

GIVE US A SAY. BRING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER. STRENGTHEN OUR DEMOCRACY.



The Covid-19 pandemic has reminded us again what it is to work together and to sacrifice together, so as to achieve a better outcome for our country. As we enter a new world where all our communities will need to be flexible and agile and where our personal freedoms will sometimes be curtailed for the greater good, a strong democracy is even more important to our future.

After the Brexit experience and even before Covid-19, every major UK party agreed that there needed to be something different in the way the Westminster system conducts itself and they all included some form of democratic review in their manifestos. It is time now to deliver on this future.

The Conservative Government was successfully re-elected, in no small part by reaching out to people who felt left behind by elites making decisions. These same people will be an important part of the Covid-19 recovery process, alongside all those from around the country who are committed to recovery in this new social order we are being forced to create for ourselves.

Prior to Covid-19, the Government had established **the Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission (The Commission)** whose aim is “to restore trust in our institutions and democracy.” This goal will be even more important in the Covid-19 Recovery phase as there will need to be a **healing process** as well as time for reflection across the country.

We are suggesting that The Commission has an even more significant remit today. It has the chance to bring the nation together by considering what our democracy should look like in this changed future.

In line with the Conservative Party’s pre-election manifesto, we believe an approach building on the work done by the independent **Citizens’ Convention on UK Democracy (CCUKD)** based at Kings College London points to the way forward to achieve **citizen engagement through deliberative democracy** and in a UK-wide National Conversation wholly complementary to The Commission. We have already interacted informally with No10 and the Cabinet Office on this and we are now ready to more formally put forward a **proposal for negotiation and agreement with Government.**

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How could such a program work?

What is outlined below is a negotiable 12-month program, with an upper limit, not for profit cost of three million pounds. In this time of social distancing, cost savings on this sum will be made through clever use of digital platforms.

Examples of the issues for discussion in the program could include: the separation of powers, the second chamber, rights in the UK, devolution of power within a strong union and how politics could be paid for. Our approach – repeatedly proven to work in countries around the globe – brings a three part ‘bottom up’ Citizens’ Convention to include the voices of all the people, and one that partners with the legitimacy of Parliament & Government and will contribute to the nation’s healing process.

1. A series of online, scientifically balanced **Themed Assemblies** (approximately six) each of which would focus on one agenda issue. The online deliberative format would include a mixture of plenary and small group discussions with prior briefing materials and input from expert speakers representing a balance of views.

– Each online Themed Assembly will formulate a set of recommendations to be reported to The Commission and to be considered as part of their Report to Parliament. **Government can accept/reject/amend the proposals in the normal way.**

– The delivery would be overseen by CCUKD and its Advisory Board (whose membership would be agreed with HMG) and the technology used would be ZOOM (or equivalent).

2. A **UK-wide National Conversation** would be input into the assemblies to ensure everyone is able to feed in to them. Individuals, families, communities, political, religious and civic society organisations would be all be included. Our ambition is to have 10 million founding mothers and fathers contributing to an agreed way forward for our democracy.

– The Conversation would be constructed and facilitated to ensure it stays deliberative and not merely yes/no propositions.

– Discussions with media partners and social media experts are already under way.

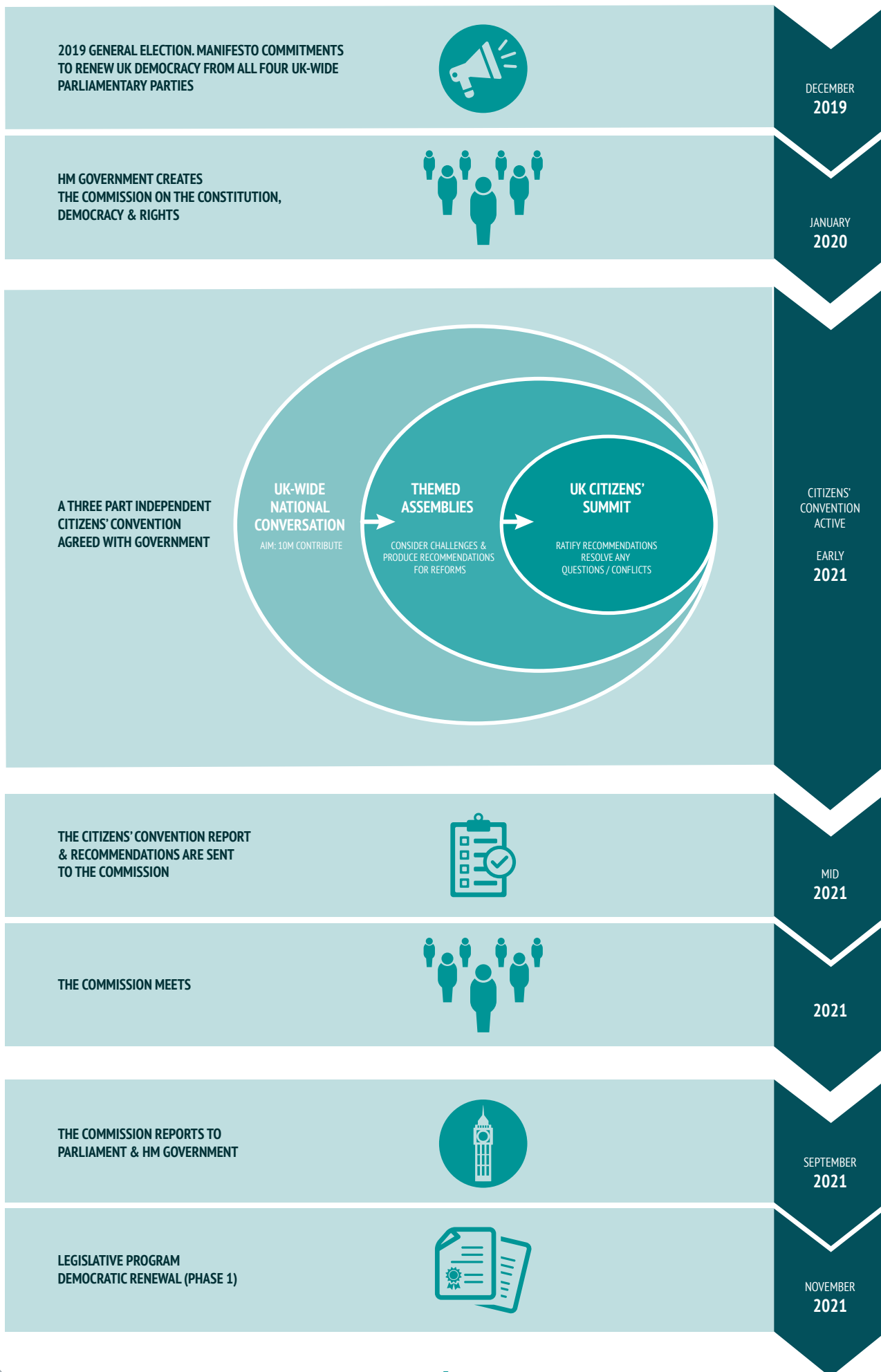
– A national research program including deliberative polling would be undertaken to identify community sentiment throughout the process. Online assemblies and the participants in the National Conversation would have access to this data.

3. The program will culminate in a **UK Citizens’ Summit** once we are able to meet and mix in-person once again (though online can be accommodated if necessary)

– The deliberations from all the online assemblies would be further considered and integrated in this facilitated forum which will bring together all those who have been involved in the online assemblies. The public at large, the media partners, The Commission and key elected officials would all be able to view the live stream of proceedings.

– Additional recommendations can be made to The Commission and the Parliament from this group.

Democratic engagement and renewal – an integrated process





What needs to happen next?

Much of the thinking on how this public engagement element of the work of The Commission could be implemented has already been done by the Citizens' Convention on UK Democracy (CCUKD) and can easily be adapted. **The CCUKD is wholly independent**, has cross party affiliations, strong international links and is inclusive of academic collaboration as well as a range of other UK providers and experts.

CCUKD is **ready to go** even in the current environment of social isolation, as the digital elements of the engagement and deliberation are currently being tested across the country as well as internationally.

We can **finalise a practical business plan with Government and The Commission** within days of meeting with the appropriate Minister and getting a decision in principle.

An international advisory board, formalising the links CCUKD already has with King's College London, Australia's newDemocracy, the Irish Convention organisers, the Centre for Deliberative Democracy, Stanford University, and the National Centre for Social Research are ready to meet and provide technical expertise. The delivery team has been selected and includes experienced project managers, civil servants and practitioners in the field recommended by CCUKD.

A Government decision is needed to meaningfully engage citizens in the process of renewing our precious democracy.

