Chapters for Change - 1



Fixing our Broken Politics

True & Fair Party
Pre-election Manifesto - Part 1
July 2023





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A Message from Gina

The UK's political system is broken.

The True & Fair Party exists to tackle our debilitating democratic deficit by proposing ideas that can modernise and strengthen the way we are governed.

This is the first part of our pre-election manifesto, which details the core aims of our party – to clean up politics, modernise democracy and combat corruption. Part two will focus on 'The Three Big Es' – Economy, Environment, Education. Part three will detail our proposals to increase access to justice and fairness in other core areas, such as the NHS and housing.

This document is fizzing with ideas. There are 38 policies, ranging from the introduction of an Ethics in Public Office Act to establishing 'Democracy Day' – a bank holiday for compulsory voting in general elections, so that working people can vote easily.

All three parts of our manifesto will be published prior to the next general election, but we are not closed to new ideas. You can expect to see considered proposals for Welsh government and civil service reform, which are just two of the areas that our outstanding parliamentary candidates are currently reviewing.

This policy development work has been a huge undertaking for a small party that is barely 18 months old. But we believe it is important to prove that we are different to other parties. We get into the detail, making pragmatic but bold proposals that we hope will make policymakers pause for thought. If the long-established parties want to steal our policies, we would be delighted. If they do not, we will be fighting for every vote in the constituencies where we are standing, from Epsom and Ewell to Wirral West, Monmouth to the Derbyshire Dales.

We're here to stimulate debate against a backdrop of a changing landscape – economically, socially, environmentally, and digitally. We want to make our country a leading democracy once again and a place where responsibility, innovation and integrity are our cornerstones.

Leader, The True & Fair Party

Line Killer

Executive Summary

The True & Fair Party's core policies to fix our broken politics and strengthen our democracy are as follows:

Government Reforms

- The introduction of an Ethics in Public Office Act (a draft bill can be found in the Appendix)
- 2. The creation of an independent body, the Office of Ministerial Accountability and Integrity, to oversee the Ministerial Code

Ministerial Reforms

- 3. The Government payroll must not exceed 100 ministers
- 4. No sacked minister should receive severance pay
- 5. Limit the number of special advisers, who should also be subject to a mandatory code of conduct

Prerogative Powers Reform

6. Codify Henry VIII powers to strengthen Parliamentary democracy

MP Reforms

- 7. Compulsory weekly constituency surgeries for MPs
- 8. MPs must not be allowed to take on second jobs, unless they are for the public benefit
- 9. Minimum House of Commons sitting time of 38 weeks a year
- 10. Introduce a contract of service, which would detail MPs' working hours and clarify their role
- 11. Repeated failure to turn up for debates, voting or business of the House would automatically trigger a by-election
- 12. Digital voting normalised within the Houses of Parliament

MP Training and Constituency Set-ups

- 13. Induction programme for new MPs and their staff
- 14. An MP school for newly elected members, run by constitutional lawyers and Parliament's clerks, would start within six weeks of a general election
- 15. Constituency offices to be professionally staffed by civil servants and located in town halls or libraries

Anti-Corruption Measures

- 16. A ban on all sitting MPs acting as paid lobbyists
- 17. A two-year waiting period between working in a government, regulator or public body and taking a job in the private or political sectors for senior staff

18. A National Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate public officials for corruption, both current and retrospectively

Reform of the Whips' Office

- 19. The introduction of a whips' code of conduct to make sure they act ethically and transparently
- 20. The implementation of measures to protect whistle-blowers within their political parties
- 21. Ongoing training and education for whips

House of Lords Reform

- 22. Reduce the number of peers to 400
- 23. Fixed-term limits of 10 years
- 24. Abolish the remaining hereditary peerages
- 25. Codify the powers of the House of Lords
- 26. Prime ministers who lose confidence votes must not be allowed to make honours nominations
- 27. Prime ministers should serve at least a year in office before they are granted the right to make honours nominations

Scrutinising Parliamentary Budgets

28. Establish a Joint Parliamentary Committee to consult on the formation of a Parliamentary Budget Office

Local Government and Devolved Nations' Reform

- 29. There must be consistent devolution
- 30. There needs to be greater public engagement in the devolution process, including the use of citizens' assemblies
- 31. Senior local authority officers, including chief executives, would be subject to the Ethics in Public Office Act, which would include a Councillors' Code of Conduct

Political Advertising

32. Political advertising must be regulated, like all other forms of advertising

Electoral Reforms

- 33. The introduction of proportional representation must be put to Citizens' Assemblies
- 34. The introduction of Automatic Voter Registration
- 35. A citizens' assembly to examine the lowering of the voting age to 16
- 36. The introduction of digital voting
- 37. Compulsory voting for those aged 18 years old and over
- 38. Democracy Day a bank holiday for general election voting

Introduction

- 1. The UK's parliamentary system is based on the outdated 'good chap' model of government, in which convention is everything and is respected by the political elite installed in Westminster. Or so the theory went.
- 2. The system was always open to abuse and successive prime ministers forced through legislation with scant regard for the expertise of our best-informed legislators. But, recent Conservative PMs and MPs have cynically and openly dismissed the primacy of the Houses of Parliament. A weak system has been stretched to breaking point. Whether it be misleading the House of Commons about 'party-gate', attempting to override Parliament during Brexit, or the corruption of the procurement system through the pandemic, the systemic failures of the good chap model have been forever exposed.
- 3. Replacing an outdated, centuries old political system cannot happen overnight, but we can make profound and pragmatic improvements through simple, common-sense changes. With non-partisan courage, clear thinking and leadership, the political system can be transformed, so the UK is once again a beacon of democracy, fairness, and responsible policy output.
- 4. These proposals would deliver the biggest integrity reforms seen for decades and begin the serious work of rebuilding public trust, modernising our machinery of government and strengthening our democracy.

Government Reforms

- 5. Ministers represent the best of us. They might hold views with which we disagree or even dislike, but their behaviour must meet the highest standards. Irrespective of which political party is in power, we must enforce these principles.
- 6. Misleading Parliament should be treated with the seriousness necessary to end the culture of lies that has pervaded recent Conservative administrations.

- a. There is an urgent need to apply standards, structure, and rules in law through an Ethics in Public Office Act. The Act would enshrine the Ministerial Code, which sets out standards of conduct, based on the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership.
- b. The Act would include the creation of an Office of Ministerial Accountability and Integrity to oversee and enforce compliance with the Ministerial Code and Nolan Principles. A draft bill can be found in Appendix A.

Ministerial Reforms

- 8. We are particularly grateful to the work of Ted Cantle, who is the founder of the Institute for Community Cohesion and the former chief executive of Nottingham City Council. His outstanding recent paper, the Twenty Charter, is a thought-provoking text about fixing our broken politics.
- 9. Whilst we do not endorse or support all of Mr Cantle's proposals, we agree with his argument that there are too many ministers, accounting for around a fifth of MPs. They receive two salaries, one as an MP and the other according to their ministerial rank.
- 10. That number does not include the plethora of unpaid Parliamentary Private Secretaries. They are typically described as "the eyes and ears of the minister in the House of Commons" or being on "the lowest rung of the ministerial ladder".
- 11. Under the Ministerial and Other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991, ministers leaving office are entitled to 25% of their annual salary as severance pay. Ministerial pay is already in addition to the MP salary, so it seems curious that those who have been sacked for incompetence should be entitled to a failure bonus.
- 12. Special Advisers (SpAds) were originally conceived to bring in specialist experience for disciplines and/or industry sector, with good SpAds proving hugely useful in fast tracking information sharing and communication between a Minister and their department; effectively doubling the Minister's capacity. The big issue with SpAds of late is the move away from technical experience to a bias on politics and media. Since the David Cameron government, we have seen a notable increase in the power, influence and control enjoyed by special advisers. The number increased from fewer than 70 under Tony Blair to more than 100 in Boris Johnson administration.
- 13. In 2017, Lord Patten said the role of the SpAd had evolved from provider of necessary ministerial support into a "counterproductive" class of official "who see it as their job to promote internecine warfare between departments on too many occasions".
- 14. This is power without accountability and the result is the influence of Spads supersedes that of the senior civil service.

- a. The Government payroll must not exceed 100 ministers. This reduction would improve the parliamentary scrutiny of ministerial decisions.
- b. Update the Ministerial and Other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991, so no minister who is sacked receives severance pay.
- c. There should be a limited number of Special Advisers; transparency about their role, qualifications, and appointment process; and they should be subject to a mandatory code of conduct. These reforms would make sure:
 - I. The public can better understand and assess the role of a SpAd.
 - II. There is not a ministerial over-reliance on unelected, politically motivated advisers.
 - III. SpAds know their responsibilities and the consequences of breaching ethical standards.

Prerogative Power (Henry VIII Powers) Reforms

16. Henry VIII powers grant the executive, including the Prime Minister, a legislative role that undermines the separation of powers and Parliamentary sovereignty, the core of the UK constitution. Consecutive governments have added broad and unspecific clauses to primary legislation to grant them powers beyond the role of the executive. This sets a detrimental and dangerous trend of diminishing parliamentary oversight and encouraging executive overreach.

- a. Codification of Henry VIII powers to strengthen Parliamentary democracy, sovereignty, and the separation of powers. This process of codification should ensure a framework of power balance, accountability, and rights protections.
- Establish a cross-party Parliamentary committee in partnership with legal and constitutional scholars to determine the codification legislation.

MP Reforms

MPs are elected by the public and paid through our taxes, yet they have no formal contractual terms by which we can hold them to account. Too many MPs enjoy their safe seats, ignoring their constituents and agreeing to whatever the Executive and Ministers tell them in exchange for an easy political life.

- 18. The long recesses and party conference seasons mean that MPs often end up working for barely eight months a year.
- 19. Left with plenty of time on their hands, MPs can take on lucrative outside interests, taking advantage of their status without focusing on the responsibilities of their elected roles. MPs have been found to leave the chamber before 2pm.

- a. Weekly surgeries should be a contractual obligation for 38 weeks a year, so MPs truly understand and represent the concerns of their constituents. The number of weeks aligns with the teaching profession.
- b. No taking on second jobs including hosting media shows and writing weekly national newspaper columns - unless compliant with a very strict set of exceptions. These exceptions, such as a qualified doctor working to support our understaffed NHS in times of emergency, would also have to be carefully audited in terms of pay and remunerations.
- c. There should be a minimum sitting time of 38 weeks in the House of Commons, which would still leave MPs with plenty of time to go on holiday or enjoy their conference shindigs.
- d. Codify the expectations of MPs working hours by introducing a contract of service/employment which clearly set out an MP's working hours. This would also clarify the role of a local MP, so that constituents know whether to contact the MP or a local councillor.
- e. Repeated failure to turn up for debates, voting or business of the House of Commons would automatically trigger a by-election.
- f. To help MPs meet these commitments, digital voting needs to be normalised within the Houses of Parliament.

'MP School' and Constituency Offices

- 21. Parliament is viewed as unrepresentative, elite, homogenous and with a significant gender imbalance. Stacked with privileged members from public school backgrounds, Parliament seems like a club that alienates so many ordinary people.
- 22. We should open this cosy club by making sure that aspiring MPs know they will have proper training about their role should they be elected. Then, people from all walks of life who can add breadths of experience and voice to parliamentary debates will feel less overwhelmed by the task ahead of them.
- 23. Another of Mr Cantle's reforms, the standardisation and professionalisation of constituency offices appeals to us. Too often, constituents face a lottery in the effectiveness of the staff and locations of these offices, while many new MPs do not have the experience needed to run them properly.

- a. An induction programme for new MPs and their staff.
- b. An MP school run by constitutional lawyers and House clerks would start within the first six weeks of being elected. A check-in session would take place three months after being elected. The programme would include:
 - I. Introductions to the administrative entities in Westminster.
 - II. The role of MPs and peers as employers of staff.
 - III. A two-day seminar for new MPs, during which they would be taught how to speak about or propose amendments and how to register their interests and potential conflicts of interest.
- c. Constituency offices should be professionally staffed by civil servants and located in town halls or libraries where MPs are more accessible to constituents and become part of the public sphere. This would help standardise service for constituents across the country, while security practices could be more easily rolled out for all MPs.

Anti-Corruption Measures

- 25. From the honours abuses of David Lloyd-George to the dodgy dossier about Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction, the public has a right to be suspicious of corruption in our corridors of power. These suspicions were laid bare during the pandemic and the awarding of millions of pounds worth of contracts to dodgy companies, friends and even family.
- 26. Whilst politicians across the established parties talk about putting up taxes, cleaning up corruption would make sure the public purse does not leak money, so we have more available for public spending.
- 27. The priority of all MPs should be to act in the public interest. However, our elected representatives can accept paid lobbying jobs on behalf of corporates seeking to influence the political landscape for their own gain. Far too often, there is a 'revolving door' for those moving between the public, political and private sectors.

- a. A ban on all sitting MPs acting as paid lobbyists, preventing secretive corporate influence within Parliament, and rebuilding public trust in our elected politicians.
- b. There must be a two-year waiting period for senior staff between working in a government, regulator or public body and taking a job relevant to those positions in the private or political. For example, a director in a regulator would not be allowed to join a company they regulated for at least two years after they left. This would help to prevent those with access to sensitive or secret information from selling their insights for personal financial gain immediately after leaving their government role.
- c. Establish a National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) to investigate public officials for corruption, both current and retrospectively. The NACC would hold public hearings in exceptional cases, operating independently of the government. It would launch investigations on its own initiative or on tips from whistle-blowers and the public. If investigators uncover possible criminal conduct, the NACC would refer those findings to the Police.

House of Lords Reforms

- 29. An unelected upper chamber is far from ideal in a modern democracy. Moving to a completely elected House of Lords, however, will take time. At present, there is simply too much resistance to push through such a fundamental change.
- 30. We need to be pragmatic, modernising the Lords and showing what an effective upper chamber, it could and should be. Resistance to fundamental change will then reduce over time.
- 31. One of the immediate problems is the sheer size of the House of Lords it is the largest legislative chamber in the world outside of China. The number is likely to increase to well above 800 once Boris Johnson and Liz Truss use unearned powers of patronage to appoint their cronies to the Lords. This is a ludicrously unwieldy number, greatly outstripping the number of MPs in the elected House of Commons. Attendance rates are poor. Leaves of absence are widespread, meaning there is a drain on the very expertise that the defenders of the status quo claim to hold so dear.
- 32. Becoming a member of the House of Lords is a privilege, it should not be a job for life, providing cosy retirement plans. The lack of a term limit means there can only be yet more expansion of the House of Lords if we try to refresh its membership.
- 33. And that membership will remain weighted towards the elite the longer hereditary peerages remain in place. Incoming members, nominated by Johnson and Truss, will have relied on the patronage of prime ministers who have failed to serve full terms. That is clearly unsatisfactory.

- a. There are 400 seats in the House of Lords, so it seems sensible that
 the number of peers should be reduced to 400. Costs would be cut and
 peers properly accommodated during debates of the whole House.
 It would also be simpler to make sure that members of the House of
 Lords are active, properly scrutinising legislation.
- b. As Mr Cantle has argued, fixed term limits of 10 years for peers would promote the regular introduction of new ideas and perspectives and minimise the risk of entrenched interests.

- c. It is time to abolish the remaining hereditary peerages, modernising the House and reducing the influence of privilege.
- d. Codifying the powers of the House of Lords would properly define its role in relation to the House of Commons during the legislative process, meaning the upper chamber could be a more effective scrutiny body.
- e. Prime ministers who lose confidence votes must not be allowed to make honours nominations. The honours list should not be a reward or consolation for executive failure.
- f. Prime ministers should serve at least a year in office before they are granted the right to make honours nominations. It is clearly wrong that premiers whose tenure is measured in weeks or even days should be allowed to reward those who supported their failed premierships.

Scrutinising Parliamentary Budgets

- 35. The UK is held out as the Mother of All Parliaments. Yet, the UK has been slow to modernise, increase transparency, accountability, and introduce reforms to improve efficiency and value for public money.
- 36. A glaring deficit is the lack of a Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO), as has been established in the Commonwealth countries of Australia and Canada. According to the Australian Parliamentary House, PBOs "inform the parliament by providing independent and non-partisan analysis of the budget cycle, fiscal policy and the financial implications of proposals".

- a. Establish a Joint Parliamentary Committee to consult on the formation of a Parliamentary Budget Office. The PBO would provide independent and non-partisan analysis of the budget cycle, fiscal policy, and the financial implications of proposals in three main ways:
 - I. Responding to requests made by MPs and all registered political parties for costings of policy proposals or for analysis of matters relating to the Budget.
 - II. Publishing a report before every election that provides transparency around the fiscal impact of the election commitments of major parties.
 - III. Conducting and publishing research that enhances the public understanding of the budget and fiscal policy settings.

Local Government and Devolved Nations' Reforms

- 38. The UK remains the most regionally unbalanced advanced economy in the world, according to the IPPR North. England is one of the most centralised countries in Western Europe and is still run primarily through powerful UK-wide institutions.
- 39. Yet local councillors are the foot soldiers of politics. In many constituencies, councillors, their families, and those aspiring to join them are the only active members of local parties. We must empower these civic minded people.
- 40. This is why we support greater devolution to the English regions, putting decision making in local hands and giving authorities greater financial independence.
- 41. June Davies, the True & Fair Party's outstanding candidate for Monmouth, is working on a paper about great devolution for the Welsh Government, which we look forward to publishing later this year.

- a. There must be more consistent devolution. Some areas and regions have been granted more powers and resources than others, entrenching economic and social disparities. A more consistent approach to devolution would promote greater local decision-making and economic growth
- b. There needs to be greater public engagement in the devolution process, including the use of citizens' assemblies. Ensuring that communities are involved in decision-making would help to build trust in local and combined authorities.
- c. Senior local authority officers, including chief executives, would be subject to the Ethics in Public Office Act, which would include a Councillors' Code of Conduct. The latter would make sure standards and behaviours are upheld across the country.

Political Advertising Regulation

- 43. Political advertising has become a significant part of election campaigns in the UK and is designed to influence public opinion and sway voters towards a particular party or candidate. Without proper regulations in place, these ads can be misleading, inaccurate, and even unethical, playing on fears, prejudices, and insecurities.
- 44. The UK needs regulations that prevent this type of emotional manipulation from being used in political advertising. Misleading or untruthful ads undermine our democratic process and erode public trust in our political system.
- 45. The UK has some regulations in place for political advertising, but they are nowhere near comprehensive enough. Unlike other forms of advertising, political ads are not subject to compliance or independent scrutiny. This means that there is no one checking to make sure that the ads are accurate and truthful.
- 46. In the 2019 general election, the Conservative Party was accused of misleading voters with a Facebook ad that featured edited footage of Sir Keir Starmer when he was shadow Brexit secretary. The ad was shared thousands of times before it was eventually removed. Labour is now unrepentantly indulging in similarly shameful attack ads.
- 47. We need comprehensive regulations for political advertising to ensure that all parties play by the same rules. We support Lord Putnam's Reform Political Advertising Campaign because it is fundamental to our democracy that political advertising is transparent, accurate, and subject to independent scrutiny.

48. Proposal:

a. Political advertising must be regulated, like all other forms of advertising.

Electoral Reforms

- 49. The first-past-the-post voting system is outdated and undemocratic. It is also misleading there is no 'post' at a set distance and MPs can often be elected with less than 40% of the vote. Boris Johnson's Conservatives won 56.2% of parliamentary seats in 2019 on a minority vote of 43.6%. They were awarded 7.4% more seats than in 2017, but only received a 1.3% increase in vote share.
- 50. The voting system protects the old, long-established parties. Safe seats exist where parties receive less than 50% of constituency support and voters are discouraged from backing the candidates they truly support.
- 51. We need a fairer system, which will encourage new entrants into politics and a wider spread of views and policies.
- 52. There is a growing clamour to make our electoral system truly democratic. Even Labour's membership has backed proportional representation, telling Sir Keir Starmer at the party's conference last year that its introduction should be a general election commitment. Of course, it won't be because first past the post protects both major parties. Labour's hierarchy, believing it is finally so close to power through a fiddled voting system, will not countenance any change at this time. The Conservatives, drifting ever further to the right, could never again secure the support of other parties to form a majority under a fair system.
- 53. A change of system will also enlarge the franchise because people will know that their vote finally matters. As the Patchwork Foundation and Hogan Lovells point out in a recent paper (Automatic Voter Registration and the Elections Bill, March 2022) voter registration is particularly low among young people and other minority groups. There is a long-term trend of falling registration among young people, politically alienating a whole generation.
- 54. The UK is one of the few liberal democracies that does not have a system of automatic voter registration in place. Of 40 liberal democracies assessed by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust and the University of East Anglia, the UK is one of just six countries that does not have a system of either automatic or assisted voter registration.

Continued...

Chapter 12 Electoral Reforms - continued

55. The UK's insistence on holding elections on a working Thursday might be convention, but it also means people struggling to get home from work, school or university might be unable or too exhausted to vote. We need a clear day to encourage greater participation.

- a. Proportional representation must be put to Citizen's Assemblies after the general election.
- b. Automatic voter registration must be introduced as a complement to proportional representation. It is important to also note that if young people and minorities are not on the electoral roll, they are not eligible for jury service and struggle to get a credit rating.
- c. We believe there should be a citizens' assembly to consider lowering the voting age to 16. We agree with Mr Cantle that citizens' assemblies, groups or panels need to be used more widely to close the existing democratic gap that creates our 'them and us' politics.
- d. The introduction of digital voting. This will encourage younger people to vote, while helping those who are ill or struggle to access polling booths.
- e. Compulsory voting for those aged 18 years old and over.
- f. Democracy Day general election polling day should be designated a bank holiday to encourage much higher vote participation.

APPENDIX A

Draft Ethics in Public Office Bill

An Act to incorporate the Ministerial Code and the Nolan Principles into law, to strengthen the ethical standards of Ministers and public officials, and to foster transparency and accountability in government.

Section 1: Definitions

- 1. "Ministerial Code" refers to the set of rules and standards outlining the responsibilities and conduct of Ministers in the United Kingdom.
- 2. "Nolan Principles" refer to the Seven Principles of Public Life established by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which provide guidance for ethical behaviour among public office holders.

Section 2: Incorporation of the Ministerial Code and Nolan Principles

- 1. The Ministerial Code and Nolan Principles shall be incorporated into law and shall apply to all Ministers and public officials in the United Kingdom.
- All Ministers and public officials shall adhere to the Ministerial Code and Nolan Principles in the execution of their duties and responsibilities.

Section 3: Obligations of Ministers and Public Officials

- Ministers and public officials shall act in the public interest, with integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership, in accordance with the Nolan Principles.
- Ministers and public officials shall uphold the highest standards of propriety and ensure that no conflict arises, or appears to arise, between their public duties and private interests.

Section 4: Enforcement and Oversight

- 1. An independent body, shall be established, known as the Office of Ministerial Accountability and Integrity (OMAI), to oversee and enforce compliance with the Ministerial Code and Nolan Principles.
- The OMAI shall have the authority to investigate allegations of non-compliance, impose sanctions as deemed appropriate, and make recommendations for improvements to the Ministerial Code and Nolan Principles.

Continued...

APPENDIX A

Draft Ethics in Public Office Bill - continued

Section 5: Transparency and Reporting

- 1. The OMAI shall publish an annual report detailing its activities, investigations, and findings, which shall be presented to Parliament.
- 2. Ministers and public officials shall disclose any potential conflicts of interest and adhere to rules on financial interests, gifts, and hospitality as outlined in the Ministerial Code.

Section 6: Review and Amendment

1. The Ministerial Code and Nolan Principles shall be subject to periodic review and amendment by the OMAI, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, to ensure their continued effectiveness and relevance.

Section 7: Commencement and Short Title

- 1. This Act may be cited as the Ethics in Public Office Act.
- 2. This Act shall come into force on the date of Royal Assent.















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