

DEMOS

MISSION-READY NATION

ENABLING MASS
MOBILISATION AROUND
NATIONAL MISSIONS

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MARCH 2025

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Demos's purpose is to build a more collaborative democracy, which enables politicians, policy makers, citizens, and experts from business, civil society and academia to work in partnership to understand and tackle the enormous challenges facing our country today.

The scale of the challenges – from the cost-of-living crisis to the growth challenge and our crumbling public services – means that politicians will have to make hard choices and find new ways to deliver change for the country. Mission-led government is central to delivering that change. This paper is the second in a project, supported by Serco and NCVO, that is looking at what it would mean for the country to be 'mission ready'.

In the first paper, *Mobilisation Nation*, we argued that the UK government needs a new approach for achieving missions. This is because, unlike previous 'technological missions' like putting a man on the moon or developing Covid-19 vaccines, the Labour government has chosen to adopt 'socioeconomic missions'. These are different in nature from technological missions: to a much greater degree, they require mass mobilisation of all sectors of society to achieve them. However, as we explored in the first paper, the conditions for the required cross-sectoral mobilisation do not exist in the UK today.

In this second paper, we argue for an overarching shift from 'government missions' towards 'shared national missions' to harness the power of collective action. To address the barriers to cross-sectoral mobilisation, we propose a series of 'enabling reforms' so that all actors – different tiers of government, businesses and trade unions, civil society and citizens – can rally around delivering the national missions. Each of these reforms would move us closer towards being a Mission-Ready Nation – with organisations and individuals able to play their part in achieving the missions and the 'decade of national renewal' which our country needs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under Keir Starmer's leadership, Labour has put the concept of 'missions' at the heart of its programme for government. We are excited by the potential of this agenda to sustain prioritisation of long-term policy objectives and drive innovation by focusing on outcomes which will benefit the whole country.

Central government correctly recognises it cannot achieve missions on its own. This is especially the case because, as we showed in the first paper of this series, *Mobilisation Nation*, the Labour government's missions are socioeconomic in nature, not technological. Socioeconomic missions, even more so than technological missions, require mass mobilisation. To quote the Prime Minister's foreword in the *Plan for Change*: "Mission-led government represents a politics of the common good – everyone pulling together, galvanised by clear objectives, sharing in the pursuit of national renewal."

However, there are structural and institutional barriers to mass mobilisation around missions. There is a risk that those in Westminster and Whitehall spend too much of their time focused on internal changes and the government's legislative programme. These changes are necessary, but not sufficient. We are concerned that the government might miss the opportunity it has in the next year or two to mobilise all actors across the country around shared national missions.

In this paper, we propose a series of reforms to enable mobilisation around the national missions. At a high level, these are designed to help achieve what we have described as '**five shifts**' of mission mobilisation:

1. From *government missions* to *shared national missions*
2. From *command and control* to *mission stewardship*
3. From *mission delivery* to *mission collaboration*
4. From *citizen engagement* to *citizen participation*
5. From *partnership rhetoric* to *enabling reforms*

Mission mobilisation requires a different role for **central government**, including changes in culture and practice:

- Inspired by ideas from systems leadership, we argue that a mission-led government needs to adopt a different style of leadership which we call 'mission stewardship'. To enable this, we propose a cross-disciplinary team should evaluate existing practice, convene experts and develop a *Guide to Mission Stewardship*, which can then be used for training and development for leaders within central government as part of a 'community of practice'.
- To encourage mission collaboration across central government and to break down barriers to cross-government working, we propose further strengthening the capacity and influence of the existing Mission Delivery Unit and No. 10 Partnerships Team, and using the Spending Review to provide some funding specifically for cross-cutting missions, not just individual departments.

To mobilise devolved, regional and local government as part of a shift towards *mission collaboration*, we propose:

- Using intergovernmental forums to discuss specifically how different tiers of government can work together to help achieve the national missions
- Using new Integrated Settlements for Combined/Strategic Authorities in England to focus on mission-oriented outcomes
- Building local government capacity to support the national missions through a programme of reciprocal secondments, creating further multidisciplinary test-and-learn teams, and strengthening capability in relation to data, digital and technology

To achieve socioeconomic missions, it is essential to mobilise leaders and organisations across businesses, trade unions and civil society – a shift from *partnership rhetoric* to *enabling reforms*. We propose:

- Reforming procurement and making better use of social value, especially to help mobilise small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations
- Creating external 'Mission Councils', attached to specific, concrete missions, in order to encourage both collaboration and collective action around national missions. Mission Councils should include a combination of members from central government, regional/local government, businesses, trade unions, civil society organisations, private finance and universities – with the membership varying according to the needs of each specific mission.
- Reforming corporate governance to counter short-termism in business by amending the UK Companies Act
- Establishing a new 'Business Ownership Commission' to examine how to encourage more concentrated, engaged ownership of businesses so that they are better able to prioritise the long-term investment and innovation needed for national missions
- Creating a clear commitment to partnering with civil society organisations on national missions via the Civil Society Covenant
- Supporting regional/local VCSE infrastructure organisations to enable civil society mobilisation

Mobilising citizens is also essential – a shift from *citizen engagement* to *citizen mobilisation*. The Prime Minister recognises the need for this, writing in the *Plan for Change*, “We invite the British people to join us in the mission of national renewal.” We agree and propose this should be taken further by:

- Mobilising public opinion around the missions by changing the rhetoric away from government missions and towards shared national missions. This is especially important if a specific mission requires citizens to change their opinions or behaviour in some way.
- Using participation in policy making in the design and delivery of national missions, building on the proposals in Demos’s *Citizens’ White Paper*
- Creating opportunities for volunteering connected to the national missions, initially by convening a workshop to explore current opportunities and challenges
- Involving citizens in mission ‘feedback loops’ to provide rapid feedback on whether changes in policy and practice are making a tangible difference to people’s lives

Each of our proposed enabling reforms would help to move us closer towards being a Mission-Ready Nation – with organisations and citizens able to play their part by contributing to the missions and the ‘decade of national renewal’ which our country needs.

INTRODUCTION

Under Keir Starmer’s leadership, Labour has put the concept of ‘missions’ at the heart of its programme for government. The *Plan for Change*, published in December 2024, confirmed its commitment to what it calls ‘mission-led government’.¹ We are excited by the missions agenda and its potential to address deficiencies in policy making and in our collective ability to achieve national goals – such as chronic short-termism, incoherence and lack of genuine cross-sectoral partnerships. However, we believe that the current approach to mission-led government will fail to achieve its potential without a change of course.

In the first paper in this series, *Mobilisation Nation*, we argued the UK government needs a new approach for achieving its missions.² This is because, unlike previous ‘technological missions’ such as putting a man on the moon or developing Covid-19 vaccines, the Labour government has chosen to adopt ‘socioeconomic missions’. These are different in nature from technological missions: to a much greater degree, they require mass mobilisation of all sectors of society to achieve them. However, the conditions for the required cross-sectoral mobilisation do not exist in the UK today.

In *Mobilisation Nation*, we identified a number of barriers to mobilising different sectors and actors around missions. In this second paper, we propose a series of ‘enabling reforms’ that aim to make the state, businesses and unions, civil society and citizens ‘mission ready’. The government cannot simply set a socioeconomic mission and expect our systems of government, economy and society to mobilise around it; there are structural and institutional reasons why progress is held back. These need to be addressed via enabling reforms if, collectively, we are going to achieve these shared national missions.

The relationship between missions, mobilisation and enabling reforms is set out in Table 1.

TABLE 1
A FRAMEWORK FOR ACHIEVING SOCIOECONOMIC MISSIONS

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5
Set specific mission	Explore nature and type of mission, and identify key sectors/actors to mobilise in order to achieve the mission	Identify barriers to the cross-sectoral mobilisation needed to achieve the mission	Undertake ‘enabling reforms’ to overcome barriers to mobilisation	Make progress towards mission, adapting approach based on feedback loops

1 HM Government. *Plan for Change*. GOV.UK, 5 December 2024. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6751af4719e0c816d18d1df3/Plan_for_Change.pdf [accessed 07/03/2025]

2 Glover, B., O’Brien, A. and Phillips, A. *Mobilisation Nation: Why the government’s missions need enabling reforms*. Demos, 20 February 2025. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/mobilisation-nation-why-the-governments-missions-need-enabling-reforms> [accessed 07/03/2025]

The Prime Minister and the government recognise the need for mission-oriented mobilisation, as described in the *Plan for Change*:

[The missions] are not just government missions, but missions for the entire country – a partnership between public and private sectors, national and local government, business and unions, alongside the whole of civil society. Mission-led government represents a politics of the common good – everyone pulling together, galvanised by clear objectives, sharing in the pursuit of national renewal.³ (emphasis added)

We welcome this emphasis on partnership working and a “politics of the common good”. We think it is right to expect actors across the whole of society – not just central government – to play their part in achieving national missions. The reforms proposed in this paper are designed to help the government translate the rhetoric of mobilisation into reality and shape a Mission-Ready Nation.

Previous governments led by Theresa May and Boris Johnson also talked about how adopting missions would ‘galvanise’ cross-sectoral partnerships. Yet those initiatives, such as Theresa May’s Industrial Strategy and Boris Johnson’s twelve ‘levelling up’ missions, largely failed in this regard. The lesson for Starmer’s government is that it is not enough to repeat words about partnership: the conditions for genuine mobilisation need to be created through enabling reforms.

The Labour Party was elected on a manifesto with a one-word title of *Change*. Since the election, there has been much discussion about how Labour should embrace being an ‘insurgent’ government, an argument put forward by influential MPs like Josh Simons.⁴ The Prime Minister is reported to have told the Cabinet that “we can either be the disrupters or the disrupted”.⁵ The government is focused on reforming the state and is banking on using AI and cutting the size of the civil service.⁶ That should not mean disruptive chaos which causes far more problems than it solves. It should mean changing the culture within the state as well as its size and shape. It also means leaning into the enabling reforms needed to achieve mass mobilisation around the national missions, even if those reforms are controversial, difficult or disruptive to ‘business as usual’.

3 HM Government. *Plan for Change*. GOV.UK, 5 December 2024. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6751af4719e0c816d18d1df3/Plan_for_Change.pdf [accessed 07/03/2025]

4 Simons, J. To beat the populist right, Labour must be an insurgent government. *Financial Times*, 14 July 2024. Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/0ca9f07c-4c10-4098-9e2f-64c5c03478e7> [accessed 13/03/2025]

5 Parker, G. Starmer tells ministers to push ‘further and faster’ for growth after grim economic forecasts. *Financial Times*, 7 February 2025. Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/8226d6a5-50b7-4ce6-a98d-32ab626243a2> [accessed 13/03/2025]

6 Mason, R. AI should replace some work of civil servants, Starmer to announce. *The Guardian*, 12 March 2025. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/mar/12/ai-should-replace-some-work-of-civil-servants-under-new-rules-keir-starmer-to-announce> [accessed 13/03/2025]

FIVE SHIFTS FOR ACHIEVING NATIONAL MISSIONS

In this paper, we propose a series of ‘enabling reforms’ so that all actors – different tiers of government, businesses and trade unions, civil society and citizens – can rally around achieving missions. Underlying our proposals are a number of themes: we have summarised these as five ‘shifts’ which, together, are designed to unlock mass mobilisation.

1. **From *government missions* to *shared national missions*** – because as a country we need to harness the power of collective action as part of “a politics of the common good”. The way to achieve this is by shifting towards shared national missions as a response to the shared national challenges we collectively face.
2. **From *command and control* to *mission stewardship*** – because achieving socioeconomic missions requires ministers and senior civil servants to take on a different style of leadership, away from command and control and output-based targets, and instead embracing ideas from ‘systems leadership’, taking on roles like ‘steward’, ‘convenor’ and ‘enabler’, and emphasising mission-oriented outcomes.
3. **From *mission delivery* to *mission collaboration*** – because traditional siloed Whitehall models of ‘delivery’ cannot achieve socioeconomic missions. Ministers and civil servants need to embrace working in cross-departmental, multidisciplinary teams and collaborating directly with regional and local partners instead of trying to ‘deliver’ from SW1.
4. **From *citizen engagement* to *citizen participation*** – because participatory and deliberative methods should be a core part of national missions, including speeding up feedback loops in a more agile, test-and-learn style of achieving change. ‘Rollout and evaluate years later’ is not an effective method for achieving socioeconomic missions in complex and adaptive environments.
5. **From *partnership rhetoric* to *enabling reforms*** – because rhetoric alone will not create genuine partnership, and enabling reforms are needed to overcome existing barriers to mobilisation of business, trade unions, civil society and citizens around shared national missions.



We also emphasise three additional underlying principles the government needs to adopt in order to make a success of its mission-led approach:

- Missions will be more effective if they are cross-sectoral, specific and measurable. For example, in our view, it will be easier to mobilise organisations and citizens around the mission to ‘halve knife crime’ than the overarching but vague mission to ‘take back our streets’.
- Different methods, techniques and ways of working are needed for different missions. Not every ‘enabling reform’ is applicable to every mission; each mission will need different coalitions mobilised around it. Trying to manage every mission in the same way is unlikely to be effective.
- Both mission-led government and specific missions themselves require sustained prioritisation from the centre of government – the Prime Minister and No. 10, the Treasury and the Cabinet Office. They will only be genuine long-term missions if this prioritisation is sustained throughout the course of this Parliament, and beyond.

MISSIONS: A WORKING DEFINITION

Since coming into vogue, the term ‘mission’ has rarely been used consistently. Indeed, this has led some to raise concerns about ‘mission washing’.^{7,8} Mariana Mazzucato, the economist and author of *Mission Economy*, has defined a mission as “a concrete goal that, if achieved, will help to tackle a grand challenge, designed to set a clear direction for cross-sectoral and cross-actor investment and innovation.”⁹ We follow this definition. We also have in mind five ‘criteria’ for missions, articulated in a 2019 paper by Mazzucato and George Dobb – that missions should:

1. Be bold and inspirational with wide societal relevance
2. Set a clear direction – targeted, measurable, and time-bound
3. Be ambitious but realistic
4. Encourage cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral, and cross-actor innovation
5. Involve multiple, bottom-up solutions¹⁰

In our first paper, we analysed which of the government’s ‘missions’ meet the definition and criteria above. In our view, several of the government’s ‘missions’ do not really meet the definition. For example, the mission to ‘break down barriers to opportunity’ is so broad that it lacks a concrete goal and does not meaningfully set a clear direction: it risks every organisation saying that what they already do contributes to this ‘mission’, and thus not encouraging change away from the status quo. However, the related ‘mission milestone’ in the *Plan for Change* does

7 Tönurist, P. 13 reasons why missions fail. Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, 13 December 2023. Available at <https://oecd-opsi.org/blog/13-reasons-why-missions-fail> [accessed 07/03/2025]

8 Stacey, K. and Elgot, J. Ministers ‘mission-washing’ spending plans in effort to avoid cuts. The Guardian, 14 February 2025. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/feb/14/ministers-mission-washing-spending-plans-in-effort-to-avoid-cuts> [accessed 07/03/2025]

9 Mazzucato, M. and others. Mission Critical 01: Statecraft for the 21st century. Future Governance Forum, 30 May 2024. Available at <https://www.futuregovernanceforum.co.uk/resource/mission-critical-01> [accessed 07/03/2025]

10 Mazzucato, M. and Dobb, G. Missions: A beginner’s guide. Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 13 December 2019. Available at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/publications/2019/dec/missions-beginners-guide> [accessed 07/03/2025]

have a concrete goal: 75% of five-year-olds reaching a good level of development in the early years foundation stage assessment by 2028.¹¹ This better meets the definition and criteria set out above: a concrete, measurable and time-bound goal, with wide societal relevance that requires cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral action to support a good childhood in the first five years of life.

The rest of this paper focuses on enabling reforms for mission-oriented mobilisation. We start with the role of central government (section 1) before turning to reforms designed to mobilise devolved, regional and local government (section 2), businesses and trade unions (section 3), civil society (section 4) and citizens (section 5). Many of the enabling reforms we propose respond to the barriers identified in *Mobilisation Nation*.¹²

11 HM Government. Plan for Change. GOV.UK, 5 December 2024. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6751af4719e0c816d18d1df3/Plan_for_Change.pdf [accessed 07/03/2025]

12 Glover, B., O'Brien, A. and Phillips, A. Mobilisation Nation: Why the government's missions need enabling reforms. Demos, 20 February 2025. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/mobilisation-nation-why-the-governments-missions-need-enabling-reforms> [accessed 07/03/2025]

SECTION ONE

THE ROLE OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

This paper considers how to mobilise all sectors and actors around the national missions. However, we are not marginalising central government itself, which has a crucial role. Central government needs to act differently to help achieve socioeconomic missions. In this section, we make the case that there are two key ways in which central government needs to change. First, *cultural change* is needed: we propose a shift towards ‘mission stewardship’ as a discipline of leadership, and ‘mission collaboration’ in the day-to-day work of ministers and civil servants. Second, the Treasury and central government overall have significant influence via the public finance system: we propose that in the 2025 Spending Review, the Treasury should break with tradition and agree funding allocations with cross-cutting mission teams/groups, not just individual departments, to encourage mission collaboration.

CULTURAL CHANGE: MISSION STEWARDSHIP AND MISSION COLLABORATION

From command and control to mission stewardship

The Prime Minister, other ministers and senior civil servants have crucial leadership roles related to the national missions. The second of our five shifts relates to the style of leadership which we think is required: from ‘command and control’ to ‘mission stewardship’.

Since the 1990s there has been interest in applying complexity theory – that is, the study of nonlinear dynamic systems – to organisational theory, strategy and management.¹³ We think this is especially relevant for socioeconomic missions. Not only is central government itself large and complex, but the UK government’s missions are designed to influence nonlinear, complex and adaptive systems (the economic growth mission, for example). Therefore, we propose that adapting ideas from ‘systems leadership’ is important for central government’s role in leading the national missions.

13 Levy, D. L. Applications and Limitations of Complexity Theory in Organization Theory and Strategy. 2000. Available at https://www.faculty.umb.edu/david_levy/complex00.pdf [accessed 07/03/2025]

Systems leadership draws on “the concerted effort of many people working together at different places in the system and at different levels”.¹⁴ It “requires a departure from traditional top-down, hierarchical and linear approaches [...] instead it requires innovative and adaptive approaches that engage broad networks of diverse stakeholders to advance progress toward a shared vision for systemic change.”¹⁵ Another way of defining systems leadership is as “leadership across organisational and geopolitical boundaries, beyond individual professional disciplines, within a range of organisational and stakeholder cultures, and often without direct managerial control.”¹⁶

We think that, learning from systems leadership, socioeconomic missions require a different style of leadership. In this paper, we use the term ‘mission stewardship’ to describe this leadership style. We are borrowing this term from the report of Camden Council’s Renewal Commission which said that “achieving the missions needs collective action from across Camden’s public sector, businesses, voluntary and community sector, anchor institutions and citizens” and that the council’s role should be to act as a “mission steward”.¹⁷

We are also drawing on others’ ideas about the changing nature of public sector leadership. A recent paper published by New Local explores the concept of ‘radical leadership’ in the context of local government.¹⁸ The paper describes how council chief executives and senior leaders are “drawing from different fields of thinking, system leadership and complexity thinking”, as well as traditional management theory.¹⁹ The paper suggests that if leaders are to operate beyond their own organisations – as those working in central government must in order to achieve socioeconomic missions – their role needs to include “mobilisation as well as management”.²⁰ Jessica Studdert, chief executive of New Local, has argued for a shift from ‘new public management’ to ‘new public mobilisation’: “Rather than trying to force certainty in an uncertain world, public institutions must work in more dynamic ways which mobilise the assets and capabilities of their own workforce, partners and communities to achieve common goals.”²¹ Similarly, an Institute for Government and Nesta report emphasises that missions require a specific type of leadership, which they describe as “sustained”, “coalition-building” (within and outside government) and “empowering”.²²

What difference would ‘mission stewardship’ make? It would, for example, mean a shift from leadership of a single organisation (likely to be oriented around more traditional management) towards leadership of an ‘ecosystem’ of organisations and people, all with a role to play in achieving a socioeconomic mission.²³ This is, potentially, a very different mindset for a Permanent Secretary and other senior civil servants to take on: traditionally these roles have focused on management of individual departments, not on wider mobilisation. The same applies to ministers: rather than focusing all their time on departmental work, they should use their political platform to mobilise cross-sectoral coalitions around the national missions.

14 Bolden, R. Systems Leadership: Pitfalls and possibilities. GOV.UK, (no date). Available at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f881ec88fa8f50429658795/NLC-thinkpiece-Systems-Leadership-BOLDEN.pdf> [accessed 11/03/2025]

15 Dreier, L., Nabarro, D. and Nelson J. Systems Leadership for Sustainable Development: Strategies for Achieving Systemic Change. Harvard Kennedy School, 2019. Available at <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/mrcbg/files/Systems%20Leadership.pdf> [accessed 11/03/2025]

16 Van Dyke, M. Systems Leadership: Exceptional leadership for exceptional times: Source Paper 4a. Colebrooke Centre for Evidence and Implementation and Cass Business School, 2013. Available at https://pure.strath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/82716263/Van_Dyke_2013_Systems_leadership_exceptional_leadership_for_exceptional_times.pdf [accessed 11/03/2025]

17 Camden Renewal Commission. Developing renewal missions in Camden. 2021. Available at <https://camdenrenewal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Developing-renewal-missions-in-Camden-Renewal-Commission-Report-2021.pdf> [accessed 07/03/2025]

18 Studdert, J., Warren, S. and Randle, A. Radical Leadership: Power, Possibility and Public Service. New Local, 13 February 2025. Available at <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/publications/radical-leadership-power-possibility-and-public-service> [accessed 07/03/2025]

19 Studdert, J., Warren, S. and Randle, A. Radical Leadership: Power, Possibility and Public Service. New Local, 13 February 2025. Available at <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/publications/radical-leadership-power-possibility-and-public-service> [accessed 07/03/2025]

20 Studdert, J., Warren, S. and Randle, A. Radical Leadership: Power, Possibility and Public Service. New Local, 13 February 2025. Available at <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/publications/radical-leadership-power-possibility-and-public-service> [accessed 07/03/2025]

21 Studdert, J. New Public Mobilisation is the answer. The Municipal Journal, 12 February 2025. Available at <https://www.themj.co.uk/public-mobilisation-answer> [accessed 07/03/2025]

22 Nesta and Institute for Government. What does a ‘mission-driven’ approach to government mean and how can it be delivered? 15 July 2024. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/mission-driven-approach-government> [accessed 07/03/2025]

23 Giles, S. Systems leadership for public sector leaders. INLOGOV Blog, 7 February 2024. Available at <https://inlogov.com/2024/02/07/systems-leadership-for-public-sector-leaders> [accessed 07/03/2025]

From mission delivery to mission collaboration

Closely related to this shift in leadership style is another shift, which we describe as being from 'mission delivery' to 'mission collaboration'. The language often used is that central government should 'deliver' missions, and the name of the Mission Delivery Unit in the Cabinet Office may reflect this. However, a traditional 'delivery' model risks relying on an overly linear and mechanistic understanding of organisations and inter-organisational interactions. It risks encouraging departments to work in a siloed way to 'deliver' policies, and it risks encouraging central government to look inward rather than outward. A shift from mission delivery to mission collaboration means breaking down barriers to cross-government working within central government, and collaborating with partners outside central government.

It is a well-known problem that central government is poor at joined-up working.²⁴ Yet better collaboration is vital for cross-cutting socioeconomic missions.²⁵ The Labour government should learn the lessons from the fate of the 'levelling up' missions, which never gained sufficient cross-government support, especially from the Treasury.

However, overall the government's approach to missions has tended towards traditional Whitehall models. Ahead of the election, Labour floated the idea of 'Mission Delivery Boards', with the potential for these autonomous units at the centre to be empowered with budgets and chaired by the Prime Minister.^{26,27} Yet in office, these Boards have not been afforded such importance or status, and appear to be rebranded cabinet committees, not normally chaired by the Prime Minister, and without their own budgets.^{28,29,30} There is a risk that Mission Boards are not sufficient either to improve cross-government working or to mobilise other actors around the national missions.

There is a Mission Delivery Unit of around 25 people in the Cabinet Office.³¹ This should certainly help to improve cross-government working, but similar Policy Units or Delivery Units have existed for many decades, and they have not been able to fully solve the problems of silos across central government and public bodies.

As an example, the National Audit Office (NAO) recently examined the work of the Department for Business and Trade in supporting the UK's priority industry sectors via the Industrial Strategy – crucial for the economic growth mission.³² The NAO's report notes that in DBT's work on economic growth "it must collaborate with at least 10 other government departments", but that "DBT faces challenges in its relationships with [other] departments", that "DBT's ability to influence other government departments varies and is limited in some areas" and that "working arrangements between DBT and other government departments were limited by data sharing arrangements, as there is no consistent formal arrangement between DBT and other government departments, and data are not shared systematically".³³ This lack of collaboration

24 Gibson, M., van Lier, F.-A. and Carter, E. Tracing 25 years of 'initiativitis' in central government attempts to join up local public services in England. Government Outcomes Lab, 16 June 2023. Available at <https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/knowledge-bank/resource-library/tracing-25-years-of-initiativitis-in-central-government-attempts-to-join-up-local-public-services-in-england> [accessed 10/02/2025]

25 Pannell, J. and Owen, J. Mission launch: Five steps the government must take to deliver its five missions. Institute for Government, 30 September 2024. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/five-steps-government-missions> [accessed 07/03/2025]

26 Fisher, L., Pickard, J. and Foster, P. Labour considers largest Whitehall shake-up in decades. Financial Times, 14 June 2024. Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/790396e2-3601-41ad-ba4b-894047b36d4d> [accessed 07/03/2025]

27 Wingate, S. Starmer says he will chair 'mission delivery boards' to meet manifesto pledges. The Independent, 6 July 2024. Available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/labour-sue-gray-nhs-prime-minister-cabinet-b2575228.html> [accessed 07/03/2025]

28 Merrifield, K. 100 days in: It's time to turn mission development into mission action. The Health Foundation, 14 October 2024. Available at <https://www.health.org.uk/features-and-opinion/blogs/100-days-in-its-time-to-turn-mission-development-into-mission-action> [accessed 07/03/2025]

29 Worlidge, J. and others. Whitehall Monitor 2025. Institute for Government, 16 January 2025, p. 19. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/whitehall-monitor-2025> [accessed 07/03/2025]

30 Cabinet Office. List of Cabinet Committees and their membership. GOV.UK, 21 October 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-cabinet-committees-system-and-list-of-cabinet-committees/list-of-cabinet-committees-and-their-membership> [accessed 07/03/2025]

31 Worlidge, J. and others. Whitehall Monitor 2025. Institute for Government, 16 January 2025, p. 18. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/whitehall-monitor-2025> [accessed 07/03/2025]

32 <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/supporting-the-uks-priority-industry-sectors>

33 <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/supporting-the-uks-priority-industry-sectors>

shows that the familiar problems of siloed policy making within central government remain unresolved.

For the civil service, as the Institute for Government commented in January, “The theory of mission-led government reprises common themes of civil service reform – including embedding longer-term thinking in policy making, breaking down departmental silos, and bringing external perspectives and expertise into decision making... [yet] overall, our analysis found little evidence that the missions have truly gripped Whitehall.³⁴” Traditional Whitehall models of siloed ‘delivery’ will not achieve socioeconomic missions: civil servants need to embrace working in cross-government, multidisciplinary teams focused on achieving missions – which are the government’s top priorities – rather than siloed departmental objectives. They also need to prioritise collaboration and partnership with organisations and people outside of government, instead of trying to ‘deliver’ success from offices in Whitehall. The ‘Test and Learn’ teams are a small but positive step in this direction.

Mission collaboration also needs to extend beyond cross-government working to partnering with other tiers of government, public bodies, the private sector, civil society and citizens. The creation of the new Partnerships Unit within No. 10 is a positive step here, and should help to encourage mission-oriented collaboration with those outside central government.

Reforms to enable mission stewardship and mission collaboration

We make two specific recommendations to enable these shifts in the role of central government towards mission stewardship and mission collaboration.

First, developing mission stewardship as a different style of leadership requires cultural change within central government. To encourage this cultural change, we recommend:

- Bringing together a multidisciplinary team with experience in systems leadership practices, which could include members from central government, regional/local government, businesses and civil society. This team should be responsible for capturing learning about best practice in ‘mission stewardship’ in real time as leaders within government learn how to do this well. Bringing together examples of good practice, innovation and inspiration from other contexts, this team should develop a *Guide to Mission Stewardship* and a community of practice around it. Both the team itself and the guide can be used to spread good practice through training and learning.
- Creating training/development opportunities for ministers to consider what mission stewardship would look like in their leadership role.
- Creating training/development opportunities for senior civil servants to consider what mission stewardship would look like in their leadership role, building on the *Guide to Mission Stewardship* and existing guides on systems thinking.³⁵
- Creating a ‘community of practice’ for civil servants with mission stewardship roles to come together, discuss, reflect and learn from one another. This community of practice can help to develop what mission stewardship looks like in the context of central government.
- ‘Working in the open’ by publicly communicating about the development of mission stewardship as a leadership style (for example, publishing more informal articles or blogs).

34 Worlidge, J. Problems with the civil service risk frustrating the government’s missions. Institute for Government, 24 January 2025. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/whitehall-monitor-missions-at-risk> [accessed 07/03/2025]

35 Government Office for Science. Systems thinking for civil servants. GOV.UK, 24 May 2022. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/systems-thinking-for-civil-servants> [accessed 11/03/2025]

Second, to encourage mission collaboration, we recommend strengthening capacity for missions at the centre of government across No. 10, the Treasury and the Cabinet Office. As the Institute for Government's Commission on the Centre of Government concluded, currently "the centre of government fails to set and maintain an overall strategy for the government to follow [and] the resulting vacuum is filled by the powerful Treasury."³⁶ This must change if mission-led government is to be successful. Currently, there is a risk that the mission teams at the centre of government might be too small and not sufficiently influential to break down departmental silos and encourage collaboration with external partners. A stronger, more strategic centre of government is needed to encourage the formation of cross-departmental and multidisciplinary mission strategy teams, and to unblock barriers to collaboration.³⁷

There are existing plans in progress to reform the Cabinet Office.³⁸ In this context, we recommend:

- Further strengthening the capacity and influence of the Mission Delivery Unit, including considering whether it should move to become part of the No. 10 team reporting directly to the Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary. (This would be aligned with the recommendation of the Institute for Government's Commission on the Centre of Government which recommended fully merging the Cabinet Office and No. 10.³⁹)
- Further strengthening the capacity and influence of the new No. 10 Partnerships Unit to encourage both cross-government working and external collaboration around the national missions.
- Ensuring that the new 'digital centre' of government within DSIT is working collaboratively across government to support data, digital and technology work as part of each specific mission. This includes, for example, providing the necessary technical and legal support to enable data-sharing between government departments, public bodies and external organisations.⁴⁰

CHANGE THE SPENDING REVIEW PROCESS TO PROVIDE FUNDING FOR CROSS-CUTTING SOCIOECONOMIC MISSIONS

At time of writing, the multi-year Spending Review process is ongoing, and is scheduled to be announced in June 2025.⁴¹ As the first multi-year Spending Review under the Starmer government, this will be crucial for ensuring funding flows to the government's priorities, including the national missions.

Not all government spending is or should be related to missions.⁴² This is one risk of having vague overarching missions, such as 'break down barriers to opportunity', which potentially encompasses the entirety of core government functions like education. Focusing on concrete, specific missions is likely to help drive funding more effectively. For example, the mission for

36 Urban, J., Thomas, A. and Clyne, R. Power with purpose: Final report of the Commission on the Centre of Government. Institute for Government, 10 March 2024. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/power-with-purpose-centre-commission> [accessed 07/03/2025]

37 Pannell, J. and Owen, J. Mission launch: Five steps the government must take to deliver its five missions. Institute for Government, 30 September 2024, p. 11. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/five-steps-government-missions> [accessed 07/03/2025]

38 <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/one-year-commission-centre-government>

39 <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/Centre-Commission-final-report.pdf>

40 Nesta and Institute for Government. What does a 'mission-driven' approach to government mean and how can it be delivered? 15 July 2024. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/mission-driven-approach-government> [accessed 07/03/2025]

41 Stacey, K. Rachel Reeves may wait until June to announce Whitehall budget details. The Guardian, 28 November 2024. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/nov/28/rachel-reeves-may-wait-until-june-to-announce-whitehall-budget-details> [accessed 07/03/2025]

42 Nesta and Institute for Government. What does a 'mission-driven' approach to government mean and how can it be delivered? 15 July 2024. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/mission-driven-approach-government> [accessed 07/03/2025]

75% of five-year-olds to reach a good level of child development is a clear, measurable and cross-cutting mission, and a number of different options could be funded through the Spending Review to support the mission (such as funding programmes/services like Family Hubs and Sure Start children's centres; funding programmes that work with families facing disadvantage, like Supporting Families; funding and reform of childcare; provision of childcare and nurseries in schools; supporting parents to help improve parent-child relationships and children's outcomes; improving the quality of housing; or using the social security system to support families by reducing poverty).⁴³

The government should use the Spending Review process to fund programmes and activities related to its specific socioeconomic missions. The Treasury must be willing to provide funding for missions, including some activities where it may be difficult to prove 'value for money' at the moment, to enable iterative policy development.⁴⁴

Traditionally, the Treasury has focused on bilateral negotiations with individual departments at Spending Reviews. This does not encourage collaborative, cross-government working. In a recent speech at the Institute for Government, Darren Jones, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, announced reforms to the Spending Review process, including negotiations with cross-departmental "mission groups" of ministers/departments.⁴⁵ This is promising, but the Treasury should go further.

We recommend that in the 2025 Spending Review the Treasury should agree funding allocations specifically with cross-cutting mission groups/teams, rather than just to individual departments as traditionally.⁴⁶ This would provide a stronger foundation for deeper collaboration centred on specific national missions within central government. We recognise this presents challenges to the traditional operation of the public finance system, but we also know that siloed funding is a serious barrier to collaboration within central government. Funding cross-cutting mission groups/teams is a powerful tool to signal culture change and the high priority placed on mission collaboration.

43 Beszterczey, A. and Sanguino, I. Enablers for effectively scaling parenting interventions. Nesta, 1 July 2024. Available at <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/enablers-for-effectively-scaling-parenting-interventions> [accessed 07/03/2025]

44 Greenway, A. and Loosemore, T. The Radical How. Public Digital and Nesta, 2024. Available at <https://options2040.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Radical-How.pdf> [accessed 07/03/2025]

45 Paxton, B. Darren Jones' reformed spending review process can help government to deliver. Institute for Government, 23 January 2025. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/darren-jones-reformed-spending-review> [accessed 07/03/2025]

46 Paxton, B. Darren Jones' reformed spending review process can help government to deliver. Institute for Government, 23 January 2025. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/darren-jones-reformed-spending-review> [accessed 07/03/2025]

SECTION TWO

MOBILISATION OF DEVOLVED, REGIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

USE NEW FORUMS TO MOBILISE ALL PARTS OF THE STATE AROUND SHARED NATIONAL MISSIONS

Since the general election, the UK government has established several new forums for discussing issues with devolved, regional and local government. These include the Council of the Nations and Regions, the Mayoral Council and the Local Government Leaders Council.

The UK government should use these forums to mobilise all parts of the state around the shared national missions, while at the same time respecting that leaders of devolved governments, Combined/Strategic and Local Authorities also have their own local priorities. Focusing on partnerships around specific missions can make discussions at these forums more useful. Which mission(s) to discuss will also differ depending on who is present: for example, local authorities have an important role to play in supporting child development, while devolved government leaders and Mayors have crucial policy functions relating to economic growth and living standards. It would be helpful to publish summaries of these meetings, structured around the specific mission discussed, which describe how different tiers of government have agreed to contribute to the relevant national mission.

Central government can also use these forums to spread good practice. For example, Camden Council has pioneered using 'local missions' to mobilise both intra-council working and partnerships with other local organisations. Highlighting examples of innovation or good practice such as this can help diffuse these ideas further, as they already are through existing networks such as the LGA and New Local.

USE NEW INTEGRATED SETTLEMENTS FOR COMBINED/STRATEGIC AUTHORITIES TO FOCUS ON MISSION-ORIENTED OUTCOMES

In December, the government published the English Devolution White Paper.⁴⁷ This included a significant programme of extending devolution via Combined/Strategic Authorities alongside local government reorganisation. It also stated the importance of collaboration with regional and local government around the national missions: “There must be a genuine relationship of equals, mutual respect, and collective purpose built around the missions to transform the UK, with clear outcomes local people will see and feel.”⁴⁸ This commitment to collective purpose and collaboration around national missions is welcome.

Practically, we think that Integrated Settlements have potential to help mobilise Combined/Strategic Authorities around the national missions. These settlements will provide Mayors and Strategic Authorities with consolidated budgets and greater flexibility, including the ability to move funding between policy areas.⁴⁹ Integrated Settlements have been agreed for the West Midlands and Greater Manchester Combined Authorities for 2025-26, and a further four will follow in 2026-27.⁵⁰

The government has committed, via Integrated Settlements, to “move away from the current complex and fragmented departmental monitoring and reporting requirements to a single, mutually agreed outcomes framework, monitored over a Spending Review period”.⁵¹ These outcomes frameworks have not yet been published. However, they provide a good opportunity to mobilise Combined/Strategic Authorities around the national missions – with central government holding them to account based on metrics related to missions, but empowering local regions to choose *how* to achieve them.

The agreed outcomes measures should specifically relate to the national missions, while at the same time being outcomes that Mayors and Strategic Authorities can reasonably be expected to influence. The outcomes should be agreed by the centre of government, including the Treasury, not just individual departments, to ensure that the outcomes frameworks prioritise the national missions. No. 10, the Treasury and MHCLG will also need to manage the potential tensions or conflicts between the UK government’s national missions and local priorities which might be different, including for political reasons.

Not all Combined/Strategic Authorities will get an Integrated Settlement during this Parliament, and some of them have only just been established (for example, two new Mayors will be elected in May 2025 in Greater Lincolnshire and Hull and East Yorkshire). Central government should consider how to support these new organisations and mobilise them around national missions, for example through:

- Secondment or other exchanges of staff between central government and Combined/Strategic Authorities
- Encouraging Combined/Strategic Authorities to have specific officers responsible for progress on national missions in the region (as appropriate for specific missions)

47 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. English Devolution White Paper: Power and partnership: Foundations for growth. GOV.UK, 16 December 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth> [accessed 11/03/2025]

48 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. English Devolution White Paper: Power and partnership: Foundations for growth. GOV.UK, 16 December 2024, p. 10. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth> [accessed 11/03/2025]

49 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. English Devolution White Paper: Power and partnership: Foundations for growth. GOV.UK, 16 December 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth> [accessed 07/03/2025]

50 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Integrated Settlements for 2025 to 2026. GOV.UK, 20 December 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-settlements-for-2025-to-2026> [accessed 07/03/2025]

51 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. English Devolution White Paper: Power and partnership: Foundations for growth. GOV.UK, 16 December 2024, p. 14. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth> [accessed 07/03/2025]

- Providing technical support and funding relating to organisational capacity around data, digital and technology

BUILD LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY TO SUPPORT THE NATIONAL MISSIONS

Local government is an important actor to mobilise around socioeconomic missions, for example in relation to child development, reducing knife crime and building 1.5 million new homes. However, since 2010, local government in England has experienced its most challenging period for decades, which has reduced councils' capacity to be partners in achieving socioeconomic missions.

Many local authorities in England are facing significant financial challenges, as a result of funding reductions from central government since 2010 and rising costs related to high-needs services, especially adult social care, children's social care and homelessness. Local authorities spend around 18% less per person today than they did in 2010.⁵² Demos explored possible reforms to local government finances in our report *Beyond the Sticking Plaster*, published in October 2024.⁵³

These financial challenges have resulted in a loss of capacity. For example, local authorities have cut the number of staff working in planning departments since 2010: this directly reduces their capacity to support the government's mission to build 1.5 million homes.⁵⁴ Similarly, since 2010 local authority spending on 'early intervention' children's services, such as Sure Start children's centres, has almost halved – reducing capacity for the child development mission.⁵⁵ The impacts of local government financial challenges are felt more widely as well: for example, if a council issues a section 114 notice to declare they cannot balance their budget, this can negatively affect local voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations.⁵⁶

What kind of 'enabling reforms' could central government implement to build the capacity of local councils to contribute to national missions? In many cases, the most significant barrier to local authorities contributing to missions is funding. In the longer term, increased funding and significant reform of the local government finance system is needed.⁵⁷ However, we recognise that the current fiscal and political context makes this challenging.

In the shorter term, therefore, central government should consider other lower-cost options which could help to mobilise local government. Specifically, we suggest:

1. Secondments between central government and local government related to specific missions could help build shared understanding and improve partnership working. Importantly, these secondments should go both ways to build deeper understanding of innovations, opportunities and challenges across both central and local government.
2. Creating further multidisciplinary 'test and learn' teams which include local authority staff, building on the first four teams in Manchester, Sheffield, Essex and Liverpool which include partnerships with local authorities and Mayors, announced in Pat McFadden's recent speech.⁵⁸

52 Ogden, K. and Phillips, D. How have English councils' funding and spending changed? 2010 to 2024. IFS, 7 June 2024. Available at <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/how-have-english-councils-funding-and-spending-changed-2010-2024> [accessed 07/03/2025]

53 Phillips, A. and O'Brien, A. Beyond the Sticking Plaster: A vision for long-term reform of local government finances. Demos, 29 October 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/beyond-the-sticking-plaster-a-vision-for-long-term-reform-of-local-government-finances> [accessed 07/03/2025]

54 Ogden, K. and Phillips, D. How have English councils' funding and spending changed? 2010 to 2024. IFS, 7 June 2024, p. 11. Available at <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/how-have-english-councils-funding-and-spending-changed-2010-2024> [accessed 07/03/2025]

55 Larkham, J. Struggling against the tide: Children's services spending, 2011-2023. Pro Bono Economics, September 2024. Available at <https://www.probonoeconomics.com/struggling-against-the-tide> [accessed 07/03/2025]

56 NAVCA. Navigating section 114s. (no date). Available at <https://www.navca.org.uk/s114> [accessed 07/03/2025]

57 Phillips, A. and O'Brien, A. Beyond the Sticking Plaster: A vision for long-term reform of local government finances. Demos, 29 October 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/beyond-the-sticking-plaster-a-vision-for-long-term-reform-of-local-government-finances> [accessed 07/03/2025]

58 McFadden, P. Reform of the state has to deliver for people. GOV.UK, 9 December 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/reform-of-the-state-has-to-deliver-for-the-people> [accessed 07/03/2025]

3. Central government should specifically seek to support and provide additional capacity to local authorities in relation to digital, data and technology. For example, in relation to data, this could mean helping local authorities to access data held by central government departments and linking datasets so that mission-related metrics can be tracked to shorten feedback loops. Central government could also play a role in diffusing good practice, highlighting examples of digital and data innovation in local government, such as in Barking and Dagenham, Gateshead and Luton.^{59,60,61} The government has taken some initial steps in this direction, creating the strengthened 'digital centre' of government within DSIT and committing to collaboration with local government as a 'next step'.⁶² This includes "identifying opportunities" to "boost local digital leadership" and "facilitat[ing] better data exchange to enable more joined-up services".⁶³ This is welcome, and we recommend that some of these conversations between the Government Digital Service and local authorities should be focused on specific missions, identifying opportunities and existing barriers that councils face.

59 Naylor, C. Only We Can Save the State: Lessons for national government from public service reform in Barking and Dagenham. Demos, 11 June 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/only-we-can-save-the-state-lessons-for-national-government-from-public-service-reform-in-barking-and-dagenham> [accessed 07/03/2025]

60 Smith, M., Hesselgreaves, H., Charlton, R. and Wilson, R. New development: The 'liberated method'—a transcendent public service innovation in polycrisis. *Public Money & Management*, 2025, 1-9. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2025.2456120> [accessed 11/03/2025]

61 Harkin, J. A tale of two councils: Luton and Barking and Dagenham use data insights to build residents' resilience. *Policy in Practice*, 3 April 2019. Available at <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/blog/a-tale-of-two-councils-luton-and-barking-and-dagenham-use-data-insights-to-build-residents-resilience> [accessed 11/03/2025]

62 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. A blueprint for modern digital government. GOV.UK, 21 January 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-blueprint-for-modern-digital-government> [accessed 11/03/2025]

63 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. A blueprint for modern digital government. GOV.UK, 21 January 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-blueprint-for-modern-digital-government> [accessed 11/03/2025]

SECTION THREE

MOBILISATION OF BUSINESSES AND TRADE UNIONS

Mobilising the private sector is essential to achieve socioeconomic missions. Most obviously, the private sector is critical for the economic growth and living standards mission, but also for several other missions, such as building 1.5 million homes and clean power 2030. Without the resources and the expertise of the private sector, it will not be possible to achieve the national missions.

However, this type of partnership between government and business is something the UK has struggled to achieve in recent decades. In the *Plan for Change*, the government rightly recognised that mobilising private capital behind its missions is critical.⁶⁴ Yet the UK lags behind other G7 economies in business investment. Germany and France both achieve levels of business investment at double the rates achieved by the UK.⁶⁵ There is a strong consensus that raising business investment in the UK and mobilising private capital behind the government's national missions is essential; the question is how to achieve this in practice.⁶⁶

Trade unions, representing the contributions and interests of workers, also have an important role to play. The UK's workforce – across the public and private sectors – is essential to achieving the national missions, from people working in childcare for the child development mission, to workers in the construction industry building the 1.5 million new homes. To achieve the missions, these must be 'good' jobs, in terms of pay and conditions, so that people are more likely to be happy and productive at work and willing to stay in these industries – conditions which trade unions help to create.

64 HM Government. Plan for Change. GOV.UK, 5 December 2024. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6751af4719e0c816d18d1df3/Plan_for_Change.pdf [accessed 07/03/2025]

65 O'Brien, A. Partnership in Practice: How can the new government work with business to deliver missions? Demos, 5 August 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/partnership-in-practice-how-can-the-new-government-work-with-business-to-deliver-missions> [accessed 07/03/2025]

66 Dibb, G. and Jung, C. Rock bottom: Low investment in the UK economy. IPPR, 18 June 2024. Available at <https://www.ippr.org/articles/rock-bottom> [accessed 07/03/2025]

In the rest of this section, we propose ideas for enabling reforms to mobilise private sector businesses and trade unions around the national missions. For ease of reading, the sections on procurement and on creating ‘Mission Councils’ include mobilising civil society as well.

REFORM PROCUREMENT AND MAKE BETTER USE OF SOCIAL VALUE TO MOBILISE SMEs AND VCSEs

The government can mobilise the private sector by encouraging businesses to invest and innovate in response to the national missions. In her work, Mariana Mazzucato has referred to this as “co-creating and shaping markets”.⁶⁷ One way to mobilise organisations around the national missions is through the use of procurement – that is, buying goods, works and services from the private sector and VCSE sector.

Central and local government (combined) spend over £350 billion annually on procurement.⁶⁸ This is double the entire NHS budget and equivalent to around £1 in every £3 which government spends overall.⁶⁹ Memorably, a former government adviser interviewed for Sam Freedman’s book *Failed State* said that, “Government doesn’t do anything. It’s a procurement agency that isn’t very good at procurement.”⁷⁰

Problems with procurement are widely recognised – at the most extreme end of the spectrum in examples like the Post Office Horizon scandal.⁷¹ Very few procurement decisions result in scandals, but it is clear that there is significant room for improvement in procurement overall.⁷² In this section on procurement reform, we examine:

- The changes the government has recently made via the Procurement Act 2023 and the National Procurement Policy Statement published in February 2025
- Reforms needed to support mobilisation of SMEs and VCSEs via procurement
- Reforms to how social value works in procurement processes to support mission mobilisation

Because many of the reforms are relevant for both private sector businesses and VCSE organisations, we cover both in this section.

The context for mission-oriented procurement reform

The new Procurement Act 2023 went live on 24 February 2025.⁷³ According to the government, the aims of this new regime include creating a simpler, more flexible system; opening up procurement to new entrants such as small businesses and social enterprises; and improving transparency.⁷⁴ In February 2025, the Cabinet Office also published a new National Procurement Policy Statement (the NPPS) which “sets out the strategic priorities for public procurement

67 Mazzucato, M. *Mission-Oriented Innovation Policy*. RSA, 2017. Available at <https://uat.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/mission-oriented-policy-innovation-report.pdf> [accessed 07/03/2025]

68 Paxton, B. The new government should take a new approach to procurement. Institute for Government, 20 September 2024. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/accountability-government-procurement> [accessed 07/03/2025]

69 Paxton, B. and Davies, N. Improving accountability in government procurement. Institute for Government, 17 September 2024. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/accountability-government-procurement> [accessed 07/03/2025]

70 Freedman, S. *Failed State: Why Nothing Works and How We Fix It*. Pan Macmillan, 11 July 2024.

71 Paxton, B. and Davies, N. Improving accountability in government procurement. Institute for Government, 17 September 2024. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/accountability-government-procurement> [accessed 07/03/2025]

72 Kapetanovic, H. *Taming the Wild West: How technology can charter a new frontier for social value*. Demos, 11 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/taming-the-wild-west-how-technology-can-charter-a-new-frontier-for-social-value> [accessed 07/03/2025]

73 Government Commercial Function. *National Procurement Policy Statement*. GOV.UK, 12 February 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-procurement-policy-statement> [accessed 07/03/2025]

74 Government Commercial Function. *Transforming Public Procurement*. GOV.UK, 29 April 2022. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/transforming-public-procurement> [accessed 07/03/2025]

and how contracting authorities can support their delivery".⁷⁵ The NPPS includes welcome commitments to using public procurement to help achieve the national missions, to delivering social and economic value that supports missions, and to maximising procurement spend with SMEs and VCSEs.⁷⁶

The NPPS also includes a commitment to updating the *Sourcing Playbook* "to introduce a new public interest test for contracting authorities to assess, at the outset of a procurement process, whether work should be outsourced or if it could be done more effectively, and drive better value for money, in-house."⁷⁷ Contracting authorities will need to balance this new 'public interest test' with the emphasis in the rest of the NPPS on using procurement to mobilise businesses around missions and on maximising spend with SMEs and VCSEs.

Issuing the new NPPS should be seen as the start of a process to drive changes in procurement practice, not the end point: previous changes have not been consistently implemented across public sector organisations, partly because the Cabinet Office currently lacks mechanisms to enforce compliance.⁷⁸ The centre of government, particularly the Cabinet Office, will need to be empowered to encourage mission-led procurement across the public sector. This must be an ongoing priority to avoid 'business as usual' prevailing.⁷⁹ On a day-to-day basis, procurement teams should also work more collaboratively to share innovation and learning – part of the shift from 'mission delivery' to 'mission collaboration'.

Mobilising SMEs and VCSE organisations via procurement

The NPPS states that, as a priority, contracting authorities should "maximise procurement spend with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs)".⁸⁰ This is a long-standing policy objective, and could be used to help mobilise SMEs and VCSEs around the national missions. However, there are serious barriers which will need to be overcome to achieve this objective.

First, there is a risk that commissioning and procurement practice contributes to creating a competitive local environment rather than fostering the partnership and collaboration essential for the national missions. To be clear, competition within specific procurement processes is important. However, if the overall environment is characterised by excessive competition, this can limit sharing of ideas, good practice and joined-up working. Competitive tendering can "disincentivise learning between organisations, corrupt the data required by public service to learn and adapt, and break long-term relationships between practitioners and residents by creating provider churn".⁸¹ Specific examples which cause problems include commissioners not allowing collaboration; a 'race to the bottom' on price; lack of information and bureaucratic processes; and tight deadlines.⁸² However, there are ways that commissioners/procurement teams can encourage collaboration within existing procurement rules.

75 Government Commercial Function. National Procurement Policy Statement. GOV.UK, 12 February 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-procurement-policy-statement> [accessed 07/03/2025]

76 Government Commercial Function. National Procurement Policy Statement. GOV.UK, 12 February 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-procurement-policy-statement> [accessed 07/03/2025]

77 Government Commercial Function. National Procurement Policy Statement. GOV.UK, 12 February 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-procurement-policy-statement> [accessed 07/03/2025]

78 <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/efficiency-in-government-procurement-of-common-goods-and-services-report.pdf>

79 Savur, S. and Paxton, B. The Procurement Act is an opportunity for government to reap the benefits of transparency. Institute for Government, 24 February 2025. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/procurement-act-opportunity-government-transparency> [accessed 07/03/2025]

80 Government Commercial Function. National Procurement Policy Statement. GOV.UK, 12 February 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-procurement-policy-statement> [accessed 07/03/2025]

81 Lowe, T. and Smith, M. Relational public service can tackle hardship in neighbourhoods. JRF, 19 April 2024. Available at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/neighbourhoods-and-communities/relational-public-service-can-tackle-hardship-in-neighbourhoods> [accessed 08/03/2025]

82 Young, R. and Goodall, C. Rebalancing the relationship: Final report. NCVO, 3 February 2021. Available at <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/rebalancing-relationship-final-report/download-report> [accessed 08/03/2025]

Contracting authorities can:

- Use co-design methods with, for example, local VCSE infrastructure organisations to ensure the commissioning/procurement process is well designed
- Provide early information and avoid short deadlines
- Welcome bids from consortia to encourage collaboration
- Explore working with a formal Alliance able to be awarded a single contract on behalf of multiple organisations (example: The Plymouth Alliance)⁸³
- NCVO also emphasise that civil society organisations should participate in procurement processes in an ethical and responsible way, for example not submitting unrealistically low bids.⁸⁴ The same applies to SMEs as well.

Second, there are other more technical factors which currently limit the extent to which procurement reform can mobilise SMEs and VCSEs around missions. These include:

- **Lack of standardisation, high-quality data and transparency.** A fragmented patchwork of separate portals and thousands of separate frameworks for public procurement makes it difficult for SMEs and VCSEs to bid for contracts.^{85,86} Data related to procurement is collected inconsistently, and is often missing or published late.⁸⁷ A lack of standardisation can make procurement processes more expensive to engage in for smaller organisations. The Cabinet Office and the Government Commercial Function should prioritise addressing these problems, including via the new Central Digital Platform.
- **Individual VCSE organisations may be too small to bid for, or deliver, contracts on their own.** To address this, contracting authorities should do more to encourage bids from consortia (two or more suppliers coming together to bid during a procurement process). Encouraging consortia is one of the aims of the new Procurement Act.⁸⁸ Other options include contracting authorities dividing contracts into smaller lots, or requiring larger suppliers to work more closely with SMEs and VCSEs in their supply chains.⁸⁹
- **Underfunding of grants and contracts, which particularly affects VCSEs.** According to a 2023 NCVO survey of over 300 charities, 40% said that their grants and contracts never covered their true costs, and 72% of respondents have withdrawn from public service delivery or are considering doing so.⁹⁰ New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) have published research, in partnership with Kent County Council, on 'full cost recovery' (that is, ensuring a contract covers the full cost of the work/service) for VCSE organisations.⁹¹

83 The Plymouth Alliance. Home page. (no date). Available at <https://theplymouthalliance.co.uk> [accessed 08/03/2025]

84 Young, R. and Goodall, C. Rebalancing the relationship: Final report. NCVO, 3 February 2021. Available at <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/rebalancing-relationship-final-report/download-report> [accessed 08/03/2025]

85 Savur, S. and Paxton, B. The Procurement Act is an opportunity for government to reap the benefits of transparency. Institute for Government, 24 February 2025. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/procurement-act-opportunity-government-transparency> [accessed 07/03/2025]

86 National Audit Office. Efficiency in government procurement of common goods and services. 23 July 2024. Available at <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/efficiency-in-government-procurement-of-common-goods-and-services> [accessed 08/03/2025]

87 Savur, S. and Paxton, B. The Procurement Act is an opportunity for government to reap the benefits of transparency. Institute for Government, 24 February 2025. Available at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/procurement-act-opportunity-government-transparency> [accessed 07/03/2025]

88 Cabinet Office. Transforming Public Procurement - our innovation ambition. GOV.UK, 13 November 2023. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transforming-public-procurement-our-innovation-ambition/transforming-public-procurement-our-innovation-ambition.html> [accessed 08/03/2025]

89 Cabinet Office. Transforming Public Procurement - our innovation ambition. GOV.UK, 13 November 2023. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transforming-public-procurement-our-innovation-ambition/transforming-public-procurement-our-innovation-ambition.html> [accessed 08/03/2025]

90 NCVO. The true cost of delivering public services. 4 March 2024. Available at <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/the-true-cost-of-delivering-public-services/survey-findings> [accessed 08/03/2025]

91 Bagwell, S., Khan, M., Manning, A., Rose, A. and Shea, J. Full cost recovery in VCSE contracts. NPC, 6 May 2022. Available at <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/full-cost-recovery-in-vcse-contracts> [accessed 08/03/2025]

Reforming social value in procurement to enable mission mobilisation

The new NPPS includes a priority that “contracting authorities should deliver social and economic value that supports the government’s missions including by working in partnership across organisational boundaries”.⁹² The emphasis here on social value is welcome and – if it drives change in procurement decisions – has potential to help mobilise businesses including SMEs and VCSEs around the national missions.

The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 sought to drive the social value agenda by enshrining requirements to ‘have regard to’ social value in legislation.⁹³ This obliged public bodies to consider how the services they commission and procure can improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the areas they operate in.⁹⁴ While this has increased engagement with social value, implementation has been mixed and patchy.⁹⁵

Achieving the objective of the NPPS requires further reforms to social value. A previous Demos report published in 2024 examined how to improve the operation of social value in detail.⁹⁶ We believe social value can be used to support mission mobilisation with appropriate reforms:

- **Increase the uptake of social value.** The NPPS should lead to increased engagement with social value, but, for example, nearly half of all local authorities have never provided staff training on the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.⁹⁷ We recommend strengthening the existing legislation to ask all public bodies to ‘account for’ social value to encourage greater uptake.⁹⁸
- **Improve the standardisation and interoperability of social value.** SMEs and VCSEs are naturally well-suited to delivering social value, but face administrative and financial burdens because of the complexity of social value in procurement processes. Specifically, Demos has previously recommended that Combined/Strategic Authorities should develop Social Value Strategies to help with standardisation and guide regional procurement; and that central government should create a Trusted Social Value Data Taskforce.⁹⁹ The Taskforce should be asked to develop ways of measuring social value specifically in relation to the mission-oriented priorities referenced in the NPPS.
- **Address the challenges in recognising ‘inherent’ social value delivered by VCSEs.** Some VCSE organisations feel that the ‘inherent’ social value they deliver through their core activities is not fully recognised within procurement processes. Social value is “often used to recognise value-add benefits such as sustainable environmental practices or local employment benefits” rather than the organisation’s core activities.¹⁰⁰ Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) has a ‘Fair Funding Protocol’ in which GMCA commits to “acknowledging that generating ‘social value’ is inherent to the work of the VCFSE sector

92 Government Commercial Function. National Procurement Policy Statement. GOV.UK, 12 February 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-procurement-policy-statement> [accessed 07/03/2025]

93 Kapetanovic, H. Taming the Wild West: How technology can charter a new frontier for social value. Demos, 11 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/taming-the-wild-west-how-technology-can-charter-a-new-frontier-for-social-value> [accessed 07/03/2025]

94 Social Enterprise UK. The state of social value in public sector spending: Shaping the future of local authority procurement. March 2024. Available at https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/03/SV32-Executive-Summary-online-version_2.pdf [accessed 07/03/2025]

95 Kapetanovic, H. Taming the Wild West: How technology can charter a new frontier for social value. Demos, 11 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/taming-the-wild-west-how-technology-can-charter-a-new-frontier-for-social-value> [accessed 07/03/2025]

96 Kapetanovic, H. Taming the Wild West: How technology can charter a new frontier for social value. Demos, 11 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/taming-the-wild-west-how-technology-can-charter-a-new-frontier-for-social-value> [accessed 07/03/2025]

97 Social Enterprise UK. The state of social value in public sector spending: Shaping the future of local authority procurement. March 2024. Available at https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/03/SV32-Executive-Summary-online-version_2.pdf [accessed 07/03/2025]

98 Kapetanovic, H. Taming the Wild West: How technology can charter a new frontier for social value. Demos, 11 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/taming-the-wild-west-how-technology-can-charter-a-new-frontier-for-social-value> [accessed 07/03/2025]

99 Kapetanovic, H. Taming the Wild West: How technology can charter a new frontier for social value. Demos, 11 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/taming-the-wild-west-how-technology-can-charter-a-new-frontier-for-social-value> [accessed 07/03/2025]

100 Bagwell, S., Khan, M., Manning, A., Rose, A. and Shea, J. Full cost recovery in VCSE contracts. NPC, 6 May 2022. Available at <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/full-cost-recovery-in-vcse-contracts> [accessed 08/03/2025]

and working with you to better understand and demonstrate that value.”¹⁰¹ Given the emphasis on social value in the new NPPS, we recommend that the Cabinet Office should publish further guidance on how to understand and measure VCSE ‘inherent social value’ in procurement, building on existing guidance.

CREATE ‘MISSION COUNCILS’ TO HELP TO MOBILISE BUSINESSES, TRADE UNIONS AND OTHERS AROUND SHARED NATIONAL MISSIONS

Weak economic cooperation between government, business and trade unions is a barrier to mission mobilisation. In other countries there is greater ‘tripartite’ cooperation and compromise, for example on issues like working hours.¹⁰² This matters for the government’s economic growth mission in particular, which requires both successful businesses and workers in ‘good jobs’ to help increase productivity and to ensure the benefits of economic growth are shared between firms and workers.¹⁰³ As well as partnering with business and unions, the government also needs to work closely with corporate bodies representing civil society, private finance and universities, as these are all essential to mobilise around the national missions.

There are some examples of good economic cooperation in the UK. For example, the Low Pay Commission, an independent body which advises government on the minimum wage, brings together business, unions and academics to advise government on issues related to the minimum wage.¹⁰⁴ A different type of example is the close cooperation between government, business and unions during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially around the furlough scheme.

These examples are, however, the exception rather than the rule. Often, there is frustration on all sides between government, businesses and trade unions (and their representative organisations, like the CBI and the TUC). Although there are regular meetings, these are not structured around mission partnerships, nor do they usually see the parties involved signing up to any type of collective agreement. Another problem is constant chopping and changing: an Industrial Strategy Council was created in 2017, abolished in 2021, and then re-created again by the Labour government in 2024 (as the Industrial Strategy Advisory Council).¹⁰⁵

No single reform will automatically improve economic ‘tripartism’ or ‘corporatism’ in the UK. However, using the specific missions can help give focus to meetings between government, businesses, unions and others – with all sides accepting shared responsibility for contributing to the national missions.

We recommend that central government should create external ‘Mission Councils’ attached to each mission.¹⁰⁶ Importantly, in our view, these should be organised around specific, concrete missions to make sure they are useful (for example, the mission to build 1.5 million new homes). Otherwise they risk being talking shops where no progress is made. Mission Councils should include a combination of central government, regional/local government, businesses/employers, trade unions, civil society organisations, private finance and universities – with the membership varying according to the needs of each specific mission. Mission Councils would help to start to mobilise more actors around a particular mission, and contribute to achieving

101 Greater Manchester Combined Authority. GMCA and VCFSE sector Fair Funding Protocol. 27 October 2023. Available at <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/9670/gmca-and-vcfse-sector-fair-funding-protocol.pdf> [accessed 08/03/2025]

102 Bangham, G. The times they aren’t a-changin’: Why working hours have stopped falling in London and the UK. Resolution Foundation, 18 January 2020. Available at <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/the-times-they-arent-a-changin> [accessed 07/03/2025]

103 Resolution Foundation. Stagnation nation: Navigating a route to a fairer and more prosperous Britain. 13 July 2022. Available at <https://economy2030.resolutionfoundation.org/reports/stagnation-nation> [accessed 07/03/2025]

104 Low Pay Commission. GOV.UK, (no date). Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/low-pay-commission> [accessed 07/03/2025]

105 Department for Business and Trade and others. Government launches Industrial Strategy Advisory Council to boost growth and living standards. GOV.UK, 17 December 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-industrial-strategy-advisory-council-to-boost-growth-and-living-standards> [accessed 07/03/2025]

106 <https://www.futuregovernanceforum.co.uk/resource/mission-critical-02/>

our overall shift from 'government missions' towards 'shared national missions'. Mission Councils can act as a forum for discussion, but they should also focus on agreeing on actions which different members will take to help achieve the missions in order to avoid ineffective meetings. The discussions and agreed actions of Mission Councils should be published to hold organisations and members accountable. The existing Industrial Strategy Advisory Council could be used as the Mission Council attached to the economic growth and living standards mission.

Mission Councils should have a civil service secretariat specialising in engagement with external organisations. A problem faced by smaller organisations, including SMEs and VCSE organisations, is uncertainty about who to speak to if they want to contribute to a particular mission. The Mission Council secretariat should be contactable, to enable better communication between government and others around missions. The secretariat should also act as 'navigators', connecting organisations to relevant central government officials or regional/local government officials, as appropriate.

To help the Mission Councils be effective, we recommend that the Treasury should allocate a small amount of discretionary funding to each Mission Council to support its work. This could be used to enable smaller VCSE organisations to take part for example, or for evidence gathering.

Central government should invite civil society organisations to be members of Mission Councils. However, as the Future Governance Forum has previously argued, ministers and civil servants need to accept that civil society organisations have multiple overlapping roles: sometimes directly delivering public services, sometimes contributing advice based on their expertise, and sometimes advocating for a particular group in society by criticising the government publicly.¹⁰⁷ Ministers and civil servants need to accept there is some tension between these roles and commit to genuine partnership with Mission Councils even when there is disagreement. Civil society organisations, for their part, should aim to be constructive partners on national missions, including working with others even when there are disagreements that have to be managed.

REFORM CORPORATE GOVERNANCE TO COUNTER SHORT-TERMISM IN BUSINESS

A feature of missions is that they are meant to be ambitious, long-term goals. The Labour Party's manifesto said that mission-led government meant "raising our sights as a nation and focusing on ambitious, measurable, long-term objectives that provide a driving sense of purpose for the country".¹⁰⁸ Short-termism in policy making has been a serious problem, especially since 2016. However, excessive short-termism in business is also a barrier to mission mobilisation. For example, the Kay Review of UK Equity Markets and Long Term Decision Making found that businesses were excessively focused on short-term fluctuations in their share price rather than long-term value creation.¹⁰⁹

Shareholder primacy drives business to pursue short-term gain over long-term interests. This is a challenge to building a 'mission-ready nation', which inherently requires sacrificing current interests for future gains. To deliver this change is likely to require corporate governance reforms: changes to how businesses are run and how business decisions are made. This is part of the shift we have identified from *partnership rhetoric to enabling reforms*.

In his 2021 Conference Speech, Keir Starmer suggested that the country needed to reform company law: "I have lost count of how many business leaders have told me that they wish their

¹⁰⁷ Ali, H., Brazell, S., Somerville, J. and Wyld, G. Mission Critical 03: Mission-driven partnerships with civil society organisations. Future Governance Forum, 30 January 2025. Available at <https://www.futuregovernanceforum.co.uk/resource/mission-critical-03> [accessed 08/03/2025]

¹⁰⁸ The Labour Party. Change: Labour Party Manifesto 2024. June 2024. Available at <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Labour-Party-manifesto-2024.pdf> [accessed 07/03/2025]

¹⁰⁹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Kay review of UK equity markets and long-term decision making: final report. GOV.UK, July 2012. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-kay-review-of-uk-equity-markets-and-long-term-decision-making> [accessed 07/03/2025]

time horizon could be longer... So, when I say that Labour pledges to change the priority duty of directors to make the long-term success of the company the main priority, we will do so with the blessing of British business.”¹¹⁰ An independent review into the Future of the Corporation led by leading academic Professor Colin Mayer for the British Academy also came to a similar conclusion, arguing for company law to put purpose “at the heart of company law and the fiduciary responsibility of all directors.”¹¹¹ This could be done by reforming Section 172 of the Companies Act, which sets out the legal responsibility of company directors who ultimately are responsible for overseeing the operations and strategy of the businesses for which they serve on the board.

In Demos’s July 2023 report, *The Purpose Dividend*, we argued a reform to UK corporate governance would give all directors freedom to exercise their judgement in weighing up and advancing the interests of all stakeholders – a major upgrade to the UK Companies Act and existing corporate governance.¹¹² This could include the Better Business Act, a proposed change to Section 172 of the Companies Act. In line with the long-term decisions needed to support achieving national missions, this would change the legal duties of directors in order to:

- Align the interests of wider society and the environment with the interests of shareholders
- Empower directors to make decisions based on the interests of the environment and society, not just the financial interests of shareholders
- Apply to all companies by default rather than having to pass a legal resolution on a business-by-business basis
- Ask businesses to report on how they are aligning the interests of society, the environment and shareholders. The Better Business Act would pass an amendment to the Companies Act 2006 which has been drafted by leading company law experts.¹¹³

ESTABLISH A BUSINESS OWNERSHIP COMMISSION TO EXPLORE HOW TO ENCOURAGE MORE CONCENTRATED, ENGAGED OWNERSHIP OF BUSINESSES

Alongside corporate governance reform, action is also needed on UK business ownership. Currently, the UK has an unusually high proportion of firms which lack the concentrated ownership of ‘blockholders’ able to affect business decisions. These factors make mission mobilisation of businesses harder because they discourage engagement with long-term national missions, including long-term investment.

A 2023 Resolution Foundation report argues that “lack of concentration in ownership is problematic, since evidence suggests that blockholders are central to promoting a culture of long-term value creation in firms”.¹¹⁴ For example, “the large stakes of blockholders insulate managers from short-term pressures to boost earnings at the expense of investment.”¹¹⁵ Similarly, Colin Mayer, writing for the IFS, has noted that “the UK has an exceptionally dispersed form of ownership of listed companies and an absence of owners of significant blocks of

110 Starmer, K. “We can win the next election” – Keir Starmer’s Labour conference speech. LabourList, 29 September 2021. Available at <https://labourlist.org/2021/09/we-can-win-the-next-election-keir-starmer-labour-conference-speech> [accessed 07/03/2025]

111 The British Academy. Policy & Practice for Purposeful Business: The final report of the Future of the Corporation programme. 2021. Available at <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/policy-and-practice-for-purposeful-business> [accessed 07/03/2025]

112 O’Brien, A. The Purpose Dividend. Demos, 28 November 2023. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/the-purpose-dividend> [accessed 07/03/2025]

113 Better Business Act. Draft Amendments to the Companies Act 2006. 2021. Available at <https://betterbusinessact.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/The-Better-Business-Act-2021.pdf> [accessed 07/03/2025]

114 Brandily, P. and others. Beyond Boosterism: Realigning the policy ecosystem to unleash private investment for sustainable growth. Resolution Foundation, 22 June 2023. Available at <https://economy2030.resolutionfoundation.org/reports/beyond-boosterism> [accessed 07/03/2025]

115 Brandily, P. and others. Beyond Boosterism: Realigning the policy ecosystem to unleash private investment for sustainable growth. Resolution Foundation, 22 June 2023. Available at <https://economy2030.resolutionfoundation.org/reports/beyond-boosterism> [accessed 07/03/2025]

shares.”¹¹⁶ Mayer argues that “the existence of identifiable, long-term committed shareholders has a significant effect on the policies that companies adopt and the degree to which they account for benefits beyond short-term financial returns... the system that has emerged in the UK is at an extreme of rent extraction, which prioritises returns for shareholders over capital investment and training.”¹¹⁷

Mayer suggests that the lack of blockholders is one of the factors behind the UK’s low level of business investment and poor productivity performance. This is a long-term problem and recently has been getting worse: for example, as highlighted in a recent Demos paper, private sector investment in infrastructure fell by a third in real terms from £24 billion in 2015 to £16 billion seven years later.¹¹⁸ The UK currently has the lowest business investment in the G7.¹¹⁹ Increasing business investment and productivity is critical for the economic growth and living standards mission.

What can be done to address this barrier to mission mobilisation? The Resolution Foundation’s overall recommendation is to focus on “pension reform as a means to rebuild domestic blockholders, driving up investment rates through better corporate control”.¹²⁰ This is partly based on the observation that UK pension funds allocate less capital to equities than in other countries.¹²¹ The Resolution Foundation report makes more detailed recommendations across Defined Benefit, Defined Contribution and Local Government Pension Schemes, including consolidation so that larger funds can act as more engaged ‘blockholders’ able to encourage long-term investment.¹²² Torsten Bell MP, now the Minister for Pensions, recently said in a speech: “Only large pension schemes can provide active, engaged ownership of the kind that presses management not just on short term returns today but on whether they can deliver over the long term.”¹²³

However, we should not rely solely on pension reform to change the ownership of UK businesses. In 2010-2012 the independent Ownership Commission, chaired by Will Hutton, examined the state of ownership in the UK.¹²⁴ The Ownership Commission’s final report argued that ownership was characterised by a “PLC monoculture”, and said that the Commission was “concerned that PLC share ownership is increasingly influenced by short-term transactional imperatives” and that “there is evidence that short termism is increasing, making it harder for Britain to have strong companies where long termism is central to the business model”.¹²⁵ The report makes a series of recommendations to encourage “more plural, engaged and stewardship-oriented ownership” (including ways to help pension funds exert ownership rights).¹²⁶

116 Mayer, C. Inequality, firms, ownership and governance. IFS, 3 March 2022. Available at <https://ifs.org.uk/inequality/inequality-firms-ownership-and-governance> [accessed 07/03/2025]

117 Mayer, C. Inequality, firms, ownership and governance. IFS, 3 March 2022. Available at <https://ifs.org.uk/inequality/inequality-firms-ownership-and-governance> [accessed 07/03/2025]

118 Goss, D. and Wood, C. Infrastructure for the Future: Fixing the foundations of growth in Britain. Demos, 6 March 2025. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/infrastructure-for-the-future-fixing-the-foundations-of-growth-in-britain> [accessed 07/03/2025]

119 Dibb, G. and Jung, C. Rock bottom: Low investment in the UK economy. IPPR, 18 June 2024. Available at <https://www.ippr.org/articles/rock-bottom> [accessed 07/03/2025]

120 Brandily, P. and others. Beyond Boosterism: Realigning the policy ecosystem to unleash private investment for sustainable growth. Resolution Foundation, 22 June 2023. Available at <https://economy2030.resolutionfoundation.org/reports/beyond-boosterism> [accessed 07/03/2025]

121 Brandily, P. and others. Beyond Boosterism: Realigning the policy ecosystem to unleash private investment for sustainable growth. Resolution Foundation, 22 June 2023. Available at <https://economy2030.resolutionfoundation.org/reports/beyond-boosterism> [accessed 07/03/2025]

122 Brandily, P. and others. Beyond Boosterism: Realigning the policy ecosystem to unleash private investment for sustainable growth. Resolution Foundation, 22 June 2023. Available at <https://economy2030.resolutionfoundation.org/reports/beyond-boosterism> [accessed 07/03/2025]

123 Bell, T. Speech at the Pension and Lifetime Savings Association Conference 2025. GOV.UK, 11 March 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-at-the-pension-and-lifetime-savings-association-conference-2025> [accessed 13/03/2025]

124 The Ownership Commission. Plurality, Stewardship and Engagement. Mutuo, March 2012. Available at <https://www.mutuo.coop/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Ownership-commission-2012.pdf> [accessed 07/03/2025]

125 The Ownership Commission. Plurality, Stewardship and Engagement. Mutuo, March 2012. Available at <https://www.mutuo.coop/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Ownership-commission-2012.pdf> [accessed 07/03/2025]

126 The Ownership Commission. Plurality, Stewardship and Engagement. Mutuo, March 2012. Available at <https://www.mutuo.coop/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Ownership-commission-2012.pdf> [accessed 07/03/2025]

However, the Ownership Commission's work is now over a decade old, and there have been significant changes in the policy and political landscape since then. Nonetheless, it is also clear that many of the problems identified by the Ownership Commission have not been addressed. Since encouraging more concentrated, engaged ownership of businesses is crucial for achieving the national missions, we recommend that the government should establish a new Business Ownership Commission to look at the issue in the round. The Commission should have a specific remit to examine how reforms to ownership can help to mobilise businesses around the national missions.

SECTION FOUR

MOBILISATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society organisations have a critical role in helping to achieve missions, in at least three ways. First, they are often formal 'delivery partners', funded or part-funded by central or local government, to deliver specific public services, programmes or activities. Some of these programmes will in the future be more explicitly oriented around achieving national missions. Second, more informally, civil society organisations are values-driven organisations and contribute to improving society. Therefore, the government should want to implement 'enabling reforms' to mobilise civil society organisations around shared national missions to which they can contribute. Third, civil society organisations have a wealth of practical knowledge, insights and evidence from their work in local communities. They are often aware of on-the-ground problems before the government is, and can evaluate in real time the impacts of economic or policy changes. Actively welcoming the insights of civil society organisations is part of embracing complexity (the government cannot know or predict everything) and prioritising rapid feedback loops, including creating space for criticism and disagreement.

There are, however, barriers to mobilising civil society organisations around the national missions. These barriers include:

- Fragile finances of many civil society organisations after the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis
- Reduced number of 'umbrella' national and local VCSE infrastructure organisations
- Challenges in participating in public procurement processes and delivering public sector contracts
- Focus on short-term challenges (e.g. short-term funding arrangements; rise in National Insurance Contributions) makes it harder to find the space for engagement with central/regional/local government on national missions, especially when this type of engagement is rarely funded

In this section, we propose reforms to help address some of these barriers: using the forthcoming Civil Society Covenant to mobilise civil society organisations around the national missions, and supporting local VCSE infrastructure organisations. Please refer to Section 3 for

proposals on reforms to procurement and the creation of new Mission Councils, which both include consideration of how these can help mobilise civil society organisations.

A CLEAR COMMITMENT TO PARTNERING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS ON MISSIONS VIA THE CIVIL SOCIETY COVENANT

Central government is currently developing a new principles-based Civil Society Covenant with several civil society infrastructure organisations. According to the press release, “The creation of a ‘Civil Society Covenant’ will usher in a new era of partnership between government and civil society and help tackle some of the country’s biggest challenges.”¹²⁷ There is an opportunity for this to set a clear commitment to partnering with civil society around missions.

Most civil society organisations are small, and as a consequence most partnerships around missions need to happen at a regional or local level. The Civil Society Covenant could include a requirement for Combined/Strategic Authorities to engage with civil society infrastructure organisations around relevant national missions, backed up with a requirement for an annual report on their engagement with the civil society sector. The same could apply to Local Authorities in areas of England without a Combined/Strategic Authority.

We agree with the Local Government Association (LGA) that the Civil Society Covenant should also include an overarching principle that civil society organisations should be brought into policy and procurement design processes at the earliest possible stage.¹²⁸ This should include open discussion of the challenge or problem that has been identified, and possible ways of addressing it. This is an alternative to a ‘consultation’ process, which may come later in the process when some of the most important decisions have already been made. This applies to central government as well as regional and local authorities. Bringing civil society organisations into processes earlier can improve collaboration, build a sense of shared ownership and help to mobilise them around the national missions.

The Civil Society Covenant should also include a commitment that central government will partner with civil society organisations when it is leading mission-related activities directly. For example, the recently announced ‘test and learn teams’ would benefit from partnering with civil society organisations and/or including civil society representatives in the teams themselves.¹²⁹

Embracing ‘test and learn’ approaches, as set out in *The Radical How*, also means embracing rapid feedback loops.¹³⁰ Mission-oriented teams, in both central government and local government, should actively seek feedback (both qualitative and quantitative) to enable iteration and improvement. The Civil Society Covenant should, therefore, recognise the important role of civil society organisations in providing constructive criticism and challenge as part of feedback loops. This means that VCSE organisations delivering services, whether on behalf of central or local government, should not be restrained by anti-advocacy clauses or non-disclosure agreements. In 2018, the government’s *Civil Society Strategy* stated that, “The government is determined that charities and social enterprises should be fully confident in their right to speak in public debates, and to have a strong campaigning and advocacy role... Simply being in receipt of taxpayers’ money should not inhibit charities from making their voices heard on matters of policy or practice.”¹³¹ However, stakeholders have told us that currently

127 Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Government partners with civil society to transform lives across the UK. GOV.UK, 17 October 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-partners-with-civil-society-to-transform-lives-across-the-uk--2> [accessed 08/03/2025]

128 Local Government Association. The LGA’s submission to the Government’s Civil Society Covenant Framework consultation. 18 December 2024. Available at <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/lgas-submission-governments-civil-society-covenant-framework> [accessed 08/03/2025]

129 McFadden, P. Reform of the state has to deliver for people. GOV.UK, 9 December 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/reform-of-the-state-has-to-deliver-for-the-people> [accessed 07/03/2025]

130 Greenway, A. and Loosemore, T. *The Radical How*. Public Digital and Nesta, 2024. Available at <https://options2040.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Radical-How.pdf> [accessed 07/03/2025]

131 HM Government. *Civil Society Strategy: Building a future that works for everyone*. August 2018. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b6b282440f0b62ec1fa611d/Civil_Society_Strategy_-_building_a_future_that_works_for_everyone.pdf [accessed 08/03/2025]

organisations are sometimes unwilling to provide feedback or speak critically because they fear losing funding. The Civil Society Covenant should aim to change this. Though this may be uncomfortable for contracting authorities, it will improve policy making, service delivery and procurement processes over time.

WORK WITH AND SUPPORT LOCAL VCSE INFRASTRUCTURE ORGANISATIONS TO ENABLE CIVIL SOCIETY MISSION MOBILISATION

The majority of VCSE organisations are small: 80% have an annual income of below £100,000.¹³² This means that umbrella civil society organisations, sometimes called local infrastructure organisations (LIOs), have a crucial role to play. LIOs have different names including Councils for Voluntary Services (CVS), voluntary action, community action or communities first.¹³³

LIOs can *communicate* the government's socioeconomic missions to the numerous small civil society organisations in their local area. LIOs are well-placed to help small VCSE organisations understand how they might be able to contribute to the national missions, or how they are already contributing, building mobilisation.

Realistically, no local or regional authority can speak to every small VCSE organisation. Therefore LIOs can also play an important role by *representing* the experiences and perspectives of small civil society organisations to the relevant local/regional authority, helping them to understand barriers to civil society mission mobilisation. In this way LIOs can "be an effective bridge between councils and the full ecosystem of VCSE organisations... helping to bring the full range of VCSE voices to the table, and empowering smaller organisations to work effectively with councils."¹³⁴ For example, LIOs can provide feedback to regional/local authorities on their mission-oriented procurement processes, and how to ensure these meet the priority of the National Procurement Policy Statement to maximise spend with VCSE organisations.¹³⁵

Local and regional authorities should, therefore, work closely with local infrastructure organisations to enable mission mobilisation. The LGA and NAVCA have produced a practice guide for councils, including advice on building long-term relationships with LIOs; partnering to create space for co-design and co-production to take place; and making use of LIOs to enable commissioning and contracting processes to be more effective for small VCSE organisations.¹³⁶

Funding for LIOs is also a critical factor. The number of local and national infrastructure charities has halved since 2010.¹³⁷ Many that still exist struggle to secure sufficient funding. Where possible, local and regional authorities should invest in LIOs to support and to mobilise the local VCSE ecosystem. However, given the current crisis in local authority finances, central government should also consider providing grant funding to LIOs. This would be a worthwhile investment to enable more effective mission mobilisation across the VCSE sector; without LIOs regional and local authorities will find it difficult to communicate with and to mobilise smaller VCSE organisations.

132 NCVO. UK Civil Society Almanac 2024. 2024. Available at <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/uk-civil-society-almanac-2024> [accessed 08/03/2025]

133 Local Government Association. Working with Local Infrastructure Organisations to engage smaller VCFSE organisations: Good practice guide. 13 September 2024. Available at <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/working-local-infrastructure-organisations-engage-smaller-vcfse-organisations-good> [accessed 08/03/2025]

134 Local Government Association. Working with Local Infrastructure Organisations to engage smaller VCFSE organisations: Good practice guide. 13 September 2024. Available at <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/working-local-infrastructure-organisations-engage-smaller-vcfse-organisations-good> [accessed 08/03/2025]

135 Government Commercial Function. National Procurement Policy Statement. GOV.UK, 12 February 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-procurement-policy-statement> [accessed 07/03/2025]

136 Local Government Association. Working with Local Infrastructure Organisations to engage smaller VCFSE organisations: Good practice guide. 13 September 2024. Available at <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/working-local-infrastructure-organisations-engage-smaller-vcfse-organisations-good> [accessed 08/03/2025]

137 O'Brien, A. Taking Back Control: Proposals for how to give power and agency back to our communities. Demos, 12 June 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/taking-back-control-proposals-for-how-to-give-power-and-agency-back-to-our-communities> [accessed 08/03/2025]

SECTION FIVE

MOBILISATION OF CITIZENS

In *Mobilisation Nation*, we identified a number of barriers to citizen mobilisation:

- Low trust in government, politicians and political institutions
- The state and public services are often poor at successfully mobilising and partnering with citizens
- Barriers to citizens volunteering, as formal volunteering has declined in the last ten years
- Citizens either not knowing about the national missions, or not feeling they connect to what they personally care about or what matters in their local area or community

In this section, we consider proposals for addressing some of these barriers to enable mass mobilisation of citizens around national missions. The overall goal of these ideas is to enable a shift from *citizen engagement* to *citizen participation*.

MOBILISE PUBLIC OPINION AROUND THE NATIONAL MISSIONS

Until now, the government's communications and rhetoric about missions has mostly focused on the idea of using them to change how central government operates. For example, the government has described a 'mission-led government' as one focused on long-term objectives with the missions "representing a concerted effort to change accountability incentives, across Whitehall and Westminster, towards long-term change".¹³⁸

Yet alongside this sits another strand of rhetoric which emphasises "partnership" and working together "towards the same goals" with "everyone pulling together, galvanised by clear objectives, sharing in the pursuit of national renewal".¹³⁹ Indeed, the Prime Minister's foreword to the *Plan for Change* concludes with the line:

¹³⁸ HM Government. Plan for Change. GOV.UK, 5 December 2024. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6751af4719e0c816d18d1df3/Plan_for_Change.pdf [accessed 07/03/2025]

¹³⁹ HM Government. Plan for Change. GOV.UK, 5 December 2024. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6751af4719e0c816d18d1df3/Plan_for_Change.pdf [accessed 07/03/2025]

“So we invite the British people to join us in the mission of national renewal.”¹⁴⁰

In our view, it is this second strand of rhetoric the government needs to develop and strengthen. The government is right to say that it cannot deliver the missions on its own. It is right to call them ‘national missions’ and invite the British people to join in the project of achieving them. We recommend the Prime Minister and the government strengthen this strand of communication, summarised by our proposed shift from *government missions* to *shared national missions*.

However, it will take a concerted and sustained effort to translate this rhetoric into reality. For comparison, the Conservative Party’s 2010 manifesto was titled *Invitation to Join the Government of Britain*, and its opening first two paragraphs are somewhat similar to the Labour Party’s 2024 manifesto:

*A country is at its best when the bonds between people are strong and when the sense of national purpose is clear. Today the challenges facing Britain are immense. Our economy is overwhelmed by debt, our social fabric is frayed and our political system has betrayed the people. But these problems can be overcome if we pull together and work together. If we remember that we are all in this together. Some politicians say: ‘give us your vote and we will sort out all your problems’. We say: real change comes not from government alone. Real change comes when the people are inspired and mobilised, when millions of us are fired up to play a part in the nation’s future.*¹⁴¹

These ideas were encapsulated as the ‘Big Society’ agenda, but the Conservatives failed to translate the Big Society from rhetoric into reality, and the whole agenda was gradually crushed by the focus on reducing public spending from 2010 onwards.¹⁴² David Cameron did not talk about the Big Society publicly after 2013.¹⁴³ Key elements of the Big Society agenda, like formal volunteering, have actually declined since 2010. This failure should serve as a warning to the new Labour government. Positive rhetoric achieves little by itself.

However, other examples show that mobilisation is possible. The public communications campaign around the Covid-19 pandemic – famously “Stay at home. Protect the NHS. Save lives.” – was enormously successful at mobilising public opinion and citizens to act in ways contrary to their own self-interest for the sake of the common good.

Mobilising public opinion around the national missions focuses on the first two of the following types of mobilisation, which are mainly about people’s awareness, attitudes and opinions:

1. Awareness of the national missions: this is a precursor to ‘mobilisation’, but is a necessary first step. It is difficult to raise awareness with the public as a whole, so the government should carefully select which missions it wants to raise awareness about.
2. Passive support of the national missions: this is about people supporting the idea of the mission and/or not opposing the measures needed to achieve it. For example, passive support would mean more people recognise that building new houses near them is necessary to achieve the 1.5 million new homes mission.

140 HM Government. Plan for Change. GOV.UK, 5 December 2024. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6751af4719e0c816d18d1df3/Plan_for_Change.pdf [accessed 07/03/2025]

141 The Conservative Party. Invitation to join the government of Britain: The Conservative Manifesto 2010. April 2010. Available at <https://conservativehome.blogs.com/files/conservative-manifesto-2010.pdf> [accessed 08/03/2025]

142 Tinline, P. Into Power 02: The Conservative Party’s 2010 transition from opposition to government. Future Governance Forum, 9 April 2024. Available at <https://www.futuregovernanceforum.co.uk/resource/into-power-02> [accessed 08/03/2025]

143 Tiratelli, L. Big Society 2.0? What sets our Paradigm apart. New Local, 26 February 2020. Available at <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/articles/big-society-2-0-what-sets-our-paradigm-apart> [accessed 08/03/2025]

3. Active support of the national missions: this is about people actively contributing to achieve national mission(s), for example through everyday actions/behaviours, through participatory processes, through volunteering, through their work, and so on. We cover some of these in the following sections.

Though a number of the missions would benefit from increased public awareness and public support, perhaps the most important are the two missions/milestones related to building physical infrastructure (clean power 2030 and 1.5 million new homes). Mobilising public opinion around these two missions could genuinely help people and local communities accept the need for new pylons or new homes to be built in their local area, if framed as part of a national mission to, for example, 'guarantee the nation's energy security' or to 'build good homes for our children and grandchildren'.

Of course, no public communications campaign will persuade everyone. But it could help shift public opinion towards support for a few specific national missions.

CONSIDER IF A NATIONAL MISSION NEEDS CITIZENS TO CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOUR

Related to the previous section on mobilising public opinion, some national missions may also require citizens to change their behaviour in some way. If this is the case, a more specific type of public communications campaign will be needed.

For each specific national mission, the mission team should identify the key sectors/actors to mobilise in order to achieve it. Does this include large numbers of citizens, in terms of their everyday lives? Practical examples might include:

- Citizens being involved in their everyday lives in 'demand-side flexibility' for the clean power 2030 mission
- Parenting for children in their early years to help achieve the child development mission

To give a specific example, Nesta has published research on 'A fairer start' for children, including a report called *Enablers for effectively scaling parenting interventions*.¹⁴⁴ One of the recommendations, based on interviews conducted for the research, is to "launch a public communications campaign to tackle the perceived stigma around parents asking for help with parenting in general, and participating in parenting interventions specifically".¹⁴⁵ This is clearly relevant for the government's child development mission (75% of five-year-olds reaching a good level of child development), and is an example of 'mobilising' citizens in their everyday lives.

If a mission needs to mobilise citizens to change their behaviour in some way, it is important to ensure this is done in a way which people find engaging and helpful. Participation and deliberation, covered in the next section, are methodologies which can be used to achieve this.

USE PARTICIPATION IN POLICY MAKING IN THE DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF NATIONAL MISSIONS

Participatory policy making can help improve the quality of policy making, overcome politically stuck problems, build greater legitimacy for policy changes, and build back trust in

¹⁴⁴ Beszterczey, A. and Sanguino, I. Enablers for effectively scaling parenting interventions. Nesta, 1 July 2024. Available at <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/enablers-for-effectively-scaling-parenting-interventions> [accessed 07/03/2025]

¹⁴⁵ Beszterczey, A. and Sanguino, I. Enablers for effectively scaling parenting interventions. Nesta, 1 July 2024. Available at <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/enablers-for-effectively-scaling-parenting-interventions> [accessed 07/03/2025]

government.¹⁴⁶ Demos's *Citizens' White Paper*, published in 2024, sets out a roadmap for the new government to embed public participation in national policy making.¹⁴⁷

Involving citizens in policy making could help to mobilise citizens around the national missions. It could do this by ensuring policy is shaped by citizens' perspectives and experiences, and indirectly by showing that the government is involving people in its national missions (although this latter point requires an effective communications campaign to achieve).

There are many different methods for involving citizens in policy making, and the specific tools chosen should vary according to the specific mission, the stage of the policy cycle and the type of input being asked from citizens. There are opportunities for citizen participation at both the national and regional/local level connected to missions, again depending on the specific mission.

In our *Citizens' White Paper*, we proposed creating Citizens' Panels – groups of 100 randomly selected and demographically representative UK citizens.¹⁴⁸ These could sit alongside the existing Mission Boards (internal central government) and our proposed Mission Councils (with external members from businesses, trade unions, civil society and others). Careful thought should be given to which missions would benefit from nationally representative Citizens' Panels. For example, the clean power 2030 mission might be a good candidate for a national Citizens' Panel because central government has a significant degree of control over the relevant policies. By contrast, the mission to halve knife crime might benefit more from people being involved who are representatives of those directly affected by the issue – such as young people, parents, civil society organisations, police, teachers, youth workers and so on. This might also be more effective if organised at the regional/local level so that the people involved have a common interest in their local region/area. Not every mission may be suitable for a Citizens' Panel: for example, the mission to grow the economy and raise living standards is likely too broad, so would need to be narrowed down to something more specific.

It is important to be clear about the purpose of a Citizens' Panel. As examples, they could be used to:

- Work through tensions and trade-offs through deliberation – for example, in relation to the clean power 2030 mission, there is a trade-off between keeping levy costs on electricity bills (as currently) or shifting these costs to general taxation (as has repeatedly been proposed by policy experts in order to reduce the price of electricity).
- Discuss whether citizens would be willing to pay higher taxes to support specific national missions – and what, if anything, might increase their willingness to do so (for example, hypothecation of tax to support that specific mission; tax paid directly to local councils; etc.)
- Develop a set of principles for what partnering with citizens looks like – for example, in relation to planning processes to support the mission to build 1.5 million homes. This is a topic Demos is currently working on through our *Unlocking Housebuilding* project.

In our *Citizens' White Paper*, we also discuss 'Co-design workshops' and 'Community conversations' as lower-cost, smaller-scale options for participation.¹⁴⁹ These types of tools can be run in person or online, and may be better suited to the local/regional level. A co-design

146 Levin, M. and others. *Citizens' White Paper*. Demos, 19 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/citizens-white-paper> [accessed 08/03/2025]

147 Levin, M. and others. *Citizens' White Paper*. Demos, 19 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/citizens-white-paper> [accessed 08/03/2025]

148 Levin, M. and others. *Citizens' White Paper*. Demos, 19 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/citizens-white-paper> [accessed 08/03/2025]

149 Levin, M. and others. *Citizens' White Paper*. Demos, 19 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/citizens-white-paper> [accessed 08/03/2025]

process is a collaborative approach to policy making where diverse stakeholders, including policy makers, experts, members of the public impacted by the issue, people working in the sector, and potentially other interested parties, work together to design, develop and/or implement policies.¹⁵⁰ Community conversations are a more informal way of holding discussions with a diverse range of people on a given policy issue, based on the idea that complex issues need to involve a range of conversations that happen in different spaces, including community spaces, where people feel more comfortable to talk.¹⁵¹

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERING CONNECTED TO THE NATIONAL MISSIONS

To help get citizens actively involved around national missions, the government should consider reforms to reverse the decline in formal volunteering over the last decade. First, on the 'demand side', volunteering is usually best managed at the local level: either at the level of local (and regional) authorities, or in the context of public services, at the level of schools or individual NHS services or trusts. A huge amount of knowledge about recruiting and retaining volunteers is already held at the local level. We therefore recommend that the Mission Delivery Unit in the Cabinet Office, in partnership with DCMS, should run a one or two day workshop to discuss volunteering and the national missions. We suggest the following features for consideration:

- Attendees should include central government (Mission Delivery Unit; DCMS), local authorities, Combined/Strategic Authorities, national civil society organisations and local civil society organisations.
- The workshop could be used to identify which missions would benefit the most from mobilising volunteers. The selected mission(s) should be specific where possible to make the workshop more focused, or alternatively the whole workshop could focus on one specific mission.
- Attendees could discuss if the national missions might have a role in encouraging people to volunteer, and thereby help with recruitment and retention of volunteers locally, while recognising that volunteering brings wider benefits for individuals and communities beyond the framing of national missions.
- Attendees should discuss the role of each actor (local authorities, local infrastructure organisations, VCSE organisations, and so on)
- One aim of the workshop should be to enable peer learning
- A short output could be produced highlighting some of the key themes and examples of good practice, ideally with contact details where possible. This could be called, for example, *Mobilising volunteers around national missions*.

As well as using its convening ability, central government could also play a useful role in spreading the use of digital tools that support volunteering: this was the subject of a recent research report commissioned by DCMS.¹⁵² Both of these proposals are responses to the challenge of how to spread or diffuse good practice between public services, local authorities and voluntary organisations across the country.¹⁵³

150 Levin, M. and others. Citizens' White Paper. Demos, 19 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/citizens-white-paper> [accessed 08/03/2025]

151 Levin, M. and others. Citizens' White Paper. Demos, 19 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/citizens-white-paper> [accessed 08/03/2025]

152 Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Digital tools that support volunteering. GOV.UK, 3 February 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-tools-that-support-volunteering/digital-tools-that-support-volunteering> [accessed 08/03/2025]

153 Plunkett, J. Are policies like medicines? Medium, 29 October 2024. Available at <https://medium.com/@jamestplunkett/are-policies-like-medicines-1962f8daf495> [accessed 08/03/2025]

Second, on the 'supply side', enabling reforms are needed to encourage and enable more people to volunteer. According to NCVO research, the top three reasons people give for *not* volunteering are "I don't want to make an ongoing commitment", "I do other things with my spare time" and "I have work or study commitments".¹⁵⁴ If citizens are to mobilise around national missions, they need the time to do this.

Employers and businesses should expand employer-supported volunteering.¹⁵⁵ For example, some employers offer workers the right to request up to three days a year to volunteer. Pro Bono Economics published a report in 2024 which suggested that employers themselves ultimately benefit from expanding volunteering via improved worker productivity.¹⁵⁶ The CIPD also has guidance on employer-supported volunteering.¹⁵⁷

In terms of public policy, Demos has previously proposed that the government should introduce a new Right to Community Service.¹⁵⁸ This would give individuals working in the public sector and in large businesses the right to request time off work for community service and volunteering. The request would need to be approved by the employer, but the government should produce guidance to help employers make the right choices and to give them criteria to consider when making their decision. This would enable a more flexible approach to give employees time off for volunteering. If found to be successful for larger businesses, this new right could be expanded to all businesses over time. We recognise however that, with the government currently asking more of businesses through the reforms in the Employment Rights Bill, this may be a challenging policy to implement at this particular time.

INVOLVE CITIZENS IN MISSION 'FEEDBACK LOOPS'

Different methods, techniques and ways of working are needed for different missions. For example, the mission to halve incidents of knife crime could be a good candidate for a 'test and learn' type of approach, with multidisciplinary teams trialling different approaches in specific local areas where knife crime is known to be a problem, as set out in a recent speech by Pat McFadden and in Nesta and Public Digital's *The Radical How*.^{159,160} Similarly, McFadden's speech referenced multidisciplinary test and learn teams being set up around the issues of temporary accommodation and family support services: both of these policy areas are relevant for the child development mission.

'Feedback loops' are an important part of this type of policy making. As *The Radical How* describes, "The goal is to create feedback loops that enable rapid iteration and improvement."¹⁶¹ Citizens should be involved in these rapid 'feedback loops'. Neither central nor regional/local government should be waiting multiple years to find out what citizens think about how a mission-oriented policy change is working. This means using smaller-scale, more agile participatory methods which can realistically be part of rapid feedback loops in order to learn from experiments and small-scale tests.

154 NCVO. Time Well Spent 2023: A national survey on the volunteer experience. 27 June 2023. Available at <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/time-well-spent-2023> [accessed 08/03/2025]

155 McGarvey, A., Jochum, V. and Chan, O. Time Well Spent: Employer-supported volunteering. NCVO, 3 June 2019. Available at <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/time-well-spent-employer-supported-volunteering> [accessed 08/03/2025]

156 Franklin, J., Gomez, R. and Uppal, T. Triple dividend: How workplace volunteering can make us happier, healthier and more productive. Pro Bono Economics, April 2024. Available at <https://www.probonoeconomics.com/triple-dividend> [accessed 08/03/2025]

157 CIPD. Employer-supported volunteering. 7 March 2025. Available at <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/factsheets/employer-supported-factsheet> [accessed 08/03/2025]

158 O'Brien, A. Taking Back Control: Proposals for how to give power and agency back to our communities. Demos, 12 June 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/taking-back-control-proposals-for-how-to-give-power-and-agency-back-to-our-communities> [accessed 08/03/2025]

159 McFadden, P. Reform of the state has to deliver for people. GOV.UK, 9 December 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/reform-of-the-state-has-to-deliver-for-the-people> [accessed 07/03/2025]

160 Greenway, A. and Loosemore, T. The Radical How. Public Digital and Nesta, 2024. Available at <https://options2040.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Radical-How.pdf> [accessed 07/03/2025]

161 Greenway, A. and Loosemore, T. The Radical How. Public Digital and Nesta, 2024. Available at <https://options2040.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Radical-How.pdf> [accessed 07/03/2025]

In our *Citizens' White Paper*, we discussed the idea of bringing together Citizens' Audit Groups to discuss the implementation and impacts of legislation.¹⁶² This idea could be adapted for missions: instead of legislation, Citizens' Audit Groups could be formed to discuss specific changes in policy or practice related to a particular mission. This could mean, for example, testing a particular change in policy or practice in one local area, and then bringing together people affected to discuss how they feel about the change. This type of citizen involvement should be a common part of the policy making toolkit, and done regularly, not relegated to evaluations published several years after a programme has been run or a policy change made.

¹⁶² Levin, M. and others. *Citizens' White Paper*. Demos, 19 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/citizens-white-paper> [accessed 08/03/2025]

CONCLUSION

Across these two Demos papers, we have argued in favour of the concept of mission-led government.

Critics sometimes argue that missions are nothing more than a rhetorical device used to help Labour win the general election. Or that the missions agenda is weak and incapable of addressing the deep-rooted problems the UK faces. Or that missions inevitably will be – or already have been – swept away by the enormous challenges and crises which governments in the 2020s have to face.

We disagree. Some of the most difficult challenges we face as a country are well-known. Economic growth has been weak ever since the global financial crisis. Workers' real earnings today are almost the same as in 2008. We haven't built enough new houses for many decades. We are exposed to energy price shocks and our electricity is too expensive. Incidents of knife crime have been rising for over a decade. Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy have barely improved since 2011.

These are all huge challenges. They are often discussed and often criticised. Yet chronic short-termism, incoherent policy and a lack of genuine partnership working has severely hindered our collective ability to address them.

Mission-led government provides a genuine opportunity to change this. To focus on the biggest challenges we face. To commit to addressing them for the long term. To recognise that they are national challenges, and need a collective national response from all of us.

After a little over six months in office, the government has made some genuine progress on the missions agenda. However, as we have argued in these two papers, achieving socioeconomic missions requires mass mobilisation of all sectors and actors. So far, the government has not fully embraced the need for mobilisation.

There is time to change that. The government should recommit to the missions agenda, with a much stronger emphasis on mobilising the whole country – embracing the wide-ranging reforms which are needed as part of an 'insurgent' or 'disruptive' programme. That means a shift from a mindset of *government missions* to *shared national missions*. It means a shift from *mission delivery* to *mission collaboration*. And it means a shift from *partnership rhetoric* to the *enabling reforms* needed to unlock cross-sectoral mobilisation.

Everyone knows we face shared national challenges. We hope that these two papers will encourage the government to use the framework of shared national missions as a way to enable us all to address them.

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