



The Young  
Foundation

# Five ways a community-centred policy agenda could take us to a fairer future

## The Young Foundation's response to the Labour National Policy Forum

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## Shaping a fairer future

### We are the UK's home for community research and social innovation

The Young Foundation is the UK's home for community research and social innovation. As a not-for-profit, The Young Foundation brings communities, organisations and policy-makers together, driving positive change to shape a fairer future.

Working to understand the issues people care about, The Young Foundation supports collective action to improve lives, involving communities in locally-led research and delivering distinctive initiatives and programmes to build a stronger society. The Young Foundation also powers the Institute for Community Studies.

For more information visit us at: [youngfoundation.org](http://youngfoundation.org)



## About this report

This paper was submitted to the Labour Party's National Policy Forum Consultation in March 2023.

The Safe and Secure Communities policy commission and its predecessor commissions have consulted on topics including devolution and the constitution after coronavirus (2020); ending violence against women and girls (2021); and guaranteeing safe and secure communities through an effective criminal justice system (2022). For 2023, the focus is empowered communities. The Labour Party welcomed submissions on this issue from Constituency and Branch Labour Parties, affiliated trade unions and socialist societies, and expert third party organisations such as charities, think tanks, businesses and civil society.

The National Policy Forum (NPF) will culminate in a meeting to determine Labour's policy platform, and that platform will contribute towards Labour's manifesto for the next general election.

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# Introduction

**In amongst Labour's calls to Take Back Control from an overly centralised politics and civil service, and embedded in Five missions for a better Britain, we see a Party talking in broad strokes about taking a *long-term view to complex problem solving, cutting through siloed working, focus on prevention, identifying common causes through which all sectors, all parts of society can play a part and focusing on outcomes, not outputs.***

There are many reasons to welcome these words and phrases - particularly for those of us in the public and social sectors, where the madness of policies that do exactly the opposite can be found at almost every turn.<sup>1</sup>

There's also a host of reasons why this is a very difficult agenda to pull off - both in general, and specifically, at this point in time. Not least because the 'how' of implementation exposes challenges that can seem almost as complex as the problem being addressed. And while we can hope for sunnier economic uplands, a return to pre-2008 levels of Treasury investment in our health, education, neighbourhoods, and livelihoods are unlikely to appear any time soon.

Which brings us to the idea of who gets involved in tackling these challenges - and specifically the role of people and communities. Here, any talk of community and civic participation in the context of limited public spending brings shudders of remembrance at the Rise and Fall of the Big Society.

**However, the central premise of this paper is the idea that our communities - and our role as participating citizens - are as fundamental to tackling big complex problems as any other state, business or philanthropic participation. [See the 'At a glance' section at the end of this paper.]**

As an organisation with deep and sustained commitment to supporting stronger communities, The Young Foundation knows approaches that put local people and their needs and ideas at the centre of our policies and practice, are a powerful route to cutting across siloes and complexities toward better outcomes - whether in education, health, safety, climate change or local economic growth.

This paper is a response to Labour's National Policy Forum on 'Safe and Secure Communities'. Reading through the questions posed was disappointing. If the Five Missions for a better Britain command us to embrace complexity and mobilise all actors to unite in common cause to tackle long-term outcomes, then framing communities as a problem to solve, or as fonts of anti-social behaviour and crime, feels old-fashioned, deficit-based, and incomplete. This is not to downgrade the importance of feeling and being safe and secure in the places we live. People are feeling unsafe. Our own research prior to the pandemic shows that safety in communities across England and Wales ranked in the top five priorities for every region in 2019, and in five regions it ranked at number one.<sup>2</sup>

But if we are to stand any chance of navigating the next couple of decades, the nature and role of 'community' - namely, the ways in which we



collectively, how we behave and feel towards each other, and how we organise and interact with the institutions that influence our wellbeing - will be foundational to pretty much every public and social policy.

As is the case for evidence and hard data relating to our climate emergency, there is compelling evidence as to why strong, connected communities who trust in their public institutions are the fundamentals of a healthy society and economy. Our communities have measurable impacts too, which debunk the 'fluffy' and nostalgic notions that often cloud discussions about them. Perhaps the most technocratic and annoying demand is that we must provide weapons-grade evidence of why strong communities are fundamental to a functioning society before unlocking serious public investment; when the evidence is in plain sight. There is no shortage of people and organisations now advocating for a society that structures itself more explicitly around the collective than the individual, and we seem to be surfing the zeitgeist of a more communitarian agenda: that from both a moral and material perspective, we are not only more likely to navigate a path through some very serious crises in the coming years if we work and act together, but our lack of acting collectively, arguably, increases the likelihood of those crises arising.

Look at how distrust in local government in Oxford opened the door for Laurence Fox and others to turn a local issue about traffic into a national conspiracy to lock people into their neighbourhoods. The more divided we are amongst ourselves, and the more distrustful and distant from governments and the state, the more dangerous and our society will become.

In general, recent government policies have – often in quite structurally embedded ways – tended to focus on the individual, not the role of individuals within society. Policy implementation for tackling complex problems must redress that bias; with the creation of conditions and structures that support community and collective action and citizen participation: in democracy, in our communities and in partnerships with state and business.

This is not an argument for more traditional notions of communitarianism. It is not in our interests (or arguably even possible) for people to live their whole lives prioritising the good of the collective. But some synthesis of liberal and communitarian ideologies is required for a political economy that is able to work successfully in complex, turbulent operating environments. We cannot think solely and only of ourselves, whether an individual, household or organisation. We won't be able to tackle our economic, environmental, health, crime, and migrant settlement challenges if we do.

Five ways a community-centred policy agenda could take us to a fairer future

**The remainder of this paper sets out five key infrastructure priorities, which are required to build trust, participation, and more collective ownership of complex challenges:**

1. **Local, social infrastructure that brings people together, to new opportunities and safety**
2. **An education system that builds capabilities and expectations of civic participation**
3. **Public sector capabilities and structures that sustain civic engagement in democracy and change**
4. **An expanded research and innovation system, which legitimises community participation**
5. **Incentivise private sector business and investors to direct their social and net zero strategies to transformational ends for vulnerable communities**



# Priority one: Local, civic infrastructure that brings people together, to new opportunities and safety

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Where people have shared public spaces, there are greater employment opportunities, better health outcomes, and higher educational attainment across every age group.<sup>8</sup>

As a nation, we accept (by and large) that hard, physical infrastructure is worth the investment. But, too often, we ignore the case for the physical infrastructure that brings us into social contact, in pursuit of new opportunities and safety.

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## Headline policy proposals

- The recently announced Dormant Assets Funding for Community Wealth Funds should act as a device to leverage private sector development contributions into community assets that have been identified as a priority by communities themselves
- A basic level of provision of spaces for young people and youth services, particularly where spaces have seen a precipitous loss, or where provision is absent
- Legislation enabling communities to more easily take ownership or management of assets of community value

Over the last decade or so, there has been a dramatic loss in the places and spaces available for people to come together. As the [Skittled Out](#) report evidenced in 2018: *“Social capital is essential to the functioning of modern economies, underpinning good government and enabling effective enterprise. But if we are to maintain and replenish our stock of social capital, then we must consider the structures that support its formation”*.

The British Academy’s [‘Shaping the COVID Decade’](#) report also included a call to *“strengthen and expand community-led social infrastructure that underpins the vital services and support structures needed to enhance local resilience, particularly in the most deprived areas”*.<sup>3</sup> [The Young Foundation’s work](#) in partnership with the Bennett Institute reinforces these messages.

There are manifest evidence of [policy outcomes](#) from investment in social infrastructure – including the relationship between the decline of spaces for young people and increased involvement in serious violence and knife crime.<sup>4</sup> Some **39% of young people have been witnesses to serious violence** in the last 12 months, and **69% of young people are changing and modifying their lives to keep themselves safe**.<sup>5</sup> This is against a backdrop of a **69% reduction in youth service provision since 2010-11**.

Around the UK, we hear repeated demands for more youth-friendly spaces, highlighting the critical importance of this on being safe, not pushed out onto the streets or into spaces in which young people can be at risk.



## Five ways a community-centred policy agenda could take us to a fairer future

The recent announcement of dormant asset funding towards Community Wealth Funds will give more communities in deprived areas the money and power to directly invest in their local area, which will almost certainly include investment into many different kinds of social infrastructure. Led by Local Trust, this success has been hard won and is very welcome. Looking at the scale of the challenge however, there is both a need and an opportunity to leverage additional money from other sources through these funds.

The Young Foundation has revealed the ongoing problem of social value creation by the private sector in its recent reporting of FTSE100 social value contributions; and the disarray and confusion with regard to 'S' of ESG strategies and investment.

The Young Foundation's proposed 'Four Scope Framework' for social impact through business brings place-based communities firmly into the realm of social impact through a fairer, greener lens. Connecting Community Wealth Fund priorities, ambitions and needs more firmly into contact with key investors and developers in deprived communities is powerful. Doing so could provide a route to bunking the 0% relative change in economic advantage, which has dogged every single intervention to tackle the challenge of so called 'left behind communities'<sup>6</sup> in the last 20 years.

Building on the Localism Act of 2012, The 'We're Right Here' campaign<sup>7</sup> - of which The Young Foundation is a partner - makes a strong case for legislation to increase the power of local communities to buy community assets and shape public services. While there are some great success stories from which to draw, this is not the only model. The transfer of liability along with ownership does not suit every asset, or every community. The goal should also be to encourage, support and ensure equal partnerships between locally-elected officials, employees and communities represented through friends groups and management committees and so on.

There are good, and often underexplored, hybrid models in which guardianship and the liability of premises are retained by the public body but day-to-day running and services are provided by community organisations. We see networks of community libraries function on this basis, for example. Communities can and do play vital roles beyond and instead of outright ownership. What's critical is the sustained investment in capacity - and capability-building, explicit attention to culture, terms of engagement, building mutualism and parity of esteem into relationships. The long-term gains of doing so will be many.



# Priority two: An education system that builds capabilities and expectations of civic participation

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**If we want to see more engagement in communities and civic action to tackle complex, long-term problems, we need to address the 'parlous state' of Citizenship education in schools.**

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The vast array of highly complex social and environmental challenges brings a responsibility towards teaching our children how to navigate them. The culture of polarisation, flattened debates, and the vitriol that forms a daily part of digital discourse is irresponsible to ignore in our national curriculum. This means nurturing confidence and ability in our children to engage in nuanced conversation and debate through speaking, or oracy, which is as important (and as assessable) as reading or writing.

It means young people experiencing what it means to have some positive control and influence in the world; a belief that actions can create positive change. All children should be given opportunities to experience how to make change, either through individual, collective or democratic activities in schools.

As [The Ties that Bind](#) House of Lords report evidenced well in 2019, the teaching of citizenship in schools has fallen into a 'parlous state' where 'very few schools take Citizenship Education seriously and most secondary schools are failing their statutory duty to teach it.'<sup>9</sup> That

## Headline policy proposals

- Reinvigoration and more serious assessment of Citizenship Education and the 'Civic Journey' in schools, including experiential teaching of community and citizenship competencies
- Government incentives to formalise the idea of the Civic University. Including expanding the notion of academic 'excellence' to incorporate the social and civic value of a university to its local communities
- Integrate proven models for connecting students to local people and communities through undergraduate research studies, and volunteering

it has become conflated with, and often taught within, Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PHSE) education curriculum is telling. PHSE is focused on individual development, Citizenship on the role that we take in society - and we are teaching our children to privilege one over the other. Evidence is clear that action-oriented teaching of citizenship (engagement in community campaigning, school councils and so on) has a 'positive, long-lasting and independent' effect.<sup>10</sup> While teaching the functions of local government is important, the act of a pupil learning how to find a place within a society is clearly what takes young people on a lifetime '[Civic Journey](#)'.

## Five ways a community-centred policy agenda could take us to a fairer future

Authors such as Ian Leslie have also made a powerful case for teaching how to navigate conflict<sup>11</sup>; that it is possible and essential for arguments to be reframed not as 'who wins?', but as a process for creating new knowledge and insight. Our children need to learn how to understand, resolve and manage conflict. Alongside the well-socialised idea of competencies such as 'collaborative problem-solving' and creativity forming part of our education, we must enable learning around situations they are likely to encounter in an increasingly complex and fractured world.

Earlier this year, Carnegie UK reported<sup>12</sup> that **76% of the UK public do not trust politicians to make decisions that will improve their lives, and two in five people say democracy in this country is not working**. There has been decrease in national engagement in politics (mostly voting) among young people. Young people need a new path to engaging in politics; a way of showing they are listening to, and there for, young people.

Yet while trust in democracy is experiencing an all-time low, this is also a time of huge interest and experimentation in forms of more direct, enhanced democratic participation, such as participatory budgeting, participatory policymaking, citizens assemblies and so on. Is the ultimate resolution of how representative democracy integrates these more direct forms of citizen and community involvement key to democracy's long-term survival? As those experiments and learnings emerge within our political economy, so too should we expose these many modes of democratic participation in schools. Smart Schools Councils is just one excellent example of how to build that into a school's culture, not instrumentally within its curriculum.

## Higher Education as a 'Civic Engine Room'

**Universities and colleges are unique in being large local employers, as well as centres of learning and engines for research and innovation. Institutionalising civic responsibilities within universities and their student body will further build structural routes to supporting stronger communities and expectations of participating in society and social change.**

Over the last three years, a 'Civic University' movement has been growing, where a university's geographic role and responsibility is used more effectively as an agent to drive positive social, local change. This work has been 'bottom up', with support from funders such as the UPP Foundation and others. Like any other business, universities and colleges are often large employers and procurers of goods and services from their local communities. Social impact and value can readily be measured through their own frameworks, or within the [Social Impact Scope Framework](#). With more than 60 of the UK's 160 universities already signed up to become Civic Universities, there is a palpable interest from inside and outside the sector to ensure this movement creates meaningful, sustained social change.





As ideas about how a university demonstrates its impact within current excellence frameworks (REF), *there is a clear opportunity to expand ideas about 'excellence'* to include the creation and measurement of a university's contribution to tackling local priorities. In real and measurable ways, universities can demonstrate social impact in every facet of their operations and work.

Good examples of this movement can be found in [University of Bedfordshire](#), [Queen Mary, University of London](#) and [Newcastle and Northumbria](#) universities. The presence of the university in the strategic development and decision-making arenas of place should be a given.

## The Student Body

Students at colleges and universities should be able to access non-academic and academic routes to engaging with their local communities and finding ways to advance their 'Civic Journey' to becoming participants in civil society. A good example of an enabling structure for this is the University of Northampton, which has embedded 'changemaking' - the process of developing creative solutions to social problems - across the curriculum.

Building a student experience focused on changemaking enhances graduates' future employment prospects, and consultation with employers indicates the skills associated with changemaking are highly valued in the 21st century labour market. The rewriting of learning outcomes across all 305 undergraduate programmes and 1,512 modules has provided a unique approach to developing student employability. This approach to orienting a student body towards their social responsibility to create positive change is a living example of how to build the lifelong civic muscle of students passing through universities through a system-wide intervention across a university.

There are other emerging, replicable models to instil greater understanding of and participation in local communities. One example is [Undisciplined Spaces](#), a pioneering opportunity from King's College London and The Young Foundation for first and second-year undergraduate students to design and deliver, virtually and in collaboration with local community researchers, creative research projects addressing issues of marginalisation or exclusion in the local communities in which they live.

This is all against a backdrop of fewer and fewer undergraduates being able to afford to move away from the family home to study. The importance of having quality universities accessible in all regions, which contribute to addressing local needs, priorities and opportunities, in combination with educating for green jobs of the future has never been more important.

# Priority three: Public sector capabilities and structures to sustain civic engagement in democracy and change

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Devolution affords an opportunity to systematise emerging forms of participatory democracy and new patterns of organising that centre communities and local people. But devolution in and of itself does not make that happen. Newer forms of democratic participation are necessary to rebuild trust in politics and must be seen as a crucial part of a local democracy.

But newer democratic engagement methods should not be 'outsourced' to third party providers in the longer term. The capabilities to service an expanded, more participatory, engaged democratic model must be grown, owned, and held within the public realm.

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## Headline policy proposals

- Embed leadership, capability-building and learning within the public sector, with participatory approaches that include and engage more citizens and people
- Agreed, comparable standards for assessing increased participation on feelings of inclusion and social capital – as well as improved outcomes resulting from different kinds of democratic engagement
- Building on the Community Leadership Academy<sup>13</sup>, we need a national centre of learning for those who dedicate their lives to working in the service of their communities



The clamour and cry for devolution of powers and funding has been growing for a number of years, and few defend the UK's position as one of the most centralised countries in the global north. Devolution is supported (to varying degrees of enthusiasm) by both major political parties, and the principle of subsidiarity – of decisions being taken at the most effective level of government or geography - is often held to be 'a good thing'. The missing challenge here is one of effective implementation. Not legal implementation, but the implementation of a way of working that reimagines and sustains trusted, inclusive relationships with local people.

Devolution doesn't *automatically* grow trust or build more equitable relationships between public institutions and people. Whether making decisions at a national, local or community level, power dynamics will always play out. There are good actors and bad. There is competence and incompetence. There are people who take power, given half the chance, and those who are marginalised in the process. People can feel as distant from and mistrustful of a local authority as they do of Westminster. The itch to 'take back control' through the EU Referendum has not been scratched, and we should not assume that devolved powers are the panacea for this intractable feeling that people are not in control of their own lives and destinies.

Attention to the *craft of engagement with people and communities* is as fundamental to an effective devolution agenda as anything else.

In addition, outside the public sector, the kind of leadership required to work in new ways, to tackle complex problems (at whatever level of geography), is not something we should expect to happen naturally, or that people learn by osmosis. The Community Leadership Academy has shown that it is not just possible, but entirely necessary to invest in the leadership development of those who dedicate themselves to their communities - whether as volunteers, paid workers, management committees, magistrates, school governors, and indeed as councillors.

The case for investment in community leadership is made more deeply in this report<sup>14</sup>. Initiatives such as the GLA's [Civic Futures](#) also brings to life the need for public sector and community leaders to work in collaboration.

We must also recognise that majority of people in the public sector live in the area they serve. The average wage of those who work in the public sector is around national average. The more representative our organisations are - and the more our organisations support their workforce to be active outside of their work role - the more likely public organisations are to be able to work alongside communities with an asset-based approach, parity of esteem, respect, and collaborative intent.

We need collective, clear visibility on the tools, methods and approaches that support working through complex and deep collaboration across silos, sectors and communities; a credible way to understand their efficacy, and the creation of lateral learning networks across sectors and geographies to improve understanding of what's working in other places.

Too often, this kind of need is recognised, and so somewhat captured by, academia. There is clear value in the What Works Network, however, practice often outpaces research and civic leaders are hungry to take action - indeed, they are taking action. The need for practitioner spaces for sharing and exchanging learning from their experiments in navigating complex challenges is long overdue.



## Priority four: An expanded research and innovation system, which legitimises community participation

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Research and innovation are tools for social transformation as much as scientific breakthrough. The more people who are engaged in activities that create insight, empathy and ownership of social and environmental issues, the greater our chances of navigating complex challenges.

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### Headline policy proposals

- Sustained, community-involving research infrastructure through the creation of a Community Research Council
- A national network of Civic Innovation Centres, whose agendas are set by local communities, with a sole focus on funding multi-disciplinary collaboration on areas of community priority

Whether in the Government's Levelling Up White Paper or in the recently published Independent Nurse Review, or the creation of ARIA<sup>15</sup>, research and innovation is continually captured and framed within a scientific and technological context. This isn't to dismiss the current government's enthusiasm to become a Global Scientific Superpower - although whether we can leverage the kind of investment into the UK required to make that gigantic leap is an open question. But solving complex, systemic and entrenched challenges facing the UK, that are rooted in inequalities of many kinds, requires as much social innovation as scientific. If it didn't, pouring money into complex social problems would solve them. Which it doesn't. Just look at the Institute for Community Studies analysis of the £20bn put into tackling geographical inequality over the last 15 years - and the 0% relative change in economic outcomes in those places.

Facing down complex societal challenges requires political bravery, and political bravery is bolstered by an engaged, active public who feel a sense of influence, ownership and agency in the innovations and change required.

## Five ways a community-centred policy agenda could take us to a fairer future

UKRI has been reframing the notion of public engagement in research and innovation to be more aligned to *public involvement and 'research and innovation for everyone'*. Through the Community Research Networks and the Community Knowledge Fund, and the Peer Research Network, it is clear there is talent, demand and capacity to build an expansive, credible infrastructure for tapping into new, highly relevant forms of knowledge. Systematising and sustaining these – and many other - efforts as a **legitimate part of our national research infrastructure** and ensuring the connection of that research to local policy and practice, is an achievable and wanted goal.

As with research, so with innovation. And, again, this is something that is continually captured by a *technological and scientific* narrative. In 1998, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts was created by the force of nature that is Lord David Puttnam through securing a £250m endowment of National Lottery funding. NESTA's central mission was rooted in innovation for social purpose and rooted in inter-disciplinarity: the need for, and the power in, collaboration across

boundaries and silos. While NESTA still exists as a national charity, times have changed. We have shifted towards devolution, and public resource flows being directed to places outside the capital - with good reason.

New futures, new ways of living and working in a way that supports a sustainable planetary habitat requires us to change. There is very little point wandering off into an enclave of like-minded souls who look and sound the same to reimagine a better future, unless that future is viscerally, emotionally and practically connected to the lived reality and experiences of everyday people in our neighbourhoods today. A network of Civic Innovation Centres, whose agendas are set by and involve local people, could do much to ignite our imagination of new futures for communities across the UK.





# Priority five: Support enabling private sector business and investors to direct their social and net zero strategies to transformational ends for vulnerable communities

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The power of our market economy to influence our people and communities is greater than anything the state can wield. Lasting and shared prosperity across a nation demands increased attention on the social outcomes created through the private sector.

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## Headline policy proposals

- Incentivise the flow of investment towards socially responsible businesses
- Set a standardised, credible way of assessing the outcomes of a business on people and society
- Bring the Better Business Act into force, providing a legal requirement for businesses to act in the interests of their wider stakeholders, including communities
- Incentivise investment into employee-owned business models, particularly in businesses with high volumes of low-paid workers
- Net zero is where the policy areas of economy, innovation and community intersect. The country needs a national policy framework and a government department that reflects this mix



# Getting to meaningful social impact in the private sector

Socially responsible, environmentally sustainable, financially successful companies exist. And they are the organisations that will continue to exist, as businesses unwilling to change find themselves hospiced by their consumers, employees and investors.

While B-Corps, mission-led businesses, stakeholder capitalism and the ESG phenomena have taken hold, to some degree, the social dimensions of private sector sustainability, practices are falling well short of what is needed to tackle long-term, systemic problems of the kind the Labour Leader describes.

And yet every decent organisation in the UK is mindful of its role in supporting its local place, community and footprint. The Young Foundation's UK sample of businesses hints at deep commitment, with around 80% of more than 250 businesses surveyed feeling responsible to help tackle climate change, above and beyond considering the direct impact of their own operations; and a similar percentage feel a sense of responsibility toward the health and wellbeing of the community or locations in which they are working. This sense of responsibility is broadly similar across all sizes of business. The more progressive corporations know they must dramatically rethink their social impact strategies if they are to deliver the transformative and overdue change we need to see. Meanwhile, economists, politicians, academics, writers and commentators are making the credible and urgent case for why our current economic models are incompatible with a meaningful journey towards reduced inequalities, social justice, and a sustainable planetary environment.

We need to see a welcoming environment for investment, and support for socially responsible businesses and those with social purpose at their core. It is depressing that BNP Paribas recently reported that for, 51% of investors, 'the "S" element of their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investment strategies is essentially a check-the-box exercise'.<sup>16</sup> And while 76% of FTSE100 companies cite 'communities' as their stakeholders (alongside workers, customers, shareholders etc), they have no formal accountability, or need to report how they are impacting them.

Any government needs to signal their support - in tangible ways - for 21st century businesses that value their workforce, their suppliers, their stakeholder communities and their commitment to contributing to big social challenges.

This requires a meaningful, industry-accepted way to understand the levels and kind of social value created by a business, either by itself or in partnership. We are some way from this goal, and despite the work of the APPG on ESG, and work from [The Young Foundation](#)<sup>17</sup> on formulating a navigable framework for understanding 'social scoping', a public investment into solving a global problem (which is currently leading to the misdirection away from - and underinvestment in - UK businesses) could be transformative.

The legal route to driving more change in this direction would be to bring the Better Business Act into force. This Act proposed a small but profound change to shareholder primacy. The Better Business Act would replace Section 172 of the Companies Act 2006, which sets out that the default purpose of companies is to benefit their shareholders and combine 'traditions of good stewardship and responsibility with new ideas to meet the challenges of the 21st century'.<sup>18</sup>

## Net zero, community, and the economy

Net zero is not a challenge solely of energy regulation, infrastructure adaptation, and crisis mitigation – as the name of Sunak’s new department suggest. It is a challenge of participation. Participation of government, communities, businesses, councils, investors, hospitals, schools, universities, and the voluntary sector. Participation of every family and every household. Participation, democratically, in an agenda that needs to be government-led and people-powered; on a scale we have never experienced in history.

The Institute for Community Studies programme has captured the evidence and assessed the capacity of every place and community to participate in net zero. Policies around transition to net zero must avoid (or not exacerbate) social, economic, and environmental injustice affecting the poorest people in UK society – which varies across every local area in the UK. The current government’s own analysis in 2021 stated that, if managed effectively by policy, there can be significant gains from net zero, and benefits in terms of population health and wellbeing. But we need to organise policy differently to accelerate and empower innovation towards net zero.

Policymaking needs to capitalise on this. In place of Sunak’s new, siloed Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero, we need a department for *community, business and environment* that supports ‘system-wide transformation’.

**The UK needs leadership that works to embrace communities that also transcend with communities of place. Communities of interest, whether of faith, ethnicity, gender, age, ability – who are so often marginalised and under-represented - must be centred within all this work. As must the recognition that some communities are not benign; whose sole intent is to divide and aggravate tension between different groups and communities.**

**This is why the work of *building trust, collective action and community* is where we should direct not just our best efforts – but our investment to forge a fairer future.**



# A community-centred policy agenda: policy asks 'at a glance'

## 1 Local, social infrastructure that brings people together, to new opportunities and safety

- The recently announced Dormant Assets Funding for Community Wealth Funds should act as a device to leverage private sector development contributions into community assets. This has been identified as a priority by communities themselves
- A basic level of provision of spaces for young people and youth services, particularly where we have seen a precipitous loss, or where provision is absent
- The passing of legislation to enable communities to more easily take ownership or management of assets of community value

## 2 An education system that builds capabilities and expectations of civic participation

- Reinvigoration and more serious assessment of Citizenship Education and the 'Civic Journey' in schools, including experiential teaching of community and citizenship competencies
- Government incentives to formalise the idea of the Civic University. Including expanding the notion of academic 'excellence' to incorporate the social and civic value of a university to its local communities
- Integrate proven models for connecting students to local people and communities through undergraduate research studies, and volunteering



### **3 Public sector capabilities and structures that sustain civic engagement in democracy and change**

- Leadership, capability-building and learning within the public sector for engaging in participatory approaches, which include and engage more citizens and people
- Agreed, comparable standards for assessing increased participation on feelings of inclusion and social capital – as well as improved outcomes resulting from different kinds of democratic engagement
- Building on the Community Leadership Academy<sup>19</sup>, we need a national centre of learning for those who dedicate their lives to working in the service of their communities

### **4 An expanded research and innovation system, which legitimises community participation**

- Sustained community-involving research infrastructure through the creation of a Community Research Council
- A national network of Civic Innovation Centres, whose agendas are set by local communities, with a sole focus on funding multi-disciplinary collaboration on areas of community priority

### **5 Support enabling business and investors to direct their social and net zero strategies to more transformational ends**

- Incentivise the flow of investment towards socially responsible businesses
- Set a standardised, credible way of assessing the outcomes of a business on people and society
- Bring the Better Business Act into force, providing a legal requirement for businesses to act in the interests of their wider stakeholders, including communities.
- Incentivise investment into employee-owned business models, particularly in businesses with high volumes of low-paid workers
- Net zero is where the policy areas of economy, innovation & community intersect. The UK needs a national policy framework and a Government Department that reflects this.

- 1 Namely, those which expect short-term results, crave simple answers, reinforce working in silos, narrowly define problems, and are addicted to counting inputs and outputs
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- 6 Yang, C. Stevens, C. Dunn, W. Morrison, E. & Harries. R. (2021) Why don't they ask us? The Role of Communities in Levelling Up Institute for Community Studies
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- 15 Advanced Research & Invention Agency. See [Aria.org.uk](http://Aria.org.uk)
- 16 BNP Paribas The ESG Global Survey 2021
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- 18 [BetterBusinessAct.org](http://BetterBusinessAct.org)
- 19 Currently delivered by The Young Foundation and Koreo with funding from Local Trust.



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