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# THE SOCIAL JUSTICE BLUEPRINT



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# THE SOCIAL JUSTICE BLUEPRINT

## **Politicians have an opportunity to transform lives, society and our economy by tackling the root causes of poverty:**

problems like worklessness, family breakdown, educational failure, debt, and addiction. This is because an approach to social justice which changes the lives of the poorest people, benefits everybody.

# 44%

**of disadvantaged children get a good pass in English and Maths in GCSEs, compared to 71% of their better off peers.**

When families on the margins find stability, work and independence, more adults and children can thrive, more people become net contributors within society, and demands on the public purse reduce. We all gain.

It is also a priority for the people of the UK. The electorate is clear that social justice should be the priority of any government. It is the core role of politics.

This blueprint is a programme for a government that is passionate about self-reliance but believes in the power of an enabling State. We want people to stand on their own feet but see a role for a thriving social sector. We want to protect the principle of a safety net welfare system, but for those who can work, we say that is the best choice for individuals, families, and wider society.

We have witnessed some remarkable improvements in recent decades but over the next few years the government will have to lead our country through further instability at home and abroad. It is crucial, therefore, that social justice remains a political priority. And there can be no greater priority.

## **The State of the Nation**

Though many of the headline figures are historically good, they hide a variation around the country that cannot be ignored. Unemployment is at record lows and our schools are better than ever. But while national employment has reached an all-time high of almost 76 per cent, the figure masks huge regional variation. Similarly the average wage of the UK hides a reality that only London and the South East sit above the average wage growth, with every other region of the UK lagging behind.

In education, there are more children than ever attending Good or Outstanding rated schools in the UK. But a child living in one of England's poorest areas is still ten times more likely to go to an Inadequate rated school than a child living in one of its richest areas. Similarly, and in part as a consequence, just 44 per cent of disadvantaged children get a good pass in English and Maths in GCSEs compared to 71 per cent of their better off peers.

We now have the highest rates of family breakdown in Europe, and in one generation the marriage rate has slumped to half its lowest point in recorded history. Drug-related deaths in the UK have never been higher. And their use in prisons has led to a system in which prisoners are no longer even safe, let alone rehabilitated.

Gambling addiction has doubled in a decade, as has rough sleeping, and mental health services are stretched to breaking.

The need for government action is clear and urgent. Positive headline statistics disguise too many lives lived on the margins of society.

**the people with little or nothing to lose from quitting the EU – as they saw it – backed Leave.**

### **What Brexit Really Means**

There is no better illustration of this divided country than Brexit. The story of the referendum was not just one of European policy. The decision to leave the European Union was an unequivocal statement for millions of people who want to change the political, economic, and social status quo. It is a huge mistake to think that the vote simply reflected a desire to leave the EU.

The vote to Leave was in no small part a cry of frustration from millions of people who feel that the powers that be in Westminster no longer know, or even care, how it feels to walk in their shoes.

The lower your income, the more likely you were to vote leave. The less-well educated voters were more likely to back Leave. The majority of those not in work backed Leave. Those living in social housing mostly backed Leave. Those dependent on a state pension largely backed Leave.

In short, the people with little or nothing to lose from quitting the EU – as they saw it – backed Leave. It would be wrong to make too many sweeping statements about the state of the nation based on that one vote. But it would be far worse to ignore a clear message that underpins it.

### **A Mandate for Change**

In the light of the evidence, and the outcome of that vote, we have a once in a lifetime chance to reshape public policy so that it genuinely helps those who feel they have no stake in society.

When many individuals and communities feel so alienated, the Government must address ways of rebuilding relationships in our families, communities, workplaces and beyond.

This is the core role of government and the philosophy underpinning this blueprint.

**“I hated what I had done and I hated the drink. I know it’s strange but I drank to black out the hurt I felt about being drunk all the time. I left treatment but, with little in the way of after care, I was drunk within two weeks.”**

**“A place to call home is simply the difference between a chance to turn your life round or not.”**

**“I just wanted to be like the older kids on the estate. They’d drive around the block with all of the younger kids looking on in admiration. They were my role models.”**

**“I missed most of primary school, most of secondary school and I am still missing loads...my behaviour had started to become really bad because I didn’t understand anything in school, I didn’t learn anything because I didn’t understand the first bit.”**

**“I was unable to work, and eventually diagnosed with complex PTSD. There was a void not having work left in my life.”**

# A ROADMAP FOR CHANGE

6% of children in care go into higher education compared to 47% of the general population.

## The best start in life

### 1 Create a Government focused on supporting families.

The evidence is clear that family breakdown underpins multiple national emergencies from our mental health crisis to the growth in loneliness. It is a key factor in problems from educational failure to homelessness. It doubles a child's chances of growing up in poverty and stifles the work prospects of their parents. The UK is now a world leader in family breakdown and, in the last decade, the marriage rate has slumped to less than half of its previous lowest point in recorded history. As a matter of urgency, the Prime Minister should create a Government Office for Family Policy attaching this new responsibility to the work of a Cabinet level Minister. A new Office for Family Policy should ensure family is part of every policy conversation. The Government Office for Family Policy should have its own dedicated budget and Civil Service team to work across government.

### 2 More pre-school support for the disadvantaged.

Children who attend high-quality settings for 2-3 years are almost 8 months ahead of children who attend none. Making childcare free under Universal Credit, raising the childcare element from 85 to 100 per cent of eligible costs, would also give parents the freedom and choice to work, presenting them with the opportunity to boost household incomes and enjoy the attendant benefits that flow from this. The government should also consider completely rethinking the child benefit offer and consider front loading it to support parents in the early years.

### 3 Address the scandal of excluded children.

School exclusion is rising but just 1.1 per cent of pupils who complete their GCSEs in Alternative Provision achieve five good GCSEs. The structures driving exclusion should be radically overhauled: we need a new inspection framework, schools should be responsible and accountable for the pupils they exclude, teachers should be trained to identify proxies linked to exclusion and commissioning expertise and funds should be devolved from local authorities to schools to support early intervention.

### 4 Have greater ambition for Children in Care.

Only 6 per cent of children in care go into higher education compared with 47 per cent of the general population. They are not less intelligent than the general population, they are just less lucky. Government must identify the support and information needed to encourage universities to do more to engage with looked-after children and care leavers.

### 5 Tackle health's determinants to close the 20-year healthy life expectancy gap.

Too many of our major public health problems, from dementia to obesity, begin early and with social roots but are treated in medicalised silos. Many of them will require Government leadership and a cross-party, cross-departmental, cross-sector commitment to tackle. To do this the Department of Health, with the recently added responsibility of social care, should maintain oversight of the NHS through NHS England but evolve into a Department of Public Health and Prevention to oversee and deliver a whole-systems strategy.

## A good job

### 6 Confront the regional dynamics that shape the British economy.

Britain is too divided between the South East and the rest. Treasury and BEIS should build local competitive advantage across regional city-based clusters: spending on physical and social infrastructure, attracting 'Big Employers' to clusters, and pairing local growth plans with a radical anti-poverty agenda.

### 7 Invest in Universal Credit and Universal Support.

Work must always pay. The Government should continue its recent investment in the value of the work allowances that claimants receive, and reduction in the taper rate of Universal Credit, so that claimants can keep more of the money they earn. But even more importantly it should also look to invest in Universal Support to fully enable the potential of this reform by giving vulnerable individuals the support they need.

### 8 A transformed vocational education offer.

In a changing world of work, we must expand the offering in our schools, colleges, and universities. Technical qualifications (including T Levels) and apprenticeships should be given far greater weight and recognition, and businesses should be encouraged to engage directly with schools on this agenda. We must also make sure universities are doing their very best to level the playing field when it comes to access to both academic and vocational degrees.

### 9 People with disabilities being supported to thrive in work.

Just 47.9 per cent of disabled people are employed, compared to 80.1 per cent of non-disabled people. Poor mental health is the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK, prompting the loss of some 70 million working days a year and costing the UK economy up to £100 billion. Better equipping and informing businesses and health professionals on mental health, to stop people falling out of work, is crucial, as is investing in Universal Support to help people into work when they have fallen out.

### 10 Government must not be afraid to endorse good businesses.

Business, by its very existence, is one of the best tools for social mobility that society has. The fact that it drives employment and economic growth is of itself a boon to the nation. The inherent operations of most businesses, from pensions to training schemes, only enhance this. Some examples of poor practice have led to a public narrative that often forgets this. The Government must recapture this narrative by cracking down on poor practice in polemic and policy, while extolling the majority of good practice.

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## Protect the people struggling most

### 11 Restore control, order, and hope to our prisons.

Our prisons can barely keep their officers and offenders safe any longer, let alone rehabilitate inmates. There is an urgent need to address this crisis and to do this we must tackle the supply of, and demand for, drugs into prisons, the recruitment and retention of staff, the creation of purposeful regimes, and ensuring that we never again see our prisons descend into crisis.

### 12 Stop 'parking' addicts and work towards abstinence recovery.

Fifty people with addictions die every week. At present, government criteria mean that someone can 'successfully' leave addiction treatment while still using alcohol or illicit drugs or addicted to prescribed medicines. This is state-sponsored addiction, not recovery. There is an urgent need for more treatment centres and services should be judged and adequately funded on whether clients leave treatment free from drugs and alcohol and whether they present again to services within six months.

### 13 Homelessness strategies must be widely rolled out.

The Housing First pilots, which give the chronically homeless a home and wraparound social support, are a great start and its success is already well established. We need to deliver a National Housing First Programme to end rough sleeping and chronic homelessness for people with the most complex needs. Such a programme would be cost neutral over the course of a parliament.

### 14 Restore community safety.

Tackle the growing problem of gang and other serious violence in London and beyond through a proven model that combines proactive community policing, credible enforcement, support for desistance, and early intervention, involving people from the police to parents. For the most challenging gang violence issues, secure adoption of a Group Violence Intervention, an approach that has already proven itself in cities as diverse as Boston, Cincinnati, and Glasgow, with dramatic results.

### 15 Tackle the housing crisis through truly affordable homes.

The Government can take clear steps to turbocharge the supply of truly affordable homes. By better capturing the dramatic uplift in land value when planning permissions are granted, providing greater financial leverage to housing associations, and revitalising councils' ability to build homes at scale, we will get much closer to ensuring that no household should suffer for being unable to afford rent in the private market.

**50** people  
with addictions  
die every week

Just **1.1%**

of pupils who complete  
their GCSEs in  
Alternative Provision  
achieve five good GCSEs

These recommendations stem from 15 years of research and are drawn from 200 publications. For further detail on any of them contact the Centre for Social Justice [director@centreforsocialjustice.org.uk](mailto:director@centreforsocialjustice.org.uk)



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