The Rt Hon. Keir Starmer MP
Prime Minister and Leader of the Labour Party

*Sent by email*

9th July 2024

Dear Prime Minister

**Re: Open government can rebuild trust, support reforms, and drive efficiency.**

Our heartfelt congratulations on your appointment as Prime Minister. Your leadership comes at a pivotal time. We, as civil society organisations, to support a 'government of service,' to rebuild trust through 'actions not words,' and return to what your Manifesto called 'the foundations of good government.' Many of us are domestic and international experts in open government, a model of governance based on <u>transparency, integrity, accountability and participation.</u>

For over a decade, we have worked with the UK government to turn these principles into action through open government plans. This process of government and civil society working together is mandatory for members of the 75-country Open Government Partnership (OGP) - a multilateral initiative, instigated by the former US President Barack Obama, with the UK becoming a founding member in 2011. The Scottish and Northern Ireland governments, Glasgow City Council and Greater Manchester Combined Authority have since joined OGP as <u>'local' members</u>.

Open government has led to the UK becoming the first country in the G20 to introduce a register of company ownership (beneficial ownership); at one stage, a world-leader in the release of open data to drive innovation; developing the world's first algorithmic transparency standard; and developing the UK Anti-Corruption Strategy. Policy commitments in transparency of official development assistance (ODA), natural resource transparency, fiscal transparency, open justice, and open contracting (procurement) amongst others, have also been jointly developed.

The Post Office scandal, PPE procurement, the opaque mortgage-raising 2022 mini-budget, the impact of corruption on UK growth and democracy (as highlighted by the Rt. Hon. David Lammy MP in his Kleptocracy speech) and the disregard for public standards and subsequent collapse in trust, demonstrate that open government is not peripheral to people's lives: it is central. And that so much more could be done. This is why we welcome the opportunity to work with a new government to revive the agenda, rebuild trust and support change for the better.

**How open government could support a Labour government?** Open government is the 'foundation of good government.' Done well, it:

● reduces opportunities for corruption, saving the taxpayer money;
● builds trust through a collaborative approach to problem-solving and policy development;
● helps ensure officials act in the public interest and enhances the integrity of public institutions;
● supports growth and efficiency by leveraging technology and data.

Here are 5 ways it could support your government:

**1. Mission-driven government:** Your Manifesto states that 'government is at its best when working in partnership' and that 'mission-driven government means a new way of doing government that is more joined up, pushes power out to communities and harnesses new technology.' This is open government.

The OGP has a unique model of co-creation that brings together reformers from inside and outside of government to develop National Action Plans for Open Government. It is cross-departmental, coordinated by the Cabinet Office, with civil society convened by the UK Open Government Network (which itself convenes a wider group of civil society networks). It has an established government and civil society Multistakeholder Forum, with links to the participatory methods forum to support public participation in policymaking. This model could aid the delivery of your missions to rebuild Britain.

**2. Ethics and Restoring Public Service in Westminster:** Disappointingly, the previous government was unwilling to meaningfully engage on standards in public life. But Labour's plans for a new independent Ethics and Integrity Commission, and the OGP process, provide an opportunity for ongoing engagement with standards experts and civil society groups to restore trust in public life.

**3. Tackling Corruption and Money Laundering:** For over a decade, civil society and civil servants have jointly developed, implemented, and provided oversight of policy commitments related to corruption and money laundering. The current National Action Plan contains a commitment to regular engagement with civil society on a new cross-departmental UK Anti-Corruption Strategy. This is to be delivered by 2025, and overseen by a new Anti-Corruption Champion - a post created by the last Labour government, but which has now been vacant for over 18 months.

**4. Growth, Innovation and Artificial Intelligence:** Enabling innovation and driving growth through open data is a fundamental aspect of open government. However, it is clear that there are challenges alongside opportunities related to evolving technology. The world's first algorithmic transparency standard was developed by the UK government in partnership with the OGP, yet much more could be done on artificial intelligence, machine learning and automated decision-making (and more widely open data) to support Labour's Industrial Strategy whilst maintaining safeguards and ensuring all the public benefit.

**5. Procurement reform:** Open contracting (procurement reform) is a key aspect of open government and will be crucial for better, mission-driven public spending. The current National Action Plan includes a commitment on the delivery of the Procurement Act 2023's end-to-end transparency, simplification of public contracts, appropriate secondary legislation, and digital tools. The Labour Manifesto makes further commitments for procurement reform, simplification, and standardisation in the areas of defence, policing, the NHS, supporting small businesses, and the wider industrial strategy as well as a landmark commitment to appoint a Covid Corruption Commissioner to investigate the appalling public misspending and cronyism during the pandemic. A large civil society network exists to support a Labour government with this agenda through the open government process, several of whom are also core participants to the Covid Inquiry module on public procurement.

**Leadership**

Open government can help those combating corruption drive legislative change, those awarding government contracts to innovate and achieve the best value, and those tackling laundered money to shine a light into the sometimes dark corners of property and company ownership. It can support those seeking to address inequality, improve the impact of ODA through greater transparency, or positively influence those upholding the fundamentals of our justice system. It can support freedom of the press and access to information, help restore political integrity and those seeking to address the twin challenges of our time: climate and technological change. And it can support the development of trust between government, institutions, and civil society.

This requires talented civil servants (and there are many), a willing civil society, and crucially strong political leadership. The latter was at times non-existent under the previous government. Your commitment to politics 'driven by a sense of service to the country' is welcome. As Prime Minister, we hope you and your government will commit to re-energising open government as the basis of a more democratic, equal, and just society. We would welcome confirmation of your support of open government and extend an invitation to meet with representatives.

Yours sincerely,

Blair Glencorse, Civil Society Co-Chair, Open Government Partnership
Kevin Keith, Chair UK Open Government Network, Co-Chair UK Multistakeholder Forum
Darren Hughes, Chief Executive Officer, Electoral Reform Society
Jennifer Nadel, Co-director, Compassion in Politics
Tom Brake, Director, Unlock Democracy
Duncan Hames, Director of Policy, Transparency International
Susan Hawley, Executive Director, Spotlight on Corruption
Gavin Starks, CEO, Icebreaker One
Gavin Hayman, Executive Director, Open Contracting Partnership
Amanda Brock, CEO, Open UK
Resham Kotecha, Global Head of Policy, Open Data Institute
Thom Townsend, UK Anti-Corruption Coalition
Saskia Konynenburg, Executive Director, National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)
Susan Coughtrie, Director, Foreign Policy Centre
Nathan Yeowell, Executive Director, The Future Governance Forum

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*CC: The Right Hon. Angela Rayner MP, Deputy Prime Minister; The Right Hon. Rachel Reeves MP, Chancellor; The Right Hon. Pat McFadden MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; The Right Hon. David Lammy MP, Foreign Secretary; The Right Hon. Peter Kyle MP, Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology; The Right Hon. Yvette Cooper MP, Home Secretary*

Kevin Keith (Chair) UK Open Government Network, C / O Involve Foundation (Registered Charity 1130568), Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London, E2 6HG. Email: UK@opengovernment.org.uk Website: www.opengovernment.org.uk