

DEMOS

CITIZENS' WHITE PAPER

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JULY 2024

involve

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Published by Demos July 2024
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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	PAGE 4
ABOUT THIS REPORT	PAGE 5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	PAGE 6
INTRODUCTION	PAGE 13
PART 1: WHY DO WE NEED TO CHANGE HOW POLICY IS MADE?	PAGE 15
PART 2: WHAT DOES PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING LOOK LIKE?	PAGE 37
PART 3: HOW DO WE INTRODUCE AND EMBED PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING?	PAGE 51
PART 4: COSTS AND FUNDING	PAGE 68
CONCLUSION	PAGE 72
APPENDICES	PAGE 73

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Citizens' White Paper has been a collaborative and participatory process to its core and we would like to thank the many politicians, policy makers, experts and citizens who contributed their time to this project.

Special thanks to the people who took part in the intensive policy design sprint. Alongside the civil servants who took part, we are hugely grateful to Peter Baeck, Nesta; Ceri Davies, NatCen; Doreen Grove, Scottish Government; Rebecca McKee, Institute for Government; Professor Alan Renwick, University College London; and Professor Graham Smith, University of Westminster; as well as Professor Jane Suiter from Dublin City University, who provided learnings from Irish citizens' assemblies.

We are grateful to the 17 ex-ministers, shadow ministers and current and former senior civil servants who we interviewed for this paper to understand challenges and opportunities around involving the public in policy making, as well as the 14 civil servants who attended our workshop. Thank you also to the 34 members of the public who took part in our Citizens' Conversations to discuss these issues.

Thank you to the Board of Trustees from both Demos and Involve for their support throughout this process.

At Demos, thanks to the team who supported this paper: Chloe Burke for design; Alice Dawson for background research; Felix Arbenz-Caines for communications and media support; Patti Garcia for coordinating the Citizens' Conversations and stakeholder outreach; and Andrew O'Brien for invaluable insights.

At Involve, thanks to Stephanie Draper for process design and facilitation, Calum Green for helping steer the project from the outset, and Daisy Thompson for process design and insights.

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July 2024

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Demos is Britain's leading cross-party think tank. This Citizens' White Paper is part of Demos's work focusing on building a collaborative democracy, which enables politicians, experts and citizens to work in partnership to tackle the challenges facing our country. By creating this new political environment, we can develop policies that work for people, strengthen citizenry, and improve trust in the political system.

The paper has been written in partnership with Involve, the UK's public participation charity.

Most of the recommendations in this Citizens' White paper were developed through a policy design sprint which brought together civil servants, academics, and practitioners to design the ways in which the government could embed public participation in national policy making. The ideas generated through the collaborative design process were collectively designed, any later changes, errors or mistranslations in the paper are solely ours.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



*The **fight for trust** is the battle that defines our political era"*

- Sir Keir Starmer's king's speech at the State Opening of Parliament, July

The Citizens' White Paper sets out a roadmap for the new government to embed public participation in national policy making. From national missions to the everyday work of policy teams across departments, the government can create meaningful opportunities to involve the public in policy making, and by doing so, start to tackle complex policy challenges and rebuild trust in politics.

The challenges facing the country and the new Labour government are daunting - from broken public services to a sluggish economy, with an electorate worn down by the cost-of-living crisis and who no longer trust politicians to serve for the good of the country. The period ahead will be marked by difficult decisions in a fiscally-constrained environment. Taking the public on this journey will not be easy.

In this context, a government taking a traditional approach to policy making risks losing public support and the political capital gained in an election, as it is forced to make the tough decisions and compromises that will be needed.

With a new government taking the reins, there is an opportunity for change and a promise of renewal. Labour has committed to a new approach to governing through its five missions. These missions set out a different way to tackle national priorities, breaking down silos and harnessing expertise and energy from across the country. In this paper, we make the case for putting citizens at the heart of that effort, bringing their insights, experience and collective judgement to bear on the challenges. This will help create the governing mandate needed for change and mean that citizens can partner with the government to deliver on the actions needed for national renewal.

WHY DO WE NEED TO CHANGE HOW POLICY IS MADE?

Drawing on interviews with 17 ex- and shadow ministers, and current and former senior civil servants, as well as polling and deliberative conversations with the public, we set out what's wrong with the way policy making is done now:

1. The 'Whitehall bubble' is too removed from the everyday experiences of citizens
2. Policy makers - at every level - feel disempowered to try new things
3. Policy making is often informed only by the 'usual suspects' who shout the loudest or don't offer rigorous enough challenge
4. Political turbulence isn't conducive to long-term policy making

Involving the public in policy making can help to address these issues, and help the government to navigate the challenges ahead. Participatory policy making can:

- **Improve policy making** by harnessing the collective intelligence of a wide range of citizens who are affected by an issue, so the policies developed will address people's needs and concerns, and not fail at first contact with reality.
- **Find ways through divisive or toxic issues**, as was seen in the Irish citizens' assembly that led to the legalising of abortion.¹
- **Overcome politically stuck problems**, especially those that require sacrifice and compromise. In the Climate Assembly UK, through deliberation participants made recommendations that would lead to personal constraint for the greater good, such as increasing pricing for more frequent flights.²
- **Build greater legitimacy for solutions** that people can get behind because they've played a role in creating them. Studies have shown that higher participation rights in the Swiss Cantons lead to greater compliance with tax policy.³
- **Avoid the fiscal and trust costs of policy failure** by involving people upstream in policy development. Policy u-turns could be prevented, such as the Conservative government's scrapping of its £1.5 billion green homes grant scheme six months after its launch in 2020 due to low take up. This could have been avoided if they had spoken to the public and providers during the policy design phase.⁴
- **Build back trust in government** from an all-time low - our 2024 polling showed that 76% of people have little or no trust that politicians will make decisions in the best interests of people in the UK.⁵ When Westminster Council ran a public participation process around climate change the percentage of people that felt listened to grew from 27% to 63%.⁶

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING LOOK LIKE?

Participatory policy making is an approach that enables people impacted by policies to be involved in identifying what the problems are for people and considering what could be done about them, bringing collective public judgement to bear on the issue. The 'people' referred to here are a representative group of those who are directly impacted by the policy on the ground, or who have a legitimate interest as members of society in informing the values and choices that underpin the policy.

On the spectrum of public engagement,⁷ participatory policy making encompasses 'involving' and 'collaborating' with the public. This goes beyond gathering insights and engaging in consultation, to bringing the public together to consider the complexity of an issue and influence decisions. At the

1 <https://involve.org.uk/news-opinion/opinion/citizens-assembly-behind-irish-abortion-referendum>

2 <https://www.climateassembly.uk/>

3 <https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/760.pdf>

4 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/mar/27/uk-government-scrap-green-homes-grant-after-six-months#:~:text=The%20government%20has%20scrapped%20its,six%20months%20after%20its%20launch.>

5 From nationally representative polling (n=2,073) conducted as part of this research between 7th and 9th June 2024. See Appendix 2 for more details on methodology.

6 <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/FINAL%20VERSION%20WCCA%20report.pdf>

7 <https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars>

heart of these methods is a promise to the public: setting out what level of influence they will have on the decision, and that the government is listening and able to act on the outcomes.

In this Citizens' White Paper, we do not recommend that citizens make the final decision on national policies. While empowering people is right and necessary in some contexts, decisions on national policy should rest with our elected politicians, and should be informed by collective public judgment, ensuring that participatory policy making strengthens our representative democracy, rather than undermining it.

Increasing impact on the decision →

	OUT OF SCOPE		IN SCOPE		OUT OF SCOPE
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding decisions made	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions still to be made	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solutions	To place final decision making in the hands of the public

From the International Association of Public Participation's spectrum of public participation⁸

Participatory policy making encompasses a range of methods that policy makers can draw on. We highlight six that can be used across government to support policy making:

- Citizens' panels
- Citizens' assemblies
- Citizens' juries
- Deliberative workshops
- Co-design workshops
- Community conversations

HOW DO WE INTRODUCE AND EMBED PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING?

The heart of this Citizens' White Paper is the roadmap to change. We have set out nine recommendations to be delivered over the course of the next Parliament.

The recommendations include both bold, transformational, public-facing actions from government, which can demonstrate the new relationship between state and citizen, with strong political leadership on this agenda; and internally-facing actions that shift how day-to-day policy making is done across government departments and parliament to improve policy development.

⁸ https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate steps (announce first 100 days; action year 1)

To kickstart the process with announcements in the first 100 days to send a signal of the government's new approach to involving citizens.

- **RECOMMENDATION 1: Announcement of five flagship Citizens' Panels to feed into new Mission Boards**

Showcase a new partnership between government and the public by announcing a role for citizens in the Mission Boards: a Citizens' Panel of 100 randomly selected and demographically representative people for each Mission Board. These Citizens' Panels will help to refine the priorities within each mission, work through trade-offs and choices inherent in actions considered by Mission Boards, and inform the Missions' policies to give people a stake in meeting the challenges ahead. To be effective, these panels must adhere to the standards laid out in Part 2 of this paper.

- **RECOMMENDATION 2: Set up a cross-government standing citizens' pool for Mission Boards and departments to draw on**

Create a large scale pool of 2,500 randomly selected but demographically representative citizens to provide a pool from which to draw smaller panels of citizens to feed into each of the five mission boards, as well as for departments to draw on for their participatory policy making work. Centralising recruitment and management of the panel will save resources and time when policy teams want to involve citizens in policy making.

- **RECOMMENDATION 3: Creation of a central hub of participatory policy making expertise in government**

Set up a central hub to provide expertise and support for policy teams to be able to use participatory approaches. It will draw on and ramp up existing expertise and accelerate the diffusion of skills across government, building up networks of policy makers with experience in participatory policy making in departments. This will shift how day-to-day policy making is done across government departments to improve policy development.

Short term actions (years 1+)

To demonstrate an ongoing commitment to resetting the relationship between citizen and state, and build the capacity and culture for participation across the civil service.

- **RECOMMENDATION 4: Announcement of a programme of flagship Citizens' Assemblies**

Prime Ministerial announcement of a programme of at least three national Citizens' Assemblies in the first term to tackle knotty politically and publicly salient issues outside of the missions. This public-facing action from government will demonstrate how the government is building on initial work through the Citizens' Panels, to further develop a new relationship between state and citizen, with strong political leadership on this agenda.

- **RECOMMENDATION 5: Levers to encourage participatory policy making across government**

Deliver a package of levers to normalise participatory policy making and build a culture of participation across government. Levers include training and support; building departmental participation units; developing senior civil service champions; new policy making guidance via a 'Citizen Participation Assessment'; and winning hearts and minds by disseminating a clear narrative about the value and impact of participatory policy making.

- **RECOMMENDATION 6: Citizen involvement in select committee enquiries**

Increase the opportunities for members of the public to be involved in select committee inquiries by providing guidance to select committee inquiry chairs and clerks on how to engage citizens in inquiries in effective, proportionate and meaningful ways.

Longer term plans (year 3+)

To embed participation in parliamentary processes, as well as independent standards setting to institutionalise participation.

- **RECOMMENDATION 7: Create and implement Duty to Consider Participation**

This Duty would require bill teams to give consideration to participation via a Citizen Participation Assessment. This should be set out in guidance by the Parliamentary Business and Legislation (PBL) Committee of the Cabinet, which will hold bill teams to account for demonstrating how they have involved the public, or explain why they have not, before the bill can be introduced in Parliament.

- **RECOMMENDATION 8: Citizen involvement in post-legislative scrutiny**

Encourage select committees to instigate more post-legislative scrutiny inquiries and build a public participation component in. This could be by convening a Citizens' Audit Group to provide testimony on the actual impact of the legislation on the ground, and what could make it work more effectively to meet its intended outcomes in the future.

- **RECOMMENDATION 9: Independent standards setting**

Create an independent mechanism to set standards and scrutinise processes to ensure that they meaningfully involve citizens in a legitimate, unbiased way. In year 1, this would be an independent advisory board overseeing the Mission Board citizens' panels and national citizens' assemblies. In the medium term, empower an existing independent body to take on the participatory standards setting function. In the longer term, spin out this function into a new independent, arms-length body, enshrined in legislation, funded by government.

TOPIC	COMMENT	EXAMPLE OF POTENTIAL AREA FOR PARTICIPATION
Sentencing	Case for public engagement to build consensus. Potential societal and effectiveness benefits.	Addressing the trade offs between prison capacity and sentencing priorities
Policing	Strong case for public dialogue. Potential societal benefits. Supported by Parliament (Select Committee has done, and recommends, deliberative activity). Several Citizens' Assemblies conducted on policing at local level.	Improving trust and cooperation between police and local communities.
Long term NHS funding	Strong case for building consensus. Potential societal benefits, fiscal savings. Strong public commitment to the cause.	Public appetite around trade offs between resource spend on prevention and primary/secondary care.
Social care	Strong case for building consensus. Potential societal benefits, fiscal savings.	Deliberation on the social care funding options that are the most acceptable to people, what they are prepared to pay for, and why
Housing and house-building	Strong case for resetting public dialogue, building consensus.	Trade offs between local sentiment and national need
Pension triple lock	Strong case for public engagement.	Public dialogue around long term affordability of triple lock mechanism, looking at potential trade-offs, such as accelerating the state pension age increase
Climate Adaptation/ Net Zero	Significant pre-existing work. Very strong case for public dialogue and action. Identified by Parliament (Citizens' Assembly previously carried out by Select Cttee and others).	Incentivising behaviour change to enable the UK to reach net zero, given the personal sacrifice required
Migration	Strong case for resetting public dialogue and having a more considered and informed public dialogue.	Managing the trade-offs between levels of immigration and labour shortages
Science and Technology eg AI	Strong public interest case. Future facing issues involving lower levels of political risk.	Consideration of the guardrails and frameworks that should be in place to ensure we use AI in a way that is safe and ethical
Assisted Dying	Very strong case for building consensus and action. Widespread potential societal benefits, fiscal savings. Low political risk. Could build on current work by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics.	Whether assisted dying should be permitted, and if so, under what circumstances.
Constitution	Including House of Lords reform. Divergent views and self-interest in solutions.	Considering democratic alternatives to the House of Lords

COSTS AND FUNDING

We estimate the total costs to deliver all nine recommendations of this paper to be approximately £21.9-31.2 million in year 1. This would cover everything from the major, public-facing flagship activities, like the Mission Board citizens' panels, to the costs of departments using participatory methods in their business-as-usual policy making. The costs for each are broken down in the final section of the paper. As with all recommendations, the Labour government will decide what to prioritise and cut their budgetary cloth accordingly.

We propose that the money to fund the recommendations comes from existing public consultation budgets that many government departments have. In some cases, this is about doing it better, not at a higher cost. Parliament also has an existing select committee budget that could be utilised for participation.

Where additional funds are required, such as to significantly build capacity or for major, national, flagship public participation processes, we propose the funding comes from the government's Research & Development budget. The government spent £533 million on policy research in civil departments (excluding Ministry of Defence spending) in 2022.⁹ Reallocating just 5.85% of this budget each year would free up the £31.2m needed to deliver all the recommendations in this paper.

⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/governmentpublicsectorandtaxes/researchanddevelopmentexpenditure/datasets/scienceengineeringandtechnologystatisticsreferencetables>

INTRODUCTION

As a nation we face deep structural challenges - we've lost faith in our public services to be there when we need them, we've lost the belief that we can invest and grow the economy, and we've been ground down by the cost of living crisis and growing inequality. The new Labour government will need to tackle policy challenges that are fiercely difficult and divisive, within an environment where we have lost our trust in politicians to serve for the good of the country.

With a new government, there is an opportunity for change and renewal. Keir Starmer entered Downing Street on July 5, 2024, with this offer to the public: "With respect and humility, I invite you all to join this government of service in the mission of national renewal."

This paper makes the case for evolving our national policy making to make it fit to take on the challenges we face today. We set out why the government should take steps towards a new participatory approach. One that creates meaningful opportunities to involve citizens in policy making to start to solve these big policy challenges and to help build a new partnership between government and people, and in this way start to rebuild trust in politics. But just setting out **why** we need a new participatory approach to policy making is not enough. In this Citizens' White Paper, we also set out **how** politicians can actively and meaningfully involve the public in policy making.

Participatory policy making is more common at a local level across our four nations, but we're behind the curve when it comes to delivering a more participatory democracy at a national level in Britain. The new government has an opportunity to reset the relationship between citizen and state, and the framework of mission-led government is the perfect opportunity to put this into practice. By focusing on cross-cutting challenges that will require government, businesses, civil society and citizens to partner in meeting them, there is a role for citizens to play in refining the priorities within and between each mission, weighing up the trade-offs and policy choices that need to be made, and informing the actions that will deliver on the missions. This will give people a stake in meeting the challenges ahead.

Through interviews with ministers, ex-ministers, shadow ministers and civil servants, we diagnose some of the problems with the way policy making is done now. These problems lead to policy failure, unintended consequences, and ultimately poorer outcomes for people who should have benefitted from government's policy decisions and for the country.

We draw on examples from across the world, from Scotland to Melbourne, to demonstrate the value of involving people impacted by a policy decision - whether that's all of us at a national level or a specific group affected by a particular issue - to make policy that works better for them, that more people can get behind even when it involves tough choices. And we draw on the findings from a series of deliberative workshops and polling with members of the public to test their appetite for involvement and how this might affect their levels of trust in the government.

The heart of this Citizens' White Paper is the roadmap to change. We have created a practical, costed plan which sets out a series of actions that the new government can take to build a more trusted democracy. These steps will enable politicians to take the hard and courageous decisions that will be required to tackle the intractable problems that the country is facing, by working in partnership with the public.

We recommend immediate interventions to start the process in the first 100 days, including building citizen involvement into the Mission Boards. And we recommend following up these actions with longer term activities to build the capacity of the civil service to deliver participatory policy making, develop a participatory culture, and develop the frameworks required to embed participation across policy making in government and parliament as a new layer to our democracy. This roadmap was designed with civil servants, practitioners and academics and tested with policy makers who are at the heart of developing and delivering the policies that affect each and every one of us throughout our lives.

The roadmap doesn't stand or fall on a single element. The new Labour government will decide what it wants to prioritise in terms of doing policy making differently. However, we hope to get across the urgency of taking steps immediately so the government can demonstrate its commitment to working collaboratively with the citizens of the country. It then needs to follow up these steps with a longer term plan of action to shift policy making practice and culture across government to draw citizens more actively into the ideas and actions that will be delivered by, with and for the country.

What this Citizens' White Paper does not do is suggest that final decision-making power lies anywhere other than with elected politicians. Involving people in policy making should complement and strengthen representative democracy. Further, it does not make the case for involving citizens at every stage in every piece of policy. Rather it makes the case for proportionate and appropriate use of participatory methods at the times when drawing on the insights and ideas of people affected by an issue would move a stuck policy forward, and enable policy makers to design policies that lead to better outcomes for more people.

The shift to participatory policy making should be as transformative as the move to evidence-based policy making, catalysed by the publication of the Modernising Government White Paper in 1999.¹⁰ We hope this Citizens' White Paper provides a similar spark for change. It will take a whole-government approach with clear political leadership from the top to set the vision for embedding it across the way we do governance in the UK, building on the experience and expertise in participatory policy making that already exists in the civil service.

By publishing the Citizens' White Paper now, just after the first change of government for 14 years, we hope to capitalise on the optimism and opportunity for change and on the sense that a different, more collaborative form of democracy is imperative for the coming challenges. This has been a long time coming, with a steady decline in trust in politics, politicians and our political institutions over many years. The new government has the chance to turn the tide of decline, and tell a new story about the way that politicians will partner with citizens to overcome the challenges we face, drawing on the insights, ideas, experiences and collective judgement of citizens to make policy making fit for the 21st century.

¹⁰ <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1999/mar/30/modernising-government>

PART 1

WHY DO WE NEED TO CHANGE HOW POLICY IS MADE?

THE PROBLEM

The period ahead of us will be marked by difficult decisions on complex issues in a fiscally-constrained environment. Even Labour's strong electoral mandate will be tested once faced with difficult choices in government. Taking the public on this journey will not be easy.

Many of the policy challenges we face will require personal sacrifice. In principle, most people agree with better funding for the NHS, reforming social care, building more homes or transitioning to net zero. But when those national policies translate into personal costs, through questions about paying more in tax, having homes built nearby or changes people will have to make to their lifestyle to cut carbon emissions, the national policy risks coming undone.

In this context, a government taking a traditional approach to policy making risks losing public support and the political capital gained in an election, as it is forced to make the tough decisions and compromises that will be needed to build a secure future for the country. And it is doing this against a backdrop of rising populism, which promises shallow and disingenuous solutions that won't address the scale of the challenges before us.

Centre-left governments and coalitions in Europe have recently struggled to push through and implement much-needed policies. For example in Germany, public division caused the government to row back on its climate agenda;¹¹ and in Spain, culture wars and populism split support for the coalition.¹²

¹¹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/heat-pumps-exploded-germany-ruling-coalition-green-law/>
¹² <https://theconversation.com/the-four-challenges-faced-by-spains-new-government-218547>

This new government is promising a new approach to governing through its five missions.¹³ The missions describe a fresh way to tackle national priorities, harnessing wider expertise to renew the country. In this paper we make the case for that expertise to involve citizens to bring their insights and judgement to bear on the issues, and help to create the governing mandate needed for change.

One way for a government to navigate complex policy areas is to take the public on that journey with them - levelling with them about the challenges ahead, the lack of a “win-win” solution, and the difficult choices and trade-offs that will be needed. The public want that honesty - in our June 2024 polling, 76% of the public want politicians to be honest about the scale of the problems the country faces; but 77% have little or no trust at all that politicians will be honest about it.¹⁴

76% of the public want politicians to be honest about the scale of the problems the country faces; but 77% have little or no trust at all that politicians will be honest about it.

Involving the public in the policy decisions that affect them goes beyond extracting public insights and opinion through polling and focus groups. It means having deeper, more deliberative conversations with the public, enabling them to be part of the process for understanding what the problems are, and what trade-offs and solutions might improve their lives, as well as work for those who have to implement the policy on the ground. Doing this will take honesty and bravery from politicians.

To invest in public services, grow the economy or transition away from fossil fuels, we need to find new ways to reach compromise, we need to create partnerships between politicians and the public to navigate this difficult terrain. By truly engaging the public in some areas of policy making, we can start to understand what the public will tolerate and why, and where there is room for compromise and acceptable trade offs. By knowing where the true Overton Window on different policy areas lies, we can start to address policy issues that have become “stuck” due to the perception that the policies will be unpopular, and we can start to rebuild trust in our democracy.

Contrary to received wisdom in Westminster, people aren’t apathetic: they do care. As we heard in our Citizens’ Conversations, the participatory process that contributed to our research for this paper, even when professing disenchantment with politics, they care about how to get a GP appointment, the state of the roads, whether their kids will be able to afford their own home one day. They want to be involved in decisions that affect them. Our polling showed that the public felt most strongly that they should be involved in decision making on public services (74% agreed), moral issues (70%), and infrastructure issues (66%). But they don’t feel like they should be involved with everything. For example, less than half of the public (45%) felt they should be involved in international or defence issues.¹⁵

The appetite to participate is there: the majority of the British public (63%) say they would be likely to accept an invitation to take part in a public participation exercise by the government. The biggest thing stopping them is their belief that the government wouldn’t listen to what they had to say, with four in ten (41%) saying this would make them less likely to take part. This demonstrates the underlying need to shift the dial on trust in politicians and politics.

¹³ <https://labour.org.uk/change/mission-driven-government/>

¹⁴ From nationally representative polling (2,073 UK adults) conducted 7th - 9th June 2024 as part of this research. See appendix for more detail on survey methodology

¹⁵ From nationally representative polling (2,073 UK adults) conducted 7th - 9th June 2024 as part of this research. See appendix for more detail on survey methodology

Trust in governments and politicians is at an all-time low,¹⁶ with 77% of people saying they have little or no trust in politicians to make decisions that honour the promises they've made, or to be honest about the challenges and limitations they face when making certain decisions (48%). Only 43% of people believe politicians make decisions in the best interests of people in the UK.¹⁷

Involving the public is not about satisfying populist demands to "be heard" but about creating sensible ways to involve people in overcoming policy challenges that have become stuck. Nor is it about just "doing what the public wants"; the government's job is to balance competing views on difficult issues, but to do this effectively they need to understand these views and, by enabling the public to deliberate, give them the opportunity to work through the trade-offs themselves. In Ireland, the vexed issues of abortion and gay marriage have been successfully navigated with the use of citizens' assemblies. There are similarly stuck policy issues in the UK: the housing crisis, reforming social care, taxation, delivering effective devolution, sentencing and prisons reform, to name a few.

We don't just need new policies for these challenging times. We need new ways to tackle the policy challenges we face - from national missions to everyday policy making. We need new ways to understand and negotiate what the public will tolerate. We need new ways to build back trust in politicians to govern.

The Citizens' White Paper proposes that involving citizens in national policy making is one route to that new compact between citizens and state.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WAY WE DO POLICY MAKING NOW?

We spoke to seven ex- and shadow ministers,¹⁸ and 10 ex- and current senior civil servants¹⁹ and a further 14 civil servants in a participatory workshop to understand what makes policy making difficult now, and what some of the barriers and opportunities are around involving the public in policy making. We also spoke to 34 members of the public in Citizens' Conversations to understand whether they feel they have a say in policy making at a national level, and how they would feel if they were given this opportunity. Participants were demographically representative of the country, and were split into non-voters, those who sometimes vote, swing voters, and those who always vote. In June 2024 we carried out nationally representative polling with 2000 people to test what we heard and what impact greater public participation would have on people's attitudes towards, and trust in, politicians. (See Appendices 1 and 2 for further details of our research methodology). The evidence below comes from this primary research.

¹⁶ <https://amp-theguardian-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/amp.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jun/12/trust-in-british-politics-hits-record-low-latest-bsa-survey-finds>

¹⁷ From nationally representative polling (2,073 UK adults) conducted 7th - 9th June 2024 as part of this research. See appendix for more detail on survey methodology

¹⁸ In this report, we refer to this group of ex- and shadow ministers as (ex)ministers as shorthand.

¹⁹ In this report, we refer to this group of former and current senior civil servants as (former) senior civil servants as shorthand.

Our research identified four key problems policy makers face in delivering effective policies:

1. The 'Whitehall bubble' is too removed from the everyday experiences of citizens

Civil servants we spoke to identified that Whitehall feels far from the people who might be impacted by its policies, with only 12% of permanent secretaries and director generals are based outside London:²⁰

"Policymakers, be they the politicians and their advisors or the civil servants, do not look like the country either in all of its entirety, and quite a lot of them will not have had to go to the Jobcentre Plus, or many of them, given the age profile, and particularly younger ones will probably have not had to interact with the social care system yet."

(Former) senior civil servant

(Ex)ministers echoed this, feeling that civil servants are much further from the public than themselves, given their connection to their constituents.

"But if you think about it, [civil servants] don't engage with people day in day out, having discussions with constituents."

(Ex)minister

This was reflected by members of the public we spoke to as part of our Citizens' Conversations, who feel they have no say in policy making at the national level, and generally wouldn't know where to start if they wanted to have more of a say, besides voting in elections.

"Overall, no, I don't think we've got a say. You give your vote to one party. And that's the end of it, basically, you probably like to believe that you're doing the right thing by voting for that party. But the proof is in the pudding, and I've never seen it happen yet."

Citizens' Conversations participant (swing voter)

2. Policy makers - at every level - feel disempowered to try new things

No one we spoke to felt they held the power in the policy making process, including (ex)ministers and (former) senior civil servants, which leaves little room for policy makers to manoeuvre in, as we heard from civil servants in particular. Whitehall is deeply hierarchical, and so civil servants look to ministers for support and approval, while ministers look to Cabinet Office or Number 10.

Especially for the most politically salient issues, this creates a closed and sometimes fearful environment, which isn't conducive to innovation, or open to ideas outside of Whitehall. Civil servants are nervous about 'doing policy making in public' as one former senior civil servant put it. No one wants to take the political risk on innovation because no one feels powerful enough to.

²⁰ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/who-runs-whitehall>

"As a director general, as one of the most powerful people in theory, in one of the most centralised governments in the world. I used to sit at my desk feeling powerless to try and shift the way we did things."

(Former) senior civil servant

Ministers often end up being risk averse, trying to get their policy past what one civil servant called the 'Daily Mail test' - that is, avoid negative coverage by the Daily Mail. This sets the policy agenda for civil servants, which can sometimes be no policy agenda at all.

"There is a culture of secrecy and nervousness in British government. So policy making happens in private. Civil servants' advice is private to ministers. And if anything leaks out or seeps out, it becomes a front page news story - 'Ministers are thinking about x' - and ministers then run a mile and they have to close it down and it's a really unhealthy media environment to to make policy if... [you want] to think about lots of different options and engage with people on it. It's an unforgiving environment."

(Former) senior civil servant

What this means is that policies are not being made with the people who will be impacted in mind, but instead are driven by the politics of the day and fears about negative media coverage.

"Politics is very centralised. So the views that matter are quite narrow. And much of it is for the theatre of Westminster and feeding the lobby, rather than what it also needs to be about, which is actual delivery for citizens."

Senior political advisor

3. Policy making is often informed only by the 'usual suspects' who shout the loudest or don't offer rigorous enough challenge

External advice, expertise and a strong evidence base are key tools that make policy making easier, and external stakeholders are often engaged in the policy making process to that end. However, some civil servants we spoke to felt it was often a small pool of the same people or organisations who may themselves be far from the actual individuals on the ground, and usually not those that are implementing the policy or feeling the impact of it. This means missing out on a lot of insight and outside challenge.

"You reach out to people you think are experts in the field...And it's probably a small pool of people...We probably miss something in that process, that external challenge...But that's difficult. The easier option is not to be asked to be challenged"

(Former) senior civil servant

As one (ex)minister put it, a reason for engaging a small pool of known experts and organisations rather than the public might be that it is more predictable - you know what they will say and what kinds of questions they will ask - and therefore will create fewer obstacles to the policy making process.

Even when the public is involved, it is often the loudest voices that get heard, rather than a representative group of the public impacted by an issue.

"We talk about "the public" quite deliberately, because one of the challenges in government is that 'squeaky wheels get greased', by which I mean campaign and pressure groups that are loud and well organised will often have more traction than individual members of the public. That can bias decision making in quite an unhelpful way... it can lead to policy being made by the edge case... so often you do something which is effective for 5% of people and create barriers and problems for 95%, the remaining cohort."

(Former) senior civil servant

4. Political turbulence isn't conducive to long-term policy making

Political turbulence and uncertainty mean both the political context and the ministers themselves are constantly in flux, making policy making more focused on the short-term, rather than the long-term. One former senior civil servant talked about the pressure that ministers are under to get the policy right in a short space of time:

"I think one of the biggest issues is short term thinking...I think the issue is [ministers] are unbelievably busy. They have very, very limited time to engage with the work. I think they're under huge amounts of pressure to get everything right because one mistake becomes a newspaper headline."

(Former) senior civil servant

Some pointed to frequent ministerial reshuffles as more evidence of the short-termism of politics - we saw three Prime Ministers, five Chancellors, and countless other ministerial changes in the previous government between 2019 and 2024 alone. We heard that frequent ministerial reshuffles leave little time for a minister to build deep knowledge of the problems, so crucial to determining the solutions, let alone be bought into seeing through the development, implementation and evaluation of policies. This problem is compounded by the fact highlighted by a former senior civil servant that civil servants also move positions often.

"I got a really good understanding, not just from visiting schools, but from talking to people in the sector, beginning to form a view, talking to experts who really understood that view as well...you really have to understand the problem properly. And then you have to work out how to deal with the problem properly. And you can't do this by being reshuffled into a ministerial position every two minutes."

(Ex)minister

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO INVOLVING PEOPLE MORE IN POLICY MAKING?

In order to develop impactful workable proposals for embedding participation in policy making, we wanted to understand the barriers. Our research with policy makers and the public identified five key barriers that would need to be overcome to implement successful participatory policy making:

1. Lack of capacity, and capability and resources

Public participation takes time, resources, budget, and bandwidth, all of which civil servants complain are already squeezed. Departments are facing average real-terms cuts over the next few years due to inflation.²¹

We also heard that the expertise is currently not there to deliver participatory methods, making it even more difficult to embed new practices into the civil service.

"I think there's another bit which is a lack of know how. So if I'm honest, if a minister said to me, I would like you to go and engage with citizens on this policy question, I wouldn't know what to do. You know, I'd work it out. I would speak to people. But it wouldn't actually be in my toolbox. As a senior civil servant, I didn't know how to go and do it or how to refine it so that ministers are asking the right question... And that in turn is linked to the fact you feel very distant from people."

(Former) senior civil servant

There are specific skills needed to engage meaningfully with the public, and these are not currently part of what civil servants learn in order to do their job.

"Having people who are able to engage them [the public], speak to them, explain that message in a way which isn't patronising, it's really, really difficult, and then translate that message into actionable things we actually can do off the back of it...is a really, really difficult skill set."

(Former) senior civil servant

Given the current short-term nature of policy making, as we have seen, one former senior civil servant talked about the lack of a reward structure in place for such methods that do require more time and investment, and push towards longer term thinking.

For participatory policy making to be successful, we need to embed a **range of methods**, including those which are easier and cheaper to deliver, as well as **building the capacity of civil servants** to implement **participatory approaches**.

21 <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/whitehall-monitor-2024/part-1>

2. Many politicians and civil servants feel like they already know what the public wants

There was a sense from several policy makers that the public is already somewhat involved in national policy making, in contrast to the public's view that they are not involved at all. As we have seen, (ex)ministers in particular feel they are in touch with the views of the public through their constituents.

Many civil servants are used to using consultative tools like polling and focus groups, and feel that this gives them enough information about what the public wants.

"There is often quite a degree of arrogance in sort of central policymakers, be that elected politicians or civil servants, or political advisors that 'I know what the public are going to say about it. I've seen YouGov polls, I've sat in a couple of focus groups, I know what people say about this, I don't need a very expensive citizens assembly or whatever... to tell me something I already know'. That is problematic and needs to be overcome, because it's demonstrably not true."

(Former) senior civil servant

For participatory policy making to be successful, we need to demonstrate that **involving people in a meaningful way** adds **value to policy development and delivery**.

3. Fear of undermining the role of politicians

Not only did (ex)ministers tend to feel reasonably in touch with the views of the public - as constituency MPs they are regularly meeting the public - but some also saw this as their role in the process, and anything perceived to diminish their role would be undermining representative democracy. These (ex)ministers felt that they are elected as representatives of the public, and in this way they bring public opinion into policy making. This has been expressed in the argument from some in Westminster that "we already have an assembly which is made up of citizens chosen to represent the public. It is called the House of Commons."²²

"I think most politicians know what they want to do and what they should do. So [involving the public] becomes an impediment."

(Ex)minister

One (ex) minister expressed the concern that "contracting out decision-making" would remove the levers from politicians to deliver on their promises which would further undermine trust and lead to a lack of confidence by politicians.

²² <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/citizens-assemblies-are-a-dreadful-idea/>

We heard concerns from some (ex)ministers that if politicians were to involve the public in policy making, it would be perceived as politicians shirking their responsibility or having no ideas of their own. The issue of control is important: one ex-minister said they would not be comfortable with giving away power to the public while still being accountable for the outcome of decisions.

“What we’ve learned [through devolution] is if we give powers away, the political culture in the country hasn’t changed in a way that’s recognised that we’re not responsible anymore. And it’s a very unpleasant place to be where you’re on the hook, and you don’t have the lever anymore... Politicians don’t want to cede control. Will we still be held accountable for things where we’ve actually allowed people to have a more direct say?”

(Ex)minister

A final concern raised by both (ex)ministers and civil servants was that politicians would not truly want to share power and embrace the public’s judgement, and it would therefore be unlikely that the participation has a meaningful impact.

“Ministers need to want it: In the absence of ministers wanting it, it won’t happen, because the system is geared to deliver what ministers want.”

(Former) senior civil servant

For participatory policy making to be successful, we need to be clear that **decision-making responsibility and accountability rests with elected politicians**, and that participation will enable politicians to show that they are **listening and responding to the public**.

4. Civil servants are reluctant to outsource policy making to the public

There was a sense from some (former) senior civil servants that public participation could undermine their role as sources of information for ministers and expertise in the policy making process by ‘outsourcing’ decisions to the public.

“I think public participation, yes. But outsourcing to the public, no... Nobody elected the people [in these groups], and there’s a risk in ‘public participation’ that actually it’s used by people in the system to hide from their own responsibility. And so I think [it’s important to make] sure that... public participation is a way of getting people heard, but not a means of lumping responsibility back onto them, which they’re not actually equipped to discharge.”

(Former) senior civil servant

As we have seen, civil servants value the role they play as experts closely advising ministers. One former senior civil servant felt that this has become increasingly true over the past decade as policy making has become more professionalised, and it has become more important that civil servants can demonstrate the policy impact they have had.

"You want to be seen as an expert... And you also want to make your mark, you want to be able to put your stamp on certain things. It's actually quite difficult with a massive machine like the Civil Service, but you do sort of want to be able to say, well, here is a piece of policy work where I took the problem, and I solved it. I presented the minister with a new policy approach, and he or she backed it. And that's because I'm a policy expert."

(Former) senior civil servant

For participatory policy making to be successful, we need to show that **participation will help civil servants develop successful policies** that have the intended outcomes if the people at the sharp end of the issue have been **involved in the policy development process**.

5. Scepticism of new and more participatory policy making methods

There was concern from some policy makers about participatory policy making methods themselves. Firstly, about whether the outputs would be useful - because the public would struggle to understand the topic well enough to provide useful input, to go beyond idealistic answers or knee jerk reactions on what the policy should look like, or to reach a consensus.

"If you appoint a panel of twenty people to decide on what should be the priorities for education policy, do you think they'll say 'well, we think the way reading is taught in this country is a disaster for disadvantaged kids because they don't learn properly at school, they don't learn at home, and this is why we have such high illiteracy rates'... No. They'll say 'more school funding', they'll say, 'we need to recruit more teachers, we need better discipline in schools'. But they won't get into that nitty gritty because they haven't done the work."

(Ex)minister

Secondly, some (ex)ministers and civil servants also raised questions specifically about the information that is shared as part of public participation processes. One concern was around bias - in terms of the questions asked, the information presented, and any media influence on the process.

“There’ll be a danger then of using the media to influence [public participation processes]. I mean, I mean, the media is used all the time, ineffectively, because it’s a difficult beast. But that’s what would happen isn’t it?”

(Ex)minister

Another concern was around confidentiality of information, and a reluctance from policy makers to share details relating to potential policies due to political or other sensitivities. Given existing fears of media scrutiny in policy making, this is an important concern to address.

“You also have to take risks about what you tell people [outside government]. But disclosing where your thinking is at can be problematic, and particularly in high profile areas of public policy, I think [the risks] are a massive deterrent [to public engagement].”

Senior civil servant

Thirdly, the question of who takes part. For example, some raised concerns that the average person would not give up their time to take part in a participatory process, leaving an unrepresentative group of people. One (ex)minister argued that once participants take part in a participatory process like a Citizens’ Assembly, they cease to be representative of the public.

“When you involve people in [a Citizens’ Assembly]..they’re often the kinds of people that get involved in this, and even if they’re not, once you start getting involved and showing them stuff, they begin to understand the issue in more detail than most people do. And therefore, they don’t necessarily react in the way that the public as a whole would. If your intention is to have them as a kind of representative sample, they cease to become representative.”

(Ex)minister

For participatory policy making to be successful, we need to **demonstrate the rigour and value** of the processes, show how the risks outlined above are mitigated through the methodology and **ensure standards are upheld**. This is set out in Part 2 of this paper.

Our recommendations for building and embedding participatory policy making in subsequent chapters are designed to address the reservations set out above.

THE CASE FOR INTRODUCING MORE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION INTO POLICY MAKING

As we can see in the preceding sections, there are plenty of reasons why politicians and civil servants are reluctant to involve people more in policy making. But we have also identified major problems with the way policy making is done now, and there is appetite from many policy makers for more public participation. This is particularly true when it comes to people impacted by a policy, as there was consensus that good stakeholder engagement can, and already does, improve the quality of policy making by making it work better for the people it was targeted at. While the public are currently less likely to be part of this engagement process, there is a clear case to be made for involving them more to make policies work better for people.

"I sat through some truly depressing focus groups when the railway managed to comprehensively screw up a timetable change a couple of years ago, resulting in really bad service in the north of England and on the Thameslink route. And yeah, just the granular nature of the emotive response, quite legitimately received from customers was very powerful in terms of the investigation we subsequently did."

(Former) senior civil servant

Many policies are considered to be so difficult or politically toxic that kicking them into the long grass seems like a better political solution than making the tough decision now - for example, fixing the social care funding crisis or sorting out the blockages in the planning system. By having such a small pool of perspectives represented in policy making teams, exacerbated by a culture in the civil service and amongst ministers that mitigates against innovation and 'putting your head above the parapet', the policies that government develops fail to tackle the issues felt viscerally by people on the ground.

Policies fail at the first contact with reality as they haven't been developed with the people impacted by the issue, either those that deal with it in their daily lives or are on the frontline of tackling it. For example, it wouldn't have taken many conversations with claimants or people on the frontline of delivering Universal Credit for DWP officials to realise that making UC claimants wait 6 weeks before their first payment may push already financially vulnerable people over the edge into poverty, an outcome which benefits no-one.

Public participation in policy making isn't a silver bullet, or correct for every policy challenge, but it will enable ministers to overcome some of the problems we have identified with the way policy making is made now. This will improve outcomes for more people, which in turn increases trust and satisfaction with politics and political processes.

Below we set out key arguments for introducing more public participation into policy making, illustrated by examples of where they have been effective.

Overcome stuck policy issues

On some issues, partnering with the public on policy making can help to solve complex challenges, giving an incoming government ways to overcome stuck policy issues, such as building enough affordable homes to meet demand, or ones that require sacrifice and compromise, such as to meet net zero targets. It can help to overcome institutional inertia in some policy areas which are deemed too hard to confront, such as the overhaul of social care provision and funding. It also provides a mechanism to work through difficult moral issues where there is no obvious right or wrong answer, such as assisted dying.

DE-TOXIFYING A DEBATE AND CHANGING POLICY

IRISH CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY INTO ABORTION

Citizens' Assemblies have led to major changes in policy on abortion and equal marriage in Ireland. In 2016-7, Ireland held a citizens' assembly which recommended ending the constitutional ban on abortion.²³

99 members of the public were chosen at random to reflect the demographics of the Irish population, including in terms of their attitudes towards abortion - 'pro-lifers', 'pro-choicers' and people who were undecided.

The assembly was followed by a referendum in 2018 where the public voted to legalise abortion in Ireland, in alignment with the conclusion of the assembly, updating a law that hadn't changed in almost 40 years.

In the Assembly 64% voted in favour of 'terminations without restrictions'. In the referendum, 66.4% voted in favour of repealing the Eighth Amendment, effectively legalising abortion in Ireland.

Research shows that knowledge of the Citizens' Assembly made people more likely to vote in the referendum and also more likely to vote yes.²⁴ This suggests the Citizens' Assembly influenced the outcomes of the referendum and helped unlock Ireland's political deadlock on abortion.

Improve policy making

"Let's say you had a public pay dispute...The Secretary for Education has no means of communicating directly with all the teachers in the country...They negotiate with the union, and the union goes and tells their members what the offer is, and I was always like, 'this is incredible in this world of modern technology'... So if I were running a major public service, I would want to have some channel where I can go [and speak directly to people]... So I think there are clear opportunities with modern technology to have that kind of deliberative process with groups of the public that have a particular stake in an issue."

(Ex)minister

Participatory policy making can lead to more effective policies that create better outcomes for more people. By harnessing the collective intelligence of a wide range of citizens who are affected by an issue or trying to tackle it on the ground, the policies developed as a result will actually address people's needs and concerns. Including more diverse perspectives mitigates against the biases that can exist within smaller, more homogenous teams of policy makers, as identified by Nesta in their work on collective intelligence.²⁵

²³ <https://involve.org.uk/news-opinion/opinion/citizens-assembly-behind-irish-abortion-referendum>

²⁴ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/irish-referendums-deliberative-assemblies/>

²⁵ https://www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/collective-intelligence-design-playbook/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwpZWzBhC0ARIsACvjWRP0_D4YbFFm1Tgv5pazh3TEQ_ofHWr-4SgqOAcXJYd3Wd-9tsbxs28aAgKdEALw_wcB

Participatory work enables policy makers and decision makers to hear how a policy issue directly affects people on the ground, which Whitehall is not currently doing well, and / or gives them greater clarity about how the public works through difficult issues to reach an agreement that the majority can get behind. More complete information on which ministers can base their policy decisions can lead to more robust evidence-based policy making.

“Anything where you’re consulting and involving people, those who are going to be impacted by policy, who are perhaps already being impacted by this policy area, and can tell you what it feels like to be on the receiving end of an interaction with the state in this area, will improve the quality of policy making because policy makers... do not look like the country in all of its entirety.”

(Former) senior civil servant

DEVELOPING POLICY ON COMPLEX ISSUES

MELBOURNE’S 10 YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN

In 2014, Melbourne City Council initiated a participatory budgeting exercise called The Melbourne People’s Panel, with the aim of informing Melbourne’s 10 year financial plan.²⁶

The Panel consisted of 42 randomly selected Citizens’ that met up six times over the course of three months. The engagement activities panel members took part in included targeted workshops, discussions, pop-up events and online budget simulations.

Melbourne’s People’s Panel was an impactful process in policy terms, with most of the panel’s recommendations being taken up in some form by the Council in the 10 Year Financial Plan which was published in 2015. Some of the recommendations provided support for existing political priorities, others provided a push to initiatives that had already been subject to political debate and some gave directions to issues that were unclear and undecided on within Melbourne council.

A 2017 study on Melbourne’s People Panel found that Melbourne’s existing track record and culture of engagement played a key part in the uptake of the Panel’s recommendations, because it gave decision makers confidence in deliberative methods.²⁷

²⁶ https://newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/docs_researchpapers_2017_DrAWendyRussell_nDF-ImpactReport_18Apr17.pdf

²⁷ https://newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/docs_researchpapers_2017_DrAWendyRussell_nDF-ImpactReport_18Apr17.pdf

Avoid the fiscal costs of policy failure

A new government can't afford the fiscal cost of policy failure. It is better to involve the public, understand their lived experience, reach consensus on ways forward that people can get behind, and get the policy right first time. As counterfactuals below show, getting policies wrong or having to deal with the fallout of unintended consequences is a waste of resources.

Policy failures are expensive in terms of money, time and public trust. Yet many could have been avoided by involving the people impacted. For example:

- Getting the policy wrong because the public reject it, like the Poll Tax.
- Policies failing at first contact with reality as the right questions were not asked at the frontline during policy development, like Theresa May's twice scrapped childcare policy.
- Government failing to bring the public with as it makes difficult decisions that will potentially cost them money, like the failure to properly fund social care which has been kicked into the long grass since the narrative failure of Labour's 'Death Tax' and the Conservative's 'Dementia Tax'.

THE FISCAL COST OF NOT INVOLVING THE PUBLIC

SCRAPPAGE OF THE GREEN HOMES GRANT

The government scrapped its flagship £1.5 billion green homes grant scheme six months after its launch in 2020. The programme offered households grants of up to £5,000 or £10,000 to put in insulation or low-carbon heating.

The policy failure could have been avoided if the government had worked with the people most impacted by the policy - building firms who had to deliver the green improvements, and the public who had to apply for the grants.

Many small building firms were put off by the complexity of the accreditation process, and were reluctant to invest the time and money needed to gain accreditation as the scheme was only to be run for a short time. Additionally, households found the scheme difficult to access.²⁸

This follows on from the government's previous failed flagship 2013 homes insulation scheme, which was killed-off in 2015 as take-up was too low.²⁹

The government should have brought small building firms and the public into the policy making process to understand barriers to delivering and accessing these schemes. Putting in place measures to mitigate these would have been a far simpler and cheaper way forward than getting the policy wrong twice, with all the resultant financial and reputational costs of having to scrap the policy.

28 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/mar/27/uk-government-scrap-green-homes-grant-after-six-months>
29 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jul/23/uk-ceases-financing-of-green-deal>

Build legitimacy for hard policy choices

Participatory processes that give people access to expert information and time to deliberate and reach agreement result in the development of consensual and considered recommendations. In some cases, the recommendations that these processes reach are disadvantageous for some people, including those represented by participants, but better for society as a whole. This shows that people can work through the compromises necessary to make decisions for the common good.

When considering these recommendations, politicians can be assured that they have deep legitimacy as they have been developed by a process of public involvement. This can strengthen public ownership of and, potentially, support for the policy, especially when the participatory process has involved participants discussing which communication frames are the most effective for members of the public like them. This in turn will increase public compliance and promote more effective implementation - when people are invited into the policy making process, it becomes more difficult for them to merely stand on the sidelines critiquing the decision. Politicians will have a better way to assess the public appetite for policy change, and to communicate the trade-offs involved. But they also need to be prepared to be influenced by the public through these processes: if they invite participation and don't take it on board, the process - and trust - can be undermined.

This could also prove important for developing controversial policies that don't have an electoral mandate. By partnering with the public, governments can start to build a governing mandate where the issue hasn't been tested in a general election.

"I think if you're able to point to the fact that actually citizens were involved and the public was involved, then it gives you a bit more ground to stand on to defend the decision."

Civil servant

INCREASING PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF HARD CHOICES

CLIMATE ASSEMBLY UK

Climate Assembly UK was commissioned by six select committees of the House of Commons to understand public preferences on how to tackle climate change, specifically how to get to netzero by 2050.³⁰

108 assembly members – made up of people from all walks of life – met over six weekends between January and May 2020 to hear evidence, discuss and reach recommendations on the UK's path to net zero. Through this time, citizens weighed up consideration for future policy around land and air travel, home heating and energy, land use, food, what we buy, energy generation, greenhouse gas removal and recovery from Covid-19.

Many recommendations the group made collectively, after deliberation, were ones which recognised the need to consider personal constraint for the greater good - for example,

30 <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/committees/climate-assembly-uk/>

members recommended a ban on the sale of new petrol, diesel and hybrid car and new gas boilers by 2035, and recommended increasing air pricing for longer distance/ more frequent flights and removing incentives to fly. In their opening statement before their recommendations, the members wrote - "We recognise that achieving net zero will require a joined-up approach across society – all of us will have to play our part. Our recommendations take account of this reality."³¹

Restore trust

Being seen to listen and engage with the public in meaningful ways can help build back some of the trust that has been eroded in recent years. The Conservative government lost public trust: Demos polling carried out during the election period in June 2024 showed that only 32% of people agree that the UK is a well-functioning democracy.³² Restoring that trust is essential to winning the long-term mandate needed to renew our nation, and provide a counter balance to the rise of authoritarian leaders across the globe.

Trust works both ways, if government wants to be trusted by the people, it must itself start to trust the people.

"Showing the public that we think that the normal, everyday voice of people... when exposed to the information and the arguments, that their ideas are valuable, I think is an important signal to send."

(Ex)minister

REBUILDING TRUST IN DEMOCRACY

WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

The Westminster Citizens' Climate Assembly brought together a randomised group of 47 diverse residents from Westminster across June and July 2023, to develop a set of recommendations in response to the following question: 'How can we overcome the main barriers to Westminster becoming a net zero city by 2040 together? How do we ensure this is delivered in the fairest way?'³³

Before the assembly, there was some distrust among assembly members. Their most common concern was that it would "be an event that can be politicised as a positive thing rather than actually being used to learn and implement change from." After the assembly, the percentage of assembly members that trusted Westminster Council to act on the recommendations from the assembly grew from 52% to 73%. The number of people who felt

31 <https://www.climateassembly.uk/report/read/final-report.pdf>

32 https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Trustwatch-2024_final.pdf

33 <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/FINAL%20VERSION%20WCCA%20report.pdf>

listened to by their council grew from 27% to 63%. And 71% of assembly members wanted to stay involved with Westminster City Council beyond the climate assembly.³⁴

These changes show that meaningful public participation can dramatically improve trust in authorities to act fairly on contentious and divisive issues, and builds active engagement in democracy.

Strengthening citizenry

Finally, providing opportunities for people to be involved in thinking about policy trade offs and decisions can also strengthen citizenry and increase democratic wellbeing, defined by Carnegie UK as 'the extent to which we all - collectively - have a voice in decisions that affect us'.³⁵ Being able to influence policy making on issues that affect us contributes to people's sense self efficacy and political efficacy, influencing individuals' subjective well-being and their life satisfaction.³⁶

The process of bringing people together who would not usually meet and giving them the time, space and skills to be able to talk to each other about their different perspectives, helps to teach people collaborative ways to approach each other's different positions, manage difficult decisions, and resolve disputes,³⁷ and can counter division and polarisation.³⁸

COUNTERING POLARISATION

'LEAVERS' AND 'REMAINERS' COME TOGETHER OVER IMMIGRATION POST-BREXIT

A deliberative exercise was carried out by the National Centre for Social Research on attitudes towards post-Brexit immigration policy to see whether deliberation changes people's views on a polarising and divisive topic. The deliberation exposed participants to a variety of views that were rooted in potentially conflicting considerations of morality and self-interest.

The evidence showed that attitudes became more nuanced as a result of the deliberation. 'Leavers' became more likely to feel that immigration has been economically and culturally beneficial for Britain: support for the view that immigration is good for the economy increased by 15% to 58%, those who said it was culturally enriching rose from 42% to 50%. 'Remainers' became a little less liberal in their attitudes towards immigration control: 63% said EU migrants should have to apply to come to Britain, up from 38% beforehand.

This exercise demonstrates that deliberation which brings people with very different views together and gives them the opportunity to talk through well-facilitated sessions can bring those with opposing views together to find common ground.³⁹

34 <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/FINAL%20VERSION%20WCCA%20report.pdf>

35 https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/pex_carnegie2021/2022/01/20123523/GDWe-A-spotlight-on-democratic-wellbeing-FINAL.pdf

36 Teorell J. Political participation and three theories of democracy: A research inventory and agenda. *European Journal of Political Research*. 2006;45(5): 787-810

37 <https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-introduction-public-participation>

38 Dryzek, John S., André Bächtiger, Simone Chambers, Joshua Cohen, James N. Druckman, Andrea Felicetti, James S. Fishkin, David M. Farrell, Archon Fung, Amy Gutmann, Hélène Landemore, Jane Mansbridge, Sofie Marien, Michael A. Neblo, Simon Niemeyer, Maija Setälä, Rune Slothuus, Jane Suiter, Dennis Thompson, and Mark E. Warren (2019), "The Crisis of Democracy and the Science of Deliberation", *Science* 363(6432): 1144-1146. DOI: 10.1126/science.aaw2694.

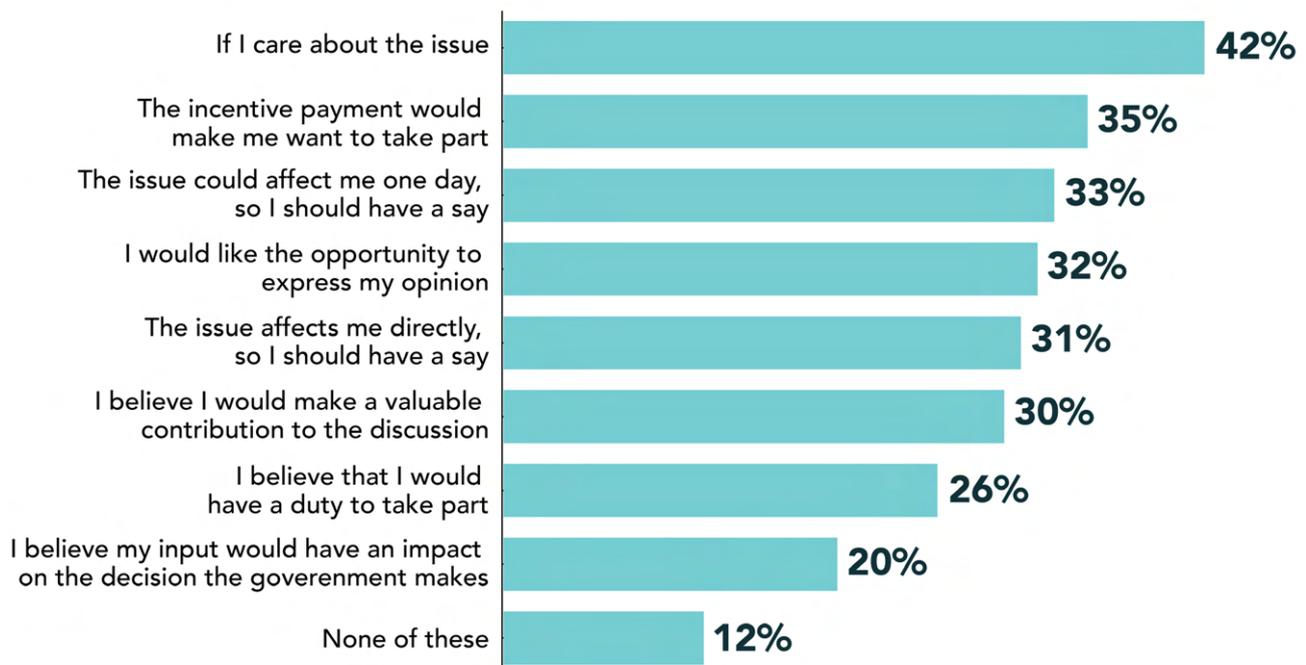
39 'Thinking about post-Brexit public policy: voters' perspective on immigration and regulation', National Centre for Social Research, January 2021

PUBLIC APPETITE FOR GETTING INVOLVED IN POLICIES THAT AFFECT THEM

There is appetite from people to input more into policy making if they are given the opportunity, which counters the narrative that the public is apathetic. If invited to take part in a participatory policy making exercise like a citizens' assembly by the government, our polling⁴⁰ found that over six in ten (63%) of the public say they would be likely to accept. This is a significant proportion of the public, particularly given this is a newer, less familiar form of public participation in UK democracy, compared for example to voting in general elections, where we recently saw voter turnout reach its lowest point since 2001 in the July 2024 General Election, with a turnout of 59.8%.⁴¹

The primary motivation for taking part, seen both in our polling and in our Citizens' Conversations, was caring about the issue. The incentive payment is also a key motivating factor, as was having the opportunity to have their voice heard on an issue that affects them.

FIGURE 1
PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO SELECTED EACH MOTIVATOR FOR TAKING PART IN A PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EXERCISE BY THE GOVERNMENT



"I think, put it this way, whatever the outcome would be least we know that we had a say. Yeah, we had some type of involvement in what the outcome would be, rather than being told this is what's going to happen. And that's it."

Citizens' Conversation participant (non-voter)

40 All stats in this section from nationally representative polling (2,073 UK adults) conducted 7th - 9th June 2024 as part of this research. See appendix for more detail on survey methodology

41 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10009/CBP-10009.pdf>

It is striking that the most common barrier to taking part by far was the belief that the government wouldn't actually listen, with four in ten (41%) people saying this would make them less likely to take part. We heard this scepticism in our Citizens' Conversations, that even if they did take part, they didn't believe it would have any impact on the government's policy making.

"[What would make people more likely to take part?] Maybe by actually seeing a change, you know, just having some sort of security and the knowledge that your opinions will be acknowledged, and will be taken into account, and they will report back on what the outcome has been from the process."

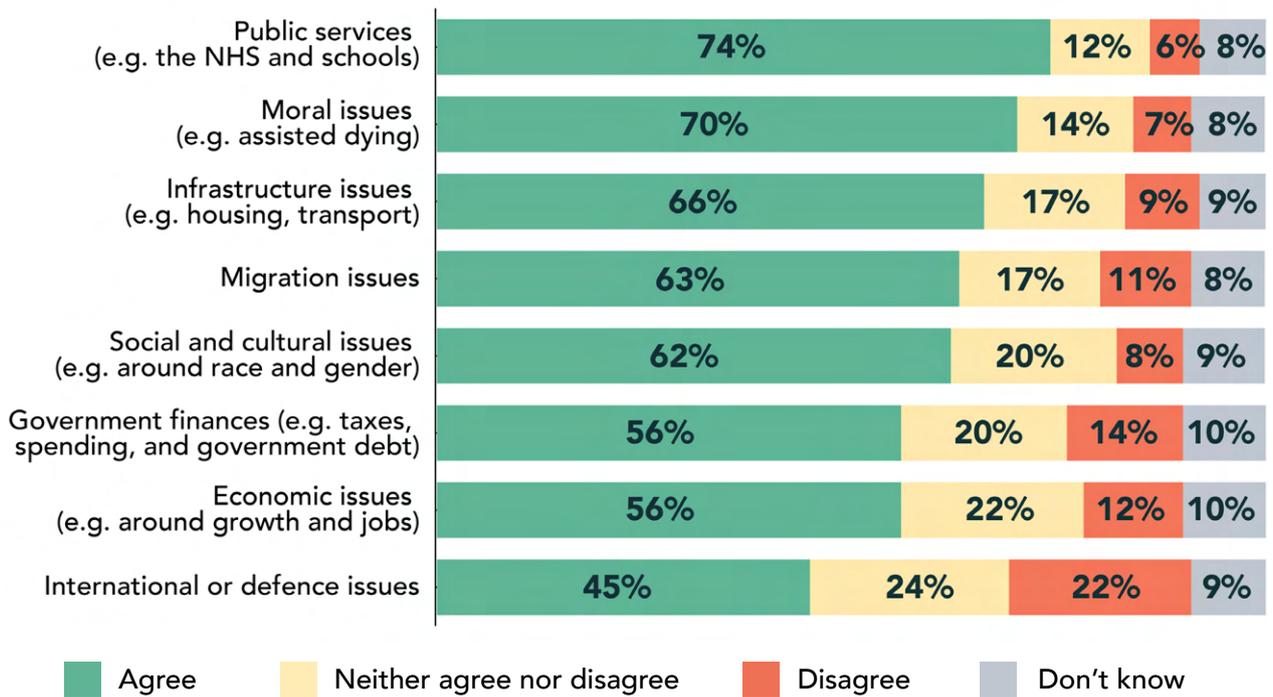
Citizens' Conversation participant (swing voter)

This is reflected in the fact that those we polled who tend to be more trusting of politicians were more likely to accept the invitation to take part (67%) than those who have no trust in politicians on any of the measures we presented (60%) - but it is encouraging that a majority of the latter would be likely to accept the invitation, despite their distrust. A much smaller proportion, four in ten (43%), of those we polled planning not to vote in the July 2024 election would be likely to accept this invitation. Nevertheless, the fact that they were more likely to take part than to vote tells us that this may be a way to engage those who are disengaged from our current politics and democracy.

In our polling, respondents were also provided with one of two scenarios describing a fictional policy decision being made by the new UK government. Some participants were given a scenario where a Citizens' Assembly was used to inform the decision and others were given a scenario where the decision was made without any public involvement at all. Respondents then answered questions to understand their levels of trust in the government's decision making process.

Trust was higher among survey respondents who were given the Citizens' Assembly scenario than those who were given the scenario without any public involvement: 44% said that they would trust the government to make decisions in the best interests of people in the UK in comparison to 35% who were given the scenario without public involvement. This suggests that if participation was used by the government to make a particular decision, and the public are aware of this, then this would positively influence the levels of trust the public have in that government's decision making process.

The appetite from the public to get involved in decision making depends on the policy issue. Our polling on the issues that people feel like the public should be involved in showed that the public were least likely to feel that they should be involved in decision making on international or defence issues (with 45% saying they should be). In comparison, the vast majority of the public feel they should be involved in decision making on public services (74%), moral issues (70%) and infrastructure issues (e.g. housing, transport).

FIGURE 2**LEVEL OF AGREEMENT THAT PUBLIC SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN DECISION MAKING ON THESE ISSUES**

"I do think I'd get more confidence from the government if we were able to make some decisions. Obviously there's been talk about things like Ukraine - I don't think it is down to us to make a decision. But, you know, things like local housing... could do with the public's help on stuff like that... I'm not saying 100% trust the government because I would never 100% trust the government, but it will give me more confidence in them leading our country, your local council and stuff. So, yeah, I definitely think it's time for something like that to change anyway, because it's just, you know, same old, same old really, and we need to make some changes."

Citizens' Conversation participant (swing voter)

In our Citizens' Conversations, to enable a more tangible discussion on involvement in policy making, we talked through three specific policy areas in our groups: affordable housing, assisted dying, and defence spending. There was a strong sense that those who will be impacted by new affordable housing policy should have a say, which is a broad group as most of us need affordable housing and will be impacted by housing policies. Often participants conceived this on a local level, for example someone who has an urgent affordable housing need in an area or someone who will be impacted by a new development in their area.

"Everybody [should have a say]. People that want the housing, people that can't afford the housing... and people that are going to have [the housing] in their back gardens or in their local area."

Citizens' Conversation participant (always voter)

While the vast majority felt strongly that the public should have a say on assisted dying, there was more debate on who the public should be in this case. Citizens we spoke to could see the clearest role for the public in this area due to the moral nature of the question, which didn't require expertise on the topic to engage with. For some, however, those who have been impacted or have experience relating to assisted dying (for example in their family, or with patients) should have the say, not the general public. For others, the general public should be involved as anyone may one day be impacted by this issue, and so should be able to have a say on it.

"If you take a complete cross section of the country, I'd have imagined a very high percentage would never have experienced a loved one dying or whatever. So it's very hard for them to make a decision, they might decide yes or no, without really thinking about it. It should really be thought deeply by people who've got first hand experience of this."

Citizens' Conversation participant (swing voter)

The policy area that citizens were most divided on in terms of whether the public should have a say was defence spending, also reflected in the polling. Many felt that this area was too complicated, and they felt too uninformed, to be able to meaningfully input into this policy area. A minority did make the argument, though, that as taxpayers whose money is being spent on defence, the public should be able to have a say in this area.

"I think it's really complicated. And there'll be loads of things happening that we don't understand and aren't in the public domain. And I think it really needs somebody who understands geopolitics to know whether this is a good idea or not. And I don't think the vast majority of people would."

Citizens' Conversation participant (sometimes voters)

Our Citizens' Conversations showed that the public have more nuanced views on the topic of their participation in policy making, than some policy makers may give them credit for. This, plus their appetite for involvement, gives us a firm platform on which to build out practical ways in which they could be involved in policy making in appropriate, proportionate and meaningful ways.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Our research with ex-ministers, civil servants and the public shows that there are problems with the way policy making is done now that mitigate against developing sustainable policy solutions that tackle the hardest issues. These problems stem from the geographical and cultural distance of Whitehall policy makers from the daily lives of ordinary people and the fact that engaging with people rarely gets beyond the 'usual suspect' stakeholders. There is a natural nervousness in Westminster about opening up policy making to the public - fears of undermining the role of politicians and civil servants, and lack of skills, time and resources to do things differently.

We will address these in the following sections and show how participatory policy making can build on existing policy making practice, and strengthen representative democracy. While not a silver bullet, engaging the public in policy making can help to overcome stuck and divisive issues, enable government to develop policies that work better for people, and rebuild trust in democracy.

PART 2

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING LOOK LIKE?

WHAT MAKES PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING DIFFERENT?

This section deals with what participatory policy making is in practice. It explains the fundamental differences between participation - harnessing the power of public *judgement* to help with policy design - and other methods of hearing public *opinion*.

On the surface, the tools of participatory policy making look similar to the useful tools of social research (such as focus groups, ethnography, or polling). However, participatory methods are different. They are designed to facilitate collective public judgement, to inform the live considerations of government, and to provide public recommendations on any tradeoffs that should be made in meeting the big challenges that governments face.

Participatory policymaking includes citizens' judgement about how the policy should develop or be delivered. The citizens are part of the decision process either because they are themselves directly impacted by the policy on the ground, or because they have a legitimate interest as members of society in informing the values and choices that underpin the policy. It can help unlock stuck policy issues and find ways through divisive issues that people can get behind. At a smaller scale, it can be used in everyday policy making to improve the quality of policies developed by departments.

A SPECTRUM OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There are different ways of conceptualising the involvement of the public in decision making, from Sherry Arnstein's 'ladder of participation'⁴² published in 1969 to John Gaventa's 'power cube'⁴³

42 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01944366908977225>

43 https://www.powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/finding_spaces_for_change.pdf

introduced in 2001. Each sets out different spaces for public participation and how these relate to government and power. We are using the International Association of Public Participation’s ‘spectrum of public participation’⁴⁴ as the basis for framing how the government could embed meaningful public participation into national policy making.

Specifically, participatory policy making as we’re describing it, sits within the “Involve” and “Collaborate” parts of the spectrum:

Increasing impact on the decision →

	OUT OF SCOPE		IN SCOPE		OUT OF SCOPE
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding decisions made	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions still to be made	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solutions	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how we canvassed a range of views	We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations in the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide
How the spectrum relates to participatory policy making as set out in the Citizens’ White Paper	Informing and Consulting includes marketing and communications, sending out information, formal consultations, public meetings. Usually means setting out information, and at a particular time in the decision process, asking for views. This is outside of participatory policy making.		Involving and Collaborating is within the scope of participatory policy making. It is a non-tokenistic, genuine approach to inviting the public into policy making. Government decision makers consider everything they hear from the public, and then make the final decision.		Empowering is outside of the scope of what we are proposing. It includes placing final decision making in the hands of public.

First two rows of table from the International Association of Public Participation’s spectrum of public participation.⁴⁵

44 https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf

45 <https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars>

PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING METHODS

There are a range of methods that can be used by Mission Boards or policy teams across government to help inform policy options and ministerial decisions.

These range from light touch methods to more deeply deliberative, and those which can be delivered at speed to those that can be utilised when a policy team has longer to address a more major challenge.

Policy teams will need to identify appropriate and proportionate methods depending on the policy context, budget and timescale.

We do not recommend that the public is directly involved in every policy nor at each stage - there are plenty of times when involving the public will do ministers, officials and citizens no favours. Specifically, we are not recommending a citizens' assembly on every policy. This is neither appropriate in terms of cost and resource, nor often the best tool for the job. There are other methods, including those that are quicker and cheaper, that policy makers can have in their arsenal to draw on when necessary.

By making use of agile, proportional participatory methods at relevant points in the policy making cycle, policy makers can present to ministers deliverable policy options that the public can get behind and help ministers to get policies right the first time.

This paper showcases six methods as examples of participatory processes. These demonstrate different ways of engaging, for different kinds of policy questions. As methods, they each have a level of consensus globally about design. They come with acknowledged design standards, for example, the OECD's guidance on citizens' assemblies⁴⁶ and meet the requirements of quality for participatory processes.

46 <https://www.oecd.org/gov/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions-339306da-en.htm>

We propose six specific tools for engaging the public and below set out how to decide which one to use:

TOOL	WHAT?	HOW?	WHY?	EXAMPLE
The following methods can be run at a national scale and would represent a national level commitment from government				
Citizens' Panels	A representative, consultative body which reflects the demographics in the relevant population, for example: of local residents, of the general public, or a group of citizens with a particular interest in an issue (e.g. service users). Panel members are brought together to deliberate on issues related to policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100s-1000s • With more than 1,000 participants it is often possible to identify subgroups of panel members who can take part in deliberative processes to a quality standard, or engaged on issues specific to their needs or interests. • Panel is systematically renewed to ensure it remains representative over time. 	<p>A permanent resource to allow for repeated, flexible use, reducing costs over time and demonstrating high commitment to participatory processes which meet high standards.</p> <p>Panels provide an ongoing deliberative space in which participants can make recommendations in a particular issue or geographical area, feeding into strategy and policy development over time.</p> <p>Panels facilitate culture shift and allow for evaluation downstream of policy implementation.</p>	Especially powerful in ongoing public service reform in areas which affect large proportions of the population, such as fixing the NHS or social care or building a modern childcare system.
Citizens' Assembly	A group of members of the public brought together to deliberate on issues related to policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100-200 members of the public, selected randomly via a sortition process. • To meet quality standards an Assembly should meet for at least 30 hours (4 days) and many meet for longer. • Assemblies are independently facilitated and experts' inputs are reviewed for balance and diversity by an independent advisory group. 	<p>Unlike consultations or focus groups, the goal isn't to just learn about what people already think. Rather, members engage in thoughtful conversations on important policy matters with people they may never normally meet and hear from experts to inform their thinking.</p> <p>Participants work together to find common ground, and develop recommendations or proposals for a way forward, which are presented and responded to by the commissioning body.</p>	<p>Major collective challenges, e.g. how to take the tough decisions needed to deliver economic growth.</p> <p>Specific, politically challenging policy areas where public discourse is emotive and polarised, such as prison reform or immigration.</p> <p>Moral and sensitive questions, such as assisted dying, which examine/surface collective values.</p>

The following methods tend to be lower cost, are more suited to smaller scales, and could be embedded across government policy making

<p>Citizens' Jury</p>	<p>A Citizens' Jury is very similar to a Citizens' Assembly in recruitment, methods and purpose. The difference is that they are generally smaller and can be run over a shorter period of time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12-24 citizens, randomly selected and representative of a geographic area or interest/issue area. • 2-4 days of deliberation, but they can be shorter. 	<p>Citizens' Juries are particularly effective on value-laden and controversial questions, where knowledge is contested and there might be important ethical and social repercussions. They are lower cost than full Citizens' Assemblies.</p>	<p>Addressing national political priorities at a regional or local level, for example:</p> <p>Delivering national housing targets through local public participation; from building new affordable homes to area plans. This could unlock local support for, and counter local opposition to, delivering homes through involving the public effectively.</p> <p>The future of English regional devolution, such as what powers should be devolved, and to which geographies, when completing the English Devolution map by 2030.</p>
<p>Deliberative Workshops</p>	<p>A more loosely defined set of approaches than Citizens' Assemblies or Juries. They are facilitated group discussions that provide participants with the opportunity to explore an issue in depth, consider each other's opinions, hear information and evidence and develop their views/arguments to reach an informed and agreed position. Sometimes clear recommendations are formed and sometimes outputs are around key principles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24+ participants, though also could be hundreds. • The choice of participants will depend on the purpose of the workshop: participants could be from particular groups affected by the issue, or representative of the whole population. • Recruited through stratified random selection to form a 'mini public'. • No min/max on sessions. 	<p>Lighter touch and more flexible than full extended processes.</p>	<p>Suitable for use in everyday government at multiple points in the policy cycle, at a small or large scale.</p> <p>For example, the local impacts of climate change: holding multiple deliberative workshops across the country on the differentiated impacts, equity implications, and trade offs for local adaptation. Or, helping to make choices around the development and application of new science and technology, in a way which delivers public benefit.</p>

<p>Co-Design Workshops</p>	<p>A co-design process is a collaborative approach to policy making where diverse stakeholders, including policy makers, experts, members of the public impacted by the issue, people working in the sector, and potentially other interested parties, work together to design, develop, and/or implement policies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experts by profession, experts by lived experience and those who hold power all engaged to make policy decisions together on an equal footing. • Can be small, c20 people • A series of workshops, either intensively over days, or stretched out over a number of weeks or months. 	<p>The value of this approach is that the policy problem is understood from all different angles as the participants come from different points in the system (users, staff, decision makers, for example). Solutions designed through the process will therefore also work across the system.</p>	<p>Best for policy issues where developing solutions across a complex system requires different perspectives to come together, and where issues of trust and power are key blockers. For example, bringing decision makers, experts, PCSOs and the public to the table as equal partners to create solutions that would work on the ground when improving neighbourhood policing.</p>
<p>Community Conversations</p>	<p>A more informal way of capturing discussions with a diverse range of people across the country on a given policy issue. A way of giving participants more input into the agenda around an issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No set number of participants to be recruited, but the commissioning agency would usually look to include more than 3 or 4 Community Conversations and involve anything from 20 to hundreds of participants. 	<p>The approach is based on the idea that complex issues need to involve a range of conversations that happen in different spaces, including community spaces, where people feel more comfortable to talk. They provide ways for citizens and other stakeholders to take part in structured conversations to capture experiences, insights and ideas.</p>	<p>Suitable for policy issues where enabling more people to be part of less formal conversation to capture ideas and insights is useful, particularly when extra input is needed from minoritised groups around the country, such as how to support communities to reduce violence against women and girls.</p>

A note on the comprehensiveness of the methods outlined:

The methods described above are participatory methods that can be used when involving or collaborating with citizens.

There are other tools which would be used to consult with people, such as polling, focus groups, online consultation forms. These are useful in some circumstances, and can be helpfully used in conjunction with more participatory tools (eg: polling to understand how well a recommendation might land within the general population), but do not, when used alone, enable policy makers to understand considered public judgement.

There are other creative participatory tools, such as legislative theatre⁴⁷ and serious gaming,⁴⁸ that have been used to great success to engage citizens in difficult and complex policy issues. We have chosen to focus on methods that policy makers new to these approaches would be able to make use of more easily; and in particular, methods which focus on deliberation and weighing up tradeoffs.

There are also digital tools that can be used to capture public sentiment and ideas at scale, for example [Pol.is](#) and [Your Priorities](#). While these tools are excellent for enabling more active public participation by feeding in ideas and expressing support for or disagreement with others' ideas, we have not included them in this list of participatory methods as they do not yet enable genuine public dialogue or consideration of trade offs. There are greater possibilities around more participatory civic tech like [Decidim](#) and [Citizen Space](#) that blend the online with offline engagement.

Which method to choose?

In order to determine which tool is the most appropriate to use for which policy issue, policy teams across government will need to assess against a series of criteria, asking themselves the following questions:

1. What question is the public being asked, and what is their level of influence?
2. Who is affected and has an interest in the decisions on the issue?
3. At what stage of the policy cycle is this public participation planned to happen? Is it upstream - ie: strategic or agenda setting, or downstream in policy development, implementation or evaluation? See diagram below mapping opportunities for public participation onto the policy cycle.
4. How much time is available to run the process, to ensure that results can have timely impact?
5. How many people need to be involved?
6. How long? Is this a process which requires a longer period of participant engagement, or a shorter one off process?
7. Does the issue have a national or local scope?
8. How much budget is available?

47 <https://www.peoplepowered.org/legislative-theater>

48 <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/2024/01/25/introducing-regbox-using-serious-games-in-regulatory-development/>

This table applies each of these questions to the six methods outlined above to recommend which is appropriate according to the criteria.

QUESTIONS:	WHAT QUESTION?		WHO?		AT WHAT STAGE OF POLICY CYCLE?		HOW MUCH TIME IS AVAILABLE?		HOW MANY PEOPLE?		HOW LONG?		NATIONAL OR LOCAL SCOPE??		HOW MUCH?	
	Narrower scope	Wider scope	Specific groups impacted by policy	Represent General public	Upstream /strategic	Downstream / policy development implementation or evaluation	Weeks to months	6m+	10s	100+s	One off	Reconvened or embedded	One location needed	Several locations needed	Low e.g. £40-150k	High e.g. £150k - £1 million
METHODS:																
CITIZENS PANELS																
CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY																
CITIZENS' JURY																
DELIBERATIVE WORKSHOP																
CO-DESIGN PROCESSES WORKSHOPS																
COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS																



This is likely to be a suitable method



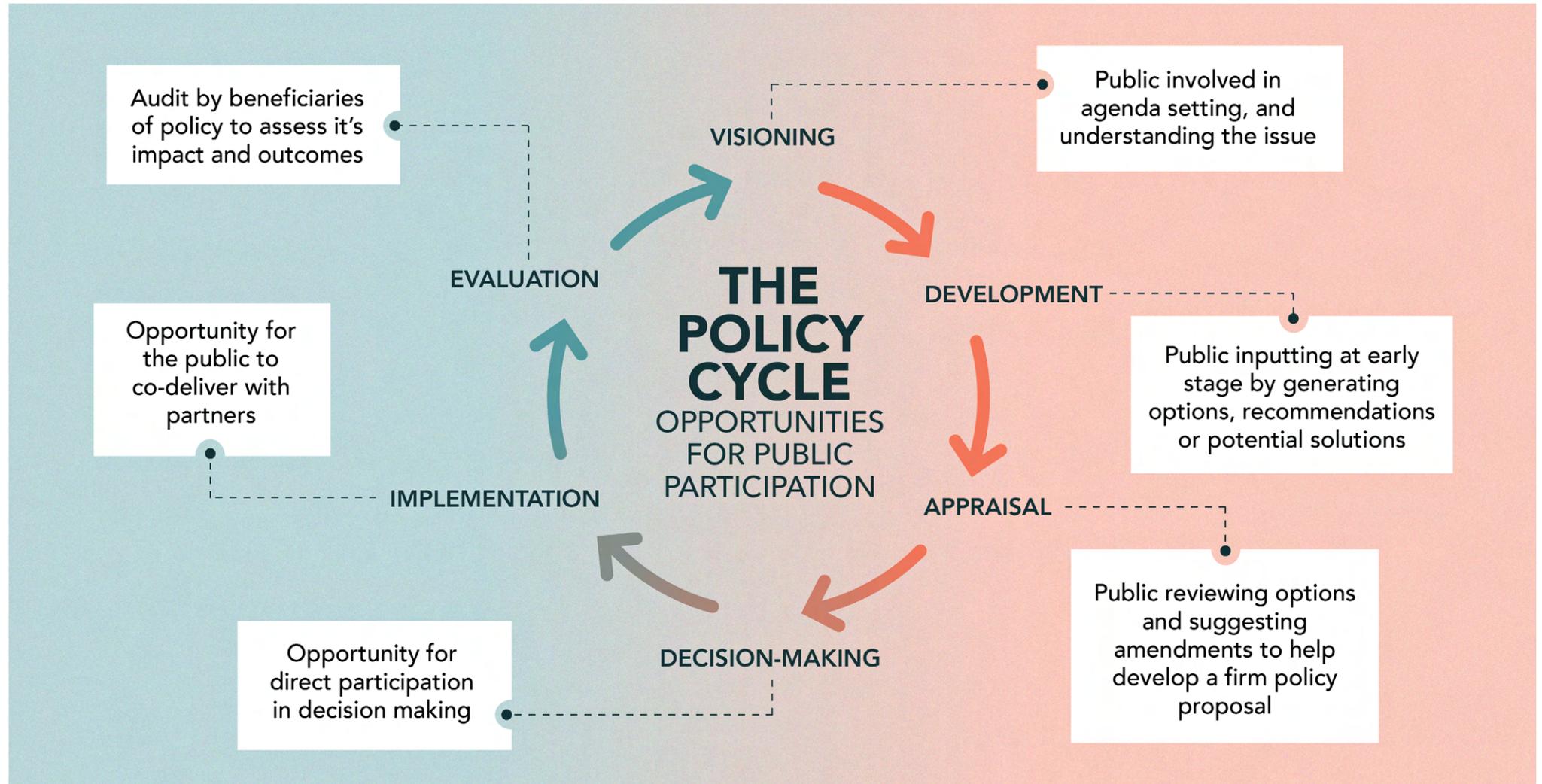
Do not use this method



This method could be used

Diagram mapping opportunities for public participation onto the policy cycle

As the question 3 above suggests, the tool that policy makers may choose to use will depend on where in the policy cycle they are. The diagram below shows the different points at which people can be involved in the process.



It can be difficult to imagine how these tools could be used in practice by policy making teams so we have set out below three examples of policy questions that teams could be charged with answering. We describe how the methods could be used to answer the questions, showing that a combination of methods is usually the most helpful to get to robust, detailed policy recommendations that teams need to develop.

POLICY QUESTION	METHOD	APPROX. TIME FROM COMMISSIONING TO COMPLETION
What are the public's views on the use of AI and big data in healthcare?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Citizens' assembly on use of AI and big data in healthcare, with participants hearing from experts on how AI and data could be used to improve healthcare as well as from experts setting out risks. Participants would produce a report setting out principles for acceptable AI and big data use, recommendations, and best ways of communicating any policy changes 2. Nationally representative polling to test public opinion on recommendations and communications framing 	6-8 months
What are the barriers to young people accessing mental health services and how can they be overcome?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Citizens' jury bringing together young people from across the country to consider what prevents them being able to access mental health support, sharing their own experiences, hearing from experts such as from school mental health provision, CAMHS, and third sector support services. Participants to set out recommendations for how barriers to access could be overcome 	4-5 months
What initiatives can improve trust and cooperation between the police and communities?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Series of 3-5 Citizens' Conversations in a range of areas, including (where there are known tensions between police and local communities, and places where there are no known tensions) to understand what the issues are from their perspective 2. 1-2-1 interviews with police from different ranks to understand issues from their perspective 3. Co-design workshop bringing together representatives from local police forces from different ranks and members of the public from areas identified above to work together to recommend measures that can be taken on both sides to improve trust and cooperation. 	3-4 months

Other potential topic areas for national participatory process:

TOPIC	COMMENT	EXAMPLE OF POTENTIAL AREA FOR PARTICIPATION
Sentencing	Case for public engagement to build consensus. Potential societal and effectiveness benefits.	Addressing the trade offs between prison capacity and sentencing priorities
Policing	Strong case for public dialogue. Potential societal benefits. Supported by Parliament (Select Committee has done, and recommends, deliberative activity). Several Citizens' Assemblies conducted on policing at local level.	Improving trust and cooperation between police and local communities.
Long term NHS funding	Strong case for building consensus. Potential societal benefits, fiscal savings. Strong public commitment to the cause.	Public appetite around trade offs between resource spend on prevention and primary/secondary care.
Social care	Strong case for building consensus. Potential societal benefits, fiscal savings.	Deliberation on the social care funding options that are the most acceptable to people, what they are prepared to pay for, and why
Housing and house-building	Strong case for resetting public dialogue, building consensus.	Trade offs between local sentiment and national need
Pension triple lock	Strong case for public engagement.	Public dialogue around long term affordability of triple lock mechanism, looking at potential trade-offs, such as accelerating the state pension age increase
Climate Adaptation/ Net Zero	Significant pre-existing work. Very strong case for public dialogue and action. Identified by Parliament (Citizens' Assembly previously carried out by Select Cttee and others).	Incentivising behaviour change to enable the UK to reach net zero, given the personal sacrifice required
Migration	Strong case for resetting public dialogue and having a more considered and informed public dialogue.	Managing the trade-offs between levels of immigration and labour shortages
Science and Technology eg AI	Strong public interest case. Future facing issues involving lower levels of political risk.	Consideration of the guardrails and frameworks that should be in place to ensure we use AI in a way that is safe and ethical
Assisted Dying	Very strong case for building consensus and action. Widespread potential societal benefits, fiscal savings. Low political risk. Could build on current work by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics.	Whether assisted dying should be permitted, and if so, under what circumstances.
Constitution	Including House of Lords reform. Divergent views and self-interest in solutions.	Considering democratic alternatives to the House of Lords

SIX KEY CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING

These six criteria are the defining features of a participatory, deliberative process. They must all be present in the thinking and design, if the process is to improve the quality of policy making, unlock difficult issues and rebuild trust.

1. COMMITMENT: A commitment to the public that the process will make a difference - with a feedback loop back to the public at the end

At the heart of every participatory process is a promise from the decision makers who commission it to the public. The promise is - this process will make a difference. Decision makers are sincere in their willingness to be open-minded, and make a public commitment to consider and respond in detail to decisions or recommendations coming out of the process. This does not mean they have to enact every recommendation, only that it is within their purview to do so.

This means that every participatory process starts with a clear question— or set of questions — to address, with a range of genuinely possible solutions. The scope for the public to make a difference to the decision is explicitly declared at the start and things that are out of scope or cannot be changed are clearly outlined.

The commitment is demonstrated at the end of the process, when the results are shared. Participants and the wider public are given clear information on the final decision and how participants' input has made a difference. The body responsible for enacting the decisions or recommendations should provide updates on how they have listened to and taken into account participants' views, with clear evidence of how decisions or policy developments have been influenced by it. It is recommended that participants meet again to review the results of a process and assess whether appropriate/ sufficient action has been taken.

2. TIME: enough for the public to share views, engage with trade offs, and make recommendations

Participatory policy making encompasses a range of methods that give time and space for the public to come together to learn about a problem, hear evidence, deliberate on the issues and trade offs, consider solutions, and reach agreement on ways forward.

The time and resource is proportionate to the question or purpose. There must be adequate time for participants to learn, deliberate and come to a decision, proportionate to the aims, objectives and method. There is sufficient resource given (people and budget) to deliver an inclusive and rigorous process. Participants need to be allowed to digest and contemplate the information they receive, so processes usually require multiple meetings with time between for reflection.

A defined decision or set of recommendations is reached as an integral part of the process. Participants consider all key trade-offs and their decisions or recommendations are internally consistent and agreed collectively. The report outlines the rationale behind decisions or recommendations.

3. RIGHT PEOPLE: Reflective or diverse group of participants with an emphasis on inclusion

The participants involved go beyond self selecting groups and the aim is to create a group that reflects the wider population; and then to centre them in the process, meeting their needs so that they are able to participate fully.

For many processes, an element of random stratified sampling is included in the recruitment methodology, based on demographics, geographical and/or attitudinal data. Depending on the topic, there may be a need to sample particularly for people with specific lived experience, or who are heavily impacted by a policy. There is also a need to consider how to include people from

marginalised or minoritised groups, and sometimes over-representing, if replicating the balance of different groups as they occur in wider society can lead to the same problems of marginalisation that we see in the world outside the deliberation. Sometimes people with particular experiences are asked also to be part of giving evidence as part of balanced information on a topic (see 5, Independence). In general the idea is to bring diverse voices together; this is different from a focus group approach where different types of people are spoken to separately, and the results compared afterwards.

To ensure the widest cross section of the public is able to attend, these methods intentionally are very inclusive in the ways people are approached. Participants are remunerated for all reasonable expenses and their time. They are onboarded and supported to attend and their accessibility requirements are met. The process fulfils a duty of care to support participants so that they will not be harmed by the process.

4. FACILITATED DELIBERATION: Learning, sharing views, deliberating, to arrive collectively at recommendations

Participants are supported through a facilitated process to consider and weigh up different perspectives and discuss with other participants. The process is well structured, with a clear progression through learning and deliberation, to decision making. The process allows time for plenary feedback, so that participants can hear views from all other participants.

This enables them to come to informed judgement, think beyond their own interests, and give a view on what is most important for the system as a whole – just as policy makers themselves must do when making decisions.

5. INDEPENDENCE: Independent, balanced information

There is independent review of the agenda, design and inputs of a process to ensure balance and impartiality. This should include some representation of different viewpoints, in particular from civil society groups. The process is designed and facilitated by impartial and trained process designers and facilitators (whether from within or outside the civil service). Participants hear balanced, accurate information, and as comprehensive as possible proportionate to the time spent in sessions. They hear evidence from diverse speakers with a range of views. Speakers do not lead or direct the participants.

The learning phase supports the subsequent deliberation and decision-making phases, enabling participants to arrive at informed and considered judgements. Information and materials are provided in a range of different formats. Inputs are accessible, avoid jargon and do not assume prior knowledge.

6. TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE: process, plan, materials, conclusions and next steps are published

The recruitment methodology, advisory group membership, speaker lists, agendas, briefing materials and process plan are openly published. The process may be live streamed or recorded for public viewing.

The process's conclusions are published in full. It is clear to everybody involved how the results from the process are intended to be used and how decision makers will use their contributions. Decision makers publicly respond to the recommendations. It is made clear, after the process, how the public input has had an impact.

AN APPROACH WHOSE TIME HAS COME

In recent years, there has been a growing use of, and interest in, participatory and deliberative methods to inform policy making across government. There are over 2000 people in the policy design community across central and local government;⁴⁹ Policy Lab, a cross-government team with a mission to “radically improve policymaking through design, innovation and people-centred approaches”,⁵⁰ has been championing these methods for 10 years with labs now in almost all ministerial departments; and the growing Participatory Methods Forum was established in 2023 for civil servants to support a systematic, evidence-based approach to participatory methods across government.

However, participatory policy making is not yet mainstream. As our research with politicians and civil servants demonstrates, there are many barriers to greater uptake, from lack of political will, to lack of knowledge and skills amongst policy makers.

The key ingredients for process design we describe above mitigate the risks which some civil servants and politicians express when considering participatory policymaking (and which we described in Part 1). Growing awareness of the philosophy behind participatory policy making, and access to the tried and tested design criteria, methods and tools which already exist, will help to surmount the barriers of lack of knowledge, skill and confidence.

AN EVOLUTION OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY MAKING

This Citizens’ White Paper proposes an evolution in policy making practice as simple and as profound as the shift to evidence based policy making in the 2000s during the Blair government, catalysed by the publication of the Modernising Government White Paper in 1999.⁵¹

Evidence based policy making is the idea that policy decisions should be informed by rigorously established empirical evidence, using data and research, rather than being based on ideology, anecdote, or intuition. Twenty years on, this is a normal part of our culture in policy making. Similarly, public consultations have become common practice in the policy making process.

Involving citizens is a logical build on these evolutions in policy making in order to help inform political leaders about citizens’ considered positions on complex issues. In addition, bringing the diverse perspectives of the public into policy making can provide broader perspectives, deepening understanding of the complexity of problems and leading to potentially better solutions. This is particularly important when policy making is often an elite sport, limited by proximity to power and the (lack of) diversity of people who work in it.

Participatory policy making is an approach that deepens the evidence base by which politicians decide how to tackle an issue by involving citizens in the development of public policy. This enables them to bring their ideas, knowledge and experience to bear on the issue at stake so their considered collective judgement can inform the policy decision.

Participatory policy making is the next stage of evolving policy making to make it fit for the 21st century. A reboot which is needed to enable politicians and the public to collectively tackle the complexity of the challenges ahead.

49 <https://publicpolicydesign.blog.gov.uk/join/>

50 <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/>

51 <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1999/mar/30/modernising-government>

PART 3

HOW DO WE INTRODUCE AND EMBED PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING?

ROADMAP FOR EMBEDDING PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL POLICY MAKING

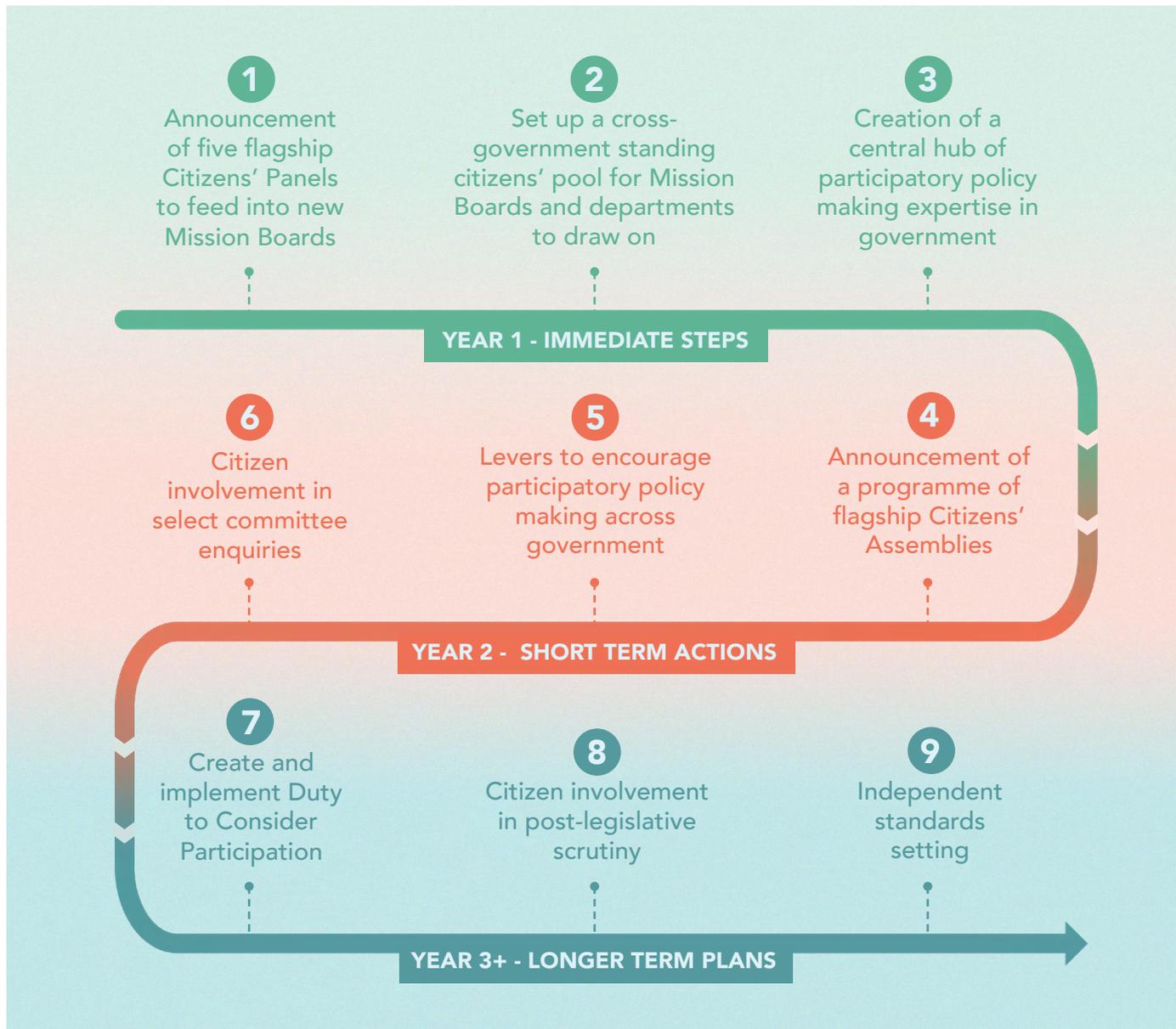
As we have set out in the first part of the Citizens' White Paper, involving citizens in policy making is one way a government can do policy making better, developing policies that work for people and have deep legitimacy, even when - especially when - the policy requires tough choices to be made. It can help to rebuild trust in representative democracy and our elected representatives. In Part 2, we set out the methodologies that can be used and the tools we recommend.

What follows is a roadmap for how to embed participation in policy making in a light touch but impactful way. The recommendations are set out in terms of:

- 1. Immediate steps** - those that could be taken within the first 100 days of the new Labour government to send a signal that it intends to build a more open and collaborative relationship between government and citizens.
- 2. Short term actions** - to build the capacity of civil servants and developing the levers to build participatory approaches into business-as-usual policy making across departments and parliament.
- 3. Longer term plans** - to embed these ways of working deeply in our policy making systems, culture and parliament.

All the elements in the roadmap are designed to strengthen our existing representative democracy and can be delivered within the system as it is at the moment. They build on current guidance, legislation or processes, reinforcing the policy making function of the Executive and the scrutiny function of Parliament, with a golden thread of participation running through it so that citizens can play a more active role in shaping policies between their 4 or 5 yearly trips to the ballot box.

FIGURE 1
TIMELINE OF RECOMMENDED ACTIONS



IMMEDIATE STEPS - (announce first 100 days; action year 1)

RECOMMENDATION 1: ANNOUNCEMENT OF FIVE FLAGSHIP CITIZENS' PANELS TO FEED INTO NEW MISSION BOARDS

Showcase a new partnership between government and the public by announcing a role for citizens in the Mission Boards: a Citizens' Panel of 100 randomly selected and demographically representative people for each Mission Board. These Citizens' Panels will help to refine the priorities within each mission, work through trade-offs and choices inherent in actions considered by Mission Boards, and inform the Missions' policies to give people a stake in meeting the challenges ahead.

The Mission Boards are the new government's innovative approach to addressing five key challenges facing the country:

- 1.** Kickstart economic growth
- 2.** Make Britain a clean energy superpower
- 3.** Take back our streets
- 4.** Break down barriers to opportunity
- 5.** Build an NHS fit for our future⁵²

For these to work, they will have to bring together the resources, skills and ambition of different government departments, devolved nations, local government, public sector bodies, businesses and civil society. And they will need to involve the public who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the missions.

We recommend that each Mission Board has a Citizens' Panel made up of a randomly selected and demographically representative body of 100 people. The role of the Citizens' Panels will change over time but the key is that citizens are embedded in these new pieces of government architecture from inception to strategy development to delivery to evaluation. Their role may also look different within each mission board, depending on the issue it is tackling and how quickly it is moving.

Announcing this within the first 100 days will send the strongest signal that the new government wants to govern differently, building a new collaborative democratic culture, and demonstrating its desire to build a consensus on change across all the communities of the country. Making the announcement as part of a high impact communications strategy will be essential to ensuring the wider public hear about the shift. This is a key part of these interventions helping to rebuild public trust at large.

The Citizens' Panels should be tasked in their work by the political leader of each mission, and given explicit support from the Prime Minister, to give their input maximum weight and status. The exact position of the Panels in relation to the mission boards will depend on the structure of the boards and can be determined as these are set up. The crucial factor is that the Citizens' Panels are built in from day 1 - they are not an add-on or a 'nice to have' but a critical part of the delivery against the missions. They should also be a permanent part of the boards for as long as the boards exist, though their role will look different depending on where in the process the mission boards are.

What the Citizens' Panel won't do is set the strategic agendas for the missions where these have been determined by government and have a mandate through the manifesto.

Below we set out a recommendation for creating a large-scale cross-government standing citizens' pool as a means of recruiting and managing citizen participants for all the government's participatory policy making in the most effective, efficient and low cost way. The participants of the Mission Boards' Citizens' Panels would be drawn from this standing citizens' pool. The participants on the Panels could be refreshed regularly in tranches from the standing pool. This staggered turnover means that any one individual's commitment is not too onerous, there will always be a mix of old and new members on the panel, plus it mitigates the risk of participants becoming 'mini civil servants' as a result of their ongoing participation.

⁵² <https://labour.org.uk/change/mission-driven-government/>

EXAMPLES OF THE ROLE CITIZENS' PANELS COULD PLAY IN THE MISSION BOARDS

- Helping to determine the priorities within each mission, based on what will have the greatest impact on people's lives and can be achieved within different time scales
- Working through tensions and trade offs through deliberation as potentially conflicting actions are conceived by the mission boards
- Being representatives of the public in co-design processes to create solutions to some of the specific challenges that the mission boards will be addressing
- Recommending further citizen involvement in specific issues that may require bringing together particular subgroups of the public to tackle them - especially where there are tensions between the interests of different groups which might impact the delivery of the mission
- Determining what role the public should play as a partner to the government and other stakeholders to meet the mission targets
- Assessing the impact of delivery on the ground and whether the policies and actions taken around the missions have had the intended consequences for citizens.

RECOMMENDATION 2: SET UP A CROSS-GOVERNMENT STANDING CITIZENS' POOL FOR MISSION BOARDS AND DEPARTMENTS TO DRAW ON

Create a large scale pool of at least 2,500 randomly selected but demographically representative citizens to provide a pool from which to draw smaller panels of citizens to feed into each of the five mission boards, as well as for departments to draw on for their participatory policy making work. Centralising recruitment and management of the panel will save resources and time when policy teams want to involve citizens in policy making.

One reason that government does not involve people more in their policy making processes is lack of knowledge about how to commission processes, recruit people, and meet the costs. In addition, this has to be done from scratch every time any policy team wants to engage with members of the public.

To get over this hurdle, we propose recruiting a single cross-government standing citizens pool of at least 2,500 people that Mission Boards and departments can draw from for their participatory processes.

This single piece of government architecture would provide a large enough body of people that Mission Boards and departments can draw from if they want to involve a random selection of members of the public in any of the methods described above, such as a deliberative workshop, panel or citizens' jury.

The pool could also be used for lighter-touch engagement if the government wanted to take a temperature check on a specific issue, or take soundings on an unfolding crisis quickly or the impact of a new issue in real time. But we recommend that this is by exception, with the primary use of the panel being for longer form participatory methods.

Refreshing the pool regularly as well as its scale would be necessary to mitigate against panel members becoming “expert amateur policy makers” - a risk that can occur when participants become over familiar with a policy process or area. Rules for keeping the pool fresh would be simple to uphold, such as replacing people once they had taken part in a participatory process.

Recruitment and management of the pool could sit with the central hub (see recommendation 3), though once recruited, the pool should be relatively low maintenance because once selected, participants wait to be called on. There would be regular communications about what members of the panel are working on to keep people engaged and motivated.

This cross-government pool will mitigate the time and cost hurdles that departments would otherwise need to expend on participant recruitment every time they want to undertake a participatory exercise.

The pool does not preclude departments also recruiting people specifically impacted by a policy that they are responsible for developing or implementing. There are many cases where smaller groups of people with lived experience, for example, would be vital to feed into a particular policy area.

RECRUITING THE STANDING CITIZENS' POOL

- Recruitment to the standing citizens' pool would be via a sortition process which is a form of democratic lottery that selects people using stratified random sampling so that the demographic composition of the sample matches that of the whole population. Random selection means that nearly every person has an equal chance of being invited to participate and delivers a more mixed and diverse sample than any other recruitment process
- Stratified random sampling would be used again to draw a smaller number of people from the standing pool to take part in a particular departmental participatory process when needed. Again, this would ensure that the smaller group is also a microcosm of the population as a whole.
- Participants would be paid for their time if selected to take part in a participatory process because their time is valuable and to overcome barriers that prevent participation as a result of lost income. Caring costs, for example, childcare costs, should also be covered.

SCOTLAND'S SOCIAL SECURITY EXPERIENCE PANEL⁵³

Scotland's Social Security experience panel brought together 2,500 people who were asked to contribute between 2017-2024 to developing Scotland's new social security system.

For example, in 2022, there were 2108 active panel members. The policy team drew on the members in order to carry out:

- **11 surveys** with 1772 responses
- **50 interviews** in person, online or on the phone
- **5 focus groups** with 30 people⁵⁴

It was fundamentally important for setting the culture of the way the new benefits were delivered, and very successful in transforming views of the Scottish Government's delivery of benefits.

RECOMMENDATION 3: CREATE A CENTRAL HUB OF PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING EXPERTISE IN GOVERNMENT

Set up a central hub to provide expertise and support for policy teams to be able to use participatory approaches. It will draw on and ramp up existing expertise and accelerate the diffusion of skills across government, building up networks of policy makers with experience in participatory policy making in departments. This will shift how day-to-day policy making is done across government departments to improve policy development.

If the government wants to mainstream participatory policy making across the civil service, the lack of widespread knowledge and expertise in policy teams highlighted by our interviews must be tackled. A vital first step is developing a central hub for resources and expertise, building on the existing capabilities and ecosystem within the civil service.

Learning from Scotland shows that delivering new participatory methods is hard for many civil servants and having a central team whose expertise can be drawn on was invaluable in building confidence and skills amongst departmental policy teams.

In order to build up a central hub, one way to do this effectively and efficiently would be to ramp up an existing team or teams. There are pockets of high capability in participatory methods across government in the departmental 'labs'. The most mature of these, Policy Lab has a decade of experience engaging many thousands of members of the public using varied participatory methods.

The value of creating a central hub for participation is to provide the expertise and scaffolding for the policy teams putting participation into practice across government. In addition, it would support

⁵³ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/social-security/engagement-on-social-security/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-experience-panels-annual-report-2022/pages/2/>

and amplify innovation, excellence and energy around participatory methods that already exist in departments.

The downside of creating a central hub is that expertise becomes focused in one place rather than distributed across the whole system. Therefore it will be critical for the hub to effectively diffuse skills, capacity and a participatory culture across policy teams (for example using the levers set out in recommendation 5). It will also be vital to build strong networks with each department with support for local policy teams to innovate and build their own culture and practice, drawing on central expertise as needed without mandating how to implement participation. The goal is mainstreaming participatory approaches across government so that this practice becomes deep-rooted in business as usual policy making.

Political pressure from the centre is a strong catalyst for widespread take up. Therefore a champion in the Cabinet Secretary would be useful to ensure the agenda has weight behind it. The Chief Operating Officer of the Cabinet Office and existing civil service champions for policy capability could also play a critical role in considering the impact of embedding participation across a civil service which is already over-stretched, as well as considering different procedures and ways of working.

We recommend that additional resources be put in place to enable parts of government that are not currently able to access participatory methods - often as a result of a lack of sufficient expertise and budget - to do so. The central hub will need resources to build this expert central team. In addition, we recommend that it also has a pot of funding that departments can bid into for match funding to deliver participatory methods on particular policies.

Initially, the hub could be staffed up by drawing together existing expertise in government, for example from policy labs, as well as bringing external practitioner experts into the civil service permanently or on secondment to provide additional expertise and staff resource. Deep strategic and practitioner capability exists in the democracy sector outside of government in the third sector and for-profit organisations. This could be drawn on to provide expertise to support the creation and diffusion of skills, capabilities and good practice across the civil service.

The central hub could also commission the creation of an independent "What Works" programme, potentially hosted by a university with funding from central government and/or UKRI, to build the evidence base for the impact of public participation on policy making, on policy outcomes and on public trust in politicians and political institutions.

ROLE OF THE CENTRAL HUB

- Championing participation across government
- Hold a funding pot for policy teams to bid into to deliver participation
- Signposting to expertise in participatory methods as they can be applied in different ways to policy making
- Ensuring that existing training, such as that provided by the Policy Profession, includes training policy makers in effective use participatory methods
- Hosting, maintaining and promoting a central repository of resources, tools and training materials on participatory policy making that any civil servant can easily access
- Grow the Community of Practice in participation at departmental level to create a network of civil servants for peer support and learning

- Ensure consistency of good practice across departments without mandating a particular participatory method
- Support policy teams to be good commissioners of participatory practice
- Act as secretariat for No10 flagship national Citizens' Assemblies
- Hold list of approved delivery partners external to government for participation commissioning
- Commissioning an independent "What Works" programme to gather evidence of impact on policy making and public trust.

SHORT TERM ACTIONS (years 1+)

We recommend these actions are taken in year 1 of the new government, giving them time to bed in during the government's first term.

RECOMMENDATION 4: PROGRAMME OF FLAGSHIP NATIONAL CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES IN FIRST TERM

Prime Ministerial announcement of a programme of at least three national Citizens' Assemblies in the first term to tackle knotty politically and publicly salient issues outside of the missions. This public-facing action from government will demonstrate how the government is building on initial work through the Citizens' Panels, to further develop a new relationship between state and citizen, with strong political leadership on this agenda.

Political ownership of the citizen participation agenda is the single most critical factor in ensuring its success. Where this is lacking, the impact of involving citizens is far weaker. The lack of trust in democracy is so stark right now, that a significant commitment that demonstrates that things will be done differently by an incoming government is critical.

Therefore, we recommend strong leadership from No10 on this agenda: with the Prime Minister announcing that the government will commission a programme of flagship national Citizens' Assemblies in its first term.

These flagship Citizens' Assemblies will be a signal of the government's commitment to being more open, setting a new precedent for involving the people in important issues.

The Citizens' Assemblies differ from the involvement of citizens in the mission boards as they can take on knotty moral questions where the government's direction is not already set. The Citizens' Assemblies would also be time-limited where the Citizens' Panels would be ongoing for the life of the mission boards.

We recommend that ministers, actively led by the Prime Minister, select the topic of the first assembly and that the PM announces that the first assembly will run during the government's first year, making it a tangible commitment.

At the same time, the PM should announce that two further assemblies will be run over the course of the Parliament. We recommend that the programme is for at least 3 citizens' assemblies in the government's first term to demonstrate that this is not a one-off but a new approach to solving complex challenges and rebuilding trust in government. Committing to three assemblies, rather than one, at the outset also mitigates the risk of the entire process standing or falling on the delivery of the first.

TOPIC SELECTION

In this report, we're not suggesting what topic the government should open up to citizen deliberation. This decision should rest with ministers, actively led by the Prime Minister, so they have ownership over the process and outcomes of the assembly.

We advise that whichever topic is selected, these criteria need to be met:

- Politically salient - high on the political agenda, but not an immediate burning platform question that politicians would be reluctant to work through via a citizens' assembly or which has a solution already outlined in the manifesto, or which is being tackled through one of the Mission Boards
- Long term, wicked problem, building consensus on issues left unresolved because of the confrontational nature of politics, misconceptions among the public, or because some issues are deemed too hard to confront e.g. fixing the NHS and social care, house building, crime and policing, implementing net zero policies, or Lords reform. Alternatively a moral problem on which there is no party line but which could affect everyone, such as assisted dying
- Issue on which ministers want to find out where considered public opinion lies
- Policy options are genuinely open, with no predetermined answer
- Issue that the public cares about
- Citizen involvement could break a political deadlock or help identify a clearer way forward.
- Not too broad so citizens have sufficient time to consider detailed recommendations on the topic

We propose that these Citizens' Assemblies offer recommendations, advice or guidance to the government - they should not be decision-making bodies. Decisions on policy and action will continue to rest solely with the government.

To give their new flagship Citizens' Assemblies legitimacy, the government must commit to examining the recommendations seriously and in good faith, and responding to them fully and publicly, even if they decide not to implement some or all of them. When government is seen not to listen to what the public have recommended, this serves to reinforce the public perception that politicians aren't representing their interests or responding to them, which will further erode public trust.

PROCESS

1. PM leads Cabinet in agreeing the first Citizens' Assembly topic, ensuring government buy-in and personal accountability of the PM for the outcome.
2. Government asks Parliament to agree to the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly. The Government's proposal could contain:
 - What the topic is, what is in and out of scope
 - Size of the assembly
 - Process by which it will be delivered
 - Funding to deliver it
 - The governance and accountability infrastructure
 - Process for responding to and actioning the recommendations. It may invite parliamentary scrutiny of the government response, for example: that the government must commit to bringing the Citizens' Assembly report before parliament to debate, and responding to the Citizens' Assembly within 3 months setting out what it will do, and again at 12 and 36 months setting out what actions it has taken, potentially after scrutiny by the relevant select committee.
3. Government commissions the Citizens' Assembly, designed and delivered by independent deliberative experts to ensure and demonstrate impartiality and high standards. An independent advisory board is set up to oversee the process, ensuring independence, neutrality and rigour.
4. Citizens participate in the Citizens' Assembly, deliberating on the topic question and reaching agreement on recommendations for action.
5. The Citizens' Assembly publishes its report and hands it to the government as the commissioning body, who will then lay it before Parliament. The report sets out what the Citizens' Assembly recommends, which could include actions for the government, and/or for other agencies, civil society, the public or businesses.
 - The PM is accountable and responsible for responding to the recommendations. As the Citizens' Assembly is a temporary body, it is up to Parliament to hold the government to account for its response to the recommendations.
 - For a comparable example, in Ireland, the Taoiseach is responsible and accountable. S/he instructs departments to deliver the recommendations.
6. Ministers would use government time for Parliament to debate the report recommendations, which the government should take into account when considering their response.
7. The government should undertake to provide its response setting out what it will do to meet the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly within 3 months, or explain why this will not be possible.
 - The response could be referred to the relevant select committee or Parliament may decide to establish a one-off committee.
 - While it might be hoped that the recommended actions are delivered in full, there will be occasions where this isn't possible or advisable. Where the government is not going to enact a recommendation of the Citizens' Assembly, it should set out transparently why not so as to continue to build trust with the public that it is listening, even if a particular change cannot be made.

8. The PM may charge the relevant Secretary of State with responding to the Citizens' Assembly report and delivering on recommendations which have been debated by Parliament and agreed by government (and / or explaining why certain recommendations won't be enacted).
9. Parliament continues to play a role in holding the government to account to deliver on its commitment to meet the Citizens' Assembly's recommendations. One way in which they might do this is to ask the government to report back to the same select committee in 12 and 36 months on progress towards delivering the actions.
10. Parliament may also choose to support the relevant select committee to enhance its scrutiny function by establishing a panel of citizens drawn from the Citizens' Assembly participants to assist in evaluating the government's delivery of the Citizens' Assembly recommendations at 12 and 36 months.

RECOMMENDATION 5: LEVERS TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING CULTURE ACROSS GOVERNMENT

Deliver a package of levers to normalise participatory policy making and build a culture of participation across government. Levers include training and support; building departmental participation units; developing senior civil service champions; new policy making guidance via a "Citizen Participation Assessment"; and winning hearts and minds by disseminating a compelling narrative about the value and impact of participatory policy making.

Recommendation 5 is a package of levers designed to normalise participatory policy making across government. This is about creating the skills, leadership, infrastructure, guidance and culture around participatory work.

For citizen participation to embed across the civil service, expertise will need to be distributed across departments. Above we have discussed creating a central hub that will be the driver for change. But that will only be successful if a culture of participation is embedded across the civil service.

This will lead to the ideal end goal where citizen participation in policy making is normalised across departments, making it business as usual. Our recommendations set out below demonstrate how this can be done in ways that do not overload department capacity or resources.

Embedding participatory methods at departmental level should be distributed across and sit within policy teams, with the central hub providing coordination, incentives, peer learning, advice and support.

There will always be civil servants on the leading edge of change and innovation. For example, the Participatory Methods Forum, which was set up in 2023, is an informal group for civil servants across government to support and enable a systematic, evidence-based approach to participatory methods across government that adds value to policymaking and improves delivery. Encouraging and enabling them to undertake participation in their policy areas will provide ever-increasing numbers of case studies and evidence of the value of the work, and lead to greater normalisation of the work.

But beyond the growing numbers of civil servants with an interest in engaging more with the public, there will be the need to get the greater bulk of civil servants, for whom this is new, to think differently about how they do policy making. This will require a multi-faceted approach via levers which are outlined below.

LEVER 1: TRAINING AND SUPPORT

In their role to train staff on core policy standards and improve the policy making system, the Policy Profession would have a key role in promoting tools and methods, and signposting to the expertise housed in the central hub. Participation and engagement is already a key plank of the [Policy Profession Standards](#).

Other avenues for embedding participatory policy making in training across the civil service include:

- Making it core learning for fast streamers
- Building the opportunity to hear about case studies or see participation in action into the High Potential Development Scheme for Directors

LEVER 2: CIVIL SERVICE ARCHITECTURE - DEPARTMENTAL PARTICIPATION UNITS

In the hub and spoke model of skills dissemination, civil servants with experience and skills in participatory methods would be supported by the central hub to act as a local unit in individual departments, or embedded in mission boards. Policy teams would therefore have a first port of call for advice on participatory practice within their department. These hubs would help to ensure take-up and build momentum.

This would work in the same way that policy makers currently have to ensure they have spoken to the department's legal or commercial representative, who in turn draws on the central Legal or Commercial Team for support, advice and consistency.

LEVER 3: LEADERSHIP

Senior champions, who are self-selected rather than appointed so they personally care about the agenda, will be critical for helping the culture shift towards participation. Ideally this would be Permanent Secretary or Director General level.

Alongside this, senior civil service participation leads would be identified in each department to promote and ensure the use of participatory methods in departmental policy, just as there is a Head of Policy Profession in each department.

LEVER 4: POLICY MAKING GUIDANCE

We recommend a new "Citizen Participation Assessment". This would involve updating departments' submissions templates to require policy teams to carry out a Citizen Participation Assessment (CPA) before submitting advice to ministers and/or permanent secretaries.

The CPA, like Equalities Impact Assessments, would require policy teams to set out how they have engaged with citizens impacted by the policy, and the difference that engagement made to the policy development, or set out why they have not done so.

The presumption should be that not engaging with citizens should be the exception, rather than the norm. In addition, the cabinet manual (currently being updated) could prescribe how participation is considered in policy making.

Similarly, Treasury could require Business Cases to set out how people impacted by the policy - whether that's the general public, or specific subgroups - have been involved in the policy design process. HMT should update the Business Case Reviewers checklist to include a requirement to assess this, which would set clear expectations of the importance of this agenda across government.

LEVER 5: WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

A clear narrative about the value and purpose of participatory policy making is needed which is told consistently through the central hub, departmental units, Policy Profession training etc and by champions. The best way to reinforce those stories is for policy makers to see and experience the impact of involving people. Therefore, opportunities for civil servants, especially those at senior level, to observe participation in action will be key to spreading the message.

This could also be done through targeted actions to reinforce participation culture. Examples of actions that would reinforce the participation agenda include:

Targeted engagement weeks, with comms and best practice stories shared within and across departments.

"One big thing" – an initiative run out of the Modernisation and Reform Unit (last year's focus was how to use data). In the first year of the new government, the focus could be participatory methods. Departments would need to publicise this and lean into it at departmental level.

Civil service awards – could include an award on participation for departments to submit ideas on.

RECOMMENDATION 6: CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRIES

Increase the opportunities for members of the public to be involved in select committee inquiries by providing guidance to select committee inquiry chairs and clerks on how to engage citizens in inquiries in effective, proportionate and meaningful ways.

Select committees have the power to hold inquiries on any issue or government action. Members of the public can be invited to submit written evidence (common but not widely publicised or taken up by members of the public), and are sometimes invited to appear as witnesses in front of a select committee (rare, and by invitation only). Some inquiries enable participation via online and in-person events so that MPs can hear directly from members of the public.

There is precedent for select committees involving citizens in their work and some have engaged citizens more deeply to guide their recommendations and conclusions, such as the six select committees that commissioned the Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change in 2019.⁵⁵

It would require no additional legislation to enable greater use of citizen participation in select committee inquiries, and would enhance transparency and build credibility, showing the committee is considering the views of those most directly impacted by the subject of their inquiry. For example, in the inquiry into the roll-out and safety of smart motorways in 2021, hearing directly from members of the public who use smart motorways could have provided firsthand accounts of their experiences, including any near-misses or accidents. The inquiry may have benefitted by bringing together a group of smart motorway users to consider risks and benefits from a user's perspective.

We recommend that guidance is provided to select committee inquiry chairs and clerks on how to engage citizens in inquiries in effective, proportionate and meaningful ways.

LONGER TERM PLANS (years 3+)

The actions set out above are focused on normalising citizen involvement in national policy making across government. Beyond this, there are further ways to stitch and embed participation into our democracy through further guidance to bill teams, citizens playing a stronger role in parliamentary processes, and independent oversight of standards.

RECOMMENDATION 7: CREATE AND IMPLEMENT DUTY TO CONSIDER PARTICIPATION

This Duty would require bill teams to give consideration to participation via a Citizen Participation Assessment. This should be set out in guidance by the Parliamentary Business and Legislation (PBL) Committee of the Cabinet, which will hold bill teams to account for demonstrating how they have involved the public, or explain why they have not, before the bill can be introduced in Parliament.

In the longer term, we propose a Duty to Consider Participation which requires bill teams to give consideration to participation via a Citizen Participation Assessment (CPA), just as they have to produce an Equalities Impact Assessment. This requirement should help to ensure that departments act differently, by requiring bill teams to consider meaningfully engaging with the public.

We recommend that the Duty is set out in guidance, rather than enshrined in legislation - at least initially. Guidance should be produced by the Parliamentary Business and Legislation (PBL) Committee of the Cabinet.

An accountability mechanism is necessary to ensure that departments are considering the use of participatory methods in bill development. This mechanism could be aimed at policies that require legislation but would happen before the bill is introduced in Parliament.

The PBL is the most appropriate accountability mechanism, ensuring that bill teams do pay due regard to participation, by requiring them to set out in the CPA how they have involved the public and what impact that involvement had. They would also have to explain why they had not involved the public, which should be the exception, rather than the rule, and only for legislation where

⁵⁵ <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/committees/climate-assembly-uk/>

there is a clear and obvious rationale for not doing so, for example: technical acts such as Tax Law Rewrites or Consolidation Acts.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR BILL PROPOSALS

When a bill proposal is submitted by a department to the Parliamentary Business and Legislation (PBL) Committee to be considered for inclusion in the legislative programme for a session, the PBL Committee considers various factors when deciding whether to recommend the bill for a provisional slot.

One of the factors the PBL Committee considers is how far along the process of working up the proposal it is. As part of this, the Duty to Engage would be added to the PBL Manual and/or Cabinet Manual to require that the bill proposal must:

- Demonstrate that it has considered the use of participatory methods as part of the policy development process
- Set out where participatory methods have been used and the impact of doing so
- Explain satisfactorily why participation has not been used, which should be the exception, rather than the rule.

If the proposal does not, the bill will not be expected to be progressed at this stage, and the department will need to continue to work on it to get it past this stage.

The PBL does not always ensure that poor legislation is filtered out or improved, and there is an issue with transparency, as the PBL's workings are not in the public domain. Therefore it would be better if parliament had to be informed about public involvement and the impact of having involved the public [as is the case in Scotland].

Government could go one step further to enshrine participation in the policy making process by producing a White Paper setting out the government's approach to involving the public. This would enable ministers to be held to account by parliament to ensure that the approach was being followed.

RECOMMENDATION 8: CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN POST-LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY

Encourage select committees to instigate more post-legislative scrutiny inquiries and build a public participation component in. This could be by convening a Citizens' Audit Group to provide testimony on the actual impact of the legislation on the ground, and what could make it work more effectively to meet its intended outcomes in the future.

The purpose of post-legislative scrutiny (PLS) is to monitor the implementation of legislation, evaluate the impact of laws and revisit legislation where necessary.⁵⁶ Under the existing process, departments should submit a post-legislative scrutiny memorandum three to five years after legislation has been enacted to the relevant select committee. In practice, between 2015 and 2019, only 19 memos were produced.⁵⁷ These memos act as a prompt to the select committee to undertake an inquiry into the impact of the legislation.

There is a great opportunity for select committees to make greater use of their power to instigate PLS inquiries and when doing so, refresh the scrutiny mechanism by building a public participation component into the process. This could be set out via amendments to the Parliamentary Business and Legislation (PBL) Manual, which could include a reference to considering any legislation for post-legislative scrutiny, subject to agreement with the select committee, and Select Committee Guidance.

The select committee conducting PLS could convene a Citizens' Audit Group made up of a representative sample of people who should have been impacted by the legislation. This may mean a representative sample of the whole public if it is legislation that affects everyone, or sampling from a specific subsection who was the target of the legislation, such as the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 which particularly impacts victims of domestic abuse.

Citizens' role here would be to provide testimony on the actual impacts, enabling the select committee to hear directly whether the intended outcomes of the legislation were achieved, and whether it had positive, negative and/or unintended consequences on people's lives. Beyond providing testimony, the select committee could charge them with considering what would make the legislation work more effectively on the ground in the future to inform the select committee's recommendations.

Given the limited capacity of select committees, we do not recommend PLS inquiry on every piece of legislation nor involving citizens in every PLS inquiry that they undertake. Priority could be given to legislation that is widely regarded as being outdated, ineffective or counter-productive.

RECOMMENDATION 9: INDEPENDENT STANDARDS SETTING

Create an independent mechanism to set standards and scrutinise processes to ensure that they meaningfully involve citizens in a legitimate, unbiased way. In year 1, this would be an independent advisory board overseeing the Missions Boards' Citizens' Panel and the first national citizens' assembly. In the medium term, empower an existing independent body to take on the participatory standards setting function. In the longer term, spin out this function into a new independent, arms-length body, enshrined in legislation, funded by government.

With trust in government at an all-time low, any change to the way in which the government engages with and listens to the public may well be greeted with scepticism. One way to mitigate this is to have an independent body that sets standards and scrutinises processes to ensure that they meaningfully involve citizens in a legitimate, unbiased way.

56 Post-legislative Scrutiny in the UK Parliament; Dr Tom Caygill; Nottingham Trent University; November 2021
57 <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/07/23/what-does-post-legislative-scrutiny-look-like/>

There are options around how this could be done:

Immediate step

As the first flagship citizens' assembly is set up, this should be overseen by an independent advisory board made up of participation experts and subject matter experts. This time-limited board would be responsible for ensuring that the process is rigorous, unbiased and exemplary. Advisory boards such as this are standard practice for almost all citizens' assemblies across the world. It is a low-cost but vital independent check on the citizens' assembly commissioners.

Medium term action

In the medium term, we recommend an independent body sets standards around participatory and deliberative methods, focusing on minimum standards (as opposed to policing the gold standard). It would also carry out spot-check audits of processes to ensure independent scrutiny.

Importantly, this body would be independent of government so as to offer the public a neutral arbiter of good practice and the ability to call out poor practice by any institution.

The cost in terms of human and financial resources of setting up a new body is high. Therefore we recommend that - at least initially - this participatory standards setting function is taken on by an existing body that already commands the respect of government, parliament and the public, and is accountable to parliament. One possibility here is making it a specific new function within the Electoral Commission.

This would require additional powers and resources to take on. But the rationale is that the Electoral Commission already upholds democratic standards, offers guidance and support, and regulates electoral behaviour by political parties. This new function would be a natural extension of its role in representative democracy to include participatory and deliberative democracy.

Long term plan

Set up a new independent, arms-length body as the Participatory Standards Commission, enshrined in legislation, funded by government. This could grow out of the function embedded until this point in an existing body. The purpose of the Commission would be to:

- 1. Develop standards:** The commission could develop standards and guidelines for participatory policy-making processes, outlining best practices and principles for engagement, consultation, and collaboration with stakeholders.
- 2. Monitoring and Evaluation:** It could be responsible for spot check monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of participatory policy making processes across various government agencies and levels of governance, ensuring compliance with established standards.
- 3. Capacity Building:** The commission could conduct training programs, workshops, and seminars to build the capacity of policymakers, civil society organisations, and citizens in participatory policy making methods
- 4. Research and Innovation:** The commission could commission research studies and pilot projects to explore innovative approaches to participatory policy-making and identify emerging trends and challenges in the field
- 5. Public Awareness:** The commission could undertake public awareness campaigns to promote the importance of participatory governance and encourage citizens to actively engage in the policy making process.
- 6. International Cooperation:** Collaborating with international organisations and other countries to share experiences, exchange best practices, and promote the global advancement of participatory policy-making.

PART 4

COSTS AND FUNDING

COSTS

We estimate the total costs to deliver the recommendations of this paper to be approximately £21.9-31.2 million in year 1. Below we set out these costs and how they could be achieved from within existing policy research budgets.

RECOMMENDATION	COST	ASSUMPTIONS	COMPARATOR
Recommendation 1: Announcement of five flagship Citizens' Panels to feed into new Mission Boards	£8m-12m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 x Citizens' Panels • 100 participants in each • Each panel to meet for 16 days / year, combination of in-person and online • Costs including staffing, design and facilitation, remuneration of panel members, and in-person costs = £1.6-2.4m per panel • Lower recruitment costs as drawn from pool described in Recommendation 2 	

<p>Recommendation 2: Set up a cross-government standing citizens' pool for Mission Boards and departments to draw on</p>	<p>£500-700k</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £300k/year central hub staffing for 3 x FTE members of staff running standing panel and providing advice to depts on usage • £200-400k costs to cover recruitment and running costs per year • Costs for the participatory processes that would draw on the panel members are covered in the costs in recommendation 3 above • A portion of membership rotates annually 	
<p>Recommendation 3: Creation of central hub of participatory policy making expertise in government</p>	<p>£1.5m</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £500k/year central hub staffing for 5 x FTE members of staff inc. 1 SCS1 • £1m pot for departments to bid into for match funding participation projects 	<p>Behavioural Insights Team - 'Nudge Unit' - in Cabinet Office cost £520,000 a year in 2011 (2 years after founding) with 7 members of staff.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: Announcement of programme of national Citizens' Assemblies</p>	<p>£2.4 - 3.6m</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 x national Citizens' Assemblies • £800k - £1.2m per assembly • 100 participants in each, in person • 8 days deliberation for each • Multiple points for wider members of the public to feed in. 	<p>Irish citizens' assembly on gender equality ran for 2.5 years from 2020 - 2022 and cost €653,037.80⁵⁸ exclusive of staff and office costs, estimated at £500,000.</p> <p>Climate Assembly UK cost £720,000 in 2020.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: Levers to encourage participatory policy making across government</p>	<p>£7.9 - £11.8m</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 x senior champions in departments at 0.1 FTE = £150k • 8 x delivery champions in departments at 0.6 FTE = £350k 	

58 <https://citizensassembly.ie/overview-previous-assemblies/assembly-on-gender-equality/procurement-costs/>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs for departments to carry out participatory work = £6.4m-9.3m in year one assuming participants are drawn from cross-government standing citizens' panel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 20 x citizens' juries = £1.6-£3m ◦ 20 x deliberative workshops = £1.6m ◦ 10 x dept level citizens' panels = £1-2m in year one ◦ 20 x co-design workshops = £2m ◦ 20 x citizens' conversations = £800k • 1 day training for 500 civil servants across govt = £300k • 2 days training for 250 civil servants across govt = £300k 	
Recommendation 6: Citizen involvement in select committee inquiries	£800k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 x deliberative workshops bringing together citizens to feed into select committee inquiries = £800k • Includes staffing and running costs plus remuneration of participants 	
Recommendation 7: Duty to Consider Participation	£0	No costs associated with this beyond what has been accounted for in terms of staff time and project costs above	
Recommendation 8: Citizen involvement in post-legislative scrutiny	£800k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 x citizens' audits of legislation = £800k • Includes staffing and running costs plus remuneration of participants 	25-50 new general public acts pass into legislation every year. It would be reasonable to carry out PLS on approx. 10 acts per year
Recommendation 9: Independent standards setting	TBC	Costs dependent on when and in what form standards setting would take. Expectation that an independent standards body would not be set up in year 1.	
TOTAL	£21.9-31.2m		

FUNDING

We estimate the total costs to deliver all nine recommendations of this paper to be approximately £21.9-31.2 million in year 1. This would cover everything from the major, public-facing flagship activities, like the Mission Board citizens' panels, to the costs of departments using participatory methods in their business-as-usual policy making. The costs for each are broken down in the final section of the paper. As with all recommendations, the Labour government will decide what to prioritise and cut their budgetary cloth accordingly.

We propose that the money to fund the recommendations comes from existing public consultation budgets that many government departments have. In some cases, this is about doing it better, not at a higher cost. Parliament also has an existing select committee budget that could be used for participation.

Where additional funds are required, such as to significantly build capacity or for major, national, flagship public participation processes, we propose the funding comes from the government's Research & Development budget. The government spent £533 million on policy research in civil departments (excluding Ministry of Defence spending) in 2022.⁵⁹ Reallocating just 5.85% of this budget each year would free up the £31.2m needed to deliver all the recommendations in this paper.

⁵⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/governmentpublicsectorandtaxes/researchanddevelopmentexpenditure/datasets/scienceengineeringandtechnologystatisticsreferencetables>

CONCLUSION

This Citizens' White Paper has set out the why, what and how of involving citizens in national policy making.

The general election in July 2024 had a 59.8% turnout, the lowest since 2001 and down from 67.3% in 2019.⁶⁰ This suggests a population jaded by politics and mistrustful that anything will change. As Sir Keir Starmer acknowledged on the steps on Downing Street the day after the election, the lack of trust - 'this wound'⁶¹ - needs to be healed and people who voted Labour and especially those who didn't need to know that this government will serve in their best interests.

The new government has an opportunity to show that it will do things differently - rebuilding that trust between the government and electorate, by listening to the public and actively involving them in the policy decisions that will affect their lives.

Participatory policy making offers ways of drawing on the insights, experiences, ideas and collective judgement of the British public. By making the most of this, policy makers can address the intractable challenges that lie ahead, navigating the difficult trade offs that will have to be made on everything from tax to public services, house building to law and order with the public, building their governing mandate for change.

The recommendations in this report can be enacted over this parliamentary term. They include both flagship public-facing policies, which will send a signal that the new Labour government intends to build a more open and collaborative relationship between state and citizens, and internal civil service-facing actions that will put citizens at the heart of everyday policy making.

Immediate steps can be taken within the first 100 days. These include announcing how the public will be involved in tackling national priorities through the five Mission Boards and building the architecture to grow participatory policy making practice across the civil service, building on the expertise and drive that already exists across departments.

Short term actions in year one onwards will build the capacity of civil servants and use levers to build participatory approaches into business-as-usual policy making across departments. Long term plans from year three onwards look at how to embed these ways of working deeply in our policy making systems, culture and parliament.

We know there is public appetite to be active partners in the policy decisions that affect their lives. What we need is for the government to trust the people's considered judgement, so the people can trust the government again.

⁶⁰ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10009/CBP-10009.pdf>

⁶¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crgewjwqqq4o>

APPENDIX 1

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

During the Citizens' White Paper research, Demos and Involve undertook qualitative and quantitative activities to explore the benefits and challenges of building public participation into the way we do policy making throughout national government. Wherever possible, our activities employed participatory methods.

This research included:

Semi-structured in-depth interviews with 7 former ministers and current shadow ministers,⁶² and 10 former and current senior civil servants.⁶³ The main aim of these interviews was to understand their views on:

- Existing barriers and enablers to good policy making.
- Declining trust in politicians and political institutions.
- The perceived impact of, and barriers and enablers to, involving the public more in policy making.

A participatory workshop with 14 civil servants from across several government departments and varying levels of seniority, under Chatham House rules. During this workshop we explored:

- Existing barriers and enablers to good policy making.
- The perceived impact of, and barriers and enablers to, involving the public more in policy making.
- Envisioning a civil service that has citizen participation at the centre of its decision-making process and completing a SWOT analysis.

4 Citizens' Conversations with 34 members of the public from across England, Scotland and Wales. They were split into four groups: non-voters, sometimes voters, swing voters, and always voters. These deliberative conversations explored:

- The issues that matter to them and their levels of engagement, trust, and sense of agency in relation to them, and where politics and voting in elections sits within this.
- Their views on who should be involved in the policy making process on three issues - affordable housing, defence spending, and assisted dying - and the perceived impact that involving the public could have.
- Public appetite to engage in public participation if invited to do so.

⁶² In this report, we refer to this group of ex- and shadow ministers as (ex)ministers as shorthand.

⁶³ In this report, we refer to this group of former and current senior civil servants as (former) senior civil servants as shorthand.

We ran a two-and-a-half-day Policy Design Sprint with 22 academics, policy makers, and practitioners. The main focus of these sessions was to design a practical roadmap for embedding public participation into policy making throughout national government.

We also consulted a wider group of policy makers and democracy experts on our draft roadmap, through individual engagement as well as through a private roundtable hosted by Demos.

APPENDIX 2

POLLING EXERCISE

JUNE 2024

We commissioned a nationally representative survey (sample of 2,073 UK adults) conducted between 7th - 9th June 2024. Question areas included exploring levels of trust in politicians and policy makers on a number of measures (listed below), testing views on the idea of public participation in policy making, Citizens' Assemblies and appetite to take up an invitation to take part in public participation - see below for text used in the survey.

List of trust measures: How much trust do you have in politicians to do each of the following?

- Make decisions in the best interests of people in the UK
- Make decisions that improve the lives of people in the UK
- Make decisions that effectively tackle the challenges the country is facing
- Make decisions in an ethical way
- Make decisions that are fair
- Make decisions that abide by the law
- Make decisions that honour the promises they've made
- Be open about how and why decisions were made
- Be honest about the challenges and limitations they face when making certain decisions
- Be honest about the scale of the problems the country faces

Explanation of public participation in policy making:

We are now going to look at the idea of a new government involving people like you in understanding and helping to solve issues that matter to you. Please read the explanation below.

This is the idea that members of the public, like you, could have more input into the decisions the government is making on policy issues.

This would be done by bringing together a group of people who will be most affected by the specific decision. This group would be given access to high quality, balanced information and expertise, time to consider and discuss that information together, and then make recommendations as a group on what to do next.

Examples of issues that the public could be more involved in are 'how could the NHS better support people like you?' or 'how could sentencing be improved to reduce reoffending rates?'

The government would still make the final decision on the issue, but the process would include people like you to help inform these decisions.

Explanation of Citizens' Assemblies:

We are now going to look at one way that a new government could involve people like you in understanding and helping to solve issues that matter to you, which is called a Citizens' Assembly. Please read the explanation below.

In a Citizens' Assembly, a group of people like you are selected by lottery, similar to the way jury service works. From that group, organisers would select a group of people from all walks of life, for example people of different ages, genders, ethnicities, class backgrounds and political views.

The group would discuss a nationally important policy issue over the course of several sessions, such as 'should assisted dying be legalised in the UK?' or 'what options for funding social care are acceptable to people?' Over the course of the Citizens' Assembly, the group would be given access to high quality, balanced information and expertise, time to consider and discuss that information together, and then make recommendations as a group on what to do next.

The recommendations that the group comes up with would be made public, but the government would still make the final decision on the issue, informed by the people who had taken part in the Citizens' Assembly.

Invitation to take part in public participation:

Imagine you get a letter in the post from the government saying you've been randomly selected to spend a few evenings as part of a group, along with other members of the public, learning about one of the issues on the previous screen, sharing your views and discussing potential solutions. You don't need to know anything about the issue before you join. You would be offered an incentive payment for taking part, as well as an offer to cover any transport, accommodation, childcare or care costs that might be needed for you to take part.

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DEMOS

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PUBLISHED BY DEMOS JULY 2024

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