Victoria Clutton – written evidence (CCE0001)

My name is Victoria Clutton. I am a citizen submitting this document in a personal capacity.

1. I think citizenship is belonging to a particular political system and associated set of social institutions. This encompasses both the benefits and responsibilities associated with that membership.
I think civic engagement is the ability to participate in the political process, run for political office, and make your issues and voice heard.
These things matter because if a political system does not honestly reflect the needs and wishes of the populace it governs then people aren’t able to live the best, most effective versions of their lives. In the most extreme cases ignorance of the needs and wishes of the populace causes unnecessary suffering, death and loss of human rights. I think this illustrates the relationship between identity and citizenship or civic engagement. Identity is a useful concept as a short hand for a particular set of needs and beliefs and cultural norms. Identity has limits as a concept because most people don’t fit neatly within the agreed modal incarnation of a particular identity but as base heuristic, making sure that the identities that make up your citizenship all have access to means of civic engagement is a really good idea. If you want to make sure a political system reflects the populace then a good start is having the political ruling class embody or at least engage with the full range of identities represented in the populace.

2. Speaking as a disabled person, you could take our human rights seriously, take including us in society seriously and engage with us better when making decisions about our lives. Accessibility to the political process is a problem, accessibility to legal support is a problem. If you want disabled people to feel more like citizens, giving them the same rights (not the same outcomes, the same rights) as other citizens would be a great place to start. For evidence that disabled people do not currently enjoy the same human rights as the rest of the populace, please see the UN report on human rights in the UK ( accessible at: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/InquiryProcedure.aspx)

4. I would like to see the voting age lowered to 16. If you can legally have a child and drive a car, you are deemed legally responsible for your life the lives of others. Voting is being responsible for your life and the lives of your fellow citizens, it doesn’t make sense to me that we deem people responsible for those things at different ages.
Voting registration legislation should not be tightened, eg requiring a driving license or a passport to register. Voter fraud is a tiny tiny problem, well below the threshold where it could ever be expected to be statistically or absolutely significant. Tightening voter registration disadvantages the poor, the elderly, the disabled, immigrants and women through a combination of creating a financial and accessibility bar to entry for the right to vote and/or making it more difficult to vote if your name or personal details change.
I would like to see us move away from a first past the post system. It encourages 2 party politics, partisanship, encourages gerrymandering and decreases civic engagement because people know how much their vote matters depends strongly on where they live. Why bother to vote if you live in the safe seat of another party. At the very least I would think that a voting system that didn’t so strongly distort the vote would give the government more information to go on and a better idea of what people actually want.

8. Freedom, tolerance, equal rights, human rights, fairness, openness, prudence, opportunity for all, innovation
Our Syria policy is a threat. Our welfare policy is a threat to the poor and disabled and elderly. Our general lack of tolerance is a particular threat to Muslim and disabled people if the hate crime statistics are anything to go by.

9. Please see everything I’ve said previously about the disabled, poor and elderly. Much of our welfare policy isolates people in these groups and punishes them, sometimes in ways that are arguably criminal. Stop doing that.

10. I think I’ve already defined my view of the relationship between citizenship and civic engagement. I think social cohesion is about defining our society in terms of what we care all care about (freedom, equal rights, opportunity, etc) and encouraging tolerance. Focus on what ties us together instead of cultural or religious differences. Explicitly define British values in our public discourse as a set of values that are independent of cultural or religious norms and show people that other differences don’t really matter that much.

27 July 2017