

# A BIGGER ROLE IN BUILDING OUR FUTURE

## OUR VISION FOR CHARITIES AND VOLUNTEERING

11 November 2019

Communities across the country face sizeable challenges, from climate change, technological transformation, economic insecurity and inequality, how to enable people to live better lives for longer, and a democracy and society that appear deeply divided.

But this moment is also one of opportunity: to rethink radically the way people and communities can shape and improve their lives and ultimately thrive.

This requires a commitment to change at all levels: economic, social, political. Charities and volunteering are central to driving this change.

At their best, charities reflect the communities they serve. The variety of causes and people they involve makes them uniquely placed to work with government, business and across diverse communities to address the challenges faced.

This manifesto calls for greater political and financial investment and greater recognition of charities' role in shaping our country's future. We want to see a re-think of how volunteering, the 'voluntary' sector and its connection to wider society are seen. In particular, we want the future health of charities and volunteering to be a mainstream concern.

### **An economy that is fair for everyone**

---

Many communities across the country feel disconnected and do not experience the benefits of economic growth.

Charities already play a central role in building stronger communities and giving people the skills and connections they need. But there is more we can do so we are all be part of a more inclusive economy.

## We call on the next government to:

- ensure the **UK shared prosperity fund** delivers a comparable level of investment in disadvantaged communities that European funding currently provides, should the UK leave the EU. This will help deliver a more inclusive labour market that helps tackle the UK's productivity challenges, while addressing regional disparities and environmental degradation.
- establish a **community wealth fund** using money from dormant assets to create a long-term endowment for deprived communities that have not benefited from economic prosperity. This would put local people in control of independent community services which can sustain themselves without reliance on government funding.
- increase **local government funding** to help reduce the significant financial strain that many public services are facing. This should be accompanied by a reassessment of the long-term sustainability of local government finances to put local authorities on a more sustainable footing so they can support their communities and tackle environmental problems.
- work with charities to implement the recommendations of the independent **Charity Tax Commission**. This would enable charities to increase support for disadvantaged communities and environmental causes.
- create a **resilient communities fund**, set up specifically for charities working with and supporting local communities, in the event of a no-deal Brexit or a failure to secure a long-term trade agreement with the EU.

## A greater role in a more open democracy

---

Charities bring people together and can create a pathway for individuals to become engaged and contribute to public life. People also want more spaces and ways to come together, to be heard and to hear each other.

## We call on the next government to:

- provide new spaces and opportunities for local activism and participation in the **community**. Thousands of community spaces are lost every year, from youth clubs to libraries, from pubs to playgrounds. Investment is needed to create the buildings and spaces that bring people together and build connections and community.
- **involve charities more in policymaking**. The government's Civil Society Strategy promises a cross-government group to work with civil society to establish the principles of effective involvement in the policy-making process. The next government should set this group up as soon as possible in the new parliament.

- **reform the Lobbying Act by implementing the recommendations made by Lord Hodgson's review.** The Electoral Commission's new guidance for non-party campaigners is very welcome, but the law still imposes unnecessary legal barriers. The next government should also consider how the retrospective regulated period works in snap general elections.
- **provide clarity and consistency on the use of 'anti-advocacy clauses'** in grant agreements and contracts. There is still inconsistency across government departments in this area. More should be done to reassure charities that they have the right to speak out on government policy, regardless of any funding arrangement.

## An inclusive and open society, with strong rights and protections for everyone

---

Our country should aspire to remain a global leader in transparency and public scrutiny and to retain the current high standards of rights and protections. We will want to remain a welcoming society and to attract the skills and talents of people from overseas, ensuring we have a prosperous economy.

Charities have played a key role in securing many of the rights and protections that are currently enshrined in EU law and applicable in the UK.

Charities also benefit from the time and skills of people coming from overseas to work and volunteer in the issues they care about, particularly in health and social care, medical research and international aid.

### We call on the next government to:

- **commit to upholding standards** in environmental regulations, workers' rights, and EU citizens' rights in any future trade agreements.
- **commit to greater engagement with charities** in order to ensure that our concerns are heard and our expertise utilised when forging new relationships with global partners.
- **provide absolute clarity to EU citizens in the UK** that their rights will be protected in a Brexit scenario of any kind. EU nationals are a vital part of the lifeblood of the UK, and their contribution to research, volunteering and charity is invaluable.

## A renewed relationship with government

---

Change of the magnitude that is required cannot be delivered by government alone, nor by business, charities or wider civil society acting in isolation. It can only come from each of these working in partnership with the other.

In this partnership, charities, business and government should be equal, and charities' independence should be respected.

### We call on the next government to:

- **reboot its relationship with charities**, based on a mutual commitment to building trust, and recognising the independence and voice of charities regardless of any funding relationship.
- ensure a **'right touch' approach to the regulation of charities and voluntary action**. Building on the principles of good regulation, government should ensure that the level of regulation is proportionate and effective.
- ensure the **independence of the Charity Commission** by strengthening the parliamentary scrutiny of its chair's appointment and of its board.

## Volunteering strengthened and valued

---

Millions of people want to give their time and talents to their community, or to the causes they support. People's interest in and ability to volunteer should be encouraged, setting them on a path of contributing to their communities and to wider society.

As volunteering plays a more prominent role in our society's future, we will need to make sure that access to charities and volunteering is more inclusive and reflective of our society.

### We call on the next government to:

- introduce a **statutory duty** to allow employees of organisations over a certain size to take a limited amount of time off work to volunteer, including to perform trustee roles.
- develop **new funding for volunteer-involving organisations to help them better involve disabled people** and break down barriers to volunteering.

## Public services fit for today and tomorrow

---

Good public services are vital for an inclusive economy, a fair society and for people to live fulfilling lives. Yet the current system is not always equipped to deal with present and future challenges, or to make the most of potential opportunities.

To develop services that enrich people's lives and provide a solid foundation for a fair economy and society, the way in which services are funded, designed and delivered needs to change. A new approach should enable and enhance the role of charities in delivering services that are collaborative, preventative, personalised and ultimately based on quality relationships.

### We call on the next government to:

- **strengthen its commitment to social value.** This should include requiring local government and health bodies to account for social value, and requiring commissioners to monitor whether their approach to social value is enabling the participation of small and medium sized charities.
- **commit to taking decisions in the interest of future generations** by developing a mechanism similar to the Future Generations Act in partnership with charities. This would include a duty for public bodies to put long term wellbeing at the heart of every decision.