



UK OPEN
GOVERNMENT
CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK

Julia Lopez MP
Parliamentary Secretary
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

March 2021

Dear Minister,

Let's take back our place as a global leader in open government.

The Open Government Network (OGN) is a broad coalition of people and organisations who wish to see the United Kingdom regain our position as a global leader in openness and democracy.

We are concerned the United Kingdom has been placed under review by the Open Government Partnership (OGP) for failing to meet the required standards for public involvement in developing the current National Action Plan (NAP). This is the second review in a row that the OGP has reprimanded the UK, with the previous NAP being delivered late. We are concerned that the plans for developing the next NAP with civil society are already behind schedule. All of this has compounded growing civil society concern about open government in the UK.

In 2011, the UK was one of the founding members of the Open Government Partnership, designed to bring together governments, civil society organisations and the public around ambitious and radical commitments. The UK's leadership on subjects ranging from open data, beneficial ownership, extractives transparency and anti-corruption was a driving force behind the OGP and the wider international agenda, and provided an example for other nations to follow.

The OGN was pleased to work in partnership with the UK government to lead progress towards the international Open Government Partnership standards, working alongside the government to develop and implement the UK's four previous National Action Plans. And with the eyes of the world on the UK this year, as we preside over the G7 summit, convene the D-10 group of leading democracies and host the COP26 climate conference, we stand ready to work with the government in ensuring the UK once again takes a lead role in open government globally.

We are therefore very concerned at the announcement that the Open Government Partnership has placed the United Kingdom under review for failing to meet the required standards for public influence during co-creation of the previous NAP.

Improvement will only be possible with the clear political support of the UK government. We urge you to state your personal commitment to championing a UK open government agenda, developed in partnership with civil society and the public, that delivers better outcomes for citizens and puts the UK back at the heart of open government initiatives globally.

The Open Government Network therefore asks you to commit to:

- Developing an ambitious action plan for open government which meets (at a minimum) the 'involve' criteria for co-creation in developing the 5th National Action Plan, addressing the points raised by the Open Government Partnership in putting the UK under review;
- Starting the Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) process between government and civil society as a matter of urgency by ensuring your presence at the first MSF meeting, enabling a currently stalled process on the fifth NAP to begin, and at least two further meetings to review development of the NAP;
- Publishing the fifth NAP in or by September 2021, the tenth anniversary of the UK's first NAP and the launch of the OGP;
- Undertaking and publishing a review of previous unmet commitments to see why they were not met and whether they can be included in the new NAP.

2021 is a big year for the UK and its place in the world. The ongoing pandemic means it is also vital for the UK government to build trust with its citizens. Now is the time for the UK to once again set high ambitions for open government, demonstrate its commitment to working collaboratively with citizens and civil society, and regain its position as a genuine global leader in open government.

Yours

- UK Open Government Network
- Scottish Open Government Network
- Wales Open Government Network
- Northern Ireland Open Government Network

- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny - *Jacqui McKinlay, CEO*
- Centre for Public Data - *Anna Powell-Smith, Director*
- Code the City - *Ian Watt, Co-founder*
- Democracy Club - *Sym Roe, CEO*
- Electoral Reform Society - *Darren Hughes, CEO*
- Full Fact
- International Lawyers Project - *Eva van der Merwe, Executive Director*
- Involve - *Tim Hughes, Director*
- mySociety

- Natural Resource Governance Institute - *Joseph Williams, Advocacy Manager*
- Open Contracting Partnership - *Gavin Hayman, Executive Director*
- Open Data Institute - *Jeni Tennison MBE, CEO*
- Open Data Manchester - *Julian Tait, CEO*
- Open Knowledge Foundation
- Open Ownership - *Thom Townsend, Executive Director*
- Practical Participation - *Tim Davies, Co-Director*
- Publish What You Pay UK - *Miles Litvinoff, Director*
- Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations - *Anna Fowlie, CEO*
- Spend Network - *Ian Mackgill, CEO*
- Spotlight on Corruption - *Susan Hawley, Executive Director*
- The Democratic Society - *Anthony Zacharzewski, President / DG*
- Transparency International UK - *Duncan Hames, Director of Policy and Programmes*
- UK Anti-Corruption Committee - *Susan Hawley and Eva van der Merwe, Co-Chairs*
- Unlock Democracy - *Tom Brake, Director*
- 360 Giving - *Tania Cohen, CEO*