

2 July 2018

Dear John,

As Vice Chairman of the Conservative Party for Policy, I am delighted to respond to the Conservative Policy Forum's summary paper on 'Conservative Values', at the same time as update you on progress that has been made in policy development over recent months.

I am grateful to you and the whole team at the CPF for the work that has gone into this project. It is extremely impressive that you received submissions from well over a hundred CPF groups, representing over 1,200 members across the country. It is also encouraging that over 4,000 party members responded to the CPF's recent online poll and agreed that all of the Conservative values identified by the CPF are important. This demonstrates the huge interest in policy making that exists in our Party, which the CPF is harnessing to great effect.

Policy making over the course of this Parliament will perhaps be more important than in any time in recent memory. The manifesto that we produce for the next general election will be the first following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. As we seek to seize the opportunities that Brexit presents, we will have greater scope to make changes to our domestic legislation than in any Parliament for over 40 years. This presents a huge opportunity for our Party.

Working with the CPF, alongside our MPs, councillors, PCCs, regional mayors, affiliate groups and our devolved partners in Wales and Scotland, I want to ensure that all parts of our Party are able to feed in to the policy process and that we make the most of all the talent that exists among Conservatives across the country.

This is why, at Spring Forum, I announced the creation of the Conservative Policy Network, of which CPF is an integral part as the voice of the Conservative membership, in order to ensure that as a wider Conservative family, we all have the opportunity to contribute to policy making, as well as looking not just to contribute to the next general election manifesto, but manifesto processes as we prepare for local, PCC, regional and devolved elections in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

On 1 July, the Prime Minister also announced the establishment of a Conservative Policy Commission, which I have been appointed to Chair. I believe that the Commission will be an important moment for Conservative policy development, ensuring that we can begin to generate new policy ideas for the future of the country for 2020 and beyond.

As the Prime Minister herself stated in her important article in the Sunday Telegraph, which I would encourage all CPF members to read (text in appendix), we ‘need to look towards the brighter future that we will build after we have left the EU. In a world of technological and social change, we need to think creatively about how to help the UK to prosper. So, guided by the values that have shaped our approach in government over the last eight years, the Conservative Party is now about to enter a new phase of renewal in government’.

The new Commission will ‘go out and engage with people in every part of the United Kingdom to develop new policies that can improve the lives of people in our country. How we maintain a strong economy, reform and improve our public services, build a fairer society, sustain our democracy, and forge a new global role for Britain. The Commission’s task forces will undertake the most extensive exercise of policy renewal ever conducted by a party in government. I want it to produce fresh, innovative thinking. Above all, I want to listen to the communities who voted for change two years ago’.

As Chair of the Policy Commission, I believe that CPF should also and will have an important role to play in the Commission’s work, which is why I will be working with the CPF board to ensure that CPF members are engaged in the process as it goes forwards. I have been highly impressed by previous CPF responses on the Environment and Youth Engagement that have been presented to me alongside James Marshall, Director of the No 10 Policy Unit, and I know that CPF members will want to engage with the Commission’s work and provide quality policy ideas for the future.

To update members on what has been announced so far, the Commission will consist of five Task Forces, which will be tasked with answering key questions that they will be set. The Task Forces to be established cover some of the key challenges for Britain as we approach the next decade:

- ***Energising our economy*** – how we drive technological opportunity whilst guaranteeing good jobs; harness markets to shared regional prosperity; and invest in infrastructure *and* support clean growth.
- ***Transforming our public services*** – how we understand the future responsibilities, technologies and delivery role for high quality public services.
- ***Building a fairer society*** – how we use government to drive social reform and social mobility; remove the remaining barriers to disability; promote integration and equality.
- ***Sustaining our democracy*** – anticipating the future devolution framework across the United Kingdom, how we support the health of our local

democracy; how we encourage participation and representation of young people in civic life.

- ***Shaping a Global Britain*** – how we balance our future economic, strategic and humanitarian needs and responsibilities in the world.

Each Task Force will be chaired by two of our backbench MPs, with a wider membership that will include the relevant Chair of the 1922/Association of Conservative Peers Backbench Committee and other Conservative MPs. For each taskforce, there will be three non-parliamentary Conservative members, to be agreed over the summer by the Party Chairman.

Each Task Force will also have a secretariat and policy adviser appointed from the Conservative Research Department that will oversee the organisation and smooth running of each task force. The Commission will be run from CCHQ, not Whitehall, and I want to ensure that the wider membership are fully able to contribute to the work of the Commission.

In what I envisage will be the largest single exercise of its kind ever undertaken by the Conservative Party in government, each Task Force will be committed to a monthly evidence gathering session across the country, visiting every region and where applicable the devolved nations. Across five Task Forces, this will mean that there will be at least thirty evidence sessions taking place across the country from September to late Spring 2019. It is vital that the Task Forces take this opportunity to listen to and hear all communities, businesses and charities, and both our public services and private sectors, who face future challenges and can identify opportunities ahead. I also want Task Forces to be engaging with CPF groups across the country and will be liaising with the CPF board to ensure that we can work together to provide significant CPF input into the Commission's work. Each Task Force will be set around twenty questions to answer as part of their work, and I am keen that the opportunity to answer these questions is also put to CPF members once they have been finalised.

Each Task Force will then produce an Interim Report, based upon the questions that they have been set and the evidence that they have gathered. These will be published in stages in Summer 2019. I view this as an opportunity to trial ideas, but also to allow for a consultative period with the party membership and the wider public. Final Reports for each Task Force will then be published around Conference 2019, providing the Conservative Party with a wealth of ideas to take forward, either in government or as part of a future manifesto process for 2022.

Reflecting on the recent Conservative Values paper, I recognise that one of the challenges in discussing Conservative values is that 'conservatism' itself is so hard to define. As the late Lord Hailsham of St Marylebone put it, 'Conservatism

is not so much a philosophy as an attitude, a constant force, performing a timeless function in the development of a free society'. As a Party, we pride ourselves on our pragmatic approach to politics – that we always put 'what works' ahead of political ideology. This is all the more apparent at a time when the Labour Party has embraced a far-left version of socialism, putting blind faith in their ideology without regard to the disastrous consequences it would have on the lives of ordinary people were it ever to be implemented.

I was pleased to read that the term One Nation Conservatism continues to resonate within our Party. First coined by Stanley Baldwin, but recalling the words and approach of Benjamin Disraeli, it is a term that encapsulates the best traditions of the Conservative Party – recognising that we seek to govern in the interests of the whole country, and that we cannot truly make progress as a nation if one part is left behind. That is why, in her first speech on the steps of Downing Street, the Prime Minister pledged to lead a One Nation Government – one which believes in 'a union not just between the nations of the United Kingdom but between all of our citizens, every one of us, whoever we are and wherever we're from'. It is why she said that our task would be to build a country that works not just for a privileged few, but for every one of us. That remains our mission today.

CPF members identified education and vocational training as the area in which the most persistent inequalities exist. We have made important progress in this area – with 1.9 million more children being taught in schools rated good or outstanding than in 2010 – but there is more to be done. Nobody's background should determine their life chances. That is why the Prime Minister has spoken of her desire for Britain to be the world's great meritocracy – as she put it, 'a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow'. So earlier this year we announced plans to support underperforming schools and increase opportunities, helping more children fulfil their potential. And we are taking skills seriously with new T-levels for post-16 education, and a new generation of Technology Institutes in every major city in England providing the skills local employers need.

As CPF members identified, making a success of Brexit will be crucial. The phase one agreement in December will allow us to get on to the vital trade negotiations and get quick agreement to an implementation period in the best interests of people and businesses in the UK and across the continent. But Brexit will not be the limit of our ambitions. We also have to carry on making a difference here and now on the issues that matter to people's daily lives: taking a balanced approach to government spending, building the homes our country needs, improving standards in our schools and colleges, developing a sustainable long-term plan for the NHS and protecting the environment.

That also means reforming our political system to ensure that our democracy is both fair and strong. We want to help the House of Lords to reduce in size, and in the House of Commons we want to ensure fair and equal representation for the voting public by equalising the size of constituencies to ensure everyone's vote will carry equal weight. We also need to ensure the integrity of our democracy by tackling electoral fraud, of which there have been worrying reports over recent years. That is why in this year's local elections the Government ran pilots in five areas to require voters to produce ID before being issued with a ballot paper. As has been pointed out, it is currently harder to take out a library book or collect a parcel at a post office than it is to vote – so we need to take action to ensure that people have confidence in our democracy.

These are just some of the ways in which, working together, we can build a Britain fit for the future. In doing so, we will be guided at all times by our Conservative values – and we will utilise the experience, intelligence and creativity of CPF members as we develop policy solutions to the most pressing issues our country faces.

I want to ensure that as Chair of the Policy Commission, as Vice Chair for Policy, CPF members and groups feel that I am approachable and want to engage with them. I am arranging to participate in a CPF Webinar in August to discuss future policy development and the Commission's work, and would be delighted to consider speaking at any wider CPF event in the future— please pass my email chris.skidmore@conservatives.com on to any CPF group that would like me to address them, and I will try my best to arrange this over the coming year. I want to ensure that, when it comes to our policy development, we work together as one Conservative family, with an open and engaging manifesto process, ensuring that the voice of the membership is listened to and heard.



Chris Skidmore

Chair, Conservative Policy Commission and Vice Chair for Policy

Appendix: The Prime Minister's Article in 1 July Sunday Telegraph: Full Text

I am setting up a new Policy Commission to speak with people around Britain and generate fresh ideas

When I became Prime Minister two years ago I committed to lead a government that put the interests of working people first. I set out my vision of a stronger and fairer Britain, where each one of us, regardless of our background, has the chance to go as far as our talents and hard work will take us. A United Kingdom that forges a bold and positive role for itself in the world. A country that works not just for a few, but for every one of us.

Throughout the ups and downs of the last two years, never for a moment has my belief in that better future for our country wavered, and my determination to help deliver it burns as fiercely today as when I stood outside Downing Street for the very first time as Prime Minister.

An essential step towards that future is negotiating the best [Brexit](#) deal for Britain. The EU Withdrawal Act is now on the statute books, and this month we will publish a White Paper setting out in detail what our future relationship with the EU should look like and how we will get there.

But building a stronger and a fairer country requires us to do more. Because the Brexit vote was also a judgement on how our economy and society works for people. That is why from the start of my premiership I have made economic and social reform a priority, alongside Brexit.

In two years we have achieved a lot. Our Modern Industrial Strategy is fixing the foundations of our economy, identifying areas of strategic opportunity for the future and creating good jobs across the country. We are using the fruits of a strong economy and record employment to invest in vital public services, like our NHS which will receive an extra £394 million a week under our long-term plan for its future.

1.9 million more children are now in good or outstanding schools and we are extending the opportunities they have to develop their skills by transforming technical education with new high-quality T-levels. More new homes were completed last year than in all but one of the last thirty years, and we are overhauling the planning rules so that even more people can get on the housing ladder.

From shining a light on racial disparities to inform the fight against racism to cracking down on the causes of the gender pay gap by introducing shared parental leave and extending childcare, Conservatives are tackling the injustices that hold people back. In everything we do, we are guided by the belief that whatever your background, age, gender, sexuality, religion, disability – we are all equal citizens of our democracy and equally deserving of freedom, respect and opportunity.

As we carry on delivering on this strong agenda of reform, we also need to look towards the brighter future that we will build after we have left the EU. In a world of technological and social change, we need to think creatively about how to help the UK to prosper. So, guided

by the values that have shaped our approach in government over the last eight years, [the Conservative Party](#) is now about to enter a new phase of renewal in government.

On Sunday I am launching a Conservative Policy Commission, which will go out and engage with people in every part of the United Kingdom to develop new policies that can improve the lives of people in our country. How we maintain a strong economy, reform and improve our public services, build a fairer society, sustain our democracy, and forge a new global role for Britain.

The Commission's task forces will undertake the most extensive exercise of policy renewal ever conducted by a party in government. I want it to produce fresh, innovative thinking. Above all, I want to listen to the communities who voted for change two years ago.

As I enter my third year as Prime Minister I am clear about my mission. To deliver a Brexit deal that sets the UK up to succeed; to press on with a programme of economic and social reform; and to renew my Party in government to turn our vision of a stronger and fairer United Kingdom into a reality for all our citizens.