

Rt Hon Andrew Burnham, MP
People's History Museum, Spinningfields, Manchester M3 3ER <https://phm.org.uk>
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What a welcome. Good morning everybody. Are you ready for this?

I'm sounding like I used to sound when I used to DJ across this great city and I'm probably doing that because I'm missing it so much – I'm missing all of you, missing this place, the people.

You were just brilliant to me in my nine years as Mayor, I could not have asked for better backing.

You were there at my back all the way through and I will never forget what this place did for me.

It's been such a wrench to leave that I've had to get special permission - from what people in Westminster call my Manchester clothes - I've had to get special permission to wear them this morning.

Sorry, Kemi, about that!

However, I have bowed to public pressure on one front – I have bought some new running shorts. It was either do that or change the decency laws, and I opted for the former. But I can't tell you how glad it makes me that we meet at this big moment in one of my favourite places on Earth - the People's History Museum.

It holds real significance for me – and not just because one of my old coats is in a glass case upstairs and - can you believe it - comes off second-best alongside Michael Foot's infamous "donkey jacket"!

It's because these galleries tell the story of our country better than anywhere else. How through time it has not been run in the interests of the many. And how ordinary people have fought to change that status quo and make it fairer.

Today we must take inspiration from that history and get ready to repeat it. The time has come to build the broadest possible coalition of people to lift Britain back up to where we all want it to be.

What hope can we have that it will be different this time. This is the question I would be asking as a voter right now. It's the one I want to answer as clearly as I can today.

And in doing so, give the new direction the country is looking for. After ten years of political turbulence since Brexit. And twenty years of falling living standards since the 2008 financial crash.

Westminster hasn't been working for people and it hasn't been working for a very long time. In fact, it is broken. And, as a result, the country isn't where it should be. It is stuck in a rut.

And, clearly, we can't go on like this. My generation of politicians - including me - must take responsibility. We haven't been good enough. But, instead of being honest about that, the parties have continued with politics-as-usual.

Finger-pointing. Point-scoring. Now that might matter less in a world where people's lives are getting better. But when they are not, it is dangerous and destructive of what remains of public trust in politics.

We cannot go through another decade like the one we have just had. We need a new determination to raise living standards of every person in this land. And we must accept that to do that, to fix the economy and the country, we need to change politics and we need to do it now.

So let me state my clear intention as I put myself forward. True to the motto of this city, I am going to do things differently. I am going to break with the more-of-the-same approach that has got us here.

I am going to give Britain the circuit-breaker it needs, by building a more collaborative politics in Westminster, by taking power out of the centre and putting it in the hands of the people and places who can use it best and, in so doing, creating a new sense of agency, possibility and hope flowing around the country.

We will make politics work for you and the place where you live. I know it can be done - because we have done it here.

When I started as Mayor in 2017, we set about building a new approach, a new politics based on the exact opposite of the Westminster approach:

Place-first, not party-first
Problem-solving, not point-scoring
Long-term, not short-term

A decade on, it's incredible how much we've been able to achieve by working together instead of fighting against one another.

The Greater Manchester way is based on strong partnership between all sectors: public, private, community, voluntary, academic, faith and our trade unions.

We ask everyone to face the same way and then pull in that same direction together. Let me give you an example.

When we realised the last Conservative Government had done something significant by introducing 45-day work placements for young people linked to T Levels, we set ourselves the mission of finding one for every young person who wanted one.

Over the course of last year, we rang round our businesses in the city region and, with the help of hundreds of companies, delivered our goal of a thousand extra work placements.

That's a thousand extra young lives changed every year and it shows what a place can do when it works as one. For Britain to get back to where it should be. Those same principles need to be applied now to how we run the country.

Pull in the same direction. Move forward together. But let's not kid ourselves: this is not as easy as it sounds. Westminster and Whitehall are set up for conflict and they require radical change if the country is to get back on track.

I left Westminster a decade ago with the Mayor of the Liverpool City-Region, Steve Rotherham, because we could see it simply wasn't working for the North-West of England and the people here and, indeed, and other parts of Britain. The same thing.

The Parliament I returned to on Monday is full of good people, many of them here in the audience today, Members of Parliament who've joined us. And they are working hard every day, trying to do the right thing for the places that they represent.

But it's hard - it's too hard - for them to make change. Why? Because when power is not in the hands of those places that they represent, but held by an insufficiently accountable outsourced state.

We are one of the most over-centralised countries in the world - and, worse, that over-centralised heart of the country is not pulling the same way but in different directions.

That is the reality of Westminster now. Both within our parties - and between them. And between the departments of Whitehall. I'll be honest: I was worried about what I found on my return last week.

It is a more fragmented, disjointed place than the one I left. And, frankly, unhappier. I will work hard to change that culture - leading from the front and showing how things can be different.

Letting MPs be authentic representatives and not using the whip system to create fear or close down debate. Involving people more in the work of the government. And drawing on the breadth and depth of talent and expertise our party has to offer.

While the political direction I set is not up for negotiation, I will build an inclusive team at the very highest level so that all parts of the party - and the country - can see themselves reflected and represented in it.

And, may I say, I will not announce those decisions on appointments - certainly not today - and indeed not until the end of this process so, until then, feel free to discount the wild speculation in circulation. Message for the back of the room there. Good morning, Mr. Mason.

I will reach out to other political parties to find as much common ground as we can and build that more collaborative approach I spoke about a moment ago. So, a greater sense of unity in Parliament will then allow us to give a clearer sense of direction to Whitehall.

I was struck by recent comments from Ministers expressing their deep frustration at the Whitehall turf wars. Like Parliament, the civil service is full of good people trying to do the right thing but they are held back by the structure and culture in which they have to work.

It is too adversarial and too much time is wasted with departmental silos battling each other and battling the Treasury rather than getting things done. How can the country pull in the same direction when that is the reality at the very top?

And as Mayors, I'm sure I speak for the front row here, we have felt similar frustration over the years when those same departments constantly push back against our legitimate requests to improve our places by devolving a fraction of the power and resources they hold.

The truth is this: the country spends too much time arguing and not enough time doing. I'm not sure this Whitehall culture could ever be justified. It wasn't justified when I was a Minister almost 20 years ago, but it certainly can't be justified now.

The stark imbalance in resources between national government and local government is holding back growth. If councils can't fix potholes, what chance do they have of bringing forward major regeneration schemes to get growth going?

While national government has got bigger, particularly since the pandemic, local government is threadbare and without the resources to fulfil even statutory responsibilities.

This is not just bad for councils and the areas they serve, it is bad for everywhere.

It is bad for London and the South East. The whole country suffers when the regions and nations are not meeting their potential and Londoners are left with an overheated economy and overcrowded housing market.

It is actually bad for national government too. Because we will never get growth up to the level Britain needs unless every single postcode in the land is set up to contribute to it.

This country hasn't thought in that way before – but, with the Makerfield Test at the heart of decision-making, it will do from now on. To make it happen, we will bring about the biggest rebalancing of power our country has seen.

It is time for Whitehall to accept that growth cannot be ordered from the top down. Instead, it can only be nurtured from the bottom up. It comes from having the power at ground level to make a real difference; from a clear shared vision that everyone can understand and investors can back.

It comes from running sound finances, as we have done in Greater Manchester, which in turn gives businesses the stability and confidence to invest, increasing their productivity and adoption of new technology.

It comes from placing our universities at the heart of local economies – as all the Mayors do - and bringing the innovation-led approach through start-ups and scale-ups. It comes from committing to decent infrastructure in all parts of the UK and getting national investors to back the aspirations set by regions.

It comes from giving people the security of a good home and good employment so that they can be as productive as possible; from good mobility and an ability to afford the basics.

And it comes from not leaving everything to the market - but public intervention where necessary to set higher ambitions for towns, as we did in Stockport, and kickstart the process of change.

This is Manchesterism. I think I even saw the Mayor of Liverpool clapping at that. It is a vision for good growth and a rejection of the old trickle-down model.

And like the ideas this museum celebrates, which grew here and changed the country, so all parts of the UK should now be given the chance to develop their own version of the same, focusing on the things that most matter to them.

Good growth in every British postcode. What a sea change that would be in the way UK government thinks about our own country!

Places no longer forgotten or written off as they have been in the past, but supported to make the best of their assets. Seeing the positives in all places. And there are positives in all places, in all postcodes across this United Kingdom – let's always remember that.

Powers for our rural economies to address issues specific to them, like inadequate transport. Powers for areas undergoing industrial transition, like Port Talbot, Scunthorpe and Aberdeen.

Powers for our proud coastal towns to reimagine themselves for the twenty first century.

And, yes, more powers for London too, over education and housing, so that London can do more for itself and remain the world's greatest capital city. And you heard that here from Manchester!

All of it backed by the stability that comes from sound public finances, as I said before, and the discipline of our current fiscal rules. I hope people can begin to feel – hopefully you can - the excitement that comes with the change that I am setting out today.

It promises a new era of possibility for Britain. Possibility for places that haven't felt it for a very long time. And I know, because I heard that from people on doorsteps in the by-election. But let's give them that feeling that ability to hope, to aspire for better.

The change will be the biggest change in our lifetimes to the way the country is run and it is consistent with the 2024 manifesto. We will create a more streamlined state with a clearer purpose: to power up all parts of the country and put a laser-like focus on growth and regeneration. Good growth.

The change will be driven through the Prime Minister's Office in an extended operation based here in Manchester. But here's the important thing - it will only be based here.

The job of No 10 North will be to make power flow into the Midlands, into the South West, into the East of England and, yes, into London as I said before, as much as the North East, Yorkshire & the Humber and here in the North West.

It will be about offering new opportunities to extend devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland by taking power deeper down. The people of Dundee and Bangor feel just as distant from Holyrood and the Senedd as they do from Westminster.

Now get this - No 10 North will be the nerve centre for a rewired Britain. It will be the conduit through which we redistribute power and resources across the UK. It will coordinate all parts of government, at national and local level, to agree a long-term economic strategy and help all places set new growth ambitions.

It will be given a mission to strive for equivalent living conditions in all parts of Britain - borrowing from the German Basic Law.

It will make place-based collaboration the new operating principle for UK plc, requiring all government departments and agencies to support strategic and local authorities with staffing and resources.

And let me say this very directly: the days of Whitehall fighting the devolution of power into the regions and nations are over, for good.

I have had 10 years of fighting the Whitehall machine - blocking this place's progress - the progress of people here, and I am simply not prepared to accept the same for any area coming after Greater Manchester.

The whole of Whitehall will now be required to get behind our places and work together with them to make quicker, more joined-up decisions. Ours will be a 10-year mission to raise living standards across the land.

To do this, No 10 North will support the regions on three clear tasks:

Reform of essential utilities

Reindustrialisation

And the regeneration of places.

On utilities, we will ensure all parts of the UK are able to take greater public control of essential services like water, housing, energy and transport, learning from the model of that has transformed our bus networks here in Greater Manchester.

We will set out 10-year plans to bring down the cost of these essentials - to individuals, families and businesses.

On reindustrialisation, we will support every region to set clear and credible industrial ambitions - and provide the support to achieve them, encouraging more cross-UK

partnership between places with complementary industrial clusters, as Cambridge and Manchester have done on life sciences.

We will consolidate public and private investment at a place-based level and help all areas establish Good Growth Funds, as we have done here in Greater Manchester.

We are such an inventive country and, going forward, we can be the world's leading innovation nation. This is the key to higher growth and I want more world-beating British manufacturers and service providers at the frontier of new technology and exporting to the world.

I will back our scientists, technologists, entrepreneurs and creatives – as I have done here– and show how Britain will be the Innovation Nation of the next decade. We will get better at capturing full value from their ideas for UK plc by changing the culture in Whitehall when it comes to backing British industry.

For too long, UK public procurement policy has been based on chasing cut-price deals around the world rather than helping our own British-based suppliers become more stable and competitive.

No more. From here on, every pound raised from taxpayers will work harder for them – and that approach will apply fully to the Defence Investment Plan. We will make sure that all eligible public contracts are subject to proper social value weighting.

And we will do that to make sure British-based companies are in a better position to win contracts. This change is essential given the need to build our own resilience in places across the country in an increasingly uncertain world.

We need to safeguard sovereign manufacturing and production capability across the country in critical sectors like steel, defence, energy, food and farming – rather than just being prepared to let it just go as we have sadly done in the past.

In return, we will recycle maximum benefits for our communities and residents. For instance, by requiring a much greater supply of 45-day work placements and apprenticeships for young people.

I take very seriously the findings of the recent report by Alan Milburn. We need a complete rethink of how we support the next generation to succeed, and it has to start with the education system.

The days of a school system configured entirely around the university route will be brought to an end.

University is great for those who want it - but when are we going to focus on the life chances of those kids who want something different? When? The country hasn't done that for a long, long time.

People have argued for many years for an education system based on parity between academic and technical and that is what we will build, giving every young person growing up here a clear path into a reindustrialised Britain.

Where young people need mental health support, it should be provided as part of in-work support.

And we will answer the call from Mayors, and particularly the Mayor of the North East, for devolution of employment support and changing the way we support and sustain people in employment, working much more through our community and voluntary sector at a grassroots level.

Working with organisations people trust to help them – rather than going to places they fear. This is the difference that the Mayors can make, and in doing that, we will reduce the welfare bill in a way that is fair and lasting and helps people move forward.

Another way to do that is by repairing the public housing stock. Britain has lost almost 1.5 million council homes since the 1980s and around the same number of people are now on housing waiting lists and have been there for a very long time.

As the result, the country is in a housing trap. We are forced to chase rents in the private-rented sector through the benefits system.

When governments try to control these costs by freezing Local Housing Allowance, it makes families homeless and places unfunded pressures on councils when they have to pay for temporary accommodation.

Britain's housing crisis is having a ruinous impact on its public finances. So, working with local areas, No 10 North will oversee the biggest council house building programme since the post-war period. We will use public land, vacant public land to reduce costs.

Let me just take you back to when I grew up here in the 1970s. Steve Rotherham and I have written about this in a certain book. But when we were growing up here, amongst the friends we had at school, there were two things that were the foundation of working-class aspiration.

A council home – a secure home – that was the foundation for everything. And then good technical education. And those things have been taken away in the decades since. So, no wonder so many young people struggle to make it work and don't make it work. Don't blame them, blame ourselves.

We haven't been giving people this stability – this ability to get on in life and it's time we did. And brought back working-class aspiration – the chance of somebody growing up here to be everything they can be. And that's what we will do. And, also, make this a city where no one has to leave to get on in life, or any of the other cities represented here today.

That's what this new era is going to be all about. A sense of hope, of possibility. That things are achievable, that you might not have thought were before.

Having this focus on council homes again, on having them in all parts of the country it will represent a decisive shift to a more preventative and productive state, adopting a national Housing First philosophy as has been pioneered so successfully in Finland.

If you don't give people a good home, what chance have they got of having a good life? What chance of making the health service sustainable, if people are not living in good accommodation, or getting a good education for kids. Everything starts with a good home and this country finally has to put that at the top of its priority list.

Through this new approach, we will bring higher density residential development to our towns, and No 10 North will be able to support all places to turn around towns, high streets and local centres, increasing footfall on the high street and protecting more green spaces from development.

To reinforce that, we will reform business rates to support pubs and high street businesses, businesses that bring social benefits to our communities. And let me finish by saying this. Rather than being a marker of decline, shouldn't we make our high streets the symbols of Britain's renaissance.

Ours is a 10-year mission to raise people's living standards. I know people can't wait forever for change. I heard on doorsteps in Makerfield how people need a bit extra now to help with rising costs. I will do my very best to deliver it and, whilst not taking risks with the public finances, will seek to give Britain some breathing space as soon as I can.

People need to be able to look forward to a night out or a holiday with the kids. People need hope. This brings me back to where I started and the stories told in this building of how ordinary people, right back to Peterloo 200 years ago here, changed a British state not built with them in mind.

Our modern challenge is exactly the same - an economy which, from the mid-1980s onwards, has not been built with them in mind and instead has handed more to those who already have most and left people over-paying for the basics.

If people in 1844 could form the Cooperative Movement in Rochdale to lower the price of food, then why can't we act now with similar courage to make life better?

Imagine what things could be like if we succeed. Imagine what it would feel like to live in a country wired to work for ordinary people rather than against them. Imagine if all local areas could build homes people can afford to the point where they could guarantee one for everyone.

Imagine if we could bring down the cost of energy for people and business and the good things that would come from that. Imagine good growth in every postcode and hope in every heart. I'll say it again. Imagine: good growth in every postcode and hope in every heart.

Well imagine no more. Let's make it happen.