Funding the Future

Burnham’s 10-year plan: What sort of Britain do we wa...

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Will Andy Burnham’s promised 10-year plan reveal his vision for Britain? Does he know what sort of country he wants to create? And will his plan explain what government should actually be trying to achieve?

In this third video in my series on Britain’s need for a 10-year plan, I ask what should be the most fundamental question facing Andy Burnham as he develops his proposals: what is his vision for Britain’s future?

A credible plan cannot simply be a collection of political promises, spending commitments or economic targets. It must begin with a clear understanding of what government is trying to achieve.

I argue that Britain needs to abandon neoliberalism and put people first.

That means creating a society where people can live free from fear of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, illness and debt. It means secure housing, decent incomes, properly funded healthcare, education, social care and pensions.

It also means opportunities for everyone to fulfil their potential, thriving and socially responsible businesses, stronger democracy, resilient infrastructure and environmental sustainability.

These priorities must form part of a coherent plan in which government policies reinforce one another.

Andy Burnham has promised a 10-year plan. But will it reveal a convincing vision of the Britain he wants to create?

And, perhaps more importantly, will that vision put people first?

That’s the challenge I explore in this video.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-f-jzOQf_Gs?si=XByiBoZfdwGcUBs3

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=cvqn2-1bb47bd-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

In the first video in this series on why Britain needs a 10-year plan, I explained that government cannot make coherent decisions without knowing its priorities.

In the second, I explained what governments can actually do, including their power to legislate, create money, provide services, and shape the economy. I also explained why government must understand the real resources available to it and how it can work with businesses to increase them.

But as essential as all these things are, and as important as having the powers to change society might be, none are of much use unless a government knows what changes it wants to make.

That brings me to the most important question in this whole series then: what should government actually be trying to achieve?

My answer is that we now need a government that will put neoliberalism behind it and instead put people first, which would represent a massive change in priorities with regard to the UK governments of the last 45 years. In this video, I want to explain what that means in practice.

A government that wants to base its work on a plan, which almost none have for decades, must begin by deciding what sort of society it wants Britain to become. That is a practical interpretation of its vision. That means identifying the outcomes it wants for people rather than starting with financial targets or assumptions about what markets will deliver.

Neoliberalism has encouraged politicians to believe that markets should determine economic outcomes, leaving governments to manage the consequences. But markets

respond to purchasing power, which means that those with the most money have the greatest influence over what is provided. Human needs are not distributed according to wealth, though, and there is no reason why satisfaction of those needs should depend upon it.

I therefore reject neoliberalism as the basis for government and believe that any responsible government should do so because in a democracy, social priorities must come first. So what does that look like? That's what the rest of this video is about.

My first priority is that people should be free to live their lives without the constant fear of what might happen to them. I mean, freedom from the fear of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, illness, and being unable to provide for those who depend upon them.

I also mean freedom from the fear of debt, particularly when people have to borrow simply to pay for food, heating, and other essentials. People should not have to worry constantly about what an unexpected bill, a lost job, or a change in circumstances will do to their security.

Nor should they have to fear violence, discrimination, or the loss of rights that allow them to live freely.

If government is to serve people, providing reasonable security against these threats must be one of its most fundamental objectives. This is what defence really means for most people in the UK and other countries.

And if people are to live free from fear, they must know that the essentials of a decent life will always be available to them.

Everyone needs a secure home, whether rented or mortgaged, that is affordable, safe, and suitable for their circumstances.

People also need sufficient income to live on, whether that comes from employment, pensions, social security, or other sources.

They need reliable access to food, clean water, energy, transport, and the other services which make everyday life possible.

None of these essentials should become inaccessible simply because someone lacks sufficient purchasing power. That means we cannot rely on markets to supply them. Governments must intervene. And a government that puts people first must therefore take responsibility for ensuring that these basic needs can be met.

But whilst meeting people's basic needs is essential, it's not enough to create the sort of society I want Britain to become. People should also have the opportunity to develop their abilities, contribute to society, and find satisfaction in what they do. They should,

in other words, fulfil their potential. That requires decent employment, fair pay, reasonable working hours, and opportunities for advancement throughout their working lives.

It also requires education that prepares children for the world they will inhabit, and not for the employers who would like to engage them in their own processes. They should not simply be trained to pass exams, in other words. They need to know so much more than that. And adults must also have opportunities to learn new skills, particularly as technology changes the nature of work and the economy.

The objective should be to help people deliver their potential rather than simply regard them as resources for employers to use.

To achieve this, care must be available throughout people's lives. People cannot live securely unless they know that the healthcare and support they require will be available to them whenever they need them.

That requires a properly resourced NHS providing healthcare according to need, alongside effective prevention measures and public health services.

It also means treating social care as an essential public priority, rather than leaving families to cope with it alone.

And older people must have access to a sufficient pension to live with dignity, together with access to care and support if they require it.

Disabled people and those undertaking unpaid care responsibilities must also have security and assistance in the form that they need.

A decent society should ensure that illness, disability, or old age never become reasons for abandoning people to poverty or insecurity.

And the reality is that a good life involves much more than earning an income, having a home, and receiving essential public services. People also need friendship, relationships, leisure, recreation, and opportunities to participate in the communities around them. That means having access to parks, libraries, sports facilities, cultural activities, and public spaces where people can meet. It also means recognising that people must have sufficient time away from paid employment to enjoy their lives and care for others.

Government should support strong communities rather than allow economic pressure and the loss of public facilities to undermine them. The purpose of economic policy should be to make fulfilling lives possible, not simply to maximise the amount of work that people do in the interests of profit maximisation by others.

None of these objectives can be achieved, though, unless people have a meaningful say

in the decisions that affect their lives. In other words, democracy must involve more than choosing between political parties every few years, although that has to be done fairly in the country in which the people actually want to live, all of which are key issues to be addressed and opportunities to provide, which must be dealt with in a long-term plan.

On top of that, people need rights that are protected, genuine access to justice, and institutions that can hold those exercising power to account. This means government must also address inequalities of income, wealth, opportunity, and power that undermine people's ability to participate equally.

This matters. The issues around inequality do not just relate to finance. They relate to access as well, and a 10-year plan would have to address these issues.

And this means as well that inequalities between different regions, communities and countries, as well as discrimination against particular groups, must also be addressed inside this plan. My 10-year plan would therefore strengthen democracy and make the distribution of income and political power fairer. It would reshape our countries, in other words.

But let's be clear, government cannot deliver all these objectives on its own, and it will be a big mistake to imagine that it could, or even should.

Businesses employ more than 20 million people in the UK and produce many of the goods and services on which our lives depend. They develop technologies, organise production, invest in equipment, and create opportunities for innovation and enterprise. A successful 10-year plan must therefore create the conditions in which productive businesses can invest, innovate, and prosper.

Business keeps saying it wants certainty. A 10-year plan should provide it as far as it's possible.

But business should, as a result, also be measured by its contribution to society, employees, customers, communities, and the environment as well as shareholders. I'm not saying shareholders do not matter. I'm saying that everything else does as well. We need to have socially responsible business.

Government must establish the priorities and create a level playing field for business, while working with businesses to develop the productive economy needed for them to deliver. This means the government must have a plan. Businesses cannot make sensible long-term decisions when government policy is unpredictable or its economic objectives are totally unclear.

A 10-year plan would provide greater certainty about investment in housing, energy, infrastructure, education, public services, and a great deal more. That would help

businesses identify future demand, develop the necessary skills, and make productive investments with greater confidence. We need that partnership.

Government can support this through industrial policy, which is something that has been long forgotten, public procurement, research infrastructure, and appropriate access to finance. Never forget that the government has a role in funding business.

In return, though, and I've said it before, but I'll say it again. Businesses must accept responsibility towards their employees, the communities in which they operate, the environment, and everyone else. The point is this: businesses must be socially responsible. The objective is the creation of a productive partnership in which private enterprise contributes to democratically established social priorities, and I believe that is achievable and good for everyone.

And in all of this, we must protect the systems on which life depends. A successful economy requires essential systems that are reliable, resilient, which is a term we have forgotten, and capable of meeting people's needs. That includes food production and distribution, water, sanitation, energy supply, communications, and transport infrastructure.

Government cannot simply assume that markets will maintain these systems adequately or make them accessible to everyone.

It must anticipate the risks created by climate change, international instability, technological disruption , financial failure, and the failures of infrastructure. It must also decide when public ownership, public provision, or stronger regulation is needed to protect the public interest. And there are occasions when it very definitely is, and action has not been taken, and we have all seen the consequences of that.

A 10-year plan should make Britain more resilient so that people can face an uncertain future with greater confidence.

And none of the ambitions I've described will be sustainable unless we recognise the environmental limits within which our economy must operate. Climate change, biodiversity loss and the depletion of natural resources threaten the foundations of human well-being. Government must therefore plan how we produce energy, construct buildings, travel, grow food, and use the materials available to us.

That transition must, however, be fair, because people should not be driven into poverty or insecurity by policies intended to protect the environment.

Britain must also cooperate on these issues internationally because environmental problems, and many of the economic risks we face, do not stop at national borders. Protecting the planet is not an additional objective, competing with human well-being because our future well-being depends upon it.

And a 10-year plan for Britain must recognise that our country is part of an interconnected international economy and society. Trade, migration, international finance, and the movement of technology all influence what Britain can achieve. Our relationships with Europe and the wider world, therefore, matter to employment, investment, public services, and our economic security.

We must also recognise our responsibility concerning peace, international development, human rights, and climate change. The government should therefore seek international cooperation while retaining the capacity to make democratic decisions about Britain's own priorities. There is a tension here. The plan must resolve it.

The important point is that none of these objectives should be treated as an isolated promise made by a single government department. Secure housing improves health, while good healthcare helps people participate in employment, education, and community life. Education develops the skills needed by business, public services, and the transition to a sustainable economy. Decent employment and reliable social security reduce poverty. Strong communities improve people's well-being and resilience.

Successful businesses depend upon public infrastructure, skilled employees, reliable institutions and customers who can afford what they produce. A 10-year plan must recognise these relationships and organise government so that its different policies reinforce one another. That's one of its key goals. And establishing these priorities does not mean pretending that government can achieve everything immediately, or that difficult choices will disappear.

Government must understand the resources available, recognise competing demands, and decide how to increase capacity over time. It must establish which actions are more urgent, which depend upon earlier investment and which can be developed over the coming decade.

It must also be prepared to change its methods when circumstances change without abandoning the objectives it has established. Every significant decision should be judged by whether it advances the security, well-being, and opportunities of the people the government serves. That is the difference between a meaningful 10-year plan and a collection of political promises that may never be delivered.

My 10-year plan for Britain begins with the simple proposition. Government exists to serve people and secure their future. I want people to live free from fear with secure homes, adequate incomes and opportunities to fulfil their potential. I want children to receive the education they need, everyone to have healthcare and older people to enjoy dignity and security. I want thriving businesses, strong communities, a fair democracy and essential services that people can rely upon. And I want all of this achieved within the environmental limits that make a sustainable future possible. These

are the priorities that will guide the rest of my plan.

That’s what I think is important. What do you think? You may disagree. There is a poll down below. Let us have your comments as ever. Please do like and share this video. Please do subscribe to our channel. Hit that bell button as well while you’re doing it. We then tell you when we’ve made another video. And if you’d like to support our work, there is a Ko-fi button somewhere up there, and there’s another one down below. On that link, you can decide to make a donation to support us, and we’d be very grateful.

Poll

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