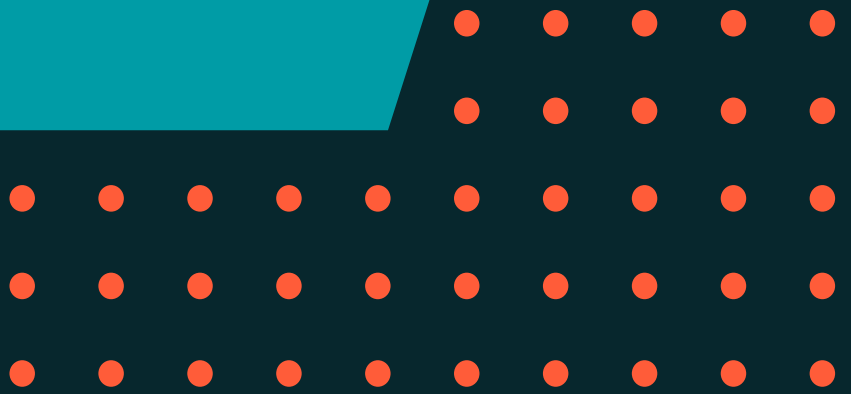




CITIZENS UK MANIFESTO

GENERAL ELECTION
2024/25



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BRINGING
COMMUNITIES
together



INTRODUCTION

All our work starts with listening. What's putting pressure on you and your family? What's making you angry? We channel that anger into action as we bring people into local democracy as active citizens and as leaders in their community. Do you want to help make a change? Who can you bring with you? This is how we build people power, within and between our 500 member communities, relationship by relationship.

This Manifesto has been developed by thousands of everyday people in diverse communities across the UK. It's a set of proposals for radical but achievable change, and it's a plan of action, as each of the priorities here involve both what we need Government to do and what we as Citizens UK commit to do. We have teams of local leaders up and down the UK, who are taking the campaigns to politicians of all parties over the coming months, in small

meetings and in big events, seeking their support. We know this method works. It's how we've built the UK Living Wage campaign that has put £3 billion more into the pockets of low paid workers, secured a cap on the cost of credit to control exploitative lenders, ended the detention of children for immigration purposes and entitled children to free school meals regardless of their parents' immigration status.

Matthew Bolton, Executive Director, Citizens UK

WORK AND WAGES

WHY ARE WE WORKING ON THIS?

Citizens UK launched the Living Wage campaign in 2001, calling for a wage that meets everyday needs. The real Living Wage is currently £12 across the UK and £13.15 in London. It is the only UK wage rate based on the cost of living. Today tackling low pay and insecure work remains an urgent priority across our chapters. At least 3.7 million workers across the UK are struggling to get by on low pay that doesn't meet the cost of living. Many are also in insecure work with limited and unpredictable hours, meaning workers and their families are being pushed to the brink, forced to rely on food banks, skip meals or go without essentials.

It doesn't need to be this way. By paying at least the real Living Wage, employers ensure their workers can afford the cost of living. The UK Government should ensure the real Living Wage is the minimum rate of pay in sectors which rely on government funding and procurement, and across our vital social care sector where low pay is endemic and work is insecure. Government can go further by introducing new laws that tackle insecure work and guarantee not just at least the real Living Wage but Living Hours for all.

The insecurity of hours and low pay associated with domiciliary care work makes it impossible to forecast how much I can expect to earn from one week to the next. My work involves travelling between clients in their own homes and it is very common for that travel time to go unpaid, despite the fact HMRC clearly classes it as legal working time. Since the order and amount of client visits on a given shift regularly change, unpaid travel time is a key reason why domiciliary care work is a particularly unreliable source of income, alongside widespread reliance on zero-hours contracts.

RACHEL KELSO, CARE WORKER AND NOTTINGHAM CITIZENS LEADER

KEY FIGURES

- 3.7 million workers in the UK, including 43 per cent of social care workers, are paid below the real Living Wage.
- 60 per cent of workers paid below the real Living Wage have used a food bank in the last 12 months.
- 6.1 million people are trapped in insecure forms of work, with nearly 60 per cent of workers whose shifts vary receiving less than a week's notice for shifts.
- One in ten workers are outsourced and a third of all UK government spending goes on public procurement.

OUR TRACK RECORD

The real Living Wage campaign is one of Citizens UK's most successful and long standing campaigns, leading to more than 14,000 accredited employers across the UK and putting £3 billion more into the pockets of low paid workers. Today one in eight people work for a Living Wage employer. The real Living Wage has become an accepted benchmark of fair pay, used in 'good work' standards and procurement policies in Wales, Scotland and several public authorities around the UK. In Wales, following campaigning by Citizens Cymru Wales, and in Scotland social care workers are now paid at least a real Living Wage after the importance of this was recognised by devolved governments.

Our impact has expanded through our Living Hours employer accreditation, designed to tackle insecure work and adopted by nearly 150 employers, and through the Living Pension, a new standard adopted by at least 30 employers which aims to prevent poverty in retirement.

As with our employer accreditations, our policy recommendations have been co-designed with employers, workers, unions and communities. We know that when we come together with business, communities and decision makers, we can change lives for the better.



WE CALL ON THE NEXT UK GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Ensure all social care workers in England are paid at least the real Living Wage, building on the example set by Scotland and Wales:

- Secure at least the real Living Wage for every hour worked, including sleep-in shifts and in-work travel time.
- Start with publicly funded adult social care. Put in place sufficient funding, delivery mechanisms and requirements on commissioners of social care to raise the wages of adult social care workers across the care they fund, including care funded by Direct Payments.
- Initiate a process with employers' and workers' representatives to ensure the whole social care sector is paid at least the real Living Wage - guaranteed through provider accreditation - and with a broader remit to improve workers' terms and conditions.

2. Embed and promote the real Living Wage and Living Hours through UK procurement and grant-making, supporting a race to the top where

employers who provide the real Living Wage and Living Hours are recognised and incentivised with government contracts and grants:

- Leverage the Social Value and Procurement Acts to make the real Living Wage a default requirement of suppliers to the public sector and to incentivise Living Hours. Ensure this is reflected in the guidance for all public contracting authorities.
- Embed the real Living Wage and Living Hours as key criteria in the creation of any 'good work' standard or charter which encourages employers to meet stretching employment standards and allows them to score more highly in procurement and grant-making.
- Lead by example and require all UK Government departments to accredit as Living Wage employers and work towards Living Hours accreditation, encouraging other public bodies to do the same.

3. Strengthen people's rights and access to predictable, sufficient hours, learning from the Living Wage Foundation's Living Hours standard, by introducing:

- A new right to an employment contract that reflects actual hours worked based on a 12-week reference period.
- The requirement for employers to provide four weeks' minimum advance notice of shifts with reasonable compensation for shifts cancelled at short notice.
- A minimum number of guaranteed hours from day one of employment, set out in the employment contract unless the worker requests otherwise.

WE WILL:

- Continue to campaign for the Living Wage and Living Hours, lifting hundreds of thousands out of low pay and insecure work, benefitting the taxpayer through savings on benefits, and building a movement of responsible employers showing that providing good working conditions makes business sense.

- Work with the UK Government, Government departments and public bodies to take forward the proposals outlined above, including:
 - Convening Living Wage and Living Hours Employers and Recognised Service Providers to understand how these changes can be implemented and hear firsthand the business benefits.
 - Convening workers from our communities who have experience of low paid insecure work and social care, to share their realities and how government can support the changes that are needed.
- Celebrate UK Government departments, local authorities, health trusts, social care providers and more who accredit as Living Wage and Living Hours employers.

MENTAL HEALTH

WHY ARE WE WORKING ON THIS?

Listening in schools, colleges and communities across our chapters, we consistently hear that existing mental health services fail to meet the needs of children and young people, who fall through the cracks in an overstretched system.

The mental health of children and young people has deteriorated in recent years and one in five have a probable mental health condition. *The National Parent Survey 2023* of more than 5,000 parents found that 40 per cent believe their primary school-age child has experienced anxiety. One in six parents say their secondary school-age child has experienced depression.

Children and young people with minor needs are helped by school and college staff, and in some cases Mental Health Support Teams, while those with severe

needs are on waiting lists for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). There are 1.8 million children and young people who are not considered unwell enough for CAMHS treatment, but who have needs beyond what existing support in schools can meet. This is where counselling would make a difference.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland young people already have access to school-based counselling. England is the only country in the UK where counselling in schools and colleges is not funded by the UK Government.

Citizens UK believes statutory counselling in schools and colleges is the best way of reaching children and young people with much-needed mental health support, as well as reducing pressure on CAMHS.

Kevin had a difficult childhood and had suffered grief. As a result of his experiences, his attendance at school fell, but Kevin was able to receive in-school counselling. During counselling he was able to address depression and anger rooted in his early years' experiences. Since counselling, he has been attending school regularly and was able to complete his GCSEs.



OUR TRACK RECORD

In 2017, Tyne & Wear Citizens launched a Citizens-led 'Commission on Mental Health' which won key policy changes that have benefitted hundreds of lives across the region. As a result of the Commission, Tyne & Wear Citizens developed the first school-based counselling pilot across the region.

South London Citizens launched 'South London Listens' to prevent mental ill-health as a result of the pandemic. More than 6,000 people shared their stories, leading to the creation of Be Well Hubs across South London. Hundreds of people were trained to support their communities, and Virtual Waiting Rooms were created to assist families waiting for appointments.

Brighton & Hove Citizens spoke to over 5,500 people to understand the mental health challenges faced by young people. They got their local council to declare a 'Mental Health Emergency', becoming the first English city to do so. They also got one of their local NHS Trusts to simplify the referral process and create Virtual Waiting Rooms to help families access key services. Finally, they secured £200,000 in local authority funding to launch a city-wide counselling pilot for all secondary schools.

In May 2024, Tyne & Wear Citizens organised a Mayoral Assembly for the candidates competing for the first elected Mayor of the recently formed North East Combined Authority. During the Assembly, the candidates were asked if they would fund a region-wide pilot for Year 9 pupils across all seven local authorities if they were elected. All candidates, including the candidate Kim McGuinness, who ultimately became the Mayor, agreed to fund the £350,000 program directly.

KEY FIGURES

- Five children in a classroom of 30 are likely to have a mental health problem, [according to a 2022 report](#).
- A survey of 1,000 GPs in 2022 found that 63 per cent felt young patients were at risk of harm through lack of access to mental health treatment.
- [One in five children and young people](#) in England had a probable mental disorder in 2023.

It's the one and only place that I can just talk about me.

KEVIN, YEAR 13 STUDENT FROM NEWCASTLE



WE CALL ON THE NEXT UK GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Provide statutory counselling in schools and colleges across England for all children and young people, building on the example set by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland:

- Put in place funding to ensure delivery over the long-term either through local authorities or mental health support teams.

2. Ensure high quality counselling provision that is sensitive to the child's individual circumstances and background:

- Set criteria that counselling is provided by those trained on a nationally recognised course, registered with a professional body for ethical oversight, training and supervision, and experienced in working with school-age children.

- Ensure counselling is integrated with other stakeholders, including Mental Health Leads, Family Liaison Officers, senior management teams and external agencies (social services, police, local authority).

3. Enable NHS Trusts and local communities to work together to improve mental health:

- Support and fund NHS Mental Health Foundation Trusts to work with schools, colleges and community groups to strengthen local support networks around families and young people.
- Set the expectation that NHS Trusts build relationships with local communities and co-design health interventions with local people.

WE WILL:

- Continue working with schools, colleges, Local Authorities and health services to pioneer and prove the effectiveness of a best practice model of school-based counselling.
- Develop and deepen innovative partnerships between communities, mental health trusts and commissioners to improve services, tackle health inequalities and address the social determinants of health.
- Continue to address stigma around mental health and strengthen relationships across our communities, recognising that social isolation is one of the key factors that leads to poor mental health.



PATHWAYS TO CITIZENSHIP

WHY ARE WE WORKING ON THIS?

Almost everyone living in the UK is on a pathway to gaining British Citizenship eventually. But rather than supporting people who have put down roots in this country to become citizens, our current system is fraught with spiraling costs, barriers, delays and stress. This means that hundreds of thousands of people living in our communities are impoverished and isolated while trying to progress their lives in the place they've made their home. If the system is left as it is, we risk a repeat of the Windrush scandal by failing to learn the lessons.

We listened to over 2,000 people in schools, universities, faith communities and charities in our membership about their experiences. Not having the certainty of knowing you can live in the UK long-term can prevent people studying, working, moving jobs, visiting family and progressing in life. Whilst on the pathway to become citizens, families spend tens of thousands of pounds on visa applications and many are blocked from basic support such as child benefit and childcare hours through a 'No Recourse to Public Funds' condition on their visa. This can force families into poverty and destitution.

The pathway is also full of unnecessary blockages. It can take months to hear back about decisions, small mistakes result in failed applications and there is no fee waiver for key parts of the pathway. We heard from some people who had been on the pathway for years and were penalised or kicked off the pathway altogether, due to administrative



failures. In most situations, legal advice is unavailable or prohibitively expensive. Gaining British Citizenship should be an achievable goal that is encouraged, not an unnecessarily long and painful process which impoverishes people who have already made this country home.

The pathway to citizenship should be timely, affordable and fair. This would transform lives, allow people to participate fully in society, and strengthen our democracy.

I came to the UK at 14 and grew up here. I played basketball for England and was proud to wear that jersey. After 30 years working in the railways, I retired and went to visit family in Zimbabwe. I couldn't return because of the pandemic and was outside the UK for long enough to lose my leave to remain. I was destitute. Because I wasn't a citizen, it wasn't enough that I wore the flag on my chest. I didn't have the security and acceptance that comes with Citizenship. That's why this matters to people like me who are British whether we have a passport or not. We have put down roots and want those roots to be acknowledged.

AMANDA, CITIZENS UK LEADER, LONDON

KEY FIGURES

- Over 220,000 children are subject to 'No Recourse to Public Funds' conditions on their visas, which means they will be denied access to basic support including child benefit and childcare hours.
- A family of four may need over £69,000 to become British citizens. The process of becoming British Citizens for a family of four on the 10-year route costs over £33,000 in fees alone. On top of this families have to pay the annual Immigration Health Surcharge and the costs of legal advice.
- An estimated 950,000 people who have already made their lives in the UK will have to wait ten or more years before they can apply for settlement and, following that, citizenship. This includes people on the ten-year route with family or long-term ties to the UK, people without status (who will wait 30 years) and children of migrants without status, even if they were born in this country.

OUR TRACK RECORD

- **Regularisation.** Our Strangers into Citizens campaign, launched in 2006, led to over 150,000 people being able to regularise their immigration status.
- **Deputy Mayor for Social Integration in London.** In 2016, 6,000 members of London Citizens gathered at the Olympic Park to make the case to the London Mayoral Candidates for a Deputy Mayor of Citizenship and Integration. This post was introduced shortly after the election and has helped drive the Mayor's work on these issues.
- **Child Citizenship Fee Waivers.** The UK government agreed in 2022 to our campaign to introduce a fee waiver for the application for child citizenship and waive the fee entirely for children in care.
- **Free School Meals.** In 2022 the UK government agreed to extend free school meals to all children regardless of their parents' immigration status following our campaign.

WE CALL ON THE NEXT UK GOVERNMENT TO:

Make the pathway to citizenship timely, affordable, and fair. The next steps towards this are to:

- 1. Make acquisition of citizenship for people who have made the UK their home a guiding principle of the migration system:**
 - Getting British Citizenship is something to be celebrated and promoted. The Home Office should prioritise supporting people who have committed their lives to the UK to become British Citizens. This means setting positive goals for citizenship and assessing policy through the lens of whether it encourages or restricts the pathway.
- 2. Ensure children and families do not face destitution while on the pathway to citizenship:**
 - No-one should be forced into destitution because they aren't yet a citizen. The Government needs to reduce fees for families on the pathway to citizenship and open up access to basic support,

including child benefit and childcare hours for those with the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' condition on their visa.

should be priced out of citizenship: there should be a fee waiver at each stage including indefinite leave to remain and citizenship applications.

3. Create a fit-for-purpose application system for settlement and citizenship:

- Application processes on the pathway should be explicit, transparent and accountable. Waiting periods should never be more than six months in any part of the system and people should not be blocked by administrative backlogs. The Home Office needs to urgently unblock and simplify the system with reforms to streamline applications, reduce processing times and increase transparency. No one

WE WILL:

- Develop community leaders with experience of the pathway to citizenship to shine a spotlight on the problem and advocate for change.
- Organise our communities to make improvements on a local level to prevent destitution, enable access to healthcare and increase local provision of English lessons.
- Promote integration and community cohesion through relationship building across differences.
- Pilot a series of community lawyering approaches and 'know your rights' trainings so people feel better equipped to navigate the system.



WELCOMING REFUGEES

WHY ARE WE WORKING ON THIS?

We have seen the public appetite to welcome refugees through our Community Sponsorship Groups in every part of the UK: from rural communities in Pembrokeshire, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, to inner city London, Manchester and Birmingham. We have been overwhelmed by the tens of thousands of people who have sponsored Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan, Sudanese, and Rohingya refugees in their communities, welcomed Ukrainians into their homes, and supported Hong Kongers rebuilding their lives here.

We want to give every community in the UK the opportunity to become a place of welcome to those seeking sanctuary, and we want every resettled refugee and person seeking asylum to experience the best of British hospitality.

The UK has a proud tradition of offering sanctuary to people fleeing war and persecution, but more should be done to enable the generosity and hospitality of the public through expanding resettlement routes and making it easier for communities to sponsor refugees.

Following the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Diocese of Oxford partnered with Citizens UK to resettle Ukrainians through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This network of support has led to 100 host households collectively welcoming 198 Ukrainians (including 72 children) across the Thames Valley area.

The experience has been challenging but positive for hosts and guests alike, and those supported report high levels of satisfaction and low levels of sponsor breakdown. The Diocese has also encouraged participation in the Community Sponsorship Scheme and Communities for Afghans.

HANNAH LING, SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVISER, DIOCESE OF OXFORD

KEY FIGURES

- Research from More in Common in 2022 shows that the public are strongly in favour of the UK offering sanctuary to refugees – with 74 per cent in favour.
- The UK public have demonstrated their willingness to help those fleeing danger in their home country. More than 70,000 people applied to sponsor a Ukrainian guest under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, enabling over 141,200 Ukrainians to come to the UK.
- Over 2.4 million refugees will need resettlement globally in 2024, a 20 per cent increase in the requirement in 2023, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Only a tiny proportion of those will come to the UK, but we need to play our part.



OUR TRACK RECORD

- ◆ Citizens UK's campaigning and practical work in building 'Refugee Welcome' groups across the country was instrumental in gaining the commitment from the UK Government in 2015 to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees.
- ◆ Since 2015 our members have helped councils locally to resettle refugees, but Citizens UK is also the largest Lead and Principal Sponsor for the UK Government's Community Sponsorship Scheme. We've supported over a quarter of groups that have welcomed refugees into their communities since 2016.
- ◆ Citizens UK is a Recognised Provider of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and through our Communities for Ukraine programme we've matched over a thousand guests with hosts, supported by Resettlement Partners. We've seen the massive difference that communities and hosts can make in stepping up to welcome refugees into their homes and their neighbourhoods.
- ◆ Citizens UK is now the Principal Sponsor for a new community sponsorship scheme, 'Communities for Afghans', which will welcome 100 families to the UK in 2024.

WE CALL ON THE NEXT UK GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Expand and simplify refugee resettlement schemes, with a focus on involving communities in the sponsorship and integration process, and giving more agency to hosts/sponsors and the people they welcome:

- ◆ Set an annual target of refugees resettled of at least 10,000.
- ◆ Build on our experience of the Homes for Ukraine and Communities for Afghans schemes to streamline the Community Sponsorship process, resource it more effectively to enable more people to become sponsors, and ensure it is accessible to eligible refugees of all nationalities.
- ◆ Introduce 'naming' into Community Sponsorship, so that local communities can sponsor eligible refugees with whom they already have a connection.

WE WILL

- ◆ Encourage Citizens UK members—including schools, faith groups, universities, charities and unions - to welcome resettled refugees through the Community Sponsorship Scheme, Homes for Ukraine, Communities for Afghans and any other similar schemes that are developed.
- ◆ Support other civil society organisations to welcome resettled refugees as Principal Sponsors (Communities for Afghans and Community Sponsorship Scheme) and Recognised Providers (Homes for Ukraine).
- ◆ Continue to offer a warm welcome to people in need of sanctuary in our communities, including those seeking asylum.



HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

WHY ARE WE WORKING ON THIS?

Everyone deserves a home that is secure, habitable and affordable. This is crucial to our health and wellbeing, our family and work life, and our dignity. Far too many people in our membership and across the UK are living in housing that is insecure, unaffordable and of sub-standard quality.

There are people living in 'temporary' accommodation for excessively long periods of time – as much as 21 years, where babies are learning to crawl on beds because of lack of space and children face chaotic moves from schools and GPs multiple times a year. Social and private tenants face spiralling rents that outstrip their income, due to a chronic lack of supply. Younger generations are giving up on dreams of one day owning their own home. And homes are too often subject to damp, mould, and other states of disrepair that impact our physical and mental health.



I have lived in temporary accommodation for over 20 years, and I have had to move 3 times during this period. My children are now adults, and they have never had somewhere they could call home. Even now, my house is not livable. I have to throw out clothes and furniture due to the damp and mould.

MELISSA (NOT HER REAL NAME), FROM A CITIZENS UK MEMBER INSTITUTION IN EAST LONDON

KEY FIGURES

- At least 168,000 children are living in temporary accommodation in the UK.
- [About 1.3 million households in England](#) are on local authority waiting lists for social housing, with [90,000 in Wales](#) and [240,000 in Scotland](#).
- 1 in 10 homes in the social rented sector in England are estimated to fail the decent homes standard, which states a home must meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing, be in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern facilities and services, and be warm enough.

OUR TRACK RECORD

In Birmingham we pioneered community-led training workshops and advice surgeries, covering basic housing rights, myth-busting, and how to navigate housing issues.

- In Wales, we gained a commitment from the Welsh Government to ban letting agency fees that were costing renters collectively millions of pounds a year.
- In London, we pioneered genuinely and permanently affordable housing through Community Land Trusts, and successfully campaigned for local authorities to develop landlord licensing schemes to help tackle rogue landlords. By securing

a commitment from the Mayor of London, we also doubled the percentage of affordable housing in new developments through the Good Development Standard.

- In Essex we expanded our Malachi Homes project in partnership with the Salvation Army and the Hill Group. This provided quality modular housing for people experiencing homelessness.
- In Somerset, we won a commitment from Somerset Council for 24 modular homes worth £3 million for homeless people and children leaving care.

WE CALL ON THE NEXT UK GOVERNMENT TO:

1. End child homelessness:

- Set a time-limit on temporary accommodation for households with children.
- Introduce and enforce improved standards, especially for families in temporary accommodation.
- Build more social and affordable homes fit for families.

2. Unlock the potential for more affordable housing across the UK:

- Build 145,000 affordable homes per year across the UK, including 90,000 social rented homes.
- Work with a diverse range of civil society landowners to repurpose land and buildings for new co-designed affordable housing, introducing specific funding and support to do this.

3. Publish a national home upgrade strategy which will make our existing homes safe and healthy as well as more energy-efficient:

- Work with communities to co-design the strategy and prioritise those most in need of home upgrade.
- Tackle disrepair in social housing by combining urgent repairs with root-cause solutions to issues like damp and mould, such as insulation and ventilation.
- Improve energy-efficiency of social rented homes to make them affordable to heat.

WE WILL:

- Work with local authorities to improve temporary accommodation, making sure it is fit for purpose for families and aligns with UK Government guidance.
- Identify and support community-led housing projects led by civil society landowners.
- Work with local authorities to identify priority areas for home repair and upgrade.
- Co-design community-led repairs and retrofit programmes which meet the needs of local people.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

WHY ARE WE WORKING ON THIS?

People in our communities are telling us how the climate crisis is affecting them now. Our campaign focuses on the role that poor quality housing plays in the human cost of climate change and how improved public transport could contribute to cutting emissions.

Thousands of people die each year because homes are damp and cold. Every day, people in our membership are faced with disrepair - we've heard about broken windows in South London and no insulation or walls black with mould in Cardiff. Our homes are leaking heat and wasting energy which makes bills expensive and contributes to rising temperatures. And as winters get wetter and summers get hotter, our homes are not fit to protect us.

Public transport is patchy, expensive and unreliable in the UK. Isolated communities are becoming increasingly disconnected so people resort to cars and taxis instead. We heard from parents in West Yorkshire who are forced to leave their jobs to drive children to school when the bus never arrives, a problem which families face in many parts of the country.

Communities are well placed to participate in locally-led home upgrade and transport redesign programmes, engaging residents and helping to prioritise those with the greatest need. This is a growing priority across the Citizens UK membership and we want to see ambition and leadership on home upgrades that match the scale of the need and a transport system which is reliable, affordable and clean.

For years I have struggled with unrepaired housing that is affecting my house with mould, and this has caused me both emotional and physical breakdowns, most of the time because the air in the flat was so infected that it affected my little son's health, and there was a time I thought I was going to lose him due to a mould crisis.

SANDRA, A PARENT LEADER FROM SOUTH LONDON CITIZENS



KEY FIGURES

- More than 7,000 people [die each year in the UK because of cold homes](#).
- [29 million homes in the UK need to be upgraded](#) by 2050 to reach the UK's net zero goals.
- Replacing car journeys with public transport can help reduce CO2 emissions by 42 per cent if using the bus and 73 per cent if travelling by train, [recent Scottish research found](#).

OUR TRACK RECORD

- We have listened to thousands of people who are living in substandard housing and facing daily challenges with public transport. We have also made change at a local and regional level.
- Led by Sixth Form students, Tyne and Wear Citizens won a £1 flat fare for 16 to 19-year-olds on buses across the region.
- West Yorkshire Citizens successfully campaigned to re-timetable two bus services to mirror the school day, ensuring that pupils and parents could commute.
- In Leeds, Bradford, Newcastle and Manchester, 64 young people from eight schools attended the Convention of the North and delivered policy asks on public transport to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and five regional mayors.
- Local campaign teams in Cardiff, Greater Manchester and London are reaching out to local authorities to involve communities in plans for repair and upgrades. We have been working with local authorities to explore what barriers they are facing with a view to embedding residents and community views into the design of housing solutions.

WE CALL ON THE NEXT UK GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Publish a national home upgrade strategy which will make our existing homes safe and healthy as well as more energy-efficient:

- Co-design the strategy with communities and work with us to prioritise those most in need of home upgrade.
- Tackle disrepair in social housing by combining urgent repairs with root-cause solutions to issues like damp and mould, such as insulation and ventilation, prioritising those most in need.
- Improve energy-efficiency of homes to make them affordable to heat.
- Reduce carbon emissions through retrofitting of homes.

2. Make public transport more affordable, reliable and accountable to the communities they serve:

- Devolve power and resources for public transport to regions.
- Introduce public scrutiny of transport provision, requiring regions to set up Accountability Boards that reflect the diversity of local communities, with power to sign off fares, timetables and plans in place of Transport Committees.
- Use agreed poverty-proofing measures in the setting and monitoring of service levels, timetabling and pricing to overcome barriers to using public transport faced by children, families, adults and seniors.

WE WILL:

- Work with local authorities to identify priority areas for home repair and upgrade.
- Co-design community-led retrofit programmes which meet the needs of local people and net zero goals.
- Work with regional authorities, local authorities and bus companies to build an inclusive membership of Accountability Boards.
- Develop credible and inclusive methods for feedback and scrutiny of public transport, including Citizens Juries.

RACIAL EQUITY IN EDUCATION

WHY ARE WE WORKING ON THIS?

Education should be an equaliser, with schools as places where every child has an equal chance to thrive. Sadly, this is not yet the case. We have listened to a diverse range of children, young people, parents and educators who have told us about their experiences of racial inequity within the education system. Many experience discrimination based on skin colour, religion, nationality or culture. Schools and multi-academy trusts are making changes to address this, but without national action, inequality persists for too many.

Students tell us that the presence and contributions of racially marginalised people are often not adequately reflected in curricula and that people aren't represented in the staff body, particularly at senior levels. We also know that many racist

incidents in schools and colleges are inadequately dealt with. All of this results in enduring negative social and economic impact, within and beyond the school gates.

Yet we've also learned of, and contributed to, good practice in many schools and colleges, from diverse curriculum in Leicester, to more equitable recruitment, retention and progression in West Yorkshire and a whole school approach to racial equity in Tyne and Wear. We want to work with the next UK Government to make sure that good practice is reflected in all educational spaces. Together we can build an education system that fosters a positive learning environment, promotes inclusivity and supports the well-being of students and staff.

KEY FIGURES

- [In the five years between 2016 and 2021, there were 60,000 incidents of racist bullying in England's schools.](#)
- [67 per cent of teachers, teaching assistants and school leaders admit to a lack of awareness about the effects of racism.](#)
- [56 per cent of educators have not received any anti-racism Continuing Professional Development in the past two years.](#)
- [In 2022, 60 per cent of schools in England had an all-white teaching staff.](#)

Ensuring that all students feel represented and safe within the education system is paramount to breaking down societal barriers. At Dixons, we are intentional in prioritising anti-racism and racial justice. From ongoing efforts to eliminate bias in recruitment, to embedding large-scale training and accountability for all leaders and staff, to supporting heads of department across our Trust to decolonise the curriculum.

As a result, we have seen positive changes in perception and a growing sense of authenticity among our staff and students. But we cannot stop there. Whilst individual schools and trusts across the nation are making progress, there is still a lack of national accountability, leaving many young people and staff excluded. It's time for the national policy environment to enable all schools to prioritise racial equity, ensuring that no individual is neglected in their educational journey.

FUNMILOLA STEWART, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL – RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT: ANTI-RACISM DIXONS ACADEMIES TRUST



OUR TRACK RECORD

We are already working with schools, multi-academy trusts, colleges and universities and political leaders across the UK to promote racial equity in education. Our highlights so far include having:

- Won increased spending on diverse books for Nottingham's city centre library, following on from the success of our 'Better Books' campaign, which provided all Nottingham primary schools with culturally diverse reading books.
- Secured commitments from senior education leaders in West Yorkshire to work together to create measures that will lead to more equitable recruitment, retention and progression of staff.
- Created anti-racist cultures in schools in Leicester by developing student leadership, with Student Ambassadors collaborating with the Leicester Education Improvement Partnership as part of a 'Diverse Curriculum Taskforce' and developing relationships with the Assistant Mayor for Education, to promote anti-racism in educational settings.
- Worked with schools in Tyne and Wear to co-create a whole school approach to anti-racism, implementing the National Education Union's Anti Racism Charter leading to changes impacting racially marginalised students, families and staff, and the wider community. This includes changes to policy and curricula, staff training and parental engagement.
- Secured commitments from the North East Mayor, Kim McGuinness, to commission research into intra and inter regional attainment gaps experienced by racially marginalised school students and to convene a taskforce to address findings.



WE CALL ON THE NEXT UK GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Review and reform the national curriculum to better represent the contributions of racially marginalised people to British society:

- Across subjects, acknowledge and celebrate knowledge production within migrant and diaspora communities, and from countries outside of Britain.
- Include anti-racism content within Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curricula.
- Work with exam boards and publishers to integrate new curricula into guidance and assessment.

2. Support education professionals and institutions to address racial inequity via the introduction of:

- Statutory training in racial equity and relevant frameworks for school leaders and governors, teachers across career phases and the broader school staff body.
- Recruitment, retention and progression measures to improve the diversity of the workforce including those that can be scaled up from schools, multi-academy trusts and regions and adopted as national programmes. The Department for Education should engage in targeted recruitment campaigns and publish ethnicity pay gaps in the education sector with action plans to address inequities.

- Updated existing safeguarding guidance to ensure zero-tolerance of racism in schools, strengthening existing anti-bullying measures, and advice to schools on de-escalation of incidents and how to support students, staff, parents and carers who are impacted.

3. Work with partners to co-design the reforms and their implementation:

- Engage a diverse range of schools, children, young people, parents and civil society groups in an expert review panel.
- Consult with the Welsh Government on the Anti-Racist Wales Strategy, to adopt relevant recommendations.
- Work with the above parties over the medium to long-term to design, implement and review reforms.

WE WILL:

- Continue to develop the leadership of a diverse range of schools, children, young people, parents and allies, who are committed to taking action to promote racial equity in education.
- Continue to organise both a national youth action team and diverse inter-generational team of our members, developing their leadership and supporting them to research and design an education system that reflects their needs.
- Develop our expertise by working with a range of experts in racial equity in education.
- Work with the Government to co-design reforms and their implementation.

DEMOCRACY & DEVOLUTION

WHY ARE WE WORKING ON THIS?

Citizens UK's vision is of a vibrant and inclusive democracy with civil society at its heart and we work every day to develop active citizens and build powerful communities. At a time when increasing numbers of people are sceptical about what democracy can deliver, we want to see power and decisions about resources brought closer to local people, and to extend the reach of our democracy to more young people.

As we have expanded our alliances into new areas of the UK, we have experienced the opportunities created through new regional Mayors in England and devolution to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We want the UK Government to push powers closer to citizens in more areas, in a way that also increases funding and support to areas that need it most. We also want to make this election about enfranchisement rather than disenfranchisement, with a call for 'Votes at 16'.



We are looking to London and Manchester as examples of how devolution can give local communities the power to raise local issues and have a handle on the local solutions. This, to us, is at the heart of devolution – not a political football, nor a party-political power-play, but an opportunity to devolve decision-making to communities.

TOBY QUIBELL, TYNE & WEAR CITIZENS

KEY FIGURES

- When asked how well they believe politicians 'understand the lives of people like you' a total of 78 percent of voting adults answered 'badly' [in 2022 polling](#).
- Young people are particularly disaffected, with 18 to 24-year-olds least likely to say that democracy serves them well, [according to 2022 polling](#).

OUR TRACK RECORD

- Trained people in our member organisations to register thousands of potential voters across our local chapters, especially those least likely to participate in elections, through our Voter Registration Champions scheme.
- Organised ten Accountability Assemblies involving thousands of people to build relationships with the candidates seeking to lead devolved administrations in Wales, Greater Manchester, North East, West Midlands, West Yorkshire and London.
- Worked with schools and colleges in Wales to encourage participation from 16 and 17-year-olds in Senedd elections.
- Successfully campaigned for the Welsh Government to ensure social care workers in Wales are paid at least the real Living Wage.

WE CALL ON THE NEXT UK GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Offer greater devolution of power and resources to nations, regions and communities across the UK:

- Bring devolved power closer to people by ensuring a seat at the table for the civil society institutions to which they belong (schools, universities, faith groups, health trusts, charities, unions and more), and encouraging greater accountability of local decision-makers to local communities.
- Devolve power and resources around housing and public transport, and to ensure at least a real Living Wage for social care workers, building on the example of Wales and Scotland.
- Devolve youth justice, probation and policing to the Welsh Government, bringing it into line with Scotland and Northern Ireland, and enabling new approaches to policing and justice developed in local communities.

WE WILL:

2. Unlock the democratic participation of young people:

- Change the legal voting age to 16 in future General and Local Elections.
- Further support schools and colleges to develop political literacy and active citizenship amongst young people from primary school onward, increasing electoral participation and young people's power to make change.

3. Introduce Automatic Voter Registration across the UK:

- Instead of registering to vote individually, citizens should be automatically registered when applying for things like a driver's licence, passport, or benefits. Like pensions, it would become opt-out rather than opt-in.

- Ask all of our member organisations - schools, universities, faith groups, unions, charities and more - to accredit as non-partisan Voter Registration Champions, committing them to register their people to vote, educate them about the new photo ID requirements, and encourage them to use their vote on election day.
- Encourage our partner organisations and accredited Living Wage employers to become Voter Registration Champions.
- Continue our tradition of organising accountability assemblies and building relationships with power-holders in devolved government.
- Encourage people to participate in public life, particularly our young people, through active citizenship in schools.



VOTER REGISTRATION: A CALL TO ACTION

Could you and your organisation help us get your community 'election-ready' and prevent 300,000 'at-risk' voters from losing their chance to vote?

Citizens UK is spearheading a campaign to do just that – but we are asking for every member organisation to join us and become an accredited 'Voter Registration Champion'.

The Electoral Commission has found that eight million eligible voters may miss out in the 2024 general election because they are not registered to vote in time, and four million people may be disenfranchised because they do not have the correct photo ID.

The 'Voter Registration Champions' scheme has been created to galvanise civil society organisations and employers into action, creating a network of organisations across the UK committed to getting their communities ready to vote.

The 'Voter Registration Champions' scheme rewards organisations for pledging to promote voter registration, educate people about the new photo ID requirements, and encourage them to turn out to vote on polling day. Citizens UK provides training and practical resources to help organisations meet the Voter Registration Champion criteria.

To get involved and find out more, go to voterchampion.org.uk



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? HOW YOU CAN HELP

This is a people-powered Manifesto and we need your help to make these campaigns a reality. Here's how you can get involved:

- If you are a politician or a decision-maker, work with us. Consider our asks and talk to us. We want to work with you for change.
- If these issues matter to you, consider joining Citizens UK. If you're not involved in Citizens but would like to be then please get in touch and we'll work out how you can support.
- If you are already part of Citizens UK, engage your parliamentary candidates. Join a delegation from your local chapter to raise these campaigns with your parliamentary candidates.
- If you're a member of Citizens UK, contact your Organiser to help lead one of these campaigns.

Thank you to all our member communities, partners, funders and allies, and most importantly, to those leaders who are experiencing these injustices right now and whose voices are at the heart of these campaigns.

BRINGING
COMMUNITIES
together

CITIZENS UK BRINGS TOGETHER PEOPLE AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS TO BUILD A BETTER, FAIRER SOCIETY.

OUR CHAPTERS:

Birmingham,
Brighton & Hove,
Essex,
Greater Manchester,
Lancashire,
Leicester & Leicestershire,
Liverpool,
East London (TELCO),
West London,
North London,
South London,
Nottingham,
Peterborough,
Somerset,
Thames Valley,
Tyne & Wear,
West Yorkshire,
Cymru Wales





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Find out more about our work

