



**Institute for
Community Studies**

Powered by The Young Foundation

The Civic Journey: introducing the idea

Written by Professor Matt Flinders



Introducing the Civic Journey project

The Civic Journey is a transformational two-year youth-led programme that was launched in September 2021. Against a backdrop of increasing evidence concerning social polarisation and community fragmentation, the project focuses on illuminating and unleashing the civic potential of young people to reinvigorate communities, identify innovative solutions to local problems and to invigorate the ties that bind individuals and groups together in a manner that celebrates diversity and difference.

The available evidence reveals a strong and positive civic appetite amongst young people. But it also reveals frustration about not being listened to, taken seriously, or empowered to take control of and lead specific agendas. As such, this project adopts a journey-based narrative, which accepts that different people are likely to need more support from their community at different points in life, just as the very same people will have more to give back to their community at various points in their life. But what do young people need in order to derive a sense of 'togetherness' or 'belonging'? How can fresh thinking design policy pathways that nurture civic engagement? What is the link between civic engagement and the skills agenda, when it comes to getting a job? What role might citizenship education or civic-orientated learning opportunities play in achieving the government's ambitions in relation to levelling-up and equality of opportunity? How do we measure the value of civic engagement within and between groups and communities?

These are just some of the questions this project will be engaging with as it seeks to:

1. understand 'what works' when it comes to youth-led policy design
2. identify the gaps that exist within existing provision
3. experiment with new forms of social action and engagement
4. focus on the relationship between different policies and opportunities
5. support young people to create their own Youth Agenda for civic renewal

This is not an academic project. It focuses on the basic challenges, barriers, and blockages that young people face in their everyday lives. It seeks to work with those young people, through a vast range of online and offline tools and through working in partnership with a number of organisations, to nurture the belief and confidence of both individuals and communities. In a post-Brexit and (hopefully) post-Covid context, the project adopts a distinctive and positive stance that identifies a rare 'civic opportunity'. That is, an opportunity in which how children and young adults are supported to be active and engaged citizens in a confident and integrated society.

The project is led by the Institute for Community Studies at The Young Foundation in partnership with the University of Sheffield and the University of Huddersfield. It is funded by the National Citizen Service Community-Interest-Company (NCS CIC).

For more information, visit [The Civic Journey](#) or contact Emily Morrison, Head of the Institute for Community Studies

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From 'What is or was' towards 'What might be'

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The Civic Journey programme focuses attention on supporting, inspiring and empowering young people and local communities. It nurtures a fresh and ambitious approach to gaining skills, accessing opportunities, and promoting community engagement. It seeks to ensure that national policy frameworks and public spending are not only better integrated and better spent but also aligned with the stated needs of young people and local communities. The core aim of the Civic Journey is very simple: to create a sense of shared understanding, collective belief, and equality of opportunity within society. It is therefore concerned with nurturing the ties that bind individuals and communities together as a counterweight to evidence of increasing social fragmentation, distrust, and isolation.

There are many benefits of this approach:

- It seeks to address fragmentation in relation to both social change and policymaking, in order to facilitate joined-up thinking and connectivity between different age groups, opportunities, and forms of engagement.
 - It reveals gaps or places where provision is particularly threadbare, and encourages working with young people to co-design a more attractive and skills-focused 'civic offer'.
 - It highlights the existence of key transition points and helps underline the notion of civic momentum. As such, it seeks to increase efficiency, catalyse innovation, and avoid duplication.
 - It provides a tool that can be used by individuals, groups and communities to explain how they think the Civic Journey needs to be reimagined, and underlines the role of the state in terms of facilitation.
 - It raises questions about 'exit', 'entry' and 're-entry' to the Civic Journey and the integration of new communities in ways that cast a fresh, solution-orientated light on perennial social challenges.
- It adopts an evidence-based design-led approach that works with young people and local communities to develop place-based or age-related policies, interventions, or opportunities.
 - It promotes a systemic approach to thinking about the synergies and positive spill-overs between specific policies or initiatives in order to ensure that the whole adds up to far more than the sum of its parts.
 - It offers a positive vision of a confident country in which all young people are empowered and supported to prosper as both individuals and active citizens.
 - It complements contemporary governmental priorities regarding community-powered innovation, place-based policymaking, equality of opportunity and 'levelling-up' regional economic disparities.

The Civic Journey focuses attention on the support structures that people need at different stages of their life, and on the fabric or connective tissue that provides individuals and communities with a broader sense of belonging and belief within society. It does not prescribe any single 'journey', nor does it suggest the existence of simple solutions to complex problems. But it does advocate the need to work through forms of co-design and co-production with young people and local communities; and to better integrate existing initiatives (citizenship education, national citizen service, volunteering opportunities, etc) as part of a reformed vision of an inclusive and confident society.

Executive summary: the Civic Journey

The Civic Journey focuses attention on supporting, inspiring and empowering young people. It listens to young people. It nurtures a fresh and ambitious approach to gaining skills, accessing opportunities, and promoting community engagement. It seeks to ensure that national policy frameworks and public spending are not only better integrated but also aligned with the stated needs of young people.

Through a focus on critical transition points, embracing diversity and building civic momentum, the Civic Journey seeks to unlock the potential of individuals and communities to drive change. Using an explicit design-approach, the Civic Journey adopts an evidence-based emphasis, which reveals new insights about 'what works' and where local innovations can be scaled up, down or out.

This document provides the first attempt to explore and discuss the Civic Journey approach in any detail. It is therefore designed to be an initial provocation or statement of early thinking. It is written for a wide audience in the hope of stimulating a discussion that will connect local communities and youth groups, on the one hand, with politicians and policymakers, on the other.

This discussion will be used to refine and develop the Civic Journey approach and to help establish a large evidence base about forms of civic engagement and civic support. Insights from youth-led social action projects will provide additional insights and combine to inform the co-production of a new Youth Agenda for civic renewal.

This document focuses on the broad parameters and building blocks of the Civic Journey approach. It achieves this by focusing on four interrelated questions:

- Why should we be thinking about the Civic Journey now?
- What is the Civic Journey in practical terms?
- What are its component elements?
- How does the Civic Journey connect with broader debates?

These questions facilitate a focus on three specific aspects or elements of the Civic Journey approach: first, it focuses on addressing systemic policy fragmentation in order to increase efficiency, avoid duplication and maximise social impact; second, it puts young people at the centre of the design process; and finally, it embraces an innovation-led and skills-building approach to change.

This programme does not seek to lock individuals or communities into any single conception of what a Civic Journey does or should look like. The ambition is to create a seamless tapestry of opportunities that each in their own ways serve to nurture social understanding across areas, ages and religions.

This emphasis helps to focus positive attention on the role of communities in relation to the government's broader 'levelling up' agenda. Ministers have recently acknowledged the need to help local communities 'shape their own areas more effectively, and strengthen the ties that bind us across the whole UK.' The Civic Journey provides a powerful foundation for this agenda.

Although the Civic Journey focuses on the position and potential of young people the basic idea opens potentially transformative opportunities across the full life course. Innovating in relation to inter-generational engagement within a broader Civic Journey approach could address increasing evidence of loneliness and isolation amongst older people, while also forging mutual understanding and respect.

It is hoped that through wide-ranging consultation, co-design and testing what might be produced is a potentially transformational approach to nurturing and supporting flourishing and integrated communities. There are positive signs that now is the moment for radical and system-wide thinking.

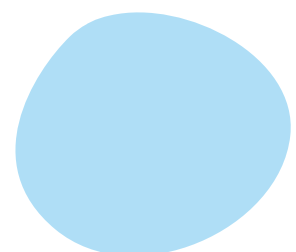
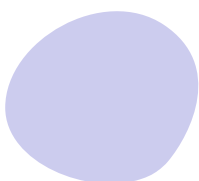
Promoting and supporting engagement across and within communities provides a way of not only building confidence, developing skills and promoting equality of opportunity in specific places. It also sends a positive and powerful message about the strengths and values that are common to everyone – the ties that bind us together as a greater whole - but may be expressed and cherished in diverse ways.

The Civic Journey is a very simple idea. It reflects the ways in which individuals develop, mature and change as they move through life, but it does so with a focus on the person's position, role and relationship(s) with their wider community. It also includes a focus on the role of the public sphere, in general, and the state, in particular, in terms of nurturing and supporting young people to negotiate the challenges of everyday life (see Table 1, below). But it is also about far more than hard structures, public policies, and social interventions. To think and reflect in terms of the Civic Journey is to focus on the fabric of society and the ties that bind individuals and their families into broader communities. As an increasing body of data and evidence points to the existence of increasing social fragmentation, political disengagement and economic inequality, thinking about (reimagining) the Civic Journey in order to nurture a healthy, flourishing and integrated society becomes more important. To focus on the Civic Journey is therefore to explore how people learn about the world around them, how they develop the skills

and confidence to express themselves, and how they can help shape their lives for the benefit of themselves as an individual, and for their family and friends and for their wider community.

There is no reason why the idea of the Civic Journey should be restricted to a focus on individuals. Countries, nations and communities are all to some extent permanently engaged in an ongoing Civic Journey as new challenges and opportunities require constant reflection and recalibration. Sometimes the beginning of a new phase or chapter in a country's Civic Journey can be obvious and terror-strewn, as in the wake of a civil war, or connected to the tensions emerging out of less violent but no less controversial periods of political history. The Civic Journey, as both an idea and a way of thinking about social challenges and policy responses, is therefore an approach that embraces not only the existence of social diversity but that also seeks to appreciate and understand the interplay between individuals, communities and wider socio-economic structures.

Term	Meaning
Civic	Relating to community life (local, national, international). Expressed through formal and informal modes of behaviour, emphasises rights and responsibilities.
Journey	A way of thinking about the relationship between individuals and society that emphasises stages, engagement and transition points throughout the full life course.
Socialisation	The formal and informal processes through which individuals come to a view about their position in society and their options to affect change.
Education	Often referred to as 'civics', generally focused on developing the knowledge and skills of young people in relation to both individual character traits and active citizenship.
Infrastructure	The vast multitude of organisations, groups and societies, plus connective processes and opportunities, that combine to create engagement opportunities.
Momentum	An impetus, drive or commitment to continuing to engage in civic activities once the initial activity has been completed.
Offer	The package of opportunities or incentives that are presented to individuals or groups in order to develop political literacy, develop new skills or encourage engagement.



The aim of this paper is to begin a conversation about *what* the Civic Journey is and *why* it matters. In order to achieve this objective, the paper is divided into four question-focused sections.

The first section focuses on context and asks why the time is ripe for fresh thinking around the citizenship challenge.

The second section explores more practical matters, asking 'what is the Civic Journey?'. This is answered through a brief review of the findings of the 2018 House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Participation – 'The Ties that Bind'.¹ This is the report that coined the term 'the Civic Journey' and that attempted to argue in favour of a far more ambitious, integrated and future-focused approach to nurturing civic engagement in all its forms.

Having outlined the broad concept, the third section focuses on detail and asks, 'what are the component parts of the Civic Journey?'. This question is addressed through a focus on five main 'pillars'. The great value of this more detailed approach is that it begins to reveal how a community-led design perspective combined with longer-term strategic thinking could help address a range of pressing societal challenges.

The fourth and final section steps back from the detail to engage with a more fundamental question: 'so what?', asking, why does thinking about the Civic Journey matter?

1. Context: Why should we be thinking about the Civic Journey now?

The Civic Journey provides a new way of thinking about how society can respond to increasing social fragmentation, political polarisation, and forms of inequality. It provides a fresh approach to addressing what might be called 'the citizenship challenge'. This asks how an environment can be created in which everyone feels a positive sense of connection and belonging to the community or country in which they live. The citizenship challenge is to be found - with various tones, textures and intensities - in many parts of the world, and is generally associated with increasing concern about (i) growing social and political polarisation, (ii) falling levels of public trust in political institutions, political processes and politicians, (iii) rising levels of social, political and economic inequality, (iv) questions concerning the integration of displaced communities through patterns of immigration and asylum and (v) evidence of the withdrawal of specific sections of society on the basis that they feel 'forgotten', 'left behind' or 'peripheral'.

Two major reference points within the existing evidence base serve to underline the existence of a citizenship challenge from very different positions. The research of Anne Case and Angus Deaton focuses on 'deaths of despair' and how working-class life expectancy in the United States began to fall in 2018. Deaths from suicide, drug overdoses and alcoholism have risen dramatically among specific sections of society as precarious modes of employment have become the norm rather than the exception.

If Case and Deaton adopt a rather pessimistic position, then Robert Putnam's book of 2021 uses evidence of civic decline in order to craft a far more positive position. Using vast historical datasets, Putnam identifies the Gilded Age (broadly from the 1870s to 1900) as one in which America recognised that the balance between individualism and some broader sense of collective wellbeing needed to be shifted from the former to the latter. This led to an emphasis on shared responsibility and collective endeavour in the Progressive Era to the extent that '[O]ver the first six decades

of the twentieth century America had become demonstrably – indeed measurably – a more “we” society' (p.11). The challenge that Putnam proceeds to underline is that a combination of forces then led to another even deeper downturn: 'Over the past five decades, America has become demonstrably – indeed measurably – a more “I” society'. The most important element of Putnam's analysis, however, is arguably his faith in the ability of communities to both recognise the need to focus on the ties that bind people and communities together, and his emphasis on an explicit design approach which seeks to unleash local initiative and civic energy as part of a more integrated national policy framework.

Although Case, Deaton and Putnam are writing about American social and political change many of the issues and themes they raise are highly relevant in the context of the UK. For example, the 2021 Prince's Trust Tesco Youth Index discovered that:

- 60% of young people said getting a new job feels 'impossible now' because there is so much competition;
- A quarter (24%) of young people claimed that the pandemic has 'destroyed' their career aspirations; and
- Young people were more likely to feel anxious now than at any other time since the Youth Index was first launched over a decade ago

Findings such as these suggest we should be thinking about the Civic Journey *now*. And yet the same survey also revealed the existence of a positive undercurrent as almost three-quarters of the 16- to 25-year-olds surveyed were positive that theirs is 'the generation that can change the future for the better'.

The Civic Journey is a multi-levelled concept in the sense that it can be applied to individuals, communities, and countries. As a result, decisions taken at the national or community level can be expected to 'trickle down to affect individual attitudes and opportunities. With this in mind, it is possible to suggest that, throughout the second half of the 20th century, the UK has been somewhat divided or uncertain about its own journey; especially how it wanted to relate to its 'old' relationships (ie to notions of empire), to its 'internal' relationships (ie with its constituent nations), to its 'special' relationship (ie with the United States) or to its 'difficult' relationship (ie with the European Union). It was this uncertainty as to global direction and international status that made the UK such 'an awkward partner' within the EU, and which subsequently manifested itself in

what has been termed 'Brexistential angst'.² It is neither necessary nor possible to offer a detailed review of all these issues and dimensions but the core argument is that a specific brand of populism has in recent years created an increasingly 'Dis-United Kingdom'. This is reflected in the existence of new and increasingly obvious social cleavages between, for example, young and old, educated and less educated, urban cities and seaside towns.³ Longstanding territorial tensions concerning devolution and national identity have, as a result, become mirrored by newer concerns regarding the 'two Englands' thesis which all, through their emphasis on difference and diversity, combine to underline the existence of a pressing citizenship challenge (see Box 1, below).⁴

Box 1. The bifurcation of politics and 'Two Englands'

A dynamic of global economic development means many countries are experiencing uneven development and their citizens are increasingly split between those who can access high-skill jobs and those who cannot. As a result, [Will Jennings and Gerry Stoker](#) have argued, some citizens are living in cosmopolitan areas of growth and others in backwater areas of decline.

There are, emerging out of these processes, two versions of England. In cosmopolitan areas, they found an England that was global in outlook, liberal and more plural in its sense of identity. In provincial backwaters, they find an England that is inward-looking, relatively illiberal, negative about the EU and immigration, nostalgic, and more 'English' in its identity. This bifurcation of England, they suggested, was already having political effects, reflected in the outcome of the 2015 general election. The 2016 Brexit referendum and the 2017 and 2019 general elections added weight to the 'Two Englands' thesis and the societal, technical, territorial and generational splintering or fragmentation that the thesis highlights is likely to further reconfigure politics in the future.

Thinking about the Civic Journey, especially in relation to a place-based agenda, provides a way of closing the gap that appears to be emerging.

If Brexit represented a very particular historical 'hinge point' then the outbreak of a global pandemic has also served to focus attention on community engagement, social inequality and why public trust in political processes matters. In this context three issues deserve brief comment.

The first issue relates to volunteering and community engagement in times of crisis. Put very simply, the Covid crisis revealed the existence of an underlying social fabric in the UK that was possibly not as threadbare as might have been expected from a simple reading of the existing data. It took less than 24 hours for the NHS Volunteer Responders scheme, for example, to achieve its target of recruiting 250,000 members of the public to provide support to vulnerable individuals, and in total over a million NHS Volunteer Responders were recruited. National volunteering networks were supplemented at the local and community level by a multiplicity of organisations and associations, individuals and families, all coming together for mutual purposes. Over the 12 months from May 2020, for example, the RSPCA's volunteer network increased by 85% to around 16,000 people (with two-thirds of their volunteers aged under 35, and a third under 25). This positive upsurge in activity flows into a second less positive issue and the manner in which Covid revealed the existence and implications of deeply embedded structural inequalities within society. Factors relating to housing, occupational risk and access to healthcare which made certain communities far more vulnerable than others in both economic and health terms.⁵ People from ethnic minority groups were almost three times as likely to contract Covid, and five times more likely to experience serious outcomes.⁶ To some extent the government's statements and commitments around civic renewal, revitalising communities and 'levelling-up' recognise that a challenge exists and must somehow be addressed. At the same time the launch of the '[Shaping the Future of Volunteering](#)' campaign by 24 of the UK's leading charities in 2021 provides another spur to thinking not just about volunteering but about how volunteering

might form one element of a more ambitious and integrated tapestry of engagement, skills and educational opportunities within and across communities.

Another reason we should be thinking about the Civic Journey *now* is because responding to the Covid crisis has already demanded that the government adopt an integrated and ambitious approach to policymaking and social support structures. From 'nudging' (as demonstrated in the public information campaign 'hands, face, space'), through to 'shoving' (for example, the formal requirement that people should wear a facemask in shops and on public transport) and 'pushing' (in the sense of legal restrictions on basic freedoms through 'lockdown') the capacity of democratic politics to innovate and respond to major social challenges was evident. The Covid crisis has also exposed shortcomings in how government works, especially in relation to working effectively across traditional organizational and professional boundaries. This is exactly why the [Declaration on Government Reform](#) of July 2021 included a commitment to establish 'mixed-disciplinary teams...devoted to overcoming the most complex public policy challenges' through novel system-wide approaches.

We will operate more seamlessly with institutions outside government, building partnerships with the wider public sector, private sector and community organisations to secure the best outcomes for citizens. We will bolster dialogue between leaders from all sectors to make sure we are spotting and tackling problems together, and explore new forms of collaboration in service delivery.

Declaration on Government Reform, 2021

The Civic Journey is concerned with identifying what brings people, communities and society together and exploring how we might encourage more kindness and connectedness, a stronger sense of belonging. The final report of the [Talk Together](#) project (March 2021), which involved over 160,000 people over a nine-month period, suggests that British society is at a crossroads.⁷ An upsurge in community spirit exists alongside more and more evidence of social divisions, political polarisation and increasing inequalities. But a strong appetite for change also exist. What's lacking is any clear idea about *how* to deliver positive social change across such a complex and multi-dimensional topic.

It is exactly this context that the Civic Journey provides a fresh, novel and system-wide approach to addressing a complex public policy challenge (ie the citizenship challenge) in order to secure the best outcomes for *all* citizens. In many ways the journey-based narrative seeks to close the gap that seems to have appeared between the governors and the governed. With this in mind, what's also interesting – and highly relevant to a focus on citizenship and civic participation – is that during Covid there also seems to have been a clear relationship between successful government responses and high levels of public trust in politics. Trust is, of course, an incredibly complex concept but put very simply in the early phase of the crisis public trust was associated with greater public compliance with government interventions.⁸ Thinking about the Civic Journey

provides a way of promoting trust (or possibly nurturing healthy forms of *distrust* or *mistrust* in politics in the sense of healthy skepticism, rather than corrosive cynicism) which in itself might contribute to the creation of a more inclusive, confident and ultimately resilient society.⁹ This brings us to a focus on the 'how?' question and to the *practicalities* of thinking, planning and engaging in terms of the Civic Journey.

Wrap up in three points:

1

Concerns about social cohesion, equality of opportunity and 'the ties that bind' have existed in the UK for some time, as they have in other countries.

2

These concerns, and the evidence that underpins them, combine to focus attention on the existence of a 'civic challenge'.

3

Brexit and Covid-19 have, in their own ways underlined, exacerbated and exposed the existence of this 'challenge'.

2. Concept: What is the Civic Journey?

Although the issues and themes that it seeks to capture and address are far from new, the concept of the Civic Journey was coined in 2018 as part of the [House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement](#).

The creation of a country in which every one of its citizens feels secure, engaged and fulfilled must be a primary objective of a successful modern democratic nation. This would be a country in which everyone feels that they belong, and to which everyone feels they can contribute.

Individuals do not learn about governmental and judicial institutions of the United Kingdom through osmosis. The values which underpin our society, which have been tested in recent years by a variety of economic and societal developments, are not self-evident. They need to be learned and understood. Another important step is to understand that the demand for individual rights cannot be divorced from the need for individual responsibility. Finally, whether older or younger, disabled or non-disabled, long established or recently arrived, marginalised or secure, every one of us who together make up the tangled skein of British society has a story to tell and a contribution to make.

To try and untangle this complex and sensitive web we have looked at the issue of citizenship and civic engagement through the prism of the Civic Journey each one of us who lives in Britain will undertake. *We have found much that is encouraging, showing British society engaged harmoniously together despite the waves of change that are inexorably rolling over us. But inevitably there are areas where we are less successful. We have tried to identify the barriers which are preventing people from feeling part of our society or contributing to it, together with the steps which must be taken to remove those barriers. So we argue for focusing resources, for reinforcing success rather than reinventing the wheel, and for adopting and seeing through long term strategies. This then is our story (p.4).*

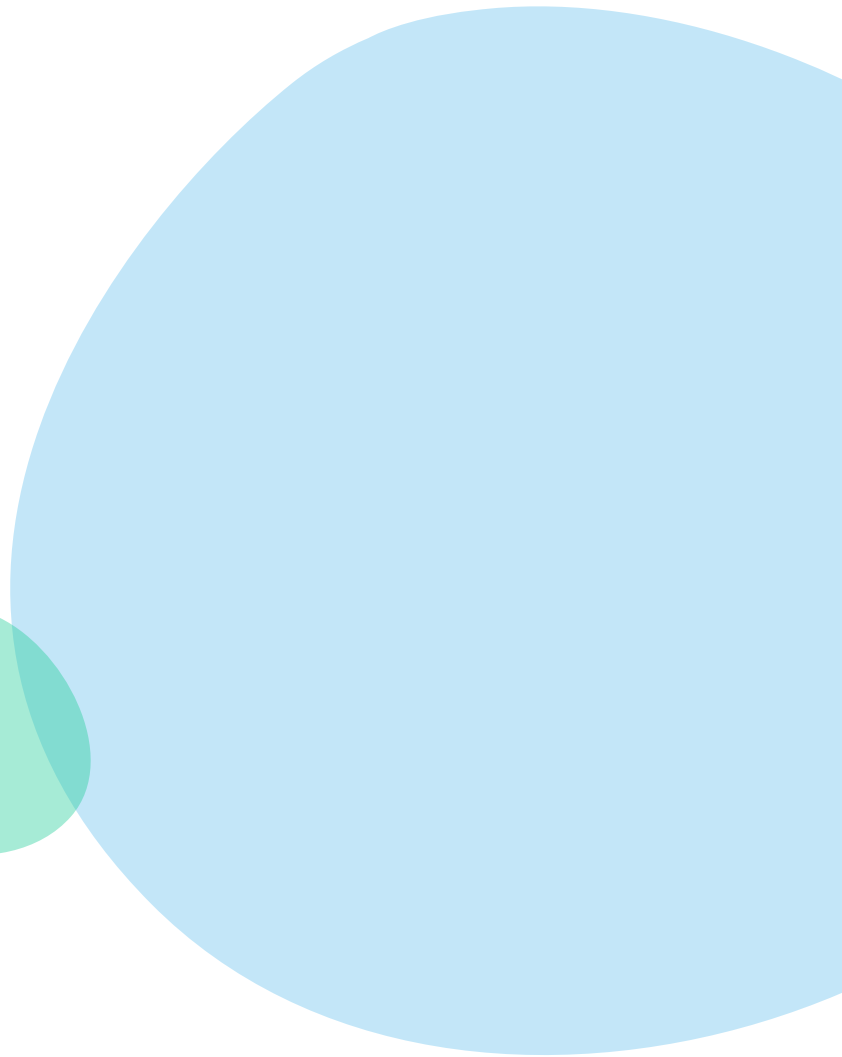
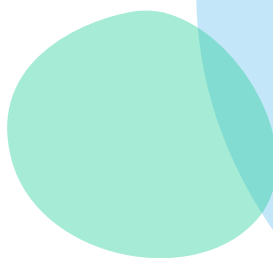
This was a landmark report in the sense that it attempted to stitch together those elements and interventions through which individuals and communities could be supported to flourish. It was concerned with 'the civic infrastructure' – the sports clubs and parenting groups, youth clubs and language classes, volunteering opportunities and political literacy – and particularly the role of the state in supporting and nurturing what the committee labelled 'the ties that bind'.

We argue that the process we have called the 'Civic Journey' should be a smooth transition in which central and local government provide individuals with a framework for benefiting from and contributing to society, and assist them in overcoming the barriers to engagement (p.4).

What the committee uncovered was a patchwork of short-lived civic interventions, funded and delivered by a range of organisations, with very little – if any – appreciation of how any single policy, investment or grant might connect with any other initiative, or serve to form part of a larger and more ambitious and integrated strategy. 'Our evidence' the committee concluded 'suggested that historically there has been no clear co-ordination across Government, no real evaluation to find what works, and no long-term commitment to initiatives—many of which appear not to outlive the minister who initiated them (p.6).

In many ways, the great value of the Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement was not so much that it identified a lack of 'joined up' thinking but that it focused attention on the stages or 'building blocks' that could be used to think about what an integrated Civic Journey might look like. The stages were elements like citizenship education in secondary schools or the National Citizen Service for older teenagers, the building blocks focused attention on dimensions such as the importance of being able to speak English and the need to facilitate and encourage volunteering. The report also focused attention on three crucial elements which in themselves served to tighten and integrate the stages and building blocks. First and foremost, the committee focused not just on the existence of stages or building blocks but on the transition points *between* these opportunities and investments. What it found was very little focus on building or maintaining civic momentum (see Box 1, above) so that participants were encouraged to develop and deepen their skills beyond the completion of any specific initiative in ways that would have benefits for both those individuals and their wider community. A focus on

transition points to stop young people, especially those from under-privileged backgrounds, 'falling through the cracks' was highlighted as being vital to the broader Civic Journey concept. Key transition points include the move from primary to secondary school, from school into either further education or the workplace, and especially around leaving home and starting a family. The focus on transition points introduces the need to think about the support structures that individuals might need to live their lives and to generate a sense of belonging – or 'togetherness'. This, in turn, focuses attention on 'entry points', 'exit points' and most importantly on 're-entry points' to any framework for benefiting from and contributing to society.



If a focus on building 'civic momentum' and an emphasis on the importance of specific 'transition points' were two key insights from the 2018 Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement then a third insight revolved around the notion of 'democratic listening'. This simply underlined the need to listen to and work *with* local communities and young people to understand how they view the world around them and what they might like to see put in place in terms of new interventions, opportunities and investments. 'Communication between citizens and government at all levels is often poor' the committee noted 'and was a subject frequently raised not just in formal evidence but by those we spoke to on our visits. When seeking people's views, communication tends to be with the 'gatekeepers'—those who

hold themselves out, not always accurately, as representing their communities. People, especially in deprived areas, must be made to feel that government is speaking directly to them, working with them and for them, and paying attention to their needs and wishes...Communities must also be prepared to open up and bring more voices into the conversation (p.5).' This is a critical point. An increasing body of research and evidence points to the value of designing and implementing policy very much hand-in-hand with local communities or groups. In some cases this has involved the wholesale delegation of control and funding to local communities in order to develop effective solutions to local problems (see Box 2, below).

Box 2. Local Trust: trusting local people

Big Local is the largest ever single endowment ever made by the National Lottery Community Fund. Launched in 2011, the scheme was truly innovative in the sense that it gave significant funds to local communities with hardly any strings attached. Instead of traditional top-down project-based funding, the emphasis was on developing trust, confidence, skills and partnerships at the local level in order to stimulate and support resident-led initiatives. Many of the places selected as Big Local areas suffered from low levels of civic activity and were chosen as they had traditionally not received what was perceived to be a fair share of lottery funding.

Now that most Big Local projects have passed the halfway point in their 10- to 15-year spending plans, what insights are emerging from this scheme?

First and foremost, local communities have been able to work together to identify shared concerns and to design community-led initiatives to tackle those concerns. Secondly, although it can take time to build relationships within communities and conflicts are to some extent inevitable the vast majority of Big Local projects (149 out of 150) are still operating. Thirdly, relatively 'light-touch' support structures (training, advice, facilitation, etc.) can be very important, especially in the early days of a project. Fourth, the biggest surprise of the Big Local initiative has been how willing local people have been to play a role in their local communities when given the opportunity. Skills and energy have been unlocked. Moreover, the evidence suggests that once involved local people 'tend to stay involved' in community activities. Finally, initiatives such as Big Local provide huge insights for anyone thinking about place-based community or economic regeneration. Learning 'what works' and tying specific investments and initiatives (such as the Big Local) into a broader and better integrated policy framework could aid broader policy ambitions around mental health, policing and crime, economic development and skills, and beyond.

<https://localtrust.org.uk/big-local/>

This focus on 'people-powered policymaking' brings us to a fourth key insight emanating from the 2018 committee report: money. Thinking about the Civic Journey in terms of an integrated and seamless tapestry of policy interventions or community opportunities provides a way of unlocking different forms of capital for the good of society. Whether these are described in terms of 'civic capital', 'cultural capital' or 'social capital' is secondary to the fact that fostering inclusive societies in which different communities exist within a common framework, and where mutual understanding and respect is nurtured through education and active engagement, provides a way of 'upstreaming' policy interventions in a highly cost-effective manner. Whether it is preventing vulnerable young people from succumbing to the

temptations of extremist groups or combatting loneliness amongst older people, the Civic Journey provides a fresh new framework for thinking about major societal challenges. And not everything costs money, which in a post-Covid context is a critical point. In many ways the concept of the Civic Journey provides a design lens that could well – by integrating investments, leveraging additionalities and listening to communities - ensure far higher societal returns on existing public spending.

With this emphasis on 'achieving more bang for each buck' in mind it is possible to draw-upon and develop the Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement's report to offer the following definition (see Box 3).

Box 3. Defining the Civic Journey

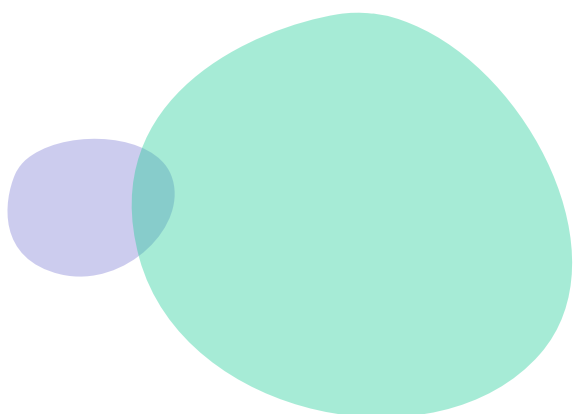
- 1. A way of thinking about the relationship between individuals and society that emphasises stages, engagement, and transition points throughout the full life course.**
- 2. Linked to an understanding of civic socialisation and momentum to emphasise how individuals can develop a positive sense of their position and role in society.**
- 3. Concerned with addressing social exclusion and enhancing equality of opportunity by supporting young people and communities to address issues that affect them or shared concerns.**
- 4. Associated with the analysis of social capital and civic infrastructure but adopting a systemic approach through a focus on key transition points, civic momentum and cadre effects.**
- 5. Focuses on the role of the public private and third sectors in working together to join-up and better integrate existing policies, interventions, and investments. Explicitly linked to the innovation agenda.**
- 6. Proposes new approaches that prioritise the self-determined needs of communities and which engages with them more deeply in the policy development process – giving them a greater stake in success.**
- 7. Does not aim to promote or nurture any single Civic Journey but to harness creativity through a focus on youth-led social action projects and a broader emphasis on community engagement.**

The Civic Journey is a simple way of thinking about how to build a 'framework for benefiting *from* and contributing to society' in a way that is designed to respond to the citizenship challenge (ie rising levels of social fragmentation, political polarisation and democratic disengagement). To think about the Civic Journey is not to think about somehow squeezing everyone into the same 'one-size-fits-all' box, but how existing or new projects, investments and initiatives might be better connected so the total value to society is more than just a sum of their parts.

For example, with the Big Local initiative discussed in Box 2 (above), how might such an innovative place-based, community-led initiative be located within a far broader and integrated portfolio of 'civic infrastructure' investments? How might its insights be scaled up or scaled out where appropriate? In what ways have Big Local projects adopted specifically age-related ambitions? What story (or stories) do local communities develop and tell when seeking to create a new vision for the future and shared goals? These questions not only help stretch and test the Civic Journey concept across different dimensions, they also begin to reveal the novelty and added-value of the concept. This is especially true in relation to rejecting established assumptions and challenging 'self-evident truths' in ways that create new perspectives and opportunities.¹⁰

Take the widely held view that an inevitable trade-off or tension exists between guarding the interests, rights and autonomy of the individual, on the one hand, and maintaining a strong sense of shared collective purpose, on the other. Although the interests of the individual and community *may* come into conflict, this is not inevitable. As such, dominant zero-sum assumptions which perpetuate the belief that any advantage gained by one side in a relationship is a loss to the other risk simply closing-down the space of innovative thinking. To put the same point slightly differently, conceptions of the individual *versus* society - or selfless *versus*

selfish behaviour - are too crude and simplistic to capture the position and potential of the individual *within* society. One of the key insights emerging from the Big Local initiative is the power of individuals partnering with local communities to reshape the economy, create wealth and drive change.¹¹ A second example might focus on incentive-based volunteering whereby the individual receives rewards or credits for spending time supporting community projects (see Box 4, below). The notion of 'Give, Get Given' challenges conventional assumptions that volunteering is and should only be a purely altruistic endeavour. It also raises new questions about blended incentives and how to ensure that policies and investments are aligned with the preferences and priorities of young people. In a way that resonates with the notion of the Civic Journey RockCorps also focuses attention on the flow between volunteering and other opportunities in the hope of building momentum and stimulating ambition. The UK Service Year initiative (see Box 5, below) was developed by the chief executive of RockCorp, Stephen Greene, and framed as 'something new for the post pandemic generation'.



Box 4. Incentive-based volunteering: RockCorps

The roots of RockCorps lie in the work of the Greenbucks Foundation in the USA. Active in the mid-1990s, Greenbucks staged its initial music concerts in Telluride, Colorado, and encouraged local residents to clean up the outdoor concert space in order to earn a ticket. RockCorps built on this idea and, by 2021, worked with 2,750 community organisations and 250 singers and performers to co-ordinate over 180,000 volunteers in 39 cities around the world. Under the banner of 'Give, Get Given', RockCorps uses music and culture to inspire action – providing the tools and opportunities for people to get involved in their local community. The idea is to 'make volunteering fashionable' through a simple offer: four hours of volunteering is rewarded with a free ticket to a concert or festival. The basic concept of volunteering delivering both personal and social benefits has continued to develop through initiatives such as 'The Collective' and 'The Apprentice' which are designed to provide more flexible and skills-focused routes into volunteering alongside earning personal benefits.

<https://www.rockcorps.com/>

Box 5. The 'UK Year of Service' initiative

The 'UK Year of Service' was launched in 2021 and aims to harness 'the strength of the next generation to find, face and take on the toughest challenges, with paid employment to serve the UK's local communities wherever the needs are greatest'. It provides paid local community placements for nine to 12 months in a variety of roles from being a social prescribing navigator to being a school service leader, working as an emergency response assistant or even a green projects intern. With annual equivalent pay of between £14,000 and £19,000 a year, the initiative offers a living wage and an opportunity to develop skills and experience while helping community projects – 'Paid work that pays back'. Initially administered by Groundwork – a federation of charities mobilising practical community action on poverty and the environment – as a two-year pilot project, the initiative hopes to recruit up to 400 young people and to generate a positive evidence base regarding social value and economic return.

<https://ukyear.com/>

Initiatives like the Big Local, RockCorps and the new UK Year of Service – to select just a few examples – provide wonderful opportunities for young people to engage within and play a role in their wider community. They also help foster basic character-related skills (confidence, awareness, empathy, understanding, etc.) alongside employment skills (workplace experience, professional networks, etc.). But thinking about these opportunities through the lens of the Civic Journey also highlights three important weaknesses. Firstly, the broader civic landscape is highly fragmented with little in the way of connective tissue serving to connect across between the various opportunities or initiatives. Secondly, the initiatives and opportunities that have traditionally existed have tended to run in parallel with the educational journey from school to college to university. This immediately risks excluding those young people who, for one reason or another, have not followed this standardised educational journey. In November 2021, for example, the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee found that around 800,000 young people (12.6% of 16- to 24-year-olds) are neither working nor in full-time study. Youth unemployment levels can vary between different places and groups. Young black people faced unemployment rates of 41.6% during the winter of 2020 (up from 24.5% pre-pandemic) compared to 12.4% among young white people (up from 10.1%). Inequalities such as these raise questions, however, not just about youth unemployment and the skills agenda but about new engagement opportunities and instilling young people with a sense of belonging and belief.

This flows into a third and final issue, as the House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Participation found – public investments in civic infrastructure tend to be very precarious and are often first in line when government cutbacks occur. Youth services, for example, are generally funded at the local level but in the last decade local authorities have experienced an almost 50% real-terms cut in their budgets. In 2021, a national review by UK Youth in the wake of Covid-19 found that of the 1,759 organisations who took part, two-thirds had experienced an increase in demand for their service, and yet 83% of those organisations were working on reduced budgets.¹² Over 1,200 of the surveyed organisations (64%) said they were at risk of closure in the next 12 months.¹³ This underlines the urgency of the topic and leads us into a more focused discussion about the component parts of the Civic Journey.

Wrap up in three points:

1

The Civic Journey provides a way of thinking about supporting young people to be confident and engaged members of society and their local community.

2

It recasts 'the civic challenge' into a civic opportunity that puts young people at the heart of the debate about civic renewal and how to address societal challenges.

3

A core theme within journey-based thinking revolves around the need for systemic change in terms of aligning, co-ordinating and delivering a more joined-up approach to policymaking.

3. Detail: What are the component parts of the Civic Journey?

So far, this paper has engaged with two main questions. The first section asked 'Why should we be thinking about the Civic Journey now?' and an answer was provided that focused not just on perennial concerns regarding 'the citizenship challenge' but also on a set of contemporary factors which, when taken together, could be construed as creating a new 'civic opportunity'. With this in mind, the second section sought to engage with a deceptively simple question, what is the Civic Journey? The answer to this question is provided in Box 6 (below) but, at a broad level, the Civic Journey can be thought of as resting upon three core values: (i) *partnership* - working with young people to design and deliver the opportunities they need to prosper and flourish as individuals and engaged citizens; (ii) *design* - moving away from a highly fragmented policy landscape towards a more strategic emphasis on nurturing civic momentum, co-ordinating across investments and delivering equality of opportunity; and (iii) *ambition* - through a focus on nurturing the ties that bind different people and different communities together in ways which illustrate the value of diversity and difference.

As the description provided in Box 6 illustrates, the Civic Journey is a flexible umbrella concept. It is concerned with capturing a number of formal and informal processes and also the relationship between what are in reality very different processes or forms of behaviour. And yet they all in their own ways serve to support, promote or deliver forms of civic participation and community engagement. They are the strands or ties that bind individuals and communities together as a bulwark against social fragmentation, distrust, loneliness and isolation. Put slightly differently, it is these processes that can build bridges and support structures to allow individuals and communities to flourish and reach their full potential as part of an inclusive and confident democracy. But talking about 'supporting structures', 'building bridges', 'transition points' and 'civic infrastructure' is meaningless unless accompanied by a more specific, practical and down-to-earth account of what these terms actually mean and relate to. What are the component parts of the Civic Journey? The great value of this question is that it not only takes us to the core of the Civic Journey idea and to an emphasis on very practical matters of design and delivery, but it also forces us to go beyond a simple statement of component elements and towards a more sophisticated understanding of some of *the issues that shape* how individuals or communities can or cannot engage with or access those various elements.

Box 6. The Civic Journey is...

...[a] way of thinking about the relationship between individuals and society that emphasises stages, engagement and transition points throughout the full life course. It highlights and explores the formal and informal ways in which individuals come to a view about their position in society and their options to affect change (ie civic socialisation). It also stresses the role of education in terms of developing the knowledge and skills to flourish as both an individual and active member of a community. The Civic Journey is a very pragmatic and solution-orientated approach to thinking about the citizenship challenge. It recognises that once individuals are given an initial opportunity to engage in civic activities such as volunteering they often seek out new opportunities (ie civic momentum). The Civic Journey is therefore concerned with nurturing and supporting forms of civic support and engagement as young people progress into adulthood (and beyond). What's distinctive about the Civic Journey as an approach is that it recognises the need to work with and listen to young people in order to design and deliver an attractive and appropriate 'civic offer'. It also recognises the role of the state in resourcing some level of underpinning civic infrastructure (places to meet, youth support services, incentives to engage, and beyond) to help sustain activities and ensure equality of opportunity. The Civic Journey is not a 'one size fits all' approach. It seeks to facilitate a range of journeys or pathways in a way that celebrates diversity and create a sense of individual confidence, shared understanding, and collective belief.

The main contribution of this section in terms of introducing the idea of the Civic Journey is that it identifies five pillars that are offered as a starting point for discussions and debate. There are, of course, lots of other potential pillars and interesting issues that could have been included; the aim here is to provide a starting point for design discussions rather than a detailed blueprint. Pillars can be added, merged or removed as the project progresses. Setting out with a detailed blueprint or agenda for action would fail the project, as the essence of the Civic Journey is that the design process has to be undertaken *with* young people and local communities. Moreover, when it comes to thinking about the future, it is important not to be constrained by the past in terms of both policy profiles and ways of thinking. The initial pillars and issues reflect quite a conventional account of structures, activities

and challenges but there may be a need to 'think beyond' in terms of radical innovation (again, a requirement where working with young people will be critical). But as a starting point, Table 2 identifies five core 'pillars' of the Civic Journey, which range from a formal/bureaucratic journey-based approach right through to a more radical and disruptive focus on activism and campaigning. Citizenship education, democratic participation and volunteering/social action are then positioned between these two poles. Taken together, these five 'pillars' can be seen as offering the main component parts of the Civic Journey, with each potentially offering key lessons and critical insights about young people's multifaceted journeys into adulthood and civic participation.

	Pillar 1	Pillar 2	Pillar 3	Pillar 4	Pillar 5
	Formal processes	Citizenship education	Citizenship education	Democratic participation	Activism/campaigning
Focus	The legal or formal framework through which citizenship is recognised	Provision of the knowledge, skills and confidence to engage.	Supporting an organisation, project or cause without payment.	The process of engaging as a citizen through formal processes.	Determined support for a cause or systemic reform.
Examples	Birth certificate, passport, access to benefits, asylum or immigration processes, voting rights, etc.	PSHE education in primary schools, citizenship education in secondary schools.	Marshalling at a Park Run, working in a charity shop, RockCorp etc.	Voting, standing for election, political party membership, etc.	Attending marches and rallies, through to direct action.

What are the benefits of setting out the component parts of the Civic Journey in this way?

1. It provides a sense of the broad landscape of processes, activities and opportunities that, when taken together, can be seen as nurturing informed and engaged citizens, and supporting healthy and inclusive communities.
2. It reveals the existence of a delicate civic ecosystem whereby different pillars serve to promote or sustain other activities. High-quality citizenship education - taught in an engaging manner by specialist teachers - *can* inspire long-term positive behaviour and engagement amongst young people.¹⁴
3. It highlights the existence of an official citizenship journey, which begins with the registration of birth and proceeds through a number of phases that tend to be marked by ceremonies or documents (ie voting, graduation, marriage, retirement) and ends with the issuing of a death certificate.
4. It emphasises the existence of critical transition points that, each in their own ways, pose challenges and opportunities in terms of citizenship and civic engagement. Individuals might need more support or have more support to offer to others at different points in their lives.
5. It stresses the role of knowledge and political literacy in terms of engagement with politicians, policymakers, or community organisations. This includes being able to access information about voluntary, social action or employment opportunities.
6. It exposes the existence of embedded (political) inequalities within and between each of the pillars that need to be considered if greater equality of opportunity is to be achieved. Various barriers and blockages exist in relation to all five pillars.
7. It generates new opportunities by highlighting potential connections between processes or policies that are too often viewed in isolation. How, for example, might formal process serve to support and nurture educational or social action projects in ways that bring people together?
8. It asks questions about the quality of existing structures in terms of supporting and inspiring young people to engage, and about 'what works' in relation to community-led problem-solving. It seeks to support a new innovation landscape for civic engagement.
9. It embraces difference and the existence of parallel structures in the sense that individuals may move to a new country in later life and want to develop new skills and play a role in their community. Devolution also creates different opportunities in different parts of the country
10. It offers a system-wide approach that chimes with government priorities. This explains its focus on integration and positive connectivity (ie civic momentum) between those different dimensions or 'pillars' as a response to evidence of increasing social fragmentation.

The great benefit of thinking about the Civic Journey is that it recognises the existence of forms of formal, informal and non-formal forms of civic participation, just as it acknowledges different 'sites of socialisation', such as the home, the classroom, the youth club or online gaming group. It therefore embraces but goes far beyond traditional conceptions of the civic infrastructure. It may well be that Table 2 provides a poor starting point for discussion; highlighting, as it does, a range of approaches, processes and mechanisms that many young people might reject as little more than outdated or even archaic forms of redundant civic or political architecture. A variety of youth engagement activities will explore whether those five pillars in Table 1 reflect how young people see the world around them, and what might need to change.

But at the very least what Table 1 *does* deliver is an emphasis on tying the pieces – education, volunteering, the skills agenda, political participation, community engagement and more - together in a catalysing and connective manner. The weakness at the moment is that these pieces (or 'pillars') exist as a highly fragmented patchwork, largely designed *for* young people but not *with* young people. Systems and structures for supporting young people and communities lack coherency, stability, flow and ambition. The Kickstart Scheme, for example, which aims to create work placement opportunities for those aged 16 to 24, has been criticised for being insufficiently integrated across government policymaking.¹⁵ Looking forward, the 'Shaping the Future of Volunteering' campaign is aware of the need to work across the broader civic infrastructure in ways that align ambitions and objectives. This might involve, for example, working with 'official' or 'bureaucratic' processes to remove barriers, reduce regulatory burdens and create

tax incentives; just as it might involve working with educational providers to open-up new routes into volunteering and a more innovative range of opportunities. The Civic Universities Network is another new initiative with huge potential to drive civic renewal as one element of a more strategic, coherent and ambitious approach to community engagement, education, employment and skills. The Civic Journey approach is concerned with supporting and nurturing a myriad of journeys by offering flexibility in relation to place, pace and provision. But this demands clarity in relation to the existence of an inclusive and joined-up civic infrastructure that supports young people and communities to flourish, and ambition in relation to innovation, equality of opportunity, and a focus on the ties that bind.

Wrap up in three points:

1

The Civic Journey embraces a range of ways in which people can feel a sense of belonging, express themselves, and contribute to their community.

2

It seeks to facilitate diversity, choice and inclusion within an integrated framework that has been designed by young people or local communities to fit their needs.

3

The aim is not to create a 'one-size-fits-all' model but to nurture a supportive system that promotes personal development and collective confidence in an inclusive manner.

4. Purpose: Why the Civic Journey matters

Integrated communities demand integrated policy. Thinking across traditional departmental, organisational, professional, territorial and cultural boundaries also provides a way of identifying those core values that unite and bind individuals and communities together. As the House of Lords Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement concluded in 2018, although wiring-up structures and processes is difficult ‘it is not a challenge that can be ignored or filed in the drawer marked “too difficult”... the challenge is too pressing to be ignored.’

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic there also appears to be a specific opportunity, as evidence suggests a strong appetite among all sections of society, and especially among the young, to play an active role in civic life. This is the ‘civic opportunity’

that this paper has attempted to map out. The government’s commitment to ‘levelling up’ across society, in terms of both economic development and equality of opportunity, certainly chimes with a focus on civic participation and community engagement. The same is true of the ‘Declaration on Government Reform’ with its commitment to working across traditional boundaries and to ensure that policies are generally developed *with* – rather than imposed *upon* – affected groups or communities. The July 2021 proposals from the Commission on Smart Government – *Strategic, Capable, Innovative, Accountable: Four Steps to Smarter Government* – speak to this agenda;¹⁶ as do the findings of a recent Institute for Community Studies project, *Why Don’t They Ask Us? The Role of Communities in Levelling -Up*.¹⁷

Box 7. Nine reasons the Civic Journey matters

1. **PERSPECTIVE:** It adopts a systemic approach across the life course instead of focusing on specific age groups or interventions, thereby forging a seamless policy landscape.
2. **RESPONSIVENESS:** Increasing evidence of social polarisation, political disengagement and inter-generational tensions point to the relevance of the Civic Journey as a unifying framework.
3. **SIMPLICITY:** As an idea and way of framing debates, it is simple: everyone is on their own Civic Journey and seeking to make sense of a changing world.
4. **FINANCIALLY:** It has the potential to increase the efficiency of public investments in civic infrastructure, making sure the total value is far more than a sum of the parts.
5. **SOCIALLY:** It puts individuals and local communities at the heart of the design process by embracing entrepreneurship, social action, and citizen science.
6. **INNOVATION:** It produces new ways of thinking about perennial and new challenges, especially in relation to long-term strategic design.
7. **ORIGINALITY:** Its focus on civic momentum, key transition points, exit and entry opportunities, provide a fresh and inclusive approach to social and economic regeneration.
8. **TIMELINESS:** The Civic Journey is founded on a commitment to ‘levelling up’ equality of opportunity and to addressing embedded social inequalities.
9. **VIBRANCY:** It does not seek to impose any standard model or approach but simply seeks to establish a supportive framework that nurtures creative ambition by individuals within communities.

But notwithstanding the reasons in Box 7 (above), arguably the most significant element of the idea of the Civic Journey is that it facilitates comparison. Comparison, that is, between the scale, extent and ambition of the existing civic infrastructure, on the one hand, compared with what young people or local communities feel is needed to allow them to feel part of a healthy and flourishing community, on the other hand. Put slightly differently, the idea of the Civic Journey promotes an explicit design perspective and a way of thinking about ‘what is’ and ‘what might be’ (this approach is often called ‘As-Is, To-Be Gap Analysis’).

When it comes to the ‘what *is*’ question the current evidence base points to the existence not of a seamless tapestry of integrated opportunities or support structures but to a patchwork quilt of policies, interventions and opportunities. Serious concerns also exist as to the quality and coverage of specific ‘steps’ or ‘stages’ (with citizenship education recently identified as ‘the missing link’) and to whether investments are really engaging with those sections of society that currently feel excluded.¹⁸ There is certainly no cross-government strategy relating to citizenship and civic participation that offers an integrated focus on elements such as *pace*, *place* and *provision* across the life course. As the 2018 Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Participation which sparked this project found:

Strategies and policies tend to emerge from a number of government departments, often as a result of a new ministerial appointment—several initiatives came out within the period this inquiry was underway—with very little clear recognition of how they should all fit together to form a coherent strategy, or of the evidence on which future assessments of success and failure will be made. No minister has overall and undiluted responsibility for the citizenship challenge, leading to fuzzy accountability, blame games and unrealised civic potential. This leads to new initiatives being created with each reshuffle of Government and then quickly abandoned with the next change of Minister. Initiatives are too often not deep rooted and are pursued with insufficient vigour.

That is not to say that ambitious plans have not been announced. As the Integrated Communities Action Plan of February 2019 illustrates, cross-governmental thinking has been evident and the creation of an Inter-Ministerial Group on Safe and Integrated Communities was intended to drive change, remove barriers and monitor progress. However, the admission by the government in December 2021 that the Inter-Ministerial Group on Safe and Integrated Communities last met in 2019 suggests further commitment and co-ordinating capacity is needed if the ‘civic opportunity’ is to be taken. And it is in this context that the idea of the Civic Journey emphasises the value of a journey-based narrative and approach that works *with* young people to design and deliver a refreshed and age-related policy portfolio that moves away from ‘what *is*’ and towards ‘what might *be*’ (see Appendix 1 for practical ideas and case studies). Thinking about ‘what might *be*’ and also ‘*how* it could be achieved’ is the main aim of the Civic Journey project and, over two years, the Institute for Community Studies is working with young people, local communities, third sector organisations and policymakers to test and trial a range of ideas and new innovations.

Wrap up in three points:

1

Issues around social integration and community engagement cannot be left in the ‘too difficult’ box.

2

It is possible to suggest that a rare ‘civic opportunity’ exists to reflect upon and nurture the ties that bind individuals and communities together.

3

Thinking about the Civic Journey is a starting point. The next step is to stress-test the idea with young people, communities and policymakers.

Appendix 1: case studies

From 'What is or was' towards 'What might be': The Civic Journeys of John, Anna and Priya

#1 The Civic Journey of John from Swindon

'What is or was'

John grew up in Swindon, Wiltshire. He is now twenty-three and still lives with his mother in an area of the town called Penhill. When John was young, Penhill used to be a sprawling council estate on the edge of town, and he enjoyed exploring the local fields and woods with his friends. His main hobbies were running, boxing and fishing, and he attended the local comprehensive school. Like the majority of his friends, he left with just a handful of low-grade GCSEs. He refers to 'citizenship education' as 'a joke' and 'a waste of time' and has never heard of the National Citizen Service (NCS). University was never mentioned to him as an option or aspiration. He joined the army at sixteen but left after a year and returned to Penhill to find the Royal British Legion, where the boxing club had been based, had been closed down. He says he feels 'trapped' and describes his estate as 'an island' due to the way in which it has become encircled by new housing estates and shopping centres. John voted for Brexit - as did his mother - and resents the closure of the railway works and major car plants that historically provided good and secure jobs in the town. He is nostalgic about the past, fearful about the future, and accepts that he has to develop new skills and possibly even return to education if he is ever to progress beyond his current part-time job as a Tesco bakery assistant. But he has no idea what to do or where to start looking for support. Volunteering, John argues, is 'for mugs... all work, no pay' and the local further education college closed four years ago. What John really wants - he confides in an almost silent whisper - is an opportunity to work on a farm. "I'd love that," he says, "develop skills, meet people, work with animals...the odd cheeky beer".

'What might be'

The civic journey matters to John for the simple reason that he feels trapped but lacks the basic skills or knowledge to move out of his current situation. What *was* a rather 'yo-yo' (ie 'you're on your own') secondary education experience might have *been* very different if John had enjoyed the opportunity to develop his confidence, meet people from beyond his estate, and be inspired by a bold approach to citizenship education within and beyond the classroom. It might also have been very different if he'd enjoyed the support of a specialist careers adviser who had the time to get to know him, or if he'd known about the existence of summer work placements or professional apprenticeships. His civic journey would certainly have been very different if local youth services had been able to keep the boxing club open, possibly even becoming a coach. The NCS would have been a great scheme for John to get involved in when he left the army, and he might still jump at the chance of getting involved in something like RockCorp (he also has friends on the estate that he thinks would be interested). Moving from where he is *now*, with his part-time job, to where he wants to *be* might also be transformed if he knew about the UK Year of Service and the variety of environmental placements it offers.

#2 The Civic Journey of Anna from Cornwall

'What is or was'

Anna lives in St Just, Cornwall. She is 20 and is in the final year of a philosophy degree at the University of Manchester. Her family runs a holiday letting business and she has two sisters (one adopted). Anna went to school in Penzance for both GCSEs and A-levels and was captain of the girls' rugby team. As an academy, her school had not taught citizenship education and she remembered the NCS experience as "a bit weird", with too much of "a focus on wind surfing and selling cakes" and not enough emphasis on real issues. "It all just felt like we were ticking a box for our university applications, there was nothing to go on to after NCS".

At this point Anna becomes highly animated. "Living by the sea is not everything it's cracked-up to be," she argues. "Beyond all that Doc Martin and Rick Stein stuff, there is rural poverty, social deprivation and an acute lack of affordable housing". The mining and fishing industries that once sustained West Cornwall – where Anna lives – have gone and yet "the levelling-up debate only ever focuses on the north of England". She is interested in politics but deeply disillusioned with the political system.

Anna reveals that one of her sisters has been battling a serious eating disorder for many years but has never been able to access the level of care and support she needs. When asked how she feels about her future Anna takes several seconds to think before slowly explaining that her biggest fear is having to return to West Cornwall. "I know it's going to happen," she concedes. "I've racked up all this debt doing a degree that I doubt will ever really help me get on in life". Most of her friends are applying to do masters degrees, but for Anna "that's just a way of avoiding the real world for another year.

"What would you do if you were me?," Anna asks the interviewer.

'What might be'

Although she's never thought of it in such terms, the civic journey matters to Anna because it would offer her answers, options and opportunities to shape her own future in ways that benefit her community and society more broadly. If citizenship education had been taught in a more challenging, provocative and dynamic manner, then maybe Anna might feel more positive about her interest in politics. If the NCS had offered some follow-on opportunities to take part in social action projects, or to be connected with a community mentor, then her personal confidence, professional skills and social understanding might be stronger. A greater emphasis at university on practical skills for life and civic engagement might have continued this civic momentum to the extent that the thought of returning to West Cornwall might even have been viewed as an opportunity for Anna to become a changemaker in her local area, through active campaigning and political participation. As graduation approaches, the idea of a 'service year' working in the voluntary sector or community sounds incredibly appealing to Anna and she immediately wonders about whether her love of rugby might be combined with a focus on mental health and wellbeing amongst young women. The English Football League Trust is a partner in the UK Year of Service and Anna decides to explore whether she might be able to get the Rugby Football Union to become a partner.

#3 The Civic Journey of Priya from the West Midlands

'What is or was'

Priya is 17 and lives in Smethwick in the West Midlands. Her grandparents came to the UK in the early 1960s from Punjab and Priya is proud to describe herself British-Asian. She has three brothers and two sisters and likes the fact that her paternal grandmother lives with them in what she describes as a 'pretty busy house'. Priya's father runs a small business with two of his brothers while her mother focuses on domestic matters.

Educational achievement has always been a high priority within Priya's house. All her older siblings attended university and Priya went to an all-girls school in Birmingham where she excelled at dance and drama. She comes from a traditional Sikh family with community life based around the local temple, and she has a strong personal commitment to the notion of *seva*, which is a *Sanskrit* word for service to others and the community. But in recent years she has become frustrated with "the temple culture", which she describes as being dominated by men, and increasingly keen to meet people from different faiths and backgrounds. "I live in the Birmingham bubble," she jokes.

Priya is interested in politics but claims to know nothing about it. Did her school teach citizenship education? "It depends what you mean by being a 'good' citizen," she responds. "It was quite a religious school and, in my world, politics is for men". She is, however, looking forward to being able to vote when she turns 18.

Her main concern for the future revolves around the fact that she does not want to go to university but sees this as her only option if she wants to leave home and meet other people. Her father recently suggested she should study at the University of Birmingham to stay at home and save money. Priya describes this as "my nightmare option" and explains that she has recently joined an online support network for young women in the same situation. "At the moment, we just chat and support each other but, at some point, I'd love to get into campaigning or even working in a women's refuge... I'm sure my dad would see this as a 'nightmare option' from his perspective!"

'What might be'

Priya is already a member of an active and flourishing community that is centred around her local temple. She also receives a lot of support and careers advice from her large family, but she wants to meet more people from beyond her own community and to explore options that do not involve going straight to university. She describes the online support network she helps to run as a "life support" mechanism.

During her second year of A-levels, the Arts Council launches a national competition to generate ideas that utilise participatory arts projects to foster civic engagement. With the support of her school, Priya uses this opportunity to develop a web-based focus on photography to showcase the multi-layered challenges that all young people face – irrespective of their background, culture or religion – in a provocative, uncomfortable and stark manner. The project receives funding and allows Priya to take a gap year, in which she sets up a small charity that supports and showcases youth-led political photography – bringing artists and communities together through exhibitions and events.

The charity also works with young people who have completed the NCS scheme in order to sustain interest and engagement around social concerns. An 'NCS Alumni' national photography competition is held every year with shortlisted submissions exhibited in public buildings all over the UK. The success of the charity leads Priya onto a degree apprenticeship in digital design and marketing, which she completes while working for a large Bristol-based social enterprise. Her plan is to establish an 'ed-tech' company that links classrooms around the world. Her parents are incredibly proud of her achievements, as is her local community, and this is reflected in the creation of a permanent gallery and exhibition space in her local Sikh temple.

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