restoration of funding cuts to local voluntary organisations to provide support, advice and advocacy for individuals and families.

### ***Benefits for those living on low incomes***

Benefits and tax reliefs are required because wages are below the Living Wage or even below the minimum wage; because local jobs may be insecure or unavailable, especially for disabled or sick individuals; or because caring responsibilities for children, older relatives or neighbours prevent employment or reduce hours available for employment. We demand:

- Adequate resources are invested in developing proposals for a Citizen's Income providing a universal secure, predictable and unconditional basic income to each legal resident.

### ***Rights for people with disabilities***

Our vision is of a society:

- Where every person is valued and is recognised as contributing value
- That actively makes equality of opportunity a reality for everyone and eliminates discrimination and disadvantage
- That enables disabled people and all people to live lives of equality, independence, inclusion, participation and dignity.

There are 11 million disabled people in the UK. Despite important progress over the last few decades, disabled people continue to experience historic and systematic disadvantage caused by physical, attitudinal and communication barriers operating in society:

- Between 40% and 60% of households with a disabled member are living in poverty

- Over a quarter of disabled people say that they do not frequently have choice and control over their daily lives
- 83% of disabled claimants who have gone through the Work Capability Assessment process would need two to three reasonable adjustments in place to do any job.

This situation is getting worse. Disabled people have disproportionately borne the brunt of austerity measures, losing nine times more support than other citizens. This includes over £28 billion of welfare support and social care cuts. This has created a crisis situation where:

- 36% of disabled people are unable to eat, wash, dress or get out of the house due to underfunded services in their area
- 34% of disabled people are unable to work or take part in volunteering or training activities after losing support services
- 53% of disabled people say they felt anxious, isolated, or experienced declining mental health because they had lost care and support from independent living services.

Urgent action is needed to restore fairness and opportunity for disabled people including re-thinking approaches to employment, social care, education and poverty so that disabled people can genuinely fulfil our potential, participate and contribute as equal citizens.

### ***We are calling for:***

1. Affirm commitment to United Nations Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Article 24 by building the capacity of mainstream education providers to become more inclusive of all disabled learners. Seek a change in the law so that disabled learners have a full legal right to be included in mainstream education with the support they need to access mainstream accredited courses.
2. Create a legal right to independent living as defined by the UNCRPD. Work with older and disabled people to develop a social care system that can deliver independent living outcomes for disabled people while maintaining choice, control and dignity. Implement an action plan to achieve the missed target for closing assessment and treatment units and supporting disabled people to move back into the community.
3. Replace the failing Work Capability Assessment with a new assessment designed in co-production with disabled people and based on a social model approach to disability. End the bedroom tax. Increase the enhanced Personal

Independence Payment mobility component eligibility criteria from 20 metres to 50 metres.

4. Provide effective support for disabled people to get into, stay in and get on in employment. Reverse the capping of Access to Work support packages. Invest further to expand the Access to Work programme by extending eligibility to deaf and disabled volunteers. Remove the barriers that exclude and disadvantage deaf and disabled people.

5. Develop a national strategy for tackling disability hate crime to implement the recommendations of the Equality and Human Rights Commission's "Hidden in Plain Sight" report. Create a legal status for British Sign Language through a BSL Act. Introduce a "No Access, no contract" clause into all public transport tenders with real consequences for non-compliance.

6. Real and effective co-production with deaf and disabled people's organisations.

Encourage local authorities to make use of EU Directive Article 19 to ring fence tenders for deaf and disabled people's user-led organisations. Re-open the Office for Disability Issues Facilitation Fund.

## Tackling climate change

The Croydon assembly recognises that climate change is a global problem that has the potential for catastrophic effects on the people and life on the planet.

Since the beginning of the industrial age, average temperatures have increased. Within the next year global temperatures are expected to be 1 degree Celsius higher than that at the beginning of industrialisation.

This is half way to the arbitrary ceiling of two degrees warming. This is considered to be the level at which the worst effects of warming would be felt.

However, for every rise, no matter how small, the likely occurrence of extremes to climate becomes a greater risk. Each year, extreme weather events increase in the UK and countries throughout the world.

Carbon dioxide levels have increased by over 40% since the beginning of the industrial age and greenhouse emissions continue to reach new records every year.

WMO secretary-general Michel Jarraud said: "It means hotter global temperatures, more extreme weather events like heat waves and floods, melting ice, rising sea levels and increased acidity of the oceans. This is happening now and we are moving into uncharted territory at a frightening speed."

The Croydon Assembly should pursue the following policies and actions:

### ***Sustainable Development***

Given the amount of development taking place in Croydon now and in the coming 10 years and beyond, it is an ideal opportunity to campaign to establish and embed truly sustainable objectives into the development of projects in the town. We demand:

- Genuine community involvement in the development of Croydon and its infrastructure. As part of this strategy, a minimum of 20 places should be allocated to community organisations within the Develop Croydon conference.

### ***Renewable Energy***

We demand:

- The increase of all forms of renewable energy in the borough on all types of building

- An increase in the use of sustainable technology incorporated into building plans.

In addition, all new and refurbished buildings should use building-integrated renewable energy sources. There must also be a continuation of adequate funding available for installing of insulation in existing buildings.

### ***Recycling and re-use***

We want Croydon to become an exemplar, achieving a 75% recycling rate for both business and domestic waste by 2020. This will show climate responsibility by citizens and businesses and ensure a reduction in burden to other communities. We demand:

- An increase in Croydon of recycling and re-use.

### ***Waste***

More use should be made of anaerobic digestion and similar technologies to produce environmentally-friendly products. We demand

- Croydon council pull out of the South London waste partnership which approved the Beddington incinerator
- Croydon council rejects all fracking licence applications both now and in the future, including those for exploration.

### ***Airports and public transport***

The Croydon assembly wishes to see an end to airport expansion either at Gatwick or Heathrow, as this will adversely affect the environment. Furthermore, we believe that a drastic increase in investment in public transport is required and that public transport should be returned to public ownership.

### ***Safer cycling***

We demand cycling training be made available to all schools and adults. Road infrastructure for cycling must be dramatically improved borough-wide. We believe that the cost can be offset by reduced use of the NHS, emergency services and sick leave and well as less traffic congestion. Amongst the benefits are improved health and wellbeing for individuals and family life as well as the economy.

### ***Air quality***

Increased construction work and an increase of traffic, both through and local, has led to worsening air quality. There have also been further concerns over the increased use of diesel fuel. This has also raised concerns about the siting of schools. Air quality monitoring must be substantially increased and that it must include measuring toxicity and other potential health hazards from the incinerator output and increased traffic levels.

## Fight racism, welcome refugees

### **Immigration**

We have a Tory government whose position is to repel immigrants and refugees, by making them as unwelcome as possible. This government has cut council funding for unaccompanied minors by 25%, as well as slashing resources across the board.

Immigrants and refugees have had a massive impact, culturally and economically and contributed positively to our society. We demand the government:

- Reverses the huge underinvestment in new housing, which has helped to result in the current housing crisis
- Work with councils to find solutions in order to provide for these desperate people fleeing war and intolerable religious and social oppression.

### **Education**

“It is vital that educators value and incorporate the cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious identities of their pupils in the curriculum and teaching.”  
*Aminul Hoque, Goldsmiths College*

“We need to focus the whole system around the education of our children; if we don’t, they simply will not reach their potential, which really could mean wasted lives. Education is not a business; it’s a matter of life and rights.”  
*Benjamin Zephaniah – Poet, writer and musician*

“There is continued evidence of discrimination in the labour market, and of stereotypes regarding the skills and competencies of black and minority ethnic people living in Britain.” *Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Runnymede Trust*

We say that:

- All students should be entitled to a broad, balanced, relevant and enriching curriculum that values students from diverse backgrounds and recognises the contribution of diverse regions and communities to our shared knowledge of the world
- The government develops policy in order to create spaces for debate and exchange that ensure the safety and intellectual growth of all participants, including when addressing controversial or sensitive topics of enquiry

- There are sufficient school places for all the children that need them, locally
- Financial support for post-16 students to stay in education be restored
- The government develops policy that ensures that black and minority ethnic staff are not over-represented among those on short-term contracts and among agency staff in schools, colleges and universities
- The government provides support and advice to those facing harassment, bullying and discrimination
- The government develops policy that ensures that schools, colleges and universities monitor processes of advertisement, appointment and promotion in order to achieve a diverse staff group at all levels.

### **Race hate crime**

The ongoing instability in the Middle East, the wars in Iraq and Syria, the continuing effects of September 11, the election of BNP councillors and the rise in Islamophobic attacks have all contributed to fear and concern amongst all minority ethnic communities.

All forms of racism are unacceptable: an attack on one minority group is an attack on all. We advocate policies that:

- Tackle Islamophobia by challenging negative stereotyping of Muslims
- End unacceptable deaths in custody of black and minority ethnic people
- Ensure that there is funding and investment available to race crime services and they are both protected and developed. E.g. Victim Support, Show Racism the Red Card
- Give victims of hate crimes access to comprehensive, support services and see that something has been done in response to their reports
- Increase the confidence of victims and witnesses to report hate incidents

- Improve hate crime training provision
- commit all governments to abide by the Geneva Convention and international law and protect human rights
- Allow for a lay overview of the Prevent strategy and end the criminalisation of students
- Create the right of citizenship for all and an end to deportations
- Provide for the council's employment to reflect ethnically across all layers and sectors.

## For a more inclusive democracy

We consider that democracy at both national and local level has been in full retreat in a number of areas for many years and that substantial changes are needed. The Croydon Assembly believes that there is a growing demand for a deeper, more inclusive democracy. This was demonstrated most recently in the mass participation in Jeremy Corbyn's campaign. It was also a feature of the movement around the issue of Scotland's independence.

There is a clear anger and frustration with the present political system. This takes the form of large-scale abstention at elections, anger with a biased voting system that favours existing parties and a sceptical view of Parliament and the "political class". This can be attributed to the fact that for the last 30 years, the major, mainstream political parties have adopted a consensus around the dominance of a market-driven economy as the only approach.

As the state has either withdrawn from, or contracted out, large areas of formerly public services, many people have questioned what government is actually for other than for promoting the private sector and capitalist markets.

- There is evidence that many voters believe Parliament does not represent their interests and that the value of the vote itself has been undermined
- There is also concern that should a progressive government come to power, the state itself will block moves to introduce substantial change that challenges corporate and financial power. This is one of the key lessons from the recent experiences in Greece.

This leads to Croydon Assembly asking: What needs to be done to bring democracy and power closer to the people? We need to think about the following:

- Many believe that corporate and financial power dictate government policy rather than the electorate. How can this be addressed?
- A recent report condemned the first past the post voting system as a lottery. We should work on more democratic voting systems
- Surveys show considerable disillusionment and alienation from the political system. Can we think of ways to give democracy a new lease of life?
- Democracy can leave voters without a sense of power and representatives who are not truly accountable. Is it time for a more direct, participatory form of democracy?

- Local government is hardly democratic, with instructions coming down from Whitehall. Consultation at local level is usually a sham and community voices are often excluded. What do we do about that?
- There's precious little democracy in the workplace, with working people having little say about what happens to their jobs, wages and conditions. Shouldn't democracy apply to the workplace too?

We need a whole system approach, starting with the need to develop an alternative economic strategy to the market-driven approach. We ought to consider:

- The abolition of the House of Lords
- Separation of church and state through disestablishment of the Church of England
- The right to petition a by-election
- An end to state funding of political parties
- Adult suffrage at 16
- Forms of proportional representation for all elections
- New forms of democratic representation.

Britain has the highest average population size per local authority in Europe. New Labour introduced the cabinet system and US-style directly-elected mayors, which has concentrated decision-making power in fewer hands leading to cronyism, patronage and corruption. Council funding is expected to fall a further 40% by 2020 when the Tories eliminate central grants altogether. Therefore to eliminate these democratic and financial deficits we need:

- More councillors (paid no more than median gross weekly full-time earnings in their locality) and councils covering smaller areas
- Abolition of the cabinet system and US-style directly-elected mayors and restoration of the committee system, which is much more inclusive than any other form of local governance and gives all councillors the right to make policy again
- The council tax, stamp duty land tax and business rates should be abolished and replaced by a system of land value taxation plus a wealth tax and more progressive income tax to fund increased provision of directly-provided public services.

## ***Fighting corporate power***

The deep connection between corporate/financial power and the European Union is expressed most clearly in the plan for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) under negotiation with the United States. This will impose markets for all public services and enable corporations to sue governments for failure to implement TTIP.

The Troika of EU, ECB and IMF trumped democracy on three separate occasions: the imposition of governments in Italy and Greece, and the overturning of Syriza's mandate immediately after a popular referendum.

- There is a clear need to develop a progressive and democratic Europe which is not in the hands of the corporations and banks.

Croydon Assembly believes that a political system that sanctions such high levels of inequality within the country cannot be said to be democratic in the fullest meaning of the term. Nor can a country that restricts trade union activity to the point where industrial action is almost impossible within the law be considered democratic.

Therefore, we consider that the Croydon Assembly should work on policies and proposals that lead towards a more democratic and just society.

- We should aim for a democratic system that enabled society to fulfil the objective of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs"
- Restore the rights of trade unions to strike and to take solidarity action
- Our objective should be to fashion a democracy that gives people power in their workplaces to decide their own future, and to extend this approach throughout their communities
- To that end, we should consider local rather than central Parliaments, developing the idea of Assemblies as potential components of a new democracy and other measures that put people in charge both in their communities and in their workplaces.