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# From Paternalism to Participation

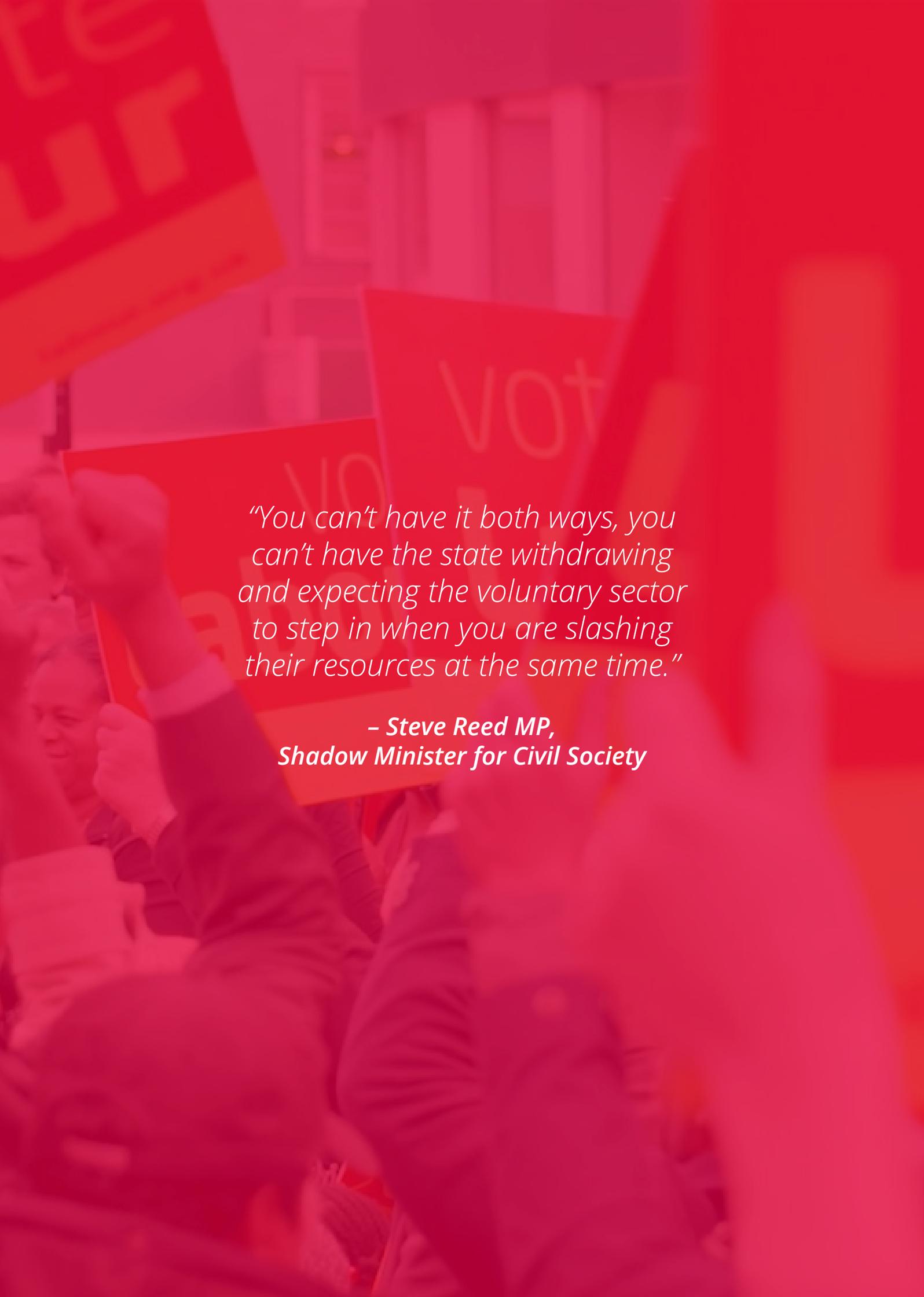
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Putting civil society at the heart of national renewal



promoted by Jennie Formby, General Secretary, the Labour Party, on behalf of the Labour Party,  
both at, Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QT.





*“You can’t have it both ways, you can’t have the state withdrawing and expecting the voluntary sector to step in when you are slashing their resources at the same time.”*

**– Steve Reed MP,  
Shadow Minister for Civil Society**

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# 1. Introduction



**CIVIL SOCIETY** is part of the fabric of our nation. It includes community groups, voluntary organisations, faith groups, campaigns, social movements, social enterprise and social action. Without a thriving civil society, democracy can't work. It is the glue that binds communities together and helps give voice to the voiceless, power to the powerless, and allows communities to take control of the decisions that affect them

The Conservative Government's Big Society shrank into little more than an attempt to replace paid public-sector professionals with unpaid volunteers. Labour's vision for civil society is bigger. It sits alongside our plans to decentralise public ownership and investment and democratize the economy. We want to deepen democracy and transfer real power to the people of this country so they can take control of the decisions that affect them. Doing that requires a strong independent civil society as its cornerstone.

Britain needs a government that does things with people instead of doing things to them, moving from paternalism to participation. Labour will increase people's opportunities to participate in the decisions that affect them and make change in their own communities. Strengthening civil society will

strengthen communities' ability to participate because civil society is made up of thousands of human-scale institutions that people trust and feel ownership over and allows them to assert power collectively.

After eight years of austerity, Britain is a divided country where inequality has deepened, poverty blights millions of lives, local communities feel powerless and opportunity has been closed off to many. Civil society must be at the heart of rebuilding the kind of country we want to be. A fairer country where we care about each other, where people can pool their resources, demand accountability, build institutions and influence the decisions that affect them, where everyone shares in growing prosperity, where opportunity is open to all, where we respect our differences and cherish what brings us together.

We reject the notion that people are little more than units of production and consumption serving a voracious economy that consumes our human relationships along with the planet we all share. We are fully rounded human beings given purpose by the work we do, nurtured by the family and relationships we care about the most, rooted in the places we live and the communities we belong to. We need a government that recognises and respects this, and we need a strong civil society to sustain it. This is why civil society is at the heart of Labour's vision for twenty-first century socialism.

## 2. Making Communities Stronger



**SOCIETY** is the sum of the human relationships that exist within it, a complex network of connections that give people support, a sense of belonging and of social solidarity. They allow us to care about each other, and to feel cared for.

But relationships have been weakened and communities atomised as society has been made to serve the economy rather than the other way round. Families are broken up as family members who would prefer to stay close move away to look for opportunities that don't exist nearer home. Older people are left isolated as society fragments around them. Young people feel their future is being taken away. Too many public services treat people as problems to be managed in isolation rather than nurturing the potential inherent in each of us and supporting communities and networks of friends and family to help individuals achieve their true potential. We need a different approach to public services that emphasises the importance of human relationships, and an economy that puts people and their communities before profit.

### What we will do

Communities need places to meet, but the Conservatives have closed down 400 day centres, 500 public libraries, 600 youth centres and 1000 children's centres. Labour will create a new Right to Space to make sure communities have places to meet, and a Community Innovation Fund using funds

from dormant assets and philanthropic giving to provide money for communities to run activities and projects in them. We will make sure planning powers allow local authorities to create more community spaces by placing requirements on developments, take over empty shops or other buildings left unoccupied for extended periods of time, and open up more publicly owned buildings for community use.

The shift towards contracting services has squeezed out many smaller charities and community-led organisations who have lost up to 44% of their income from public bodies as a result. This approach also makes services less responsive to service users, makes services inflexible, and disproportionately benefits large corporation organisations like Capita and Carillion. Labour will increase grant funding for smaller projects to ensure smaller charities can benefit, and our new approach to collaborative decision-making in public procurement will promote community wealth building and local employment along the lines piloted in Preston.

The local economy has a big impact on local communities, but communities are often unable to influence business decisions that affect them. We will give communities a bigger say by increasing representation from local charities, community organisations and social enterprises on local enterprise partnerships, requiring them to promote inclusive growth that tackles inequality and invests in people as well as hard infrastructure. Labour's new social enterprise

strategy will double the size of the co-operative sector in the economy which by its nature is more responsive to local communities, and our plans to increase worker representation on company boards will give members of the local community a bigger say.



## Example

Every One Every Day is a participatory project based in two former shops in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. The community runs projects in the shops and across the local area that bring people together to make change on their own terms. So far they've engaged over 2,000 people in 70 projects in 38 locations across the borough that include cooking, gardening, crafts, skills, education, leisure, play, sports – even a singing barber. It's created a stronger sense of community, tackled isolation and other endemic social challenges, and shown the community how it can make its voice heard and take action on its own terms.

Ambition Lawrence Weston (ALW) is a community-led, third sector organisation which oversees the regeneration of the Lawrence Weston, a socially excluded housing estate in north-west Bristol. ALW have delivered a variety of significant projects some of which create sustainable sources of employment and income including passive housing, renewable energy, improvements to green spaces, the installation of new play areas and the development of an arts and crafts shop. They have taken over a disused former youth centre and reinvented it as a community hub. The area is a Big Local and has received funding and support through the programme.

### 3. Importance of the places we belong to

**T**HE PLACES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS we live in are key to our sense of who we are, where we belong, and the community we are part of. We value shared spaces like parks, squares, and communal institutions like libraries, pubs and community centres. We want our high streets to be vibrant and offer a diverse range of things to do and places to go. We feel diminished when they are run down or closed. We want our public spaces to be safe, welcoming, lively, open to all, and to reflect the communities that use them.

People need a bigger say over the places where they live because they understand their own neighbourhood better than anyone else and this gives them unique insights into how the area should function, as well as a sense of an area's history and what matters most to local people. Civil society is a key part of bringing people together to participate in shaping their area to meet the community's needs, now and in the future, but to do that we need to support local community-led organisations and make sure there are community-controlled spaces that enable people to come together to act.

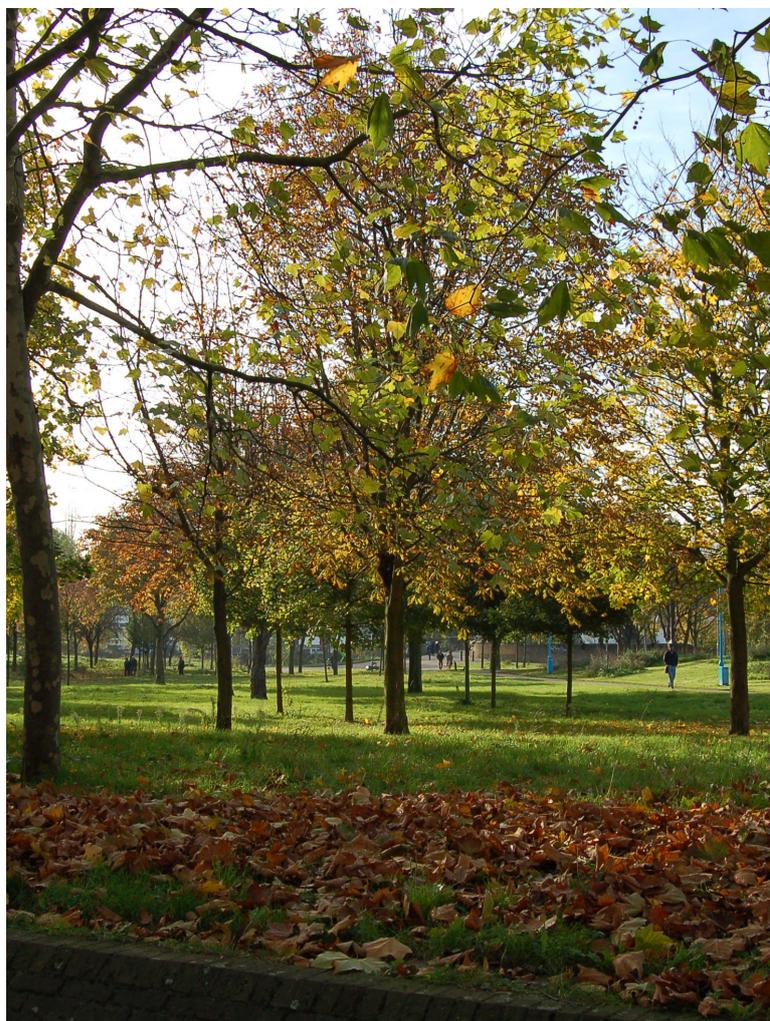
#### What we will do

We will encourage local authorities to identify and support community anchor organisations that can help local communities participate in decisions that affect the local area. These will be existing community-led organisations that can increase community participation in decisions like directing local investment or regeneration, running public consultations, managing parks and green spaces or running community spaces.

We will create a new Public Right to Control that allows communities to bid to take control of buildings or other assets in their neighbourhood that are neglected, underused, or not meeting their needs. Our new Community Innovation Fund will provide a new source of funding and support to renew

these places or run community-led activities in them by making available money from dormant assets. We will ask local authorities to work with the community to create business plans and new revenue streams to sustain these buildings and the activities taking place inside them.

The Public Right to Control will include new rights for service users to change how public services work if they are failing. Based on the principles of co-production, this will involve giving service users the right to be actively involved in reshaping those services and making services directly accountable to service users. In many cases this will involve charities or campaign groups that can advocate for vulnerable service users who need help to participate. We believe giving more power to communities will help create a more preventative approach that tackles problems at source rather than simply managing them once they've happened.



## Example

The Black Prince Trust is a community hub in a deprived neighbourhood in Kennington, South London, on a site that the council transferred to the community in 2011. The Trust provides sports, leisure, arts and education activities for the local community which have improved life chances for people living on a nearby social housing estate, and they fundraised money to build a professional-sized basketball stadium for use by local people.

Labour-run Preston Council has adopted a Community Wealth Building approach to use the council's financial muscle to make sure everyone benefits from the local economy. It localises as much public spending as possible aiming to benefit poorer neighbourhoods, promotes the Living Wage and high quality staff training, and encourages new forms of community ownership of local businesses and assets that are more responsive to local people's needs.



## 4. A Fair Legal Framework

**T**HE LAW should provide clear rules for how civil society can operate. Under the Conservatives, the Lobbying Act has created a culture of fear in the sector with many organisations now self-censoring and afraid to speak out about the social injustices they see. This harms democracy and prevents the Government learning from mistakes. Labour believes the law should energise civil society, not stifle it. We know that civil society wants clear, fair rules that help it to play a bigger role in supporting communities, so that is what Labour will deliver.

### What we will do

Labour will repeal the Lobbying Act and replace it with a new Community Empowerment Charter based in law that empowers civil society organisations to campaign, with clear parameters for fundraising, transparency, accountability and representation based on the Hodgson Review principles which the Conservative Government wrongly shelved. It will recognise the important role charities and campaign organisations have to play in public decision making and will ban anti-advocacy ‘gagging

clauses’ in Government contracts and grants.

The interests of civil society are often absent when decisions are taken, so Labour will review the roles of ministers across government to ensure the needs of civil society are always taken into account.

We will review the Social Value Act to strengthen it and make sure public decision-making benefits local communities, including by involving more co-operatives and social enterprises in delivering public services.

Leadership in charities doesn’t reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, so we will work with the sector to establish a Charities Leadership Programme to support future leaders from more diverse backgrounds and challenge the sector to improve diverse representation at the top and tackle race and gender pay gaps.

We recognise the important role played by charity trustees so we will ensure that charity trustees receive equal status in law to school governors, councillors and others who need appropriate time off work to carry out duties that benefit the public.

### Example

Conservative Government ministers have been criticised for inserting gagging clauses into public sector contracts and funding agreements, such as those issued by the DWP. These have been used to prevent civil society partners criticising failings by the Government or individual ministers and are part of a growing culture of secrecy in Government. This attempt to suppress information is anti-democratic, an abuse of public funding and prevents services from learning from failures. Labour will ban it.

## 5. Giving people a bigger say



**L**ABOUR WANTS people to have a bigger say over the public decisions and the public services that affect them, with more direct accountability to service users where possible. Charities, voluntary and community organisations all have a role to play in making sure the most vulnerable, in particular, are able to participate in decisions that affect them.

Many of the world's leading cities are piloting innovative new approaches to increase public participation in decision making, including new digital platforms such as Decide Madrid. Labour wants to see new models for increasing public participation piloted across the UK and envisages a key role for civil society in supporting this.

### What we will do

We will make public decisions more accountable to communities by updating and reinvigorating voluntary sector compacts – negotiated agreements that govern the relationship between civil society and government nationally and locally. After ten years, it's time for a refresh – and our emphasis will be on strengthening and increasing accountability to communities and service users by strengthening the role of local charities and community organisations who can make sure their voice is heard.

We will promote collaborative decision making, encouraging public service providers to involve their service users in taking

decisions about how those services are run, the outcomes they are working towards, and the support they offer. This cannot be limited to consultation alone – people need the power to assert their voice when those in power refuse to listen, and civil society has an important role in acting as their advocates and champions. This will mark a radical change from top-down approach to public services and put services users and front-line workers in the driving seat.

Instead of being passive recipients of whatever's on offer, Labour wants people to have the power to actively shape the services they use and decisions that affect them. People who are most disadvantaged often have limited capacity to participate, so we will involve charities and campaign groups to act as their advocates and make sure they always have a voice when decisions that affect them are taken. We believe that making public services directly accountable to the people who use them leads to better public services, fully takes service users' real needs and aspirations into account and provides better value for money.

The digital revolution offers radical opportunities to increase public accountability and participation in decision-making, but the UK is falling behind world leaders. We will identify local, regional or combined authorities to run pilots alongside civil society partners on increasing public participation through new models of digital democracy and open data. There is a key role for existing and new civil society organisations to help citizens participate in decision making with



examples including Decide Madrid where citizens propose and vote for new local laws or budgets, and vTaiwan where citizens and experts come together online to negotiate a consensus between diverse opinions. We will bring civil society organisations together to increase the use of digital technology and digital platforms across the sector. We want to see digital partnership agreements that give community-led organisations access to public sector or other platforms, and the development of more platform co-operatives that allow shared access to digital technology to develop new community-led organisations and activities.

### Example

Decide Madrid is a platform for public decision-making launched by Madrid City Council. It allows citizens to propose and vote for new local laws, and to help allocate city council budgets. Citizens can propose local laws on any issue, and if they gain enough support the council works up full proposals which are then put to a binding public vote.

Oxford City Council has declared a climate emergency and set up citizens assemblies to decide on local action to tackle climate change. A randomly selected representative sample of local people are deciding on options and time-scales for carbon reduction in areas including housing and transport.

## 6. Giving civil society the resources to succeed



**T**HE CONSERVATIVE Government has sidelined, undermined and underfunded civil society by cutting its funding and closing down spaces where communities come together to act. New funding like over £2bn in dormant assets have been identified but never fully allocated, and windfall funding like the £500m National Fund have been wasted instead of being opened up to work for communities. Labour will ensure charities and civil society organisations have the resources they need to benefit the communities they serve.

### What we will do

Brexit represents a major threat to charities' funding, so Labour will ensure the level of structural and investment funding lost from the EU is matched in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. We will set up an advisory group with strong representation from civil society, local communities and local authorities to help allocate the funding.

Community led activities and initiatives need ongoing funding, so Labour will set up a Communities Innovation Fund using funding from dormant assets and philanthropic giving. The fund will prioritise communities that have seen the highest levels of disinvestment over recent years, and will revolutionise community ownership and public participation. We want to promote new ideas that help communities

and vulnerable people participate in decisions and services that affect them, and develop new community owned assets that build community wealth and social capital including through the new Public Right to Control.

Social investment has a bigger role to play in improving the financial stability and resilience of civil society organisations. We will launch a review into social investment and particularly the role of Big Society Capital to ensure it is effectively supporting the sector, and review how it can do more to build social capital and incorporate models of community reinvestment in our poorest communities where Conservative cuts have hit hardest and where civil society is weakest.

The generosity of the British people is a source of great pride for our country, but governments have not properly supported this kind of philanthropic giving. We will undertake a review of the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme to encourage more small-scale giving.



## Further information

If you would like further information about Labour's Civil Society Strategy, please contact:

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 **Labour**

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