FIRST 100 DAYS OF GOVERNMENT

Statement by Voice4Change England

Introduction

It has been a historic election in the UK, and Voice4Change England (V4CE) is hopeful that the new government will maintain the momentum towards advocating for a more equitable and inclusive society. In recent years, the UK has faced numerous challenges: a cost-of-living crisis, a pandemic, a decade of austerity, a worsening climate crisis, a broken rental market, housing shortages and increased homelessness, and a neglect of public services — all contributing to deepening structural inequalities. These challenges have disproportionately affected Black and Minoritised Ethnic (BME) communities who remain underserved and overlooked.

V4CE remains committed to ensuring that these voices are heard and given due weight across the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector and in policy forums. It is crucial that the new government acts with urgence to implement legal frameworks that address and dismantle systemic barriers, creating an environment that centres humanity, communities, families, and equality through comprehensive legislative protection. There is a lot to tackle – but with a united effort, we can make significant strides towards lasting change.

In the first 100 days of this new government, we urge our leaders to take bold and decisive actions for a transformative society that addresses structural barriers, marginalisation and injustices.

Strengthening Government and Charity Partnerships for a Resilient Society

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Many civil society organisations across the UK are on the brink of closure due to the relentless cost-of-living crisis and government charity funding cuts, highlighting a concerning trend of charities struggling amidst soaring operational costs and escalating service demands. Amid these challenges, the voluntary sector remains indispensable to public service delivery, contributing £15.8 billion annually. It continues to champion vulnerable communities, confront structural inequalities, and advocate for funding to address societal issues that government funding does not cover.

Inadequate funding within civil society will have grave consequences for the UK. This could cause significant further harm to society and the public sector, increase financial costs, continue to cause the trend of widespread charity closures and irreversible harm and impacting the most vulnerable in our society (Charity Excellence). The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare profound societal inequalities, compounded by persistent poverty and financial disparities that continue today. More than ever, people are dependent on civil society outputs in their day-to-day lives, such as foodbanks and debt advice.

Strengthening Government and Charity Partnerships for a Resilient Society

Together, the government and the voluntary community sector must work to strive towards a society where all citizens are healthy, content, and secure, while actively closing the gap on inequality and helping the most vulnerable.

Therefore, it is essential to reset and fortify the relationship between the government and the voluntary sector. The future resilience of the voluntary sector hinges on comprehensive government support, including:

Using charity expertise:
Integrating charities into policy formulation and execution, encouraging sustained engagement through secure funding streams.

Investing in public services and welfare reform:
Addressing critical areas where charities have stepped in, such as food banks, where the majority are subsidising public services.

Promoting volunteerism:
Establishing programmes to engage young people in civil society, empowering them to make meaningful contributions to their communities voluntarily.

Strengthening Government and Charity Partnerships for a Resilient Society

Increase funding and resources:
The financial difficulties in the charity sector began in late 2021 and the sector requires funding to address social issues, conduct research projects and build stronger communities. Civil society organisations deliver essential services, and coupled with the fragile economy and inflation, we propose more funding to ensure sustainable outcomes for our sector and communities.

Local collaborations:
Strengthening partnerships among voluntary and community sector organisations to enhance community support and jointly deliver essential services.

Reviewing electoral legislation:
Safeguarding charities' freedom to advocate on behalf of social causes and ensuring equitable participation in democratic processes.

By reinforcing these partnerships and implementing supportive policies, the UK Government can empower the voluntary sector to continue playing a pivotal role in building a fairer, more resilient society for all (NAVCA, 2024).

Address Structural Racial Inequality

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Structural racism is something we witness every day. At home, most children who live above the fourth floor of tower blocks are Black or Asian. At school, Black Caribbean girls are excluded double the rate of their white British counterparts. In hospitals, many BME people may delay or avoid seeking help out of fear of racist treatment from medical staff.

Its consistency is a malignancy that inflicts pain, trauma, and unequal outcomes on BME communities. For generations, its persuasive nature has forced these communities in the UK to have endured systemic injustices, reinforced by social norms, culture, policies, and practices that maintain racial disparities. As an organisation that advocates for anti-racism and racial equity, we must refuse to normalise this injustice.

Social systems, such as housing, healthcare, employment, and education, are institutions that are embedded with racism. It is a stubborn problem, which casts a shadow over our society and leaving many feeling powerless against the inequalities in social systems and institutions.

Address Structural Racial Inequality

The Equality Act 2010, designed to create a fairer and more equitable society, specifically addresses race as a protected characteristic, thereby prohibiting racial discrimination.
Despite its intended goals, significant hurdles remain.

Triggers for racial disparity require a more sophisticated, intersectional, and holistic approach, by avoiding people being 'othered' and centring our shared humanity and common interests. The causes of racial disparities are complex and interrelated, necessitating a nuanced and comprehensive strategy to address them effectively. Government policy aimed at promoting racial equality must adopt an intersectional approach that recognises interconnected factors such as nationality, sexuality, religion, age, gender, disability, and class as laid out in the Single Equality Act originally created in 2011 by the government.

Moreover, Age UK has highlighted persistent financial inequalities among older people from Black ethnic groups, many of whom belong to the Windrush Generation. These individuals navigate intersecting identities that increase their vulnerability to poverty.

Address Structural Racial Inequality

Proactive policies could have significantly reduced disparities in infection rates and mortality among BME groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. Urgent and comprehensive policy action is therefore imperative to prevent such disparities from recurring, especially considering how research indicates an increase in the frequency of pandemics in the future.

Within the first 100 days, the UK government should reassess existing policies that inadvertently deepen discrimination, morality, hardship and poverty within these communities, including:

Strengthening anti-discrimination laws:
To dismantle institutionalised racial disparities, we advocate for the government to adopt comprehensive race equality strategies and anti-discrimination laws that prohibit racial discrimination in employment, housing, education, and other critical social systems with enforcement. Outcomes can be evaluated through clear goals aimed at decreasing racial inequalities in these fields, along with defined timelines and milestones to track advancement, and systems of oversight to guarantee adherence to commitments (Operation Black Vote, 2024).

Address Structural Racial Inequality

Eliminate the ethnicity pay gap:
The persistent ethnicity pay gap in the UK, as highlighted in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Ethnicity Pay Gaps 2012 – 2022 report shows that the ethnicity pay gap persists, with BME groups earning significantly less than their white counterparts. This underscores the need for systematic interventions to address income disparities between BME groups and their white counterparts. Mandating ethnicity pay gap reporting can be a crucial step towards achieving accountability and transparency in this regard. For long term systemic change, policy and legislation should require employers to create action plans, conduct pay audits, and establish monitoring committees. Studies indicate that these steps can substantially decrease ethnicity pay gaps.

Create public health campaigns:
The UK government should create specific interventions and public health campaigns aimed at increasing awareness and reducing the disproportionate impact of public health crises on ethnic minority and migrant communities (UCL, 2023). The government can also ensure that clinical research trials include BME participants to ensure effectiveness of treatments across different genetic backgrounds and physiological responses.

Address Structural Racial Inequality

Confront injustices faced by the Windrush Generation:

The government must confront the historical injustices faced by the Windrush Generation and their descendants. Despite their invaluable contributions to British society. The Windrush Scandal revealed profound injustices that include statelessness and barriers to essential services such as housing and healthcare. Immediate steps must include overhauling the Home Office hostile environment policy – which has been described as racist - by enacting legislation to secure citizenship for affected individuals through safe, accessible and affordable routes to status.

Appoint a Windrush Commissioner:

We advocate for the appointment of a Windrush Commissioner to oversee justice for those affected, implement a psychological support scheme to assist impacted individuals, and ensure measures are in place to prevent such injustices from recurring.

Address Structural Racial Inequality

Addressing racial disparity requires a deep and nuanced understanding of these multifaceted triggers and their cumulative impact on different communities. In conclusion, we urge the new administration to prioritise strategically allocating resources within the first 100 days. This will be a pivotal step towards achieving genuine racial equality and social justice in the UK.

Address Climate Change and its Disproportionate Effects Against Black and Minoritised Ethnic people

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This year, the UK experienced its wettest 18 months since records began in 1836. We endured record-breaking heatwaves in the summer of 2022, with temperatures reaching 40°C in England and resulting in 2,985 excess deaths. The continued burning of fossil fuels, the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions that are driving the climate crisis, is making our planet more unstable and unliveable. A crisis that is made visible in the UK through weather extremes and sewage pollution has already been rapidly unfolding largely in the Global South.

Less wealthy and privileged nations subject to colonial and neocolonial projects that saw their land, labour and resources exploited have not benefited fairly from the industrial revolution and other developments in infrastructure, health and technology. This is a legacy that remains as marginalised and racialised communities around the world face climate disaster, displacement, and restrictions on their movement and political rights. Their voices are too often suppressed or excluded altogether in local, national, and international negotiations.

Address Climate Change and its Disproportionate Effects Against Black and Minoritised Ethnic people

To move away from a deeply divided, unequal, extractive, and oppressive society, meaningful participation by affected communities is needed to shape climate solutions that do not reproduce social inequalities and injustices. We urge the new UK government to revise climate-related policies to address these changes urgently and centre climate justice ambitions.

To combat these disparities and ensure a fair response to climate change and equal access to green spaces, we advocate for the implementation of an environmental race equity framework within the first 100 days of government:

National Strategic Plan for Environmental Bill:
An initiative proposed by the Wildlife and Countryside Link, this Bill introduces the human right to a healthy environment, including access to high-quality local green and blue spaces. It requires all Local Government bodies to recognise this right and ensure equal access to nature.

Strengthen and Continue Commitment to Climate Redress and Reparations
through the Loss and Damage Fund to support global climate resilience and nature restoration and establish liability and compensation for historical emissions.

Address Climate Change and its Disproportionate Effects Against Black and Minoritised Ethnic people

Green Spaces Scheme:
Develop urban green infrastructure in local neighbourhoods, particularly targeting Black and Minoritised Ethnic communities and other nature-deprived areas. This includes mapping green space availability and collaborating with local communities to remove structural barriers to access and ensure inclusivity.

Support the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Race & Community
inquiry on racism and the environmental emergency to ensure a just and equitable green transition for everyone and ensure that people of color no longer endure the disproportionate effects of pollution, inequitable access to environmental goods such as green space and to resources allowing them to be climate resilient.

Invest fully in renewable energy,
energy efficiency, electric vehicles and affordable public transport, and ensure that we are on track to meet the legally binding net zero target by 2050 where greenhouse gas emissions produced by the UK are equal to or less than the emissions removed by the UK from the environment.

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Decolonise and Decarbonise Education on Climate Change

to broaden and deepen the conversation around climate in a way that is intersectional, interdisciplinary, and engaged with global justice and solidarity movements so that full historical narratives particularly around slavery, colonialism, imperial dispossession, unequal development, and continued exploitation are given their due weight across educational frameworks.

We believe these steps are essential for addressing climate change equitably to ensure a sustainable future for all, recognising the UK's responsibilities in the roots of the climate crisis through colonial conquest and in establishing and upholding a global capitalist order that has exploited and made expendable large segments of the world without impunity. We strongly advocate for a just transition that does not neutralise or neglect a historical and race-conscious, decolonial lens of understanding and addressing the climate crisis.

Building More Energy-Efficient Homes

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Housing is central to our world; it is essential for a good and healthy life, accommodating the most important resource of all: people. The housing crisis in the UK is a national emergency, with an unprecedented demand for affordable and quality housing.

The latest housebuilding figures show the UK government did not meet the annual target to build 300,000 homes in England by the mid-2020s. In London, housing stands at the heart of the nation's housing crisis, and in Manchester, the housing market is significantly influenced by financialisation.

The Government and City Hall in London have acknowledged the pressing housing crisis, yet stronger commitments and regulations are essential to meet ambitious targets for building hundreds of thousands of homes. This commitment necessitates a focus on increasing housing supply, implementing robust regulations to prevent exploitation, and prioritising homelessness prevention. The failure to meet these targets has led to a critical shortage of affordable and comfortable homes, exacerbating homelessness.

Building More Energy-Efficient Homes

It is imperative that any housing strategy places families, communities, and vulnerable individuals at its core. We cannot rely on the private sector to addressing the housing emergency. 1.3 million people are on the social housing waiting list, and unless the government transforms the social housing structure, this will only worsen.
Families on lower incomes are disproportionately affected by the crisis. Social housing is being lost through sales, demolition, and conversions. Currently, more than 145,000 children are homeless in temporary accommodation, housing provided by councils and housing associations

The climate crisis and housing crisis are closely interrelated, with each exacerbating the other. Extreme weather events and rising energy costs are compounded by poorly insulated housing. Cold homes pose a significant public health risk, leading to a much higher incidence of poor physical and mental health among residents. This situation strains an already overstretched NHS and contributes to the UK's low productivity (UCL Institute of Health Equity IHE).

Building More Energy-Efficient Homes

To address these issues, the government should, within the first 100 days, launch a robust building programme aimed at safe and well-insulated homes for families in the UK and preserving energy usage. This initiative would focus on:

Building New, Energy-Efficient Social Homes:
To effectively resolve the housing crisis in the UK, it is crucial for the government to prioritise building a minimum of 250,000 new homes annually. These new homes must meet rigorous energy efficiency standards to ensure they are well-insulated, thereby lowering energy bills and promoting sustainability.

To ensure all new homes are affordable for people, it is imperative that affordability is properly defined and prioritised. Research indicates that individuals under thirty are currently spending more than 30% of their income on rent, surpassing other age groups. We define affordability as ensuring monthly rent charges do not exceed 30% of the median renting household's income. This criterion should guide policies and initiatives aimed at addressing the housing crisis, ensuring that housing options are financially viable for all demographics.

Building More Energy-Efficient Homes

Improving Existing Homes:
Upgrading insulation, installing energy-efficient windows, and revising heating systems to create healthier living environments and lower energy bills for families.

Promoting Renewable Energy:
Integrating renewable energy sources, such as solar panels and heat pumps, into both new and existing homes to further reduce carbon emissions.

Grenfell Tower Inquiry Recommendations:
Incorporating the Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations into housing policies is crucial to prevent future tragedies. Seven years after the Grenfell Tower fire, these recommendations should be implemented for both new and existing homes, particularly social housing. This includes ensuring robust evacuation plans are in place specifically tailored for disabled residents living in high-rise flats.

Build More Energy-Efficient Homes

Addressing the health inequalities of poor housing conditions:

Addressing the health impacts of poor housing conditions is crucial. Such conditions are associated with a spectrum of health issues including respiratory diseases like asthma, cardiovascular diseases, injuries, mental health disorders, and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and influenza.

Hospitals within Barts Health NHS Trust, which serve East London including The Royal London Hospital, St Bartholomew's Hospital, Mile End Hospital, Newham Hospital, and Whipps Cross Hospital, grapple daily with health challenges exacerbated by inadequate housing. This demonstrates the regional health disparities, particularly in East London, where pockets of high poverty rates persist. An illustrative analogy is the loss of approximately one year in life expectancy for every station eastbound on the Jubilee Line from Westminster to Canning Town. Research indicates that ethnic groups are disproportionately affected by issues such as mould and dampness in housing. We recommend collaborative efforts between the government and NHS to identify and support individuals whose health suffers due to poor housing conditions.

Building More Energy-Efficient Homes

Implementing these measures can lead to warmer, healthier homes, reduce energy consumption, and significantly contribute to addressing both the housing crisis, racial disparities, and climate change.

Regulation and Oversight of the Private Rental Sector

Regulation and Oversight of the Private Rental Sector

Abolish Section 21 and Implement the Renters Reform Bill

Amidst a housing shortage and lengthy social housing waitlists, renting has become the sole choice for countless individuals. Yet, it's often unaffordable and unattainable, pushing nearly 5 million adults to live with their parents, postponing milestones like marriage and starting families. Today, young people face greater challenges in buying homes compared to past decades, exacerbated by a severe lack of social housing. Given renting's pivotal role as a housing pathway, transforming the rental sector is imperative to foster a healthier society with secure homes.

Under Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988, if your landlord wants you to vacate the property, they may suggest an earlier move-out date at any time. This is the one legal private route landlords can evict tenants from their rental property without giving a reason with just two months' notice. Last year, Shelter reported a concerning trend: Section 21 court proceedings reached a seven-year peak. This trend significantly contributes to the increasing homelessness crisis.

Regulation and Oversight of the Private Rental Sector

Average rental prices in the UK have climbed to a record high. Rents have now risen by 8.8 per cent across the country, with prices up by as much as 20 per cent in some areas and renters encounter minimal protection and security regarding their homes. The renting system is failing and urgently requires comprehensive reform.

We advise the next government to deliver the Renter Reform Bill
within the first one hundred days of governance to reform the private rental sector. Shelter describes this bill as a "once-in-a-generation opportunity." Introduced in May 2023, the bill aims to provide private tenants with better protection against section 21, rising rent rates, substandard rental properties, preventing bidding wars, no-fault evictions, and discrimination due to family status or low income.

Regulatory bodies need to be appointed to monitor and enforce compliance
against landlords and rental agencies who exploit the vulnerable rental market.

Regulation and Oversight of the Private Rental Sector

Explicitly prohibit landlords and rental agencies soliciting or accepting bids,
which has caused a bidding war crisis. Bidding wars in the rental market, where prospective renters offer more than the asking price or several months of rent upfront, have become increasingly common in high-demand areas. This practice, driven by the desperation to secure housing, has several implications and raises important considerations for renters, landlords, and policymakers.

Strengthen tenant advocacy organisations and support services
to provide legal assistance, counselling and advocacy for renters who face unfair practices in the rental market.

Over 90,000 households in England were threatened with eviction. Scrapping Section 21 could eradicate these issues and transform the UK housing rental market.

Scrap Anti-Protest Laws

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Society belongs to all of us. In our democratic society, it is crucial to protect the right to advocate for change, build solidarity, and unite for collective action. Protesting is not just a right; it is a powerful movement that brings together people from diverse backgrounds to push for transformative change.

Historically, protests in the UK have been instrumental in achieving significant progress on issues such as women's rights, anti-apartheid, criminal justice reform, anti-racism, human rights, immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, and climate change. Examples include the Bristol bus boycott, actions by the Stansted 15, and the global Black Lives Matter civil rights movement of 2020. These protests reflect societal attitudes, drive democratic evolution, and highlight urgent issues requiring structural change.

Protests serve as a vital bridge for communication between government and society, compelling those in power to listen to community concerns and address systemic issues.

However, recent anti-protest laws passed in England and Wales since 2022 have imposed restrictions on these fundamental rights and freedoms essential to our democracy.

Scrap Anti-Protest Laws

As we enter the first 100 days of this government, we urge for:

Terminate restrictive measures on protesting:
The restrictive measures on protests outlined in the Policing, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023 in England and Wales should be repealed.

Defend the freedom of expression:
It is important to preserve the freedom of expression as this could discourage the public of civic engagement. The principles of Article 11 must be upheld, which ensures that everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Supporting Legal Protections:
Promote legal protections for protesters in the UK against unjustified arrests, harsh penalties, or disproportionate use of force. This includes advocating for legal aid and support services to ensure fair treatment in legal proceedings related to protests.

Scrap Anti-Protest Laws

Ensuring Police Accountability:
Advocate for transparency and accountability in the enforcement of protest laws by condemning arbitrary arrests and disproportionate use of force. Push for measures that require clear justification and oversight when police impose conditions or intervene during protests.

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