Civil Society Futures – written evidence (CCE0073)

Civil Society Futures is creating a space for a much needed conversation among those involved in all forms of civic action – from informal networks to large charities, Facebook groups to faith groups. The Inquiry runs from January 2017- January 2019. It is chaired by Julia Unwin the former chief executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and is guided by an independent panel of people with perspectives ranging from theatre making in South Wales to tech investment in Gaza, local government in the North of England to the world’s alliance of civil society organisations. This Inquiry is powered by a collaboration of four organisations: Citizens’ UK, Goldsmiths, University of London; openDemocracy; and Forum for the Future. The Inquiry has been funded by the Baring Foundation, Esmee Fairbairn, Barrow Cadbury, Paul Hamlyn, Lloyds Bank Foundation, City Bridge Trust, Lankelly Chase and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Research support has also been provided by NCVO.

Through a series of open conversations between people across England – face to face and online – we are discussing how the world is changing, how civic action is changing, and how civil society organisations can adapt in order grasp those changes and steer us towards a better society. Community organisers are hosting events across the country, giving people the chance to come together and discuss how civil society is being changed and how it needs to change, what’s working well and who we can all learn from. Qualitative and quantitative research is being undertaken by a team at Goldsmiths to help us understand what’s going on in civil society and what people think needs to happen. Together, this work will contribute to a map of the future of English civil society. The inquiry will host a ‘Civil Society Lab’ to experiment with new forms of civil society organisation and test constraints and enablers for scaling successful elements of civil society today with the aim of learning how to strengthen civil society in the future.

Through our research, conversations and workshops we are investigating how to maximise the positive effects of civil society including those of citizenship and civic engagement. Although our work is only 6 months in the making we have done a survey of relevant literature and begun our qualitative research.

1. What does citizenship and civic engagement mean in the 21st century? Why does it matter, and how does it relate to questions of identity?

1.1 Citizenship and civic engagement relates to the ability of individuals to be members of the public and participants in society and its democratic processes. The ability to exercise citizenship and civic engagement is situated in concerns about a democratic deficit. Prominent reports have observed, ‘[t]he need for change; the need to seek the voice of marginalised and disadvantaged people in decision-making processes is of undeniable and acute local, national and global relevance’ (RSA and JRF consultations, 2017).

1.2 This points to a need to focus on democratic institutions and engagement: how to ensure that marginalised voices are heard in the mainstream and how to create safe places for public debate, at a time of apparently increasing polarisation. Twenty years ago Benjamin Barber (2004:11) talked of ‘the growing incivility of our public discourse’ (betokening an uncivil society), yet after Brexit, and the 2016 US election, as well as the rise of trolling and other abusive behaviour on social media, it could be argued that this ‘incivility’ has reached a new low. Strengthening civil society could help promote a discourse that allows for:
‘The development of shared interests, a willingness to cede some territory to others, the ability to see something of oneself in those who are different and work together more effectively as a result— all these are crucial attributes for effective governance, practical problem-solving and the peaceful resolution of differences.’
(Edwards, 2004:55)

1.3 Yet in Britain, trust in political and other institutions is at a historic low. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2017), between October 2016 and January 2017 ‘trust in government fell from 36% to 26%; in business from 45% to 33% and in the media from 32% to 24%. The authors describe this steep plunge as a ‘crisis of trust’ and Britain itself as being ‘on a cliff edge’. Similarly polling by Ipsos MORI saw trust in politicians in the UK fall from 21% at the end of 2015 to 16% at the end of 2016.

1.4 Britain also has a significant ‘trust gap’ of 19% (second only to the United States) between ‘informed publics’ (‘in the upper income quartile, university educated and with a declared interest in politics and the media’) and those with an income less than £15,000. Moreover both groups have less trust in government this year than they did last year. Amongst the least affluent it has hit a new low of just 20%, but it has also fallen significantly amongst the wealthiest, from 54% in 2016 to 38% in 2017 (Edelman, 2017).

1.5 Citizenship relates to political participation. The Hansard Society’s 2016 Audit, undertaken before the Brexit referendum, found formal political participation had increased overall - with voter turnout in the 2015 general election at 65%, the highest since 2001, and more people claiming to be strong supporters of a political party (41%) than at any time since 2003 – but inequality had also increased: ‘there is now a 37 percentage point difference between the certainty to vote levels of those in social classes AB and DE, an increase of six points in 12 months’ (Hansard Society, 2016, p.6). The audit also highlighted a distinct generational divide, with more than twice as many people aged 65 – 74 years (80%) than 18-24 year olds (39%) saying they were absolutely certain to vote (ibid, p.55).

1.6 At the same time, overall confidence in the system, and especially in people’s ability to influence decisions, is low:

‘Only a third of the public think the system by which Britain is governed works well (33%) with those living furthest from Westminster most likely to be dissatisfied. Just 35% believe that when people like themselves get involved in politics they can change the way the country is run. Only 13% feel they have some influence over decision-making nationally although 41% would like to be involved in decision-making. More people (46%) would like to be involved in local decisions but just 25% currently feel they have some influence at the local level.’
(Hansard Society, 2016, p.6)

1.7 This is the backdrop against which the EU referendum turnout of over 72% took place, apparently bringing to the surface deep divisions of class as well as generation that ‘cannot be divided from the economic dislocation that has taken place since the 1980s’ (Dorling et al 2016). Studies by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Goodwin and Heath, 2016) and the Resolution Foundation (Clarke, 2016) both find that low skilled and working class voters in the most deprived regions were more likely to vote Brexit. This suggests that the ‘democratic deficit’ is not a sign of apathy: people will turn out to vote if they think it will make a difference. 60% of all ‘new voters’ (who had not voted in the 2015 election) voted leave. As Unwin has argued, ‘people in the
overlooked and too often ignored parts of the country ... voted leave because they weren’t satisfied with what they have. And they didn’t feel able to change things’ (2016:4).

1.8 In this context, the voluntary and community sector becomes a vital part of a much wider civil society – not only a collective term for providers of services or meeters of need, but also a catalyst for voluntary action and participation; a promulgator of social values and social justice; and a voice for marginalised and mainstream users, members and communities. Much of the literature posits that citizenship and civic engagement requires an active and vibrant civil society as a vital pre-requisite for a healthy democracy, enabling different voices to be heard and different ideas about the good society, and the values that underpin it, to be contested and debated.

2. Citizenship is partly about membership and belonging. Are there ways we could strengthen people’s identity as citizens, whether they are citizens by birth or naturalisation? Could citizenship ceremonies or events throughout the educational process play a role? Should pride in being or becoming British be encouraged?

2.1 Our qualitative research with communities around England is revealing the importance of place as a site of belonging. But this is most meaningful where networks of trust are strong and people feel that systems of (national and local) government are sufficient to listen and respond to their needs. Citizenship ceremonies or events are likely to quickly be seen as hollowed out of meaning if systems of democratic participation are weak. Dalton (2017) argues that there is a participation gap: the better-off are more engaged in policy while the poorest vote less and lack the resources to lobby for change. Drawing on evidence from the International Social Survey Programme that measured citizen participation in established democracies in 2004 and 2014 he notes that:

*The decline in voting is an obvious and very troubling trend. However, the good news is that democratic institutional reforms and citizen innovation have increased the number and variety of access points that people can use to influence political outcome. The expansion in citizen skills and resources also enables more people to engage in these more demanding forms of participation.*

2.2 He goes on to describe new forms of collective action that point to an interested and involved citizenry – more engaged than their parents’ or grandparents’ generation. However, he is at pains to also point out that while opportunities for participation may have increased they are not equally available to all and there is a sizeable and growing socio-economic participation gap across all types of political action – those with higher levels of education and higher income possess the skills and resources to enable them to participate beyond the voting process. As these opportunities grow so the gap widens between the rich citizenry and the poor citizenry. Our research echoes these findings with all groups recognizing equality as central to community well-being and citizen engagement.

2.3 The participation gap is further aggravated by the processes of privatization in the provision of welfare. It is argued that an emphasis on out-sourcing of council services has detached them from democracy, depoliticising decisions about public welfare and the public good (Croft and Beresford, 1996; Prior et al 1996; Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001, Lister, 2001). If civil society is to offer ‘room for us to engage with neighbours, friends, citizens, strangers who must of necessity live together’ (Barber, *op cit*), then there also need to be mechanisms to enable people to identify and negotiate their common interests. This space is inevitably reduced when councils are overseeing rather than delivering contracts. Our respondents consistently state the
importance of feeling represented and being able to participate in local decision making – both
elements of civic engagement that they perceive as lacking

3. Civic engagement can be seen as both a responsibility and a right of citizenship. Beyond
the existing legal framework, should citizens have additional formal rights and
responsibilities? How do you see the relationship between the two? Should they have
the force of law individually or be presented as reciprocal duties between citizen and
state? How should they be monitored and/or enforced?

3.1 Encouraging active citizenship has been a recurring theme in public policy over at least the
last two decades, from New Labour’s ‘Active Citizens’ and its emphasis on civil renewal (Blunkett,
2003) and ‘double devolution’ (D Miliband, 2006) to David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ and the
‘localism agenda’ (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011). Yet there are
inevitable limits to how much communities can do for themselves, as McCabe argues: ‘While
communities can affect change, there are structural and global factors (from mass unemployment
to the power of multi-national corporations and global warming) that cannot easily be solved at a
nation-state level, let alone a “nano” community level.’ (2010:11). This is particularly true of those
in more deprived communities as 50 years of regeneration initiatives has found (see for example
CDP Editorial Collective, 1977; Faith in the City, 1985; Lister, 2002).

3.2 This new localism has been introduced against a background of austerity and resulting
state retrenchment, with a predicted ‘black hole’ in local government funding of £5.8 billion by
2020 (Local Government Association, 2015). Cuts of 40% to core local authority funding and
welfare reforms have had a cumulative impact, hitting people hardest where deprivation is
greatest, with older, industrial areas and seaside towns worst affected (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013;
Wilson et al, 2013; Corfe, 2017).It is difficult for people and communities to be ‘makers and
shapers’ (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001) when local authorities are needing to be ‘cutters and
shutters’. And it is especially difficult to find equitable solutions to social problems when resources
are unevenly distributed and scarcest where they are needed most.

3.3 Barber (2004) argues that the state plays a vital role in providing a legal and regulatory
framework to support democratic engagement and help to create a level playing field for citizen
participation. But a Big Society does not mean a small state. Indeed, strong democratic institutions
help to make society more civil; they are also necessary to tackle deeper structural problems and
manifestations of social injustice that citizens and communities cannot reach.

3.4 Over the last 50 years there has been a succession of government initiatives aimed at
tackling economic decline in such areas. Notable are the National Community Development
Programme (CDP) of the 1960s and 1970s; Urban Development Corporations in the 1980s; City
Challenge in the 1990s; and the New Deal for Communities in the 2000’s. Some constructed
disadvantaged communities themselves as the problem (in lack of skills, motivation, and
community). Some focused on local agencies and partnerships. Others emphasised ‘enterprise’.
But all failed to address the underlying structural causes and consequences of industrial decline.
As Faith in the City reported, then as now: ‘Viewed against the magnitude of the problem,
government action has been pragmatic: treating the worst evidence of economic decline and
poverty by small-scale intervention’ (1985:173). These same post-industrial areas remain
‘overlooked and too often ignored’ (Unwin, 2016:4).
4. Do current laws encourage active political engagement? What are your views on changes to the franchise for national or local elections, including lowering the voting age? Should changes be made to the voting process or the voting registration process?

4.1 Current laws do not encourage active political engagement where this involves civil society organizations. In its 2012 report, Democratic Audit highlighted the role of independent voluntary associations in supporting and strengthening democracy, counter-balancing the power of the state and the market and holding both to account as well as ‘creating a space in which people can empower themselves in association with others’. The Audit included an assessment of outcomes for civil participation and engagement, including ‘a healthy and vibrant civil society,’ since 2002. It concluded that there had been a modest improvement under new Labour, but the rise of the ‘contract culture’ was a risk to the sector’s independence - something the Deakin Inquiry had pointed out six years earlier.

4.2 While austerity measures have had both direct and indirect impacts on the sector’s voice and independence - for example, through ‘gagging clauses’ in contracts (Independence Panel, 2015) - even more pervasive have been changes in the political environment. Since 2010 there has been mounting criticism of charity campaigning, not least from within government. Organisations such as Oxfam and the Trussell Trust have been much criticised for drawing attention to poverty in the UK today, with both organisations accused of being ‘ overtly political’ (Butler, 2014), and the Trussell Trust being accused by the Department for Work and Pensions (ibid) of ‘drumming up business’. The Red Cross has been admonished for ‘meddling in politics’ after it spoke out about the crisis in the NHS (Phillips, 2016).

4.3 The Institute for Economic Affairs continues to accuse voluntary organisations that campaign of being ‘fake charities and sock puppets’ (Snowden, 2012), arguing that charities should be helping poor people rather than campaigning against the causes of poverty. This argument has carried weight with some parts of government, leading to the now (mostly) rescinded ‘anti-advocacy clause’. It also appears to have implicitly informed Charity Commission guidance on campaigning by charities in the EU referendum, which was much more restrictive than that produced by its counterparts in Scotland and Northern Ireland (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2016; Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, 2016; Office of the Scottish Regulator, 2016).

4.4 Other specific threats to the sector’s voice and independence are identified by the Baring Foundation’s Independence Panel (2015, 2016) and include:

- Commitments to recognise the sector’s right to campaign, and to be consulted at an early stage on policy developments, set out in the Compact between the government and the sector, have been watered down (National Audit Office, 2015);
- The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 (the ‘Lobbying Act’) has created a ‘chilling climate’ for charity campaigners and remains unchanged in spite of recommendations for reform identified by Conservative peer Lord Hodgson (2016); and
- Reform of Judicial Review, particularly the imposition of new financial restrictions, will make it much harder for voluntary organisations to challenge government decisions.

4.5 Civil society has long given rise to calls for social justice, from the abolition of slavery to the (on-going) campaign for the living wage. Its continuing ability to do so should therefore be of central concern to an Select Committee investigation into citizenship and civic
engagement: If ‘the space for civil society is closing’ and developments in the UK are ‘helping to legitimise regressive trends in the treatment of civil society organisations globally’ (CAF, 2016:2) then any attempts to enhance civic engagement should make clear the possible consequences.

4.6 Our own research and that of others has pointed to the enthusiasm amongst young people for civic engagement alongside the frustrations of not being listened to. In this regard, we would support lowering the voting age to 16.

5. What should be the role of education in teaching and encouraging good citizenship? At what stages, from primary school through to university, should it be (a) available, and (b) compulsory? Should there be any exemptions? Should there be more emphasis on political participation, both inside and outside classes? How effective is current teaching? Do the curriculum and the qualifications that are currently offered need amending?

5.1 There is as much empirical evidence in support of the notion that civic education/citizenship studies leads to greater involvement in civic life and volunteering over time as there is against it (Edwards 2014). However, on the whole, those who participate in voluntary associations are more likely to participate in politics, especially if they do so at school or university. This would suggest that encouraging political engagement, citizenship and associational activities throughout education is important. Our respondents also regretted the demise of lifelong learning and felt this deflected from community tolerance and understanding difference. This should also be considered in light of research that points to the markers of poverty and low educational attainment as being the most important factors for civic engagement. Civic education may be useful but it can never replace political reform to alleviate poverty.

6. Do voluntary citizenship programmes such as the National Citizen Service do a good job of creating active citizens? Are they the right length? Should they be compulsory, and if so, when? Should they include a greater political element? Should they lead to a more public citizenship ceremony? Are they good value for money? What other routes exist for creating active citizens?

6.1 In order to understand whether voluntary citizenship programmes work it is necessary to understand what the barriers to volunteering are. According to the Community Life Survey 2015-2016, commissioned by the Cabinet Office, the number of people volunteering has remained stable for many years. Other studies have shown that people are more or less likely to volunteer at different stages in their lives (Mohan, 2015, Brodie et al, 2011): students in full time higher education, are more than twice as likely to volunteer as other age groups (CAF, 2016).

6.2 Lack of time seems to be one barrier preventing more people from volunteering (or volunteering more), when people have busy lives and are already juggling paid work and caring responsibilities (Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), 2013, Brodie et al, 2011). Our research shows that the reality of working life for most people today - insecure, low paid, zero hours contracts - makes it extremely difficult for people to commit to regular volunteering when they are struggling to survive. It also renders calls for time off work to do so unrealistic (Mohan, 2015, Buckingham, 2012, Coote, 2010). In the current economic climate, when resources are scarce, people in low income areas tend to give less priority to community-based activities (Crisp et al, 2016).

6.3 It is equally important to understand what motivates people to participate. The evidence suggests that they do so for personal and social reasons, because of their ‘faith or values, their
sense of community, whether of identity, interest or place, or simply a desire for friendship and conviviality’ (Jochum, et al, 2005:33). Studies show that most people choose to volunteer in the areas of sport and exercise (54%), arts, hobbies and recreational activities (40%) and children’s education / schools (34%) (Buckingham, 2012). In other words, people participate for their own reasons and not in response to government initiatives (Patel, 2016), unless of course they are taking part in action opposing government policy (McCabe, 2010), such as anti-war demonstrations or encouraging people to welcome and support refugees (Citizens UK, 2017).

7. How can society support civic engagement? What responsibility should central government, devolved and local governments, third sector organisations and the individual have for encouraging civic engagement? What can the Government and Parliament do to support civil society initiatives to increase civic engagement?

7.1 Edwards (2014) argues that a strong, diverse and independent civil society ecosystem is most likely to make associational life “a handmaiden of broader social progress” (p.110). Ensuring a strong, independent and diverse civil society requires the creation of an enabling environment for all associational life alongside support for specific forms that are missing from the civil society ecosystem.

7.2 A clear theme in the literature is the need for an active and supportive voluntary and community sector infrastructure that can build relationships within and between communities and between civil society and these other sectors (Crisp, et al, 2016, Bolton, 2015, Moore & Mullins, 2013). The value of infrastructure bodies and LIOs has also been recognised by the Independent Commission on Local Infrastructure (2015), convened by the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action. Organisations that can help groups develop and learn, co-ordinate their activities, represent their interests and connect them to resources and decision-makers. This poses a compelling case for long term investment in local infrastructure that is relevant to the needs and circumstances of the sector, but this requires new models of funding and provision to adapt and change (Independent Commission on Local Infrastructure, 2015).

7.3 In recent years charitable foundations have shown an interest in developing programmes focused on local people and places (see for example, IVAR, 2017, Bolton 2015, 2013, Telfer, 2013, Phillips et al, 2011). Recent projects in this vein include the Big Lottery Fund’s ‘Big Local’ programme, which gave residents in 150 local areas £1million to use to improve their local area, with minimal strings attached (IVAR, 2015) and the RSA’s project within the Connected Communities programme, which aimed to research and strengthen relationships within communities (Parsfield et al, 2015). There is now a growing literature setting out the lessons that can be drawn from such initiatives. It is clear from these studies that place-based initiatives do little to compensate for the massive withdrawal of place-specific statutory funding such as the abandoning of Labour’s regeneration programmes.

7.4 When people in more deprived areas have less ‘community wealth’ to draw on and face greater challenges in securing the necessary skills, knowledge and contacts they need to achieve change (Lindsey, 2013, Moore and Mullins, 2013, Aiken, et al, 2011), voluntarism alone will do little to ameliorate the impact of austerity or the experience of long-term industrial decline on civic engagement. Proposals that seek simply to increase volunteering as a means to build community capacity without recognising the consequences of long term industrial decline and deeply felt, multi-layered forms of deprivation will not be able to effect social change.
7.5 Long-term support includes ongoing funding. As Matthews and Pratt note ‘intermittent or poor funding’ is one of the main reasons that initiatives ‘fizzle out’ (2012:iii). In spite of a growing interest in community enterprise, in practice it is very difficult for community initiatives to be financially self-sustaining (Crisp et al, 2016, Moore and Mullins, 2013).

8. What are the values that all of us who live in Britain should share and support? Can you identify any threats to these values, which affect the citizenship of, for instance, women or various minority groups? If so, how can their citizenship be strengthened?

8.1 If, as so many studies now argue, social, economic and political equality are vital for the health of our societies, our economies and our democracies then values that support equality such as tolerance, non-discrimination and non-violence are the ones most likely to engender trust, mutual understanding and cooperation. This has been broadly voiced by our participants who have focused on the need for more ‘sharing and caring’, for bridges rather than walls.

8.2 A challenge for future civil society may be to maintain a focus on human needs: not just recognising the assets within communities, important though this is (RSA, 2015), but developing people’s capacity to be and do (Sen, 2010, Nussbaum, 2003) shifting attention from ‘the means of living to the actual opportunities of living’ (Sen, 2010:233). This draws attention to people’s needs and aspirations and how these are shaped and constrained by ‘often unjust background conditions’ (Nussbaum, 2003:34) of social and economic deprivation, enabling us to ask different questions about how to promote human flourishing and the kind of society we want to live in. This might mean challenging the idea that economic growth is the ultimate goal for societies, and market mechanisms the most effective way of determining human affairs, and increasing the space for, and autonomy of civil society and voluntary action. How do we promote ties based on moral obligations and relationships, rather than contracts? These questions are particularly important at a time when both economic prosperity and environmental sustainability are so fragile, and the need for fair and just solutions, both locally and globally, is so urgent.

9. Why do so many communities and groups feel “left behind”? Are there any specific factors which act as barriers to active citizenship faced by different communities or groups - white, BME, young, old, rural, urban? How might these barriers be overcome?

9.1 Looking at who volunteers and/or participates in civic activities, the Third Sector Research Centre has shown that there is a relatively narrow ‘civic core’:

‘a group constituting less than 10% of the population contribute between 24% and 51% of the total civic engagement, depending on which dimension is examined. ... The social characteristics of members of these ‘core’ groups are analysed and it is shown that members of the ‘civic core’ are drawn predominantly from the most prosperous, middle-aged and highly educated sections of the population, and that they are most likely to live in the least deprived parts of the country.’

(Mohan and Bulloch, 2013)

9.2 Charitable resources are also unevenly distributed with many more located in more affluent areas (Clifford, 2012) where they are more likely to support cultural activities, rather than ‘urgent needs’, and less reliant on statutory funding or paid staff (Lindsay, 2013). Both Lindsey (2013) and Mohan (2015) attribute this to socioeconomic segregation and varying levels of poverty and affluence with more people in more affluent communities having the time, skills resources and connections to engage in this way. Lindsey and Bulloch (2013) asked respondents if they felt that ‘the communities they live in have the capacity to meet their own needs through
volunteering’. While no-one felt very confident, some in more affluent areas were aware that there were ‘capable and committed’ people (often retirees) with the wealth, skills and time to give to local causes in their community. In contrast people in more deprived areas were more doubtful (Lindsey and Bulloch, 2013).

9.3 However, studies also show that the poorest in society tend to give the highest proportion of their income to charity. In 2010/11, a study by Li (cited in Pudelek, 2013) showed that the poorest 20 per cent gave 3.2 of their monthly income to charity, while the richest 20 per cent gave just 0.9 per cent. This would suggest that the composition of the ‘civic core’ is not indicative of a lack of civic intent on behalf of the poorest in society but rather that you do not have the luxury of time at your disposal to ‘volunteer’ when you are struggling to get by.

9.4 Economic inequality also maps on to disability, ethnicity and age with the young, disabled and people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities experiencing multiple forms of socio-economic disadvantage and often feeling cut adrift, misrepresented and excluded.

10. How do you see the relationship between citizenship and civic engagement on the one hand and social cohesion and integration on the other? What effect does the level of diversity in schools and workplaces have on integration in society as a whole? How can diversity and integration be increased concurrently?

10.1 In the most recent Community Life Survey, 89% of people agreed that ‘their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together’, an increase of 3% on the previous year - the highest level recorded since 2003 (Cabinet Office, 2016). While this finding is very welcome, it must be seen against a rise in reported hate crimes in recent years. Between 2014 and 2015 there was a 326% rise in reported street-based anti-Muslim incidents (Hansard, 29.6.2016). In the days after the EU referendum (23rd- 26th June 2016) there was a 57% increase in reported hate crime, with more incidents reported in areas that voted leave (Stone, 2016) a trend that was sustained for at least another month (Travis, 2016).

10.2 While some have linked a lack of community accord to the effects of spatial segregation, with high concentrations of minority ethnic communities living in separate neighbourhoods from their white British counterparts (Cantle, 2001; Cantle and Kaufmann, 2016), a recent comprehensive review of social scientific evidence has shown that income inequality and deprivation are far more important determinants of community discord in the UK (Demireva, 2015). In its response to the Casey Review (2016), the Runnymede Trust argued that these inequalities are ‘persistent and widespread’, they ‘remain a major barrier in modern Britain, and that responding to these inequalities and creating the condition for everyone to interact as equals should remain the starting point for any integration policy’ (Runnymede Trust, 2016).

10.3 In the media and elsewhere, diversity, integration and immigration are too often conflated in ways that are unhelpful (Demireva, 2015). Immigration has long been high on the list of people’s concerns, with successive polls recording significant majorities in favour of reducing the number of migrants entering the UK (Edelman, 2016, Blinder and Allen, 2016). However, ICM research on public attitudes towards immigration for British Future, undertaken after the Brexit referendum, suggest that ‘beyond the most vocal extremes’ public opinion is more nuanced with most people being ‘anxious reducers ..[...]once one paints a picture of an actual person, rather than a generic figure, even if it is just by stating their job, people are more likely to give them a fair shot at joining our society’ (ICM 2016:12)
10.4 In response to this British Future suggests that a ‘national conversation on immigration is needed so that people’s views are heard and they can have a role in shaping policy in this area: ‘While immigration remains a high profile issue, we are not good at talking about it. This means we do not have the opportunity to put forward our views or to hear the opinions of others. Contested narratives are not articulated and renegotiated; communities are not offered a space in which to come to a consensus about immigration and integration. Talking about immigration and how we live together, and agreeing on what constitutes a decent debate, also helps communities to challenge hate crime and prejudice.’ (Katwala, et al, 2016)

10.5 It is unlikely however that this national conversation will be led by the commercial, mainstream media. This raises the importance of not-for-profit media operating in civil society and in the public interest to better represent the un/misrepresented and highlight important debates and providing a genuinely public sphere.

11. How important are levels of English proficiency for first and second generation immigrants and what could be done to increase them, including through support for ESOL classes? Are there particular barriers faced by newcomers to Britain? Could the naturalisation process, including the citizenship test, be improved and if so, how? [no response]

12. Can you give examples of initiatives and role models that have helped promote a positive vision of British Citizenship within a tolerant and cohesive society?

12.1 Faith Groups also have a long tradition of service and action in civil society spaces. Many traditions have organisational structures which respond to the local, for example in the diocesan structures of the Anglican and Catholic churches. These often mean that they maintain a long-term and very rooted presence in every area, even where many other agencies may have withdrawn. Others draw on their long histories as providers of community support through established charitable organisations. Their values and relationality are often regarded as underpinning effective civil society participation. On the other hand, widespread ideas of faiths as oppressive, sexist, homophobic, evangelical and violent feed in to an idea of them as best kept to the private, not public realm. This tension plays out in a context which depends upon faith groups to plug gaps in services and communities, whilst struggling to talk well about them (Dinham 2015).

12.2 Other new forms of activism are emerging that are much less dependent on formal ‘bricks and mortar’ organizations. Digital technology has enabled people to self organise, building and sustaining new social movements and grassroots campaigns. As Fenton states, this has led to ‘a new means of, and a new meaning of being political’ (2016:25). Social media has also enabled small producers, including local enterprises and small charities, to emerge and develop where previously this would have been difficult’ (McCabe and Harris, 2017a:13). This can be seen in local campaigns in the UK that have been enabled by digital communications, for example:

- Focus E15 is a campaign started in 2013 by young mothers threatened with eviction from the hostel where they were living, after Newham Council cut its funding, to be rehoused outside of London, away from their families and social networks. The campaign came to prominence in 2014 after they occupied a block of flats on a local estate that the council was planning to sell to private developers. Since then they have continued to be active,
building links with and supporting tenants on other estates, including the Guinness Trust-owned Northwold estate in Hackney, a third of which is under threat of demolition, to be replaced by ‘luxury’ flats for sale at market prices.

- Acorn UK was founded in 2014 by private tenants in Easton, Bristol to campaign to ‘end evictions, rip-off tenancy fees and unhealthy housing’ and help communities to organise in support of more ethical housing. It now operates in 8 cities in England and has just successfully won its first national campaign, getting Santander to agree to drop a clause in its contracts requiring landlords to raise rents to the maximum.

- Just Space is an informal alliance of community groups, campaigns and independent organisations established in 2006. It aims to enable Londoners to participate in planning decisions and ensure that those decisions take account of community needs and not just the interests of developers. Recent actions include a public protest in Haringey against selling public assets to private developers (14.2.17) and working with the Chair of the London Assembly Economy Committee, encouraging people to tweet their views on the needs of small enterprises to inform the committee’s deliberations (21.2.17).

12.3 Digital technology changes the dynamics of communication, ostensibly facilitating opportunities for individuals to participate. But this on-line presence is most effective when linked to off-line activities and opportunities to build solidarity (Cammaerts, 2015, Gerbaudo, 2012, Taylor, 2015). For example, 38 Degrees, best known for organising e-petitions has begun to set up local groups, hosting events and organising meetings with MPs (Fenton, 2016). However, the internet and social media in particular, also stands accused of naturalising the segregation of society into echo chambers. Based on the notion that birds of a feather flock together the internet predicts who we are depending on who we follow on Twitter, who we ‘like’ on Facebook, the ads we linger over, producing network analytics that naturalise the segregation it finds and making a commercial and political virtue out of the fact that we tend to be similar to our friends.

12.4 Furthermore, connective activity online does not transcend social and economic inequalities. In the UK almost all of the wealthiest people use the internet while this falls to 58 per cent amongst the lowest income group (less than £12,500) (Dutton et al., 2013). Just as patterns of economic inequality are replicated in access to healthcare and educational attainment (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009) so they map onto access to and uses of technology (Pew, 2015). There is a ‘digital divide’: internet users are still younger, more highly educated and richer than non-users, and more likely to be men than women, and more likely to live in cities. Furthermore, the Oxford Internet Institute point out that the one aspect of internet usage that correlates with social class and educational attainment is use for informational or political purposes (Blank and Groselj, 2015). Social media does not exist in a vacuum. While it has the potential to bring new voices into political debates, it can also reflect and reinforce existing social relations and patterns of privilege. The internet may be democratizing, but more often than not its effects are felt most strongly amongst the middle classes (Fenton, 2016).

12.5 New approaches that promote a more tolerant and cohesive society do seem to be emerging: Community Mutuals, Credit Unions, Community Land Trusts, Co-operative childcare, skills-share schemes etc. While such community action can be valuable, it is often by its nature small-scale ‘and cannot be expected to tackle area-wide disadvantage in isolation’ (Crisp, et al, 2016:i).

12.6 The overriding conclusion of much research in the areas of citizenship and civic engagement is that wider social, political and economic context impacts not only on local areas,
but also on people’s ability to participate and their power to influence the wider determinants of poverty and disadvantage that affect their lives and the life of their community.

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