

DEMOS

BUILD BACK STRONGER

THE FINAL REPORT OF
RENEW NORMAL:
THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSION
ON LIFE AFTER COVID-19

MARCH 2021

“I hope that with all the problems and illness this has caused, people will realise that there is a much bigger lesson to be learnt. What lockdown has demonstrated is that we can make massive changes quickly and with one another we can make things better.”

– Renew Normal contributor; 40s; South East England

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INTRODUCTION

Britain needs a comprehensive plan to Build Back Stronger after the Covid-19 crisis: building up families and communities as well as the economy, and strengthening our ability as a people and as a nation to adapt to the shocks of the future.

Drawing on the contributions of 50,000 citizens, this paper is a blueprint for a stronger, more resilient, and more united nation. This report sets out how we can rebuild consensus about Britain's future with an aspirational agenda crowdsourced from the public themselves.

At the core of our approach is a fundamental belief that the only way forward after a crisis is through consensus and collaboration. We understand that this is contentious. For many people, what matters most in a democracy is the competition of ideas. One side wins, and the other loses. For many political activists, consensus is at best the slow road to change, and at worst a by-word for surrender.

But the outbreak of Covid-19 has caused trauma and upheaval on a scale that has only ever happened in times of war. Our economy has taken a hit three times the size of the global financial crisis. Ambitious but expensive plans for levelling up growth between the regions of the UK, decarbonising our economy, or improving funding for our health and social care systems look more important, but less affordable, than ever. To recover at all, let alone to meet our ambitions, we need to act together.

The Renew Normal process - the People's Commission on Life After Covid-19 - was designed to identify and campaign for a political agenda that would help us do exactly that. We have mapped hundreds of possibilities to identify a policy pathway that will bridge political divides: a reform agenda that can unite everyone, even groups with radically different perspectives on the future.



OUR APPROACH

Renew Normal has been a national conversation, from April 2020 to February 2021, on how the United Kingdom should change in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our goal in conducting this work was to involve as many members of the public as possible in a programme to identify the ways in which this experience has changed our lives, and what that should mean for the future of our country. After years of political division over Brexit, Demos and the Renew Normal Commissioners believed that we needed to build consensus about the future, bridging divides through a process of consultation, engagement, and collaboration.

In Phase 1, from May - June 2020, our open access survey collected stories and insights about life under lockdown from nearly 12,000 people and mapped the practical and policy changes that had been most influential during this period. Our report, *Britain Under Lockdown*, showed this period was characterised by deep emotions - fear, joy, outrage, anxiety, compassion and more. Crucially, the research laid bare the extraordinary diversity of experiences: whether on health, home working, housing, or volunteering: what was liberating for some was a huge burden for others.

We followed this in September 2020 with Phase 2: a large-scale nationally representative poll of over 10,000 people that enabled us to identify how good and bad experiences had affected people across a range of demographics. The report, *Divided Britain*, showed that pre-existing inequality had had an enormous impact on people's ability to get through the challenges of the pandemic. From financial outcomes to healthy eating; from anxiety and wellbeing to the risks of catching Covid-19 or losing a loved one, the picture was the same: the poorer you were, the worse your experience.

Phase 2 also enabled us to identify the ways in which opinion and expectation had changed about how Britain should be in the future, using Polis (detailed below). This enabled us to focus the final stages of Renew Normal on the eight issues where it seemed there'd been the most dramatic changes - the issues on which there is the potential for consensus about future reform. That does not mean these are the only issues with which public policy should be concerned post-pandemic. Social care and NHS funding remain vitally important to address, for example. We chose our priority areas based on the strength of shifts in opinion.

The areas our research identified were:

- Key workers and low pay
- Communities and volunteering
- Remote working
- Online life
- Misinformation
- Green spaces
- Trade and economic resilience
- Inequality

We consulted with the public and experts on each of these topics to identify a policy agenda for reform. This report sets out the conclusions of those consultations, and the six overarching lessons we believe need to be drawn from this process as a whole.

BRIDGING DIVIDES

At the start of the pandemic, it seemed there was one silver lining among the clouds: after years of political division and animosity, the country came together behind a common purpose. At the political and the community level, we were united. Within a few short months, that spirit had dissipated. Now, a year since the first lockdown measures were put into place, and as the end finally comes into sight, divisions are as raw as they ever were.

We knew that this pandemic would cause far-reaching, unparalleled change. We knew what for some was a period of nuisance pushed others into catastrophic hardship. We knew, even in the early days, that it risked dividing campaigners, if not the population at large, into tribes – those who wanted to go back as quickly as possible to the way things were, and those who wanted to leap forward and allow the experience to transform our lives permanently. Bridging that divide was never going to be easy, and after a year of anger, frustration, boredom and anxiety, many people will find it hard to develop empathy for those who disagree with them. We risk greater division.

For the last year, Demos has been pioneering the use of a new online tool for public participation in policy: Polis. Originally developed in the US, but first deployed in Taiwan, Polis enables us to take a new approach to building consensus that has been vital in drawing together the policy agenda for Renew Normal. Polis is an interactive survey format which allows respondents to do more than just answer the questions: they can also submit questions for others to answer. It therefore enables us to crowdsource ideas directly from the public.

Polis separates respondents to the survey into two groups, according to the answers they give - we call them Group A and Group B. This initially has a

polarising effect: it creates groups that are effectively as divergent as possible. Crucially, however, it also empowers us to identify what - if any - statements or opinions bridge that divide. If Group A and Group B represent divided tribes, then those statements on which they agree are bridges of empathy between them.

A policy agenda built on those bridges of empathy has the best chance of bringing together a divided population in the months and years to come. That is what this report proposes.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report contains a number of sections, reporting on the consultations and research we have conducted, and drawing them together to form conclusions. There are three main parts:

- 1.** Findings. This section reports on the conclusions of our consultations and research on the seven topics identified by the public as priority areas for change.
 - Low paid and key workers
 - Our approach to trade and resilience
 - The future of home working
 - Online life and misinformation
 - Communities and volunteering
 - Access to green space
 - Inequality
- 2.** Lessons from Covid-19. This section takes the findings and identifies five cross-cutting lessons from our experience over the last year.
 - There's consensus for change. Don't pretend this didn't happen.
 - Level up people, not just places.
 - Community makes us stronger, not just happier.
 - Remote working and online shopping are here to stay. We have to adapt.
 - We need to redesign the places where we live and work.
- 3.** Build Back Stronger. This section shows how pursuing the policy recommendations identified in this process will help build up national resilience. It makes the case that this narrative - Build Back Stronger - has the best potential to unite the country behind a post-Covid renewal plan.

The report concludes with a short section drawing together all the policy recommendations included in the paper as a whole.

FINDINGS

This section summarises the findings of the consultation process on the eight topics we explored in the final phase of Renew Normal.

On each, we identify the key insights from the process - though Online Life and Misinformation are presented together as a single sub-section. We then identify both the policy and political risks ahead on this agenda. On each topic - with the exception of inequality - we then present the findings of the Polis survey, identifying the key areas of consensus. We then put forward the outline of a policy agenda.

Demos is also working on a number of additional programmes that have emerged from the Renew Normal process, including a major public deliberation on the food system; an analysis of the future of urban spaces, based on modelling of future commuting and spending patterns; and our ongoing Workshift Commission.



LOW PAID AND KEY WORKERS

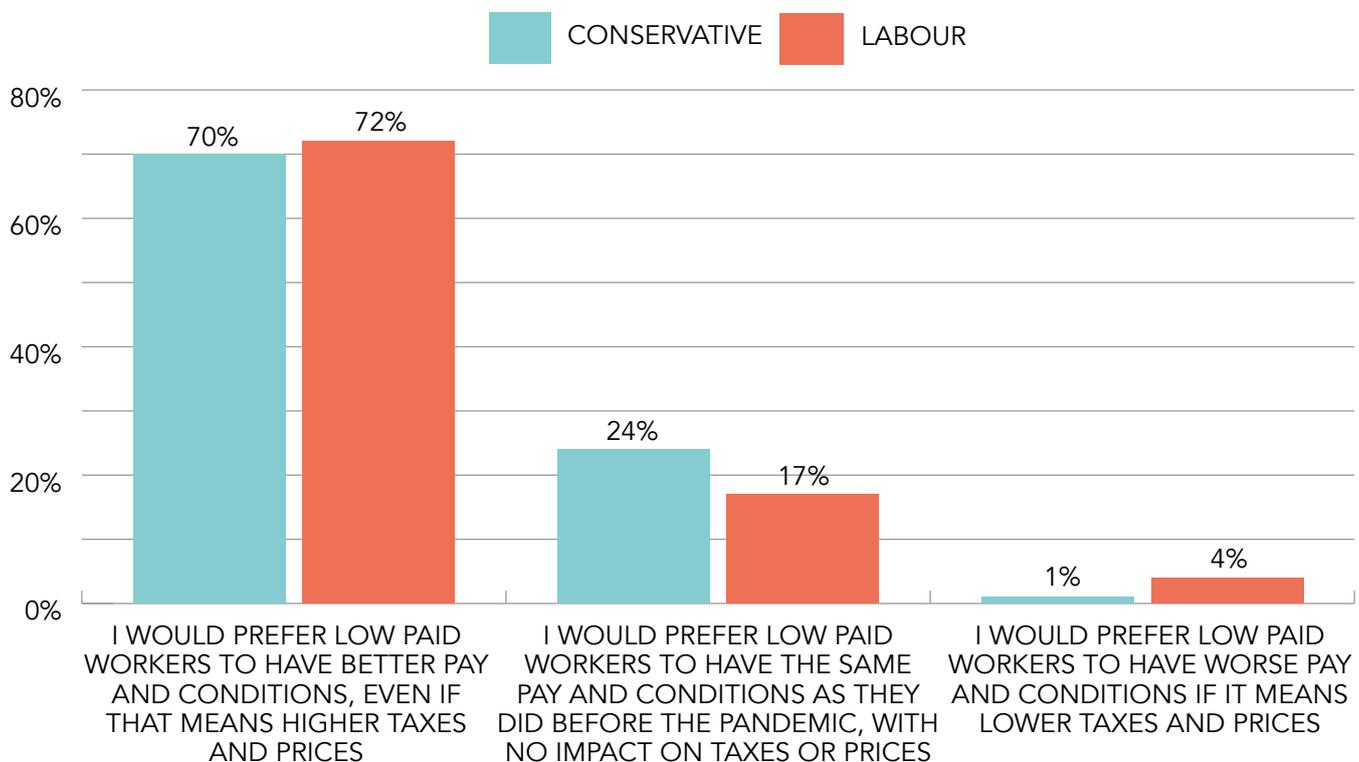
Insights: We value key workers more, and are more worried about low pay.

From the start of our public engagement work, it was clear that there has been a shift in how the public sees low paid and key workers. In our first open access survey, this was one of the most common issues identified by respondents as an issue on which they had changed their minds. For many respondents, their perception of what constitutes valuable work had changed in the light of the coronavirus and the critical nature of contributions from health workers, bus drivers and people who work in essential shops.¹

It is not surprising that our research suggests there is now demand among the public for better recognition for these workers. Our polling found that 94% of the public say they think low paid workers have been important during the pandemic. 68% say low paid workers have been “very important”, while only 40% say they believed this before the pandemic - strong evidence of a shift in attitudes.² There also appears to be strong public support for better pay for low paid workers and a more generous social safety net.

We found very strong support for better pay and conditions for the low paid, even if this leads to downsides: seven in ten (71%) would be willing to pay higher taxes and prices to provide better pay and conditions for low paid workers.³ This appears to be a shift from pre-pandemic levels: in February 2019, Survation found 64% of the public believed all public sector workers should be uplifted to the real Living Wage.⁴ Our question asked the public to accept a substantial trade-off - higher taxes and prices - and yet still found a substantially higher proportion of the public were willing to support this change.

Support for better pay and conditions for low paid workers is also remarkably consistent across different socioeconomic and demographic groups; we found relatively little variation in attitudes by age, gender or income.⁵ Indeed, as the chart below shows, attitudes are extremely consistent across different voter groups. For example, 72% of Labour voters and 70% of Conservative voters at the last General Election support better pay and conditions for low paid workers, even if it means higher taxes and prices. This suggests that this agenda could build bridges across the electorate and is likely to enjoy a wide coalition of support.



Source: Demos polling, September 2020

1 Demos open-access survey, August 2020.

2 Demos polling, September 2020.

3 Demos polling, September 2020.

4 Living Wage Foundation. Low Pay Spotlight: Public Sector, 2020. Available at <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/low-pay-spotlight-public-sector> [accessed 7/12/2020]

5 Demos polling, September 2020.

There is also strong evidence for a change in consensus opinion about the safety net and the welfare state. A clear majority (57%) want benefits for the unemployed and low paid to be more generous after the pandemic than they were before.⁶ The British Social Attitudes Survey 35 reported that only 20% of the public wanted higher benefits for the unemployed, and 31% wanted wages topped up for low income couples without children.⁷ BSA reported much higher support for benefits for couples with children and lone parents (58% and 70% respectively), but our survey did not rely on reference to children to secure support for increased benefits.

Risks: Tread carefully to maintain consensus on tax; it's potentially divisive to offer special treatment to key workers.

There are of course risks associated with developing an agenda to increase wages and the social safety net, and improve the recognition of key workers - first and foremost maintaining consensus for the fiscal costs of any increase in benefits, or public sector pay. In A People's Budget, published by Demos and the Standard Life Foundation last year, we identified strong public consensus for tax rises, so long as the lowest paid are insulated and everyone pays a fair share.⁸

The economic consensus remains that any tax rises would be best timed once the economy has recovered more fully, but across the political spectrum the public is willing to support those tax rises, when they are needed.

A greater risk, when it comes to the public, is a split between public and private sector workers in terms of recognition and reward for the Covid-19 response. While NHS workers have been at the frontline, offering extraordinary care and service for which we are all grateful, it has been apparent during this crisis that it is not only public sector key workers on whom we depend. The most obvious example is the care sector: the majority of care is provided by people on extremely low pay, often with weak employment protections and limited sick pay, working in public service and yet technically in the private sector. But without carers in the community and care homes, the impact of the pandemic on the vulnerable would have been incalculably greater.

Other essential workers include those in the public sector like teachers and police officers; people

employed in outsourced public services including bus drivers, postal workers and refuse collectors; and millions in the private sector including retail and farm workers, delivery drivers and broadband engineers.

Our Polis exercise found many of the public are wary of any kind of special treatment for key workers. We found high levels of division over the principle of 'special treatment' - the statement: "It would be unfair for key workers to get special treatment compared with non-key workers" was highly divisive. The public were highly divided on even modest examples of 'special treatment' for key workers, such as cheaper access to public amenities (e.g. swimming pools and gyms) and additional travel discounts. But they were united in their opposition to more substantive forms of special treatment: we found united and strong opposition across attitudinal groups - including those most open to special treatment - to the statement: "Key workers should be able to access more generous benefits than non-key workers from the government if they become unemployed."⁹

This could be because the public are concerned about potentially dividing workers into the 'useful' and 'less useful'. We found moderate consensus support for the statement (submitted by a participant): "In order to discuss key workers we must first define what a key worker is - and this risks dividing society into the 'useful' and 'useless'".¹⁰

This adds up to a strong case that efforts to reward those who contributed to the Covid-19 effort cannot be concentrated on the public sector or any specific sub-group of key workers. Many will make the case for a public sector pay rise on its own merits, but our evidence suggests that it would be a mistake to argue for this as a core component of a post-Covid settlement. Instead, we believe the focus should be on low pay across the board, in both the public and private sectors.

The economic case for this is also stronger: it is the low paid who have borne the brunt of the financial impacts of the crisis. A study from July 2020 by the Institute of Employment Studies found that the low paid had, even by that stage of the pandemic, seen a significant fall in employment, with no change for those in higher-paying jobs.¹¹ By contrast, many higher paid key workers (just like higher paid non-essential workers) have seen an increase in their disposable income: 42% report having been able to save and more than six in ten key workers say their

6 Demos polling, November 2020.

7 Phillips, D., Curtice, J., Phillips, M. and Perry, J. British Social Attitudes: The 35th Report. British Social Attitudes, 2018. Available at https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39284/bsa35_full-report.pdf [accessed 7/12/2020]

8 Glover, B. and Seaford, C. A People's Budget: How the Public Would Raise Taxes. Demos, 2020. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/A-Peoples-Budget-Sept-2020-v5.pdf> [accessed 23/02/2021]

9 Demos Polis, September 2020.

10 Demos Polis, September 2020.

11 Papoutsaki, D. and Wilson, T. Covid-19 and the low paid: Early analysis of Labour Force Survey. Institute for Employment Studies, 2020. Available at <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/covid-19-and-low-paid-early-analysis-labour-force-survey> [accessed 19/2/2021]



household has been “very” or “relatively financially comfortable” during the pandemic.¹²

Policy proposals

The policy agenda on key workers should be focused on low pay, improving the safety net, and investment in training to help people progress out of low paid jobs. The government should be considering:

Tackling low pay with:

- Increases in the minimum wage, and improved enforcement.
- Prioritising low paid public sector workers for a significant pay rise, including targeted funding to enable higher pay in private companies delivering public services, such as care.

Improving the safety net by:

- Extending sick pay to low paid workers.
- Increasing the rate of sick pay.
- Making permanent the £20-a-week increase in Universal Credit, pending a wider review of sustainable welfare spending.

Improving opportunities and productivity with:

- A new education and training offer for all low paid workers.
- A statutory entitlement to paid learning leave.

OUR APPROACH TO TRADE AND RESILIENCE

Insights: We want to be better protected against disasters and shortages, even if it costs more.

The early stages of the pandemic and lockdown were dominated by discussions about shortages: from essential PPE to pasta and toilet paper. Empty shelves and food rationing were an unprecedented experience for most of the population, and never before had we needed to worry about glove, apron and mask supplies for our medical professionals. Add this to the knowledge that the pandemic had spread so quickly across the world because of our interconnectedness - humans travelling across borders - and it's no surprise that many people told us they'd changed their minds about how important it is for Britain to be self-sufficient. Many respondents to our open access survey felt they'd had enough of globalisation.

¹² Jooshandeh, J. and Lockey, A. All Clapped Out? Key Workers Living Through Lockdown. RSA, 2020. Available at <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/reports/2020/rsa-briefing-all-clapped-out.pdf> [accessed 19/2/2021]

In our nationally representative polling, some six in ten supported policies to: “reduce the amount of products being imported to Britain, to help boost British industries and help the country become more self-sufficient, even if it cost more and reduced the choice of products.”¹³

But this is a subtle shift in public opinion and priorities, not a sea change. There is no indication in our data that the British public want us to pull up our borders or go for total self-sufficiency. The focus is on essential supplies, and better preparedness for disasters. We asked people whether they thought it was important for the UK to be “self-sufficient so that we don’t have to rely on other countries to source essential supplies (even if this means things are more expensive or less efficient during normal times)”. 30% of people said this had been very important to them before the pandemic, but 41% said it was very important now. In other words, this is newly important to about one in ten of us.¹⁴

It is also clear that people’s enthusiasm for increased resilience is not blind to the trade-offs or costs involved. 52% were willing to support or strongly

support the idea of the government “spending a lot of money on preparing for potential future disasters, even if they are unlikely to happen and the money would be wasted if they do not happen.” Only 13% opposed this approach.¹⁵

This may be because of increased fears that disasters will become more frequent. In our Polis consultation, 86% agreed that: “What used to be thought of as a rare disaster now seems to happen with more frequency e.g. flooding as a result of climate change and erosion.”¹⁶

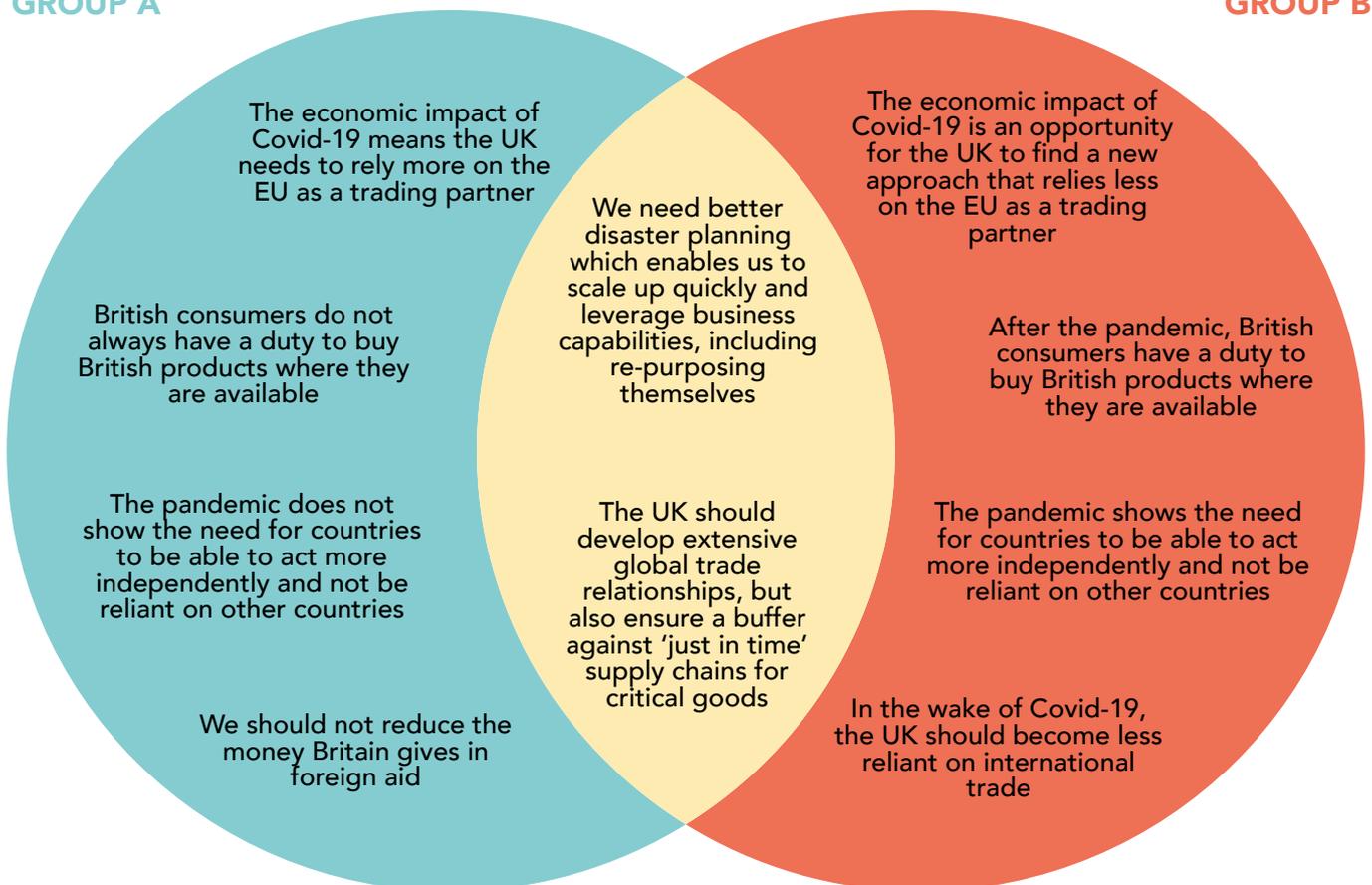
Risks: We may lapse back into polarising debate because of Brexit, even though there are huge areas of public consensus.

There is a huge political risk associated with the way trade policy is dealt with in Westminster. Many assume that trade policy, or this debate about ‘just-in-time’ supply chains is a naturally divisive issue, simply because it is so closely aligned to the Brexit debate. But on all of these issues, our research showed there was very little divergence between

POLIS: TRADE AND RESILIENCE

GROUP A

GROUP B



13 Demos polling, November 2020.
 14 Demos polling, September 2020.
 15 Demos polling, November 2020.
 16 Demos Polis, October 2020.

self-identified Leave voters and Remain voters. Both back greater resilience and preparedness, even at cost to themselves

We divided responses to the Polis into two broad attitudinal groups, A and B.¹⁷ Group A is more internationalist, in favour of global cooperation and interdependence, and less inclined to view the economy in terms of patriotism. Group B is more nationalist, in favour of economic independence, and inclined to view the economy patriotically. As an example of the extent of the divide: 91% of Group B believe Britain shouldn't rely on other countries, as a point of principle - while only 28% of Group A agree.

Yet there are a substantial number of issues on which both groups agree: notably the environment and labour standards. More than two-thirds of each would "buy more goods produced in the UK to help the environment, even if they cost more than imported alternatives", and more than 80% of each would like to impose tariffs on countries who build coal fired power plants. There was even greater agreement on trying to keep out goods produced by exploited workers: about 90% of each group would like to do so.

Of course, these public ambitions come with their own risks: under WTO rules, our ability to impose restrictions or non-tariff barriers is very limited. Furthermore, the reality may be that we will secure greater resilience by diversifying our trade networks than by on-shoring production or warehousing (storing up goods for sale or distribution later on). There is a risk of over-correcting our stance on globalisation - a more protectionist approach would come with economic costs and greater political division.

Nevertheless, it is helpful to understand that there is public consensus even across the open-closed political divide. There is no reason to seek a divisive narrative on the future of trade policy, and a nuanced approach to boosting resilience in the context of 'Global Britain' has every chance of winning public support.

Policy proposals: Avoid divisive narratives to build consensus on a long term approach to trade and resilience.

In May 2020 the government launched Project Defend, to increase supply chain resilience for essential goods and services and protect our technology infrastructure. We support this approach as a vital part of improving our ability to withstand shocks in the future. This is one of the issues on

which opinion has shifted most substantially and the public will expect to see a visible, measurable shift in our approach as a nation.

In addition, we recommend the government:

- Engages with the public in a consensus-building process, such as a citizens' assembly, on the future direction of UK trade policy
- Engages with other countries on the reform of multilateral institutions to provide greater protection and security against future shocks
- Publishes wider information on the expected impacts of a range of possible future shocks, opening this process up to greater public scrutiny and challenge.

As we argue later in this paper, it is also vital that we go beyond the question of supply chains in considering the real nature of national resilience. Turn to the Build Back Stronger section below for our proposed new model of resilience.

THE FUTURE OF HOME WORKING

Insights: Most of those who worked from home want to carry on, at least part of the time, because it made many of us happier and more productive.

2020 saw remote working on a scale like no other: for almost the entire year, many people in the UK, where possible, worked from home. Between three and four in ten were working remotely most of the year.¹⁸

This huge experiment has had profound effects on our lives. It has challenged many assumptions about the way we work, not least how to maintain a productive and happy workforce. While the future is still uncertain, it seems likely from our research that a huge number of people will carry on working from home, at least for part of the working week. Among those who have worked from home during the pandemic, the majority (51%) want to continue doing so more in the future than they did pre-pandemic.¹⁹

Of course, employers might challenge that ambition if they want to get back to the operating model they used before, and there is some anecdotal evidence that the 2021 lockdown has been more difficult for remote workers. Nevertheless, data collected by PwC about employers worldwide found that 80% of the companies they surveyed are adopting remote work as the new norm.²⁰ Similarly, a CBI survey of its members found that only 28% of its members expected to work entirely or mostly in the office in the future, while a much larger proportion are in

¹⁷ Demos Polis, October 2020.

¹⁸ ONS. Coronavirus and homeworking in the UK: April 2020. 2020. Available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/coronavirusandhomeworkingintheuk/april2020> [accessed 19/2/2021]

¹⁹ Demos polling, November 2020.

²⁰ PwC. PwC Survey: 80% of companies anticipate remote work as the new norm on the labour market. 2020. Available at <https://www.pwc.ro/en/press-room/press-release-2020/pwc-survey-80--of-companies-anticipate-remote-work-as-the-new-n.html> [accessed 19/2/2021]

favour of splitting remote working evenly between the home and the office (47%).²¹ The survey also finds a significant change in mindset in favour of more flexible working patterns.

One of the benefits to employers of a remote or hybrid model is actually the benefit to remote workers themselves. There is strong evidence to suggest that it has improved wellbeing and community engagement for many of those who were able to work in this way.

Remote workers have been more likely to improve their exercise habits, spending habits, physical health and mental health, than those who have not been working from home.²² Further, those who have always worked from home have been more likely to report they were “much better” than just “a little better”, suggesting that for some the positives have been felt acutely. For example, over a third of people always working from home said that their mental health got “much better” (35%) - almost twice the proportion of those who “never” worked from home. Those who had been working from home were also more likely to volunteer (25% vs. 13%) and feel more connected to their local community (52% vs. 46%), than those who did not work from home during the pandemic.²³

Risks: This change risks widening divides - between those who have to commute and those who don't, and places with lots of workers and places without. And we might waste money trying (and failing) to stop this trend.

With demonstrably strong public support for some form of continued remote working - both from employees and employers - it is clear that to some degree there is no turning back. But this comes with three clear risks, which Demos is exploring both through our Workshift Commission and our work on the future of urban spaces.

First, it's clear that remote working doesn't work for everyone, or every business. Younger and poorer people are less likely to have access to a quiet working environment or a good broadband connection. Employers that move to hybrid or remote-dominated working schedules will need to ensure they're not just pushing costs onto staff, instead providing office facilities or covering the costs of a home office, to enable people to work well. This will require new thinking, and potentially new employment rights.

There are huge practical consequences too, explored in Demos' recent paper by Julia Hobsbawm, the Nowhere Office. Remote working can make it

harder to collaborate, explore, or be creative with colleagues. It can reduce social connections with teams, affecting the social capital that can be part of employee retention. We can expect companies, over time, to find a range of models that work and enable them to attract and retain talent, but this won't be simple or easy.

Second, policy makers often discuss the hourglass labour market: low-paid jobs at the bottom, high paid jobs at the top, but too few opportunities to progress from one to the other. Sustained increases in remote working could create a second hourglass, with a big divide between those who can work flexibly and those who cannot. On one side will be workers with no or low commuting costs, cheap lunches at home in their kitchens, and potentially flexible hours. On the other side of the hourglass will be those who have to commute, eat out or pack a lunch, and are far less likely to get to choose their working hours.

This isn't simple: we've already noted that some people hate working from home, and are far happier travelling to an office, construction site, factory or hospital, for their job. This isn't a problem where people have agency over their employment choices. But we can expect serious political and social ramifications if we effectively see two labour markets develop: one with high pay, low costs and high flexibility, another with low pay, high costs, and low flexibility, and very few pathways between them.

Third, one of those consequences will be economic. Forthcoming research conducted by Demos has shown that a shift to remote working among higher income workers could lead to further economic divergence between rich and poorer areas. Higher income areas will have a substantially increased number of workers who stay local - instead of commuting to city centres as they did in the past - and will spend more locally, helping those local shops and services to thrive. In poorer communities, the effect is smaller so those high streets will not experience the uplift to the same extent.

This is not the only economic risk. Our urban spaces may have to undergo substantial transformation to find new uses for an oversupply of both office space and services - like food and retail - which were used by office workers who aren't returning. Public transport networks have lost huge amounts of fare revenue during the pandemic; if commuter volumes don't recover, some routes may become unviable or need greater subsidies. If fares rise, it is likely to affect poorer workers, who are still commuting, the most.

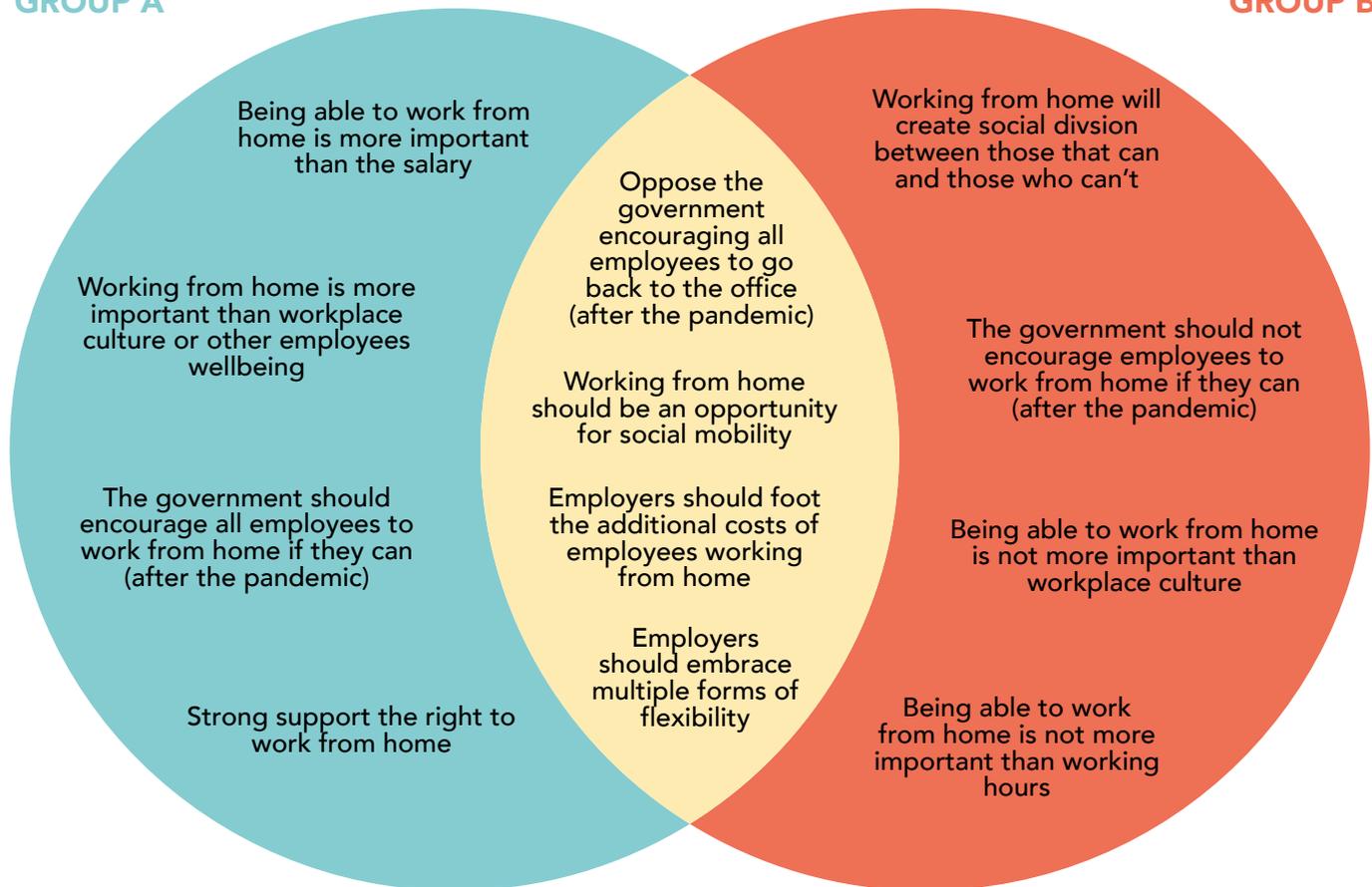
21 CBI. No Turning Back. 2020. Available at <https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/5855/no-turning-back.pdf> [accessed 19/2/2021]

22 Demos polling, November 2020.

23 Demos polling, November 2020.

GROUP A

GROUP B



Our Polis consultation explored the political dynamics of these risks.²⁴ We identified two groups: remote working enthusiasts (Group A) and remote working moderates (Group B). This is the first insight: no-one thinks this is a trend we should fight to stop. In fact, there was relatively strong consensus that the government shouldn't incentivise people to go back to offices.

There was strong support among both groups for employers using remote working as a way to widen the talent pool, and that employees should be given more opportunities to re-skill, in light of increased remote working opportunities. In addition, there was consensus that businesses should play a role in footing the additional costs - such as heating and broadband - paid by employees due to increased homeworking.

Finally, there was consensus that flexible working should be about more than location. Above, we identified the risk of an hourglass economy with huge flexibility for some, and none for everyone else. Leaning into public opinion by pursuing policies to expand flexible working for everyone would help balance that risk.

Policy proposals: Promote flexibility in all parts of the labour market, and support the economy through this transition.

Government should abandon efforts to intervene in the market and persuade or incentivise office workers back to their old patterns. Instead, it should support people through the transition.

Flexible hours are overall more important to the population than the ability to work from home.²⁵ We suggest that government should work with industry, sector by sector, to identify ways to improve flexibility and ensure the lessons learned from this pandemic can spread to the whole economy. This will be important for economic recovery: we know increased flexibility in the workforce, from being able to work remotely to holding different hours, can enable more people to enter or re-enter the labour market.

The Civil Service and public sector could lead the way on using remote working to support the levelling up agenda, with a drive to increase remote working opportunities in areas where there are limited labour market opportunities.

When it comes to managing the consequences of this economic shift, the public is clear that they

²⁴ Demos Polis, October 2020.

²⁵ Demos polling, November 2020.

expect the government to take a role in driving the transformation of city centres.²⁶ The market will, of course, drive much change. But the social consequences of unmanaged decline and derelict buildings are profound: active strategies will be needed to minimise this risk. Below, we look at the role community groups could play in redesigning places and the importance of expanding access to green space as part of any civic redesign.

ONLINE LIFE AND MISINFORMATION

Insights: Many people have valued the move to doing more things digitally, so this shift will stick even though it doesn't work for everyone.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, people found that digital tools and the online world offered new possibilities for new ways of living, and for many, this increase in freedom and choice is something they are keen to preserve. The message from our research is clear: the internet has brought significant benefits for many people during the pandemic.

In our open access survey, a majority of respondents said that they relied more on technology and the internet during the pandemic than before, and that they had learned to use a new technology.²⁷ Many people shared their stories of using the internet during lockdown to keep in touch with family and friends, to join exercise classes, social events, watch theatre, go to church, learn new skills and connect with their communities.

The poll found that over half of people (51%) think that the greater use of, and reliance on, new technologies during the pandemic (e.g. video conferencing apps such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams) has been a good thing for them personally (vs. just 8% who said it was bad), and 61% think that it has been a good thing for the country.²⁸ WhatsApp and Facebook groups set up over the pandemic helped communities support each other, as well as enabling the training of hundreds of people around the UK to work to organise community support.

Demos research has shown that 77% of the UK adult public use online learning at work, with benefits for skills, expertise and efficiency.²⁹ During lockdown, as people were furloughed or made redundant, online learning in many cases became a central part of life. Over the last 12 months, the Open University

has seen an increase of 77% in visitors to their OpenLearn platform.³⁰ Access to essential services also shifted online. Health services saw a huge rise in use of online services - with online consultations doubling in March 2020 to more than 1.8 million.³¹

We also found broad support for the role the internet can play in our lives across groups of people with very different attitudes to the politics of the internet. In our Polis consultation, we found two strongly divided groups amongst our participants.³²

Group B - the interventionists - has a desire for much stronger regulation of the internet, and strict restrictions on a wide variety of harmful content online. They want little tolerance of bad behaviour or content online, and are very supportive of government intervention.

Group A - the government sceptics - wants to preserve freedoms online, both intrinsically and to prevent bad regulation. This group felt the internet is a positive force in society, rarely felt anxious online, and didn't feel that unpleasant behaviour stopped them doing what they wanted. They are generally against increasing government regulation or intervention – even where that intervention would promote internet access.

However, despite divisions about how the internet should be regulated and the role of the internet, we saw consensus that the internet was a positive force in their lives. Even across people with strongly divided political beliefs, there remains positivity and optimism about the role of the internet in our lives.

Risks: The digital divide will become more important, face-to-face services are in jeopardy, and we need to improve the quality of online debate.

There are serious and substantial risks from this unstoppable shift to living more online.

The first risk is to those left outside these new systems. A significant portion of the population are limited in their internet use or do not use it at all: 9 million people in the UK can't use the internet without help and 7 million people have no access to the internet at home.³³ The disparate experiences of people during Covid-19 proved that digitisation does not affect everyone equally. Those who feel less confident online, or lack digital skills; who cannot

26 Demos Polis, October 2020.

27 Demos open-access survey, August 2020.

28 Demos polling, September 2020.

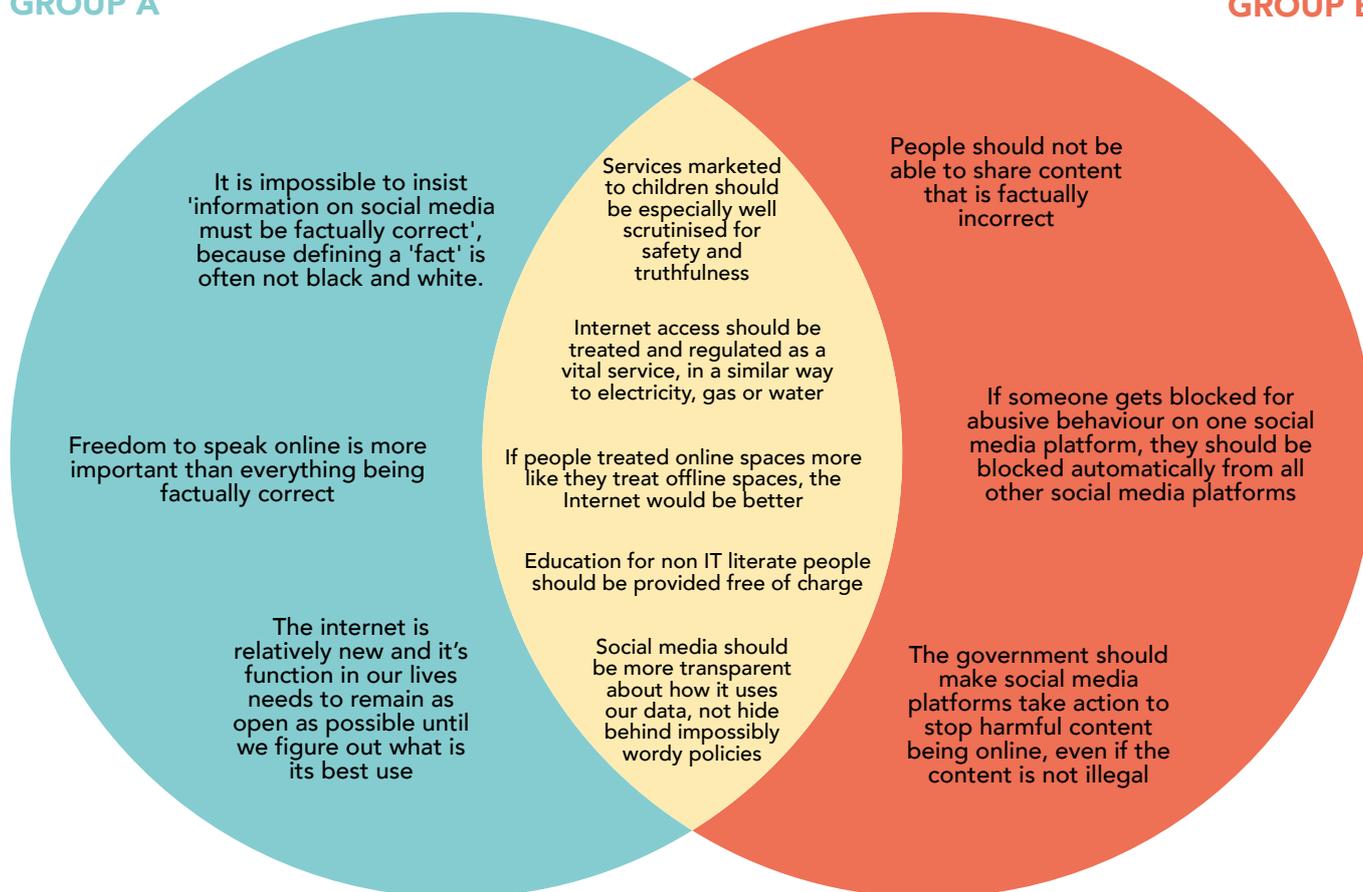
29 Lasko-Skinner, R. How the internet could transform the labour market for the better. Demos, 2020. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/blog/how-the-internet-could-transform-the-labour-market-for-the-better/> [accessed 19/2/2021]

30 The Open University. Data: Adobe Analytics 1.3.19 – 25.2.21

31 Bibby and Leavey, 2020 in, Stone, E. and others, Digital Inclusion in Health and Care: Lessons learned from the NHS Widening Digital Participation Programme (2017-2020). Good Things Foundation, 2020. Available at https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/sites/default/files/research-publications/digital_inclusion_in_health_and_care-lessons_learned_from_the_nhs_widening_digital_participation_programme_2017-2020_0.pdf [accessed 23.02.21]

32 Demos Polis, September 2020.

33 Good Things Foundation. Digital Nation UK 2020. 2020. Available at <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/sites/default/files/research-publications/digital-nation-2020.pdf> [accessed 19/2/2021]



afford devices to get online, or struggle to afford continuous payments for internet access; those who live in rural areas with poor broadband access; those whose jobs do not allow them to work remotely; those who are disproportionately targeted by online harms from abuse to scams - these are the people who risk being left behind or left out by a new digitised world.

Our research shows the public is alive to this fear and willing to back efforts to get more people online. In our nationally representative poll, 54% of people said they would support the government spending more money on digital infrastructure such as broadband, with just 10% opposing. 60% said they would support the government spending more money on helping people unable to use the internet to get online, with just 8% opposing.³⁴

Then there's the impact on face-to-face services, which many of the participants in Renew Normal have raised fears about. Though people welcome their new choices and freedoms, they don't want online life to become the only way of doing things. Concerns abound that businesses will move to online-only working, which for some people negatively affects their mental health and productivity; that the convenience for some

of being able to access essential services online will overshadow the need of others for offline options; that online retail will leave the high street devastated.

75% of people told us they would prefer essential services (such as in education, banking, and healthcare) to be accessible both online and offline after the pandemic, even if it is more expensive.³⁵ This is easier said than done: the costs of digital transformation are substantial, and the costs of retaining face-to-face services in both public and private sector become unviable once customer numbers fall below a critical mass. It is vital that we think creatively about ways to navigate this challenge and meet public expectations.

And finally there are risks from the often toxic nature of our online environment, from misinformation to the impact of social media on mental health. The pandemic has brought into sharp relief that public health is affected by what happens online as well as off: from conspiracy theories online leading people to attack 5G towers, to health misinformation endangering particularly vulnerable people. In our poll, though people appreciated the new connections tech had afforded them, 48% said that the impact of social media and time spent online on

³⁴ Demos polling, November 2020.

³⁵ Demos polling, November 2020.

their life and happiness had not changed during the pandemic.³⁶ By contrast, just 17% said it had made it better, while 25% said it had made it worse.

This risk can, however, be turned into an opportunity to find a new model for the internet. Demos' Good Web Project is exploring the rules and protocols that should underpin a liberal web, and will continue to put forward policy proposals that will help us meet the challenge of building healthy, well-regulated online spaces.

Policy proposals: Digital inclusion and infrastructure investment, a new model for face-to-face services, and building a better internet

It is time for an 'Everybody In' approach to digital, focused on both infrastructure and skills. The government should:

- Recognise internet access as an essential need, invest significantly in digital infrastructure in less well-connected areas, and provide help to those who are unable to afford sufficient internet connection. We support the proposal of a Minimum Digital Living Standard.³⁷
- Invest in upskilling people who are currently digitally excluded through lack of skills, focusing on supporting existing local authority or community organisations who are providing these services.³⁸

We need to redesign face-to-face services - in the public and private sector - developing a strategy alongside efforts to reinvent our urban spaces.

- Savings made by essential services moving online should be invested back into targeting offline services at the particular groups who most require them.
- National and local government should collaborate on creating innovative 'front of house' models for the full range of public services, including collaborating with the private sector.

And we need to build a better internet. Policy interventions should include:

- A duty of care on platforms should include requirements on platforms to empower users to report and reduce abuse online, including providing more transparent reporting tools and processes for redress.

³⁶ Demos polling, September 2020.

³⁷ Carnegie UK Trust. Learning from lockdown: 12 steps to eliminate digital exclusion. 2020. Available at https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2020/10/14161948/Carnegie-Learning-from-lockdown-Report-FINAL.pdf [accessed 19/2/2021]

³⁸ Good Things Foundation. Coronavirus and Digital Inclusion. 2020. Available at <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/coronavirus-and-digital-inclusion> [accessed 19/2/2021]

³⁹ Foxglove. Open letter from content moderators re: pandemic. 2020. Available at <https://www.foxglove.org.uk/news/open-letter-from-content-moderators-re-pandemic> [accessed 23/02/2021]

⁴⁰ Demos polling, September 2020.

⁴¹ Demos polling, September 2020.

⁴² Duffy, B. Life under lockdown: coronavirus in the UK. KCL: The Policy Institute, 2020. Available at <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/coronavirus-in-the-uk.pdf> [accessed 13/08/2020]

- An independent regulator should require data access from social media platforms, so that the incidence of harmful content and the effectiveness of reporting, moderation and curation systems can be assessed by third-parties outside of the platforms themselves.
- Tech platforms should invest in their human moderators, offering increased professional psychological care and enabling greater home working.³⁹

COMMUNITIES AND VOLUNTEERING

Insights: Community connection and relationships were the silver lining in the pandemic. They must be preserved and enhanced as part of the recovery settlement.

The pandemic was a hugely divisive experience. On every issue we researched, from finance to friendships, healthcare to hunger - some people's lives got better, and others got worse. But on average: things got worse. On almost every topic more people said life had got harder, with only two exceptions: connection to community, and connection to family.

While mutual aid groups were established in streets and estates across the country, and community organisations mobilised to look after millions of vulnerable people, it is clear that community organising was not a universal experience. And yet, where it did happen, it was one of the few sources of hope and optimism in an extraordinary year. 31% of people told us they felt more connected to their local community and 39% reported being more connected to friends and family.⁴⁰ A further 6% of adults - more than 3 million people - who didn't have anyone they could turn to for help in their neighbourhood, now feel that they do.⁴¹

Polling from King's College London in April 2020 found 60% had offered help to others while a further 47% had received help from others.⁴² Similarly, ONS data suggests that 66% of people thought that if they needed help, then other local community members would support them during the pandemic.

And people want this to continue. In one of our polls, 42% of respondents said that they were "very likely" or "fairly likely" to volunteer for the NHS or

public service in the future.⁴³ Nearly three quarters of us believe that volunteers playing a greater role in public services would be good for society, and good for public services.

So any strategy for renewal and repair must build on this widely-shared public ambition for more community, more collaboration and more mutual aid.

Risks: Social capital is unequally distributed, so we could see widening inequality. We could try to micromanage from the state and mess things up. And we could expect too much from voluntary services.

We've identified three key risks associated with using a programme of community investment to bring the country back together: inequality in social capital, the challenge of using the state to mobilise non-state actors, and the risk that volunteerism is seen as a way of covering up underinvestment in public services. It is the last of these that could drive political division, as the results of our Polis consultation show.

First, inequality. Covid-19 has exposed the way in which 'left behind' areas of Britain are often lacking in social capital and social infrastructure, as well as economically disadvantaged. The Carnegie UK Trust found that voluntary mutual aid activity was 60% lower in 'left behind' neighbourhoods.⁴⁴ Deprived areas with low levels of social infrastructure received less than half the Covid-19 related funding per head than other equally deprived communities with a stronger social infrastructure.⁴⁵

Community business and charitable organisations have often formed the anchor points for mutual aid activities: where they do not exist, individuals have often struggled to pull together sufficient critical mass to meet needs. Areas that lacked infrastructure were unable to apply for funding, or when they did, were often unsuccessful. A significant proportion of us still do not know the names and contact details of people in our neighbourhood (45%) - but it's 61% of those in social grade A who do, and only 36% those in social grade D.⁴⁶ People in group A were also twice as likely as the average person to have made new connections during lockdown.

And this could get worse. Research exploring the impact of the 2008-9 recession on volunteering behaviours suggests the decline in volunteering has been more pronounced in regions of high unemployment, and in socially and economically disadvantaged communities.⁴⁷ Poorer communities will be most adversely affected by the oncoming recession, making them vulnerable to a further reduction in social action.⁴⁸ By contrast, richer areas are likely to benefit from an increase in professional home workers, who are more likely to have time for volunteering and community involvement. We could see a widening gap in terms of community engagement: another confirmation that the levelling up agenda addressed above needs to focus on social as well as economic capital.

The greatest political risk associated with a movement to increase volunteering and improve community connection is if this is seen as a way to cover up for cuts. While there is huge enthusiasm for mutual aid groups to continue, and for more volunteers to be involved in public service, this has to supplement core funding and essential services.

This is confirmed by the results of our Polis consultation. It identified two groups: community activists (Group B) and community naturalists (Group A).⁴⁹ Both are keen on greater community activity and collaboration after the pandemic - the divide is about whether to generate this proactively or to focus on organic growth. The activists are keener on government investment, interfaith outreach, and even forgoing work to volunteer. The naturalists are more sceptical about those kinds of intervention. But on both sides there is a strong conviction that voluntarism should supplement essential public services, not replace them.

Protection of, and investment in, public services will help ensure that a programme of community development does not become a political dividing line, but a source of connection and optimism for the nation.

Finally, there is the intrinsic challenge of using government to prompt community-building - perhaps one of the reasons the community naturalists are wary of government funding. Most efforts by the national government to mobilise the

43 Demos polling, September 2020.

44 Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion. Communities at risk: the early impact of Covid-19 on 'left behind' neighbourhoods. Local Trust. 2020. Available at: <https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Communities-at-risk-the-early-impact-of-COVID-19-on-left-behind-neighbourhoods.pdf>

45 Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion. Communities at risk: the early impact of Covid-19 on 'left behind' neighbourhoods. Local Trust. 2020. Available at: <https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Communities-at-risk-the-early-impact-of-COVID-19-on-left-behind-neighbourhoods.pdf>

46 Demos polling, September 2020. Social grades as defined by the Market Research Society here: <https://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/Definitions%20used%20in%20Social%20Grading%20based%20on%20OQ7.pdf>

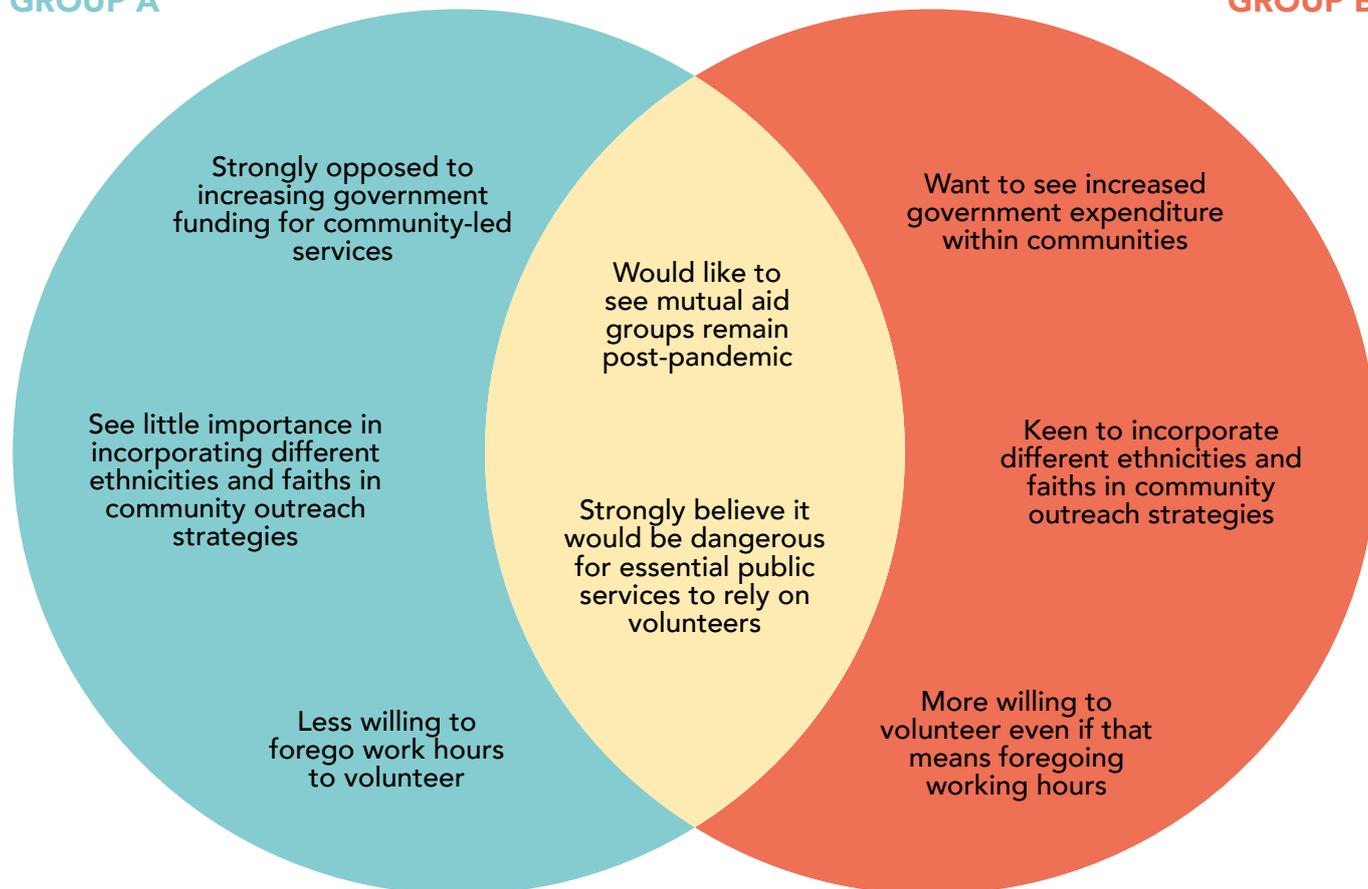
47 Lim, C. and Laurence, J. (2015) Doing good when times are bad: volunteering behaviour in economic hard times. The British Journal of Sociology, 2015. Available at <https://europepmc.org/article/MED/25925802> [accessed 19/2/2021]

48 Lim, C. and Laurence, J. (2015) Doing good when times are bad: volunteering behaviour in economic hard times. The British Journal of Sociology, 2015. Available at <https://europepmc.org/article/MED/25925802> [accessed 19/2/2021]

49 Demos Polis, October 2020.

GROUP A

GROUP B



hyper-local will struggle. National government is too remote and bureaucratic to be able to initiate or grow community networks and neighbourhood organisations, which have to be largely self-organised to last. So it should not try. Instead, we need to look at the barriers and challenges that hold back community development, and focus efforts on removing them: including access to buildings, digital infrastructure, funding, and opportunities to take control over programmes or places.

Policy proposals: Put communities in the driving seat of rebuilding and recovery: give them funding, assets and opportunities to mobilise around.

We need to stop thinking of community as 'nice to have' and start putting it at the heart of our recovery and renewal planning. Community action isn't a bolt-on to make people feel good: almost every element of government activity should consider how to mobilise community action and volunteering, as a way of improving outcomes and effectiveness.

In other words, if - as we recommend later - we decide to massively expand urban green spaces, or launch a plan to fight obesity and promote healthy eating, we should work out how to make communities and local relationships a core part of the solution.

Communities should be empowered to:

- Lead the process of reimagining their own urban, suburban, and rural spaces that are affected by economic and technological change. From high streets to new parkland: communities should be leading on design, and be a major part of delivery.
- This should be funded by a mix of grants, asset transfers, and support for community businesses.
- Communities - who have been such a vital part of the response to food poverty - should be a major part of the National Food Strategy.

Communities have shown they are one of the most effective elements of disaster and emergency relief. All our resilience planning should include efforts to build up social capital and community infrastructure that can be flexibly deployed at times of crisis:

- We should create a new measure of social capital, and its geographic distribution, to inform policy making.
- The government's levelling up agenda should aim to reduce inequality of social capital - as well as economic capital.

It is vital that efforts to increase volunteering and voluntarism are focused on community building and supplementary support. A major programme of community development must not become a political dividing line, but a source of connection and optimism for the nation. In a recently published

paper on the impact of the pandemic on the charity sector, Demos noted that 57% of charities with public sector contracts said they were subsidising these contracts with other resources, including public fundraising.⁵⁰

- Government should mitigate these risks by ensuring public service funding keeps up with demand. It should also:
- Introduce new protections to ensure charities are not subsidising core NHS or other services.
- Guarantee statutory funding for hospices.

ACCESS TO GREEN SPACE

Insights: One of the biggest changes, and strongest areas of consensus, is the increased value we put on access to green space.

During the pandemic, the unprecedented restrictions on our movement made us more aware of the green spaces and nature around us. They became our main spot for meeting with people, for exercising and clearing our mind. So it is no surprise that access to green space topped our poll of the issues people thought had become more important as a result of the pandemic.⁵¹

This isn't just a summer phenomenon: our most recent poll in November showed that 74% support the government and councils spending money on more and better maintained green spaces, such as parks. 8 in 10 older people support this statement. A further 28% of people strongly support spending money on more and better maintained green spaces.

Investing in green space is also a way of building up our mental, physical and environmental resilience. Evidence shows that people spending time in nature reported consistently higher levels of both health and wellbeing than those who reported no exposure.⁵² Prior to this pandemic, research from Natural England suggested that if everyone in England had equal access to good green space, the NHS could save over £2 billion a year in treatment costs.⁵³ They have an environmental benefit as well, such as improving air quality, reducing the possibility of flooding or providing cooling or shading.⁵⁴

Reclaiming land and streetspace for community-run parks, in particular, could help build social capital and community connection, while increasing access to green space as part of a public health strategy.

Risks: We could see continued inequality in access to green space, and a backlash if transport change is pushed through too aggressively.

Like so many of the issues raised by Covid-19, access to green space reminds us of the powerful impact of inequality, which goes far beyond simply income. A study by Friends of the Earth conducted in 2020 found that 11.6 million people in England live in the 1,257 neighbourhoods which are the most deprived of green space.⁵⁵ Ethnic minorities are particularly affected: 42% of BAME people live in England's most green space-deprived neighbourhoods.⁵⁶ Now we understand the links between green space and wellbeing, it's clear that any failure to improve access will have a continuing effect on inequality in the long term.

There is also a real need to decarbonise transport and improve public health. Increased investment in safe walking and cycling routes will be an important part of urban transformation. With more people working remotely, it may be possible to encourage a substantial shift away from motor vehicles and toward community living. There is some enthusiasm for this: by a margin of two-to-one the public support the government and councils setting aside more areas in towns and cities where road traffic is banned, even if it makes it more difficult or expensive to travel by car (44% support vs. 22% oppose).⁵⁷

However, rushed or poorly-planned efforts to reduce car usage, for example by blocking side streets, can be extremely divisive. Turning roads into cycling or walking routes or green spaces was one of the most divisive issues in our Polis. Around half of Group A, moderate greeners (47%) think cyclists are given too much preference over drivers as things stand. On the other hand, more than 9 in 10 in Group B, absolute greeners (95%) say we should make it easier and safer for people to cycle in town and city centres.⁵⁸

50 Wood, C. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the charitable sector, and its prospects for recovery. Demos, 2021. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Covid-19-impact-on-the-charitable-sector.pdf> [accessed 24/02/2021]

51 Demos polling, September 2020.

52 White, M. et al. Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. *Nature*, 2019. Available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-44097-3> [accessed 19/2/2021]

53 Natural England. An estimate of the value and cost effectiveness of the expanded Walking the Way to Health Initiative scheme 2009 (TIN055). 2009. Available at <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/35009> [accessed 19/2/2021]

54 Kingsley, M. and EcoHealth Ontario. Commentary Climate change, health and green space co-benefits. Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada: Research, Policy and Practice, 2019. Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6553580/> [accessed 19/2/2021]

55 Friends of the Earth. England's green space gap. 2020. Available at https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/files/policy/documents/2020-09/Green_space_gap_full_report_0.pdf [accessed 19/2/2021]

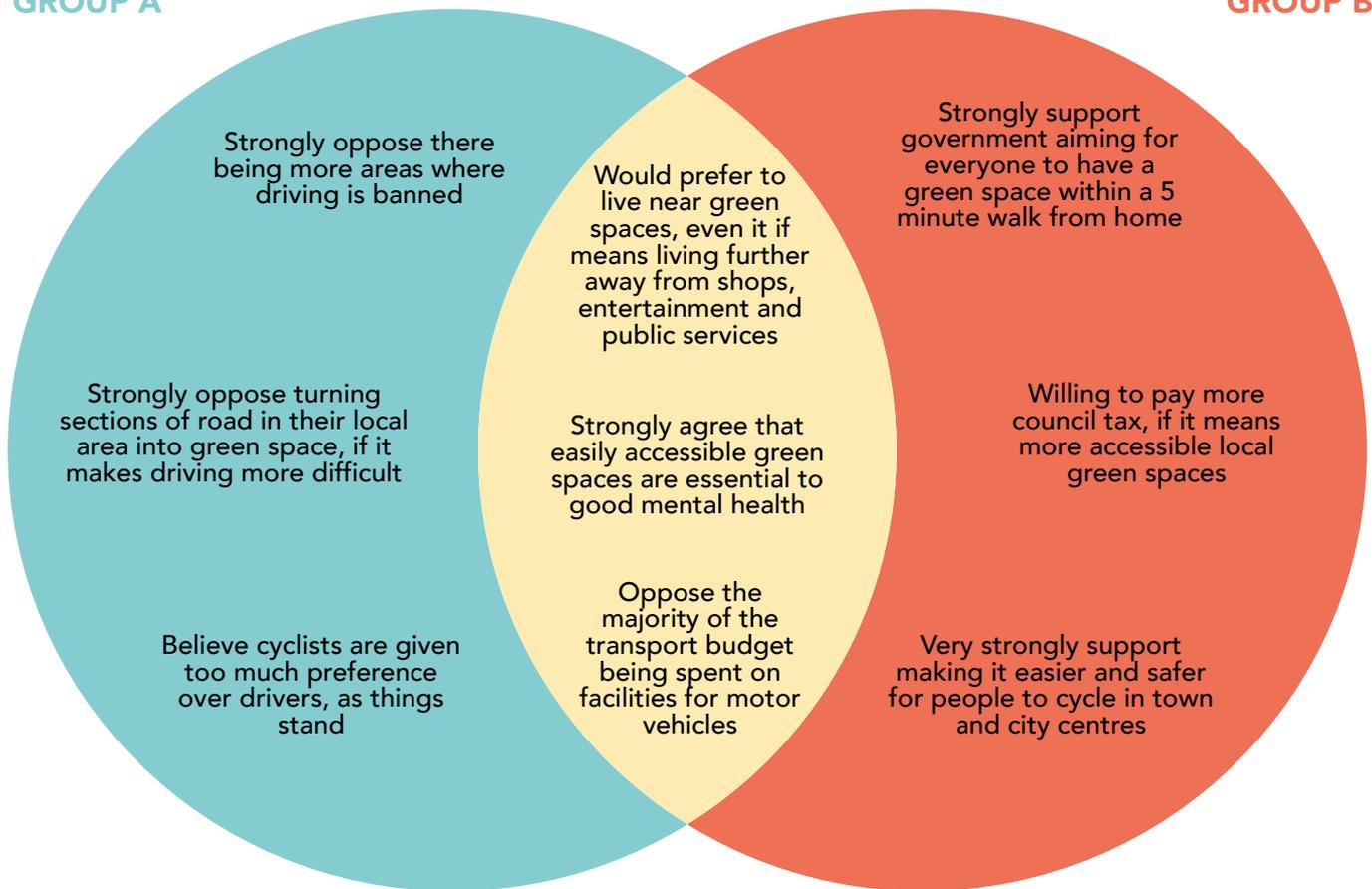
56 Friends of the Earth. England's green space gap. 2020. Available at https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/files/policy/documents/2020-09/Green_space_gap_full_report_0.pdf [accessed 19/2/2021]

57 Demos Polis, October/November 2020.

58 Demos Polis, October/November 2020.

GROUP A

GROUP B



We need a consultative approach to build consensus for urban redesign, not piecemeal transport interventions that just cause a backlash.

Policy proposals: A massive investment in new community and civic parkland should be a core element of the post-Covid settlement.

We already know - from the research cited above and elsewhere - that we are going to need to redesign our physical infrastructure to respond to the impacts of Covid-19. At the same time, this is an opportunity to update our social and economic geography to keep pace with technological change. At the top of the agenda for this physical transformation should be improved access to green space, in particular for those communities who have the least.

Local and national government should:

- Create a new parks fund to support the reclaiming of disused urban land for green space - including both small community parks and strategic green space in major centres, to drive social and economic regeneration.
- Set a goal that no-one should live more than five minutes away from green space, and that every urban area should have at least one landmark park.

This is also an opportunity for community development and everyday democracy. As Covid-19 recedes, we can find new purpose for neighbourhood groups and community organisations in designing and managing new or existing green spaces. Local and national government should:

- Give more power to people in local decision making about future green space.
- Encourage public engagement in managing green spaces on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure full community consultation over transport redesign proposals - like Low Transport Neighbourhoods - to increase walking and cycling.

INEQUALITY

Insights: Attitudes have changed substantially, because the pandemic has made inequality more visible and has drawn attention to the way inequality harms us all.

One of the greatest shifts in public opinion during this crisis has been on questions of social and economic inequality. As outlined above, there is strong evidence of a change in attitudes, with particular enthusiasm for 'levelling up' the poorest groups and the lowest paid, as well as equalising access to opportunity, good health, and wellbeing essentials like green space and decent food.

As a society, we have seen the extent of inequality through this crisis. Through campaigns and discussions about food, access to green space, and health inequalities, it has become increasingly clear that inequality is about more than income. Opinium reported that 39% believe that inequality is worse in Britain than they realised pre-pandemic.⁵⁹

And the pandemic has worsened inequality on any number of measures. Our research showed that a huge range of behaviours and experiences during lockdown were correlated with your socio-economic status, from whether you ate well, bonded with your neighbours, or managed to teach your children at home. In short: the poorer you were before this crisis, the more likely you were to struggle during it.

Racial disparities in health outcomes are not new, but they have become uniquely high-profile during the pandemic. The combination of the Black Lives Matter movement and the debate about the disproportionate health impact of Covid-19 on some ethnic minorities has created a wider public conversation about structural inequalities, specifically around race, that has the potential to prompt widespread change.

Our results demonstrate that a sizable proportion of respondents felt people were more aware of age, race, and economic inequality within the UK since the pandemic began.⁶⁰ And, crucially, they are also supportive of stronger efforts to tackle these three forms of inequality than we made prior to the pandemic:

1. On age inequality: 47% felt that people were more aware of age inequality; 53% favoured taking stronger action to tackle it.
2. On economic inequality: 56% felt people were more aware; 57% supporting tougher action.
3. On racial inequality, 51% felt people were more aware; 49% supporting tougher action.

Finally, and vitally, there is increasing evidence that the public is willing to accept the trade-offs associated with doing more to tackle inequality. As set out above, polling we conducted in November found very strong support for better pay and conditions for the low paid, even if this leads to downsides like higher prices or tax rises.

Other forms of investment to level up - on wellbeing, opportunity, or race inequality - also command substantial public support. Government expenditure

59 Compassion in Politics. Over one in three adults admit inequality in Britain is worse than they thought pre-Covid. 2020. Available at <https://www.compassioninpolitics.com/inequalityworse> [accessed 7/12/2020]

60 Demos polling, November 2020.

61 Demos polling, November 2020.

62 Wells, A. 'Unavoidable cuts'? YouGov, 2010. Available at <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2010/10/19/unavoidable-cuts-story> [accessed 7/12/2020]

63 Glover, B. and Seaford, C. A People's Budget: How the Public Would Raise Taxes. Demos, 2020. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/A-Peoples-Budget-Sept-2020-v5.pdf> [accessed 23/02/2021]

64 British Heart Foundation. What factors put you at risk from coronavirus?. 2020. Available at <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/news/coronavirus-and-your-health/what-makes-you-at-risk-from-coronavirus> [accessed 23/02/2021]

expanded enormously during the pandemic in order to provide support to people, businesses, and public services at a time of crisis. Only a small minority (15%) want spending to be reduced, while 26% say the government should maintain spending and 47% say the government should spend more.⁶¹ This is in marked contrast to public attitudes in 2010, where 60% of voters viewed spending cuts as unavoidable for the Coalition government.⁶²

Other work by Demos suggests the public, on balance, supports increasing taxation in order to pay for this spending, though the consensus is that those tax rises would be best timed once the economy has recovered more fully.⁶³

Finally, it's clear that the pandemic has exposed the effects on inequality, as well as its extent. Yes: the pandemic has worsened inequality. But inequality also worsened the pandemic.

Individual and family-level financial fragility

Huge numbers of people and families had no savings or sick pay to fall back on as the pandemic began. This made our whole economic system more fragile and increased the call on the state for emergency aid. We have seen sharp differences between the rich and poor in terms of not just mortality, but wellbeing, safety, hunger and loss of income. That unequal impact clearly has not just harmed those directly affected.

The pandemic is harder to suppress when some people cannot afford to isolate; have such inadequate homes that they cannot bear to stay indoors or don't have homes at all; cannot afford equipment to educate their children at home; or have so little power at work that they can be forced by unscrupulous employers into Covid-insecure workplaces.

And the economy will recover more slowly for all of us because of the long tail of scarring impacts: businesses that were too fragile to survive, jobs that have been lost and people who accrued debts they can't afford to repay.

Public health and wellbeing

The UK has comparatively high levels of obesity, diabetes and hypertension, all of which are risk factors for severe disease with a Covid-19 infection.⁶⁴ Ministers have now accepted that the overall health

of the population contributed to our systemic vulnerability to this pandemic and increased the number of deaths and ICU cases.

More broadly, it is likely that high levels of anxiety and depression in wider society made us less resilient to the impacts of lockdown on our mental health and wellbeing. The UK has wide disparities in access to green space and a significant problem with food and fuel poverty - the latter a significant factor during the winter lockdown period. All these will have worsened the impact of the pandemic and the resulting lockdowns on the health and wellbeing of the population as a whole.

Social capital

The community response to Covid-19 has, as we saw above, been one of the most reassuring beacons of light during this difficult year. And yet we have also seen that there remain substantial proportions of the population who know almost no-one in their neighbourhood, and that loneliness increased for millions. Most worrying of all, there are huge gaps and disparities in social capital across the UK. Mapped comprehensively by Onward as part of their State of Social Fabric inquiry, it is clear that - with some notable exceptions - social capital is thinner in places of poverty and disadvantage.⁶⁵

Risks: This doesn't mean the argument is settled.

There has been a change in opinion about inequality, but that doesn't mean there is easy consensus about precisely what to do about it. In some ways, public concern about inequality is not new: the 2019 British Social Attitudes Survey reported that 78% think the gap between high and low incomes is too wide. And yet, this long-standing consensus has not prompted policies that have reduced inequality.

There is slightly less consensus, too, around efforts to reduce inequality between groups - even where there is clear evidence, from this pandemic and elsewhere, that some groups experience structural disadvantage. 37% of respondents to our poll believe we should not take further action to reduce racial inequality; 38% said we should not take further action to reduce age inequality.⁶⁶

The best way to build consensus here, and avoid divisive narratives, is to focus on the concept of levelling up. Levelling up brings together the idea of improving outcomes for the worst off with the idea of maintaining aspiration for everyone. Renew Normal's work - and other research by Demos, notably on the tax system - suggests this is the best way to build consensus. There is far less enthusiasm for tackling inequality if it involves bringing down people at the top, than if it is focused on levelling up those at the bottom.

Policy proposals: Level up people, not just places, and think about wellbeing and community as well as incomes.

The levelling up agenda needs a new scope. Initially the agenda has been focused on the idea of bringing jobs and opportunity - often through public transport investment - to left behind places. Now, after Covid-19, levelling up needs to become an agenda to bring wellbeing and prosperity to a far wider range of left behind people and places, covering social as well as economic policy.

Levelling up should include:

- Renewed efforts to tackle low pay and improve the welfare safety net (as set out above).
- A major investment in building social capital in left-behind areas, through practical community projects (as set out above).
- Huge expansion in access to green space, especially in left-behind areas, as part of a wellbeing strategy to reduce happiness inequality.
- A national programme to get Britain healthy, with targets to substantially reduce the gap between rich and poor on obesity, activity levels and smoking.
- Renewed commitments to level up opportunity, health and wellbeing for people from ethnic minority communities.

⁶⁵ Tanner, W. et al. The State of our Social Fabric: Measuring the changing nature of community over time and geography. Onward, 2020. Available at <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/The-State-of-our-Social-Fabric.pdf> [accessed 23/02/2021]

⁶⁶ Demos polling, November 2020.

LESSONS FROM COVID

This section of the report seeks to identify the cross-cutting lessons and insights from the Renew Normal process.

This pandemic has had such a vast, far-reaching, and complex impact on our lives and the policy agenda, that it is almost impossible to keep anything in a silo. The whole pandemic response was an unparalleled spillover from health policy to the economy. But everywhere you look, there is a web of interconnection. Community policy is linked to the green space agenda, which is linked to reducing obesity, which is linked to inequality. Remote working affects not just the economy of towns and cities, but the scale of volunteering, and patterns of exercise.

The five lessons are set out below. They can be used as a framework against which to test any policy proposal for post-Covid recovery. If we ensure our policy response is fully informed by these lessons, we can build a coherent recovery plan: one that sows consensus instead of greater division and inequality.

1. There's consensus for change. Don't pretend this didn't happen.
2. Level up people, not just places.
3. Community makes us stronger, not just happier.
4. Remote working and online shopping aren't going away: we need to adapt.
5. We need to redesign the places where we live and work.



LESSON 1: THERE'S CONSENSUS FOR CHANGE. DON'T PRETEND THIS DIDN'T HAPPEN

Minds and expectations have changed, in many cases radically. This may not be a paradigm shift: there is little evidence to suggest the pandemic will be the end of capitalism, or that a libertarian backlash against lockdown will lead to the dismantling of the state. But there is ample evidence that it would be a mistake to minimise the impact of this period of our history on our ambitions, expectations or behaviours in the years to come.

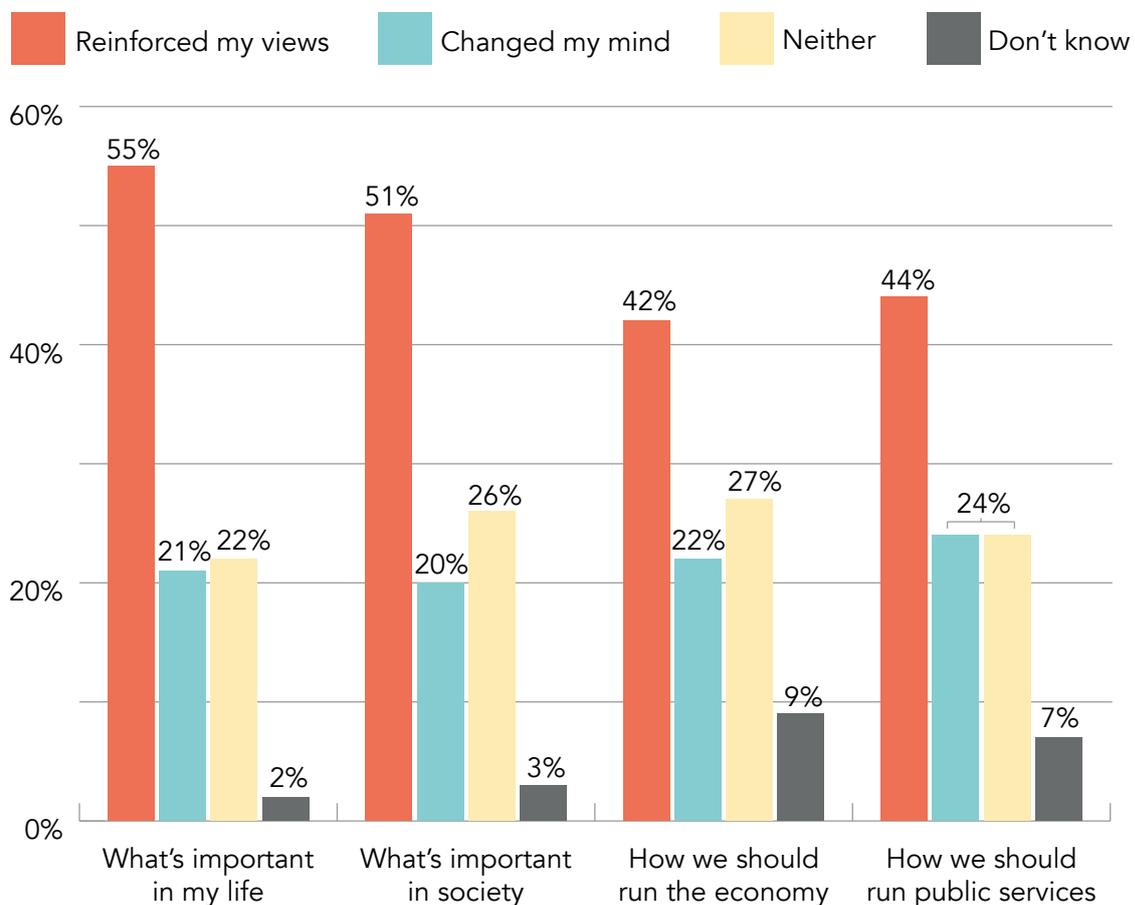
In our first survey, about 7,000 of the 11,000 respondents told us they had changed their mind about or learned something as a result of the pandemic, with examples as diverse as discovering their neighbours were wonderful, to deciding to stop work; from seeing the importance of immigrant workers in our care system, to losing faith in other people when seeing them breaking lockdown restrictions.

In November, we conducted a nationally representative poll to identify whether this shift in opinion was still prevalent and to what extent across the population as a whole. We asked people to tell

us if they had changed their mind or reinforced their views on a number of topics: what's important in their life, what's important in society, how we should run the economy, and how we should run public services.

On all domains, people were about twice as likely - or more - to have reinforced their views than to have changed their minds. But that doesn't mean we can ignore the political ramifications. First, people who have doubled-down on their beliefs as a result of this pandemic may be more likely to change their actions or political choices because of the new-found strength of their opinions. They could be mobilised as activists or make different choices about how they spend their work or leisure time.

Secondly, it's vital to recognise that it is genuinely unusual for 20-24% of the population to change their minds about big issues in so short a period. Shifts in public opinion about matters like homosexuality, climate change and the welfare state tend to be largely a result of generational changes, as those on one side of the debate die and are replaced by a generation with different views. We have seen what many consider a big change in public opinion about climate change over the last six years: Ipsos Mori polling found 85% were concerned about climate



Source: Demos polling, November 2020

change in 2019, compared to just 60% in 2013.⁶⁷ But that's a 25 percentage point change over six years, not six months.

The clearest, overarching insight from Renew Normal is this: attempts to return the United Kingdom to the way things were will fail, because this is not what the public want or what business will invest in. While overall the pandemic has had a negative impact on the public's health and wellbeing, and will continue to have serious consequences for our economy, it has also caused changes in the way we live our lives, and what we want from our society, that the public wants to maintain.

When thinking about the future, it is vital for all our leaders to understand the fundamental shifts that have occurred. The future we expected in January 2020 is not going to happen. We need to start planning for the future we now want.

LESSON 2: LEVEL UP PEOPLE, NOT JUST PLACES

The question of inequality and levelling up recurred across almost every consultation or discussion we conducted. We found worries about low pay and the safety net; concern about food poverty; evidence of a big gap between rich and poor on almost every outcome measure from healthy eating to happiness. The things people learned to value - like community connection and green space - are less available to those in poorer areas, with disabled and ethnic minority groups often even less able to access them.

There is a real opportunity after this crisis to shift the focus about what the government means by levelling up. The agenda to narrow the gap between poorer, northern towns and richer places in the South East remains important. But as we emerge from the crisis, it's clear we need a much more comprehensive approach, if we are to make Britain stronger and more resilient.

That comprehensive approach should include:

- **Levelling up wellbeing** - through investment in green space and more flexible working.
- **Levelling up social capital** - through a community development programme and support for volunteering.
- **Levelling up health** - with a focus on poverty reduction, obesity, and healthcare access.

- **Levelling up for left behind workers** - with a higher minimum wage, strengthened employment rights and a stronger welfare safety net.
- **Levelling up for left behind groups** - fulfilling commitments on racial equality and support for disabled people.
- **Levelling up digital access** - with a combination of infrastructure and skills investment.

LESSON 3: COMMUNITY MAKES US STRONGER, NOT JUST HAPPIER

The pandemic has proved beyond all doubt that community networks are a vital component of national resilience. National shielding support schemes, national test and trace, and national volunteering programmes were regularly outperformed by their local counterparts. And, as we explored in the previous section, hyper-local community organising delivered not just direct aid, but a national morale boost, too.

Community business and charitable organisations have often formed the anchor points for mutual aid activities: where they do not exist, individuals have often struggled to pull together sufficient critical mass to meet needs. Areas that lacked social infrastructure were unable to apply for funding, or when they did, were often unsuccessful.

This is because community organisations contribute both social capital - often built up over years or decades - and organisational agility. Localised efforts are often the most receptive to the continuously changing nature of emergencies, because they remove the usual bureaucratic measures and can

mobilise people to meet need incredibly quickly. What makes their work uniquely successful boils down to the connections and trust they have built up over the years.⁶⁸

And yet, we have also seen that there remain substantial proportions of the population who know almost no-one in their neighbourhood, and that loneliness increased for millions. Gaps and disparities in social capital contribute to systemic fragility, increasing the demands on the state to support individuals where neighbours and communities had not organised to do so. There is therefore a benefit to all of us if we fill these gaps in social capital, as part of the wider levelling up agenda.

⁶⁷ Skinner, G. Concern about climate change reaches record levels with half now 'very concerned'. Ipsos MORI, 2019. Available at <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/concern-about-climate-change-reaches-record-levels-half-now-very-concerned> [accessed 7/12/2020]

⁶⁸ Taylor, M. and Wilson, M. Locally Rooted: The place of community organising in times of crisis. Community Organisers, 2020. Available at https://www.corganisers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Locally_Rooted_the_place_of_co_in_times_of_crisis.pdf [accessed 9/2/2021]

LESSON 4: REMOTE WORKING AND ONLINE SHOPPING ARE HERE TO STAY. WE NEED TO ADAPT

Over the last year, we've seen an unprecedented shift of our lives online. And while it hasn't been perfect, and we can expect to see some return to offline working, socialising and shopping once restrictions are fully lifted, the simple reality is that we are not going back to how things were before.

People are broadly positive about the role technology has played in our lives. So there's not much point trying to put the genie back in the bottle and persuade or incentivise people back to their offices, high streets, or commute. The policy agenda needs to urgently focus on three things:

- How to improve the quality of online experiences.
- How to adapt offline services so they can be affordably retained.
- How to adapt our physical spaces to the economic realities of the future - see Lesson 5 for more on this.

We need an 'everybody in' strategy for the digital world. A significant portion of the population are limited in their internet use or do not use it at all. 9 million people in the UK can't use the internet without help, while 7 million people have no access to the internet at home.⁶⁹ These figures are not significant, but they also intersect with other inequalities: research by the Good Things Foundation and NHSX Digital finds that digital exclusion is a co-determinant of health, and as such, the digitally excluded risk health inequalities to a greater degree.⁷⁰

Online spaces need more oversight as they become more important. Online spaces aren't automatically good or bad: how they are designed, controlled and run determines to a large degree how people experience them. The pandemic has been a stark demonstration that online spaces, as they play a greater part in our lives, are even more in need of oversight and design in the public interest.

Unregulated online spaces which are driven by commercial incentives are spaces where misinformation and abuse flourish: this poses serious threats to both individual wellbeing and public health. While the platforms have been much more aggressive and collaborative about misinformation, they have often been left playing catch-up. Forthcoming work on online harms needs to give regulators greater access to data, and incentivise

much greater investment in human moderation at scale. Our ongoing Good Web Project will continue to make recommendations about establishing a better set of rules and norms for a healthy internet.

We need to adapt offline options so that they can be retained. Our research showed real fear that offline options - to work, shop, or access public services - would disappear, and it would be people who are vulnerable, poor, or digitally excluded who would lose out. The public is clear that they would like offline options to be retained but - especially when it comes to shopping - this may be expensive or impossible. In public services, we argue that some of the savings from digital transformation should be recycled into face-to-face services for those who need them, as well as digital inclusion efforts. There are real opportunities, given the changes we are likely to see in office and high street property use, to redesign workspaces and public service 'front offices' to create hybrid spaces, where face-to-face support can be provided alongside digital infrastructure. Co-working spaces in towns, shared between multiple employers, for example, may offer a half-way house between a long commute and home working. Many high streets could benefit from digital hubs where citizens can get face-to-face support accessing a range of online public services.

We need to reset the rules for remote working. From health and safety assessments to the costs of heating and broadband connections; from privacy and workplace surveillance to management training: there are a host of policy issues triggered by this step change in the numbers of people working from home. Through the Workshift Commission, Demos will explore these issues and make recommendations about how to ensure this change catalyses improvements in our working lives.

LESSON 5: WE NEED TO REDESIGN THE PLACES WHERE WE LIVE AND WORK

Our economic and social geography was under pressure long before the pandemic. Shopping was moving online and high streets were suffering. Cities were growing, pricing many people out, while towns were often dwindling, many with ageing populations. There were wide variations in access to green space and community buildings, which so often act as the foundations of community connection. Our public transport networks were overcrowded and in need of investment, and we needed major investment to create the infrastructure for moving towards electric vehicles.

69 Good Things Foundation. Digital Nation UK 2020. 2020. Available at <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/sites/default/files/research-publications/digital-nation-2020.pdf> [accessed 19/2/2021]

70 Stone, E., Nuckley, P. and Shapiro, R. Digital Inclusion in Health and Care: Lessons learned from the NHS Widening Digital Participation Programme (2017-2020). Good Things Foundation, 2020. Available at https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/sites/default/files/research-publications/digital_inclusion_in_health_and_care_lessons_learned_from_the_nhs_widening_digital_participation_programme_2017-2020_0.pdf [accessed 19/2/2021]

Of course, the United Kingdom has always had an extraordinary range of public spaces, civic architecture and heritage assets, of which we are rightly proud. But pre-pandemic it was becoming increasingly clear that we needed to reshape the places where we live to increase civic space, adapt to climate change and technology, and to accommodate the changing needs of an ageing population.

The pandemic accelerated many of these long term trends. This raises huge questions for the physical infrastructure of the country: from the viability of public transport networks to the imperative of insulating homes; from how to repurpose vacant office or retail buildings to how to create high quality public space where communities can come together.

Transition cannot mean that we wash our hands of the consequences of economic and social change: vacancies, derelict buildings, or impossibly expensive public transport. Of course, the market will support much of the switch from non-viable to viable uses of buildings. But the public is clear that they want the government to take a role in managing the consequences of change. In our research, there was widespread support for government playing a role in driving the transformation of city centres, to become primarily places for community, arts and leisure rather than businesses.⁷¹

This is more than an obligation: it's an opportunity.

Now is the moment for urban and rural planners alike to innovate. To test and explore how to build more liveable spaces, to support the connected communities the public is so keen to see emerge after this pandemic. This is an enormous opportunity for what Demos has called Everyday Democracy: mass participation in a consultation about what the future should look like for the spaces that matter most to each of us.

We can mobilise discussion and debate, and help build a positive agenda for places that have - for too long - accepted the inevitability of decline.

And the plans we develop for those places can and must feed into the wider policy agenda for post-Covid-19 renewal:

- More cycling and walking infrastructure could also be part of countering obesity and improving wellbeing.
- Insulating homes can be part of a plan to create new jobs, cut carbon emissions, and improve families' financial resilience.
- Creating new, local co-working hubs for public servants on high streets could help create jobs and civic pride in left behind towns, as part of the levelling up agenda.

And as we set out above, at the top of the agenda for geographic change should be improved access to green space, in particular for those communities which have the least. Reclaiming land and streetspace for community-run parks, in particular, could help build social capital and community connection, while increasing access to green space as part of a public health strategy.

71 Demos Polis, October 2020.

BUILD BACK STRONGER

“How do we prepare and give confidence to our teenagers today, who are facing climate change, the fracturing of international bonds and... pandemics and climate change? How do we build resilience?”

– Renew Normal contributor,
female, 70s, South East

In many ways this is a pick and mix report. Some readers may want to just home in on the topic that interests them the most - and they are welcome to do so. But our goal was to go one step beyond the individual findings and identify a policy narrative that had a chance of bringing a divided country back together. In this section we set out that vision.

Our core recommendation is this: we must put resilience at the heart of our post-Covid recovery programme. A national strategy to Build Back Stronger is the best way to bring a divided country back together, and drive both recovery and renewal.

First, we need to set out why division matters.



DIVIDED WE GET STUCK

One of the great strengths of a democracy is our freedom to disagree with one another. Debate, dissent and division all have a vital role to play in a healthy, liberal society. And yet there needs to be something that holds us together, across these divides. Nations need a 'demos': a collective identity and a shared understanding that enables citizens to pool their sovereignty, and accept the rules imposed by the democratic will.

But we live in an era of fast and accelerating change which is putting more strain on democratic legitimacy than, arguably, has ever been seen before. Just a few examples:

We need fundamental transformation in our economy, from the way we generate energy to how we eat, if we are to prevent catastrophic climate change. And yet not one democratic government has a popular mandate for a detailed pathway to net zero carbon emissions.

Demographic change is sweeping the West. We have an ageing population, increasing demand on public services as the taxbase of working age people reduces. People ask for better public services, but are not necessarily willing to pay any more in tax.

Vast, global companies - which have grown far faster than any predecessors - are stretching our understanding of the relationship between state and corporation, and the social contract. Individual nation states - especially liberal democracies - seem feeble when acting against these global companies, and yet no-one has found a way to secure real democratic legitimacy for supra-national bodies like the European Union.

And yet, in the face of this change, the tools we have to build consensus – political institutions, social institutions, shared media content - are stagnant, fragmenting or collapsing. Access to information has in one sense been radically democratised by the internet, but has brought with it misinformation, radicalisation, outrage and a new platform for international information warfare, all of which sows division and discontent just at the moment when we need to take long term, collective decisions.

ALONG CAME COVID-19

In the early days of the pandemic, the country united - after years of political division and acrimony - in a common endeavour to beat the virus.

Yet much of that communal energy had dissipated within months and now, a year on, divisions are rawer than ever. Indeed, Covid-19 has actually accelerated divisions in many ways:

1. Accelerating change.

Change is often pretty divisive, not least because you get winners and losers. In the UK - as in many other countries - we were already going through the digital transformation of public and consumer services and high street decline. Our labour market was changing as a result of both technology and globalisation. Health, care and pension costs were rising while tax revenues dwindled. Covid-19 accelerated all of these changes. We have seen:

- A huge acceleration of the shift to online services, working and shopping.
- The collapse of several major high street chains.
- Massive job losses, making the risk of labour market transition more painful.
- Hugely increased pressure for public service spending.
- A collapse in tax revenues.

2. New divisions

As earlier waves of Renew Normal showed, Covid-19 also created a new pool of divisive problems. While there has broadly been consensus support for the majority of lockdown measures introduced throughout the last year, there have been visible arguments about a number of political issues including:

- Lockdown resentment: complaints from those who disagreed with the measures.
- Lockdown outrage: fury at those who refused to comply with the rules, in particular public figures who broke quarantine.
- Mask wars: the same pattern, with compliers reporting high levels of resentment towards non-compliers, and some non-compliers feeling outraged by the rules.
- Very visible economic winners and losers, including controversial large scale contracts for some private companies.
- Billions of pounds claimed fraudulently for Covid-19 support, while up to 3m weren't eligible for any help from the schemes.
- The debate about who should get priority access to vaccines, and the possibility of vaccine passports.

3. Widening inequality

Inequality was already a divisive force of resentment and political anger before this crisis. It has got both worse and more salient. So we can expect more anger about inequality; without commitment from our politicians to address it, this is likely to lead to greater division and resentment.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

Renew Normal was designed to understand what kind of agenda would bring Britain back together after all this. Throughout this report, we have set out ways of navigating divisive policy issues and building consensus: tackling low pay for everyone, rather than just rewarding public sector workers, for example, or promoting flexible rather than just remote working. We want to apply that approach to the overarching narrative for post-Covid recovery.

Early on in the crisis, a movement was launched that said we should “Build Back Better.” This movement, backed by a range of political and civil society organisations, argued that we should be ambitious about recovery. Instead of just trying to patch things up, we should try to solve the problems Britain faced before the crisis. We absolutely support that approach. The Prime Minister welcomed it too, and at the start of this year launched a Build Back Better council, to “unlock investment, boost job creation and level up the whole of the UK.”⁷²

The problem with ‘Build Back Better’ is that it doesn’t seek to define what ‘better’ means. It doesn’t identify what old problems we should solve, or even what qualified as a problem in the pre-Covid world. That is why, throughout Renew Normal, we aimed to move beyond the slogan and identify what it was that people want to change. We offered everyone the chance to have their say on what ‘better’ really means.

In December, the leading public health academic Michael Marmot put forward his proposals for post-Covid reform under the banner of Build Back Fairer. This was another helpful contribution, but in our view it remains problematic. On the surface, fairness is something we can all agree on, but the word masks a fundamental values divide between those who think fairness means equity and those who think fairness means that actions should have consequences. This can create tension when it comes to choosing policy on welfare and job-seeking, or obesity and food choices.

As the findings set out above show, we do not need to rely on a potentially divisive fairness debate to make the case for reducing inequality. There is a strong case that reducing inequality benefits all of us, by increasing the resilience of the country as a whole. The way to bring together all the policy recommendations set out here, in a way that builds consensus rather than division, is to focus on that resilience story.

A NEW MODEL OF RESILIENCE

Our Build Back Stronger agenda goes beyond the boundaries of conventional resilience and security strategy, to consider the full range of factors that affect our ability to respond to, and recover from, shocks. This section of the report builds on a 2009 Demos paper by Charlie Edwards, Resilient Nation. In Resilient Nation, Edwards made the case that citizens and communities needed to be brought into emergency response systems: their agility and social capital make them far more able to prevent as well as respond to disasters. “Next generation resilience relies on citizens and communities, not the institutions of the state”, he argued.⁷³

The pandemic showed how prescient this was. National shielding support schemes, national test and trace, and national volunteering programmes were regularly out-performed by their local counterparts. And, as we explored in the previous section, hyper-local community organising delivered not just direct aid, but a national morale boost, too. So community building is clearly an essential component of any future resilience strategy.

We have identified four more:

Individual and family-level financial resilience

Low pay and low savings ratios make millions of families financially fragile. With no savings and low sick pay, individuals and their families had little cushion to fall back on. That makes our whole economic system more fragile and increases the pressure on the state for emergency aid if and when a crisis hits. And as we saw above, low pay and financial fragility make it harder for people to take the actions needed to respond in a crisis - like self-isolating. If they can’t afford to lose a day’s pay, people are more likely to take risks, whether that’s exposing themselves to Covid-19 right now, or risking travelling to work in flood conditions in the next crisis.

Public health and wellbeing

We are not healthy enough: we have high levels of obesity, diabetes and hypertension, all of which are risk factors for severe disease - not just with a Covid-19 infection but in almost any pandemic. There’s a mental health dimension too: with high levels of anxiety and depression, our ability to manage the impact of trauma and crisis can be impaired. Other issues - closely correlated with poverty - like food insecurity, fuel poverty, and loneliness all reduce our resilience too.

⁷² HM Government. Prime Minister and Chancellor launch new Business Council. 2020. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-and-chancellor-launch-new-business-council> [accessed 24/02/2021]

⁷³ Edwards, C. Resilient Nation. Demos, 2009. Available at https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Resilient_Nation_-_web-1.pdf [accessed 24/02/2021]

Trade flows

As we saw above, interruptions in our food supply, and the global race to secure adequate PPE took the public by surprise. There is a strong consensus for a new approach to improving the resilience of our essential supply chains. The government is exploring this through its Project Defend.

Integrity of public information systems

Social media networks have long been under scrutiny for the information ecosystems they have created. Before the pandemic, foreign interference in elections was the focal point of fear about online disinformation harming our society. The pandemic has brought to the fore how public health can rely, in a much more fundamental sense, on healthy, well-managed information environments where engagement is not driven by fear.

We have seen platforms being much more proactive when it comes to dealing with Covid-19 misinformation than on other online harms. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter have labelled and removed misinformation, pushed good information and directed users to authoritative sources, and altered their advertising policies to ban anti-vax ads and give free ads to health services.^{74, 75, 76, 77, 78} But this response has been inconsistent and its success is unclear. Experts commented to us that, though platforms had taken more steps against misinformation than usual, they had repeatedly delayed taking the most significant steps like banning ads from anti-vaxxers, rather than doing so early on.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, some states have used the crisis to further their own political aims through disinformation campaigns online.⁸⁰

Overall, both states and social media companies have been adapting and altering policy as they went along. There was, and still is, no established playbook for increasing access to and trust in reliable information, while reducing the risk of misinformation. That lack of a coherent information systems strategy, and a reactive focus on stamping out harms rather than building healthier alternatives, has hampered the pandemic response throughout and continues to affect vaccine hesitancy.

A comprehensive approach to resilience needs to focus on all five issues in an integrated way: trade flows and essential goods are only the beginning. Resilience strategies need to start with building up the financial and health resilience of individuals, families and communities, and ensuring access to high quality information for all.



A COHESIVE POLICY AGENDA

The policy agenda identified by the public through Renew Normal is well targeted to improve our resilience on all of these fronts. We looked above at trade policy, where public attitudes align closely with the priorities of Project Defend: improving our national resilience while staying open to trade and diverse supply chains.

Public demands for a major new levelling up agenda will also help improve resilience. Tackling low pay and precarious employment, and improving the protections of our welfare system will not just improve the finances and health of individual families, but the ability of those families to withstand future shocks, and so the resilience of our economic and health system as a whole.

74 Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Sub-Committee on Online Harms and Disinformation. Oral evidence: Online Harms and Disinformation, HC 234. House of Commons, 2020. Available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/459/pdf> [accessed 13/08/2020]

75 Hillier, L. As usage soars, what are social media platforms doing to help support and inform users. Econsultancy, 2020. Available at <https://econsultancy.com/coronavirus-as-social-media-usage-soars-what-are-platforms-doing-to-help-users-be-better-connected-informed-and-supported/> [accessed 13/08/2020]

76 CCDH. Tech Company Claims. 2020. Available at <https://www.counterhate.co.uk/tech-company-claims> [accessed 13/08/2020]

77 Gregory, S., Kayyali, D and Faife C. Covid-19 Misinformation and Disinformation Responses: Sorting the Good from the Bad. WITNESS, 2020. Available at <https://blog.witness.org/2020/05/covid-19-misinformation-response-assessment/> [accessed 13/08/2020]

78 Tidy, J. Coronavirus: Facebook alters virus action after damning misinformation report. BBC News, 2020. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-52309094> [accessed 13/08/2020]

79 CCDH. #WilltoAct: How social media giants have failed to live up to their claims on the Coronavirus 'infodemic'. 2020. Available at www.counterhate.co.uk/willtoact [accessed 13/8/2020]

80 Ricard, J. and Medeiros, J. Using misinformation as a political weapon: Covid-19 and Bolsonaro in Brazil. Harvard Misinformation Review, 2020. Available at <https://misinfoview.hks.harvard.edu/article/using-misinformation-as-a-political-weapon-covid-19-and-bolsonaro-in-brazil/> [accessed 23/02/2021]

The growing public consensus for building more inclusive, healthier and accessible online spaces - as set out above - will help build a more resilient information system, where individuals have access to more reliable, trusted sources of information, and harmful misinformation is harder to come by.

And a major investment in community development - including better access to green space and

coordinated efforts to tackle food poverty - will help build the social capital and human connections that are so essential to effective disaster relief.

The diagram below shows the way in which the policy recommendations contained in this report will, together, contribute to this comprehensive resilience approach.



POLICY SUMMARY

This section is a short summary of all the policy proposals included in this report, for easier reference.



KEY WORKERS AND LOW PAY

Government should:

Tackle low pay with:

- Increases in the minimum wage, and improved enforcement.
- Prioritising low paid public sector workers for a significant pay rise, including targeted funding to enable higher pay in private companies delivering public services, such as care.

Improve the safety net by:

- Extending sick pay to low paid workers.
- Increasing the rate of sick pay.
- Making permanent the £20-a-week increase in Universal Credit, pending a wider review of sustainable welfare spending.

Improve opportunities and productivity with:

- A new education and training offer for all low paid workers
- A statutory entitlement to paid learning leave.

TRADE AND RESILIENCE

We support the approach taken by Project Defend to improve the resilience of supply chains for essential goods and services.

We recommend the government:

- Engage the public in a consensus-building process, such as a citizens' assembly, on the future direction of UK trade policy.
- Engage with other countries on the reform of multilateral institutions to provide greater protection and security against future shocks.
- Publish wider information on the expected impacts of a range of possible future shocks, opening this process up to greater public scrutiny and challenge.

It is also vital that we go beyond the question of supply chains in considering the real nature of national resilience.

THE FUTURE OF HOME WORKING

Government should abandon efforts to intervene in the market and persuade or incentivise office workers back to their old patterns. Instead, it should support people through the transition.

Flexible hours are overall more important to the population than the ability to work from home. We recommend the government:

- Work with industry, sector by sector, to identify ways to improve flexibility and ensure the lessons learned from this pandemic can spread to the whole economy.
- Encourage the Civil Service and public sector to lead the way on using remote working to support the levelling up agenda, with a drive to increase remote working opportunities in areas where there is a lack of labour market opportunities.
- Take a role in driving the transformation of city centres.

ONLINE LIFE AND MISINFORMATION

It is time for an 'Everybody In' approach to digital, focused on both infrastructure and skills. The government should:

- Recognise internet access as an essential need and invest significantly in digital infrastructure in less well-connected areas, as well as provide support to those who are unable to afford sufficient internet connection. We support the proposal of a Minimum Digital Living Standard.⁸¹
- Invest in upskilling people who are currently digitally excluded through lack of skills, focusing on supporting existing local authority or community organisations who are providing these services.⁸²

We need to redesign face-to-face services - in the public and private sector - developing a strategy alongside efforts to reinvent our urban spaces.

- Savings made by essential services moving online should be invested back into targeting offline services at the particular groups who most require them.
- National and local government should collaborate on creating innovative 'front of house' models for the full range of public services, including collaborating with the private sector.

And we need to build a better internet. Policy interventions should include:

- A duty of care on platforms should include requirements on platforms to empower users to report and reduce abuse online, including providing more transparent reporting tools, and processes for redress.
- An independent regulator should require data access from social media platforms, so that the incidence of harmful content and the effectiveness

81 Carnegie UK Trust. Learning from lockdown: 12 steps to eliminate digital exclusion. 2020. Available at https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2020/10/14161948/Carnegie-Learning-from-lockdown-Report-FINAL.pdf [accessed 19/2/2021]

82 Good Things Foundation. Coronavirus and Digital Inclusion. 2020. Available at <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/coronavirus-and-digital-inclusion> [accessed 19/2/2021]

of reporting, moderation and curation systems can be assessed by third-parties outside of the platforms themselves.

- Tech platforms should invest in their human moderators, offering increased professional psychological care and enabling greater home working.

COMMUNITIES AND VOLUNTEERING

Communities should:

- Lead the process of reimagining their own urban, suburban, and rural spaces that are affected by economic and technological change. From high streets to new parkland: communities should be leading on design, and a major part of delivery.
- This should be funded by a mix of grants, asset transfers, and support for community businesses.
- Communities - who have been such a vital part of the response to food poverty - should be a major part of the National Food Strategy.

All our resilience planning should include efforts to build up social capital and community infrastructure that can be flexibly deployed at times of crisis.

- We should create a new measure of social capital, and its geographic distribution to inform policy making.
- The government's levelling up agenda should aim to reduce inequality of social capital - as well as economic capital.

It is vital that efforts to increase volunteering and voluntarism does not become a political dividing line but a source of connection and optimism for the nation. That means we need to make sure it's not covering up for cuts.

Government should mitigate risks by ensuring public service funding keeps up with demand. It should also:

- Introduce new protections to ensure charities are not subsidising core NHS or other services.
- Guarantee statutory funding for hospices.

ACCESS TO GREEN SPACE

At the top of the agenda for the physical transformation of our urban and suburban spaces should be improved access to green space, in particular for those communities who have the least.

Local and national government should:

- Create a new parks fund to support the reclaiming of disused urban land for green space - including both small community parks and strategic green

space in major centres, to drive social and economic regeneration.

- Set a goal that no-one should live more than five minutes away from green space, and that every urban area should have at least one landmark park.

This is also an opportunity for community development and everyday democracy. As Covid-19 recedes, we can find new purpose for neighbourhood groups and community organisations in designing and managing new and existing green space. Local and national government should:

- Give more power to people in local decision making about future green spaces.
- Encourage public engagement in managing green spaces on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure full community consultation over transport redesign proposals - like Low Transport Neighbourhoods - to increase walking and cycling.

INEQUALITY

Levelling up needs to become an agenda to bring wellbeing and prosperity to a far wider range of left behind people and places, covering social as well as economic policy.

Levelling up should include:

- Renewed efforts to tackle low pay and improve the welfare safety net.
- A major investment in building social capital in left-behind areas, through practical community projects.
- Huge expansion in access to green space, especially in left-behind areas, as part of a wellbeing strategy to reduce happiness inequality.
- A national programme to get Britain healthy, with targets to substantially reduce the gap between rich and poor on obesity, activity levels and smoking.
- Renewed commitments to level up opportunity, health and wellbeing for people from ethnic minority communities.

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