

Re:State

Re:Think

Bold ideas to remake
the State

Claire Ainsley • Rosie Beacon • Mike Bracken CBE • Rt Hon Mayor Andy Burnham • Deborah Cadman OBE • Rt Hon Claire Coutinho MP • Lord Nigel Crisp KCB • Chris Curtis MP • Dr Penny Dash • Rt Hon Lord Michael Gove • Professor Donna Hall CBE • Sir David Haslam CBE • Joe Hill • Paul Johnson CBE • Dr Simon Kaye • Polly Mackenzie • Rt Hon Lord Francis Maude • Lord Jim O'Neill • Charlotte Pickles • Lord Mark Sedwill GCMG • Professor Tim Spector OBE • Sir Andy Street CBE • Rachel Wolf •

About *Re:State*

Re:State is established as the leading Westminster think tank for public service reform. *Re:State* was formerly *Reform* think tank.

We believe that the State has a fundamental role to play in enabling individuals, families and communities to thrive. But our vision is one in which the State delivers only the services that it is best placed to deliver, within sound public finances, and where both decision-making and delivery is devolved to the most appropriate level. We are committed to driving systemic change that will deliver better outcomes for all.

We are determinedly independent and strictly non-party in our approach. This is reflected in our cross-party Advisory Board and our events programme which seeks to convene likeminded reformers from across the political spectrum.

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Re:Imagining the State



Charlotte Pickles

Director
Re:State

Britain is broken. That is not a cry of despair, but a call to radical action. We have been here before – our economy flatlining, our social fabric unravelling, our democracy in flux – and recognising the scale of the challenge, previous generations boldly remade the State. We can do so again today.

In 1942, Beveridge wrote “a revolutionary moment in the world’s history is a time for revolutions, not for patching”. In just a few short years Britain built the modern welfare state: the NHS, a comprehensive social security system, free education for all, hundreds of thousands of council homes and entirely new towns. It was a period in which government stepped up and delivered radical reform commensurate with the scale of the challenge.

More than 80 years later, that post-war settlement is crumbling, the institutions and models created no longer meet the challenges of a radically changed world. Yet in

the wake of the Global Financial Crash, Brexit, a global pandemic, war in Europe and the collapse of the rules based order, we have not followed Beveridge’s wise words. We have patched. And we have been found wanting – we are living through a “revolutionary moment” and there is now no alternative to revolutionary action.

Our health system is built on rationing care, leaving millions without access to timely treatment. The gap in life expectancy between the richest and poorest is expanding. Diseases of previous eras, like rickets, scurvy and measles, are once again being reported in children. Millions of people are consigned to a life on disability benefits.

School absence has rocketed, particularly among the poorest. The attainment gap is once again widening. We have a chronic shortage of skills in critical sectors. Rough sleeping, homelessness and

the use of temporary accommodation has soared. A quarter of UK adults lack financial resilience.

Our prisons are overcrowded, violent and drug-infested, and justice is failing as our courts buckle under rising backlogs. We are paying billions to stop wind farms generating too much energy, bats and spiders are delaying critical infrastructure, the planning process for the Lower Thames Crossing ran to 360,000 pages at a cost around £300 million. The State seems unable to secure our borders, and we’re sinking £5 million a day in accommodating asylum seekers in hotels, while social care is on its knees.

The State is failing at its most basic functions. Our spending is near record high for peacetime, yet the public are, unsurprisingly, deeply, and almost universally, dissatisfied with public services.

We face the twin challenges

of poor outcomes and unsustainable spending. Proceeding on the same path would mean fiscal bankruptcy. Public sector net debt to GDP is currently around 100 per cent, the OBR forecasts it will exceed 300 per cent by 2070 in the event of shocks. And only a fool would bet against further era-defining shocks.

In the depths of the Great Depression, running for the presidency of the United States, FDR said: "The country needs and, unless I mistake its temper, the country demands

bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something."

From this attitude came the New Deal. The risk facing today's politicians is not from acting too fast, or trying to do too much. It is risk-aversion itself. It is an unwillingness to reject a status quo that once helped us rebuild, but now acts as a drag anchor on prosperity.

Fundamental questions must be posed about the shape and role of the State, about what it should do and where we, as citizens and civil society must step up. About the role of central versus local government. About how we hold these systems to account. And about where government should step back and where it should be more muscular.

No amount of patching is going to remake the State for the next generation. This collection is a call to action. History is watching.

Charlotte Pickles is the Director of Re:State.

The case for remaking the State



Claire Ainsley

*Director of the Project on Centre-Left Renewal
Progressive Policy Institute*

The question of remaking the State is fundamental to the fight for democracy versus authoritarianism. Increasing numbers of citizens in developed democracies are starting to question the foundation of modern liberal democracy, as they continue to be expected to fund a state that they are becoming less sure is serving them.

This is particularly acute amongst younger people, the perhaps unexpected audience the right-wing populists are gaining traction with, who seek to exploit people's discontent with a settlement they are unconvinced works in their favour. If we are to inspire the next generation that this world is theirs and that we have to take shared responsibility for running it, then we have to think radically and urgently about what and who our State is for. Simply defending the status quo or proposing limited fixes just isn't sufficient for the rupture that is occurring between those for whom the existing order works, and the many for

whom it doesn't.

We could start by fronting up what happened during the Covid-19 pandemic. The only explanation I can find for how little we want to talk about it now, to address the failings and learn from them, is that it is easier to bury the memory of a trauma than to relive it. But like all traumas, they find a way to resurface. An emotional long Covid is present in our classrooms and care homes, in the public services that are the State's frontline, and in the people who rely on them most.

When the rule-makers, who had asked the public to make extraordinary sacrifices for the collective good, then broke those rules for their own indulgence, they broke something less tangible too. They broke a social contract that had been made with one another, to protect one another. The offense wasn't just about the laws and the rules. It was about breaching what binds us together, the unquantifiable good that

came from helping our neighbours and community.

The good news is that our social selves are proving remarkably resilient, against a tide of disruptive forces from malign international actors to online propagandists. Technology has been a power for our coming together, as well as pushing us apart. What we make of these developments, whether they become a force for our continued human progress or our destruction, is really up to us.

To turn the sentiment into action, we need a sense of urgency and concrete actions. Remaking the State means starting a conversation about what we, as citizens of this incredible country, want and expect from one another. Deliberative methods and a new army of parliamentarians offer opportunities to have a deeper conversation in communities about what citizens want from the State, and what they are prepared to put in.

For example, I don't think it's feasible for working-age adults to continue to pay such a high proportion of local tax into a social care system they might never use, but I'd like to know what my community thinks is possible. Businesses need to become a critical part of the conversation about our obligations to one another. As the standout pandemic success – the creation and rollout of the vaccine – showed, business has so

much innovation, resource and responsibility to contribute to our shared endeavours.

The current Government gets how high the stakes are for democracy and that's why they have made such a big theme of reform, from shaking up the centre, to devolving power, to making everyday health services work better for people. *Re:State* can play an important role in

offering innovative ideas and practical solutions offering innovative ideas and practical solutions in this parliamentary term in ways that mean people can see and experience State reform for themselves. It will take the ingenuity and real experience of people from all walks of life – from industry, frontier technology firms, local government, practitioners and citizens – to reimagine how and what a better State could be.

Claire Ainsley is the Director of the Centre-Left Renewal Project at the Progressive Policy Institute, and former Director of Policy to Keir Starmer.