

PM speech on building a better future: 4 January 2023

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak makes a speech setting out his priorities for 2023.

New Year should be a time of optimism and excitement. Yet I know many of you look ahead to 2023 with apprehension.

I want you to know that as your Prime Minister, I will work night and day to change that, and quickly.

Not just by providing relief and peace of mind for the months to come - although we will.

But also by changing our country...and building a better future for our children and grandchildren.

A future that restores optimism, hope, and pride in Britain.

Let me first address two issues that I know are at the forefront of everyone's minds:

I know there are challenges in A&E - people are understandably anxious when they see ambulances queuing outside hospitals.

You should know we're taking urgent action:

Increasing bed capacity by 7,000 more hospital beds and more people cared for at home.

Providing new funding to discharge people into social care and the community, freeing up beds.

And the NHS are working urgently on further plans for A&E and ambulances.

And, on strikes.

There's a lot of misinformation out there.

So I want people to clearly understand the government's position.

We hugely value public sector workers like nurses.

They do incredibly important work.

That's why we want a reasonable dialogue with the unions about what's responsible and fair for our country.

And in the coming days we will update you on the government's next steps.

Today, I want to make a simple commitment: this government will always reflect the people's priorities.

People don't want politicians who promise the earth and then fail to deliver.

They want government to focus less on politics and more on the things they care about.

The cost of living, too high.

Waiting times in the NHS, too long.

Illegal migration, far too much.

I think people do accept that many of these challenges are at least in part, the legacy of Covid and impacted by the war in Ukraine.

But that's not an excuse; we need to address these problems, not just talk about them.

Since I became Prime Minister, we've made progress:

Stabilised the economy and people's mortgage rates.

Provided £26 billion of support for the cost of living.

Invested billions more in schools, the NHS and social care.

Deepened ties with allies around the world on everything from Ukraine to our collective economic security...

Continued our unwavering support for the armed forces in their efforts to keep us safe.

And set out a concrete plan to stop the boats and tackle the unfairness of illegal migration.

But of course, we need to do more.

So I want to make five promises to you today.

Five pledges to deliver peace of mind.

Five foundations, on which to build a better future for our children and grandchildren.

First, we will halve inflation this year to ease the cost of living and give people financial security.

Second, we will grow the economy, creating better-paid jobs and opportunity right across the country.

Third, we will make sure our national debt is falling so that we can secure the future of public services.

Fourth, NHS waiting lists will fall and people will get the care they need more quickly.

Fifth, we will pass new laws to stop small boats, making sure that if you come to this country illegally, you are detained and swiftly removed.

So, five promises - we will:

Halve inflation.

Grow the economy.

Reduce debt.

Cut waiting lists.

And stop the boats.

Those are the people's priorities.

They are your government's priorities.

And we will either have achieved them or not.

No tricks... no ambiguity... we're either delivering for you or we're not...

We will rebuild trust in politics through action, or not at all...

So, I ask you to judge us on the effort we put in and the results we achieve.

These five promises are the people's priorities. So, they're my immediate priorities, too.

But they're not the limit of my ambitions for our country.

They're the foundation.

My aim is to build a better future for our children and grandchildren.

A future where they feel optimism, hope, and pride.

To realise that vision, we need to change our mindset.

Politicians talk a lot about change...

But the truth is, no government, no Prime Minister, can change a country by force of will or diktat alone...

Real change isn't provided - it's created.

It's not given - it's demanded.

Not granted - but invented.

The choices we make as individuals...as workers...business owners... parents...all add up to something far greater.

And if we are honest, change also requires sacrifice...and hard work.

It's a big risk for a politician to say that.

But the stakes are too high...and the rewards too great...not to level with you.

So, change is hard. It takes time. But it is possible.

And we know that because we've done it before.

During Covid, we protected millions of people's jobs and businesses - a record I'm proud of.

And we know it's possible because you can see change happening, you can feel it.

Just look at our state schools, empowered by reform, in some of the most deprived parts of our country, producing some of the best results.

Those teachers and pupils work hard and make sacrifices because they know that what they are doing is bigger than themselves.

They demand, inspire, and deliver excellence.

And their ethos of excellence can become the animating spirit of our nation.

Inspired by them, together we can change our country's character.

We can reverse the creeping acceptance of a narrative of decline.

Reject pessimism and fatalism.

Refuse limits on our aspirations.

To do that, we need to have the imagination and confidence to do things differently and better.

The vision to do today what is needed for tomorrow.

In other words, we need to change the way our country works.

That requires a change in mindset.

What does that mean in practice?

It means:

A more innovative economy...

Stronger communities and safer streets...

A world class education system...

An NHS built around patients...

And a society that truly values the family.

In all these areas and more we must have the courage to change.

To think bigger, strive for excellence, not give up when things get tough.

And if we can do that...

...then we really can build a better future.

In the coming months I will set out our plans in each of these areas.

But let me set the direction, today.

A better future is one where our economy is growing faster so that everybody, everywhere across our Union, has new opportunities for better paying, good jobs.

And the change we need is to put innovation at the heart of everything we do.

An ethos embodied by so many of the fantastic businesses here at Plexal.

Some people think innovation is about gadgets and geekery - a nice to have, peripheral to growth compared to the traditional levers of tax and spend.

That's exactly the mindset we need to change.

Let me tell you why innovation is so important.

Over the last 50 years, it was responsible for around half of the UK's productivity increase.

New jobs are created by innovation.

People's wages increased by innovation.

The cost of goods and services reduced by innovation.

And major challenges like energy security and net zero will be solved by innovation.

The more we innovate, the more we grow.

And the world is seeing an incredible wave of scientific and technological change...

...so right now, the most powerful way to achieve higher growth is to make sure the UK the most innovative economy in the world.

That's why we are:

Increasing public funding in R&D to £20bn to enhance our world leading strengths in AI, life sciences, quantum, fintech, and green technology.

Seizing the opportunities of Brexit to ensure our regulatory system is agile and pro-innovation.

Making sure entrepreneurial and fast-growing companies get the finance they need to expand.

Spreading a culture of creative thinking and doing things differently across every part of the UK.

If we're going to deliver this better future, people will have to work hard.

But I believe good, well-paid jobs are about more than just financial security.

They give people purpose, confidence, dignity - the chance to build a better life for themselves.

But I also believe that if you work hard and play by the rules - you should be rewarded.

Which is why as soon as we can, the Government will reduce the burden of taxation on working people.

And it is staggering that at a time when businesses are crying out for workers, a quarter of our labour force is inactive.

So our growth plan will look at how we can support those who can, to move back into work - including through the welfare system.

Now all of this will make this country a beacon of science, technology, and enterprise and lift our productivity, raise our growth rate, create jobs in the decades to come.

Good jobs give people pride in their own lives.

But a better future also means reinforcing people's pride in the places they call home.

And the change we need is to do away with the idea that it's inevitable that some communities and some places can never and will never get better.

I love my local community and it's not right that too many for far too long have not felt that same sense of meaning and belonging.

Government can't create it - it's something we build together.

But the state does provide the foundations.

So we will deliver on our promise to level up - with greater investment in local areas, to boost growth, create jobs...

...and reinvigorate our High Streets and Town Centres.

But all the regeneration in the world won't mean anything unless people feel safe in their communities.

By this Spring, we will have an extra 20,000 police officers, patrolling the streets, answering the call for help, and catching criminals.

We've got to stop violence against women and girls - and let's be frank...

...that means men taking responsibility for creating a culture and society where women are safe in their communities and at home.

We've got to reduce reoffending - because a small number of career criminals account for disproportionate amounts of crime.

And we've got to beat addiction - because heroin and crack addicts account for almost half of all robberies.

Strong communities are also built on values, on the golden rule: treat others as you would like to be treated yourself.

But too often, a small minority break that golden rule.

They spray graffiti on war memorials.

Discard needles and Nitrous Oxide cannisters in children's playgrounds.

Gang together and cause disorder and disruption.

Anti-social behaviour isn't inevitable or a minor crime.

It makes life miserable for so many and it can be a gateway to more extreme crimes.

So, this government will work tirelessly to crack down on anti-social behaviour, giving police forces, mayors, and local authorities the tools they need...

...and giving communities confidence that these crimes will be quickly and visibly punished.

Wherever you live in our United Kingdom, you should be able to feel proud of your community.

And that's what we'll work together to achieve.

So, we will create a better future by changing our economy and strengthening our communities.

We also need greater social justice.

And the way we achieve that - is education.

This is personal for me.

Every opportunity I've had in life began with the education I was so fortunate to receive.

And it's the single most important reason why I came into politics: to give every child the highest possible standard of education.

Thanks to the reforms we've introduced since 2010, and the hard work of so many excellent teachers, we've made incredible progress.

But with the right plan - the right commitment to excellence - I cannot see any reason why we can't rival the best education systems in the world.

To do that, yes - we'll need to fix the damage of Covid, especially for our youngest pupils.

And yes - it'll require more investment, which is why just weeks ago in the Autumn Statement we provided £2bn of extra funding for schools.

But that's not the limit of our ambitions. We're not content with just catching up.

First, we need to support good teaching and spread best practice with a plan to improve attainment in primary schools.

Next, we need to stop seeing education as something that ends aged 18 - or that sees university as the only option.

With more technical education, lifelong learning, and apprenticeships.

And one of the biggest changes in mindset we need in education today is to reimagine our approach to numeracy.

As Chancellor, I introduced Multiply, a new programme to give hundreds of thousands of adults the opportunity to get the basic numerical skills they need.

But we're one of the few countries not to require our children to study some form of maths up to the age of 18.

Right now, just half of all 16-19-year-olds study any maths at all.

Yet in a world where data is everywhere and statistics underpin every job, letting our children out into that world without those skills, is letting our children down.

So we need to go further.

I am now making numeracy a central objective of the education system.

That doesn't have to mean compulsory A level in maths for everyone.

But we will work with the sector to move towards all children studying some form of maths to 18.

Just imagine what greater numeracy will unlock for people:

The skills to feel confident with your finances, to find the best mortgage deal or savings rate;

The ability to do your job better and get paid more;

And greater self-confidence to navigate a changing world.

Improving education is the closest thing to a silver bullet there is.

It is the best economic policy, the best social policy, the best moral policy.

And that's why it's this government's policy.

As we build this better future for our children and grandchildren...

...I feel a deep responsibility to pass on a health service that will be there for them...

...just as it was there for our parents and grandparents.

When I talk about the NHS, I'm not just talking about a prized public service.

I'm talking about my family's life calling.

My Dad was a Doctor. I grew up working in my Mum's pharmacy.

I saw day in day out the devotion they gave to their patients.

And my record demonstrates how important those memories are to me.

We've significantly increased funding for health and social care.

Recruited thousands more doctors and nurses.

Upgraded more hospitals with cutting-edge technology.

But Covid has imposed massive new pressures and people are waiting too long for the care they need.

We're fixing that.

But we need to do more.

At a time when we're putting record sums into the NHS...

And recruiting record numbers of Doctors and Nurses...

Healthcare professionals are still unable to deliver the care they want...

And patients aren't receiving the care they deserve.

So we need to recognise that something has to change.

That doesn't mean structural reforms to the NHS.

We will always protect the founding principle of an NHS free at the point of use.

But what it does mean is an NHS where patients are in control, with as much choice as possible.

Where we're comfortable with the NHS using more independent capacity - if that's what it takes to get patients quicker and better care.

Where patients can access more information and data, allowing them to make more informed choices and hold services to account.

And where we will no longer accept unwarranted variation in performance between trusts.

Because high quality healthcare should be there for you wherever you live.

And as the NHS works with professions to develop a workforce strategy early this year, I've asked them to consider how we can best support Doctors, Nurses, and other healthcare professionals, like pharmacists, to work more flexibly.

We all share the same objective when it comes to the NHS: to continue providing high quality, responsive healthcare for generations to come. And that's what we are going to deliver.

Our vision of change will revitalise every aspect of our lives - better jobs, stronger communities, world-class education, an NHS built around patients.

But family is something politicians struggle to talk about because you can all too readily be pilloried for being out of touch or worse, hostile to those who don't conform to some idealised form.

We live in a world today where family can and does take many forms.

But whatever your family looks like, it doesn't matter as long as the common bond is love.

We shouldn't be shy about it: We cannot not talk about the thing that is most important in most of our lives.

Not when the evidence is clear that strong, supportive families make for more stable communities and happier individuals.

I wouldn't be where I am today without the love of my family, the kindness they gave me, the sacrifices they made for me, and the values they taught me.

I learnt from them the virtues of hard work and self-improvement...

...the importance of treating others with respect and the value of service...

...of how a community relies on people going above and beyond what they are required to do.

Today, it is the love of my wife and children that sustains me in the most difficult moments in this job.

Family matters.

We need to support parents to manage the demands of modern workplaces without weakening the irreplaceable bonds of family life.

And we're going to roll out Family Hubs to offer parents the support they need to raise a child.

Because I believe deeply that family - not just government - can help us answer the profound questions we face as a country.

When it comes to health, family cares for us when we are sick and old; family teaches us values in education; when it comes to community - family guides us in right and wrong.

That's why family runs right through our vision of a better future.

When I first spoke to you as Prime Minister, I stressed that trust was not given but earned.

I hope that in these first few weeks in the job I have begun to earn your trust.

And I've made five promises today to deliver peace of mind. We will:

Halve inflation.

Grow the economy.

Reduce debt.

Cut waiting times.

And stop the boats.

But I know this is just the start of what we need to do to build a better Britain together.

As well as peace of mind today, this afternoon I've also set out a vision for a better future for our children and grandchildren.

We're not going to get there overnight.

Or even in this Parliament.

But this is the journey we are on.

And despite all the challenges we face, all the anxieties that people feel, I know we can get there.

Others may talk about change, I will deliver it. I won't offer you false hope or quick fixes, but meaningful, lasting change.

I want people to feel something that they do not always feel today:

A belief that public services work for them;

A knowledge that if you work hard in the good times, the state will be there for you during the bad;

A hope that the world will be better for their children than it was for them;

A sense of belonging in the place they call home.

I guarantee that your priorities will be my priorities.

I pledge that I will be honest about the challenges we face.

And I will take the tough but necessary decisions to ensure our great country achieves its enormous potential.

I will only promise what I can deliver. And I will deliver what I promise.