



Civil Society Priorities for West Midlands Regional Elections 2021



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Updated: February 2021



The vision of Citizens UK is ‘**a healthy democracy with civil society at its heart**’ and its mission is ‘**to build the capacity of the people to participate in public life, to act together for the common good, to win change, and to strengthen civic institutions in the process**’.

We do this through practicing the craft of community organising by:

1. identifying & developing leaders,
2. running sophisticated winnable campaigns, and
3. strengthening our member organisations to make an impact in their community/sector.





Our Membership

Principal Partners:

1. Newman University
2. University of Birmingham
3. Queen's Foundation Ecumenical College
4. Aston University
5. Bournville Village Trust

Schools:

7. Anglesey Primary School
8. St Francis' Catholic Primary School
9. St Clare's Catholic Primary School
10. KE Handsworth Wood Girls' Academy
11. Ark Victoria Academy
12. Ark Tindal Primary Academy

Union Branches:

13. UNISON Birmingham Colleges Branch

Faith:

14. Birmingham Methodist Circuit
15. Birmingham Progressive Synagogue
16. St Francis Church Handsworth
17. KSIMC Birmingham (Clifton Rd Mosque)
18. Huda Mosque & Community Centre
19. Masjid Al Farouq, Walsall

Community/Enterprise:

20. Aspire & Succeed
21. Eurosom Community Midlands CIC
22. Ashley Community Housing
23. Sister Care Services CIC
24. BLESST Centre
25. Saathi House
26. DaEro Community Forum
27. Communities Engage & Thrive CIC
28. Tao Fitness Centre CIC
29. BEEAS (ESOL Charity)



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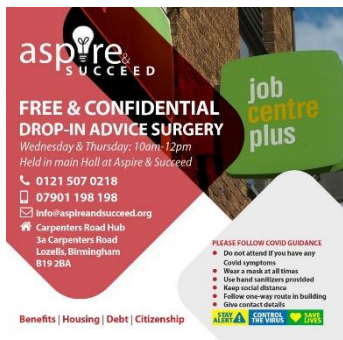
In March 2019, we at Citizens UK: Birmingham, set out to do some soul work! We launched an extensive listening campaign to unpack our chapter priorities in preparation for seeking pledges at regional elections in 2020.

In total we had over 800 face to face conversations, during 7 months of events and activities.

In October 2019, our leaders from across member institutions together with supporters gathered to vote on top civil society priorities for the 2020 regional elections for Mayor & Police + Crime Commissioner.



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Then the Covid-19 pandemic struck, changing our focus to fighting the spread of the virus & responding to arising community issues. Here's a [thread](#) on how we organised in 2020.



Citizens UK: Birmingham Delegates Assembly 2020

Wednesday 25th November 2020
 6pm-7.30pm on Zoom
 Register here to book your place:
<https://tinyurl.com/yyejqzy9>

Join leaders from across Citizens UK member organisations to review 2020 and plan ahead to next year's regional elections.

We will be outlining our updated priorities to make families better off, communities safer and our region a place of welcome.

We will also celebrate the work of so many in our communities who have taken charge to make a difference to people's lives during this pandemic.

More info: saidul.haque@citizensuk.org



It's no bull, follow the guidelines!
 Keep **OUR CITY** safe, prevent a lockdown, save lives!



I hope I haven't offended anyone by the implied expletive above - but, as a public transport user who has also suffered a covid-19 death in the family, this is a message I feel strongly about.

11:14



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Make our families better off

This priority is at the root of all our campaigns as it seeks to improve the money people have coming in as well as secure a home of their own, they can afford.

- 1. Mayor to ensure the build of 20% affordable housing from Commonwealth Games investment and elsewhere in Birmingham – of which at least 3064 should be social rent family homes**
- 2. Both to make the West Midlands a real living wage region**
- 3. Both to offer at least 100 paid work placements for 16-30 year olds**





1. Mayor to ensure the build of 20% affordable housing from Commonwealth Games investment and elsewhere in Birmingham – of which at least 3064 should be social rent family homes.



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1. **A picture of Birmingham:** In June 2020, 3064 families were in temporary accommodation, 428 of them were in emergency B&B accommodation ([source](#)). Over 13,000 families on council's housing register.
2. They are the people most struggling to meet market rent or able to get a mortgage to buy at a 'affordable rate'. Council has approximately 60,000 properties and has let under 4,000 in the past 12 years. Most properties let are flats and not able to accommodate families with three or more children.
3. Our concern is the urgent need to build social rent family homes to respond to the crisis of 1800 (see #BrumWish campaign by Birmingham Mail) city homeless children living in temporary accommodation & to build our way back to recovery from the pandemic.
4. Stories of mums like '[Maryam](#)' (Birmingham Live) and '[Denise](#)' (SKY News) who have endured terrible experiences living with their children in cramped B&B rooms (minus breakfast). The children travelled across long distances in the city to attend school and relied on fast food places for dinner at the end of the day.
5. Our member primary schools and community organisations report regular stories of families in similar situations.
6. We are pleased in Feb 2020; the Combined Authority became the first of any region to [define 'affordable housing'](#) based on paying no more than 35% of salary on housing costs.
7. **There is a national call for Government to act to build council homes as well as calls to increase the Housing Benefit cap, but will you work with us so locally opportunities like the Commonwealth Games & other investments deliver on social rent family homes as a priority within their affordable housing target?**



2. Both to make the West Midlands a real living wage region



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1. The voluntary rate, £9.50 per hour for those aged 18 years and over, is independently calculated to reflect the increased cost of living
2. Over 6,000 UK employers currently pay it; 219 of which are headquartered in the West Midlands (source: Living Wage Foundation)
3. Since 2011, £43,614,112 in extra wages has gone into workers' pockets in the West Midlands
4. In 2019, [research by KPMG](#) found there are 2.1 million jobs in the West Midlands (21%) still paying less than the real Living Wage
5. [New research](#) by the Living Wage Foundation found over a quarter of low-paid workers (amounting to over one million people across the country) have had to regularly skip meals since the start of the pandemic as a result of financial constraints, with over a third saying low pay had negatively affected relationships with close family and friends, and nearly half seeing a negative effect on their levels of anxiety.
6. Birmingham is the only Living Wage accredited council in the Combined Authority. Joined by regional leaders Greater Birmingham & Solihull Chamber of Commerce, Office of the West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner, West Midlands Police, National Express and Sandwell & West Birmingham NHS Hospital Trust, they are on course to announce Birmingham as a Living Wage city in the summer.
7. In 2017, we asked the Combined Authority to become a living wage accredited employer. In 2020, [it did](#).
8. London 2012 was the first [living wage accredited Olympics](#), ten years on will Birmingham 2022 be the first living wage accredited Commonwealth Games?



3. Both to offer at least 100 paid work placements for 16-30 year olds

1. During our listening campaign, we heard stories from school leavers to undergraduates on how difficult more and more young people were finding securing paid work experience.
2. 19-year-old Joherul from Lozells, an undergraduate at Aston University, was unable to secure any part-time work since turning 16 despite making over 20 applications. He is worried he will graduate with no paid work experience.
3. The number of teenagers with part-time jobs has nearly halved over the past 20 years according to [a new report by the Resolution Foundation](#). 60 percent of 16-64 year olds who have never worked are young students.
4. Unpaid work experience disproportionately benefits those from better off families.
5. Our member institutions strongly argue the significant incentives paid work opportunities offer to counter negative messages of gangs & youth violence.
6. The placements will be determined by the needs of the employer: some may choose to offer a block week or two of full-time hours, whilst others may prefer to offer part-time hours over multiple weeks. Every placement would be subject to a successful application by the young person. The rate of pay needs to be the real living wage rate of £9.50 per hour for those aged 18 years or over.
7. An example of a programme initially piloted with Citizens UK by a local authority is '[Hackney 100](#)'
8. We do not have a detailed proposal for a paid work placement programme yet but will work with you to co-produce a pilot.



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Make our communities safer

These priorities are at the focus of our work in tackling the rise in 'everyday hate' and the need for better youth mental health counselling as a public health approach to reducing youth violence.

- 4. Both to convene mental health counselling by trained staff in schools and colleges**
- 5. Both to pilot hate crime action plans with public, private & third sector employers**
- 6. Police Commissioner to make Misogyny a hate crime indicator**





4. Both to convene mental health counselling by trained staff in schools and colleges



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1. In [November 2018](#), the Children's Commissioner Anne Longfield called for every school to have a mental health counsellor. She called for better lower level mental health services to "ensure easy access before conditions deteriorate".
2. In [December 2018](#), the Department for Education and Department of Health named 25 "trailblazer" areas for new mental health teams, which will work with around 8,000 children and up to 20 schools each from late 2019. Birmingham was not included in the list of areas.
3. Our listening campaign in 2019, identified the below issues:
 - a. The Forward-Thinking Birmingham service relies on referral to make an appointment, teachers and parents in our membership point out an on-site counsellor in school would remove this barrier to access/seeking help.
 - b. Community leaders working with children affected by youth violence pointed out how an easy access to low level mental health service in School could have an impact to reduce chances of ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
 - c. Young people from our member institutions urged any new service must be delivered by staff experienced with working in diverse communities with different cultural factors.
4. In [October 2019](#), Birmingham's health and education bodies announced their own pilot with 20 schools in South Birmingham.
5. We welcome this project, but it only covers the area under the remit of Birmingham & Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group, and not that of West Birmingham. It also does not involve the third sector who have unique insights and experience of working with families from diverse communities.
6. Will you meet NHS Commissioners with us in your first 3 months in office to work out how his can be supported & prioritised?



5. Both to pilot hate crime action plans with employers

1. Hate crime has [more than doubled](#) in the West Midlands since 2013
2. This current West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner's [online page](#) related to hate crime is inadequate. There were a total of four sentences referring to hate crime in the [Police & Crime Plan 2016-2020](#)
3. Less than [1 in 10 hate crimes reported are prosecuted](#).
4. In 2019, Law Commission launched a review of hate crime law – with Aston University we hosted [a hearing in Birmingham](#) during our listening campaign where our members shared powerful stories of antisemitic, Islamophobic, racist and homophobic incidents in a variety of settings from in school/on campus, at places of worship, in the workplace, on public transport to out & about on the street.
5. On 10 Sept 2020, following our own study Citizens UK launched report: '[Overcoming Everyday hate](#)'. Also that month, it was confirmed hate crime on the rise in our region during pandemic.
6. Also, during Autumn of 2020 Citizens UK teamed up with Birmingham City Council to begin to support employers to develop their own hate crime action plans within their Diversity & Inclusion work.
7. Will you work with us and stakeholders to pilot hate crime action plans with employers - focusing on preventative measures with a commitment to record and report on how they are doing?





6. Police Commissioner to make Misogyny a hate crime indicator



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1. There have been [60,000 recorded hate crime incidents on women](#) in the UK.
2. The Police & Crime Commissioner has the power to make misogyny a hate crime indicator. Nottinghamshire and North Yorkshire Police & Crime Commissioners and their Police Forces have done it.
3. This is [what](#) the Deputy Chief Constable of North Yorkshire Police said when they launched it. Contrary to what you might read in certain newspapers, recording misogyny as a hate crime would not lead to [“men being locked up for wolf-whistling”](#). Misogynistic hate crimes recorded by the police since Nottinghamshire Police Force adopted it include stalking, groping, indecent assault and kidnapping.
4. Making misogyny a hate crime simply means police forces would log and monitor such incidents and then enable them to create a full picture of the problem, support victims, and make them aware of where incidents are reoccurring.
5. **The problem is intersectional:** many local women’s experiences revealed the intersection of misogyny with other forms of hate, most notably islamophobia. Muslim women in Aston, Birmingham shared stories of how they were singled out for Islamophobic abuse on the street because they were women.
6. We were pleased to hear the [Law Commission announce recognising gender as a hate crime](#) indicator within its recommendations to improve legislation.
7. Will making misogyny a hate crime indicator be in your Police & Crime Plan?

Build a region of welcome

Our priorities here aim to build a region where all communities get access to advice and support whether they are newly arrived as refugees or have been settled here for generations.

- 7. Both with partners to set up a ‘Community Advice Fund’ commissioning free local advice surgeries delivered by civil society groups + institutions.**
- 8. Mayor to promote a region of sanctuary: backing extension of VPRS, community sponsorship & ensuring ESOL covers more hours of lessons with childcare & travel costs**
- 9. Mayor to extend business support to ethnic minority entrepreneurs**





7. Both with partners to set up a 'Community Advice Fund' commissioning free local advice surgeries delivered by civil society groups + institutions.



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1. With 'austerity' Birmingham carried out significant cuts to advice provision it delivered and commissioned, leading to the closure of council run neighbourhood offices as well as independent city advice agencies who were a regular point of call for residents to get free in person advice on rights and services.
2. In 2019, we found vulnerable families were waiting until they were in crisis to seek advice and support, when school and children's professionals were involved. Navigating telephone and online provision was very difficult with limited accuracy on securing the right help.
3. During Lockdown 1 in 2020, we found the rapid response of food parcels and other support for vulnerable households by an amazing range of organisations and voluntary groups often missed the offer of direct help to access rights, entitlements and support provided by statutory agencies, charitable foundations and specialist advice agencies.
4. **Story:** A mum of 4 had her universal credit payments stopped because her husband joined her in the UK on family reunion back in February. The DWP office in Handsworth repeatedly told her in March it will be reinstated when her husband's National Insurance number comes through. This was wrong, they didn't need to stop payments and according to Covid rules published online then the DWP were not issuing new NI numbers but were accepting new claimants without it. We helped her draft a complaint requesting a review of the decision citing above. Overnight her payments were reinstated. Up until then her family were relying on credit from a local grocery store, the school meal vouchers for kids, food parcels from charities and had fallen behind on their rent.
5. Community Advice Surgeries is the tested intervention to reduce health inequalities and to speed up a public health approach to reducing violence in our region.
6. The social and economic impact of Covid is widely reported. We are calling on the Mayor & Police Commissioner to team up with others to launch an emergency 'Community Advice Fund' for local groups and civil society institutions to deliver advice surgeries with the cost of staffing, resources and training covered.



8. Mayor to promote a region of sanctuary: backing extension of [VPRS](#), community sponsorship, refugee welcome schools & ensuring ESOL covers more hours of lessons with childcare & travel costs



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1. Citizens UK has a strong record of organising to uphold our country's long held tradition of offering sanctuary. In 2015, our [local work](#) supported a national campaign to resettle Syrian refugees from UN camps. In 2017, the then Home Secretary backed our work on launching the [community sponsorship programme](#). In 2018, we launched [Refugee Welcome Schools](#) with the NASUWT.
2. On Armistice Day in November 2020, civil society groups from across the West Midlands gathered to form a regional network of community sponsorship projects. In December 2020, Home Office Minister Chris Philp attended a [Citizens UK Assembly](#) on refugee welcome and announced the Government's continued support for resettlement of refugees & community sponsorship.
3. **As Mayor, will you regularly meet and work with us to promote a region of sanctuary, ensuring national government recognise this?**
4. Ahead of the 2017 West Midlands Mayoral elections, we called for a comprehensive programme for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to be developed which covered childcare and transport costs for learners.
5. At the time, the remit for ESOL had not been devolved to the Combined Authority. It now has, and we are pleased to see a [review](#) was commissioned by the Combined Authority.
6. The review identifies the barriers of limited hours, childcare and travel costs to learners, but doesn't identify what will be done about it in year one. The case studies mentioned do not include any community providers.
7. It may not have been within the remit of the review, but in our listening campaign we have heard from local English language learning provision (not ESOL) taking place by faith, voluntary & community organisations receiving no support to sustain their classes.
8. We welcome the Combined Authority's decision in May 2019 to extend free ESOL to those in work and earning up to the real living wage. **We request to join the proposed 'Expert Panel of ESOL Practitioners' to which our alliance will be represented by [BEEAS](#)?**



9. Mayor to extend business support to ethnic minority entrepreneurs



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1. Businesses owned by ethnic minorities contribute £25-£32 billion to the UK economy a year (CREME, Aston University). It is not clear what that figure is for the West Midlands.
2. In 2017, we called for annual reporting on how well business support providers impact ethnic minority entrepreneurs.
3. Since then, we teamed up with the Growth Hub, NatWest and the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME) to test a community organising approach to business support. Focusing on High Streets in some of Birmingham's most disadvantaged Wards, the project engaged with over 300 local small businesses and worked intensively to support 60 of them.
4. Many of the entrepreneurs were also active in civil society, often juggling between earning an income with serving their local or diaspora communities through commitments at their places of worship, with cultural events or through charitable work.
5. The [project](#) has yielded insights into the concerns, challenges and creative potential of communities.
6. We welcome the Combined Authority's commitment to 'Inclusive Growth' and request active steps need to be taken to engage diverse communities in conversations and policies on it.
7. **We ask the Mayor to work with us on the following:**
 - 1) Meet with business owners from our project
 - 2) Support a study to establish the contribution of, and challenges facing, entrepreneurs from ethnic minority backgrounds in the West Midlands
 - 3) require business support intermediaries to set out their approaches to engagement
 - 4) report on progress at the Annual CREME Conference

Relationship with us

10. Both the Mayor and Police & Crime Commissioner to meet with us twice a year

11. Both the Mayor and Police & Crime Commissioner to attend a mid-term Accountability Assembly in 2022



Further information

Saidul Haque Saeed

Lead Organiser, Citizens UK: Birmingham

c/o St Mary's Convent, 98 Hunters Rd, Birmingham, B19 1EB

Email: saidul.haque@citizensuk.org

Mobile: 07878 673 186

