

# 7. DEMOCRACY & DEVOLUTION

*"We are looking to London and Manchester as examples of how devolution can give local communities the power to raise local issues and have a handle on the local solutions. This, to us, is at the heart of devolution – not a political football, nor a party-political power-play, but an opportunity to devolve decision-making to communities."*

**TOBY QUIBELL,**  
TYNE & WEAR CITIZENS



## OUR TRACK RECORD

- 1. Trained leaders in our member institutions to register thousands of people to vote across our local chapters, especially those least likely to participate in elections;**
- 2. Organised Accountability Assemblies to build relationships with the candidates seeking to lead devolved administrations in Wales, London, Greater Manchester, North Tyneside, West Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire and the West Midlands;**
- 3. Worked with schools and colleges in Wales to encourage participation of 16 and 17 year olds in Senedd elections.**

### Campaign overview

The core of Citizens UK's vision is of a vibrant and inclusive democracy with civil society at its heart. At a time when increasing numbers of citizens are sceptical about what democracy can deliver, we want to see power and decisions about resources brought closer to local people, and to extend the reach of our democracy to more young people.

### What are we trying to change?

Faith in our democracy is at a low ebb. In recent polling, when asked how well they believe politicians understand the lives of people like you, a total of 78 per cent of voting adults answered 'badly'. Young people are particularly disaffected, with 18 to 24-year-olds least likely to say that democracy serves them well (just 19 per cent say it operates well against 55 per cent who say badly). Only six per cent believe voters have the most powerful influence on government decision making, with around half of all adults saying that party donors, businesses or lobby groups wield the greatest power.<sup>19</sup> We believe that we can change this by bringing decisions closer to the people affected, and enabling more people to actively participate in democracy.

Two of the biggest themes in UK politics at the moment are Levelling-up and devolution. As we have expanded our alliances into new areas of the UK, we have experienced the opportunities created through new regional Mayors in England and devolution to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We want the UK Government to push powers closer to citizens in more areas, in a way that also increases funding and support to areas that need it most. We also want to make this election about enfranchisement rather than disenfranchisement, with a call for 'votes at 16'.

### How are people in our communities affected?

"It is our experience that devolution creates real hope that local communities can engage in decision making processes that will help shape local policies, in areas such as transport and mental health services. It also provides opportunities to hold local leaders accountable for local services."

**SONIA DENHAM, CO-CHAIR OF GREATER MANCHESTER CITIZENS**

"We are proud to have worked together with Welsh Government to achieve a commitment to pay the Real Living Wage for Careworkers in Wales. Just this year an additional £70 million has been earmarked to lift the pay of 90,000 workers in the social care sector in Wales to the new Real Living Wage rate. I don't think we would have achieved that without devolution. Devolution has allowed Wales to be a trailblazer in other ways too – such as empowering 16 and 17-year-olds to vote."

**DR DEBORAH HANN, CO-CHAIR OF CITIZENS CYMRU WALES**

"In our rural part of the South West, we recently went through a local government reorganisation, with many small councils across a wide and sparsely-populated area being replaced by one unitary authority – Somerset Council. I'd like to see the UK Government devolve more powers so that we can do things like create an investment fund for establishing new business opportunities and skills education programmes, ensure an integrated public transport system with affordable travel schemes, or even fund collaborative partnerships and programmes for health and social care, business and education, and the arts. The powers they have in Greater Manchester, or across the Bristol Channel in Wales make us green with envy."

**CHRIS WADDILOVE, CITIZENS SOMERSET**

"I attend Cardinal Newman Catholic School, in Brighton. We're members of Brighton & Hove Citizens.

When I go up the i360 - a huge tower from the top of which you can see the whole of Brighton and Hove - I can see new buildings being built across my city. I can see many parks dotting the landscape. I can see some shops along the seafront boarded up as they've gone out of business. I can see buses up and down my city's roads. I can see ambulances and police cars. I can spot where Council offices are. I can see my city. Many things happen in front of my eyes, every day. Decisions are made about my life, the lives of my family and friends, day in, day out.

The decisions made about me are often beyond my control. Thankfully, Citizens provides me with the power I need to address some of that.

What would help even more is if I was able to vote! I have opinions. I want to make sure that they matter. My voice matters. My life matters. And I want to vote on the issues that matter to me and that will affect me for years to come."

**WILLIAM, IS 16 YEARS OLD AND LIVES IN BRIGHTON AND HOVE**

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SOLUTIONS WE THINK MIGHT HELP?

1. Greater devolution of power and resources to nations, regions and communities across the UK..
2. Change the legal voting age to 16 in future General and Local Elections.

