



# Civil Society Futures.

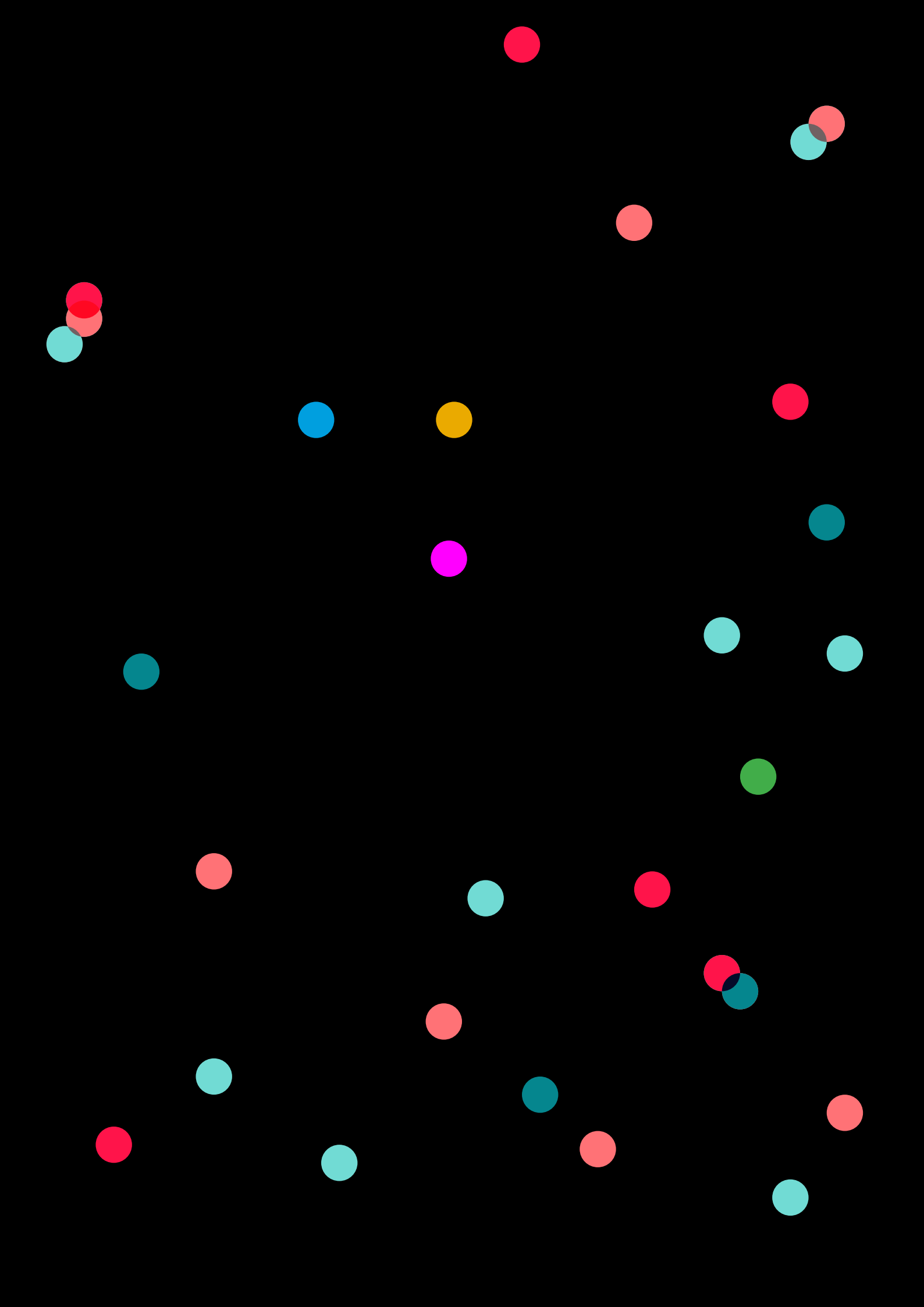
The independent inquiry



**Civil Society  
in England: Its  
current state and  
future opportunity**

**Nov 2018**





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# Foreword



Civil society involves all of us. When we act not for profit nor because the law requires us to, but out of love or anger or creativity, or principle, we are civil society. When we bring together our friends or colleagues or neighbours to have fun or to defend our rights or to look after each other, we are civil society.

Whether we organise through informal friendship networks, Facebook groups, community events and protests; or formal committees, charities, faiths and trade unions, whether we block runways or co-ordinate coffee mornings, sweat round charity runs or make music for fun; when we organise ourselves outside the market and the state, we are all civil society.

The task set for this inquiry was to consider the future for civil society. To do this we examined the environment in which civil society operates, the many pressures and changes it faces, and engaged groups, networks, organisations and individuals to develop a shared understanding of what the future might hold, and the role of civil society in shaping it.

What we found was both challenging and exciting.

We believe that civil society has a vital role to play in helping to address the challenges that lie ahead. Re-energised, civil society could be at the heart of the changes we need in our society as whole: reviving our dented democracy, rebuilding our social fabric and enabling us to address the great challenges of climate change and environmental degradation.

But civil society will not be able to do this without changing itself.

## **We live in a time of change, a time of enormous upheaval – and a time of unprecedented opportunity.**

Our **democracy** is questioned and many feel it is under threat. People are hungry for the power to make their lives, their community and their country better. We can see this hunger being voiced from the Brexit vote to #metoo, in the solidarity movements formed around people seeking asylum, in the response of the community around Grenfell Tower. But from national politics to our local neighbourhoods, too often that voice goes unheard – and too often it is turned to anger and division. We witness across the world the rise of populist movements and parties, offering easy answers to tricky questions. Much loved and well-known institutions are being challenged as expectations change, accountability is demanded and trust is no longer a given – as the crises in Oxfam and other charities this year have shown.

But new movements and networks that respond, and organisations that adapt, can tap into this incredible new energy as a force for change, from confronting sexual abuse to communities saving their high streets.

In our changing **demographics** there are tensions and divides between generations, as for the first time within living memory young people experience a lower standard of living than their parents. Our population is ageing, throwing into question old certainties about how we pay for our social safety net and expectations for later life. There are many more people living with disabilities and long-term medical conditions – a triumph for them and for medical science, but our social fabric needs to catch up. Patterns of family life are changing – with more single-person households, more separated families, more self-determination. We have greater diversity and differences in faith, ethnicity and identity than ever before – and that’s a cause for celebration. But it also demands change.

As we’ve seen in social upheavals of the past, such as more women going into paid work during the Second World War, and the waves of immigration in the decades that followed, each change is an opportunity to renew and revitalise our society, to find new ways to value each other and connect.

The transformative impacts of **digital** change, automation and globalisation are reshaping how we work, live and interact. They have brought huge benefits but we also risk a more disconnected, less human, less equal world, with ever-deeper and sharper divisions between places, generations, races, faiths, social classes and more.

But these changes also open up incredible possibilities barely imaginable even a decade ago, to connect with each other, create with each other, understand each other and support each other, if we can shape and use the tools for good.

Both **austerity and inequality** have made life much tougher for many and radically altered the environment for many civil society organisations, for local authorities and for central government. This landscape is fundamentally different from

a decade ago and we must respond in the decade ahead.

It will not be easy, and it questions many of our old assumptions, but from the management of libraries to changing land ownership we can see the seeds of experimentation with new models.

And there are more upheavals to come.

Our **environment** is changing fast, with climate, species loss and other major issues becoming increasingly urgent, affecting current and future generations.

Our **economy’s** future is uncertain, as people on all sides of the political debate question fundamentals such as the future of work, the role of the state and markets, and how we can prosper in the decades ahead.

## **A strong civil society is urgently needed to shape the future.**

We need to take on these big issues for our society, bring people together and lead change. These challenges are urgent, the time to act is now and we must take them on.

But responding to times of greatest need is what we have always done. Civil society is at its best at times of change.

When the Industrial Revolution transformed our cities, it was civil society that organised to combat the squalor and chaos, built housing and supported people to make a better life.

After the horrors of the two world wars it was civil society that supported displaced people, refugees and traumatised veterans, and helped to rebuild our country.

In the 1960s and 1970s we organised anew around homelessness and domestic violence, and in the 1980s, seeing the horrors of AIDS, the gay community mobilised heroically to demand a better response.

Today it is civil society that organises to welcome refugees, to open food banks, to conserve our precious wildlife, to show that black lives matter, to fight for internet freedoms.

Civil society has never just stood on the sidelines and watched. There is a golden thread throughout our history: civil society renewing, reshaping, reinventing and making a difference.

Neither the market nor the state alone can re-thread our social fabric, rebuild our democracy and respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing age. We must be at the heart of it. We must lead the way.

## **But civil society can't do it in its current form. We must change to be fit for the future.**

Civil society risks becoming irrelevant if we do not change. We must be in step with – or a step ahead of – the times we live in.

If we do not respond to people and communities' desire for power, we will lose our legitimacy and waste the potential of the many ways they can have agency over what matters to them. We will waste the tremendous potential of civil society to thrive through change.

If we are not accountable enough to those we are here to serve, we will lose our way and miss abuse and misconduct.

If we do not connect closely enough and deeply enough with the people who matter, we will lose touch and fail to deliver the changes we seek. And if we don't connect within civil society – national and local, small and large, generalist and specialist – we will not rise to the opportunities we face.

If we do not continually, bravely work to build trust, we will lose the essential foundation for everything we do.

As the world we are in changes, so must we. We all have a stake in civil society's future health: government and business and people everywhere rely on us.

## **So how do we change?**

For too long there have been high-level reports that bear little relationship to the real experiences of people working and taking part in civil society.

This report reflects the realities people face and the very significant, focused changes they have told us they want to see – people across many different parts of civil society, at all levels, in all organisations, large and small, old and new. These issues need to be heard and understood, both in Torbay and on the Today programme, they are as vital in Walsall as in Westminster.

We have heard – from long-established organisations and new start-ups, from challenger organisations and from incumbents, from small local charities and networks of young people – that collectively we can and must seize the opportunity to shape the future, rediscovering our enduring purpose: to connect in order to shift power.

We have listened very carefully, and heard time and again that, too often in civil society, size, turnover and short-term measures of impact are treated as the best measures of success. What we have heard loud and clear is that real and long-lasting success comes from the depth and breadth of connections with people and communities, and the opportunity for everyone involved to have some power.

We have heard that people really care about the **place** where they live. Young and old have a passion for their neighbourhood, town, city. And they need spaces where then can meet – can be, can talk, can celebrate, can mourn.

We have heard that people see civil society as a way of expressing their sense of **belonging and identity**. And that this is challenging, and contested, but important.

We have heard that **work** is changing, and that less and less does it provide the meaning and purpose that is essential to us all.

And we've heard that the **ways we organise** aren't always right for what we want to do now. That people are coming together in looser networks and movements, as well as forming charities and new forms of enterprise. And that the ways we organise need to keep pace with people's expectations.

## **A call to everyone in civil society to commit to a shared PACT.**

To change for the future, all of us within civil society and those who interact with civil society need to respond with care, courage and commitment. Local community groups and large national charities, new online movements and established funders, sector bodies, regulators and government.

What needs to be done will be different for each one of us. But together we know how to transform civil society and transform society for the better.

These ideas have come together in a shared PACT for civil society, created from the views and ideas of civil society, bringing together our collective energy and experience. It is a call for all of us in civil society – people, organisations and institutions – to commit to:

- **Power:** consciously shifting power in big ways, sharing more decision-making and control, being a model for the rest of society and doing whatever is needed so that everyone can play a full part in the things which matter to them.
- **Accountability:** holding ourselves accountable first and foremost to the communities and people we exist to serve, revolutionising our approach – including being more accountable to each other and to future generations.
- **Connection:** broadening and deepening our connections with people and communities – especially when it's hardest – for this is the heart of civil society's purpose, bridging the frequent divides that span our society and investing in a new social infrastructure for civil society.
- **Trust:** devoting the time and resources necessary to building trust – our core currency and foundation – earning trust by staying true to our values and standing up for them, and trusting others with vital decisions that affect them.

Some inquiries end with a list of specific recommendations, usually addressed to other people. This one ends with an urgent call for us all to behave differently in order to meet the challenges of the next decade.

It is our behaviours, attitudes and practices that will allow us genuinely to shape the next decade. We know how to do it – we don't need to wait for permission, so let's get on with it.

**Julia Unwin**

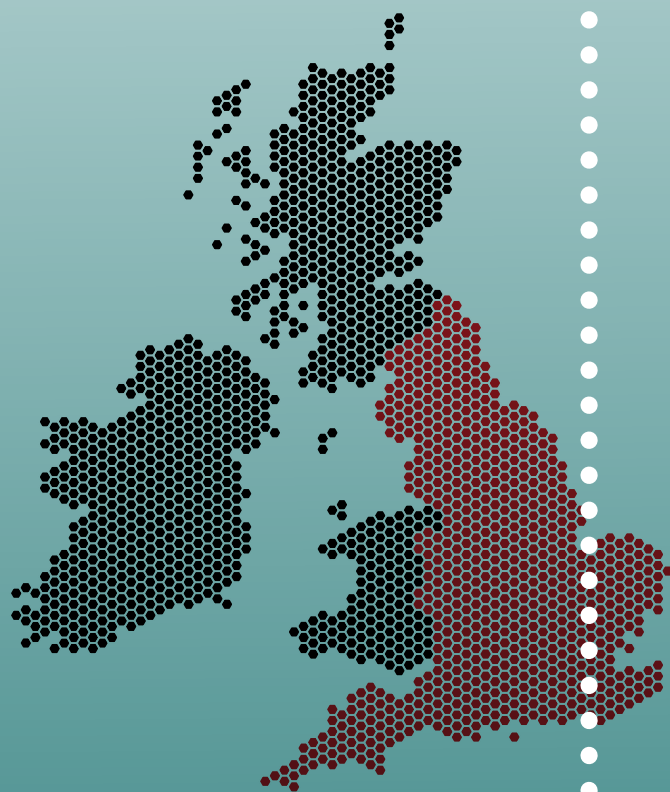
**Chair, Civil Society Futures**







# Civil Society Futures journey.



We've heard from over **3,000** people



Literature review with **186** references



**50+** conferences and events



**6** youth events



**27** community workshops  
in **9** places from Penzance to Sunderland



**50** interviews by Community Researchers



**70** people took part in Let's Talk About Race events



**40** interviews with activists and bridge builders



**250** meetings with civil society leaders



**120** blogs and articles

Learn more about our approach:  
[civilsocietyfutures.org/approach](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/approach)

# Who we are



The inquiry was guided by an independent panel of people, bringing a unique set of skills and perspectives to this journey, ranging from theatre-making in South Wales to technology investment in Gaza, local government in the North of England to the world's alliance of civil society organisations.

The panel was chaired by Julia Unwin, who was Chief Executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for 10 years and Charity Commissioner from 1998–2003. It included Asif Afridi who works for brap, a national equality and human rights charity; Sarah Gordon, business editor of the Financial Times; Bert Massie, a leading disability rights campaigner, who served on the panel before he sadly died in October 2017; Debu Purkayastha, Managing Partner at 3rd Eye, a venture capital and private equity firm; Dhananjayan Sivaguru Sriskandarajah, Secretary General of CIVICUS, a global alliance of civil society organisations; Rhiannon White, co-founder of Common Wealth Theatre; Carolyn Wilkins, Chief Executive of Oldham Council; and, Steve Wyler, an independent consultant and former Chief Executive of Locality, with 30 years experience in the field of social change.

The inquiry was powered by a collaborative team of individuals, bringing skills from four unique organisations: Citizens UK, with its roots in communities across England; Forum for the Future, with its experience of helping people figure out how the world is changing and how best to respond; Goldsmiths, University of London, with its expertise in research; and, openDemocracy, to engage discussion and debate about the role of civil society in England.

The inquiry was funded by eight foundations: Baring Foundation, Barrow Cadbury, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, City Bridge Trust, Esmée Fairbairn, Lankelly Chase, Lloyds Bank Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Additional research support was provided by NCVO.

Thanks to all those who have been part of the extended team making Civil Society Futures possible: Margaret Bolton, Adam Dinham, Deborah Grayson, Calum Green, Sunny Hundal, Laurie Macfarlane, Julia Oertli, Adam Ramsay and Cathy Runciman.



## Team



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## Panel



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James Goodman



Steve Wyler



Bert Massie



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Asif Afridi



Sarah Gordon



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Tom Greenwood

# Introduction

## Can civil society be the change we need?

This inquiry into the future of civil society in England has taken place during a period of great change and uncertainty. From Brexit to the growing prominence of artificial intelligence (AI), increases in poverty and persistent inequality, the ongoing effects of austerity, decreases in trust and a profound alienation that speaks of a deep-seated crisis for democracy, along with shocking new data about the rapid decline of the natural world (IPCC, 2018), the inquiry has heard the real difficulties and challenges the current context presents. But we have also heard how people are coming together to meet those challenges, to face issues collectively and inclusively, listening hard and changing their practices, while seeking out ways that social justice can be achieved and transformational change become possible. The seeds of hope are springing up across a civil society that is reclaiming a positive view of the future against all odds. A civil society providing services and support in incredibly difficult times. A civil society working with those who have been most 'done to', left behind and left out, seeking to redistribute power and control in favour of people and communities – helping to build people's power in the 21st century.

Of course, civil society alone cannot deal with the impacts of globalisation, automation, inequality and austerity. But civil society can organise, can innovate and can respond. It can make sure that overlooked and ignored people and places are heard, and that their voices are listened to. It can ensure that there is no hiding place for poverty, discrimination and intolerance. Civil society, the state and the market all depend on each other, but it is often civil society that is closest to the issues on the ground. Yet, too often, we heard from people in civil society that decisions about them are made without them. That politics is something that is done to people and places, not by people in places. Where those in power fail to see issues – child sexual exploitation, the experience of the Windrush generation over the last couple of decades, the impact of Universal Credit on people and communities – those in civil society can alert us to the dangers ahead and to unforeseen outcomes. Civil society is the canary in the coal mine, the warning cry that shouts 'foul play' to power. Civil society itself has tremendous resource and power through its close knowledge of daily life. But, as members of civil society, we all need to develop practices of listening more acutely and working better with the knowledge that civil society embodies, to bring about transformational change.

Change, as we know, is in civil society's DNA. Civil society is made up of organisations with a purpose and a passion, hard-wired to respond to turbulent times. Throughout history, civil society has led the way in responding to major issues at global, national and local levels. Think of the explosion in civil society activity providing services and improving people's lives in response to the squalor and misery generated through



the industrial revolution, and the subsequent transformation of our cities, towns and villages as civil society became a powerful voice for change; the ways in which civil society mobilised to support displaced people and refugees after the horrors of the two great European wars; how gay men and lesbians, supported by a coalition of activists, mobilised and created an amazing alliance between scientists and activists to respond to the Aids and HIV crisis; how a transnational anti-apartheid movement responded to the global context of decolonisation in solidarity with anti-colonial struggles in South Africa; and how, 100 years ago, the suffragettes campaigned to get women the vote. Civil society is often the first to see the consequences of major social crisis, and the best placed to respond through providing services, building assets, enabling people to organise – powerfully, angrily and effectively.

The inquiry learned that civil society is everywhere and all of us are involved. There are no cold spots of civil society activity anywhere in England. But there are people and places that are overlooked and ignored. People and places that are excluded from the sites where power resides and decisions are made. Participants in the inquiry told us repeatedly, how power over their own lives was depleted; a prevailing sense that existing democracy doesn't work for the majority, and never will unless there are new forms of governance with genuine participation in which everyone can challenge and change the systems they are part of. Civil society has at its core the capacity to build connections and bring into being the power in our communities. The inquiry found a civil society that enables people to connect, to find strength together, to organise and respond quickly to emotional, practical and political needs. This matters urgently.

**“Every single thing that has been won for the wider larger population [...] particularly those at the rough end of it has been won through local grass-roots organising that eventually led to change at a higher level. The power is with people at a more privileged higher level, of course it is, and eventually it just**

**takes mass organisation [...] and usually it's the people hardest hit or who have been confronted with those hardest hit that are the first to get moving, and eventually things grow and grow, and suddenly, before you know it, not only has it become a mainstream opinion but it has galvanised people.”**  
**(Manchester Palestine Action)**

Civil society can help nurture meaningful relationships across diverse communities, spreading understanding and a sense of belonging that can build confidence and help create the circumstances in which communities can exercise power and agency. Just as Action for Children's works hard to engage young people in charting their own lives and creating capacity and agency, so too Scope has re-structured itself to ensure that disabled people are agents of their own destiny and are demanding the shift in power that the inquiry is heralding. In London, The Way Ahead, a joint initiative by civil society, public sector bodies and funders, is building a collaborative system of decision-making that seeks to co-produce an understanding of need and how to tackle it, while harnessing the power of 'unusual suspects' within communities so that civil society can thrive. Recently, we have also seen retail and hospitality workers come out together on a co-ordinated strike against precarious working conditions and low pay; and how a fossil fuels industry that could do great damage to efforts to combat climate change is being challenged by campaigners.

Civil society coming together out of necessity and making change happen.

The inquiry is in no doubt that a shift in power is needed. This is our main finding, and without it the consequences are potentially devastating. Power is a problem and too often is contained by the privileged. People and communities want much more – they want to realise their own power and use it. The challenge of shared power is real and difficult, and as vital for civil society organisations to address in their own practices as it is to redistribute power in society more broadly.

Just as the Church Urban Fund, with its emphasis on building strong and deep relationships, has engaged with power at its most fundamental and challenging level, so too we have heard from housing associations, arts organisations, advocacy bodies, social enterprises and community development agencies, of the need for a dramatic shift in power that speaks directly to the concerns and purposes of all civil society organisations. A recognition that an enduring purpose of civil society has been to build understanding, bridge divisions and connect communities to realise power to change: to connect parents of children with severe disabilities so that their voices can be heard by those who exert power; to connect people forced to use food banks so that their experience can shape and change public policy; to connect people who often feel that they have no power with those who wield it, and the need to make them listen. It is these connections that make possible the sort of profound shift in power that is going to be necessary in the future. A future which all of our analysis suggests risks being very much less human.

To shift power means understanding who has been shut out from power and tackling racism, discrimination, inequality and exclusion in all our practices to ensure civil society is reflective and protective of our diverse humanity. The desire to redistribute power is a common exhortation, but change seldom happens. The work of the inquiry revealed that the demand for change is deeply felt, and a revived, re-energised and emboldened civil society can really help to lead the way on some of the biggest issues of our time.

Many people and organisations have already recognised the challenges ahead and are finding ways to address them. The inquiry has created a PACT that offers one possible road map for navigating the difficulties we face and creating more hopeful futures. It is one possible route of many, yet the inquiry is clear that Power, Accountability, Connection and Trust need our urgent attention if civil society is to meet the challenges of the next decade.





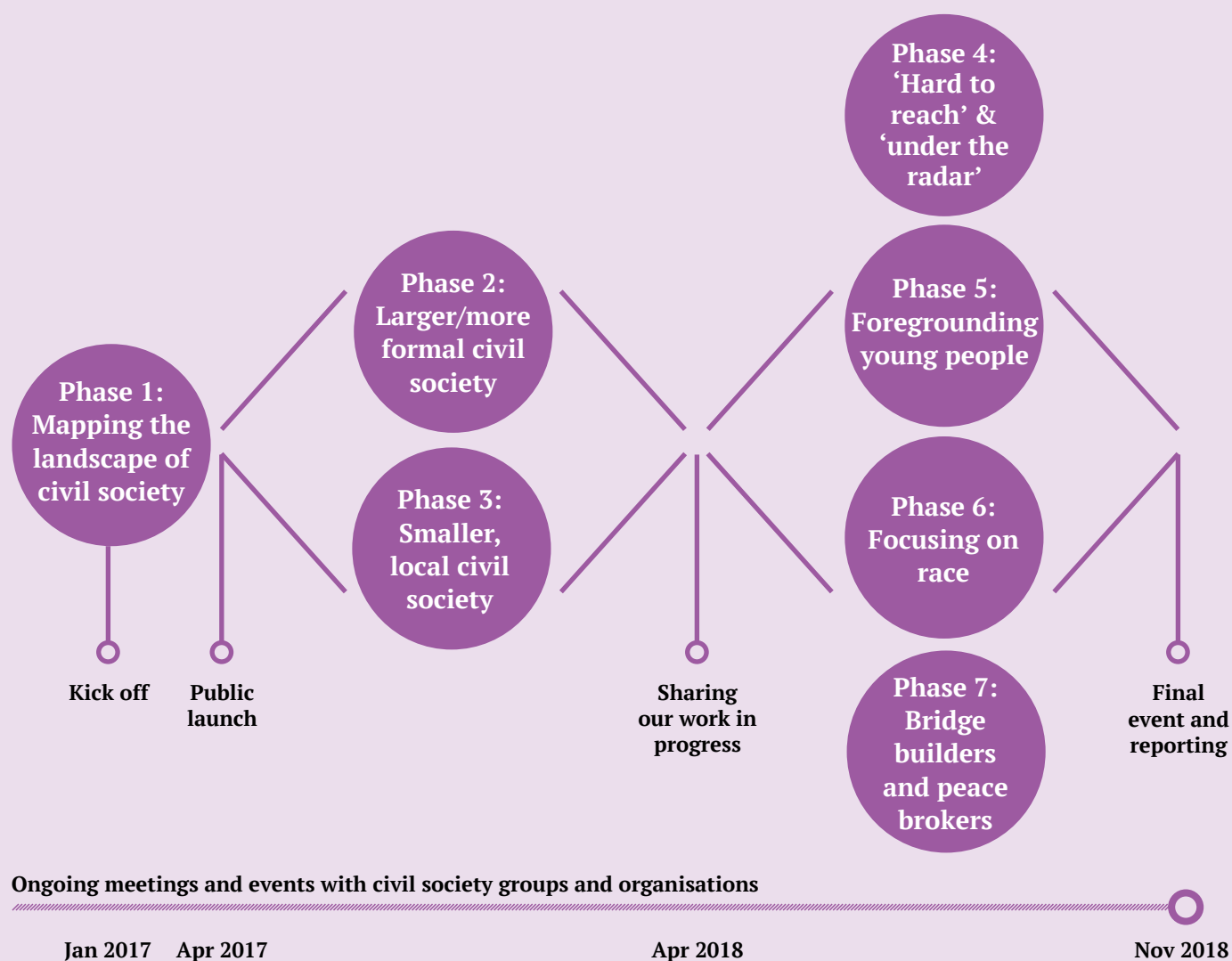
# Principles in practice

The report embodies the principles and continuing spirit of the inquiry to be humble, listen intently, be broad and inclusive in our approach and bold in our vision:

- **Action-oriented:** drawing upon new ideas from civil society actors while being rooted in rigorous evidence.
- **A process that creates value:** we have taken the premise of participatory action research to try work with rather than on civil society.
- **Sustainability driven:** through addressing long-term social and environmental trends we have been investigating how civil society can develop in sustainable forms for sustainable ends.
- **Systemic:** by seeking to understand the social, political, economic, environmental and technological factors that provide the context in which civil society functions, we have developed complex, systemic insights into how power works within civil society and around it.
- **Iterative and open:** by accepting there is no single, definitive answer to the many challenges civil society faces and embracing a range of types of knowledge and experience.
- **People-centred:** many people who have contributed to the inquiry have told us how much they value face-to-face conversations as a chance to develop relationships and seek deeper forms of understanding. We have tried to do this as much as possible, reaching out across England, from Newcastle to Penzance.
- **Fun:** civil society is often the place where people deal with the hard issues that society faces – increases in loneliness, problems with mental health, debt, unaffordable housing, to name just a few. But it is also the place where people find joy and purpose. We have realised just how important it is to seek out the joy and to remember to have fun – not as a glib aside for a civil society often operating at the hardest edges of life but as a fundamental part of human flourishing.

# What we have done

The inquiry used an inclusive definition of civil society: When we act not for profit nor because the law requires us to, but out of love or anger or creativity, or principle, we are civil society. When we bring together our friends or colleagues or neighbours to have fun or to defend our rights or to look after each other, we are civil society. Whether we organise through informal friendship networks, social media groups, community events and protests, or formal committees, charities, faiths and trade unions; whether we block runways or co-ordinate coffee mornings, sweat round charity runs or make music for fun; when we organise ourselves outside the market and the state, we are all civil society.



Inevitably this approach lent itself to a range of mixed methods best suited to the particular participants involved and the questions explored. As more questions came to the fore, so different people and organisations became part of the inquiry, in a constant deliberative process of reflexivity and methodological evolution. This has given us an abundance of often unruly data, matched by the huge diversity of people and groups we spoke to and heard from. But in each case our intention was to bring a futures thinking perspective to bear with a focus on action and participation.

From the outset, we were clear that an inquiry focused on the future of civil society must focus on those people involved in creating it. This approach was welcomed by those who took part. A common frustration expressed in many of the meetings, interviews, conversations, focus groups and workshops was that, all too often, people come in and do research on civil society without ever giving anything back to it. The inquiry responded to this in its practices and its approach to research. Wherever possible, we worked with people in forms of engaged research, rather than doing research on them from a distance.

The mixed methods approach within a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework is explained further in Appendix 1.

This extended report draws on the daily work the inquiry team has been involved in since January 2017. It is described below in seven phases of activity. From the very many meetings, conferences, workshops, conversations and submissions of evidence, to participatory action research, interviews and the expertise of the inquiry panel, we have attempted to reach across the vast array of activity that civil society encompasses, consider the futures that may lie ahead and how civil society can best prepare for them. In our efforts to provide the means for as broad a range as possible of people and groups to contribute to the inquiry and come together to articulate their own visions of the future, we heard from over 3,000 people across the length and breadth of England. Still, we are well aware that we have come nowhere near to covering all that civil society is, and nor have we understood everything

that it is doing. Rather, we have taken a series of snapshots across the diversity of civil society life and attempted to piece together what we have found, and make sense of it, while recognising that there is much else besides.

## **Phase 1: Mapping the landscape of civil society research**

We have looked carefully at existing research in order to cover the widest range possible of literature on civil society, digital democracy, volunteering, social movements, activism and protest analysis, and to track the latest trends and developments across areas important to social action and empowering communities. We took account of social, political, economic, environmental and technological trends, focusing in on issues that allowed us to make a more systemic critique of power and the possibilities for change. This [initial review of research](#) in the field has underpinned and informed our thinking throughout.

We have tried at every juncture to ensure that we are not just thinking about the nature of civil society as we find it now or how change has happened to date, but also what might be on the horizon, and therefore what social transformation might look like.

We have also mapped and convened conversations between the work of six other related inquiries:

- [Empowered Communities in 2020](#) (Local Trust, IVAR)
- [Future of Civil Society in the North](#) (IPPR)
- [The Social Change Project](#) (Sheila McKechnie Foundation)
- [Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations](#) (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation)
- [Future of Localism](#) (Locality, Power to Change, Queen Mary University)
- [Creating Confidence - Good and Bad Help](#) (Osca, Nesta)

While also sought to take account of the work of others, including:

- [Future of Doing Good](#) (Big Lottery Fund)



- Stronger Communities (Comic Relief UK)
- [Citizens' Economic Council](#) (RSA)
- [Commission on Economic Justice](#) (IPPR)
- Community Life Survey 2017-18
- [HM Government Civil Society Strategy: Building a Future That works for Everyone](#)
- UK Civil Society Almanac 2018, (NCVO)
- [Digital Campaigning and the voices of lived experience](#) (Social Change Agency)
- [Transforming Lives with Tech: A global Conversation](#) (Nominet Trust)
- [Skittled Out? The Collapse and Revival of England's Social Infrastructure 2018](#) (Local Trust)
- [The Future of Community Business](#) (Power to Change)
- [The Way Ahead](#)

## Phase 2: Listening to larger and more formal civil society actors and organisations

Our [call for evidence and contributions](#) received substantive reports from 57 people or organisations from within the more formal parts of civil society (see Appendix 2). The inquiry also met with a wide range of umbrella and infrastructure organisations such as Locality, National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NACVA), Voluntary Organisations' Network North East (VONNE), National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), to name but a few, and participated in a constant stream of conferences and events around England.

People within civil society also responded to our call to [hold 'conversations'](#), with 64 conversations taking place across England (see Appendix 3). These conversations were based on an open source toolkit inviting communities of interest, locality and practice to host dialogues on a topic important to them concerning civil society. The invitation was met with huge energy and appetite from a wide range of people, organisations, groups and collectives, including leaders in the sector and grass-roots activists – all echoing the need for more opportunities and spaces for genuine dialogue and

exploration. From the Plymouth Octopus Project, VONNE, Southampton, York and Leicestershire CVS', The Blagrove Project and Community Action Milton Keynes to the Royal Society of Arts, the Centre for Science and Policy at the University of Cambridge and Bradford Cathedral, the many conversation convenors were motivated by a variety of reasons: to enable people from their own organisations to reflect and discuss how civil society is changing around them, to convene different stakeholders around a specific topic or issue, or to host an open forum for debate that any member of the public could join in. From this phase of active listening, insights and a developing understanding of issues were fed through to the other strands of the inquiry.

## Phase 3: Understanding smaller, local civil society actors and organisations

Much research on civil society focuses on charities and voluntary organisations that are easily identifiable from registers or membership lists. The inquiry adopted a much broader, more inclusive, and much more challenging, but more accurate, approach to civil society. We sought to understand how people felt part of civil society in their daily lives and practices, where the smaller and often less formalised parts of civil society can be found. We visited nine areas, returning to each three to four times. Local sites were selected to cover a mix of geography (because we know place matters), politics (because council activity, local infrastructure and support is important) and socio-economic factors (because poverty and inequality are persistently relevant to civil society activity). These variables were taken from important markers for civil society that emerged from the literature review in Phase 1 and continued to be flagged in Phase 2.

Our initial visits involved nine qualitative workshops (organised either by Citizens UK as partners in the inquiry, or by other civil society groups/individuals based in the localities themselves).

Alongside the workshops we undertook a basic socio-demographic mapping exercise that sourced background data to inform the workshops, including key socio-economic, cultural, historical and civil

Location	Geography	Politics	Socio-economic	Notable features	Session lead
Peckham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South London</li> <li>• Urban</li> <li>• Borough of Southwark</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour Council since 2010</li> <li>• 72.8% voted Remain in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southwark is 41st most deprived local authority. Peckham is among the most deprived parts of Southwark</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Density of civil society activity</li> <li>• Gentrification</li> <li>• Rising property prices</li> </ul>	Peckham Citizens UK
Marks Gate, Romford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater London</li> <li>• Urban</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borough of Barking and Dagenham</li> <li>• Labour MPs</li> <li>• Labour council</li> <li>• 62.4% voted Leave in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barking and Dagenham ranks 1st on average nationally for income deprivation, 3rd most deprived for education, skills and training and 3rd for crime</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of the neighbourhood programme Every One Every Day initiative, run through the Participatory City Foundation</li> </ul>	Marks Gate Citizens UK
Mansfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nottinghamshire</li> <li>• Market town</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turned Conservative in 2017 for first time since 1885</li> <li>• 70.9% voted Leave in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-industrial: coal mining and textiles</li> <li>• Ranked 59th most deprived local authority out of 326</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre of the bitter miners' strike dispute in the 1980s</li> </ul>	Mansfield Citizens UK
Shirebrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North East District of Bolsover, Derbyshire</li> <li>• Rural town</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MP: 1 Labour</li> <li>• Council: 16 Labour</li> <li>• 70.3% voted Leave in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-industrial mining town</li> <li>• Ranked 61st most deprived local authority out of 326</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sports Direct set up directly on the site of the old mine, employing hundreds of migrant workers</li> </ul>	Citizens UK
Oldham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North West</li> <li>• Town in Greater Manchester</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MPs: 2 Labour</li> <li>• Co-operative council: Labour, 46; Liberal Democrats, 9; Conservatives, 2; UKIP, 1; independents, 2</li> <li>• 60.1% voted Leave in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-industrial mill town</li> <li>• Ranked 51st most deprived local authority out of 326</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High minority ethnic population</li> <li>• History of protest: Luddite, Suffragette etc.</li> </ul>	Inquiry panel member (Oldham Council)
Newcastle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North East</li> <li>• University city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MPs: 3 Labour</li> <li>• Newcastle City Council: Labour, 55; Liberal Democrats, 20; independents, 3</li> <li>• 50.7% voted Remain in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ranked 92nd most deprived local authority out of 326</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-industrial: ship building</li> <li>• Urban regeneration</li> <li>• Arts and culture investment</li> </ul>	Newcastle Citizens UK
Sunderland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North East</li> <li>• University city</li> <li>• Coastal community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MPs: 3 Labour</li> <li>• Council: Labour, 66; Conservative, 6; Liberal Democrats, 2; independents, 1</li> <li>• 61.3% voted Leave in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ranked 92nd most deprived local authority out of 326; ranked 9th most deprived for employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post -industrial: shipping</li> </ul>	Citizens UK
Epsom and Ewell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market town in Surrey in South East</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MP: Conservative</li> <li>• Epsom and Ewell Borough: Residents Association, 26; Liberal Democrats, 6; Labour, 3; Conservatives, 3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the 20% least deprived districts in England</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity to Greater London; Metropolitan Green Belt under threat of development</li> </ul>	Local civil society actor
Penzance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South West</li> <li>• Rural</li> <li>• Coastal community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MP: Conservative</li> <li>• Penzance Town Council: independents, 10; Liberal Democrats, 8; Mebyon Kernow, 1</li> <li>• 57% voted Leave in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treneere in Penzance is the most deprived neighbourhood in Cornwall</li> <li>• Cornwall ranked 143rd out of 326 local authority areas for deprivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High levels of second (holiday) home ownership</li> <li>• Tourism (seasonal) economy</li> </ul>	Local civil society actor (Volunteer Cornwall)

society characteristics of the localities we visited. These were given to participants in the workshops and then refined with feedback from them to give a situated account that provided the necessary context for the research process.

In total, 148 people were involved in these initial workshops. Participants were recruited by people who were active in civil society in the area. We asked for as much diversity as possible, taking account of gender, age, ethnicity, faith, social class and disability in particular. (In the event, younger people, broadly conceived as 18-30 years old, were under-represented in the workshops, and as a consequence became part of separate line of inquiry.) From these participants 36 people volunteered to act as Community Researchers, who then went on to interview other people in the locality in an attempt to bring about broader and more inclusive discussions. In all, 50 Community Researcher interviews were undertaken.

## Phase 4: Focus groups and interviews: ‘hard to reach’ and ‘under the radar’ groups

Several of the Community Researchers became involved in feeding back thoughts and ideas as the research developed, as well as discussing what could be done to actively build on these findings within the places we visited.

Return visits to the nine areas took two approaches: Citizens UK worked explicitly in three sites (Peckham, Newcastle and Mansfield) to bring people together to explore and take action on a locally relevant issue. The purpose was to investigate what the inquiry meant in practice in local contexts, by

Place	Issue	Focus of activity
Mansfield	Local identity and belonging in Mansfield	How can a local community tell its own story and make Mansfield known as the most welcoming place in England?
Newcastle	Grassroots democracy and devolution in Newcastle	How can the 2019 mayoral election for the new North of Tyne combined authority enable local people and communities to have more power over decision-making?
Peckham	Youth power and violence in Peckham	How can we as a community tackle rising levels of youth violence in Peckham?

understanding a specific issue as it is seen through the eyes of those who are experiencing it, then figuring out what this issue would look like in the world as people think it should be and developing the actions to get there.

Each of these three self-organising groups involved those who attended the first workshops in Phase 3 and also drew upon Citizen UK’s existing relationships with local communities to include a wide range of civil society actors specifically relevant to particular themes. The aim was for workshops to be attended by a consistent group of people, to allow sufficient time and space to build connections and an understanding of each issue. Three further workshops were held in each of these three areas.

As these chapters were self-organising around issues of local concern and around real-world social and political developments, timings of activity extend beyond the inquiry. In Mansfield,





90 people convened to hear testimonies from those who had been supported by befriending, and won a commitment from the council to work together over the coming months to develop a befriending service. In Newcastle, a new alliance has formed of existing civil society institutions, to put local decision-making on the agenda of forthcoming North of Tyne Combined Authority mayoral elections. In Peckham, school exclusions have been identified as a key driver to rising youth violence, and teachers and students have begun work on a new campaign to ensure the most vulnerable young people are not left behind.

Within the remaining six sites (Penzance, Epsom and Ewell, Marks Gate, Shirebrook, Sunderland and Oldham) we held a focus group with the Community Researchers to reflect on the discussions that came out of the first workshop, to understand better the nature of civil society activity and what they felt were priorities for civil society in their area going forward. The Community Researchers then linked us to further civil society groups and actors that were revealed in the research process to suffer from exclusion and discrimination in the areas we visited. A further focus group was undertaken with these ‘hard to reach’ groups. The purpose of these focus groups was to determine current conditions and possibilities of civil society in these localities through the eyes of those who often struggle the most to be heard. Where focus groups were impossible due to participants’ difficulties of time and resource in attending external meetings, we visited the groups in situ and spent time with them.

With the help of the Community Researchers we also interviewed up to three key actors in civil society in each locality (25 in total) from informal locally networked groups with an explicit political/social or environmental justice and protest dimension – those who set out with an explicit mission to make change happen. We also interviewed groups without a local place-based focus that fitted this remit. These grassroots activist and advocacy organisations were often found ‘under the radar’, and are concerned with systemic change and with a futures dimension that is intrinsic to their work (see Appendix 4). Sometimes these individuals and

groups felt that they were being pushed ‘under the radar’ because it was increasingly difficult to be public about the work they did while still fulfilling the requirements of funding agencies or charitable status. And sometimes they had sunk ‘under the radar’ because they were running on empty with no space to operate from or time to make themselves more visible.

## **Phase 5: Foregrounding young people**

Although it was never intended that the workshops, focus groups and interviewees would be fully representative of the local populations we visited, when we looked closely at the people who had been involved, there were clear gaps in areas that participants had raised as important. In particular, young people (below 30 years of age) were largely absent from the civil society groups we were talking to, suggesting that generational divides are as much of an issue in civil society as they are in society generally. We addressed this concern with a specific youth-engagement activity, working with Rhiannon White (inquiry panel member and co-founder of Common Wealth Theatre). Together we identified youth groups across England that are pioneering approaches to working with young people using creative methods and seeking out lesser heard voices. We worked with the following four groups:

- GL4, Gloucester
- Speaker’s Corner, Bradford
- 20 Stories High, Liverpool
- Voices That Shake, London

Each group hosted a workshop, drawing on participatory theatre techniques to open up a conversation, build trust and understand young people’s hopes and fears for the future. These workshops explored what civil society meant for young people in a way that was relevant to them and their lives. The sessions followed an outline structure, but also evolved based on the input of those in the room. Each workshop was followed by a day of filming/podcast-making with the group, during which chose their shoot locations and decided on a message to share about the future to those who they see as having influence.

Each group then selected a youth ambassador, and together they designed and developed a survey of 1,000 young people to supplement the workshop process. They also hosted a youth residential event for those who took part in the workshops to create an opportunity for those involved to meet and collaborate around a shared creative response that expresses the future desires of those involved.

Finally, a film was made to share the voices and perspectives of those involved in the process.

Find out more about what we heard from young people at [civilsocietyfutures.org/youth](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/youth)

## Phase 6: Focusing on race

Racism was high on the public agenda during the inquiry, from hate crime on our streets, the treatment of the Windrush generation and the experience of the survivors of the Grenfell tower tragedy, through to Islamophobia in the media, there are increasing concerns that we're becoming a more racist society. The inquiry identified the difficulties much of civil society has in talking about and acting on race, racism and race inequality. In response, we undertook a strand of research working with Asif Afridi (an inquiry panel member) and brap, an organisation focused on transforming the way we think and do equality, to ask:

- Why is civil society not talking about 'race' and race inequality?
- What is the relationship between the championing and progression of race equality and civil society organisations?
- Is there a role that civil society can play in progressing race equality? Where are the barriers and where are the opportunities?

Using a mixture of interviews and facilitated groups discussions in Birmingham, London and York, this research spoke to British, Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) voluntary sector organisations, larger dominant organisations within civil society (such as ACEVO and Big Lottery Fund) as well as those with lived experience of racism and race inequality.

To read the full report on race in civil society visit [civilsocietyfutures.org/resources](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/resources)

## Phase 7: Bridge builders and peace brokers

A key issue that emerged during the inquiry was the idea of the 'other' in local communities. Identity mattered to people, enabling them to come together, gain confidence and take action. But it can also be a barrier, entrenching divisions and building tensions in communities, for example where violence, extremism, oppression, prejudice or poverty have impacted. The inquiry found many people seeking how to build bridges, spread understanding and find better ways to live together well. Innovative examples of 'bridge builders' and 'peace brokers' were explored further in three faith-based and one non-faith-based case studies, paying particular attention to the role of religion, belief, values and world-views, and to a mix of actors across sectors (state, private and civil society).

The case studies involved interviews and focus groups with four organisations:

(1) *Spaces of Hope* is an initiative in Stockport which describes itself as 'curating spaces of hope'. It brings together innovative mixes of civil society actors – from professional community practitioners through to individual community activists – to 'meaning-make' as a response to experiences of pointlessness and emptiness in personal, community and professional life.

(2) *Sadaqa Day* was established to initiate an annual day of social action in London, led by Muslim communities but reaching out across the faith and non-faith spectrum. The hope was that this would lead to new, sustainable relationships across difference and promote peace and harmony. The project started with some support from central government. It has since received very little funding, but has been sustainable because it taps into existing networks of grassroots community organising. Notably, most of the local co-ordinators have been Muslim women. This gender dimension is seen as important by the women involved because it provides a space in which they can decision-make in ways that are much more difficult within the mosques whose committees are (mostly) men-only.

(3) *Youth Violence* case study: this involved four initiatives working proactively to respond to youth violence by building relationships with young people vulnerable to being caught up in violence or violent gangs. Work in these initiatives is based on the philosophy that prevention is better than cure, and investment in young people is key. The current reliance on criminal justice approaches is seen to marginalise vulnerable young people and jeopardise their future before they have encountered alternative chances. With a chronic lack of trust in the state institutions and services that remain, civil society is playing a key role in building bridges with young people and maintaining a fractured peace. This civil society engagement is heavily reliant on local relationships, connection to a geographic community and a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by young people (an understanding that many team members have gained first hand).

(4) *London Queer Muslims* is seeking to challenge the dominant narratives about queer Muslims, both in the LGBTQIA+ community and in the Muslim community. The group is a place for the discussion and practice of Islam without needing to debate whether it is acceptable to be Muslim and queer. Their collective practice embodies the inclusion they seek by developing and sharing power among their members, both through their meetings and in the way they make decisions. They set up in 2017 and plan to become an 'official' charity or Community Interest Company (CIC).

The seven phases of the inquiry process gave a deeply textured and qualitative sense of what civil society is, the challenges it faces and what it could become in the future. It informed and underpins the PACT that the inquiry is calling for people, organisations and institutions to commit to.





↑  
PLAYGROUND

EXISTING  
ENTRANCE

Seating

WOODEN CHAIR ON WALL  
BOG HUT  
MONKEY BARS AGAINST FENCE  
CORNER SHAPE COVERED SPACE - CLIMBING FRAME  
NET IN MIDDLE  
TEPEE AREA

Shelter  
recyclable  
materials  
for  
Slater



# The future starts here

**“It is impossible to imagine a future unless we have located ourselves in the present and its history; however, the reverse is also true in that we cannot locate ourselves in the present and its history unless we imagine the future and commit to creating it.” (Stetsenko, 2015)**

## **Context and conditions of civil society practices**

To develop a compelling and relevant vision for what civil society in England could become, we need to understand the different connected factors that are shaping civil society now and may do so over the next decade. Across all the work of the inquiry we have been exploring what these factors might be – what makes people feel optimistic or pessimistic about the future, and what the future barriers and enablers might be for different people’s and groups’ visions for the future; what trends they feel are most important for civil society to consider, respond to or proactively shape.

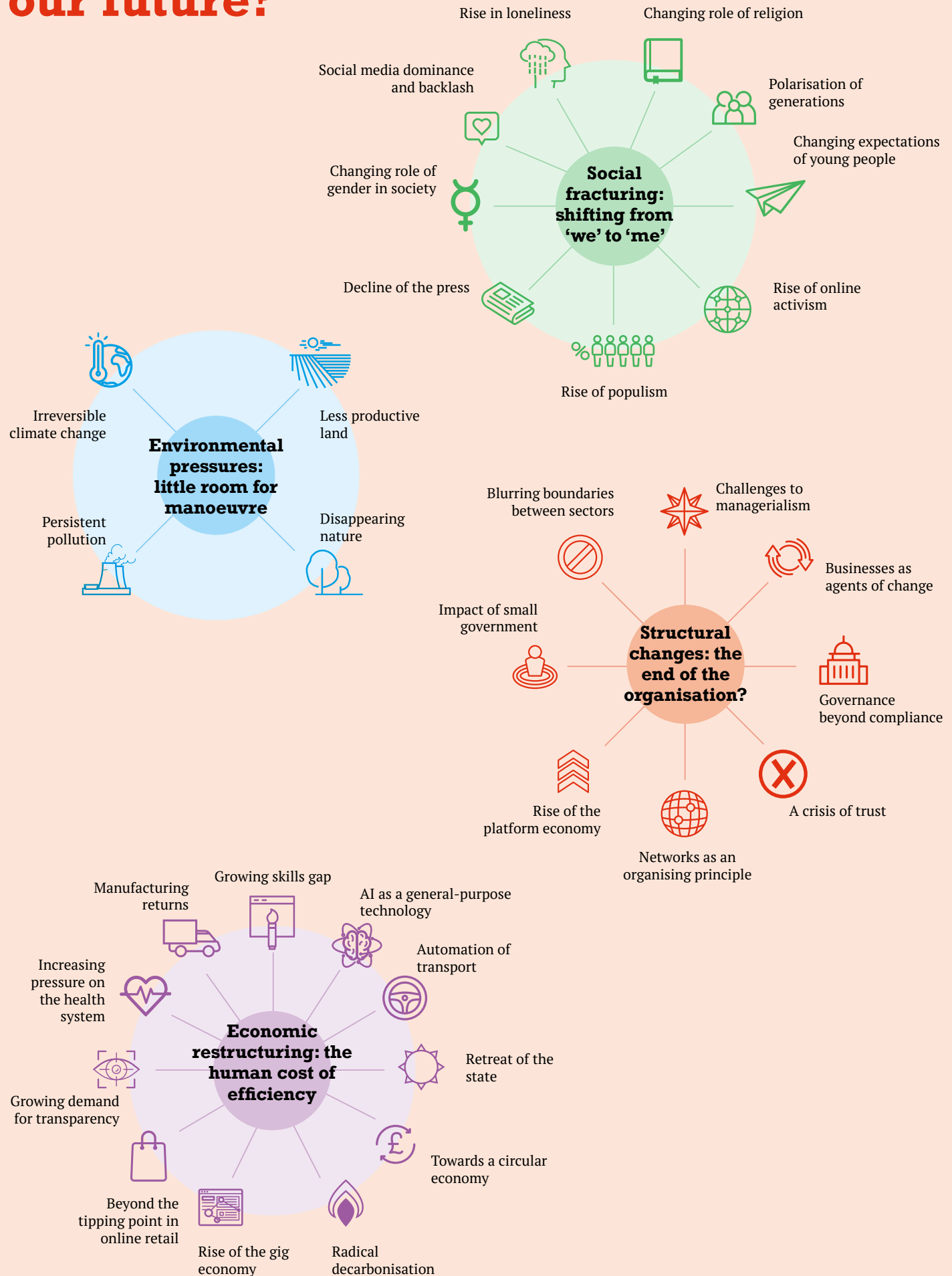
The trends diagram on the following pages pulls out seven main thematic areas that frame the context for any consideration of civil society futures: social fracturing, environmental pressures, structural changes, economic restructuring, personal precarity, the changing nature of place, and global volatility.

There are a number of specific trends, themes and signals of change within this very broad context came to the surface more emphatically during the work of the inquiry. They are covered in more detail in the context snapshots below.

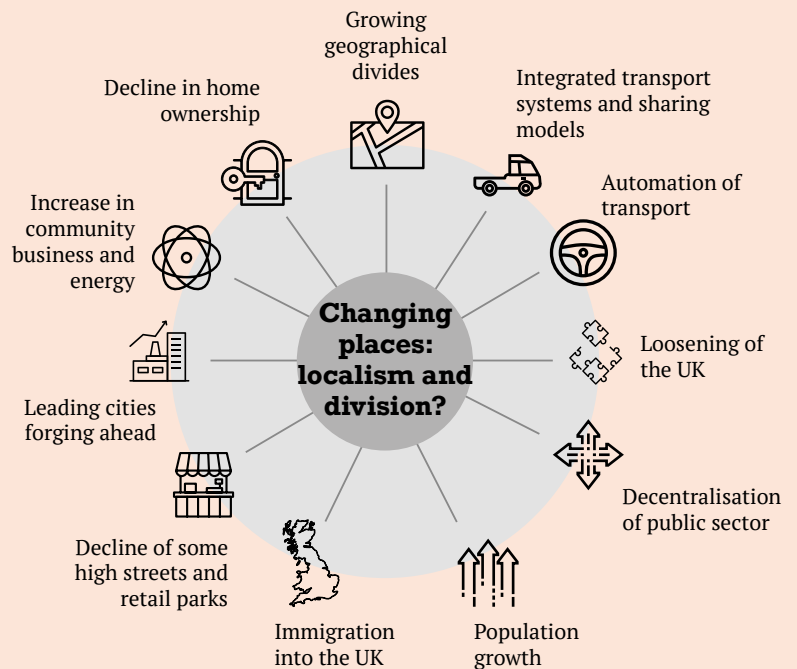
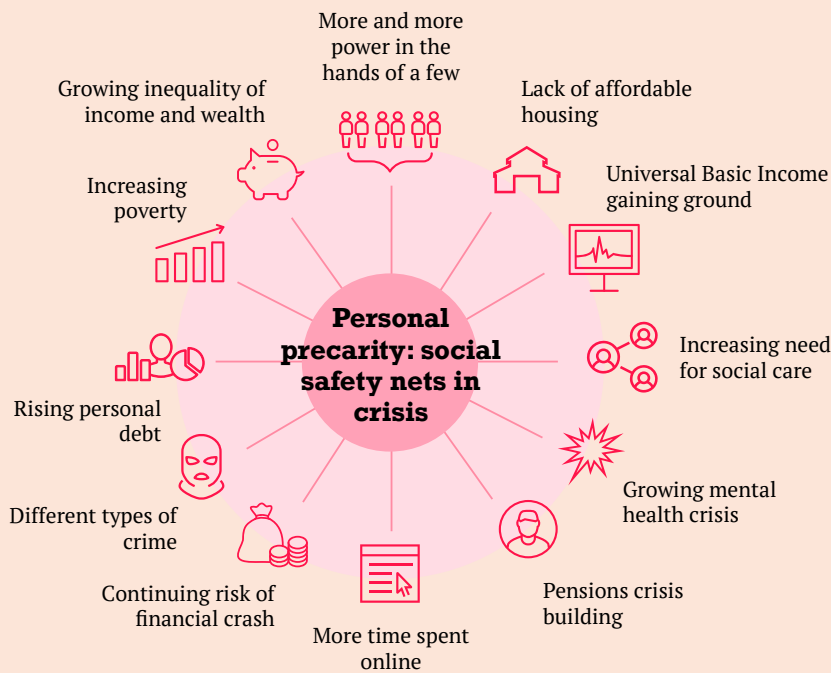
**Inequality of income and wealth: Since the 2008 financial crash the wealth of the richest 1% in the world has grown at an average of 6% per year compared to 3% for the rest. If this rate continues, the world’s richest 1% will own two-thirds of the world’s wealth by 2030 (House of Commons Library, 2018).** In the UK, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) notes that between 2011-12 and 2016-17 income inequality decreased slightly in the top half of income distribution and increased in the bottom half, due to reductions in benefits for poorer households and low earnings growth for high earners. But IFS predicts that inequality is likely to increase between now and 2022-23, as benefit cuts fall on lower-income households and earnings go up (Cribb, Keiller and Waters, 2018). The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR, 2018) commission on economic justice reveals how the financial health of the UK is divided along lines of income, geography, gender, ethnicity and age. It ranks the UK as the fifth most unequal country in Europe. All around us there are analyses of how inequality damages our societies, our economies and our democratic systems (Piketty, 2014; Dorling, 2014; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009, 2018).



# What are the trends shaping our future?







**Explore the full interactive map:**

[civilsocietyfutures.org/trends](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/trends)

Inequality is linked to but different from poverty. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation defines poverty as “when a person’s resources are not enough to meet their minimum needs”. In September 2018, the Social Metrics Commission revealed the persistence and depth of UK poverty. More than one in 10 (12.1% of the UK population or 14.2 million people) are in poverty, and have been so for the last two or three years. A further 2.5 million people live less than 10% above the poverty line and 2.7 million people live less than 10% below it. Disabled people are much more likely to be living in poverty. According to Armstrong (2018), an unprecedented 67% of British children in poverty now live in a household where someone is in work. Last year, UNICEF (2017) reported that nearly one in five children in the UK lack sufficient safe and nutritious food. The IFS (2017) has predicted that child poverty will rise from 15.1% in 2015 to 18.3% in 2020-21, mainly due to benefit changes forcing lower incomes down.

In England, between June 2010 and March 2016, a policy of deficit reduction resulted in cuts of £26 billion in UK social security and tax credits spending (Tinson et al., 2016). Young adults (16-24 years) were particularly hard hit by ‘rapidly falling real wages, incomes and wealth’ (Hills et al., 2015:3). Poverty is also strongly linked with disability and ethnicity, with people from black and minority ethnic communities experiencing multiple forms of socio-economic disadvantage. Austerity politics is a key factor, having consequences for the future of civil society.

Concentrations of wealth come with concentrations of power, highlighting the gap between the privileged and powerful and the poor and powerless. People feel increasingly ignored and are ever more aware that elite and corporate power often excludes them (Crouch, 2004, 2011). Perhaps it should come as no surprise that there is also a crisis of trust in institutions, and particularly in the government, with 67% of people saying that the government does not deliver on policy promises that protect average people (Edelman, 2018).

Prominent reports in the UK have observed, ‘[the] need for change; the need to seek the voice of marginalised and disadvantaged people in decision-

making processes is of undeniable and acute local, national and global relevance’ (RSA, 2017). Civil society has a vital role to play in ensuring that the places where decisions are made about resource allocation, the way things are run and developed, or discarded and decommissioned, are devised and driven by those whom these decisions will affect. Some charities and foundations have made great strides in inclusive and equal structures of governance and decision-making, but many more need to follow suit. The inquiry has developed the PACT framework as one means of helping people do this.

### **Localism and division: The places we live hold distinct and devastating markers of inequality.**

The economic gap between coastal and non-coastal communities has widened over the last 20 years in terms of economic output per head, low employee pay and high unemployment (Corfe, 2017). Meanwhile, the long-established north-south divide is steadily morphing into one between London and the rest, with the difference between our capital city and the rest of the country being the biggest of any country in Europe. London boasts nearly all of the social mobility hotspots (Social Mobility Commission, 2017), with children going to school in Westminster and receiving free school meals being five times more likely to go to university and then on to good jobs in London, than children elsewhere in the country. Recent signs of economic growth in Bristol, Manchester and Liverpool are pointing to a new east-west divide and disproportionate disadvantage in the rural areas of eastern England. As we go through the process of extracted divorce proceedings with the European Union (EU), a renewed focus on geographical asymmetries has emerged in recognition of their relationship to the Brexit vote. Some leaked predictions estimate that leaving the EU will further exacerbate place-based inequality, with England’s regions likely to grow 13-16% less than they would have done (Hutton and Adonis, 2018), and regions like Cornwall forecast to lose up to an additional £60 million per year in EU funding.

### **The rise of the ‘gig economy’: Characterised by insecure, temporary and freelance contracts,**

**the gig economy has increased the number of jobs and kept unemployment low, but has also further eroded basic workers' rights (Armstrong, 2018) as well as contributing to consumer concerns over safety and accountability.** Zero-hours and short-hours contracts, the norm of the gig economy, have disrupted dominant markets and both exploited and contributed to a low-wage workforce. For example, Uber has become dominant in personal transportation services, while take-away food services like Deliveroo gain in popularity. Often such workers are forced into 'self-employment' by employers keen to reduce their tax liability, avoid paying the minimum wage and deny workers rights. The TUC (2018) notes that of four million adults over 25 classified as self-employed, 49% (1.96 million) are earning less than the minimum wage. The need for better regulation and protection for workers has not gone unnoticed, and civil society has responded with a show of strength and determination. The first nationwide strike of its kind by workers from the retail and hospitality sector took place on 4 October 2018. The action was organised by War on Want, Unite and the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union; it involved strikers ranging from students and young workers at McDonalds and Wetherspoons through to couriers and drivers at Uber Eats and Deliveroo. We have also seen new unions emerge, such as the IWGB, which is explicitly focused on dealing with workforces that are precarious, low-paid and often suffering the worst employment practices of the gig economy. During the period of the inquiry, Unison also had success in securing the abolition of employment tribunal fees, and BALPA was recognised by Ryanair. These actions represent a civil society gearing up to face the many challenges of the future.

**Artificial intelligence as a general purpose technology, as well as machine-based learning, are argued to be on the brink of bringing forth major changes to the world of work as we know it, from health to education to law.** Job losses look likely although estimates of the possible extent and nature of the impact of these new technologies vary hugely (Lawrence, Roberts and King, 2017), opening up new ways of thinking about a fairer and better future for work and workers. Ideas such as

the Universal Basic Income (Hirsch, 2015; Lawrence and Mason, 2018; Painter, Thorold and Cooke 2018, Hirsch, 2015), Guaranteed Income (Hughes, 2018) and community wealth funds (such as the Alaska Permanent Fund) (Cummine, 2016) foreground the necessity of putting money in people's pockets, but can overlook the purpose and belonging that come with meaningful work. This has been addressed by the Enspiral Network, which focuses on the need to create more meaningful work (Miller, 2014), and others who turn to things like the possibility of a shorter working week (Srnicsek and Williams, 2015), which some companies are now trialling. Such initiatives raise interesting possibilities for the voluntary capacities of civil society. Similarly, as social enterprise and the community business sector grows (Power to Change 2016; Grayson, 2018) and we see a resurgence in co-operatives (Co-operatives UK, 2016; International Co-operative Alliance, 2017; Mayo, 2015) that position themselves as agents of social change, so these too raise new possibilities for civil society engagement.

**Retreat of the state and decentralisation of the public sector: Local authorities in England have suffered a 49.1% cut in core funding from central government between 2010-11 and 2017-18 (National Audit Office) and many feel that core funding will never return to previous levels.** Councils in the poorest areas of the UK have borne the largest cuts proportionally, as they were more reliant on central government grants. As a consequence, councils and other public agencies have sought to further outsource and share services as a means of reducing costs and improving performance. Compulsory competitive tendering for council contracts has been with us for many years, but there has been little research to explore whether outsourcing to for-profit companies provides value for money or improves performance (Walker and Tizard, 2018). In the wake of the Carillion crisis – one of the largest private suppliers of services to the public sector that went into liquidation in 2018 – there is fresh consideration of whether the outsourcing imperative is running out of steam. Several local councils (Croydon, Ealing, Harrow, Hounslow and Oxfordshire County Council) and other public institutions (the Southbank Centre,



Nottingham Hospital Trust, several universities and English Heritage) are now bringing services back in-house as they take stock of the National Audit Office's report in January 2018, which shows how PFI partnerships have squandered £200 billion mainly as a means of keeping debt off the Treasury's books.

While an emphasis on out-sourcing has placed decisions about public welfare and the public good outside of democratic institutions, it has also enabled many civil society organisations to survive and thrive. Civil society organisations have often been considered to bring added value to social services through being more in touch with people and having the necessary specialist skills that enable them to build social capital as well as provide services. But they find it difficult to compete with the large private contractors (Mohan and Breeze, 2016). There's little hope of a reversal of cuts to core government funding, and local councils are considering whether they are better off running things for themselves – this could cause major difficulties for some civil society organisations, while opening up fresh opportunities for citizen involvement in the public realm.

**Generational polarisation is a growing cause for concern.** Different experiences between the generations are increasingly being felt. Young people have undergone an unprecedented decline in their socio-economic conditions (Hills et al., 2015). State support has been withdrawn and this has left many young people in poverty. The introduction of tuition fees for university degrees means that many young people are now facing a lifetime of debt with little prospect of secure employment and work stability. Home ownership is increasingly an unrealisable dream for many, and wages are low (Corlett, 2017). Mental ill-health is on the increase (McManus et al., 2016). Across the country, only 36% of millennials think they will be financially better off than their parents' generation and only 31% think they will be happier (Shrimpton et al., 2017). Many of the civil society groups and organisations we spoke to had little engagement with young people. Almost all of them spoke of the urgent need to redress the age imbalance in their midst, yet few knew how to

do it. Young people may be experiencing political disaffection, but they are not disengaging from civil society activity. Rather, we have seen an increase in forms of activism amongst the young, who are seeking out potential solutions to an otherwise bleak future (Cammaerts et al., 2014; Wybron et al., 2017). A civil society of the future needs to find ways to connect with young people on their own terms, and to ensure that the next generation of civil society leaders is able to shape their own future. Failing to do this will mean that young people do not take part in civil society, which in turn risks irrelevance.

**Challenging binary gender and sexuality norms: Half of British teenagers identify as not exclusively heterosexual (Dahlgreen 2015).** The number of people who publicly identify as trans has grown dramatically in a decade. The feminist movement has had a fresh injection of energy, with issues relating to gender inequality, sexual violence and harassment becoming more visible through high-profile revelations and movements, often organised on social media, such as #metoo. While emerging research is mapping the historical impact of a post-industrial society on gender roles (Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012; McDowell, 2014; Bennett, 2015), there has also been notable backlash against all of these changes, and a huge increase in online trolling and abuse against almost anyone who is not white, heterosexual and male (Gardiner, 2018). An inclusive civil society needs to be alive to these issues.

**A rise in loneliness is pervasive, occurring across all ages and all socio-economic groups, with Britain being named the loneliness capital of Europe (Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, 2017; ONS 2018).** Loneliness is defined as perceived social isolation and lack of supportive social relationships. It has been found to contribute to multiple psychological and physiological health problems. Among older people it is associated with cardiovascular disease and stroke, increased blood pressure, cognitive impairment and physical decline. In young people it is associated with mental health problems, reduced employment prospects and bullying. Meaningful social connection is vital to human development, health and survival. In

recognition of the problem the government has appointed a minister for loneliness and launched a loneliness strategy. The minister has acknowledged that cuts to local authorities have impacted upon the very social institutions and community spaces where people come together – libraries, youth clubs and community centres – contributing further to experiences of loneliness. Extensive social media use has also been linked to feelings of social isolation, with relentless online connection leading to new forms of solitude (Turkle, 2011). The role of civil society in reclaiming spaces for social connection and reconnecting a lonely country in the future will become ever more vital.

**The religious and secular make-up of England has become increasingly diverse since 1945.** Historic churches have seen a severe decline in attendance, and growing numbers of people identify as non-religious. Meanwhile, there are now more Baptist, Muslim and independent church-goers (NatCen, 2017). Faith-based groups are also key to engendering longstanding and deep-seated forms of civil society participation (Dinham, 2009). The buildings of religious institutions have also proven to be important for civil society, often providing crucial meeting spaces in the wake of closures of community centres. And there are signs of the crossing of boundaries and bridge building between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ groups within civil society, to build understanding and achieve change, such as the Living Wage campaign (Andrew Purkis, submission to the call for contributions). In contrast to this, however, we also see the notion of faiths as being oppressive and spreading sexist, homophobic, and violent extremism (Dinham, 2015). Islamophobia is on the rise (Elahi and Khan, 2017). A recent study by Hope not Hate (Khan-Ruf, 2018) linked anti-Muslim sentiment to deprived areas with general opposition to immigration. The organisation concluded that people in places where they feel in more control of their own lives and optimistic about their futures are more resilient to hateful narratives.

**Traditional media (TV, radio and print) are also changing, but the drivers of change here are largely economic.** The newspaper industry in Britain is in freefall. As Google and Facebook suck in advertising money, Gumtree and eBay eat small-ads income and people expect not to pay a cover price, the traditional business model of newspapers has collapsed. Journalists’ jobs have been cut back and made less secure, with more and more news space to fill at ever faster speed, leading to news content that is faster but shallower (Phillips, 2014) and journalists who are more compliant with editors’ primary concerns for the bottom line, for fear of losing their jobs. Local newspapers are also struggling to survive, or closing down, or being bought out by the big national conglomerates and moving out of town and out of touch with the communities they are supposed to serve (Mediatique, 2018).

Despite their economic fragility, the influence of mainstream news media remains. Convergent shifts in cultural production, journalism, political communication, marketing and data mining have contributed to the emergence of a mediated regime facilitated by deregulated, commodified and ever-faster forms of communication. Here, political discourse is often commandeered by the stuff of entertainment, while news all too frequently traffics trivialities and repackaged public relations material (Davies, 2008). This trend, traceable across the last 40 years, to subjugate mediated activity to market logic and competition through ever-more commercialisation, has prepared the way for what Will Davies has referred to as ‘post-truth politics’, based

on an over-supply of 'facts' and an under-provision of meaningful analysis (Davies, 2016).

Google and Facebook may claim to be exercising corporate responsibility in the face of fake news, but this distracts from the far larger problem that their very 'structure and economics [...] incentivise the spread of low-quality content over high-quality material. Journalism has a civic value – journalism that investigates power, or reaches undeserved and local communities – is discriminated against by a system that favors scale and shareability' (Bell and Owen, 2017:10).

The battle over what will replace legacy press has begun, but no-one is yet sure of the answer. New news outlets have sprung up boasting different business models, and are run as co-operatives, through membership schemes or crowd-funded, offering a range of benefits, including democratic member control, equitable member economic participation, education, training and a concern for the community (Media Reform Coalition, 2018) opening up the prospect of new (albeit smaller) public spheres for civil society to engage with.

**Online activism has grown, and it is easier than ever before to protest and ever easier to ignore.** Online protest may spread awareness of social and political issues, enable the mobilisation of huge numbers of people in a matter of seconds and offer quick-click responses for those who want to be politically involved, but on its own it is unlikely to fix structural problems of society. In a world of digital abundance, government consultations may attract many thousands of responses, but they are beginning to treat online petitions (often orchestrated by organisations such as Avaaz or 38 Degrees) differently from those now termed 'direct responses' (DCMS, 2018). Social media has undoubtedly changed contemporary forms of sociality and the ways in which we enact civil society – and it will continue to do so. But increasing doubts are being raised as to whether it can fulfil the democratic and social potential once accredited to it. Growing anxiety is being expressed in relation to echo chambers, online influencers, covert advertising, bots and the role algorithms

play in our daily decision-making, as well as in our electoral and democratic processes.

The British Government has also been revealed to be engaged in mass digital surveillance programmes co-ordinated by the Government and Communication Headquarters (GCHQ), giving cause for concern for many civil society activists, and Facebook has been shown to have precious little regard for data privacy. It is no surprise that ever-more people are suspicious of online content, with concerns over fake news simply adding to this mix. Although offline activism is often a desired feature of digital mobilisation, frequently it remains the domain of a lone individual connected to like-minded others but isolated from human contact. Our participants spoke of a real need for qualitative social interactions, the importance of meeting people in person, discussing issues at length and seeking understanding over differences, so they could develop meaningful relationships. Spaces for political engagement have expanded in a digital mediascape, but our orientation towards them is changing too. People are recognising the need for a shift away from atomised expressions of social activism, and are trying to search out new political projects that offer hope and inspiration for a different way of living and better ways of doing democracy.

**'Populism' is a politically charged and hotly contested term, but is used here to refer simply to the offering of apparently easy solutions to complex problems, and which can lead to political polarisation.** Different forms of populism have stepped into the breach created by extensive inequality, the democratic deficit and an increasingly pervasive sense of 'us' and 'them'. Populism has contributed to the collapse of the main parties in the French presidential elections in 2017, the election of Donald Trump in the USA, the resurgence of the anti-austerity politics of Jeremy Corbyn and the decision taken by UK voters in 2016 to leave the EU. These events have brought to the fore the economic dislocation that has taken place since the 1980s, revealing deep class as well as generational and ethnic divisions. Marginalised voices have kicked back against a post-war party system that has failed them and a professional political elite that has



largely ignored them. Across Europe, the parties to gain the most from this populist moment have been those on the right, which have sustained or grown their popularity in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, Spain, Germany, Italy, France and the Netherlands.

**Environmental stress continues to grow.** By 2030 the planet could have warmed by more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, taking humanity into uncharted climate territory, and threatening our communities and way of life. A report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2018) warned that limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society. Without these changes the environmental consequences will be catastrophic in little more than a decade. In England, as elsewhere, we are likely to experience higher temperatures, sea-level rise, heavier rainfall and more serious flooding, but also prolonged periods of drought. As soil loss and decline in soil fertility due to intensive agricultural practices continue, English agriculture will likely face conflicting pressures to become more efficient, while at the same time rebuilding degraded land and ecosystems.

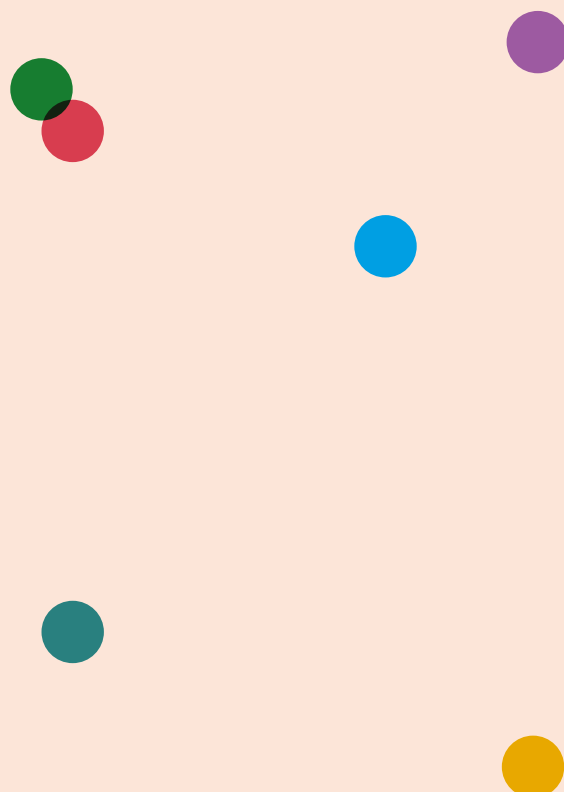
Nature is in decline. We have already lost half of our wildlife globally, and research suggests that the extinction rate is running at something like a thousand times the historical norm (McKie, 2017). As children are spending less time outside and in natural environments, a trend that has been associated with the epidemic of mental ill-health, civil society may well need to help reconnect people to the natural world. In this vein, NHS Shetland recently teamed up with the RSPB to issue 'nature prescriptions' to patients to help treat mental illness, diabetes, heart disease, stress and other conditions.

Air and water pollution, and the epidemic of plastics pollution, are likely to continue to affect our lives. The inquiry encountered a wide array of civil society responses to environmental issues: from the Surfers Against Sewage campaign for a plastic-free Penzance to Pont Valley Protection Camp, Voice for Leith Hill and Shirebrook, and Langwith Against Fracking it was clear that civil society has a major

role to play in the coming decade in campaigning for awareness of environmental issues and in promoting the role of people, communities and their natural assets against corporate interests and regressive environmental policies. In particular, environmental concerns came up as a key priority for civil society action amongst the young people we spoke to:

**“[I hope that] the sincere immediate threat of global catastrophe [will be something] that people take action round.” (Young person’s workshop, Bradford)**

During the lifetime of the inquiry, in October 2018, three environmental activists became the first people to be jailed for over a year each (two for 16 months and one for 15 months) for an anti-fracking protest. The severity of the sentences was appealed against successfully, but not until the protestors had been in jail for six weeks, raising increasing concerns about the contraction in the space for environmental protest.



# What does this mean for civil society in the future?

In England, the impact of the trends outlined above relating to inequality, poverty and democratic decay are particularly marked for working class and minority communities, as well as young people. This raises particular questions for civil society about who has the power to contribute fully to the making of their own history, and who feels locked-out of power and excluded from influencing the very decisions that impact on their lives.

**“Ideally power should lie in the hands of the people – but it doesn’t.” (Newcastle, self-organising group)**

Many recent reports (e.g. IVAR, 2018; IPPR, 2018) point to a disregard for ordinary people by those who hold power; they identify an alienation from politics that is exacerbated by poverty and damaging for democracy. They reveal people in communities who are isolated (Wilson et al., 2018; Gregory, 2018), and lonely (HM Government, Civil Society Strategy, 2018), and a public life that is increasingly hollowed out of all meaningful participation (Independent Commission on the Future of Localism, 2018).

How can today’s movements, organisations and institutions transform – and tomorrow’s emerge – to put more power in the hands of people and communities?

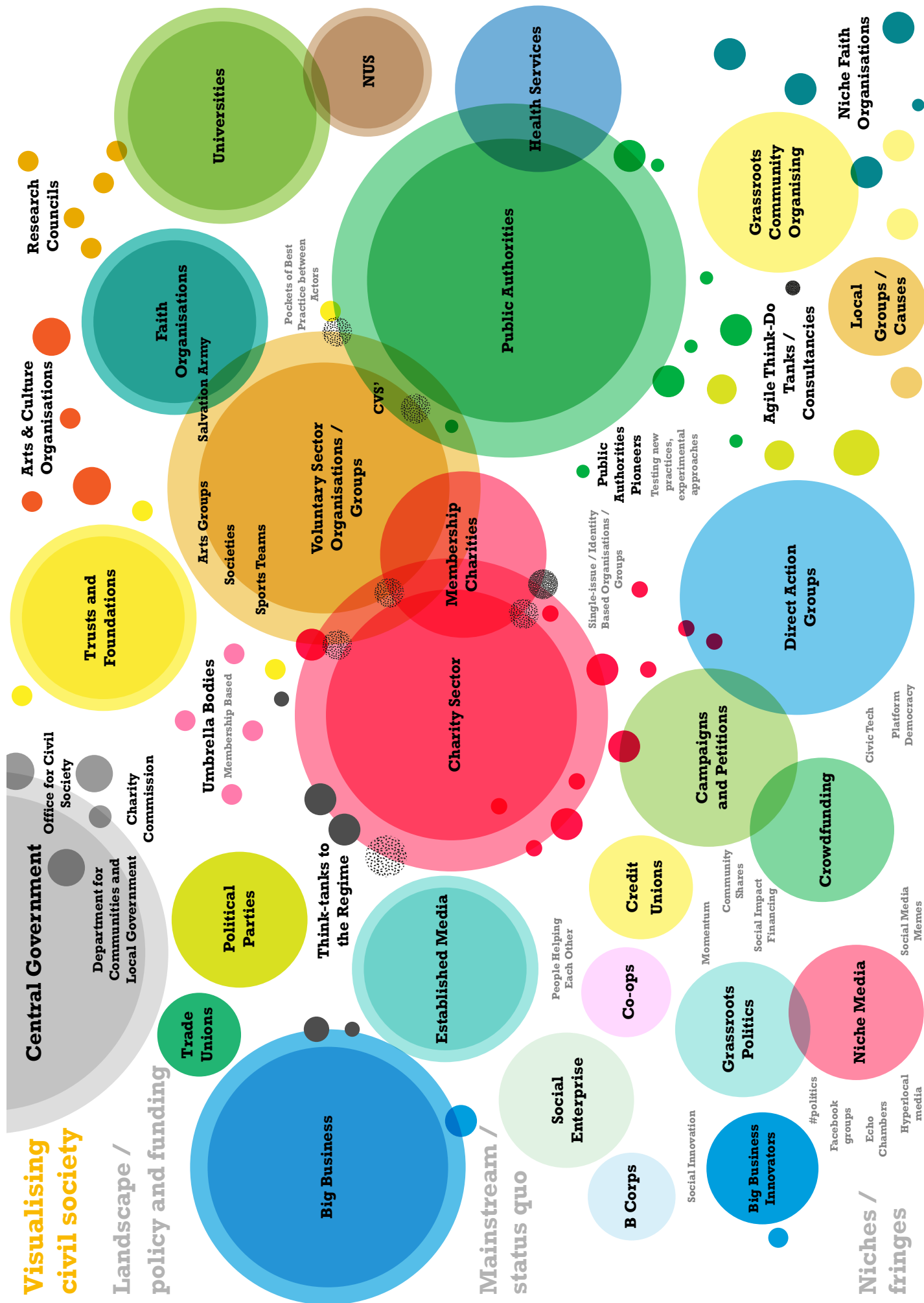
If it is time to reinvent our democratic futures and search out what democracy could become, as so many recent reports suggest – how can civil society lead the way?

In this spirit, the inquiry asked what civil society can do to shape the future.

## Visualising civil society

We have encountered civil society in a myriad of forms, and we are well aware that there are many more besides. The civil society and actors map shown opposite offers one way of visualising the richness and diversity of civil society activity, and has been a useful tool to remind us of the vast array of interests and activities that the term "civil society" encompasses. The map shows how civil society touches everyone.

The evidence we have collected is large and multi-faceted, and reaches from the very small to the very large civil society organisations. It speaks to individual experiences and collective desires; the impact of social, economic, political, environmental and technological factors; as well as civil society as organisations working within our communities. Each of these aspects is complex and interrelated, requiring a holistic and systemic approach that recognises the inter-dependency between civil society, the state and the private sector.





## What is civil society?

Notions of civil society, its purpose and how we conceptualise it change over time. We have encountered notions of civil society that speak to traditional ideas of associational life – that part of society that sits between the state and the market, most commonly referred to as the 'voluntary', 'third', 'NGO' or 'non-profit sector'. Here, people come together for un-coerced human association (Walzer, 1998) and for a whole host of activities, from running the local football team to welcome groups for refugees to established legacy charities that are household names. But we have also encountered a strong sense of civil society as something that runs counter to particular ideologies that derive from the competitive individualism and me-first approaches to life that were deemed dominant for too long. Rather, we found a civil society concerned to practice and promote social norms of tolerance, non-discrimination, co-operation and trust, with a strong desire for a different way of living based on kindness, compassion and understanding while acknowledging the need for systemic change.

Bound up with each of these interpretations is the clear sense of civil society as public sphere – the space where people come together to gain understanding, learn about difference and engage with systems of power. It is in these spaces where civil society is embracing new forms of civic agency, experimenting with participatory forms of governance, and incorporating co-operative practices and renewed forms of self-determination. The common denominator across all these initiatives

is more power in the hands of more people to shape the decisions that affect their lives, creating new publics in the process.

**“In this sense civil society – as a set of capacities – and politics – as a set of processes – become united in the public sphere, providing an essential antidote to the depoliticisation and fatalism that are so marked in contemporary societies.” (Edwards, 2014:71)**

The inquiry has been led by what people have told us is important now and what their vision of the future for civil society is. Unsurprisingly, we discovered that this is deeply entangled with conditions of the state and the market; that it springs from seeds relating to notions of associational life. But these are fed by an increasing desire to tend to the common good against pervasive and persistent inequalities; that the means to do this requires social, political and economic strategies developed from a whole new way of thinking about the ways in which economic and social life connect.

This is explained in more detail below through the key themes that stood out in the analysis – places and spaces, belonging and connectedness, work and purpose, organisations and organising, power and powerlessness – with this final theme running through all the rest.



# Civil society: where change begins





# Power and powerlessness

## Building power through connection

The civil society we found had a hunger for change, not only in society but in their own practices. This hunger was fed by a recognition that when people work together, seek mutual understanding and identify ways of dealing with the issues they face, then communities and lives can change for the better. When people come together in collective endeavours, power within civil society grows. We found a deep desire for involvement in decision-making, for co-production, co-creation and co-ownership as the only way to realise the changes people want to see in their own lives and in the world around them.

**“It’s about being brave – change is coming, we can either let it happen to us or be in front of it.” (Penzance community workshop)**

**“[You] can only make a change in the world by making a change in your community.” (Youth workshop, Liverpool)**

Connecting civil society to each other and to those in power in local authorities enables people to be seen and heard. People were very clear about what is needed: co-development in decisions from the very start, as equal partners in power leading to forms of co-production, rather than “decider and consultee” (GLA workshop, Hackney 2017).

**“They send in consultants for hundreds of thousands of pounds to tell us the bleeding obvious. It’s like, thanks, but just give us the money and we would have done that 10 years ago.” (Penzance community workshop)**

But there was enduring awareness that this enthusiasm was rarely matched by those in power:

**“At the moment civil society lacks respect by politicians and the corporate world, however without it society would not function and the economy would unravel. Millions of pounds are spent in shaping and developing the economy and very little on building social capital. The complexity of issues facing us requires this imbalance to change.” (Ian Jones, Volunteer Cornwall, call for contributions)**

And a firm understanding that power shared did not translate into civil society doing the job of the welfare state – participants wanted to be involved in decisions about



how these services were delivered, without that being a substitute for them:

**“The Big Society was actually the state doing nothing and leaving everyone else to pick it up.” (Newcastle community workshop)**

Civil society has found far more creative responses to current crises. Borne out of necessity, civil society is coming together to find solutions that could lead to long-term thinking focused on problem solving and away from short-term crisis management. Civil society is trying, and often succeeding, to be the author of its own stories and agent of its own future, but this is not made easy.

**“The mechanisms for change that are present in Britain today are most accessible to the most privileged people, which is a huge problem, so [...] we tend to focus much more on that and we call that the democracy gap, which means people of privilege have access to more democracy than anybody else, and we have changed all our programmes [...] to try and close that democracy gap.” (Campaign Bootcamp)**

Here we found emerging practices seeking new ways to enact democracy and give voice to the disenfranchised, such as the Life Changes Trust, which involves young people with experience of being in care in funding decisions, while the Tudor Trust, Pilgrim Trust and Bromley Trust support campaigning and advocacy organisations with core or unrestricted funding. Foundations are convening, brokering and using networks to connect communities with people in power and decision-makers: processes that require practices of care, listening and the active seeking of understanding. Creating the means for participatory democracy speaks not of a singular nostalgic notion of community but rather of the diversity of community life, the institutions within it and how they are situated within a broader social and political

order. It is a 21st century notion of communities of difference:

**“To all intents and purposes, politics is a business now. Everything they do is a business-based policy [...] It’s like a stock check. People are human beings. You can’t do a stock check on human beings. We’re all different. We’re all complicated. We’ve all got different backgrounds. We’ve got all different problems. So you... you can’t possibly legislate for that...what you can do is provide a fair system.” (Newcastle, activist)**

Building power through connection is much more than social togetherness, important though that is. It begins with recognition of injustices that are connected even though they may be experienced differently:

**“Instead of it being siloed, we try to engage, to understand the connections between shared injustices and see it in a very broad political framework. As opposed to ‘the feminists who are over here and the climate organisers are over there and the racial justice people who are doing this here’. Instead, building solidarity and support and a, yeah, a movement for social change.” (The Edge Fund)**

The experience of injustice is differently inflected but is also a crucial dynamic of changing power relations – it speaks to the senses of democratisation – and what it means to be seen and heard. It is what inspires people to seek social transformation and is at the centre of the development of new inclusive and participatory forms of decision-making. This means taking special measures to compensate for the social and economic inequalities of unjust social structures. It requires creative and sensitive approaches alive to the injuries marginalised people have suffered; approaches that build trust and relationships over

time as a means of engendering confidence and opening up possibilities for change. The work of the inquiry points to the urgent need for marginalised, disenfranchised and disadvantaged people to be at the heart of decision-making processes, and many groups in civil society are leading the way, creating new publics and connecting to power.

**“It’s intrinsically about challenging the people in power to listen to the less powerful.” (Campaign Bootcamp)**

**“I think the biggest thing that we’ve done is change the discourse and change the mentality of the people from absolute nihilism and depression [...] to actually being one of hope and the sense that we have a value and that we’re not being rewarded enough for our value and we don’t deserve to live and work in poverty for the rest of our life. And the industry is to blame and we shouldn’t be the ones suffering from it and that we can fight and we can win. And there is so much more hope now.” (IWGB)**

The above discussion shines a light on parts of civil society that are attending to the possibilities for progressive social change by seeking to put more power in the hands of more people. You need to know power to shift power. And so we found a commitment to understanding inequality and appreciating what powerlessness feels like. The sorts of people-powered processes that we have been consistently told are necessary, come from bids for recognition and resource allocation that will require special provisions for the excluded and disenfranchised, alongside the willingness of people to grasp responsibility for change. But it is not made easy. Our evidence shows just how lacking processes of accountability are and how much they need to change. Accountability is key, and it became a central pillar of the inquiry’s PACT.

**“It’s important that accountability**

**is woven into the process.” (Newcastle self-organising group)**

## **Barricades to/for power**

The challenges for civil society to build power and find ways of being heard are deeply felt. Few people feel they are heard, let alone responded to or actually involved in any decision-making. We were told that politics has become something that is done to people and places not by people in places. People feel that those in power don’t think that they need to be listened to or, worse, that they are dispensable.

**“People think, ‘Well I haven’t been listened to before so why would they start listening to me now?’” (Peckham community workshop)**

Jobs are insecure and life is precarious, social services are being withdrawn from those who are most unprotected – the poor, the homeless, the disabled, the undocumented – yet participants frequently noted how those in power seem unable to recognise or respond to the consequences this has on the ground. When people feel that their voices no longer matter and they are cut adrift through economic inequality, precarity and non-recognition, they lose faith in the institutions that are supposed to represent them.

**“People are just that tired... they’ve seen that no one’s been listening to them.” (Newcastle community workshop)**

**“It’s called an election but we might just as well throw darts and see what happens.” (Penzance focus group)**

In post-industrial towns in particular, where markers of deprivation are high, people feel that the places where they live have been brushed aside by politicians and abandoned by government. A profound change is taking place as people feel the full force of the end of the ‘post-war settlement’ – with its mixed economy of state and private sector (and a commitment to full employment) – and its

replacement by a situation where we have gone through a global financial crash, resulting in unlikely prospects of secure employment, and a policy of debt reduction that has left local authorities experiencing massive cuts, with welfare benefits slashed. Few people believe that the existing system can solve our problems any more; trust in politicians and the media is at an all-time low.

**“I have a fear of civic breakdown – people are so angry and people get so angry about politics, they make irrational decisions, that to them are completely rational.” (Penzance community workshop)**

**“There’s a big polarisation of class, there’s a working man against the government and establishment, there’s a mistrust. You talk about accountability, because the first thing you hear is, well the council have got the money the council have got the power, where does it go? They don’t trust, they think everything is being syphoned off, are there all these private business decisions being made that aren’t actually in the best need of the community? And all that mistrust comes up time and time again.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

Brexit, austerity and, most recently, the Grenfell Tower tragedy have opened up new questions and challenges that have given rise to unsettling assumptions about and an extensive lack of trust in the sufficiency of the political and economic status quo. Participants spoke of their own power over their lives as depleted and political accountability as diminished:

**“You’d have to put a rocket up their [the council’s] arse to get real action and real change and real local representation, and the people that represent Sunderland actually living and being involved,**

**and living with the consequences of the decisions that they make about Sunderland.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

**“I’d like to see more power being given to the people ... [We need] a punk era.” (Voluntary Organisations Disability Group discussion)**

The usual answers to issues of civic participation are to expand access, particularly digital access. But, while technology may change the dynamics of communication and facilitate opportunities for individuals to participate, it’s not a quick-fix solution to many problems of access that communities face:

**“It’s not just social media but there’s all sorts of things that people feel that they can’t engage because they haven’t got the skills. [...] And finding out what is going on, because that’s the hardest thing. The previous director of public health said she was at a meeting and it was all to do with Sunderland but none of them knew what all the services were they provided.” (Sunderland workshop)**

**“Living in the internet age and especially, social media age, like I think it is a lot easier for people to access, kind of, information and like inspiring material on direct action. That’s kind of how I got involved. But, at the same time, like there’s an overwhelming amount of information and kind of the mind-numbing aspects of social media can also do the opposite. So I feel like we’re probably...could be we’re just becoming more polarised, with some people becoming more radical and some people becoming even more passive.” (Pont Valley Protection Camp)**



Connective activity online has been used to great advantage by many in civil society, but often it does not transcend social and economic inequalities – the digital divide remains a live issue. In the UK, almost all of the wealthiest people use the internet, while usage falls to 58% among the lowest income group (less than £12,500) (Dutton et al., 2013), and 17% of people in the UK do not have broadband access in the home (Ofcom, 2017).

**"I've been talking and trying to help a lady who lives out far in the wilds, like. She's got no internet access. She can only get a mobile signal in Hexham, which is 50 miles away [...] How is she going to log into a job match and stuff like that? And she said, I [...] just can't afford internet access and a telephone package. [...] Internet access isn't exactly like priority, you know what I mean?" (Newcastle, activist)**

Social media does not exist in a vacuum. While it has the potential to bring new voices into public realms, it can also reflect and reinforce existing social relations and patterns of privilege (Fenton, 2016). Pointing to technological quick fixes also misses the crucial point that building power through connection is not just about being part of an online network (although this may well be important) but comes from the relevance and recognition that stems from forms of substantive and meaningful relationships. It is only in relationships that matter that caring and being cared for is most keenly felt and most deeply appreciated.

**"As long as you are a part of a group of refugees you are a refugee, you are perceived as one, but if you get to know somebody I don't think about it anymore, my friend, the Congo friend the Ghana friend, they are my friends now, so I know they are in an asylum seeker situation, but I see George, I don't see the refugee. If that is a little tricky neuro-connection human**

**thing to happen, but if a civil society structure in every town can make this connection spark, we will have done a lot." (Dorking Refugee Support)**

This is civil society as associational life. It is about communality; it is where strong social ties are more likely to give rise to an ethos of care. People recognised that strong social ties were unlikely to come from social networking online. However, what the digital age does not appear to satisfy or respond to, and may well be part of, is a pervasive sense of disconnection that skirts around thin forms of sociality – a case of being 'alone together' (Turkle, 2011) with like-minded folk, which may offer a sense of familiarity but rarely builds deeper relations or extends sociality to those who are different from you.

**Participant 2: "Big community events, we used to have [...] teddy bears' picnics in Mowbray Park, everybody used to go and all families from all over Sunderland [...] would all come together into Mowbray Park. We used to have fancy dress parades down Forsett Street, and we didn't have two buttons to rub together, [...] but the whole of Sunderland would turn out, [...] we need to have the community events and the community activities that aren't necessarily church based or school based."**

**Participant 5: "I think we'd all struggle with that nowadays [...] with mobile telephones and the internet and what have you, you can FaceTime somebody from Australia that you haven't seen, whereas the street parties everybody got together, and at events you would see people who you hadn't seen for a long time." (Sunderland community workshop)**

In this context, civil society steps in as a catalyst for community action and participation, a promoter and builder of social values and social justice, and a voice for both the marginalised and the mainstream in society. Yet this is seen as diminishing:

**“What has been – and continues to be – lost is the advocacy (voice) role of civil society – both at levels of individual/case advocacy and collectively.” (Angus McCabe, Birmingham University, call for contributions)**

Rather than increased access to information online, people spoke of the urgent need for the deep involvement of ordinary people in decisions that affect their lives; the need for different voices to be heard, and different ideas about society and the values that underpin it to be contested and debated. Civil society contains many very different views and values that are deeply felt and firmly held. Those wanting to preserve green space and those wanting to build social housing will be in conflict; just as those wanting more medical research and those resisting animal experimentation often start from opposing principles. Civil society forges the spaces in communities where these differences can be aired, debated and better understood, and mitigates against the quick-fire social media responses that can often generate fear and heighten conflict. The fears and conflict that are expressed are real, but civil society can offer better ways of listening to and learning from them.

**“It’s bringing desperate pockets of communities together for dialogue [...] to stop and think and talk [...] giving people space and time to interpret things in their own way, and that being allowed to be okay [...] that’s apparently revolutionary for people.” (Spaces of Hope, Stockport)**

The places we inhabit and the spaces within it matter to many of us in civil society and beyond (IVAR, 2018; Gregory, 2018). Place is about history, recognition and a sense of belonging. It is about long histories deeply embedded in places – the mining community in Shirebrook, the old mills in Oldham, the shipyards in the North East – that evoke emotions rarely captured through the quantitative survey techniques that are so often relied on by policy makers. It is where you meet people at the school gates, at the local takeaway, at the pub, at the doctor’s surgery, at the swimming pool or the café; it’s where your children can play, where you remember them growing up. Partly, this is fuelled by memories of what places have been and what has happened in them, and partly by nostalgia for times gone by:

**“I remember when there was a real pride in Mansfield, the mines which treated people with dignity and a beautiful market. It wasn’t great then but at least there was pride.” (Mansfield self-organising group)**

**“My fears are [...] it’s becoming a place that I won’t recognise and I’ve lived here for 34 years.” (Peckham community workshop)**

But it is also fuelled by a desire to create places that people can be proud of now; where young people would choose to settle; where people come together in all their diversity:

**“To say ‘Yeah Marks Gate’ not ‘Urgh Marks Gate’.” (Marks Gate community workshop)**

**“I would love to see Peckham as a place that has communities that are very different but come together.” (Peckham community workshop)**

**“An area that has a strong community will get further than a divided one.” (Youth workshop Gloucester)**

# Places and spaces that matter

## Social imprints of place

Place emerged as important, both for how people feel connected to those around them, and for a sense of belonging that brings social cohesion and social purpose. Coming together despite our differences is about the ordinary everyday experience of social life and culture – it is part of what creates meaning through conversation and collaboration. It is, by definition, participatory and constitutive of knowledge and understanding of places, situations and circumstances, along with a searching out for how harms – such as experiences of poverty and discrimination – can be repaired and redressed.

**“But people who live in those poverty situations [...] the first thing they always say to us is ‘I want this place to look nicer, I want to be more proud of where I live, I’m sick of the dog dirt being around on the floor.’” (Sunderland community workshop)**

Places and spaces within them are where civil society flourishes and conversely, when they diminish, civil society too can suffer the consequences.

**“There are huge numbers of community activists on the ground in Cornwall, that are dealing with street homelessness, street food projects. Environmental programmes are looking at different economic models, they’ve done that in Penzance. That was done two years ago. That’s a huge amount of active, pissed off, determined people who are trying to deliver all sorts of change within Cornwall. So I think that’s where the hope is, that the people are hopefully getting ticked off enough that they’re actually starting to do something about it.” (Penzance community workshop)**

## Forgotten places

Since the mid-1990s, public policy has failed to acknowledge the importance of place to people’s lives. Anchor institutions and organisations that understand local areas and can root places to people, as well as being able to respond to issues particular to them, have not been prioritised. Big Local, a resident-led programme of local transformation funded by the Big Lottery, has made inroads with 150 communities across England, each receiving £1million to make their area a better place to live. But they have only scratched the surface of the challenges many face due to austerity



and the multiple other social and economic changes outlined above. The injuries of place-specific neglect are now felt acutely. People in many places feel unheard, neglected and ignored, and are hungry for a new vision and the power to make it happen.

**“Central UK government thinks the north ends at Manchester.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

**“A whole part of the city which should be the creative kind of hub of the city, that’s just completely derelict now, and no vision.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

The recurring sense of place-based neglect adds to the perception that government (local and national) and politicians can no longer be trusted to deal with issues and are unable to meet need where it occurs. The further people feel from decision-making, the more arbitrary the control that other people have over their lives feels, and the more vulnerable people feel to those who hold power. Local responses, where people come together around common concerns and have some control over their own destinies, are felt as the only real possibility for progressive change to happen. And when it does, confidence grows and a sense of community builds – people feel part of something, social capital swells. When people, organisations and institutions connect, collaborative practices become possible, and lived citizenship becomes a reality.

**“We’ve got all these social groups in Peckham, like Peckham Citizens and Peckham Vision, and that’s how we influence the council.” (Peckham community workshop)**

**“If the council didn’t do it then nobody did it, but we actually need to get away from that.” (Oldham community workshop)**

**“If we always present problems but never solutions, we get what we’ve always got. If we focus just on the**

**problems we fall into moaning do-gooders, who never actually change a thing. We need to be able to articulate the World As It Should Be.” (Newcastle self-organising group).**

Encouraging active citizenship has been a recurring theme in public policy over at least the last two decades, from New Labour’s ‘Active Citizens’ and its emphasis on civil renewal and ‘double devolution’ through to David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ and the ‘localism agenda’ – yet there are inevitable structural limits to how much communities can do for themselves, and for some, the problems feel overwhelming. As Mohan (2018) states, ‘[t]he localist rhetoric and policies of the present government are likely to benefit rich, stable communities, not poorer communities characterised by considerable population turnover’.

**“It ties up with Brexit and austerity, but if Nissan decided to go, we’d be in one hell of a mess.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

In Peckham, the people we spoke to found it difficult to access decision-making processes at a local council level particularly in relation to housing development plans and the role of private developers, this was echoed in many of the workshops. People consistently stated the importance of feeling represented and being able to participate in local decision making – both elements of civic engagement that they perceive as lacking. They want to be involved in the futures of the places in which they live. They don’t see this as volunteering (the word rarely came up) but as a civic imperative as a member of their community.

## **Lost spaces**

Place is also connected to the spaces within it, including who has access to those spaces and on what terms. Different places have different resources available to them. People often lack adequate spaces to come together. Church buildings and schools were seen as vital resources but also were unlikely to feel welcoming for people from different faiths or

for young people in particular. In Marks Gate in East London, when we asked where young people got together the only place participants could think of was outside the fish and chip shop, since so many community spaces were considered unsafe or had closed down. The same story was repeated elsewhere:

**“Space for playgrounds and things is being taken.”  
(Peckham community workshop)**

**“I mean just doing that and putting a social meeting place in the neighbourhood [...] is a huge thing, and just opening up that space, that space for dialogue, that space for people to organise themselves, from that things come out like walks around the neighbourhood explaining the murals there are, which are fantastic, and just getting people to be proud of their own neighbourhood, organising litter pickups, things where you don’t need a huge amount of money for it but it’s getting, it’s just getting people together, talking to each other, meeting a neighbour.”  
(Sunderland community workshop)**

Sites perceived as ‘forgotten places’ often have diminished spaces for civil society activity, and so the gap widens between the rich citizenry and the poor citizenry. Gregory (2018: 31) paints a worrying picture of a disintegrating social infrastructure that impacts most in the poorest areas: since the 1970s, we have lost 28,000 pubs; in one year in 2016 alone 121 libraries closed; an estimated 600 youth centres closed between 2012 and 2016; 1,200 children’s centres have closed since 2010; at least 214 playground facilities have closed since 2014, and the number of post offices has fallen by 50% in 30 years amongst declines in community halls, bingo halls, banks and museums.

The closures of community spaces often falls most heavily on resources for arts and culture – spaces that are also perceived to be important place makers. It is through arts and culture that people often gained a sense of pride about where they lived and found forms of storytelling that made visible what they felt was so often overlooked.

**“But we also believe that we have a civic responsibility, and I have to say as an organisation we’re a public art gallery and our business is not just about showing art. It is about the community in which we sit, and we have a programme called Postcard to Penzance, where we have invited publicly through the newspaper and the radio locally, people to come in and discuss certain issues that concern the town.” (Penzance community workshop)**

These sorts of spaces form the connective tissue of place and offer a qualitatively different means of sociality from chatting to friends on social media. Rather it is about participating in one’s own history through creative expression and learning about shared living through creative practices. We heard about meaningful connections between people – being part of something and building relationships



that can result in the collaborative creation of social value. Importantly, it also offers the possibility for thinking how life could be otherwise. Time to dream, time to unleash the imagination and a time to be bold. But funding for arts organisations has been hard hit by cuts in public spending. This is one of the reasons why Sunderland's bid to become City of Culture 2021 was so important to the people there. The bid had generated much creative thinking across civil society (even though it was ultimately unsuccessful):

**“I think it's got a lot of people thinking about this vision and how it can be. I hope that won't dissipate [...] if we don't get it. But I think there will be enough vision to say what we want.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations (2017) resonates strongly with our findings. It notes that arts organisations with a civic role share common features, including that people and local communities are central to their practice; that place matters; and that developing relationships and strong connections are key. It also found that leaders are over-stretched and under-supported: co-production with communities requires particular skills that often need additional support, and approaches to funding and evaluation can make sustaining civic work in arts organisations difficult.





# Identity and belonging

## Embracing and transcending difference

In bringing identity to the fore we are not harking back to essentialist ideas of who we are and how we identify as individuals. Rather, we found notions of identity that actively seek to recognise difference and to embrace differentiated notions of citizenship among diverse publics, while also coalescing around shared interests. This is identity defined by the shifting and overlapping meanings attributed to the various struggles and causes that civil society actors are part of. Identity that transcends the particular struggles of any one group or individual and is located in types of collective identity discursively formed.

**“I hope we have a prosperous future where people from all walks of life can feel safe and included – like they matter in this world.” (Young People’s workshop, Liverpool)**

Transcending individual identities resists the marginality and victimisation that can become defining characteristics of ‘identity politics’. This idea can be powerful, and it is often those in power that seek to devalue it. Yet some of our participants described a loss of momentum in collective action on race equality as being due to divisive funding practices for separate communities and simplistic approaches to representing the demographic diversity of modern society.

**“The binaries are breaking down and we need to reflect that complexity in our response to that.” (Phase 6, focus group, London)**

There is no trade-off between something like class or anti-racism or disability politics. Rather, these are complex nuanced forms of identity that are discovering ways of holding many issues in tandem and thinking them through together: newly collective forms of identity, that extend the notion of belonging rather than constrict it. We all want to belong and to be treated fairly and equally by others in society. Relevance and meaning in our lives come from relationships, expressing ourselves and being heard, but also from being part of something bigger – recognising that we have things in common as well as being individuals with particular histories. This is central to civil society’s purpose in an increasingly changing, global, individualised and digitalised world.

**“We regularly talk about and campaign for the black ‘community’, the Muslim ‘community’, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans ‘community’ [...] We can miss opportunities to respond to bigger, structural challenges**

**[...] to improve the things that could make us all most happy.” (Asif Afridi, inquiry panel member)**

Civil society is recognised as the space where difference and differences can be overcome:

**“It creates the space for the fact that you and I have completely different lifestyles and ideas, but it doesn’t stop us doing certain things together.” (Peckham community workshop)**

**“London Queer Muslims is a positive space that inspires an ethos of radical inclusion and works to move the conversation on Islam and LGBT to new identities beyond binary narratives.” (London Queer Muslims)**

There are opportunities to deepen collective organising through greater recognition of the intersectional experiences of those living in a complex and demographically diverse modern England. People need to be allowed to be themselves and not be ‘put in a box’. This will create more opportunities to hear diverse experiences and explore shared interests. To achieve this, parts of civil society may need to think and act differently. Some participants mentioned the success of Black Lives Matter. This movement has its roots in forms of contemplative practice. The founders were interested in manifesting the change they were seeking through the process and movement – not waiting until the end. The real-time practices of the movement – nurturing curiosity, working on ally-ship, group therapy, meditation, connection, solidarity and care for each other – have been central to its success in the USA and beyond.

## **Overcoming discord and recognising inequality**

**“Brexit is changing our notions of cultural identity and what it means to be British and brown.” (Clore Fellowship Conversation)**

Building forms of collective identity and senses of belonging are vital roles for civil society in the future. The Community Life Survey 2016-2017 (DCMS, 2017) revealed that 81% of people agreed ‘their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together’, a decrease of 8% on the previous year. This shift should be seen against a rise in reported hate crimes in recent years. Between 2014 and 2015 there was a 326% rise in reported street-based anti-Muslim incidents (Hansard, 2016). In the days after the EU referendum (23-26 June 2016) there was a 57% increase in reported hate crime, with more incidents reported in areas that voted Leave (Stone, 2016). Recent Home Office statistics (October 2018) note that in 2017-18 the number of hate crime offences recorded by the police increased by 17%. The most commonly recorded motivating factors in these hate crime incidents was race.

**“Because I live in Roker, [...] we’ve got a lot of asylum seekers, we’ve got a load of international students, we’ve got a load of white working class and a load of white middle class, and I’m seeing attacks up and down Roker Avenue and burnt doors and bleach and paint and all kinds, and union flags being flown in back gardens and it’s like you say, it’s just becoming more disparate, it’s not, it’s not a good climate.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

While some have linked a decrease in community accord to the effects of spatial segregation, with high concentrations of minority ethnic communities living in separate neighbourhoods from their white British counterparts (Cantle, 2001; Cantle and Kaufmann, 2016), a recent comprehensive review of social scientific evidence has shown that income inequality and deprivation are far more important determinants of community discord in the UK (Demireva, 2015). In its response to the Casey Review (2016), the Runnymede Trust argued that these inequalities are ‘persistent and widespread’, they ‘remain a major barrier in modern Britain, and

that responding to these inequalities and creating the condition for everyone to interact as equals should remain the starting point for any integration policy' (Khan and Finney, 2016).

Inequality is recognised by people as a major barrier to community well-being and citizen engagement (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2018). This concurs with Dalton (2017), who argues that although there are new forms of collective action that point to an interested and engaged citizenry, there is a sizeable and growing socio-economic participation gap across all types of political action – those with higher levels of education, secure employment and higher income possess the skills, time and resources to enable them to participate beyond the voting process.

**“Well, when you’re working class and you go there you feel a bit uncomfortable.” (Peckham community workshop)**

People from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities experience multiple forms of socio-economic disadvantage, and often feel that institutionalised racism means their needs are unlikely to be represented in local decision-making. In a review of the BME voluntary sector, Mayblin and Soteri-Proctor (2011) point to one study that found that the absence of community organisation left the African-Caribbean community of a multi-ethnic town in the south of England disempowered and unheard. But other studies note how, for some civil society organisations, being defined by ethnicity alone has been problematic. BME civil society organisations have a long history of responding to and fighting racism and discrimination, but their shape and function have also been constrained by dominant views of what BME organisations can achieve and the level of race inequality that is acceptable in British society (Afridi and Warmington, 2009).

The inquiry found that there is a belief that BME organisations are best-placed to serve and work with their communities. While there might be truth in this, this typecasting often keeps such organisations under-valued and poorer, and it can drive them out of

business. Uncomfortably, it also absolves the larger, richer parts of civil society from any responsibility for this work. Civil society sometimes reinforces divisions, putting us in separate boxes defined by singular identities and ignoring intersectional understandings of power (Crenshaw, 1989).

**“People expect our organisation to say some of these things [...] People assume I have an axe to grind. We need trusted people in civil society [...] the big charities need to step up and be advocates for it.” (Phase 6, interviewee)**

More shared accountability for this work would involve larger charities taking an active role in progressing this agenda, and some are already doing this. But although parts of civil society are talking about ‘race’ and race equality, we heard that the discussion is muted and often insufficient. The reasons for this are complex. Research participants recounted how this reflected a myriad of elements: a lack of focus on race equality within public policy; a perceived decline in the level of overtly ‘political’ work on race equality within the BME voluntary sector, as more focus is placed on service delivery; a belief that we now live in a ‘post-racial’ society and the media framing topics such as ‘immigration’ or ‘Islamophobia’ as distinct and separate from ‘race’ equality; that ‘diversity’ can obscure the bigger conversation we need to be having about ‘race’, patterns of discrimination and racism; and, a lack of confidence to talk about ‘race’ if you are from a white British background, for fear of ‘getting it wrong’.

An assumption that white British people or mainstream charities can’t ‘do race’ can stem from a lack of personal confidence and ‘fragility’, and this also needs to be worked upon if accountability is to be shared. It also involves funders being clearer and more ambitious about the impact on race equality that they expect (both of themselves and others). The people we spoke to are acutely aware that it is difficult to speak to others outside of their own networks and to engage with people who aren’t like them. Muslim civil society is facing particular



challenges in relation to a context of increased securitisation raising troubling issues relating to lived experiences of identity:

**“With a lot of the kind of even the Prevent stuff, like you know we can’t explicitly be talking about [...] foreign policy. It’s seen as being a form of [...] like you know extremism.” (Muslim youth organisation)**

This can create fear of the other, and mitigates against understanding and solidarity. Civil society is not always civil, and can (whether wittingly or not) reproduce disadvantages in society and act as, or be perceived as, a zone of exclusion, without always working to overcome these barriers. But we also found a strong desire to find ways to come together that transcend divisions based on ethnicity, class and religion. This is a desire for a civil society focused on equalising relationships, ‘putting difference first’, creating spaces to talk – not with a clear purpose, but to discover purpose through talking regardless of role or power, and when the powerful can join the less powerful on equal terms, and listen:

**“Where is the thing that makes us more than the sum of our parts.” (Peckham community workshop)**

**“In terms of people crossing lines, I think what the Spaces of Hope work has done is it has said that actually we can enter this space on equal terms.” (Spaces of Hope, Stockport)**

As well as a desire for all parts of civil society to focus on defeating racism and division wherever it is found.

**“We need to recognise the many identities we all hold simultaneously, and to create routes to civic engagement and representation that can cope with that complexity.” (Asif Afridi, inquiry panel member)**

## **Framing identity and constraining belonging**

Society is characterised by a diverse mix of beliefs, ideologies, identities and ways of being, but a very limited understanding and literacy of these is brought to bear in political and public life. The question of how race in particular has been represented in the mainstream media has been a long-standing issue, and one that frames much civil society activity:

**“The politics and the media and the narrative around you is changing and becoming harder and more fixed, so therefore it’s hard to measure your effect. You might think, oh you know what, this is useless what we’ve achieved, because just look at how much hate is out there [...] the hate that’s out there is so much worse than it was when I was 17.” (Hope not Hate activist, Barking and Dagenham)**

**“For much of our work we’re in a corner, the work that we do with our Mosque with schools is often sort of trying to just explain yourself against the tabloid narrative that’s just what we do because we’re human. That’s not because we’re Muslims.” (Sadaqa Day)**

Recently, the social media campaign #Oscarssowhite highlighted the continued racial imbalance within the Hollywood film industry, but such forms of low-level representation of racial difference, as well as its misrepresentation, are issues that cut across all forms of mainstream news and entertainment media (Saha, 2018). A lack of genuine engagement with alternative meta-narratives of how society could be otherwise (whatever these may be) closes down opportunities for greater mutual understanding.

The internet, and social media in particular, also stands accused of naturalising the segregation of society into echo chambers. The internet predicts who we are depending on who we follow on Twitter, who we ‘like’ on Facebook and which adverts we linger over, producing network analytics that naturalise the segregation it finds and making a commercial and political virtue out of the fact that we tend to be similar to our friends. The 2018 Digital Attitudes Report notes that only 12% believe that the internet has had a positive impact on society and that there is public demand for technology companies to be more responsible and accountable. Civil society has an important role to play in shaping the future of the digital world (Doteveryone, 2018).

**“We need to make sure that we can shape the way in which we are able to participate in public spaces – and this is as true of Twitter as our town squares.” (Joy Green, Forum for the Future)**

## **Building relationships, extending belonging**

Belonging is not always, or simply, connected to geography, but is also firmly rooted in meaningful connections with others. Where people have or find relationships that matter to them, a sense of belonging is more likely to be felt:

**“There were a hundred arts groups all over the country that were approached for this project: this making of a banner and this procession [...] It was just so lovely, the atmosphere was really nice and it made you want to carry on. It’s not rigid. You can go [...] you can do something together or you can make your own thing. But it’s just this community feeling, isn’t it, and it takes away that isolation. You’re getting on with your neighbours and your friends.” (Shirebrook focus group)**

The word ‘community’ was used many times, and while this was connected to the places people live, it was often much more about human connections, shared understandings and a sense of collectivity. The sense of the collective is experienced as powerful, as humanising. Participation is a form of action, and the process of participating is key to those involved, but this is not only participation for participation’s sake, it is a form of participation that builds towards a strategic vision of social meaning as social change.

**“What I’ve learned is the power of [...] collective voice, the power of solidarity among women, the power of not being alone and the power of stories.” (Everyday Sexism Project)**

People spoke about feeling that they belonged if others thought they belonged, if they felt welcome and accepted. A feeling that is quickly dissipated through the experience of discrimination. A felt sense of belonging seems to suggest people are

more likely to want to become involved in civil society. This helps explain why faith groups are often concentrated sites of social action – congregations are primarily social places of relationship building. A civil society that engenders meaningful relationships becomes a community asset and is more likely to flourish.

**Respondent 8: "It's always open to people in the community who live locally, they can come in and if they've got a couple of quid they put it in the pot and if they haven't we feed them anyway, and it's a really nice community event."**

**Respondent 9: "I enjoy coming here because I've got a lot on at home and I work night shifts, so I support people with disabilities, I've got some stuff that I'm dealing with at home so I come here on a Thursday just for me, to have a bit of me time, and we have a good laugh, we drink lots of tea and we eat healthy food which is great, because we all sit down together and have a good old chat."**

**Respondent 6: "A dysfunctional extended family where everyone comes together, yeah." (Penzance Whole Again Communities)**

The connective tissue of all civil society groups is human relationships, and it requires care and attentiveness. Too many interactions with charities and NGOs have felt more like distant, transactional experiences. Many large charities are realising this and starting to change their practices. Shelter has recognised that the only way to tackle the housing and homelessness crisis is to build a social movement fit to defend the right to a safe home for everyone. Their 2019-22 strategy seeks to bring individuals and organisations together, recruiting 500,000 supporters, expanding the number of community organisers working with local groups, and sharing expertise and resources, while providing hands-on leadership and support. It is a strategy based on hands-on involvement rather than arm's-reach fundraising. Other parts of civil society are moving away from structures and hierarchies, and even funding, to much more informal and almost 'pop-up' environments where people can join ordinary conversations in which needs and concerns can be heard and responses worked through together, exploring the power of groups to work together and discover hope. Shared understanding and knowledge of who has power and who has not and then how to change that comes from building the connective fabric of communities. Forms of connection that are in themselves deeply humanising:

**"It's why people are having to take action locally because the bigger organisations and the big charities aren't doing it. [...] It needs to be a whole community approach. So, yes, you need people [...] you need grassroots and you need those people determined to make change saying [...] let's just do it. Basically, at the end of the day, all of this stuff is for the community, so it takes a community effort. And**



**play to your community's strength because the nub of a lot of it for me, is community, rebuilding your communities, giving strength back to our communities and rebuilding those connections and networks.” (Activist, Penzance)**

Other people in our workshops and ‘conversations’ spoke about the need for “an end to selfishness” (Mansfield community workshop); that society has become too much about individuals and competition and too little about caring for each other and sharing resources.

**“Me instead of we. We all build our own little empires, we all have our own little gates at the front of our houses.” (Epsom and Ewell community workshop)**

**“We’re pushed further apart by competition for smaller resources and a desire to find our uniqueness, not our common ground.” (CEOs of Youth Organisations Conversation)**

**“We’ve got to get away from this every man for himself business.” (Shirebrook community workshop)**

The work of the inquiry has shed light on a renewed emphasis on practices of meaning-making through human connection, along with the equalising of power in these places and spaces. Here we find an insistence on humanity, rooted in values and beliefs articulated clearly but in which old binaries of private–public and sacred–secular are rendered redundant: a future in which all manner of religions, beliefs, values, worldviews, motivations and actions are named and shared in pursuit of goals that are understood on a deeply human scale. This promises a movement towards a more meaning-infused public sphere in which we engage, and participate in ordinary, human terms, not as consumers or as individual identities but as community collectives functioning across civil society, the state and the private sector.

In Frome in Somerset we heard about a collective project to combat isolation and to save lives and NHS money through connecting local GP surgeries to community groups and volunteers. The Compassionate Frome project was launched in 2013 by a GP who kept encountering patients who seemed defeated by the medicalisation of their lives and staff at the practice who were demoralised because they could not address the problems they faced. Compassionate Frome began by creating a directory of agencies and community groups, identifying where there were gaps, employing health connectors to link people to forms of care and support, and train voluntary community connectors to do the same in communities. The aim was to prevent the isolation and loneliness that often comes with illness and, in turn, exacerbates it. The number of emergency admissions to hospital fell dramatically. Frome is run by an independent town council that has focused on increasing involvement in local decision-making. Those in Compassionate Frome believe the two things go together – a community that co-owns its problems and finds solutions together.

# Reimagining work and purpose

## Volunteering in the age of the precariat

The trends section above notes how dependable, well-paid, meaningful work continues to disappear, with automation and AI signalling more change is on the way. The insecurity this gives rise to has real consequences for civil society. Work has become increasingly precarious, low paid and with long hours. It's making life harder for people – and affecting how much they can take part in civil society activities.

**“We’ve lost the main industry that supported the town.”  
(Mansfield community workshop)**

Anxiety about work was particularly acute for the young people we spoke to:

**“Robots take over jobs – our purpose is challenged.”  
(Bradford young persons workshop)**

Proposals that seek simply to increase volunteering as a means to build community capacity without recognising the consequences of long-term industrial decline and deeply felt, multi-layered forms of deprivation connected to place will not be able to effect social change. In Shirebrook we heard how the closure of the local pit led to thousands of job losses. During the process of rebuilding the local economy, two businesses bid for the old colliery site. One was an engineering firm that said it could bring 2,500 skilled jobs to the area, the other was Sports Direct that said it could offer 5,000 jobs. The tender went to Sports Direct on a peppercorn rent on the exact site where the old mine had been. The company immediately outsourced recruitment to agencies, which brought in migrant workers on low wages who were placed in multiple occupancy housing in the old pit village, creating tensions in the town. Work, place and purpose combine in a brutal rendition of the felt experiences of post-industrial England.

**“You pick your wages up on a Friday. You get told there and then if you’re working the following week. Because you know it’s zero-hours contracts. You can’t plan your life. You can’t get a mortgage.” (Shirebrook community workshop)**

Many now experience or see the future of their working lives in precarious, low-paid and temporary jobs. In December 2017, according to an ONS survey (ONS, 2017), around 901,000 people were on zero-hours contracts. As so many of these people need more than one job to make ends meet, the survey found 1.4 million zero-hours contracts in place – 5% of all contract agreements. To avoid negative publicity attached to zero-hours contracts, many companies are now shifting to short-hours

or 336-hour contracts. If you work a 40-hour week on one of these contracts you lose your rights to hours and payments after about nine weeks.

The inquiry found that the reality of working life for many people today – insecure, low paid, zero-hours contracts – means people are ever busier surviving and often find it difficult to do much else. If you are worried about where your next meal will come from, volunteering your time for free is unlikely to be a priority (Lindsey and Mohan, 2018). This makes it extremely difficult for people to commit to volunteering and renders calls for time off work to do so unrealistic (Mohan, 2015). The Community Life Survey 2016-2017 (DCMS, 2017a) noted that volunteering levels have fallen for most age groups since 2013-14 with just over half of those who said they didn't volunteer in the last year citing work commitments as a factor (Weakley, 2017). The Charities Aid Foundation (2015) states that only 7% of employees are able to have some time off work to volunteer.

**“The greatest crime about poverty is no time.” (Peckham community workshop)**

**“People can't volunteer if they have to feed their children.” (Epsom and Ewell community workshop)**

The increase in insecure employment and the gig economy do not favour regular commitment to civil society activity. As the population ages and unpaid caring increases, the likelihood of volunteering outside the home is also likely to diminish (Lindsey and Mohan, 2018).

**“We somehow find ourselves in a city where to have one job, or one income in a family is not enough.” (Peckham community workshop)**

## **Civil society redefining work in the community interest**

The post-recession period has been the worst period for pay growth in 200 years (Armstrong, 2018). At the end of 2016, the GMB union looked at ONS data on average earnings for 170 occupations between 2007 and 2016, and found that in only 19 occupations has pay kept pace with inflation. Pay is stagnating because it has been decoupled from productivity (as profits go up workers get paid less with capital taking a disproportionate share of the benefits). On the horizon, growing automation in the economy will most likely benefit owners of industry rather than workers, unless something is done. Digital platform monopolies will continue to dominate and soak up global advertising revenue, which will also result in job losses across many industries.

**“I fear robots will replace workers.” (Clare Fellowship Conversation)**

**“I fear a future and our ability to support cohesion of a society where digital tech/AI create such different relationships across and between communities.” (Fundations/Foundation Conversation)**



Opportunities for meaningful work are also geographically divided, with job creation over the last 10 years being heavily weighted towards London and the South-East (Clayton et al., 2017). Civil society is beginning to step up to the challenge. The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) was founded in 2012 and has a membership of primarily low-paid migrant workers in London. It provides employment representation for its members and campaigns on low pay, zero-hours contracts, bullying and harassment. But to bring a social justice framework to these interlacing trends requires policies based on redistribution: such as progressive tax policies, union-friendly laws to strengthen the collective power of workers and enhance their bargaining rights, and the expansion of employee ownership schemes giving staff majority ownership of companies (Lawrence and Mason, 2018). This opens up the potential for work to be redefined within a more generative people's economy that functions for the local public good rather than for private profit.

**“Externally, the funding environment and growing pressure from consumers for more ethical businesses is potentially changing the face of civil society. Social enterprises are an example of this change. They have been growing in recent years and 28% of them are based in the most deprived communities in the UK.” (Caroline Howe, Lloyds Bank Foundation, submission to the call for evidence)**

‘Community business’ is emerging as a potential solution to many of the above endemic and systemic problems and has been the subject of an associated research project undertaken by Forum for the Future and Goldsmiths (Grayson, 2018). Community business has a long history, from mediaeval guilds and friendly societies to philanthropic communities, but has recently been adopted as a term by Power to Change, a grant maker set up in 2015. It refers to community businesses as initiatives that are locally rooted, trading for the benefit of the community, accountable to the local community and with broad

community impact. Power to Change estimates there are 6,600–7,000 community businesses in operation in the UK (Diamond et al., 2017), with a total market income in 2017 estimated at £1.2 billion. Community businesses have 35,500 reported paid staff and involve around 119,500 volunteers. They have a range of positive social impacts, including improved health and well-being and facilitating a reduction in loneliness. Community businesses could offer positive ways of reimagining work and purpose in the future, including meeting growing care needs, harnessing technology for equitable ends, keeping investment in the real economy, reorienting trade away from profiteering, providing homes rather than investments, building resilient local economies and addressing inequalities. Other benefits could include adapting to resource scarcity and decarbonisation, enabling co-productive relationships with the state, and embedding democratic participation in everyday business structures (Grayson, 2018).

Community businesses can be considered a subset of social enterprises (asset-locked trading businesses, designed to deliver social goods, in which profits are reinvested into the business or into other activities with social benefit). Pearce (2003;66) argues that the language of social enterprise shifted focus away from “an emphasis on collective action to individual entrepreneurialism, albeit for social benefit”, to “emphasising the ownership and accountability structure of organisations to focus on the social purpose” and from “a political perspective working towards fundamental change to a more technical approach aimed at getting on with the job in hand”. A central question for the sector is whether community business and social enterprise is fundamentally conceived of as a more communal way of doing business, or about bringing market values and business practices further into the community (Grayson, 2018).

Other forms, business models and terms for organising work that broadly operate under the principles of social benefit include: co-operatives (organisations owned and run by members using cooperative principles); mutuals (“an organisation owned by, and run for, the benefit of its members”) (BIS, 2011: 2); Community Interest Companies (the

legal structure created in 2004 for social enterprises); Community Anchor Organisations (“place-based, multipurpose organisations, which are locally led and deeply rooted in their neighbourhoods”) (Localities, 2017), and Development Trusts (“community-led organisations using a combination of enterprise and creativity to improve the quality of life for local people”) (DTAS, 2018). In varying ways, each of these seek to make a difference through ‘how and who they employ, through where they invest their profits, through where they are based and how they operate’ (Nick Temple, Social Enterprise UK, submission to the call for evidence). As the welfare state retracts and work becomes more precarious and low-paid, solutions that seek to embed (local) businesses in co-productive and accountable relationships with communities can offer ways of sharing resources and power more fairly, with the possibility of building social capital.

**“The corporate world has to recognise that without a strong civil society their businesses would fail.” (Ian Jones, Volunteer Cornwall, submission to the call for contributions)**



# Ways of organising

## Lack of representation

Penny Wilson from Getting on Board (a charity that helps people become new leaders in communities through board-level volunteering) notes that there are an estimated 100,000 vacancies for charity trustees in the UK and that 59% of charities say that their boards are not representative of the communities they serve:

**“In practice this means homeless charities with no one on the board with experience of homelessness, prison education charities with no one on the board who has been in prison, carers charities with no trustees with caring responsibilities and so on.” (Penny Wilson, Getting on Board, submission to the call for evidence)**

Wilson notes that there is significant under-representation on charity boards from other groups, including those with professional skills, young people, women, members of BME communities and disabled people. ActionAid is one of the charities that has undergone a radical reconfiguration of its structures of governance. Powered by feminist principles, it has built a board of trustees that is 69% female and features young people and representatives from the countries in which it works, ensuring that they can actively influence policy and impact strategy.

Elsewhere, however, the inquiry found that efforts to engage with people from ethnic minority backgrounds is often felt to be tokenistic – where they may be present but don’t have power, or people don’t listen to what they really think or feel.

**“When you look at some of the statistics around leadership and governance around race, there is clearly a disconnect between those that are trying to deal with the issues within our various communities and the leadership.” (Phase 6 interviewee).**

The inquiry heard that being inclusive and diverse is about more than numbers –we need to ensure that BME people within civil society feel they have power. We need to improve how civil society engages with the lived experience of those who have experienced race inequality. This should include recognising how some views have less credibility or are not heard within civil society itself. People should be supported to reflect upon and use their personal power to make a positive impact on race equality, but also enable others to step in and access power and resources too. Similarly, while the ethnic diversification of organisations and boards is a helpful ambition, when conducted in isolation it can obscure structural racism and make fixing racism the job of that BME person alone:



**“Talking about why Caribbean men are more likely to end up in secure units, we’ve known that for 30 years. But it’s almost impossible [to talk about it] unless one of the poor souls has killed somebody. To hear it’s not just an issue. That’s one of the difficulties we have in civil society.” (Interviewee)**

In some respects, civil society is trailing behind the public and private sectors in its interest in workforce diversity. But following other sectors may not be the best route to achieving change. We need to ask what hasn’t been done so far. We need a vision for race equality in civil society that includes, but goes beyond workforce diversity to include concrete outcomes associated with addressing structural causes of inequality.

## **Out of reach and out of touch**

For many of the people we spoke to in local communities, large-scale institutional charities seem increasingly out of touch, out of reach and lacking in significance. As the largest charities have become bigger, so some forms of poverty (including child poverty) have increased and inequality has persisted. While charities are not blamed for these problems, neither are they understood as being significant to ordinary people’s lives or recognised as vital levers to social change. Much of our data came in before the Oxfam and Save the Children scandals relating to sexual exploitation and sexual harassment, but these have clearly not helped this perception (Edwards, 2018). For some, the larger charities more closely resemble the establishment.

**“People just...people just mistrust them [big charities]. I worked for an aid organisation... and it was a real eye-opener. And from that point on, I’ve not donated to any big charities... they just become big corporate machines... and I think that’s why I want to be involved in more grassroots stuff.” (Activist, Penzance)**

The perceived blurring between state, for profit and not for profit also makes each sector increasingly indistinguishable from the other. Charities seem to be in a no-win situation, with public perceptions lagging some way behind the reality of the practical problems they are facing in delivering what is required with the resources available:

**“Funding systems and structures are driving detrimental change and are inhibiting small charities from flourishing. The challenges of public sector commissioning ... [mean] that it is ever harder to access, coupled with rising demands that have led to a capacity crunch that sees fewer than 1 in 2 charities confident they will still be operating in 2021. This aligns with evidence from NCVO, which shows that since 2008/09, funding has been directed towards the biggest charities, while grants to those with an income of less than £1million have seen decreases of up to 48%.” (Caroline Howe, Lloyds Bank Foundation, submission to the call for evidence)**

The voluntary sector think-tank New Philanthropy Capital (Butler, 2017) notes that two-thirds of charities say they have used money from public donations to prop up key health and social services they have been hired to provide. Half the charities surveyed turned down contracts because the operational risks of trying to deliver a quality service on the cheap were too high. Others handed contracts back because they felt they could not deliver value to beneficiaries with the available funding.

**“The process of chasing grants or contracts in the face of the wholesale retrenchment of statutory provision, and the resultant mangling of ideals, approaches and democratic practice, to fit tender briefs, is the principal determinant of change in**

**civil society at present.” (Martha Wilkinson, Community Foundation, submission to the call for evidence)**

Alongside the huge restrictions on funding from contracts, the industrial approaches to fundraising undertaken by the larger charities are rarely felt to engage people in the work of the organisation or build relationships with them (despite changes introduced as a result of the Etherington Review) (NCVO, 2015). Some, such as the Parkinsons Society, are trying to change this through seeking to have personalised relationships with the 10,000 people being diagnosed with Parkinson's every year. Christian Aid is aiming to be open and transparent through sharing hard data and evidence about the actual change their projects are making to people's lives. Scope is focusing less on service delivery and more on representation of beneficiaries. But many other charities are at risk of being caught between a rock and a hard place – no longer seen as being able to give voice to the powerless or no longer trusted to act on their behalf, and no longer able to compete for contracts against private companies that can either do the work cheaper because of efficiencies of scale, or are prepared to do it on the cheap by cutting corners and jobs.

**“Professionalised, brand-driven and beholden to government for their multi-million contracts and big business for their ‘partnerships’, charities are seen to have become part of the very system they were set up to challenge.” (Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, inquiry panel member)**

Instead, those in local communities spoke about civil society as being about people and it being found among people you know, in neighbourhoods and localities, where proximity to need brings understanding as well as the possibility of response or solution to problems as they are experienced, often by those who experience them.

Micro-organisations, with an average annual income under £10,000, constitute approximately half of all civil society organisations (NCVO, 2017). People are finding that they can organise themselves in new ways without the need for the restrictive and sometimes onerous structures of the more formal charities or organisations that are frequently perceived to shy away from being political, to be overly large and excessively obedient.

**“I used to donate to Friends of the Earth and then I cancelled my subscription because like, in honesty, they're just like not radical enough, by any means. I don't think they will make the real significant change.” (Activist, Pont Valley Protection Camp)**

In every place we visited we found people coming together to garner collective power and pursue social and political goals, but rarely did this involve large formal charities. These micro-organisations often, operating structure-free and sometimes out of a community development model, play a significant role in society, yet are often overlooked in terms of funding.

**“There are two major trends: (a) people are finding that they can organise themselves in new ways, cheaply and effectively. There is much less interest in ‘charity’ structures, which are both onerous and restricting – particularly regarding politics. (b) Many organisations are increasingly commodified and corrupted by their relationship with government, who treats them as a service provider. Survival depends on obedience and increasing size – this hollows out the community that the organisation was originally developed to serve and undermines the role of advocate often expected of such organisations. The great advantage citizen action has over actions rooted in power is that it is easier for citizens to collaborate and to work over wide-ranging networks. As power and money is further concentrated, I expect to see more divergent action in the spaces between.” (Simon Duffy, Centre for Welfare Reform, submission to the call for evidence)**

There is an awareness that ‘anchor organisations’ are required to locate activity in and coordinate activity from. Infrastructural support also helps to nurture small community organisations that can engender the trust of the community and be accountable to them. The lack of local linking organisations, such as local Councils for Voluntary Service (CVSs), leaves many groups disconnected from each other and operating in silos. Battles over scarce resources can turn people against those who ‘are not like us’. Facilitation is required to bring different groups together so that people can get to know the diverse groups and shared challenges that make up their communities, ensuring that these groups can work together to be more effective.

**“In the future there has to be an emphasis on collaboration, working with communities constructively using the necessary tools to address the emerging challenges. [...] there has to be improved dialogue across sectors and within civil society itself. Also, national civil society bodies have to work differently with local groups instead of parachuting in with national agendas.” (Ian Jones, Volunteer Cornwall, submission to the call for evidence)**

Funding systems and structures are also felt to be inhibiting the smaller more informal elements of civil society from surviving and flourishing. These are groups that are not professionalised and don’t necessarily possess the cultural capital required to fill in grant applications and reports. It is also difficult to get funding for continuity and structures because so much funding is project-based. People spoke of the onus of accountability resting solely on their shoulders, with little sense of mutual responsibility or support from funders. Similarly, public sector commissioning has made it ever harder for smaller organisations to access funding opportunities. It is notable how these funders are very much seen as ‘them/the other’, part of the establishment and part of the problem.



Looking to the future, funders need to find a means of meeting people on equal terms and taking risks with groups who may not look or sound like them. They also need to free themselves from the tyranny of an audit culture that disallows certain practices that do not fit into neat boxes. The Edge Fund is one example of a grant-making body that has tried to do just this. It supports efforts to achieve social, economic and environmental justice and to end imbalances in wealth and power, and in the process it gives those it aims to support a say in where the money goes.

**“So we fund, I suppose we try to fund work that addresses the root causes, the injustice and oppression rather than trying to mitigate the symptoms of it all. And this is why we don’t tend to fund charitable work. Because a great deal of charitable work is kind of propping up the system as opposed to challenging the system.” (Edge Fund)**

This raises a further and much larger concern. Small-scale civil society activities will continue to make important contributions to the lives of individuals and communities, but who will have the courage and resource to take on the really big issues – socially, politically, economically and environmentally – when charities find it increasingly difficult to do so?

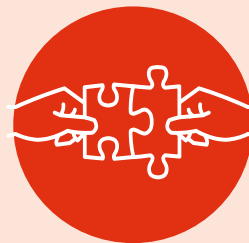
How do we produce more prospects for hope rather than trying to find hope in order to act?

What we are finding has different ramifications for different types of organisations, groups and individuals across civil society and the private and state sectors. One finding has extensive significance for all sectors – the need to put more power in the hands of more people. The need to increase real and practical accountability. The importance of human connection, and the challenge of building trust. Expertise exists in abundance in communities and needs to be recognised and valued. The consequences of this are far-reaching and require a transformation in our practices, organisational cultures and ways of working. We are calling for a change in behaviour,

attitudes and practices – recognising that change is in the hands of civil society.

The findings also suggest that narratives about civil society need to acknowledge and promote civil society as being made up of multiple public spheres – from the very large service providers to the very small community groups. These spheres are interdependent and each has a vital role to play; each needs to consider how power can be distributed more equally and how more people can be given more control over their own lives and that of their communities. An emphasis on power gives a more political hue to the work of civil society that may feel uncomfortable for some, but this is work that civil society has always been part of and engaged with. It is not new, it is simply being made more relevant by people in civil society now as the desire for a shift in values and imaginaries towards a more equal and just society comes to fore as a consequence of the multiple crises we are living through and the future changes we are part of. Civil society has always affirmed that politics is about people and that campaigning is part of life. A braver, bolder civil society is emerging that is looking towards distributed power and a citizen’s economy to bring about that change.

# How can we shape the future together?



**“Our vision for the future is a civil society formed on innovation, boldness and challenge. This is the precursor to a positive and healthy society.”<sup>1</sup>**

## A time of change

Civil society cannot stand still as society shifts. We have never just stood on the sidelines and watched. Through previous decades and centuries we have responded to change, reshaped and reinvented.

We combated the squalor and chaos of the Industrial Revolution, supported displaced people, refugees and traumatised veterans after world wars, organised on homelessness and domestic violence in the 1960s and 1970s, mobilised around AIDS in the 1980s, and in the last decade have welcomed refugees and opened food banks.

**A strong, renewed, re-energised civil society** is urgently needed to shape the future now. Today we face big upheavals and crises, and new opportunities that call us to reinvent ourselves again, to transform ourselves and transform society.

Civil society has the opportunity to rebuild our dented democracy, heal social division and resist environmental degradation. We need to lead change and bring people together. There is an opening now that is real and urgent, but in order to meet it we need to be fit for the future.

The world is changing quickly, as we’ve seen in the two years of this inquiry. Collectively, we must transform ourselves – or risk becoming irrelevant. As our interim report set out, the big message from the many hundreds of discussions we have held and

submissions we have received is that the big role for civil society in the coming years is to generate a radical and creative shift that puts power in the hands of people and communities, preventing an ‘us and them’ future, connecting us better and humanising the way we do things.

**We are putting forward a PACT for civil society, by civil society – shared aspirations for us all to commit to, for the decade ahead and beyond.** It’s not waiting for permission, or hoping others will provide a plan. It’s civil society making a commitment to get ready for the future. It is a response to the changing world we live in, based on what Civil Society Futures has heard from thousands of people across England.

Carers and chief executives, funders and activists, national networks, major institutions, regulators, civil servants and local authorities, local community groups, young people from Liverpool to Gloucester – many, many people’s voices have shaped this PACT. It is intended to support us all to thrive in the future, and to build on the very best existing initiatives across civil society.

Collectively, we have the power to change ourselves and shape our country and communities for the better. Let’s take responsibility for the future of civil society and society itself.

This change won’t come from outside – it is in our hands. It requires all of us to re-examine and renew our behaviours, attitudes and practices.

**“We can only make a change in the world by making a change in our community.”<sup>2</sup>**



# Navigate the future

The PACT is a map to guide us all in the future: a set of principles, practices and questions that are designed to help each of us forge our own future.

**Each person, each group, each organisation, each movement will use it differently.** There are no easy one-size-fits-all solutions. This is about getting ready for uncertain futures and thriving in them. Whoever we are, whatever we do, whatever happens in the years ahead, shifting power and fostering deep connections can help us be more relevant to the people and communities around us, and an even greater force for good.

**Please read, reflect and share with others.** These are practices for the long term. They need ongoing reflection and long-term commitment. There aren't necessarily quick or simple answers.

**Some things may be challenging.** To change and evolve there are certainly things that are challenging. Judgement and criticism are not helpful. Let us all be open and questioning, listening very carefully to what people are saying and paying attention to the changes around us.

Throughout, stories of what others are doing can inspire us: there are many more of these at [civilsocietyfutures.org/stories](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/stories)





# Our PACT

**>>By civil  
society, for civil  
society, shared  
by us all**

## Power

### >>A great power shift

Too many people feel unheard and ignored. There are too many imbalances of power.

Change in society begins by changing ourselves in civil society.

We don't want to deny anyone the chance to make the contribution that only they can.

We will practice shared and distributed models of decision-making and control.

We will do whatever's needed so that all those who want to – not least those who have been excluded – can play a full part in the things that matter to them, and can bring the wisdom and expertise that we need.

## Connection

### >>Building deeper, closer connections

At its heart, civil society is and always has been about the power of human connection.

But too often we have lost connections, because the world is changing fast or we have become too remote from the people and communities we are here for.

We will build real and meaningful relationships between people, meeting as equals – especially where this is hard to do.

We will create and invest in better ways to connect that are fit for the 21st century, to create a national people–power grid, energising and universalising social action across communities and across our country.



# Accountability

## >>An accountability revolution

For too long we've focused only on accountability to funders and to government. It's time we focus on accountability to the communities and people we exist to serve.

Whether we're a long-established charity or a new social movement, we will hold ourselves accountable first and foremost to the people, communities and causes we exist to serve.

We will be collectively accountable across civil society and to future generations.

When we talk about our impact, we will always acknowledge what others have contributed.

# Trust

## >>Investing in our core currency

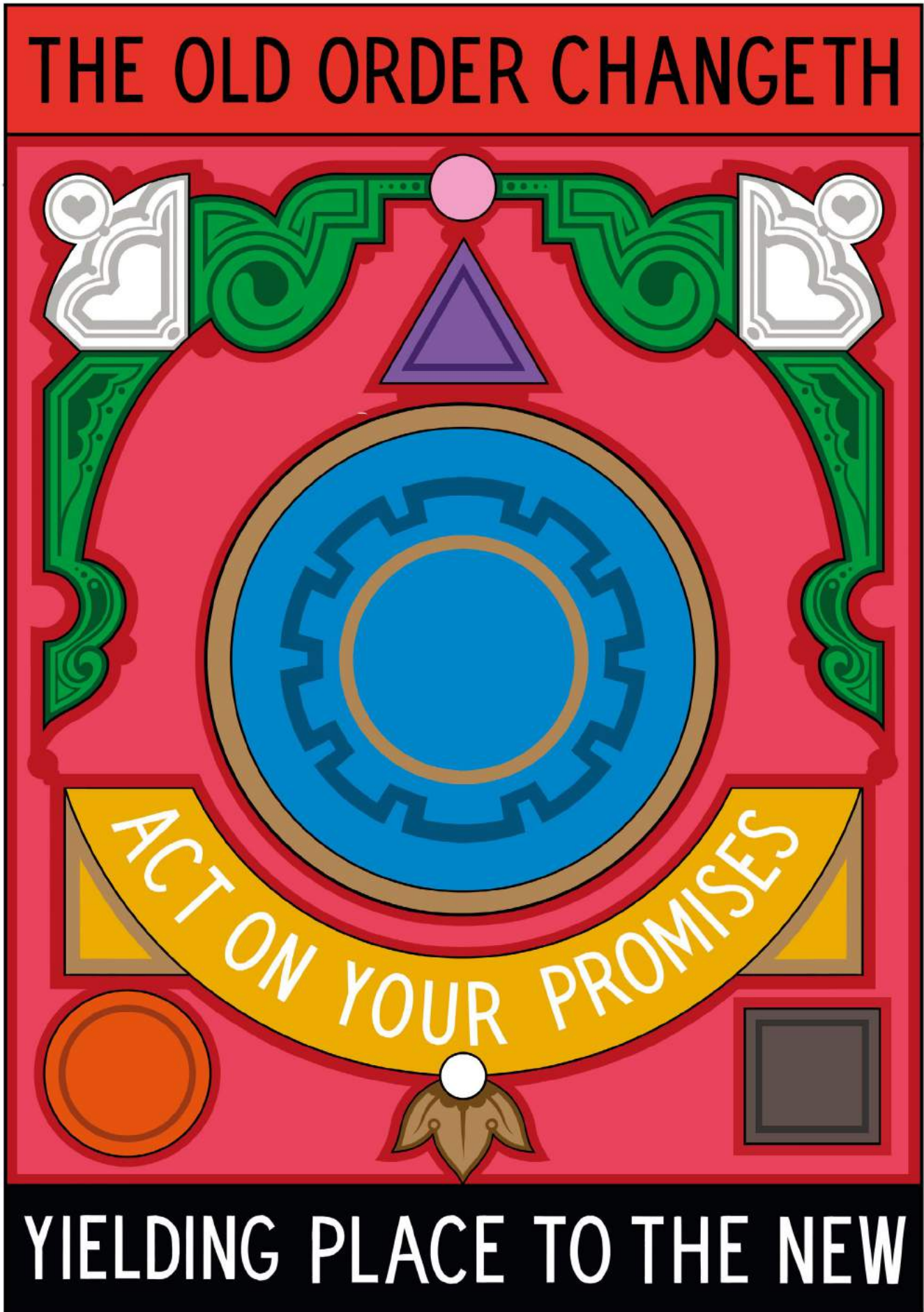
Trust is the most important asset we have – even more important than money, it is an essential foundation for everything we do.

Following abuse, damagingly competitive pursuit of funding and loss of faith in institutions, we cannot take trust for granted.

We will build trust by staying true to our values and doing what's right – being honest about our failures and successes, defending rights and calling out injustice.

We will take the time, commitment and care to build trust with the people and communities we work with. And we will trust them to provide insights, make decisions and run things.





Creative response to PACT by artist Rebecca Strickson



# Power

## >>A great power shift



**“The powerlessness of feeling guilty, ashamed or fearful. The power that emanates from trust, love and confidence [...] These overwhelming emotions... Power at times feels like a taboo subject.”<sup>3</sup>**

**“I want the inquiry to challenge what those of us in power will give up so that power is shared.”<sup>4</sup>**

Across our country – and in civil society – too many people feel unheard, ignored, frustrated. Imbalances in power are often at the heart of the issue: who gets listened to, who makes decisions, who is in control.

Change in society begins by changing ourselves in civil society.

We want everyone to have the chance to make

## **The future could include...**

Diverse civil society leadership at every level, opened up to people of different genders, ages, ethnicities, attitudes, world views, politics, social class, faiths and more... **Funding decided by the people** it is there to support... Locally designed and delivered public services... Those with direct experience of the issue being valued as experts... A new culture and generation of leadership that understands power, and is prepared to share it and shift it... Traditional organisational structures reimagined and re-energised... More organisations and networks **embrace visionary radical change**... Visible platforms for people to **share their stories and build collective power**.

the contribution that only they can. We will consciously create a healthy, sustainable and more equal civil society.

We will address inequalities and conflict by seeking to understand power and oppression, recognising the power we have and supporting others to discover theirs.

We will practice shared and distributed models of decision-making and control, such as citizen juries, community ownership and participatory grant-making.

We will do whatever is needed so all those who want to can play a full part in the things that matter to them – not least those who have been excluded – so they can bring their wisdom and expertise.



## Lankelly Chase

Lankelly Chase is an independent foundation working in partnership with people across the UK to change the systems that perpetuate severe and multiple disadvantage.

Their approach is to develop and support ‘**action inquiries**’ into the changes that are needed, one of which is addressing the question: ‘How can power shift to people who are marginalised, so they have the motivation, capability and freedom to become change agents?’

The foundation is working with a network of partners, seeking to learn through a range of experiences, as well as drawing on the rich work others have done in the past. It is an ongoing process, using different methods to understand what power means to people, and trying to uncover the assumptions we all have about this issue.

Watch more here:

[civilsocietyfutures.org/lankelly-chase](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/lankelly-chase) and find out more about their power action inquiry.

## London Queer Muslims

London Queer Muslims challenges the dominant narratives about queer Muslims, both in the LGBTQIA+ community and in the Muslim community. The group is a place for the discussion and practice of Islam without needing to debate whether it is acceptable to be Muslim and queer.

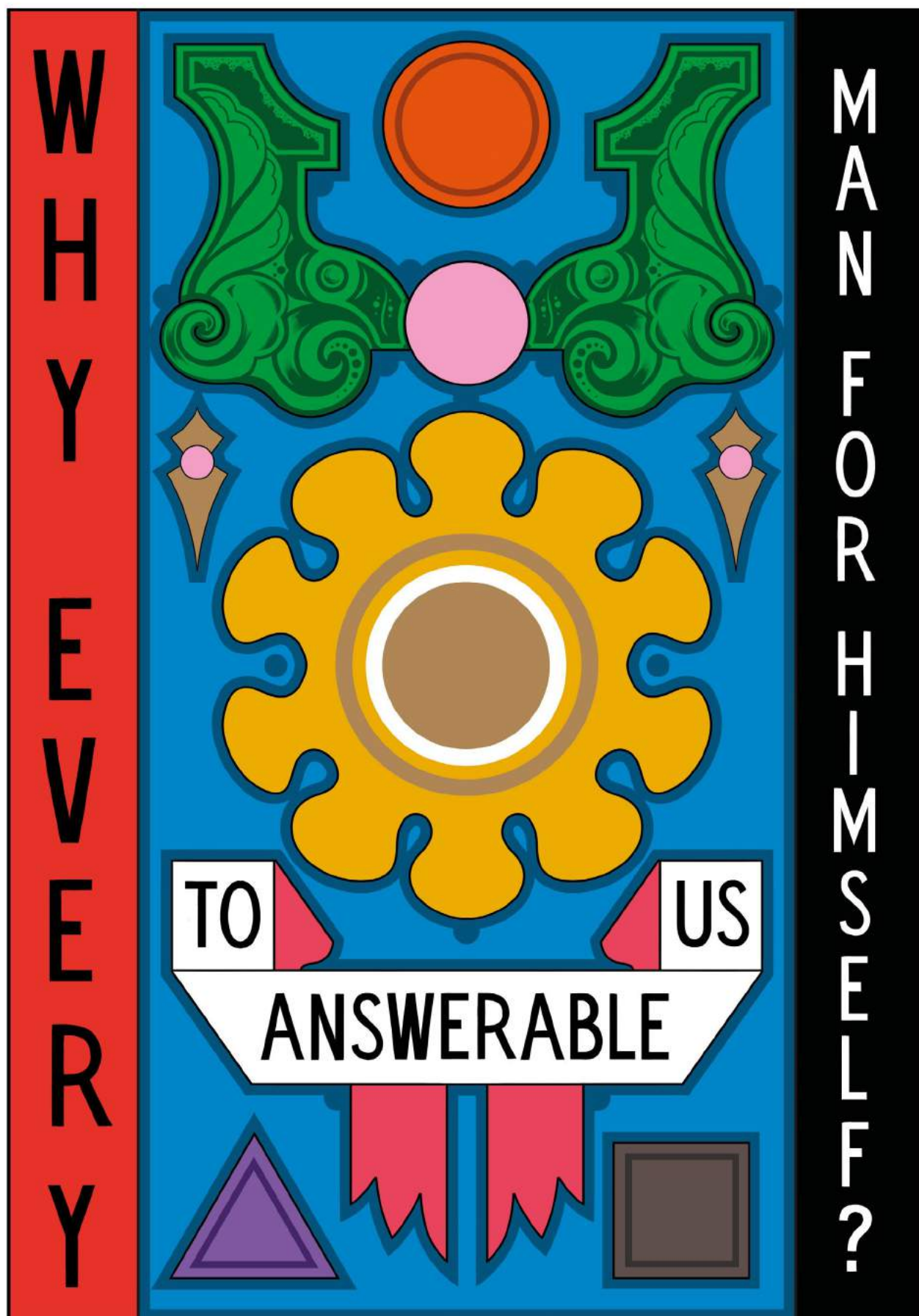
As well as trying to build the power of queer Muslims in London, the group seeks to embody its ideals of inclusion in its own internal practices, by building connections and developing and sharing power among their members – often basing these processes on ancient Islamic traditions.

The group facilitates meetings on a rotational basis, building up the capacity of members so that different people can lead groups, consciously aiming for gender justice when choosing who will lead sessions. And they take all their decisions using a form of consensus based on an Islamic concept called ‘ijma’.

Hear more about how the group works:

[civilsocietyfutures.org/London-Queer-Muslims](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/London-Queer-Muslims)





Creative response to PACT by artist Rebecca Strickson



# Accountability

## >>An accountability revolution



**“There’s a real responsibility that falls on civil society organisations, schools, churches and community groups.”<sup>5</sup>**

**“True accountability builds respect and ownership, and only comes with genuine relationships.”<sup>6</sup>**

For too long we’ve focused on accountability to funders and to government. It’s time to focus on accountability to the communities and people we exist to serve.

Civil society organisations fear being blamed for failure, and accountability can too often mean ticking boxes or being timid: form-filling, fear and insecurity, which stifles innovation and doesn’t address what really matters. Paperwork might be completed, but poor practice, abuse and inequality continue.

There is a lack of collective accountability in our systems, and cultures of silence have persisted. Some in civil society knew of abuse at Oxfam and elsewhere, and others knew that Kids Company would fail: there was a culture of silence, and this undermines shared accountability.

## The future could include...

Civil society collaborating with local authorities to reimagine their roles, such as [co-operative councils](#) as one example... [New kinds of unions](#) for the gig economy to hold companies to account... A duty to future generations in every organisation’s

What matters most is the people we are here to support and our relationships with them. From long-established charities to new social movements, we will all:

- **Be accountable first and foremost to the people, communities and causes we exist to serve** – where necessary, standing up to funders and government.
- **Be willing to be held to account**, not just expecting others to be accountable to us but being accountable to them and developing new and more challenging ways of being accountable.
- **Commit to building relationships**, putting in the time and effort to seek feedback, genuinely listen and change.
- **Co-design our accountability systems and practices** with those to whom we are accountable.
- **Recognise our responsibility to future generations** and act accordingly.
- **Adhere to common public standards** on critical issues such as safeguarding, health and well-being.

charter... Organisations’ structures and behaviour valued as much as the work that they do – including in measurements, evaluation and funding...

Organisations open and transparent about their practice and their mistakes, learning and evolving... Thriving community media as ways are found to support it, holding to account those in power locally...

## Scope

Seven decades after it launched, [Scope](#) has taken big decisions to refocus on its core mission – achieving an equal society in which all disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else – and decided to stop, exit or transfer all other activities. This has involved the sale of care homes and downsizing the organisation, with the loss of hundreds of jobs, and an initial income reduction of 40%. It is now more concentrated on achieving structural change by influencing public policy, the law, markets and attitudes.

In its new strategy Scope has an aspiration to work directly, and more accountably, with two million disabled people each year from 2022. Achieving this requires a shift of the organisation's operating model, empowering staff and volunteers, providing freedom to innovate and take decisions, embracing digital, data and technology, and shifting culture.

Read more [civilsocietyfutures.org/scope](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/scope)



**“The principle of being driven and motivated by core purpose and social impact rather than income or size is important for others to learn from. Too often charities who claim to be radical and pioneering are in reality cautious and conservative, and unable, or possibly unprepared, to take difficult decisions.”**  
**Mark Atkinson, Chief Executive**

## 360 Giving

360Giving was born from the desire of a funder who found it hard to see who else was funding initiatives she was interested in, that funders were ‘giving in the dark’ and that the information needed to make strategic decisions wasn’t there. What could the sector do to be more data-driven and more accountable?

The [360Giving platform](#) brings funding information together so that anyone can see quickly what’s being funded in a particular community or sector – and today 100 funders share over £25 billion worth of grants openly. These range from charitable trusts to family foundations, corporate funders, local authorities and central government departments.

All the data can be accessed, downloaded and compared by anyone who wants to better understand how civil society is funded or make better funding decisions themselves. This transparency has not only enabled greater accountability but also more insightful, strategic decision-making – and has enabled funders to think more broadly about what information they collect and how they use it. What questions does it help answer? How can they explain more clearly what they do and don’t fund and why?

Read more here

[civilsocietyfutures.org/unlocking-funders-treasure-chests-data/](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/unlocking-funders-treasure-chests-data/)

# LET US REASON





# Connection

>> **Building deeper, closer connections**



**“I hope we are brave enough to change, live and connect differently.”<sup>7</sup>**

**“It’s about building up relationships. All of it is about building up relationships.”<sup>8</sup>**

Connections are vital. To bring together people with shared experiences – and those with different experiences. To make sure those with power listen to those who feel they have little. To identify the change that’s needed and how we work together for that change. To build deep human connections between those with power and those who feel they lack it, and between people who feel powerless to ensure that their voice is heard. To recognise and value the power we do have, whether as members of communities or as leaders of organisations.

Building deep connections is civil society’s historic role, and it has never been more needed. Our society is divided between urban and rural, between north and south, between young and old. It is still deeply divided on racial and class lines. Civil society has an essential role to connect powerfully across these damaging divides and drive lasting social change. But too often we have lost our ability to build connections, because the world is changing fast or we have become too remote from the people and communities we are here for.

The implications are enormous when connections are not made. Society can only understand what is really going on by listening very hard to the voices

of people who know. Communities were concerned about abuse of young girls in some northern towns, the citizens of the Windrush generation were being advised by civil society organisations, but all were ignored. People in Whitehall and many institutions in London were surprised when so many places voted for Brexit, but people working and living in those communities already knew.

**We will extend and renew our ability to connect with people.**

**We will build real and meaningful relationships between people**, meeting as equals within and across communities – especially where it’s hard to do.

**We will bridge divides across race, gender, generations, social class and more** – learning from the past, experimenting with new approaches and listening deeply to different people.

Our infrastructure for connecting groups and organisations is outdated, under-resourced and falling apart, and there are too few connective networks to join up civil society, either locally or nationally.

**Together we will create and invest in better ways to connect and collaborate** that are fit for the 21st century, combining welcoming and energising physical spaces, with online forums that encourage us to share and to discover – a national people-power grid energising and universalising social action across communities and across our country.

## The future could include...

Long-established spaces, such as [Visit My Mosque](#), [Toynbee Hall](#) and [20's Plenty for Us](#), change and develop... New types of spaces open up, such as [Living Rooms](#) and [Fab Labs](#)... Success is measured on the depth and quality of our connections, not

by the number of 'impacts'... Investment in hyper-local community-owned media like [Bristol Cable](#)... People and organisations with radically different perspectives make a point of working together, using their different perspectives productively to create change... Peer support is available for people pioneering challenging new approaches...

## The Way Ahead

The Way Ahead is building the future of civil society support in London, providing a system that puts London's communities at the heart of the way everyone in civil society works.

Its system change group brings together stakeholders from across different civil society structures, including funders, local councils, front-line organisations and infrastructure groups, to create new systems that create improved outcomes for Londoners.

In the first three years it has created a shared vision, set up the London Hub, influenced the policies and approach of regulators, given infrastructure groups and councils more confidence in, and understanding of, their roles in supporting civil society, as well as setting up the new Cornerstone Fund to support collaboration and partnerships.

Read more here:

[civilsocietyfutures.org/the-way-ahead](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/the-way-ahead)



## Community connectors: Health Connections Mendip

Community connectors are members of the community who know what support and advice is available locally on things like housing, education and debt advice, and who can signpost friends, family, colleagues and neighbours to these resources.

Community connectors play a vital role in Mendip, a region of Somerset, joining up local communities and providing a bridge between local people and health and well-being services as part of Health Connections Mendip.

So far, over 650 people in Mendip have been trained as community connectors – a wide array of people including hairdressers, taxi drivers, drug and alcohol workers, care workers, adult social care workers, primary care staff, sixth-form students, church congregations, peer support group members and hundreds of other members of the public. An average of 20 people a year have been signposted to health services by each community connector – around 13,000 connections in total.

Find out more:

<https://healthconnectionsmendip.org/community-connector/>



## Our next big infrastructure project: a national people-power grid

Over several hundred years great nationwide infrastructure projects have been successfully realised – from canals to railways, hospitals to universities, television transmitters to broadband networks.

This is the infrastructure that made possible the industrial revolution and the welfare state, and which in recent years has created the foundations for the digital revolution.

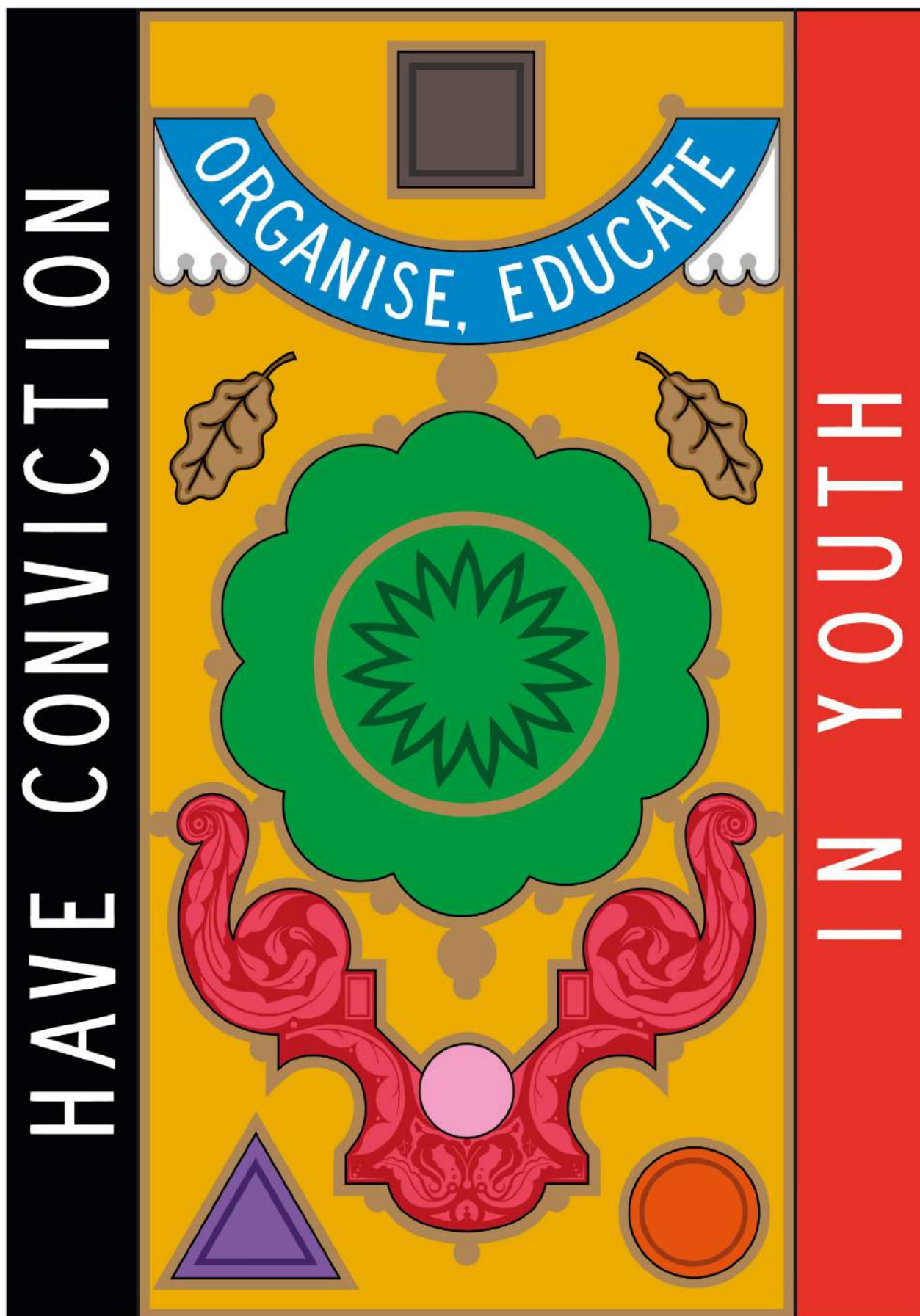
What kind of infrastructure will we need for the future? It could include a national people-power grid, operating universally across the country but owned and controlled within our communities, and made possible by:

- **People who connect people.** In every neighbourhood, people who are really, really good at encouraging connectivity to flourish. ‘Community organisers’, skilled at listening, at igniting the impulse to act, at helping people come together to improve their lives and their neighbourhoods and to bring about the changes they want to see. ‘Community connectors’, people who are ready and willing to pick up a conversation with someone who seems to be struggling, tell them about social activities or support organisations, support and encourage them to play a fuller part in community life.
- **Sustained effort.** Locally embedded institutions that feel welcoming and attractive to all sections of the local population, and where associative life can flourish. Pubs, coffee shops, libraries, schools, community health centres,

locally run housing associations. What is really needed is a revitalised version of a community centre or hub – lively, entrepreneurial, energising, community-owned and led – driving connection and collaboration, building pride and possibility in the here and now, while also playing the long game.

- **Digital platforms.** Social media in particular will play a big role, enhancing transparency and exposing injustice, engaging with very large numbers of people, and sometimes helping to shift public debate and behaviour in dramatic ways. New ways to help people come together to generate constructive solutions, and to learn from the experience of others, exchanging skills and knowledge – a [social wiki](#), perhaps?
- **Self-interest.** We need to tap into the great grassroots virtues of thrift, impatience and sociability, and work along the grain of real motivation, the desire lines carved out by love, anger, fear and hope, the give-get relationships, which are most likely to work most of the time for most people. [Time-banks](#), ‘[micro-providers](#)’ schemes, [community shares](#) schemes, a series of local, regional and national resource banks where investment can be pooled and held in trust for communities to contribute to and draw down from.
- **Solidarity.** Within communities we need to discover the art of solidarity, taking steps to understand why some people are left out, becoming curious about what others are thinking, making time to talk about tensions and disagreements, discovering unexpected shared interests. And beyond individual communities we need platforms that make it easier to find inspiration, share support and drive change, from Hartlepool to Hastings, Penrith to Penzance, building a national solidarity network. Read the full article at: [civilsocietyfutures.org/people-power-grid](#)





Creative response to PACT by artist Rebecca Strickson

# Trust

## >>Investing in our core currency



**“We need to move at the speed of trust.”<sup>9</sup>**

**“Leave the people who you trust to actually make the decisions they know about.”<sup>10</sup>**

Trust is the most important asset we have. But trust is too often seen narrowly or undervalued. It’s considered important to win over a donor rather than something much more profound – the core currency of civil society. Even more vital than money, trust is an essential foundation for everything we do. Relationships built on trust are very different to those that are not: embodying shared responsibility, shared ownership, collaboration and cooperation. From women’s shelters to online communities, to carers to international development, the real work that enables us to have genuine impact is the work of building trust.

We cannot take trust for granted. Following abuse, financial mismanagement and the damagingly competitive pursuit of funds, alongside a wider trend of declining faith in institutions, trust in parts of civil society may be falling – the data varies, but it is an issue that has come up consistently through the course of this inquiry. It’s not just the public’s lack of trust in civil society organisations that is so damaging, there’s also mistrust between different parts of civil society. Many people have told us they feel large civil society organisations are slaves to their brand, bureaucratic, disconnected from their supporters and too close to government or corporations, which they fail to challenge as a consequence.

It’s time to restore and increase trust in civil society – enabling us to achieve even more – by valuing trust and continually investing in it.

**We will stay true to our values and do what’s right**, however uncomfortable it may be, knowing it may mean being unpopular. We will be honest about our failures and successes and learn from them, acknowledging others, sharing bravely and openly.

**We will defend rights and call out injustice. Civil society is political:** we will challenge those in power – even if they fund us – and work with others to fundamentally change systems of inequality and powerlessness. We will also stand in solidarity with others who do this, actively speaking up even when their actions are unpopular.

**We will prioritise building trust with the people and communities we work with.** We will devote time and other resources to relationships, taking the time, commitment and care that’s really needed. We will find ways to measure trust and reflect it in how we evaluate success.

**We will trust people, communities and other civil society groups to provide insights, make decisions and run things** – recognising that they often know best about what they need and what can be done. We will live this out in the way we work and the decisions we make, both the big decisions and the everyday ones.

## The future could include...

Every process includes time for dialogue and getting to know each other... Communities are trusted to make decisions, to own and control assets such as **land and housing** and **permanently endowed local funds**... National groups have a genuine and deeply rooted **presence at local level**... An end to the Lobbying

Act because we must be free to speak out on political issues – and a refusal to let it stand in our way in the meantime... Shared measurement and understanding of trust... Year zero funding for projects, including significant time to build trust and relationships between people... **Funding is made available for the disobedient** who challenge systems, trusting and rewarding them to do more... Funding is entrusted to people even if they are not connected to an organisation...

## Belfast Friendship Club

In 2004, Belfast was rocked by a series of unprovoked racist attacks on its Filipino community. In a population still reeling from decades of civil conflict, mistrust of minorities remained close to the surface. A large group of civil society organisations and charities gradually came together and, in 2009, started the **Belfast Friendship Club**, a safe space for people to meet and build relationships.

It was primarily aimed at anyone new to the city for any reason, but also welcomed locals, who now make up almost a quarter of the membership. And it has flourished ever since.

Belfast Friendship Club meets every Thursday evening, and over the months and years meaningful connections and friendships have been forged, irrespective of backgrounds or identities. The club's strength arises from an ethos of solidarity, equity and respect, and a large, loyal and expanding membership draws newcomers into its warm and welcoming space.

Read and watch more here: [civilsocietyfutures.org/belfast-welcoming-refugees-radical-new-approach-speaking/](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/belfast-welcoming-refugees-radical-new-approach-speaking/)

## Shelter

Shelter's ambitious new 10-year strategy aims to tackle the housing 'national emergency', demanding homes that are safe, secure and affordable, and providing holistic support to those at the sharp end of housing problems.

Doing this depends on building trust with many people and other organisations. It plans to take a proactive role in building and working with existing networks, people and organisations across the country as part of a 'movement for change'.

Shelter has looked afresh at its role and contribution to this nationwide movement – recognising how its access to expertise, data and a bank of experts in housing law can help local charities advocating for change. In addition, it has many regional hubs and more than 100 shops, and looks to see these as centres of information and support for other bodies seeking to improve people's housing.

**“We will join forces with individuals and organisations, empowering and amplifying the voice of anyone who wants to work alongside us. And we'll seek to recruit 500,000 supporters to defend the right to a safe home.”**  
**Polly Neate, Chief Executive**

Read more here: [https://england.shelter.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/our\\_strategy](https://england.shelter.org.uk/what_we_do/our_strategy)



# Putting it into practice

**“Social change is always rooted in strong values, beliefs and principles.”<sup>11</sup>**

This PACT is something we can all put into practice in what we do as part of civil society.

Change will come through our individual and collective leadership, and through the ways we organise and work together. It needs to be part of our everyday actions and decisions, as well as inform our long-term dreams, visions and strategies. Those with established prestige and power might have more of a role to play – but every one of us can help to lead the way.


## Individuals

Below are suggestions of what it might mean personally for each of us to recognise our own role and lead the way – being open, courageous and willing to change our everyday practices. We can cultivate each practice and make them visible in how we work – it's not just what we do in public and not just about those at the top of groups or organisations. We will each be better at some of these than others, and each day might be different, it's a constant journey.



# Power

>>Consciously shift power

**From**  **Towards**

## Power unaware

I am unaware of my power and privilege, and am not actively working with it to shift imbalances.

## Power aware

I am aware of my power and privilege and actively work with this to shift imbalances.

## Power over

I exert control over people and activities.

## Power with

I create an enabling environment for people I work with, to build and cultivate their power.

## Unaware

I am unaware of my perspective and the impact that has on the choices I make, and who or what is listened to and valued.

## Self reflection

I am mindful of my perspective and the impact that has on the choices I make, who and what is listened to, and what is valued.

## How to put this into practice


### Consciously shift power:

- Recognise your own power.
- Bring attention to power dynamics in groups you work with by openly discussing and exploring it with them.
- Support others to build power and become leaders.
- Stand up for everyone, not just the majority.



# Accountability

>>Explore and change your accountability

**From**  **Towards**

## Independent

I do things alone, create silos and assume I know best.

## Interdependent

I am accountable to those I work and interact with and seek their views.

## Scrutiny

I have a predefined view of accountability that is predominantly based on formal processes.

## Shared

I build relationships based on dialogue and feedback, which informs how I work on an ongoing basis.

## Rigid

I have a fixed way of doing things, even when I know it isn't the right thing to do.

## Adaptive

I constantly learn and embrace the unknown, admit mistakes and adapt how I do things.

## How to put this into practice


### Explore and change your accountability:

- Ask for and act on feedback
- Actively seek diversity of views and opinion about how to improve things
- Identify who you are accountable to today and who else you interact with. Look at what it would take to change this
- Admit and share your mistakes and failures and talk about how that informs your actions



## Connection

>>Deepen connections with people and communities

From  Towards

### Transactional

I build relationships built on one defining aspect of a person.

### Relational

I meet people as equals and recognise we're all complex beings with different identities that intersect and create unique experiences of the world.

### Scarcity

I believe people need help, are lacking something and won't change.

### Abundance

I believe in the capacity and potential of people to change themselves.

### Echo chambers

I build connections with those like me.

### Bridging divides

I value multiple perspectives and actively build understanding, connections and collaboration with those who are different to me.

## How to put this into practice

### Deepen connections with people and communities:


- Understand your own / multiple identities and what this means for your connections.
- Listen to people you might not otherwise and those with different views to your own.
- Find out more about who isn't engaging with your work and try to find out why.
- Make time and create spaces to discuss some of the challenging issues that prevent people from connecting with and supporting each other.
- Understand more about who is working on similar issues in your area: be curious, connect with and learn from them, and try to do something together with them.





# Trust

>>Maximise trust

From  Towards

## Risk averse

I prefer not to move out of my comfort zone, to speak out, stand up, challenge and act on things that matter in solidarity with others.

## Courage and bravery

I speak out, stand up, challenge and act on things that matter and in solidarity with others, even when that's uncomfortable.

## Listening lightly

I listen to the facts and what is visible.

## Listening deeply

I invest time in people, move at the pace of the slowest and seek different perspectives. I get to know people, am curious and listen deeply to their feelings and needs, and this informs how I choose to act.

## Avoiding creative tension

I find it hard to trust people and respect their way of doing things. I avoid challenge, conflict and tension.

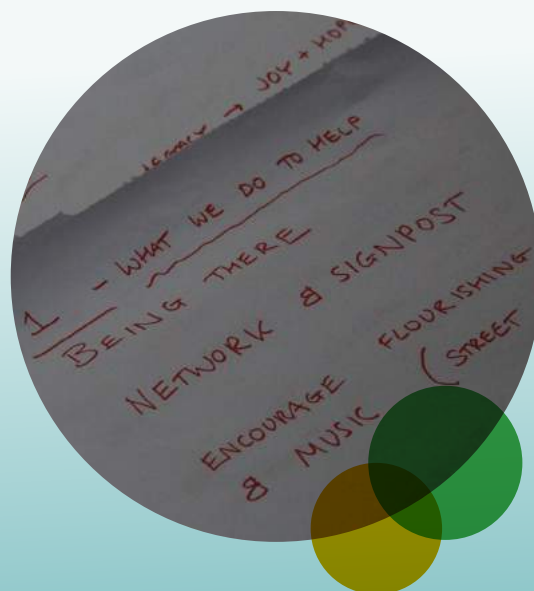
## Embracing creative tension

I trust people and the process and see value in people doing things their way. I find ways to work with challenge, conflict and tension in a constructive way.

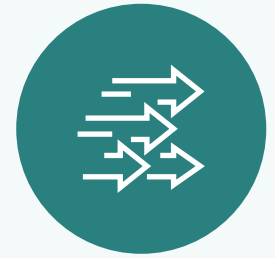
## How to put this into practice

### Maximise trust:

- Notice when you're taking or avoiding risks. Ask what you would do in that situation if you were ten times braver.
- Understand how to gain trust and acceptance within different spaces and communities.
- Make time to seek out different perspectives and views and to listen deeply.
- Admit when you don't know, and ask for support.



# Organisations, groups, networks and movements



**Much of the PACT is about what we do when we come together, whether that's in a formal organisation or any other way.**

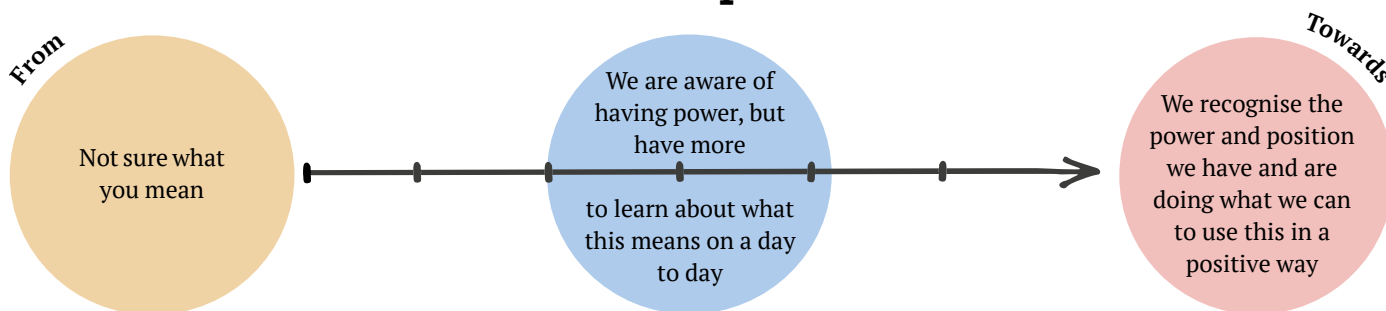
Below are questions designed to help you begin reflecting on what it means collectively for you. It is an opportunity to start a conversation with those you work with, to bring to the surface different perspectives on your work and to identify areas you might wish to change or work towards.

Beyond starting this conversation, there are number of other areas for groups' and organisations' ways of working that you could usefully explore:

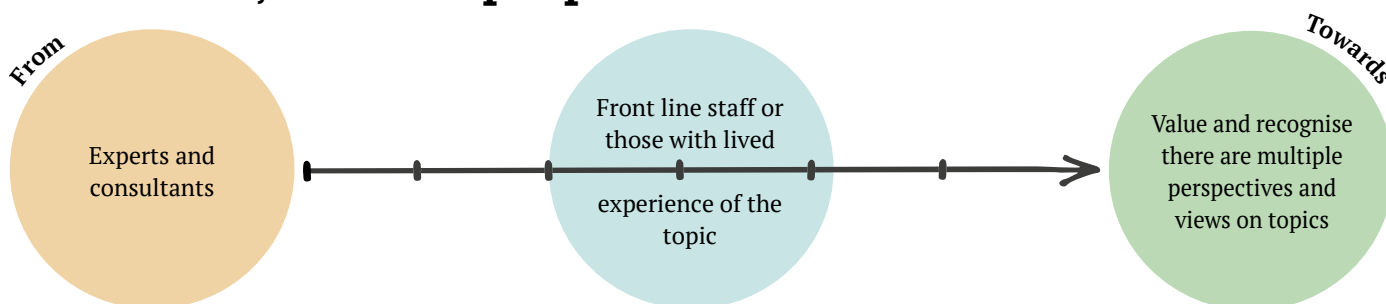
- Use the PACT as a basis when you review how well you are doing.
- Integrate and use the PACT to inform your strategy and planning cycles.
- Look at your story and narrative – be clear about your purpose, role and contribution to long-term change on each of the areas of the PACT.
- Develop your own PACT manifesto for your group or organisation that supports your activities and culture.
- Review and evolve your HR, recruitment and pay practices.
- Review your governance and decision-making approaches.
- Critically review your feedback approaches and mechanisms.
- Develop an approach to conflict resolution.
- Create explicit measures of connection and trust (and mistrust) in your group or organisation.
- Include honest reflections in your annual reports on your practice, learning, failures and questions you're working with.
- Find other ways to live out the PACT: for example, create connections and shift power and money by buying services from within civil society – from meeting spaces, catering, IT support, design and research to grounds maintenance.

# Power

## How well do we understand our own power?



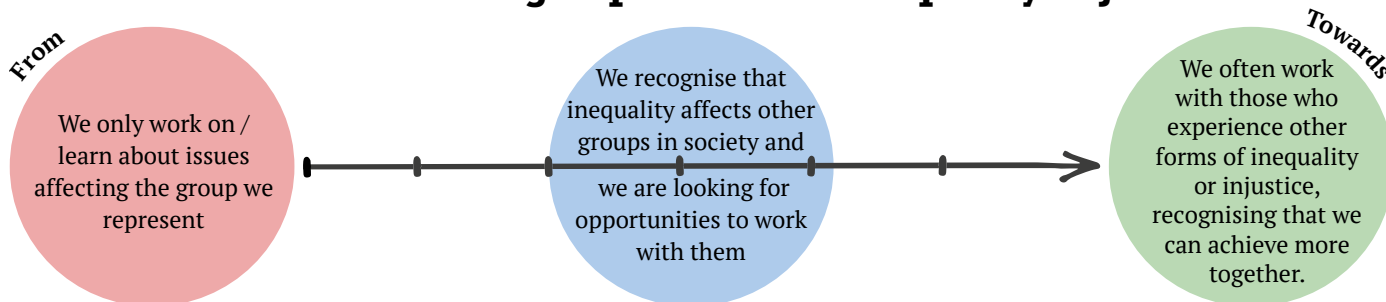
## Whose views, voices and perspectives do we value the most?



## How do we make difficult and important decisions about the work we do?



## How do we work with other groups on issues of equality or justice?



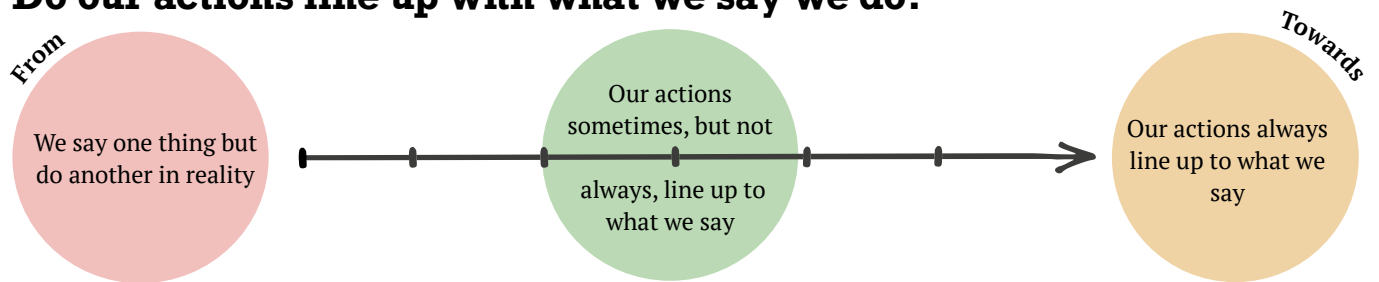
## Want to explore more?

- [\*Power and Privilege: A Handbook for Political Organisers\*](#) (NEON)
- [\*Social Power – How Civil Society can ‘Play Big’ and Truly Create Change\*](#) (Shelia McKechnie Foundation)
- [\*Power cube – understanding power for social change\*](#) (Institute of Development Studies)
- [\*Losing Control\*](#) - a movement for people who want to let go of power to unleash social change (Social Change Agency and Practical Governance)
- [\*“But Wait, I’m Woke!”: The Trials of the White Male\*](#)
- [\*Manager\*](#) (Guppi Bola)
- [\*People Power and Technology: The 2018 Digital Understanding Report\*](#) (doteveryone)
- [\*Power: A practical guide for facilitating social change\*](#) (Carnegie Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation)
- [\*Power Moves – Ignite the power of your philanthropy for equity and justice\*](#) (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy)



# Accountability

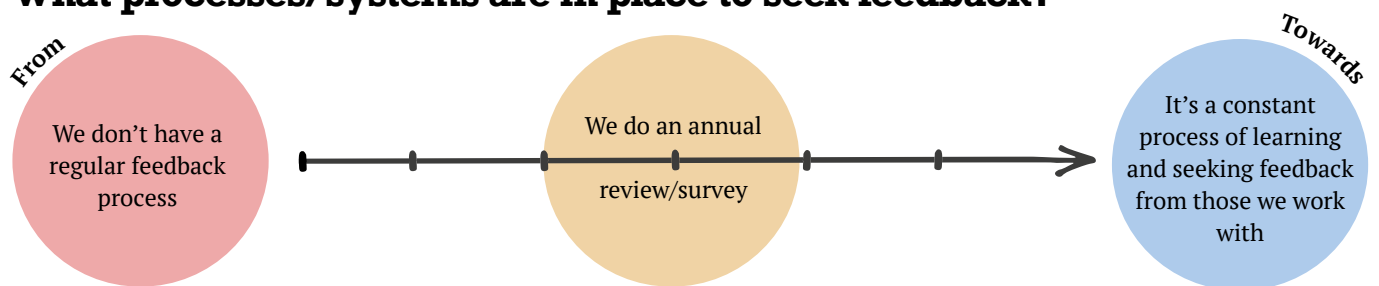
**Do our actions line up with what we say we do?**



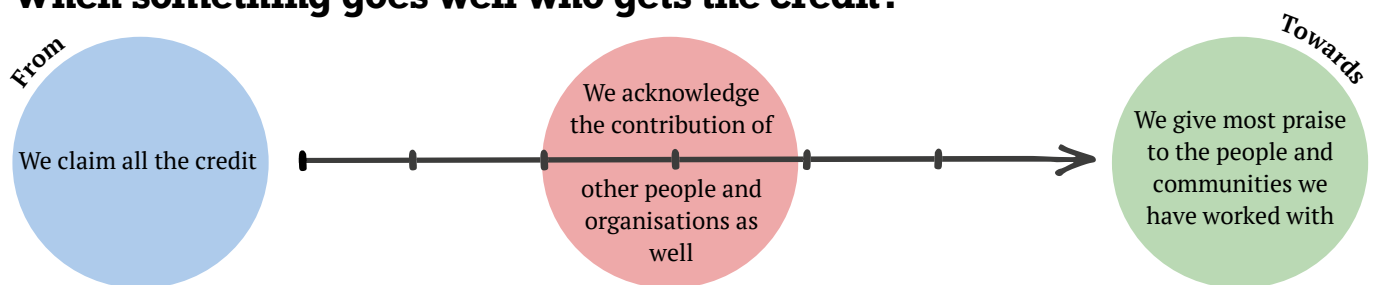
**Who mainly drives our group's/organisation's agenda?**



**What processes/systems are in place to seek feedback?**



**When something goes well who gets the credit?**



**How do we view our strategy and approach to change?**

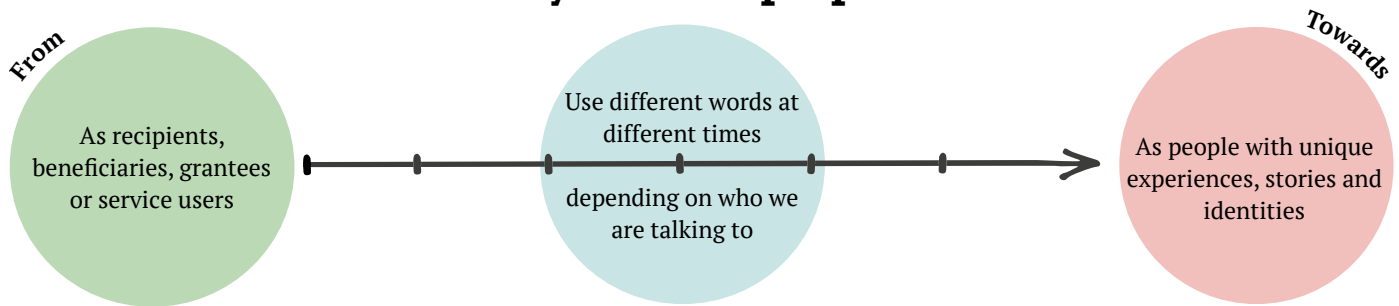


**Want to explore more?**

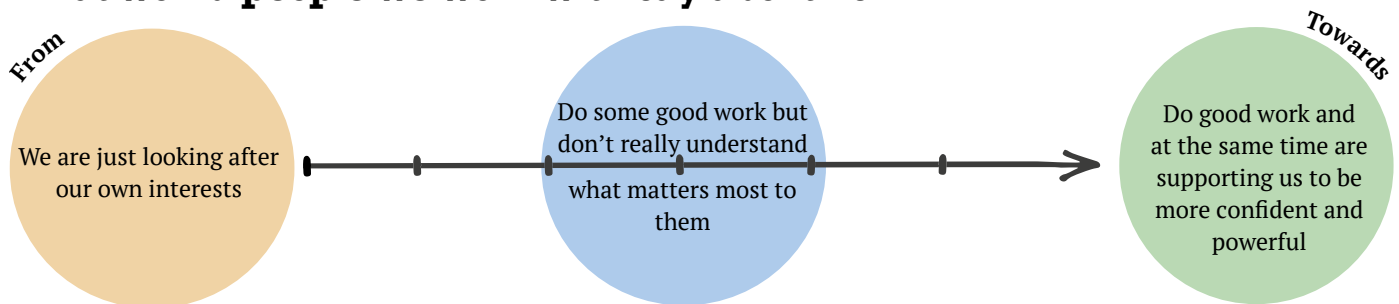
- [Charity Governance Code](#) – a practical tool to help charities and their trustees develop high standards of governance (Charity Commission)
- [Resilient Roots Accountability Initiative](#) (Civicus)
- [Loomio](#) – a tool for collaborative decision making (Loomio)
- [CoBudget](#) – tool for collaborative budgeting (CoBudget)
- [Enspirial Handbook](#) – handbook of alternative agreements and practical guidance (Enspirial)
- [Future of Community Enterprise](#) – a vision for a future accountability with community enterprises (Power to Change)

# Connection

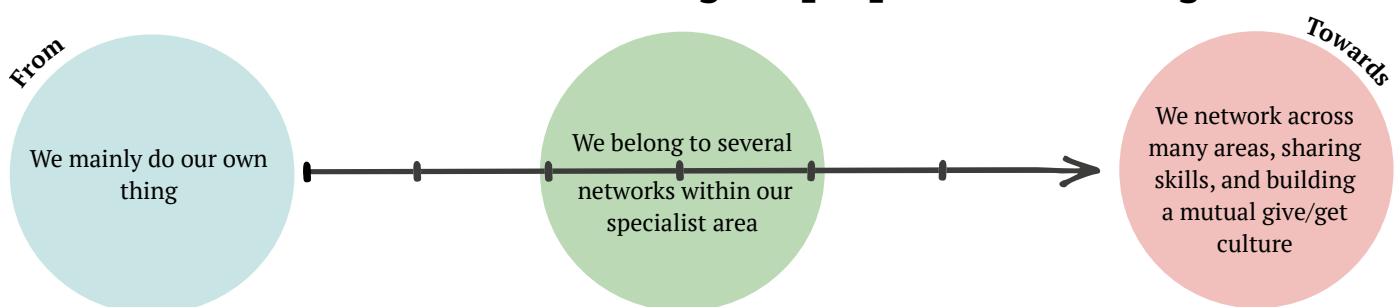
## How do we view and actively describe people we work with?



## What would people we work with say about us?



## Are we well-networked with other aligned people/networks/organisations?



## Do our efforts focus on causes or symptoms?

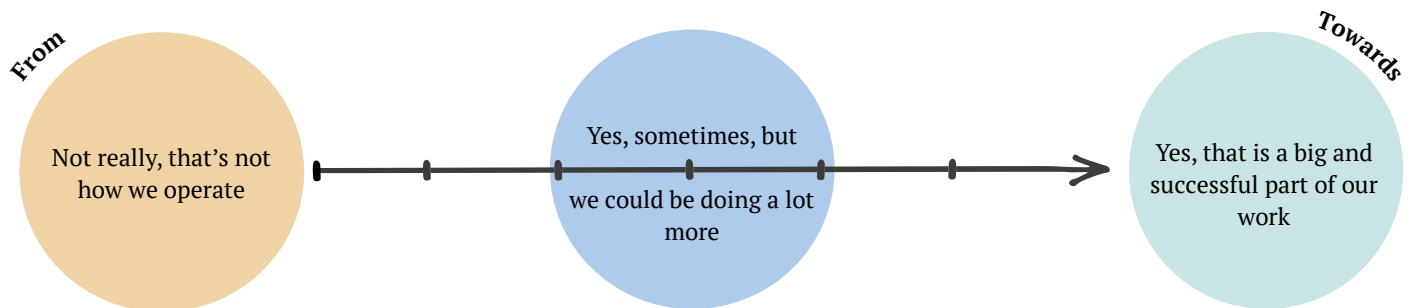


## Want to explore more?

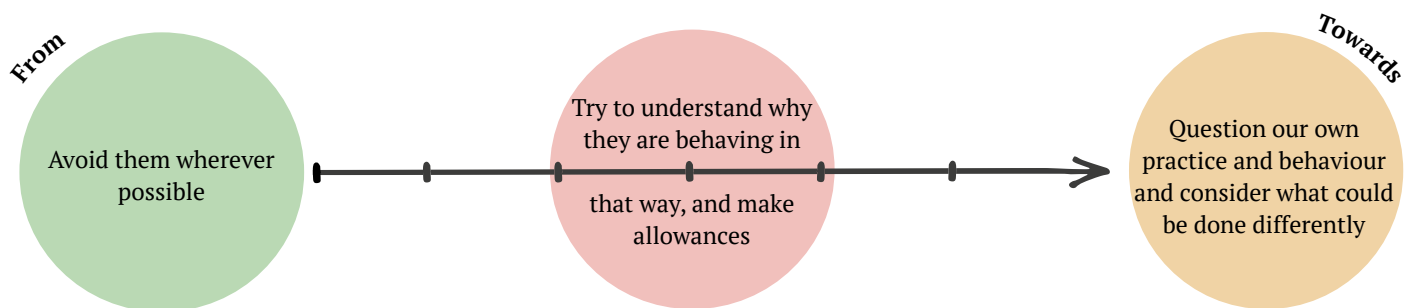
- [The State of Collaboration - How Ready are We to Work Together?](#) (Collaborate)
- [Four essential ingredients of collaboration](#) (Forum for the Future)
- [Identity-based forms of organising in civil society: good or bad?](#) (Asif Afridi)
- [Racial Diversity in the Charity Sector](#) – leadership principles and practical recruitment advice (ACEVO and Institute for Fundraising)
- [Walking the Talk on Diversity: What is Holding the](#)
- [Charity Sector Back from Putting Words into Action?](#) (NPC)
- [Getting Started](#) – A guide for communities on doing research (ARVAC)
- [Safer Spaces policy](#) – guidelines to create a respectful, understanding and kind space where people feel able to express themselves and ask questions without fear of reprisal or humiliation (Sisters Uncut)
- [Time to Change](#) – employer pledge to demonstrate a commitment to change how we think and act about mental health in the workplace (Time to change)

# Trust

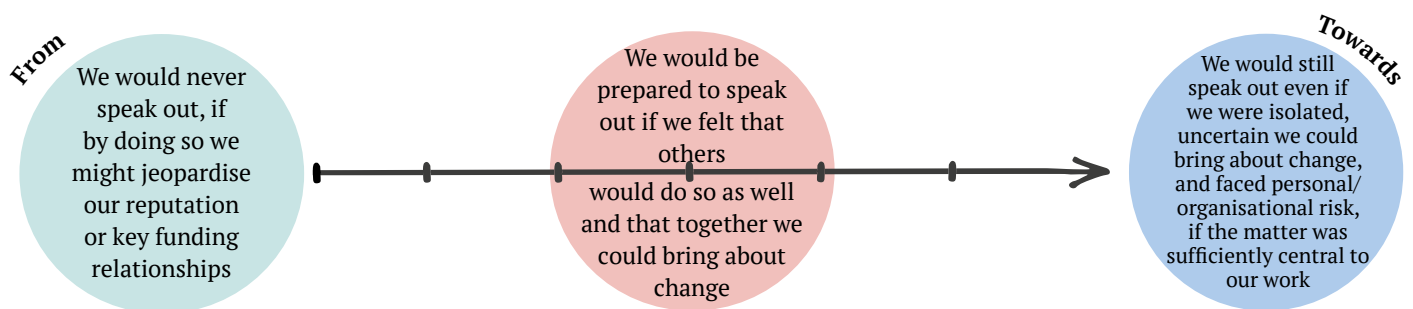
**Do we create opportunities, places or spaces in which people come together and build trust?**



**When people disagree with us and behave in challenging ways, what do we do?**



**Are we prepared to speak out on something fundamentally wrong, even when that might anger those who hold power over us?**



**Want to explore more?**

- [Charity Code of Ethics](#) – a guide for how to recognise and resolve ethical issues and conflicts
- [The Future for Communities: Perspectives on Power](#) (IVAR and Local Trust)
- [Detectorism Insights #1](#): Stories, provocations and cultural portraits from an experiment by participatory Social Lab, CoLab Dudley (CoLab Dudley)
- [Community Leadership](#): Tales from the front line of community based organisations (Various)
- [Civil Society Futures Conversation Toolkit](#) – a guide for hosting a conversation about the future (Civil Society Futures)



# Let's talk about **race**



**“Our wounds will only heal if we tend them.”<sup>12</sup>**

Racism has been high on the public agenda during this inquiry. Whether it's hate crime on our streets, the treatment of the Windrush generation or Islamophobia in the media, there are increasing concerns that we are becoming a more racist society.

But mostly we heard little about race in our many conversations and workshops across civil society, and so commissioned a specific piece of research to surface issues and find solutions. Asif Afridi (an inquiry panel member) and equality organisation brap spoke to black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) voluntary sector organisations, large organisations within civil society, such as ACEVO and Big Lottery Fund, as well as those with lived experience of racism and race inequality.

It brought to light the difficulties much of civil society has in talking about and acting on race, racism and race inequality – and solutions to help us all. Read more at [civilsocietyfutures.org/race](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/race)



## **Why isn't civil society talking enough about race and race inequality?**

Some parts of civil society are discussing these issues, but it's too often muted or insufficient. Research participants cited a number of reasons:

- A lack of focus within public policy.
- A perceived decline in political work on race, with more focus on service delivery within the BAME civil society groups.
- A belief that we now live in a post-racial society.
- Framing in the media of topics like immigration or Islamophobia as distinct and separate from race equality.
- More comfort in discussing workforce diversity, and less comfort in discussing patterns of discrimination and racism affecting wider society.
- Lack of confidence to talk about race if you are from a white British background, for fear of getting it wrong.

## **Opportunities for progressing race equality**

Despite the need for greater investment in race equality work locally and nationally, change needs to come from within civil society. A lot of this comes down to personal skills, taking responsibility, and relating and talking to one another differently about this topic. It also requires us to make this a priority and to pursue it with confidence and certainty.


We need a vision for race equality in civil society that includes, but goes beyond, workforce diversity to include concrete outcomes that address structural causes of inequality.

Using the PACT framework, there are some practical steps we can all take:

**“When you look at some of the statistics around leadership and governance around race, there is clearly a disconnect between those that are trying to deal with the issues within our various communities and the leadership.”<sup>13</sup>**

## Power

>>Consciously shift power

**From**  **Towards**

### Unrepresentative

The ethnic diversity of my senior leadership team is not something I consider.

### Representative

I take active steps to ensure those in leadership positions are representative of our diverse society and have the right skills, experience and values.

### Tokenism

I do engage with people from ethnic minority backgrounds and recruit them, but I don't give them real access to power.

### Sharing power

I think about and measure whether people from ethnic minority backgrounds feel listened to and whether they have access to power.

### Not listening

I don't value, hear or understand the views and experiences of those that have experienced race inequality and racism.

### Actively listening

I engage directly with and learn from the lived experiences of those who have experienced race inequality and racism.


## Practical actions

- Recognise how some views are currently seen to have less credibility or are not heard within civil society – think about the role you personally could play in changing that.
- Review and improve the ethnic diversity of your workforce.
- Gain feedback from staff and people you work with – do people from ethnic minority backgrounds feel listened to, do they have power, do they feel they have the choice to act and progress in a way they value?
- Find support to reflect upon and use your personal power to make a positive impact on race equality.
- Listen to people's lived experiences of race inequality and act on what you hear.

# Accountability

**“People expect our organisation to say some of these things [...] People assume I have an axe to grind. We need trusted people in civil society [...] The big charities need to step up and be advocates for it.”<sup>77</sup>**

>>All of us taking responsibility

**From**  **Towards**

## **Race equality work is too hard for me**

I can't do work on 'race equality' because it is too big or challenging an issue, I might get it wrong and I might be called 'racist'.

## **I recognise and work with personal discomfort**

Despite personal discomfort and fear, I take active steps to learn about race equality and the role I can personally play in progressing it.

## **Displacing responsibility**

People from ethnic minority backgrounds and organisations that work with and are led by them are the experts – it is their responsibility to progress race equality, not mine.

## **Taking responsibility**

I take an active role in progressing race equality, and I use my power, profile and resources within civil to raise awareness about this agenda.

## **Closed to feedback**

I work to progress social justice – I don't need to gain feedback about whether I am representing or meeting the needs and interests of people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

## **Open to feedback**

I gather and listen to feedback about what I do. I understand whether people from different ethnic backgrounds experience the support I provide differently, or whether I am representing their interests effectively.

# Practical actions


- Personal reflective work to increase confidence in talking about race, starting with this article <https://nationalseedproject.org/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack>.
- Organisations: identify how race equality impacts your work, where it is missing at present and how it could be better included, and take steps to receive feedback on your work and the services you might provide.
- Funders: revisit and co-produce ideas of the impact and outcomes you expect from grantees that are funded to work on race equality – be clear and ambitious about the impact on race equality you expect from yourself and others.



# Connection

**“The binaries are breaking down and we need to reflect that complexity in our response to that.”<sup>78</sup>**

>>Coming together to address race equality

**From**  **Towards**

## Division

I don't feel solidarity with others working on race equality within civil society, and don't feel able to learn about their work or engage with them.

## Building relationships

I actively think about my relationships with others within civil society, and work to be more curious about what others are doing on race equality and to become a better ally.

## Diversity within ethnic groups not recognised

I am doing work on race equality. I don't need to recognise the other aspects of diversity that intersect with 'race', like gender, disability, sexual orientation and so on.

## Diversity within ethnic groups recognised

I actively seek to understand a diversity of views and experiences within ethnic groups based on gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and so on. I create spaces where a diversity of views on race equality can be heard.

## Race equality is a stand-alone challenge

I work on race equality alone. Other social justice movements don't understand what I do and I have little to gain by connecting with them.

## Race equality is linked to other challenges in society

I work to explore shared interests with others working on social justice issues in my community (such as food poverty or environmental justice). I aim to understand what they are doing and seek opportunities to work with them to progress race equality too.


## Practical actions

- Build connections with other groups – those you already collaborate with and those you don't – to act on race equality.
- Funders: fund groups that work across different communities/identities.
- Learn more about intersectionality: [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/9202/Guide-to-Intersectionality/doc/Intersectionality\\_Guidance\\_Feb\\_18.doc](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/9202/Guide-to-Intersectionality/doc/Intersectionality_Guidance_Feb_18.doc).

# Trust

**“Without discussing history, it becomes hard to expect different outcomes and to build trust and equity between people from different backgrounds.”<sup>79</sup>**

>>Trust and history

From  Towards

## Not recognising distrust

I am doing or funding work on race equality, I don't understand why people aren't engaging with me.

## Recognising distrust

I recognise that past history and bias can affect how much I trust others and how much they trust me.

## Not engaging with the past

The past is behind us and I don't want to talk about it. Talking about the continued effects of colonialism, empire and class is painful, or I'm not aware of it.

## Engaging with the past

I am open to discussing and learning about uncomfortable topics of race inequality and histories of racism and discrimination.

## Practical actions

- Listen and understand the perspectives and experiences of others – engage with historical issues and events (e.g. empire and colonialism).
- Understand your own role in continuing inequality.



# Ecosystem and structures



This inquiry has deliberately and consciously concentrated on what civil society can do itself, and it has heard from people, organisations, networks and movements that are driving fundamental change.

**But civil society does not exist in isolation: it is part of a large and complex ecosystem.** It is shaped, influenced, supported and formed by the environment in which it operates. In turn, it has an impact on that environment, both the market and the state – they are interdependent and, increasingly, civil society, government and businesses need to work together for a thriving society. Each also has a direct interest in doing so.

Neither the public sector nor the market would be able to cope without the civil society action taking place everywhere across the country. It is the people informally helping their neighbours, getting involved with schools, food banks, sports clubs and tenants associations who power communities and make public services viable, from health to education, housing, policing and much more. It is the consumer organisations giving feedback to business, the workers and tenants organisations asserting rights. It is the organisations of people with disabilities that have made the inadequacy of some services so clear.

This is true nationally and locally. The level of interdependence and the power of civil society is too often overlooked. This risks undermining confidence in civil society. And yet it is civil society that helps to shape the national conversation. It is civil society that connects people without power to those with power, and enables people who feel they haven't got power to come together.

## **The ecosystem within which civil society operates has a critical role in enabling civil society to thrive.**

The actions of government – from the operation of the benefits system, through to the funding settlement for local authorities, and policy on social care – fundamentally shape the environment within which civil society works. Austerity and the reduced capacity of local authorities have had, and will have, a major impact. Equally, the operation of the markets, from the precariousness of employment through to the state of our high streets, shapes and affects what civil society is able to do.

There are other actors within the ecosystem too, many of whom are also part of civil society, including funders, commissioners, national bodies and leadership support groups.

### **Throughout this inquiry stories, both good and bad, have come to light about the ways in which all these different actors work together.**

People have spoken of blurred boundaries, and mutual support, as well as challenges, and the impact of decisions that have then directly influenced the outcomes of civil society.

This has included many successes and collaborations:

- Local authorities working collaboratively and imaginatively to share the resources in a place to build the confidence and capability of a place.
- Constructive joint working in which mutual support was the watchword.

- Support from local business for civil society in the area.
- The blurring of boundaries between the state and civil society, with shared programmes of work.
- Civil society organisations getting support from businesses both for skills, space and funding.
- Organisations – public, voluntary and private – increasingly taking seriously their role as anchor institutions, working across boundaries to shape better futures.

But there are also problematic experiences:

- Poor commissioning practices that ignored the skills and knowledge held in civil society, and made their independent operation difficult.
- Labour market conditions that made engagement in civil society incredibly difficult.
- Apparently careless funding decisions that prevented civil society bodies from contributing.
- Suddenly vacated high streets, leaving desolation and challenge, with no time for planning or remedy.
- Enforced competition that made a truly connected civil society hard to achieve.

## **If civil society is to renew itself, the ecosystem will need to change too.**

Civil society, government and business: the PACT has implications for all of us, in whatever sector we work.

And the people–power grid social infrastructure that we propose above could be a major long-term initiative involving all of these actors, bringing people together everywhere across the country to ensure that this ecosystem works to connect people with each other – the enduring purpose of civil society.

Let us all work together to support thriving communities and a thriving future society.

## **Funders of civil society, such as grant making trusts and foundations, national, regional or local community foundations, part of civil society or public sector grant makers**

**Reflect the PACT in everything you do and develop the funding ecosystem to support people and communities to build their capacity for change**

This could include:

- Supporting and helping to build the people–power grid.
- Endowing and helping to build local endowments that can be directed and owned by people in the community.
- Starting to measure the depth and breadth of connections, taking them just as seriously as you take other impacts.
- Shifting power by making sure that local communities and people with lived experience make and are involved in funding decisions.
- Recognising that trust takes time to build, by paying for development and start-up of projects with time to build connections and trust, not just ‘delivery’.
- Co-designing accountability mechanisms together with those receiving funding, and only demanding accountability that is simple, proportionate and necessary.
- Taking risks that reflect the very real risks taken by people in communities every day.
- Assessing the depth of connections when assessing funding proposals, and recognising that building social capital, alongside achieving social change, requires support, engagement and long-term trust.



## **Commissioners such as CCGs, housing associations, local authorities**

**Change your contracting practices to reflect the PACT.**

This could include:

- Engaging the people–power grid to support and help design local and specialist commissioning practice.
- Developing social value clauses that allow better informed commissioning decisions to be made.
- Ensuring that the costs of the time and effort needed for trust, relationship building and connection are included in funding for projects – not just ‘delivery’.
- Jointly designing contract specifications with civil society.

## **National infrastructure bodies such as NCVO, NAVCA, ACEVO and EDF**

**Promote changes in culture and practices, explore and invest in deliberate and thoughtful connections across civil society.**

This could include:

- Investigating how to develop the people–power grid.
- Using the PACT, promoting it across civil society, supporting your members in their use of it, and promoting the difference that it makes.
- Promoting widespread shifts in culture and practices, to recognise and pursue success differently from the current norms of income, size and short-term impacts – instead prioritising areas such as depth and breadth of connection, levels of trust and shifting of power.

- Explicitly working to address inequality in support provision across the country and with regard to particular types of civil society organisation.
- Working collaboratively with peers to ensure that the limited resources available for support to civil society are used to greatest effect.
- Encouraging collaboration and the sharing of resources across civil society: for example, larger organisations sharing premises, skills, experience and funding with smaller organisations at the community level.
- Encouraging civil society organisations to concentrate resources on issues and areas of greatest need.

## **Leadership support, such as ACTION, CLORE and ACEVO, working with new and existing learning providers**

**Ensure that you are developing leaders at every level – both volunteers and those who are paid – to meet the challenges of the PACT.**

This could include:

- Providing great practical support for leaders in civil society, supporting the changes in behaviours and leadership standards for a 21st century civil society, with power, accountability, connection and trust explicitly reflected in the ethos and the content of all training and support.
- Developing leaders who recognise and pursue success as depth and breadth of connection, levels of trust and shifting of power, rather than short-term gains.
- Developing nationwide, cross-sector peer models of learning and development.

## **Regulators and government, such as the Charity Commission, CQC, Ofsted and the Health and Safety Executive**

**Work with civil society to create an enabling environment to support its future.**

This could include:

- Including the areas of the PACT in how your measure whether organisations are meeting their charitable purpose, and other measures of success.
- Gathering intelligence from civil society.
- Listening to the challengers and trouble-makers.
- Supporting and being open to new forms of civil society organising, and different models of meeting purpose.
- Ensuring that the voice of civil society can be heard – this will mean regulators explicitly emphasising the role of civil society in providing feedback and knowledge, and doing so publicly.
- Government providing long-term investment in communities through a Community Wealth Fund.

## **Local authorities**

**Proactively work with civil society to overcome future challenges at a local level and support thriving local communities.**

This could include:

- Transferring decision-making power to local communities, for example participatory budgets, citizen juries and community commissioning of service, among other means.
- Alliance building with civil society, other local public spending bodies and the private sector, to ensure that all the resources in a community

are mobilised to develop resilience.

- Listening carefully to sections of the community that are most dependent on services, and protecting their interests when spending decisions are being made.
- Providing grants, making appropriate asset transfers, and focusing on commissioning and purchasing locally.

## **Businesses**

**Understand what your role is, and support and collaborate with a flourishing civil society.**

This could include:

- Acknowledging your dependence on the operation of a revived and re-energised civil society, and working to enhance its capacity.
- Building on the deep collaboration that already exists in some areas to ensure that these connections help to renew civil society, not exhaust it.
- Investing in the people–power grid through funding, secondments, provision of physical space, training and engagement.
- Considering local civil society in your procurement and partnership decisions, and recognising the skills and knowledge that civil society contributes.
- As anchor organisations, working with civil society to shape places, recognising the power of procurement, recruitment and reputation.

# The future together



**“My hope for the future is that civil society is ingrained in who we all are.”<sup>17</sup>**

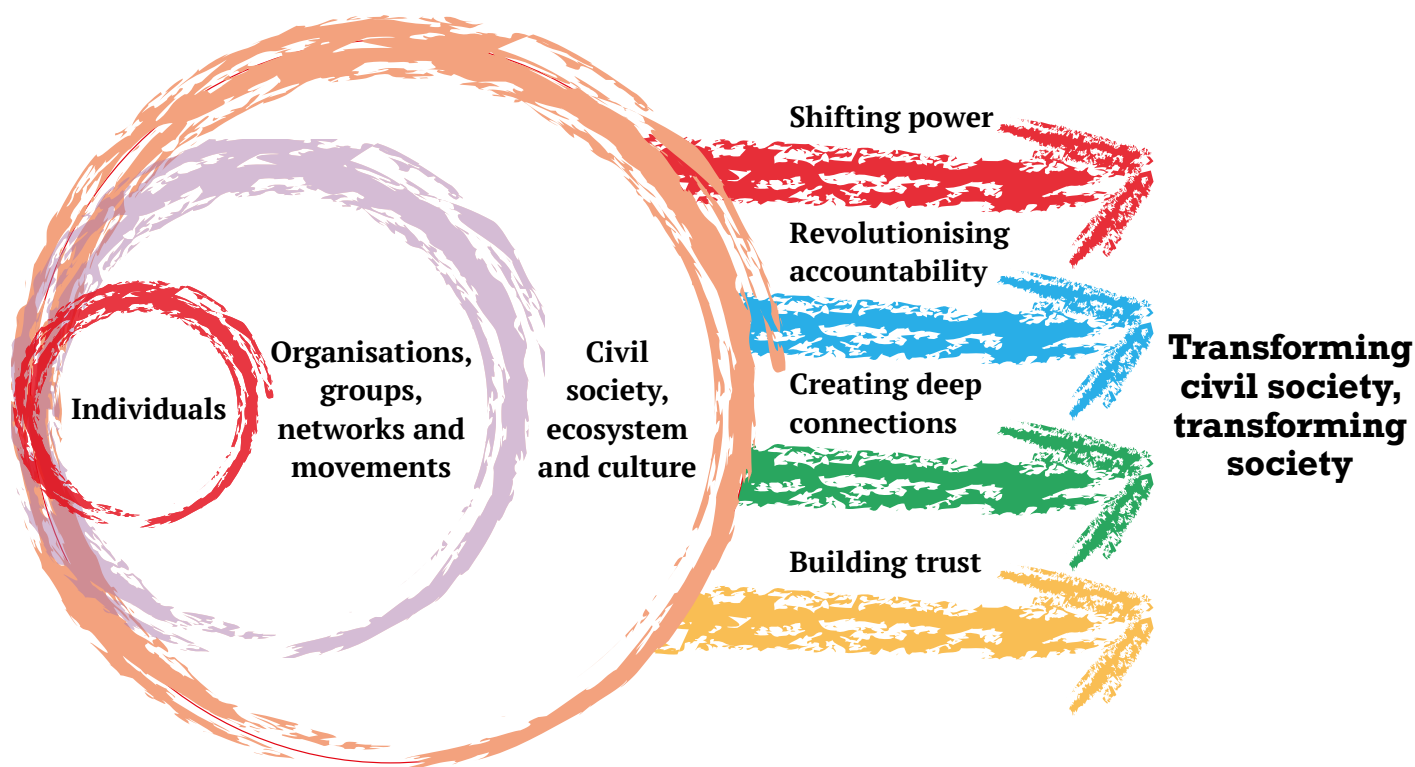
**“We have the potential to be extraordinary.”<sup>18</sup>**

Civil society has always been about coming together – to celebrate, to connect, to face our greatest challenges, to create justice.

To embrace the decade ahead, we need to change simultaneously as individuals, communities, organisations and systems. We need to work together through a shared endeavour.

Let us shift power, revolutionise accountability, build real, meaningful connections and invest in trust.

[www.civilsocietyfutures.org](http://www.civilsocietyfutures.org)



# Appendix 1

## **Mixed methods: Civil Society Futures in a Participatory Action Research Framework**

We positioned our research practices loosely within a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework that took form most explicitly in the deep dives into the nine local areas.

PAR (Whyte, 1991; Bergold and Thomas, 2012) starts from the people at the centre of the research and is oriented from the outset towards social justice and social change. As an approach to investigating and understanding what the future of civil society could look like, it works with people to understand and move towards the sorts of things that they want. Importantly, PAR is not just observation. It does not seek simply to explore what is out there, extract the data and leave the research subject just as it was found. Rather, PAR starts out with the intention of working with the research subjects to identify what change might look like and then to help them bring that change about.

In essence, PAR attempts to be a democratic approach to doing research that is both critical and collaborative. It tries to be research that is flexible enough to adapt to participants' needs and desires; to recognise when it might be best to alter the direction of travel, to reconsider if the research questions are really the right ones, and to recast intended outcomes to best suit those who will be most affected by the process. The idea is that in the process both the researchers and the research participants learn something.

PAR also puts the researcher in the fray. Rather than working from the outside looking in, PAR is about working with people to see what would make change possible. So although we used traditional methods – facilitated discussions, interviews, focus groups and workshops – these were organised around questions that allowed us to consider the distribution of power, resource and voice, both within groups and in the wider society. We have discussed the changing nature of civil society, how to maximise the prospects for the positive effects of civic action and considered how we may be able to share ideas to realise these opportunities.

Of course, the inquiry team was limited and couldn't be everywhere at once. In order to stimulate as wide and inclusive a debate as possible, we also invited people to hold their own 'Conversations' wherever they were, and to feed this material back to us. All of this provided us with a mass of 'data', from which we identified common themes and an explanatory framework, which was then feed back to the places it came from to stimulate further conversation and action in an iterative, open and dynamic process.

PAR is difficult to do well. It is a challenging and at times frustrating approach that forces each of us constantly to break down boundaries and barriers to our thinking and



our practices; to consider what it really means to work together; to fully take stock of all forms of knowledge that can have a bearing on the subject and our understanding of it. It requires an ongoing commitment from researchers and research participants, a willingness from each of us to step outside our comfort zones and meet each other on equal terms. Inevitably, it often needs a time-frame longer than research funding will allow. This has been as true for the inquiry team as it has been for the many people struggling with this on a daily basis in civil society at large.

We have not always been able to fulfill the requirements of an on-going participatory action research approach as much as we would have liked. We wanted to explore civil society activity across England, to be as inclusive as possible. But getting the balance right between scope and depth within the 2-year time-span of the inquiry was difficult. Due to the ready-formed networks of Citizens UK, we were able to work more closely with the three self-organising groups in Mansfield, Newcastle and Peckham, but PAR underpinned our general approach across the inquiry, with a desire to strengthen civil society as we went about our work.

Data has been captured in various forms. All of the Phase 3 workshops and interviews were recorded, fully transcribed and analysed thematically with the help of NVIVO software, which enables the systematic identification of patterns and trends. The data fed back to us from the conversations came in report form from the groups themselves. The inquiry team and panel met regularly to discuss and develop an emerging analytical framework across all of the data sets. In order to ensure that we were all approaching the various types of data in similar ways that could be broadly cross-referenced and tested against each other, we have drawn upon the 'three horizons' framework (Sharpe, 2013) to help categorise and contextualise the findings. This approach encourages you to think about the future from the conditions of the present. It identifies current systemic patterns and the ways we can expect those to develop if everything continues on the same trajectory, and then how to imagine different and better futures from what we can locate in the present. At the end of the analysis we invited participants to an event in Birmingham to reflect on the findings of work with us to refine and revise them.

# Appendix 2

## A note on language

**In discussing these issues and raising these questions we are also painfully aware that language can elicit trust and power and at worst mistrust and alienation.**

We are aware that for some people, the way we are talking about some of these ideas is imperfect and there will be other ways of describing them. We also recognise that how we share things here won't reach everyone, excludes many and that there will be other ways of communicating the same ideas.

The trends analysis above has been used to frame, contextualise and interrogate the evidence that we have collected in all its forms throughout the inquiry. We have encountered civil society in a myriad of forms and we are well aware that there are many more besides. The civil society and actors map below offers one way of visualising the richness and diversity of civil society activity and has been a useful tool to remind us of the vast array of interests and activities that the term civil society encompasses.

**The evidence we have collected is large and multi-faceted. It speaks to individual experiences and collective desires; the impact of social, economic, political and technological factors, as well as civil society as organisations working within our communities.** Each of these aspects is complex and interrelated requiring a holistic and systemic approach.

Of course, notions of civil society, its purpose and how we conceptualise it change over time. We have encountered notions of civil society that speak to traditional ideas of associational life – that part of society that sits between the state and the market most commonly referred to as the “voluntary”, “third”, “NGO” or “non-profit sector” where people come together for un-coerced human association (Walzer, 1998), for a whole host of activities from running the local football team to welcome groups for refugees. We've also seen a strong sense of civil society as something that runs counter to particular ideologies that derive from competitive individualism and me-first approaches to life deemed dominant for too long. This is a conception of civil society driven more by a values-based understanding of what makes the ‘good society’.

It is not necessarily connected to philanthropic impulses – the desire to do good, rather it is concerned to practice and promote social norms of tolerance, non-discrimination, cooperation and trust. The fact that this notion of civil society as the ‘good society’

has come through so strongly in the workshops in particular, is also indicative of the perception of participants of a dire lack of trust, tolerance and co-operation being pervasive in a deeply unequal society, coupled with a strong desire for a different way of living based on kindness, compassion and understanding.

Bound up with each of these interpretations is the clear sense of civil society as public sphere – the space where people come together to gain understanding, learn about difference and engage with systems of power. It is in these spaces where civil society as the good society meets new forms of politics, economics and public policy and ultimately translates into better forms of democracy.

Such ideas form the basis for the current resurgence of interest in new forms of civic agency, participatory democracy, cooperative practices and renewed forms of self-determination. The common denominator across all these initiatives is more power in the hands of more people to shape the decisions that affect their lives creating new publics in the process.

**“In this sense civil society – as a set of capacities – and politics – as a set of processes – become united in the public sphere, providing an essential antidote to the depoliticisation and fatalism that are so marked in contemporary societies” (Edwards, 2014:71).**

To focus on one dimension of civil society could only ever give an overly simplistic account of the places, spaces, people, organisations, practices, politics, hopes and desires of the multiple civil society realms and offer little by way of understanding what the futures of civil society may hold. What we have attempted to do here is to be led by what people tell us is important now and what their vision of the future of civil society is.

What we found is that this is deeply entangled with conditions of the state and the market – it springs from seeds relating to notions of associational life – but these are fed by an increasing desire to tend to the common good against pervasive and ever extending inequalities. The means to do this requires social, political and economic strategies developed from a whole new way of thinking about the ways in which economic and social life connect.

# Appendix 3

## Responses to the call for evidence and contributions

Name	On whose behalf are you sharing this information?	Organisation/group/network name (if appropriate)
Alan Twelvetreets	Individual	Citizens UK, Wales
Andrew Purkis	Individual	Individual contribution
Angus McCabe	Individual, research organisation	Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham
Ben Young	Individual	Individual contribution
Bill Kerry	NGO	The Equality Trust
Carol Webb	Individual	Individual contribution
Caroline Howe	NGO	Lloyds Bank Foundation for England & Wales
David Beel	Individual, research organisation	Staffordshire University/Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD, Cardiff University)
David Menham	Individual	David Menham
Dr Christala Sophcoleous	Research organisation	WISERD, Cardiff University
Dr Robin Jackson	Research organisation, NGO, Network of citizens	Centre for Welfare Reform
Ed Mayo	Trade association	Co-operatives UK
Ella Sips	Individual	Chester Voluntary Action
Fred Garnett	Individual, research organisation	Learner-generated contexts research group
George Lueddeke	Academic Researcher	Individual contribution
Hugh Small	Individual	<a href="http://www.democracy150.uk">www.democracy150.uk</a>
Ian Jones	NGO	Volunteer Cornwall
Jackie Rosenberg	Collaborative commission	London Communities Commission
John Mohan	Academic researcher	Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham
Jonathan Lindsell	NGO	Charity Futures
Lyn Winter	Individual	Individual contribution
Maggie McAndrews	Individual	The Mac Gallery
Maria Rovisco	Individual	University of Leicester
Martha Wilkinson	Community foundation	Devon Community Foundation
Nick Temple	Membership body	Social Enterprise UK
Nina Hathway	An independent network of local charities and community organisations working in Westminster.	Westminster Community Network
Paul Hackwood	NGO	Church Urban Fund
Penny Wilson	NGO	Getting on Board
Professor William Maloney	Academic researcher	Newcastle University
Rachel Rank	NGO	360Giving
Simon Duffy	Research organisation, NGO, Network of citizens	Centre for Welfare Reform
Tim MacDonald	Individual	Individual contribution
Vicki Sellick	NGO, Foundation	Nesta
Wendy Baverstock	Individual	Individual contribution



# Appendix 4

## List of conversations held

A map version of this can be found [here](#). The list below only represents the conversations that have fed back their insights to us and have therefore been analysed as evidence as part of the research process.

Title of Conversation	Date of event	Location	Host
Danish Civil Society field trip	02/05/17	Skip Garden, London	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Charity Commission	08/05/17	Charity Commision, London	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Inquiry funders	09/06/17	Barrow Cadbury, London	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Unusual Suspects Festival	16/06/17	Barbican Centre, London	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
CEOs of large charities/voluntary groups	20/06/17	NCVO, London	Stuart Etherington, NCVO
Forum for the Future staff, 1/2	10/06/17	Forum for the Future, London	Forum for the Future
Connecting the tech sector to civil society	06/07/17	Somerset House, London	Cassie Robinson, Doteveryone
Funders staff session	12/07/17	Interface, London	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Living Change – Civil Society Futures	17/07/17	The Library, London	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
A business take on Civil Society	18/07/17	Elmley Nature Reserve, Isle of Sheppey	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Forum for the Future staff, 2/2		Forum for the Future, London	Forum for the Future
London Youth Network	31/07/17	London Youth Network	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Future of student volunteering	16/08/17	Liverpool	Student Volunteering Network
The future of civil society in Milton Keynes	25/08/17	Milton Keynes	Community Action MK
Civil Society Futures – CEOs of youth organisations	30/08/17	London	Girl Guides
The future of civil society in Milton Keynes	06/09/17	Milton Keynes	Community Action MK
How can local and national civil society organisations work most effectively in places?	07/09/17	Southampton	Southampton CVS
Local Conversation	09/09/17	Leicester	Leicestershire VCS
How can VCSs inspire change for sustainability at a city level?	21/09/17	Plymouth	Plymouth Octopus Project (POP+)
How can civil society tackle economic inequality and social inequalities (related to identity of one form or other) in an integrated way and in a way that doesn't increase divisions between different communities and parts of society? 1/2	25/09/17	London	Caroline Ellis
Office for Civil Society Conversation	28/09/17	London	Office for Civil Society
What is the future of different types of value exchange in civil society?	03/10/17	London	Karen Morton, Management Development Network
Future of grant making	04/10/17	London	Danny Sriskandarajah
The role of Comic Relief in civil society	10/10/17	London	Comic Relief

What is the emerging direction of travel for the criminal justice sector and how is this affecting civil society when working in this area?	12/10/17	London	Barrow Carbury Trust
What is the future of the youth organisations and how might we tackle the changes needed from a place-based angle? Conversation and interactive session with Rhiannon White (Inquiry Panel member)	24/10/17	Winchester	The Blagrave Trust
A Southwark Conversation	24/10/17	Southwark, London	Community Southwark
Civil Society Futures, what does this mean for policy and civil servants?	24/10/17	Cambridge	Centre for Science and Policy, University of Cambridge
The Future of English charity law and regulation: Is the English model of charity and its regulatory framework fit for purpose for the future?	26/10/17	Liverpool	Charity Law & Policy Unit, University of Liverpool, School of Law & Social Justice
Building on community – the power of relationships	30/11/17	London	Community Resources
How can civil society tackle economic inequality and social inequalities (related to identity of one form or other) in an integrated way and in a way that doesn't increase divisions between different communities and parts of society? 2/2	30/10/17	London	Caroline Ellis
Local conversations	27/11/17	Kingston	Kingston Voluntary Action
The future of civil society and disabled people's services	28/11/17	London	Voluntary Organisations Disability Group
The future of civil society: A North East perspective	30/11/17	Newcastle	Voluntary Organisations' Network North East
Making sense of the insights from conversations run by NAVCA members in autumn	05/12/17	London	NAVCA
Role of art in civil society	05/12/17	London	The University of East London
Local conversations	06/12/17	York	York CVS
Reimagining governance (Part 1)	07/12/17	Birmingham	Association of Chairs
Future of democracy	13/12/17	London	Newspeak House
Future of organisational forms	10/01/18	London	Julia Unwin, Hareed Sabeti
Civil Society Futures and Big Lottery	11/01/18	London	Big Lottery Fund
Civil Society Futures and the West Midlands in the next 10 years	30/01/18	Birmingham	Barrow Cadbury and West Midlands Funder Network
Funding the Cooperative City	05/02/18	London	Eutropian and Everyone, Everyday
Reimagining governance (Part 2)	08/02/18	London	Association of Chairs
Role of civil society for a flourishing city	07/03/18	Bradford	Bradford Cathedral

# Appendix 5

## Activist/advocacy groups interviewed

- Pont Valley Protection Camp
- Dorking Refugee Support
- Sisters Uncut
- IWGB
- Sisters of Frida
- Westwood and Coldhurst Women's Association
- Oldham Unity
- Momentum
- Manchester, Palestine Action
- Change.org
- Bent Bars
- Jawaab
- London Renters Union
- Surfers Against Sewage
- Edge Fund
- A Voice for Leith Hill – Dorking
- Out and Proud
- Everyday Sexism Project
- NEON
- Shirebrook and Langwith Against Fracking
- Campaign Bootcamp
- Key individual activists in Sunderland, Newcastle and Barking and Dagenham

# Appendix 6

## Representatives from the following organisations were involved in the self-organising chapters in Peckham, Mansfield and Newcastle, part of the Phase 4 of research.

### Newcastle

Baltic Art Gallery  
Newcastle CVS  
Launchpad/Broadacre House  
Church Action on Poverty  
Sage Gateshead  
Walker Parish Church  
Islamic Diversity Centre  
Newcastle Citizens Advice Bureau  
Newcastle University  
Newcastle Central Mosque

North East Wellbeing  
West End Woman and Girls  
Quakers  
Roman Catholic Church, North Tyneside

### Mansfield

Sonya Ward (Labour Candidate for Mansfield)  
Kate Alsop (Mayor)  
Councillor Barry Answer (Cabinet member for Housing)  
Chief of Staff for MP Ben Bradley  
Mansfield AFC  
Asquith Primary School  
Manor Academy  
Maun Refuge  
The Polish Church  
Quakers  
Freedom Café  
Welcome Café  
Soup Kitchen  
Minister of Bridge Street, Bethel, Farnsfield and Shirebrook Methodist Churches  
Pheonix Project  
Transform Notts Together  
Sutton in Ashfield Food Bank

### Peckham

Brandon Baptist Church  
Notre Damn Secondary School  
Surrey Square Primary School  
Church of Scientology  
Phycologists for Social Change  
Southwark Anti Knife Forum  
All Saints Church  
Peckham Vision  
Community TV Trust  
Peckham Settlement  
Into University  
XLP  
Red Thread  
Hadiaya Women's Association  
A Band of Brothers

# Appendix 7

## Footnotes

1. CEO of large charity
2. Liverpool youth workshop
3. Jess Cordingley, What we have learnt about 'power' so far, Lankelly Chase. <https://lankellychase.org.uk/what-we-have-learnt-about-power-so-far/>
4. CEO of youth organisation
5. Mansfield community workshop
6. Civil society pioneers workshop
7. Bradford youth workshop
8. Epsom & Ewell community workshop
9. Civil society pioneers workshop
10. Penzance community workshop
11. Sheila McKechnie Foundation, Social Power [http://smk.org.uk/wp-content/files/SMK\\_SocialChangeProject\\_Digital-Pages.pdf](http://smk.org.uk/wp-content/files/SMK_SocialChangeProject_Digital-Pages.pdf)
12. brap research team, Civil Society Futures race report
13. Interviewee, Civil Society Futures race report
14. Interviewee, Civil Society Futures race report
15. Workshop on race in civil society, London
16. brap research team, Civil Society Futures race report
17. Living Change conversation
18. Penzance community workshop

## Pictures

Cover photo: Build Up Foundation  
Page 8: Build Up Foundation  
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Page 47: Daniel Fuentes, Unsplash  
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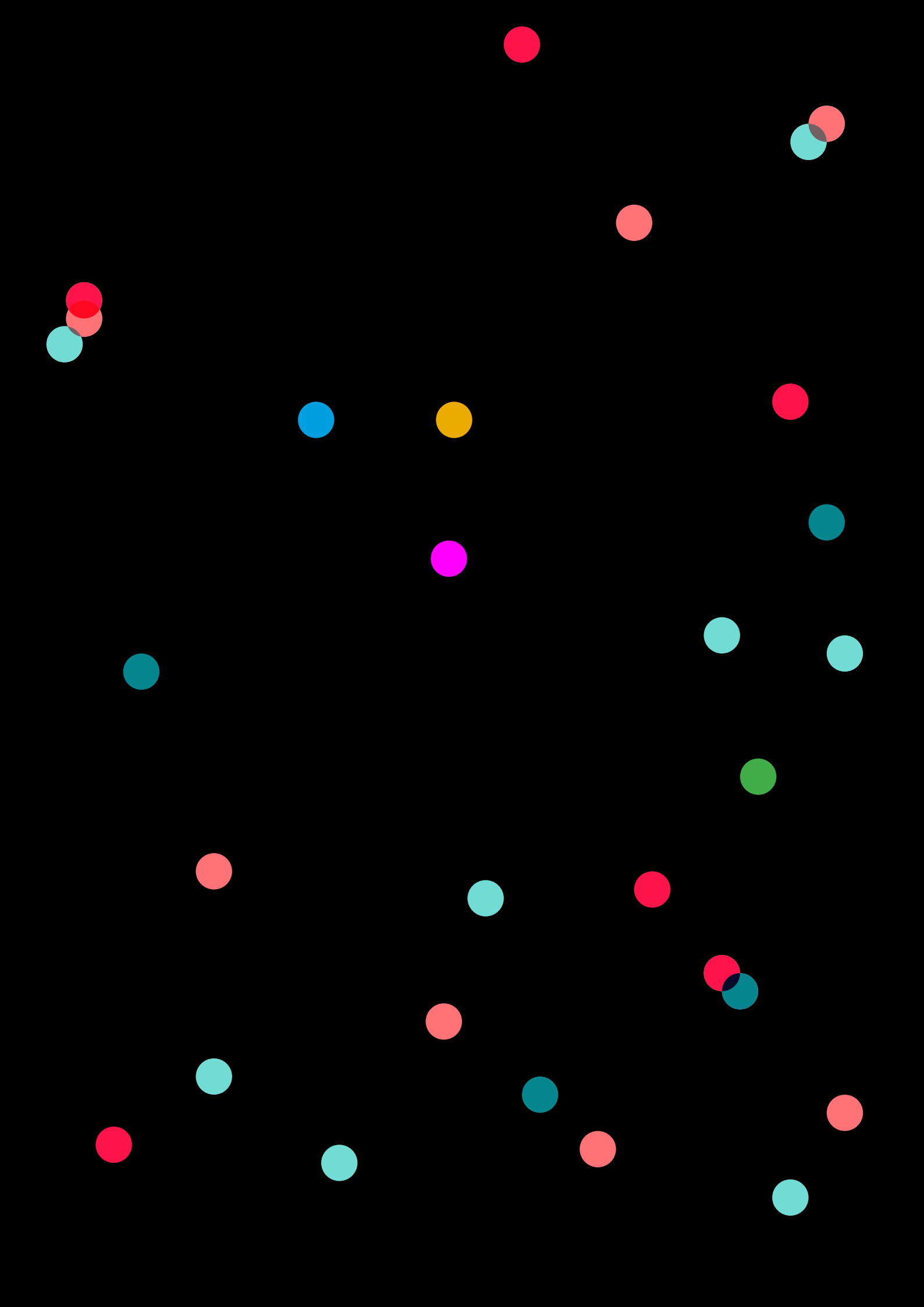
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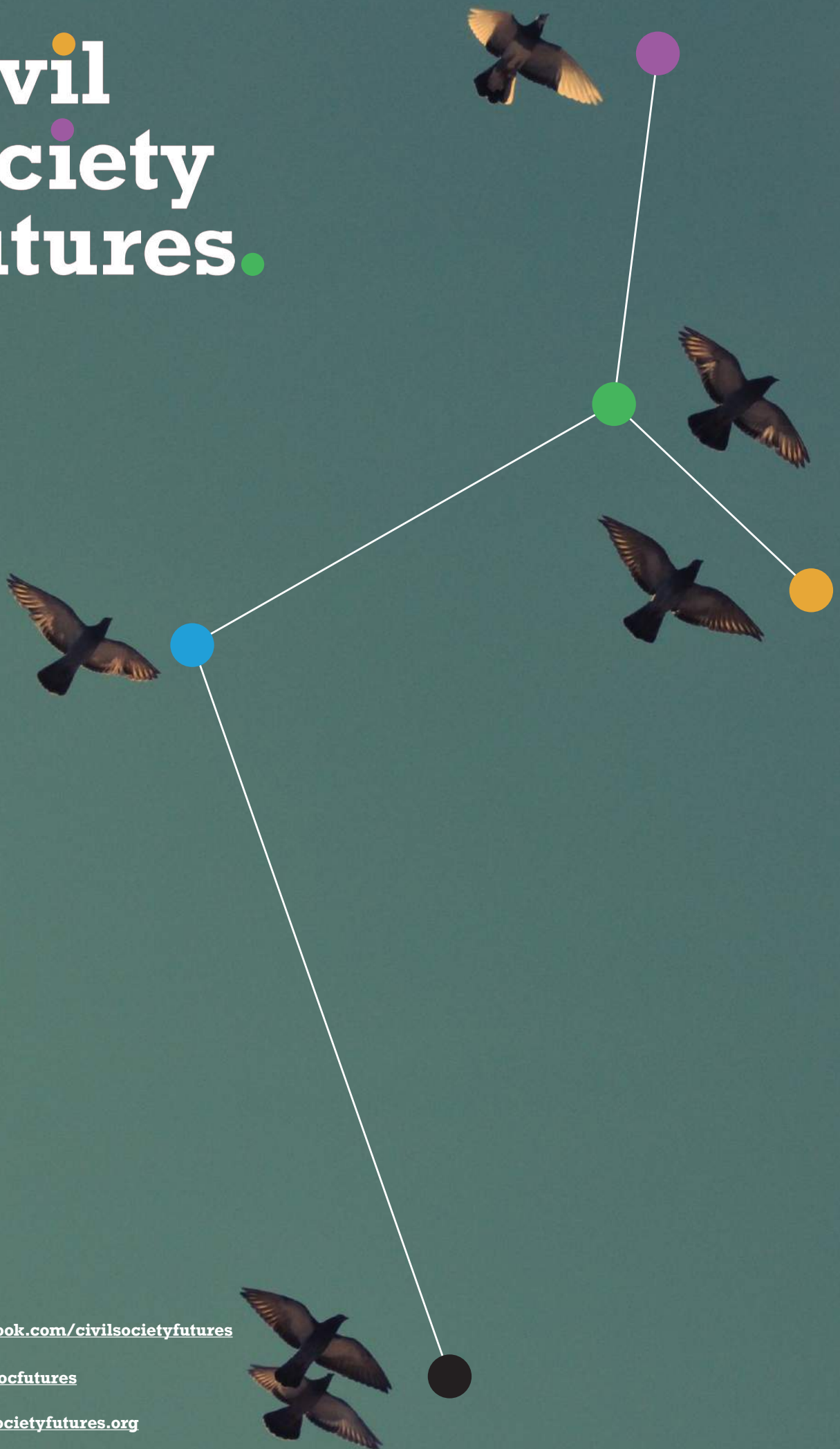
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