

reweaving the fabric of society

The home of community organising in the UK. Building powerful communities that work together for the common good.

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Welcome...

... to our third National Newsletter, kindly sponsored by Aviva.

The year of any General Election is a year of change. A new parliament, a new government, a new budget – and new opportunities and challenges for local communities.



Citizens UK is no exception – among all our work around the General Election, this year has also seen the launch of three local alliances in Leeds, Maun Valley and Peckham, the Good Jobs Campaign, new partnerships and collaborations with the NHS, and a Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life.

But none of our work would be possible without our roots in the age old tradition of community organising. In the run-up to the General Election, hundreds of people from our membership used our tried and tested methods to build relationships with politicians from all the major parties. 140 parliamentary candidates signed our Citizens Commitment to back our Social Care Charter, to do all in their power to end the indefinite detention of migrants, and to meet with us if elected. Over 50 of these are now MPs, including 17 Conservatives.

Then, our accountability assembly of 2,200 organised citizens on May 4th saw our members thank the three main parties for those promises they'd made five years before, and kept, and to pin them on our demands for the next five – as well as showing off the diverse musical and dramatic talent of our alliance!

All this work has set us up with a good working relationship with Her Majesty's Government and Opposition, and other political parties. We've already seen one big win, as the Chancellor announced in his budget a significant rise in statutory minimum pay for over 25s – a key ask in our Manifesto.

What makes Citizens UK different from any other campaigning or lobbying organisation is that the political action we do is driven at every level by leaders in the institutions in our membership. From local training and listening campaigns to negotiating with Cabinet ministers and planning national actions, at the heart of all we do are people like you.

Our responsibility is to build your capacity to work together for the common good – yours is to claim that power and use it.

Neil Jameson,
Executive Director, Citizens UK

A new look for www.citizensuk.org

If you've visited our website recently, you'll have noticed some big changes. As well as having a fresh new look, our new website gives you plenty of opportunities to get involved. From getting updates on all our different chapters and projects to taking action online, from finding out what's happening near you to reading our reports and publications, the new website is the place to go! If you haven't already, you can sign up at www.citizensuk.org.



Peckham Citizens: a new neighbourhood alliance

Local schools, churches, charities and residents' associations in Peckham are coming together to pioneer a new micro-level organising alliance in order to make positive changes in their south London neighbourhood.



Peckham Citizens meet at Rye Lane Chapel

Leeds Citizens: a new city-wide alliance

Leeds Citizens made local headlines as it was officially founded on 7th July at Elland Road stadium. After a six-month listening campaign, 650 people from faith, education and other civic groups met to receive recognition from a variety of local decision makers, who each committed to work with the alliance on a range of proposals to improve life in the city. These included tackling poverty through the Living Wage and credit unions, improving mental health services, and overhauling the bus network.

In return, Leeds Citizens has committed to:

- Launch Living Wage Week on Monday 2nd November with a series of actions to encourage local businesses to become Living Wage Employers;
- Sign people up to credit unions and participate in the launch of Leeds City Credit Union on 20th August;
- Work with First Bus to improve reliability and frequency of specific bus routes over the next few months, and jointly launch a Bus Covenant by the end of 2015 – a new deal to promote mutual respect and good behaviour on buses from the public and bus drivers;
- Work with Leeds & York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and Leeds Community Healthcare Trust to develop a new pilot for providing culturally sensitive care for elderly people in Leeds;
- Seek the support of Leeds North CCG to create a 'navigators' service for people accessing mental health services.

The event took place on the 10th anniversary of the 7/7 bombings, a significant date for the city as three of the four bombers were from Leeds. The impressive roll call of diverse member communities showed how civil society in Leeds is united in its pursuit of social justice.



New Testament Church of God Leeds 'Voices in Praise' choir opens the Leeds Citizens Founding Assembly. Photo credit: Bill Rollinson, Yorkshire Evening Post

In July, 140 people from across the area met to hear the results of a six-month 1,000 Voices campaign, which asked 1,000 people from Peckham what they like about the area and how it can be improved. While respondents celebrated diversity within the well-integrated community, housing, debts, jobs and Kelly Avenue Park have stood out as key concerns.



**Rev. Paul Collier,
Vicar and Manager of
Copleston Church Centre:**

"Peckham Citizens is all about people in Peckham working together to change our local area for the better, recognising that some things will only

change when we demonstrate the real strength we have in acting together. We spoke to 1,000 people to find out the real hardships that local people are facing. Now we know what's top of the list for people, we can start taking real, tangible action to make a difference to people's lives in Peckham."

Maun Valley Citizens: a new semi-rural alliance

Mansfield in Nottinghamshire is a town that knows about politics and the impact that it can have. In the eighties, it was the front line not only between striking miners and police but also between strikers and those who continued to work.

Maun Valley Citizens is building relationships in the town to bring a new message of hope and progress – that politics is something that can be for the good of the people. Since September 2014, local leaders have built an agenda on jobs, safety and loneliness – negotiating, taking action and winning change on problems with a corrupt landlord, speed limits outside schools and job opportunities for young people.

In April, 335 people from across the town came together for an Accountability Assembly. They put their agenda to mayoral candidates who, in a tight race, recognised the power of the room and agreed to relationship and action with the alliance. On that day, 11 institutions committed to fund and support Maun Valley Citizens, with a further 15 in the room considering membership.

Louisa Hillman, manager, the Beacon Project:

"This is a way to speak up and really feel heard. It's important for people to realise that they are not alone - others care about the issues they are facing."

The Good Jobs Campaign: citizens and business bridge the skills gap



Good Jobs candidates at the University of East London

Citizens UK is joining forces with industry leaders to tackle two of the UK's biggest issues: skills shortages and social mobility. Our unique connections with hundreds of schools, colleges, faith and cultural institutions have allowed us to identify thousands of diverse and talented young people.

By collaborating with employers in engineering, creative industries, technology, digital media and health, the 'Good Jobs Campaign' matches young people and the businesses urgently needing their skills.

Candidates can receive training in leadership and employability skills as well as support from a community mentor to prepare them for the workplace. Furthermore, young people are offered work experience and Living Wage internships to help them decide what sector suits them.

New Health Partnership in Greenwich

Greenwich Citizens has been piloting a new way of collaborating with the NHS. Using Citizens UK's unique community organising tools in its public engagement work, Greenwich Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has been giving our member communities a place at the table in local health decision-making.

With funding from the CCG, Greenwich Citizens trained students from Corelli College in community organising techniques. They put that training into action to identify local health priorities, coming up with a Young People's Mental Health Charter. This asks the CCG to improve outcomes for young people who miss appointments with local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), increase community Mental Health training for young people, and make better use of digital technology to engage with young people.

Greenwich Citizens also gained commitment from Oxleas Mental Health Trust to work together to improve the experience of referrals to CAMHS - an common issue across our alliance. Other schools, colleges and youth groups from Citizens UK are now looking to emulate the work of Corelli College students.



The Young People's Mental Health Charter is signed



**Duncan Selbie,
Chief Executive,
Public Health England:**

"I'm delighted to see the students and staff at Corelli College show just how local organisations are able to work together and create innovative ideas to improve mental health and wellbeing in their areas. It's great to see children being given the opportunity to help themselves – and I hope Corelli proves inspirational to other schools to develop similar joint initiatives like this which have the potential to make a real difference to young people's lives."



**Mayor of London
Boris Johnson**

“The Good Jobs campaign is an excellent initiative that will help young Londoners pursue promising careers in sectors of the economy that are crying out for new talent.”

In its first year, the Good Jobs Campaign will see 500 young people from London state schools and colleges, as well as the 200 Citizens UK member churches, mosques, synagogues and community groups from across London, receive employability training.

Leading employers already backing the campaign include Atkins, JP Morgan, Herbert Smith Freehills, Omnicom, Barts Health Trust and Decoded.

- Over 700,000 young people are out of work in the UK.
- In London alone, it has been estimated that by 2020 technology, health, engineering and the creative industries will need at least 1.5 million new recruits.
- There are already 20,000 unfilled vacancies predominantly in the science and technology sectors.
- By 2020, the UK will need hundreds of thousands of new engineers – that means doubling the current number of engineering apprentices and graduates.
- Massive skills shortages across the health sector mean there are many vacancies for critical jobs like midwifery.

Take action!

- If you're a business, institution or individual and want to get involved in the Good Jobs Campaign, register your interest at www.citizensuk.org/good-jobs

Update on the Living Wage Campaign

STOP PRESS – CHANCELLOR ANNOUNCES HISTORIC MOVE ON LOW PAY



We were delighted when the Chancellor George Osborne announced in July the introduction of a 'National Living Wage' for over-25s, a new higher rate statutory minimum. This will see over 2.5 million workers receive a much needed pay rise. This is a massive victory for Citizens UK and those communities, workers and business leaders who have campaigned for a Living Wage and action on low pay since 2001. The improved statutory rate was one of the key Manifesto asks in our General Election work.

At the time of going to print (July 17th 2015), we are planning a summit of our members, the Living Wage Foundation Advisory Council and the Citizens UK Council to consider the important questions raised by this announcement.

Watch this space for updates.

Meanwhile, the action continues:

Citizens UK members have joined ShareAction's AGM Army to put pressure on big retailers to pay the Living Wage.

- 10 leaders from Citizens:mk and the Craftivist Collective staged a 'stitch-in' outside M&S in Milton Keynes, sewing messages onto handkerchiefs to be delivered to the board, celebrity endorsers, and major shareholders at its AGM.



- Tesco agreed to meet and discuss the Living Wage after an unprecedented number of questions on the subject.

- At the Next AGM, Chairman John Barton acknowledged the principle that hard working people should earn enough for a dignified standard of living.

There's still a long way to go, but these are sure signs of progress towards a fair wage for those working in the retail sector.

The total number of Living Wage Employers passed the 1,500 mark in June with the accreditation of OVO Energy. This marks a significant milestone in the campaign's progress.

Democracy in Action

This year's May Bank Holiday marked the culmination of months and years of concerted organising across the national alliance. Five years on from our first General Election Assembly in 2010, we took the opportunity to thank the Coalition government for the commitments made then which they have delivered on, and to raise issues from our 2015 Manifesto with each of the parties live on stage, in front of 2,200 people.

Driven by the Citizens UK Council (see opposite), more than 200 of our leaders were involved on stage, providing everything from uplifting music and inspiring songs to powerful testimony and considered questioning.



2,200 people from across Citizens UK's membership gathered in Central Hall Westminster.



Sajid Javid, Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband addressed the assembly.

Sajid Javid, Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband were each given a warm welcome, but also faced our determined negotiations on the Living Wage, ending indefinite detention, the creation of a Community Finance Foundation and improving standards in social care.

Each of the parties agreed to continue to work with us over the course of the next five years, and we are pleased to have started the new parliamentary term with a positive relationship with them all.

Now we have to deliver on our side of the commitment, from signing people up to join their local credit union, to training dementia friends or supporting local Living Wage businesses, and continuing to hold politicians and their parties to account.

Highlights from our Manifesto progress so far:

Sanctuary:

- The new working group on ending indefinite denention, chaired by Bishop Peter Selby, has met immigration minister, James Brokenshire MP. They will produce recommendations in the next six months and meet him again to discuss them.
- Citizens UK leaders, Syrian refugees, and people who had come to the UK in the WWII Kindertransport marched to Parliament in July, just as the Prime Minister David Cameron announced a modest expansion to the UK's existing resettlement scheme.

Just Money:

- We are in discussions with the Conservatives on our proposed Community Finance Foundation.
- In Lambeth, south London, a project with the local council has seen over 150 people joining Credit Unions in the last two months.

Social Care:

- We're building a working group led by Bishop James Newcome, which will begin negotiations with national government from September.

Housing

- As this is an issue mainly affecting London and the south-east, we are focusing our efforts on the London Mayoral campaign in the run up to next year's mayoral election.
- In the coming months, thousands of our members in London will be getting out onto the streets to find out how their area is changing and where the desperately needed new homes are going to be built.

Read the latest on Health, Jobs, Living Wage and Governance in the rest of this newsletter.

Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life Announced

Citizens UK exists to develop the capacity of communities to become involved and politically active for the common good. We celebrate the breadth and diversity of our membership, including many mosques and Islamic centres. Yet currently, many Muslim leaders are retreating from public life, fearful of being tarnished as extremist simply for having faith - distancing this already disadvantaged community from the mainstream.

In July we announced a new Citizens Commission, chaired by Rt Hon Dominic Grieve PC QC MP, to consider how the Muslim community could better participate in British public life. We know that the key to understanding any situation is to speak and listen to those involved.

The 25 commissioners include General Sir Nick Parker, Sir Richard Dearlove, Jenny Watson, Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Professor Mohamed El-Gomati. After touring the UK to hear directly from Muslim communities, including those in our membership, along with business, education and government bodies, they will develop a series of recommendations for civil society, government, business and other sectors to reverse the trend of alienation.


Take action!

To find out more about the Commission, or to have your say, visit www.citizensuk.org/commission_on_islam.



Commissioners meet young people from Leeds Citizens on the anniversary of the 7/7 bombings

Citizens UK Council – our members' parliament

As a citizen-led alliance, as well as trustees, we also have a representative Council, a kind of members' parliament, where political decisions can be debated and made. This group drove our work around the General Election, including the Assembly in May, and will take forward our relationship with the Conservative government over the next five years. It is chaired by Pastor Des Figueiredo (South London Citizens, co-chair since 2013), and Revd Karen Rooms (Nottingham Citizens, co-chair since May 2015).


Take action!

If you're from a member institution and would like to find out more about getting involved in our work at a national level, get in touch via the details on the back, or your local organiser.



Charlotte Wood,
Nottingham Citizens, who co-chaired
the Council from 2014-2015 explains:

“Being on the Council is a completely unique experience. It’s a privilege to be representing my local alliance, and to take part in decisions affecting the whole Citizens network – and the whole UK. It’s a big commitment to travel to meetings several times a year, but even with my mobility issues, I’ve found it to be worth the effort – the more I’ve put in, the more valuable it’s been. Council members get our formal mandate from our local Delegates’ Assemblies, and report back to our Leadership Group after every meeting. But it’s really in one-to-one meetings that I’ve found the connections are built from the local level right up to the national. For me, being on the Council has been the best way of learning the practical art of community organising.”

Why I'm involved...

...our members explain what they enjoy about their work with Citizens UK.



Sister Mary Horgan,
Sisters of Mercy, Citizens UK
Birmingham

Q What's your proudest Citizens moment?

The 2014 assembly at Mount Zion Church in Birmingham. My role was to challenge the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) manager about the stresses caused by sanctioning benefits. For Michelle, who gave a moving testimony, the impact of sanctions was years of hardship due to accumulating debts. The assembly secured a helpful working relationship with the DWP.

Q What's the impact of membership been on you and your institution?

St Mary's Convent provides office space for Becca and Saeed, Citizens UK Birmingham's community organisers. As Sisters of Mercy our charism is Mercy - Pope Francis describes it as "Mercying". This spirit very much links with the principles of Citizens UK. So we as a Community and Citizens UK Birmingham as a chapter are both enriched by this partnership of doing social justice together.

Q What are you most looking forward to over the next 12 months?

I'm moving to London. It's sad to leave a vibrant Community and chapter, but I'm looking forward to building relationships with new leaders and being involved with organising and campaigning there for years to come.



Ali Abdi
youth worker, Somali Progressive
Association, Cardiff Citizens

Q What's your proudest Citizens moment?

Seeing 70 young people from diverse backgrounds, many dressed as chickens, calling on Nando's in Cardiff to provide halal food. If it had just been one group making the call we would've been ignored – but as an organised alliance we won. Last Eid Nando's was heaving with customers – we can now literally taste the success!

Q What's the impact of membership been on you and your institution?

As a youth worker in a mainly black and minority ethnic (BME) area with a sizeable Somali community, I see a lot of social issues first hand. By joining Cardiff Citizens, we've finally found a channel to address them. We've worked together with a wide range of other groups to win victories on low pay, better jobs – not to mention halal chicken! Thanks to Cardiff Citizens we've got a way to make real change for social justice.

Q What are you most looking forward to over the next 12 months?

I'm joining the Citizens staff team as an organiser in the Grangetown area. It'll be a new alliance, but it's my community, so I'm already well embedded. I'll be doing lots of one-to-ones and a listening campaign, as well as focusing on voter registration in the run up to the Welsh Assembly Elections next year.

Take action!



Join us! Is your institution a member of Citizens UK yet? To find out more about joining, visit www.citizensuk.org/join or call 020 7043 9881



Give! You can help us build a new generation of civic leaders prepared to act together for the common good. Set up a regular donation or one-off gift at www.citizensuk.org/give.

Get in touch: ☎ @

To find out more, contact us:

- @CitizensUK
- facebook.com/CitizensUK
- www.citizensuk.org
- 020 7043 9881
- 112 Cavell Street, London E1 2JA

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