

Innovation Unit

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An open letter to the Prime Minister, Theresa May

Build a better future for all: create great public services that build agency and enable communities to thrive

Dear Prime Minister,

The UK has never required stronger leadership - both nationally and locally. You have pledged to deliver ambitious social reform, setting a vision for the future of the UK that works not only *'for the privileged few, but for every one of us'*. We welcome your pledge and agree that to build a better future we need to give every individual, family and community more control over their lives and well-being. This must be a driving principle of your leadership that quickly becomes visible and tangible. It has to remain at the top of your agenda, even as Brexit negotiations take centre stage.

Working in diverse communities throughout the UK we see that for many times have never been tougher. Austerity has caused widespread division, particularly in communities left behind by globalisation, and this was epitomised by the genuine anger demonstrated during and after the referendum. It is unsurprising that many people do not feel in control of their own futures or the direction of their lives, or believe that mainstream politicians can help them to improve things. It is within communities where there is openness, kindness and tolerance that people thrive.

Great public services contribute to individual well being and thriving communities by enabling resilience, confidence and strong relationships. Agency is at the heart of much better outcomes and value for money in public services; from supporting people to manage their own long-term conditions, to the development of new mental health services that are designed and run by service users, to the reinvention of schools which explicitly set out to enable every young person to develop the personal and intellectual autonomy they need to shape their own lives.



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If as Prime Minister you are serious about helping people seize control and improve their own lives, you must also be serious about creating the permission, resource and leadership for public innovation that gives agency and power to people and communities.

We encourage you to commit to a public services transformation agenda that supports:

- 1. A requirement for local areas to innovate** - to create radically different, localised services focused on enabling people to achieve their aspirations and thrive.

We need to see more examples of the work Innovation Unit is supporting in Lambeth to transform mental health services - where service users are working in partnership with professionals from the council and CCG to reshape support that helps avoid crisis, dramatically reducing the use of secondary care in the context of budget reductions of 40%.

- 2. A healthcare system that recognises wellbeing as a core outcome** - with new approaches to tackling mental ill-health and long-term conditions as priorities.

We need to see more examples of our work with Nesta on People Powered Health - which demonstrates that services built on the principles of co-production dramatically improve the quality of life for people with long-term conditions and, delivered at scale, have the potential to save the NHS £4.4bn a year.

- 3. Local public services that actively build and strengthen relationships within and between individuals, families and communities** - creating the resilient social fabric that enables children to flourish, that allows adults to thrive (not just survive) and that helps older people live independently for longer.

We need to see more system-wide innovation, as in the DfE's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, which we support - the Leeds' Family Valued programme is using Family Group Conferences across children's social care so that families can make decisions, mend relationships and drive change for themselves, and Pause is working with seven local authorities to reduce the number of children being removed into care, by helping women who have experienced multiple child removal take control of their own lives.



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- 4. An education system that values all young people** - where all are part of a learning community and fully invested in up to adulthood, and where success is measured by the ability to contribute to and thrive in the adult world.

We need to see more radical alternatives to the traditional model of school - through our School Design Lab we are leading a conversation about reinventing school and learning in order to create vibrant, dynamic and community-engaged learning environments for all young people.

None of these things are out of reach, as these examples illustrate. In our work, we see the kernels of great public services that can help shape a different kind of public life - in which people have more control over their lives and communities can thrive.

Real change is happening, and so it will continue. But there are key contributions government must make to enable more widespread change that is sustainable.

Innovation requires **devolution**, not just of responsibility for finances and outcomes, but of true accountability and all of its leverage. This means not just permission, but the capacity, resources and support to fulfil the needs and aspirations of individuals, communities, localities and districts.

Crucially, it requires a willingness to **involve citizens** in the process of designing, delivering and owning public services. A commitment to co-production that enables people to have an equal and reciprocal relationship with professionals - so they are no longer passive recipients of care, but active members of thriving communities. The referendum vote represents a strong rejection of intervention from outsiders. Communities in Britain want the chance to build their own futures - but making the most of this chance will take more than legal frameworks and rhetoric.

Without acknowledging and leveraging the strengths and assets of people, we will never be as strong as the sum of our parts, nor will we fulfill the promise of the devolution agenda.

Public innovation can enable you to realise your vision of a Britain that works for each and every one of us. Innovation Unit will contribute all our expertise and energy to the task, and you must provide the leadership, vision and capacity to make radically different, better, lower cost public services the 'new normal'.



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We would love the opportunity to meet with you to share more about our work and explore how widespread, sustainable change to public services can be delivered.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Gillinson
Managing Partner

