

Dear Colleagues,

2023#2 Making The Case ... for Responsibility

Thank you to everybody who submitted a response to help us Make The Case for Freedom. Now that this year's round of elections are behind us, we anticipate inviting representatives from CPF groups that submitted some of the most interesting ideas to help develop content for a leaflet outlining the most promising ideas discussed.

This briefing paper is the third in our series of consultations aimed at strengthening grassroots Conservatism. These focus on "Making the Case for Conservatism" by building on the Conservative values previously identified by the Party membership and applying them to what have been called the "big four" priorities facing the country—namely, the cost of living, energy security, the NHS, and our place on the world stage.

Make sure that your Conservative Association or Federation has a date in the diary to be a part of this process—and be sure to invite as many members and supporters as possible. As usual, please send your responses to the questions in this briefing paper to CPF.Papers@conservatives.com, using the associated response form published alongside the paper on the CPF website. The deadline for submitting your response is 2nd July. We aim to publish our next discussion paper on 3rd July.

We look forward to hearing your views,

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Setting the scene

“I believe that a system built around the free exchange of goods and services, the responsibility of the individual, the division of labour – is the morally right way to organise our economy.” (Rishi Sunak, 24 February 2022)¹

“The current political crises in Washington and London and the existential threat to the free world from authoritarian regimes can be attributed to the eroding of personal responsibility in the West. ... Freedom without responsibility leads to anarchy; responsibility without freedom leads to tyranny.” (Dr Paul Wong, 2019)²

In recent years, traditional views about what it means to be responsible have been challenged by shifting social and economic landscapes. The rise of individualism, technological advancements and persistent inequalities have created a complex environment in which the concept of responsibility is no longer as straightforward as it once was:

Individualism: With the rise of individualism,³ there has been a shift away from collective responsibility towards a greater emphasis on personal responsibility. This has led to a greater focus on individual rights and freedoms, which can result in a decreased sense of obligation to others outside of one’s personal circles.⁴ On the other hand, trends also indicate that altruism is everywhere on the rise. Globally, “More people donated money to charity in 2021 than in any year of the previous decade” and the UK is consistently ranked in the top five countries for the proportion of people donating money to charity.⁵

Technological advancements: The rapid pace of technological advancements⁶ has led to increased complexity in many areas of life, making it more difficult to assign responsibility. For example, in the context of social media, it can be difficult to determine who is responsible for harmful content or cyberbullying, as the responsibility may be spread across multiple parties such as platform providers, users and regulators.

Inequality: Despite record investment in the NHS,⁷ health inequalities remain stubbornly high across the country.⁸ Although equality of wealth⁹ and equality of opportunity (or social mobility)¹⁰ in the UK are comparable to many other developed nations, the persistent gap between rich and poor¹¹ also challenges traditional views about responsibility, particularly in relation to the provision of social welfare. This can lead to a sense of unfairness¹² and contribute to a breakdown in social cohesion.¹³

There is therefore a growing need to revisit and re-evaluate traditional views about responsibility, and to explore how they can be adapted to better serve contemporary society. In this context, it is important to consider the meaning and value of responsibility, and how it can be applied in practical terms to address some of the most pressing issues we face in the UK today. This is essential for all those who are interested in promoting a more responsible and sustainable future for our society.

Questions for discussion

1. How would you make the case for responsibility as a distinctive Conservative value and the ways in which it should be a guiding principle in policymaking?
2. How might the importance and benefits of responsibility for both individuals and society be effectively communicated, encouraged and fostered in individuals and communities, especially among young people and those who may not prioritise it?

3. How should Conservatives balance the value of personal responsibility with the need for a social safety net for those who are truly in need?
4. What are the major threats to responsibility and how can society protect against those who may abuse responsibility to take advantage of others or to justify discrimination and unfair treatment of marginalised groups?
5. How might the responsibilities of the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland be better balanced with those of the UK government?
6. How might specific policies in each of the following areas better reflect Conservative views of responsibility?
 - i. Cost of living
 - ii. Energy security
 - iii. Health and social care
 - iv. Global influence
7. Is there any other observation you would like to make?

Sources and Further Details

Cover photo: Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society © 2016 Utah State Historical Society: *Statue of Responsibility* at American Fork, Utah, designed by Gary Lee Price, <https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6zd26q0>

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