

A Manifesto For

# A New Social Covenant



Miriam Cates MP  
Danny Kruger MP  
Imogen Sinclair

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Introduction

# The Conservative case for a new social covenant

“The roots of a successful economy are among the households and the communities where people live”



The UK has a social as well as an economic challenge to overcome. Indeed the economic challenge - low productivity, low growth, high taxation and high inflation - are partly caused by the problems in our society.

Too many of us are lonely, or anxious, or unwell. Too many people are out of work, or in prison, or in jobs that simply don't pay enough to keep a family. Communities are hollowed out by economic forces beyond their control. Young people struggle to find a stable job and a secure home, and parents struggle to support children, dependent adults, and their own relationships.

The result is that the state is both too big and too small. Ever-rising demand, particularly in health and welfare, means that government is always growing but also that there is never enough money for the front line.

A strong economy is the only way to finance public services. We need to stimulate the supply side of our economy to boost growth, create well-paid jobs and generate tax revenues. But cutting taxes and regulations is not enough on its own to grow the economy - especially in the places far from London and the South East which have been left behind by globalisation.

The roots of a successful economy are among the households and the communities where people live; where they acquire the habits of resilience and responsibility; where they can play a part in and influence the services their neighbourhood receives; and where they receive the social support that no public service can provide.

Conservatives often focus just on the economic supply side, and leave the social supply side - the institutions of our communities, from the family to the football club - alone. The result is that these institutions occupy an environment dominated by the political Left, who distrust the old-fashioned values of family and neighbourhood life and believe the state is the only proper agency of the common good.

The Left have also significantly influenced the framework of rights and responsibilities that the state upholds and enforces on its citizens - including the rules over immigration, citizenship and border control. The effect of Conservative inaction, and the Left's highly energetic activism, in all these areas has been to weaken our security, our social cohesion and our prosperity.

The New Social Covenant is a vision of a stronger nation, more resilient in the face of shocks and capable of nurturing the roots of economic growth. In our view the purpose of politics is to nurture the conditions in which people can develop the values and skills, and access the opportunities, for success. That means strengthening our families, our communities and the nation: the institutions that make us safe, happy and free, and also make us better neighbours, workers and citizens.

Government should set itself the task of making stronger families, stronger communities and a stronger nation. This Manifesto sets out three policy principles which will help do this.

# 1. Stronger families: Support the household economy

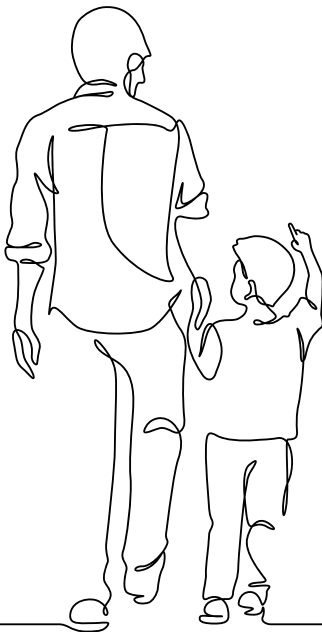
The UK's tax system is one of the most individualistic - and therefore most anti-family - in the developed world. Income tax should take into account people's family circumstances, as it does across Europe, and as it used to in Britain before personal taxation was introduced by Nigel Lawson in 1990.

We should fulfil Lawson's original intention to allow couples to share their personal allowances, so that couples where one partner stays at home to look after children or elderly parents are not penalised.

We also need to redesign childcare and social care to help families make choices that work for them. Currently, the state subsidises a rigid childcare offer which pushes parents of young children to go out to work in order to qualify for help. We know that two thirds of all parents of preschoolers would prefer to work fewer hours so that they can spend more time at home.

Similarly, the state offers more generous support for families who put their elderly parents into residential care, rather than caring for them at home as many older people and their families would if they could afford to.

With both children and the elderly we need to support the natural unit of care, the family - allowing families to choose how to use public money in a way that is best for them and their loved ones.





## 2. Stronger communities: Empower local people to take back control of local life

The UK is one of the most centralised countries in the developed world. Only 5% of taxation is raised locally, compared to 15% in France and 30% in Germany - and only a quarter of the money we raise locally is spent locally. People rightly feel disconnected from the decisions that affect their communities.

Partly this is because the institutions of local life - from parish and town halls, to pubs and post offices and local shops, to charities, faith groups, arts centres, sports clubs and youth groups - have suffered from economic change and public spending cuts. Meanwhile public services are rigidly controlled from the centre, with tiers of management and bureaucracy that disempower both local people and front line public servants, further reducing the quality of local leadership as talented people decline to serve in the community.

Yet the opportunity is there to revive the local economy and help people take back control from Whitehall. The internet is making towns and villages, coastal communities and rural areas economically viable once again. New forms of community governance and public service delivery can empower local people and local organisations to play an active role in neighbourhood life.

We need to seize these opportunities. One mechanism is the Community Covenants outlined in the Government's 2022 Levelling Up White Paper: plans for a local area that are developed and delivered by local people in partnership with public agencies, including councils and government itself. Each area's Covenant will be different, but all will put communities in charge. We need to develop this model and trial it in places across the UK.

### 3. A stronger nation: Restore the basis of the common law

Laws around equality and human rights, originally intended to set out political freedoms and protections against discrimination, have been adapted over time by governments, courts and public bodies, with the effect of widening social divisions and undermining the nation state itself.

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) was drafted by British lawyers in the 1950s. It was designed to bring to a Europe recovering from totalitarianism the benefits of political liberty which had been long enjoyed in the UK under our common law tradition. Yet over time, the ECHR has been interpreted in ways which go far beyond the original expectations of the drafters, allowing the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg to intervene in policy which should be reserved to the British Parliament and Government - including the fundamental power of a sovereign state to control its own borders. The 1998 Human Rights Act which incorporated the ECHR and all the judgments of the Strasbourg court into UK law has further eroded our legal and political traditions.

In the same way the Race Relations Act of 1976 gave effect to the traditional legal principle that every citizen is equal, and imposed a new duty on public bodies to promote equality between different ethnic groups. This noble aspiration has since been overlaid, particularly via the 2010 Equality Act, with a set of complicated expectations for the treatment of various different groups. These expectations often conflict with each other, and with common sense.



The UK's rights framework regulates the relations of citizens with each other and with the government. It should protect individuals from discrimination, promote good relations among different communities, and uphold the sovereignty of our country - not create social division and undermine the state. We need to review the rights framework as it currently operates and, where necessary, reform it so that it supports the traditional liberties and responsibilities of the British people enshrined in statute and common law.

## About the New Social Covenant Unit

Established in 2021 by Miriam Cates MP and Danny Kruger MP, the New Social Covenant Unit (the NSCU) exists to share an old-new set of ideas in British politics. We believe that the primary purpose of public policy should be to strengthen families, communities, and the nation: the associations that make individuals happy, safe and free. Given the unique threats and opportunities of our age we need a 'new social covenant': a restatement and adaptation of these ideas for the 21st century.

The New Social Covenant Unit is not a think-tank. We exist to promote ideas and policy suggestions from a range of people who agree with aspects of – not necessarily all – the ideas we believe in. Rather than claiming to have all the answers, we want to help British politics pivot towards the great opportunities of the new era we are in – to create a more local, more connected, more sustainable life for all. Different people will have different ideas of how to make this happen, and differences and disagreements are fruitful.

### Miriam Cates MP (Co-Chair, NSCU)

Miriam was elected MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge in 2019. She is a community volunteer and a former science teacher.

### Danny Kruger MP (Co-Chair, NSCU)

Danny was elected MP for Devizes in 2019. He is a former adviser to Government on civil society policy, and the founder and former CEO of two charities working with prisoners and young people at risk.

### Imogen Sinclair (Director, NSCU)

Imogen has several years' experience working in policy and Parliament. She authored 'Community Capital' (2019) for the Centre for Social Justice and is a visiting fellow at St Mary's University Institute of Theology and Liberal Arts.

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