

**THE**  
**PEOPLE'S**  
**VOICE**



A report by the People's  
Vote campaign

# THE PEOPLE'S VOICE CAMPAIGN

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We know that a new vote on Europe must be a different kind of campaign to the 2016 referendum.

It must recognise that many millions of people voted to leave the EU because Britain does not work for them. They demanded change.

In order to succeed, and help heal the divisions that afflict our country, a new vote must convince voters it is a route to a better future for the country, their communities and families.

The People's Voice initiative seeks to define a different kind of campaign, by starting a national conversation about the greatest challenges that face the UK and how a new referendum can be part of the solution.

We travelled across the country, holding public meetings, usually chaired by local MPs, involving community leaders, young people, employers, and ordinary people from all kinds of backgrounds and walks of life.

The People's Voice focused on areas that voted heavily to leave. Events in places like Sunderland, Grimsby, and Birmingham brought together people from all sides of the Brexit debate for an honest conversation about the challenges that face this country.

The campaign gave people the chance to have their say on how a new vote should be different, either through the thousands of online surveys completed or the hundreds who attended our events.

## BRIDGING DIVISIONS

People claim that the UK is hopelessly divided, that Brexit is an unbridgeable schism, with two irreconcilable sides unable to understand each other. They claim that any referendum would inevitably mean conflict and discord.

This was not the experience of the People's Voice initiative.

In town halls and meeting rooms across the country, Brexiteers and remainers found common ground. They spoke about inequality and jobs, homes, the NHS and immigration, and found broad agreement on what we need to achieve. They agreed they were sick of project fear and fake news, and said that a referendum campaign had to involve people from all backgrounds and walks of life, especially the young.

There were passionately held views on all sides, the debate was at times heated and the differences of opinion that were exposed by the 2016 referendum were still on display.

But the People's Voice showed that another referendum doesn't have to be a huge argument that divides the country. It can be based on facts and respect for each other. It can offer something to all people, however they voted in 2016. It can be a different kind of campaign about how we create a different - better - Britain.

# WHY A NEW VOTE HAS TO BE DIFFERENT FROM 2016

By Andrew Cooper

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The 2016 referendum left a bad taste in the mouth. Fake news, project fear and undeliverable promises damaged trust in politics and were a chief cause of the chaotic, never-ending Brexit process to which the nation has since been subjected.

The blame lies with both sides. Tall tales about how straightforward it would be to leave and overconfidence about how good a deal we could get were part of the problem; now, with hindsight, we can say with certainty that some of the assertions confidently made about Brexit have turned out simply not to be true. But the dry economic projections of the Remain campaign - all too easily cast aside as project fear - and its failure to make an emotionally resonant or positive case for staying in the EU are also to blame.

A new referendum can, and must, be a different kind of campaign.

Those campaigning to stay in the EU cannot be tin-eared to the towering challenges faced by so many people and communities across the UK. There are very good reasons why people voted for Brexit, a successful remain campaign will have to convince them that these challenges are best fixed working within, not outside, the EU.

And we need to find a way to agree on some shared facts. A new referendum has the big

advantage that it will test a specific Brexit deal against staying in the EU, so the trade offs will be clearer. But even so politicians and campaigners have a responsibility to treat facts with more respect.

It's easy to cast Brexit as a cause of great division in our country, but I rather believe it has revealed divisions that have existed for a long time. Fear of these divisions is not a good reason to fear putting the question back to the people. A new referendum can be a chance to tackle the challenges this country faces head on, help restore faith in honest politics, and begin to bring our country back together.



Andrew Cooper,  
Group Board Director, Populus

# THE 2016 REFERENDUM IN NUMBERS

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# 67%

agree that 'In the 2016 referendum both Remain and Leave campaigns told lies and scare stories, meaning that it was impossible for people to make a proper choice'

# 81%

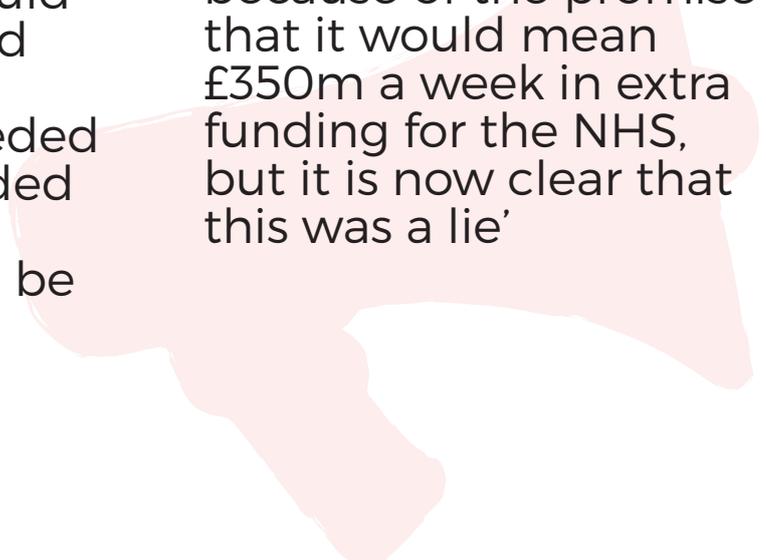
Agree with the statement: 'it's turned out to be much more complicated than we were told in the referendum'

# 64%

agree that 'in the referendum campaign we were told that getting a good Brexit deal would be easy - that we could have our cake and eat it, because the EU needed us more than we needed them. None of that has turned out to be true'

# 62%

agree that 'Many people voted for Brexit in the 2016 referendum because of the promise that it would mean £350m a week in extra funding for the NHS, but it is now clear that this was a lie'



# THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING THE UK - AND HOW WE CAN ADDRESS THEM

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We asked about the biggest challenges facing this country. People told us they are worried about inequality between people and regions; they wanted to restore pride in Britain and its regions, they painted a picture of low paid, insecure work, a fragile economy, and families struggling to provide a home for their children; they questioned how we manage immigration, how we protect our NHS and how we deal with climate change.

## 1. PRIDE, PATRIOTISM & THE PLACE OF OUR NATION

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People lamented Britain's lost sense of pride in itself. Because of dying industries, changing communities, or a loss of power on the world stage, some people feel confidence and bullishness about our Britishness has been lost.

There is a real desire for a renewed sense of national identity, and although there exist as many definitions of Britishness as there are people to define it, many common themes emerged. Pride in our regional communities, our national institutions (the BBC, the NHS), our history, our economy and our industry were at the forefront of people's minds.

People drew a clear distinction between patriotism and nostalgia, they are crying out for a positive, hopeful vision for the country, but reject a backward-looking return to an imagined past.

"[We need to] rebuild pride in this nation and the qualities that people from other countries see in us and our society (eg BBC, NHS, fairness - the qualities seen at the opening ceremony of the London Olympics)."

"We have lost a sense of civic pride, unity, responsibility and connectivity. People feel devalued, marginalised and, very naturally, angry at all of this. We have put money at the top of our priorities as opposed to the people."

"Generating and celebrating a greater sense of history and civic pride in their local area, food, industries, dialect, etc in England should be a priority to counter the negative anti-foreigner nationalism that exists when people feel that something is being lost"

"When a nation loses pride in itself, it turns in on itself, and out against the 'world'. That is where we are today."

## 2. INEQUALITY

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People told us that two nations exist in the UK today. Some framed it as the North versus the South, or as London versus the rest. Others as rich versus poor or urban versus rural.

The idea that an elite thrives while many others barely survive was prevalent.

The proliferation of food banks came up time and again. People reported a growing sense that ordinary, everyday people with good jobs (nurses, teachers, hauliers) were struggling to make ends meet as the cost of living rises and pay doesn't keep up.

Dismay at modern-day poverty was combined with a sense that wealthy people are not playing by the same rules, that business uses loopholes to minimise tax, that rich people store their wealth offshore, that the tax system is unfair.

“Wealth and power needs to be better redistributed, both from the rich to the poor and from London to the provinces - Brexit came about largely because large swathes of people have not reaped the rewards of globalisation, and feel removed from political decisions taken in Westminster.”

“[The biggest challenges are] the inability of single wage earner on a low level, basic income (nurse, teacher, lorry driver, supermarket worker) to provide a home, food, warmth and other simple modern day necessities for himself/herself a spouse and children.”

“Fairer taxation. Council tax on the smallest house the same proportion of value to that of the largest house. End offshore tax havens and make all of the rich of this country pay the taxes they should.”

## 3. THE HEALTH OF THE BUSINESSES THAT MAKE UP OUR ECONOMY

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People want an economy that is prepared for the future, one in which business is given the certainty it needs to thrive, and one that produces the taxes that keep our country running.

People are keenly aware that business needs regulatory certainty, stable support from Government, and easy access to other countries' markets. They know these are uncertain times for business, not just because of Brexit, but because of the pace of change in fields like automation

and artificial intelligence, and because of the impact of globalisation. They understand that foreign investors choose Britain partly because of its close links to European markets. They are frustrated by the threats Brexit poses to the businesses that make up our economy.

There is a strong conviction that business must be protected and supported, so that we can feed our economy and reap the benefits for public services.

“To prosper the UK needs to attract both foreign investment and to nurture the talent the country has for risk takers who want to start and develop their own businesses. We need to engage the finest minds to get the taxation of businesses on a fair footing so that the UK exchequer can see growing revenues to pay for health care, education, science, defence and the myriad of other things that we need in the future.”

“We must diversify our economy, reduce our dependence on the financial sector and reduce the risk of a repeat of 2008. We need to invest in the emerging opportunities; health services and health technologies, cyber security, robotics and the internet of things. These sectors are where the jobs of the future

will be and the UK is well placed to take a leading role in their development.”

“Businesses need certainty. Resolve the Brexit issue, get rid of as much bureaucracy as possible, support them with appropriate grants, tax breaks etc and let them make money, provide services and employment.”

“Without a strong economy nothing else will work, we won't be able to invest in health, education or defence. Since Brexit began the pound has slumped, businesses have gone under (including mine) and people are divided. We must support businesses and quickly - how many more have to make redundancies or move overseas before we do something.”

## 4. INSECURE JOBS AND WAGES

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What it means to work in the UK has transformed over the past decades - for many people this change has not been for the better.

We found a sense that secure jobs with good wages and good prospects have been replaced by an economy that is more unstable and fragile. People worry about work for them and their families and feel insecure about the future.

Insecurity seems to be the chief characteristic of the jobs market for many in the UK today. People talked of zero hours and short term contracts and the gig economy. They spoke of a loss of union power and being

powerless to address low wages or unfair employment practices. They talked of the state having to top up peoples wages through the benefits system, and called for a higher minimum wage to counteract this.

“Whole communities have been left in shock and bewilderment about what has happened to them, well-paid, skilled and secure work has disappeared only to be replaced with zero hours insecure contracts offering little hope for the future.”

“Millions of people in work are now receiving such poor wages that the state has to top-up their incomes. Employers are in effect being subsidised.”

“The roll out of universal credit which may have been paused... could be restarted within days. Our local foodbank continues to be inundated with people who have been [found] ineligible [due

to] all sorts of clauses and opt outs that almost seem to be targeting reducing benefit received by people who are eligible.”



## 5. HOMES

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Owning a home is a totem of financial security, but for many in this country it has never seemed harder to achieve. People are worried that housing simply isn't affordable anymore for many on ordinary wages. They spoke of the intergenerational unfairness in home ownership, as many older people reap the financial rewards of property younger people can no longer afford.

For those who cannot afford to buy, a lack of social or council housing is an equally severe challenge. They worry about the impact on community when people cannot afford a house in the place they call home.

They want more housing, both to buy and to rent; they want it to be better designed; fundamentally a good home should be available to everyone, not just the wealthy.

“Lack of affordable, appropriate housing for a growing population. It's not in the right

places, it's not the right kind, it's not the right price. Often [it] doesn't exist at all. Planning regs need to consider individuals less and the general requirements of the population more.”

“The long-term rise in house prices has hit the young while benefiting the old. My generation (I'm 74) could buy a house in their twenties, both because prices were lower and because they were not burdened by student debt. Now people rent for longer and even without house price inflation lifetime housing costs are much higher and more people will still be paying for housing after retirement.”

“Probably the single biggest issue is the lack of affordable housing, I think building far more social housing in well-designed estates to promote community is a major priority. I suspect that this would also alleviate a lot of the bad feeling about immigration.”

## 6. IMMIGRATION

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People overwhelmingly recognised the benefits of immigration. They feel largely positive about the impact immigrants have on the country, helping our NHS and care services to run, staffing our hospitality industry, doing jobs

that need doing in a country that has high employment, paying taxes and contributing to the cultural life of the nation.

But at the same time some have real concerns about migration and its impact on jobs, wages,

public services and communities. Even the most supportive recognise that more can be done to manage immigration and ensure its benefits are shared fairly throughout the nation.

Brexit supporters are sick and tired of claims that fear of immigration drove the Brexit vote (as they are sick and tired of people trying to simplistically pin any single motive on their decision to leave). Immigration is an important issue for some voters, but it is not a dominant issue and it does not feature in everyone's calculations.

“The UK needs free movement of people, for the benefit both of British people who wish to enlarge their horizons (especially the younger generation), and of

the British economy [which needs] all those who come and work here.”

“To get a People's Vote off the ground there has to be some acknowledgement of the fears of many who voted leave about uncontrolled immigration. It would be an opportunity for UK Government and the EU to come up with some way of managing UK immigration better without compromising on the core 'freedoms'.”

“We need to address people's fears about immigration and for this we need good accurate information - how many EU people are employed in the UK; how much the NHS relies on this pool of labour; how small the number of EU people living here is who are claiming benefits.”

## 7. THE NHS

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People told us of their fears for the NHS. They worry about postcode lotteries that deliver different outcomes for patients in different parts of the country. They are concerned about staff shortages which increase waiting times and hit quality. They fear we are asking more and more of our health service, without investing in it properly. They can see it falling apart at the seams.

People recognise that the health service and Europe are inextricably linked, whether because of the European doctors and nurses that keep the NHS running, or the private US healthcare firms that would demand access to the NHS as part of any post-Brexit trade deal.

The quality and depth of the debate about Europe and the NHS has moved on dramatically since 2016, its importance remains unchanged.

“The lack of adequate funding for the NHS resulting in staff shortages, a lack of access to treatment options; drugs which are deemed too expensive in some areas & long waiting times.”

“Our NHS services - in particular in the field of mental health - is not consistently providing the same high standard services for adults and young people. It's a postcode lottery.”

“The NHS is facing shortage of

medical staff, there being a large number of vacancies unfulfilled as applications from qualified European staff are greatly

reduced due to uncertainty about their future and the potential disruption to their families.”

## 8. PEACE AND SECURITY

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A theme people kept coming back to was peace and security. They said that one of the most powerful benefits of Europe was underpinning decades of peace following traumatic 20th Century wars. They value the modern-day security collaboration that helps us extradite criminals and share information about terrorist threats. People understand that economic union, political and security collaboration across Europe keeps us all safe.

Whatever people's views on our membership of the European Union, they believe that security is something we should not risk.

“The effects on peace and the power balance in the world of a stable Europe with UK on board. Emphasis on EU representing peace and haven of support in an increasingly dangerous world.”

“Why is Putin so in favour of our leaving? Precisely because it weakens Europe, and the counterweight to his kind of strongman authoritarian politics. Europe offers a way to operate that respects citizens, offers welfare, education, health to all its citizens and is a peaceful body. This is important.”

## 9. CLIMATE CHANGE

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People are worried that all the noise about Brexit means that climate change - a global challenge of unprecedented scale - has been left on the back burner. People recognise the threat posed to our way of life by man-made climate change and they are angry that politicians are not doing enough to fix it.

People recognise that issues like climate change can only be solved by coordinated international action, they know that institutions like the EU have a vital role to play, and they want the UK to be a world leader in finding solutions.

“The most important issue worldwide is the Climate Crisis. Climate has to come first in everything we do - otherwise there is no point. There is no point in leave or remain if we are doomed because we are not taking the climate crisis seriously enough.”

“Many of our most urgent projects we can best tackle as members of the EU, shaping as well as enacting policy (tackling climate change and environmental issues, developing opportunities for education and training, creating good jobs, investing in poorer regions,

joined-up transport planning and housing policies, etc).

“I believe the biggest challenge is how to change our economy so that we are not damaging the planet. We have to end the way we measure success by GDP. We

must tackle climate change as a priority whilst working towards a fairer society in which everyone can contribute.”

“Climate change, not high on everyone's agenda but it sure as hell should be!”



# HOW CAN A NEW VOTE BE DIFFERENT TO THE LAST REFERENDUM?

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A new referendum must address the concerns of those who voted to leave, all sides of the Brexit debate agree on that. They told us campaigners should swap project fear for a positive vision of the EU; deal in facts not fake

news; focus on peace and security; and represent all walks of life, especially young people. Whatever people's views on Brexit, they have equally strong views on how a new vote can be different.

## 1. ADDRESS THE CONCERNS OF THOSE WHO VOTED TO LEAVE

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Whatever people's views on Brexit, they said again and again that a new referendum must address the concerns of those who voted to leave.

There is anger in many parts of the country about our relationship with Europe, many people and communities feel ignored, misunderstood and patronised by political leaders. People who voted leave have a set of legitimate concerns - many of these are outlined in the section above.

So any campaign to remain in the European Union must understand the concerns of people who voted to leave and offer credible solutions to them.

"We need to say about many problems, "It's not the EU that caused this, it's the UK". We need to advocate a perfectly possible program of regeneration for a country that has been forgotten."

"There needs to be more emphasis, with humility, on addressing the issues affecting people in Leave-voting areas, rather than the rather negative (although true) emphasis solely on the economic effects. if you live in area which has been ignored and left high and dry, why should you care what happens to some apparently posh rich bloke down South?"

## 2. DEAL IN FACTS, NOT FALSEHOODS.

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People raised concerns that falsehoods - even lies - influenced the referendum in 2016 and they raised concern that the same could happen again. Both sides of the Brexit debate are criticised equally, project fear, fake news on

Facebook and lies on the side of a bus are met with the same disdain. Many people still feel they don't know where to turn for facts they can rely on about Europe and they are tired of uncertainty.

Some say that giving people a final say will be different, because it will test a clear leave proposition - or propositions - against remain. The trade-offs will be clear and exaggerated claims about the benefits and the risks of leaving will be more difficult to spin. However, many remain worried that facts will get lost in the noise of the argument.

A new vote must find some way to give voice to differing opinions whilst giving people much more certainty on the facts.

**“A new campaign must find a way to give people information they can rely on.”**

**“Much more information should be made available to the public so that choices are truly informed. The disinformation and lies of the previous campaign were appalling and have brought about a deep distrust of politicians.”**

**“Tell the truth!!! Honest even if it's not palatable to either of the sides, the truth should be paramount. People are not stupid, they can now see the truth about Brexit and can now make a more informed vote.”**

**“The undermining of "Experts" has also been hugely damaging; this too needs to be dealt with.”**

### **3. SWAP PROJECT FEAR FOR A POSITIVE VISION**

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“Project Fear” was castigated by everyone we spoke to, it remains a complete turn off to voters. Many people simply do not believe that leaving the European Union will cause immediate and significant harm to them and their families. They understand the economic arguments, they know that leaving could harm our economy, but they assess the risk worth taking, in the absence of a convincing case that Europe benefits them personally.

The instruction to campaigners for the remain side in a new referendum is clear - they must put forward a much more effective positive case for the European Union.

The truth is that there are

countless stories of the ways in which Europe benefits British people. From manufacturers selling their products to customers all over Europe with no extra red tape, to students, tourists, workers and families travelling freely to live, love and work.

A campaign to stay in the EU must have these stories at its heart.

**“We need more positive stories from all over the UK about what EU investment, training, research funding, university collaboration, scientific and medical exploration and discovery has meant for individuals, communities and regions. Business successes thanks to**

between EU countries and overseas investments from other countries and businesses wanting to be part of the largest consumer and business market in the world need to be trumpeted. Find passionate advocates who can tell their stories.”

“It must be about the future, and

hope, not “project fear”. So, it is a challenge to the real decision-makers, UK government and business, to ensure everyone has a share in our future. EU has been a whipping boy, but the responsibility lies elsewhere. And our government, business and the EU can work together to make a real and positive difference.”



## 4. INVOLVE ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE - ESPECIALLY THE YOUNG

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Both Brexit and Remain have been cast by some as the projects of an elite. What people really want is a campaign that speaks to everyone, from all walks of life.

Young people are particularly important. People feel strongly that the future of the young is under question, and therefore they should play a big part in the leadership of a referendum campaign.

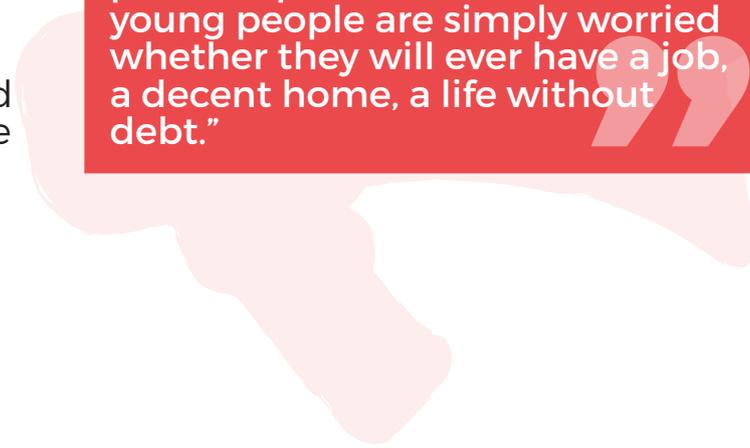
People also want to give voice to the parts of the country that voted to leave. Whatever side of the Brexit debate they come from, people recognise that putting the issue back to the people must offer a platform to those from parts of the country whose voices have been unheard for too long.

The MPs, community leaders, employers, families and young people we spoke with all asked the same question: why did we

not have this constructive conversation back in 2016? It would have made a real difference then, and it can make a real difference now.

“The necessity to make sure that a second vote is not something dreamt up by a South East Elite but that people from all walks of life, all ages, all areas of the country and all political persuasions.”

“Young people front and centre. By all means talk about Freedom of Movement being the most progressive social policy the world has ever seen but please be very aware that for a HUGE number of people, the opportunity to live, work, study, love and retire in 28 European countries is a very middle-class pre-occupation - most of our young people are simply worried whether they will ever have a job, a decent home, a life without debt.”



# WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE PEOPLE'S VOICE?

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The People's Voice campaign is just getting started. Over the coming months it will continue to go to all parts of the country, focusing on places that voted to leave, working with MPs, community groups, employers and local campaigners to start discussions that involve all sides of the Brexit debate.

We want to host People's Voice events with all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds. We want businesses, campaigners, community leaders and individual members of the public to contact the People's Vote campaign ([info@peoples-vote.uk](mailto:info@peoples-vote.uk)) and work with us to host a People's Voice discussion in your community.

The conversations we have won't shrink from discussing our differences. People are welcome whatever their views on Brexit

and whatever they think of a People's Vote. We believe there is much more that unites than divides us, the People's Voice is proving that we can find common ground.

The People's Voice will continue to show how a new referendum can be a different kind of campaign.

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## PEOPLE'S VOICE EVENTS TO DATE

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- Barnstaple
- Birmingham (with Jess Phillips MP)
- Brighton (with Caroline Lucas MP)
- Dunbartonshire (with Jo Swinson MP)
- Exeter (with Ben Bradshaw MP)
- Grimsby

- Leeds (with Rachel Reeves MP)
- Plymouth
- Sunderland (with Bridget Phillipson MP)

For video of previous events, check out the People's Voice YouTube channel.

