

**we
OWN
it**

Manifesto 2017:

How public ownership can give us real control



“ I don't believe that anyone pays taxes wanting some of that money to go into the pockets of shareholders in the private sector. ” **Dave Eagle**

“ With privatisation prices go through the roof and services become shoddy and non-existent. Just look at the trains, buses, NHS, post office and energy suppliers. ” **Laraine Ward**

“ I just feel that things that people need – from transport to care services and everything inbetween – should be owned by the people and run for the people. ” **Jo Allen**



We Own It is an independent, not-for-profit organisation which campaigns for public ownership. Quotations throughout the report are drawn from supporter comments on our website.

We Own It Manifesto 2017:

How public ownership can give us real control

Public ownership is highly popular, totally achievable and would save us money. Bringing public services and assets into public ownership has the potential to unite our country, however we voted in the referendum or whichever party we support. Public services should be working for you and me.

Public services – from the railways to Royal Mail, from social care to council services – belong to all of us. We built them, we pay for them, we use them every day. But right now, we don't have control of many of our public services and profits are handed to shareholders.

Over the past 30 years, our public services have been outsourced to the private sector and many of our public assets have been sold off altogether. Politicians have taken an ideological approach which said that private must always be best. The evidence doesn't support this and neither does public opinion. It's becoming increasingly clear that privatisation has failed.

The number one reason people voted for Brexit was that they wanted decisions about the UK to be made in the UK.¹ That means we need public services that are accountable to us, not to distant shareholders who put profit ahead of people.

Our new polling shows that both Leavers and Remainers support public ownership across a range of services. 73% of Leavers and 77% of Remainers want to see more or the same level of public ownership. Only 12% of Leavers and 13% of Remainers want to see less public ownership in the UK after Brexit. 77% of both Leavers and Remainers said that public services were an important factor in their vote in the EU referendum.²

Public ownership is more popular than Brexit. We need to take back control – by moving forward into a future where public services belong to all of us.

Whatever else they're saying in their manifestos, we want political parties to commit to three things.

1 Take back what we've lost

It's time to make a break with the failed privatisations of the past and bring energy, water, railways, buses and care work into public ownership. Communities need real control over the public services that have been stolen from us over the past 30 years.

2 Protect what we have

It's time to protect the public services we have for the future. Our precious NHS, our schools and education system, our council services, other valuable public assets and our green spaces need to be held in common for our grandchildren.

3 Create the new public ownership of the future

It's time to bring public ownership into the 21st century. We need new models that can help create and support new services that work for all of us, not just the big corporations. Social media creates a public space that should be democratically accountable. Technology – like new driverless cars – needs to be harnessed for the common good.

Public ownership means that profits must be reinvested and democratic control must belong to the public. Different models will be appropriate for different sectors. It can be local, regional, national or international. Sometimes public ownership means public sector (for example in the NHS). Other times it could include other not for profit or cooperative models as long as there is accountability to citizens and an asset lock where appropriate. This is about protecting and creating public services that are more responsive and more accountable to citizens and workers than ever before.

This report is illustrative, not comprehensive in covering every public service. Our aim is to show that public ownership is popular and possible in a number of key areas.

Taking back what we've lost



1 Energy

54% of Leavers and **52% of Remainers** want to see energy in public ownership.³

Money saved:
£3.2 billion
a year⁴

Energy was privatised in 1986. The Big Six companies now cream off substantial profits while people struggle to pay their energy bills. Meanwhile our investment in renewables lags behind other countries.

At the same time, alternative energy suppliers are springing up in the UK and around the world. Robin Hood Energy was the first council owned energy supplier and has been followed by Bristol Energy and White Rose Energy. Our Power was set up by housing associations in Scotland to make energy supply fairer. These providers give people affordable energy and invest locally. Our Energy offers people an energy company they can co-own.

We need to

- Buy back the distribution networks and the National Grid (the government recently sold it to a team of investors including the Chinese and Qatari states⁵).
- Encourage local authorities to set up energy supply companies like Robin Hood Energy which would compete with the Big Six. In Germany these companies have taken 50% of the market.⁶ Promote investment in renewables through these new public companies and local community groups.

Moving to a publicly owned energy system in the UK would pay for itself in 10 years as we would save money on shareholder profits and interest payments.⁷

Case study: The city of Munich in Germany has committed itself to developing an electricity supply that is 100% municipal and 100% from renewable energy. The council did this because they were tired of waiting for the private companies to make the necessary investments, and they were confident that the city council could do the job better. By 2016 it had already reached the first target, as the municipal energy company was supplying enough renewable energy to provide the needs of every household in the city.

2 Water



59% of Leavers and **63% of Remainers** want to see water in public ownership.⁸

Money saved:
£1.8 billion
a year⁹

Water is a human right – without it life on Earth would be impossible. In Scotland water is in public ownership and in Wales there is a not for profit provider. In most of Europe and the USA, water and sewerage is run by municipalities through public sector water operators. In England, however, we have a private monopoly system for water that doesn't make sense.

The scandal started when the water companies were privatised in 1989 for almost nothing – investors paid £7.6 billion, but the government took over all the debts of the sector (worth £4.9 billion) and handed the new private corporations a 'green dowry' of £1.5 billion.¹⁰ The investors, meanwhile, gained a monopoly of an essential service, debt-free, and they have been allowed to increase prices by more than 40% in real terms.¹¹ The water companies have created a debt mountain, increasing debt by 74% in the ten years to 2013.¹²

If we bring water into public ownership, not only will we gain democratic control, we will save £1.8 billion per year by cutting out shareholder dividends – equivalent to around £70 per

household per year¹³. This can be used to reduce prices, finance investment, or help finance other public services. And we can save yet more money by replacing the expensive private debts with cheaper government bonds.

Parliament should take full account of the over-extraction of dividends and the excessive debt mountain when deciding how much to compensate shareholders.

We need to

- Bring the private water companies into public ownership, turning them into new public water companies for each region. These would be owned and run through partnerships of local authorities with representatives from local communities and employees.
- Take back the functions of the regulator, Ofwat, into a government agency, accountable to parliament and required to hold open monthly consultations.

Case study: In 2010 the city of Paris remunicipalised its water service after 25 years of privatisation. The service became far more accountable and transparent, so that citizens can see exactly what is being done with their money. It also became much more efficient: prices were reduced by 8% in the following year.

3 Railways



62% of Leavers and **60% of Remainers** think railway privatisation has been a failure.¹⁴

Money saved:
£1.2 billion
a year¹⁵

Our railways were privatised in 1994. Today, we suffer from the highest train fares in Europe, overcrowded trains and a fragmented, chaotic system. State run companies from other countries run many of our rail franchises yet the government won't allow any direct public ownership by the UK.

We need to build a railway fit for the future – accountable to passengers, with lower fares and more investment in better services.

We need to

- Bring railway franchises in-house one at a time, as they come up for renewal.
- Keep Network Rail public and managing its assets to make an ongoing profit for the public purse.¹⁶
- Gradually phase out the private ROSCOs (the rolling stock companies which own the trains). We could do this by buying trains directly on behalf of the public instead of renting them, using expensive financing deals and middle men who take a profit.

“ Our continental friends enjoy a publicly owned railway: funny enough, they copied us. Time we turned this around and stopped providing income for shareholders with money that should be ploughed back into a publicly-owned, British railway system. ”

Catherine Vickery

Case study: In 2009, the East Coast line was taken into public ownership (after National Express walked out on the contract) and it was a huge success. The service had a 91% customer satisfaction rate.¹⁷ It paid back £1 billion to the Treasury and was the most efficient franchise in the UK.¹⁸ The government reprivatised the line in 2015 but it shows what can be achieved under public ownership.

4 Buses



58% of Leavers and **60% of Remainers** believe councils should have the right to set up their own local bus companies.¹⁹

Money saved:
£506 million
a year²⁰

Our buses were deregulated and privatised in the 1980s under Thatcher. Since then, bus fares have doubled in real terms, and many routes have been cut – particularly in rural areas which don't make a profit for private companies.

2,400 bus routes have disappeared in England and Wales since 2010, due to cuts of £78 million a year to local authority supported bus funding.²¹ However, our research shows that the big five companies take £181 million annually in profits out of our bus network. Cutting shareholders out of the equation would give us more than double the money we need to reverse these cuts.²²

There are still 11 municipal public bus companies in England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland's buses are provided by the state through Translink. These bus companies get fantastic results. In fact, public bus companies have been crowned Best UK Bus Operator at the UK Bus Awards in 4 out of the last 5 years!

We can push multinational bus companies and their shareholders out of the market by creating new, publicly owned bus companies to compete with them across the country. It's time to put the public first and reinvest profits in better services and lower fares.

We need to

- Reverse the recent government ban on new municipal bus companies in England.²³
- Help local authorities to set up their own municipal bus companies and provide low cost capital funding to get started
- Give all local authorities the powers to franchise buses as we transition to public ownership (the new Bus Services Bill only allows authorities with a Mayor to copy the London model – which is still privatised but enables more control over pricing and routes).

Case study: As a municipally owned bus service, Reading Buses can invest an additional £3 million a year in the bus network (around 12–15% of its annual turnover) because it doesn't pay out dividends to private shareholders.²⁴ The extra money means better quality buses, and is one reason why more people take the bus in Reading.

5 Social care



74% of Leavers and **77% of Remainers** want to see social care in public ownership.²⁵

We will all need social care at some time in our lives in the same way that we all need the NHS. Yet, there is no national care service. Care services have been privatised since 1991 and the system is in crisis. Private providers are demanding more funding in order to satisfy their investors and shareholders. Our care needs can be met in many different ways and we do not all want to go into residential care. We need to be in control so that we can design future care services that meet our own local needs. These services should not be determined by the profit-seeking business models that private providers use. Care services should be publicly owned, publicly funded and publicly delivered – and working for the people who use them. Local authorities are best placed to do this, using local democratic structures to involve local people and in-house services to deliver community based services. Care workers need to be well-trained, well-paid and supported in their work.

We need to

- Enable councils to bring outsourced social care services in-house, end the practice where care workers are limited to client visits of 15 minutes and pay them a living wage.
- Explore new models for care like the Italian cooperative model and the Buurtzorg model in the Netherlands which have real potential to improve care for older people.²⁶
- Move away from the financialised model of residential care by building homes without the 12% profit rate.²⁷

“ I would like to live in a caring society, where people are more important than profit.” Shirley Carter

Protecting what we have



6 NHS

79% of Leavers and **81% of Remainers** want to see the NHS in public ownership.²⁸

Money saved:
£4.5 billion
a year²⁹

Our NHS is there for us if we get ill, need an operation, have a baby or have an accident. In a civilised society, we promise to be there for each other. A 2014 Commonwealth Fund report found that the NHS is the most efficient healthcare system in the world.³⁰

Policies to undermine the NHS have been put forward for years. Private financing and outsourcing have been pushed. The Health and Social Care Act of 2012 created new requirements to contract out to 'any qualified provider'. Now, the government's brutal cuts, pushed through under the guise of 'Sustainability and Transformation Plans', are undermining the NHS and paving the way for privatisation.

Our NHS is precious and it needs to be saved for the future.

We need to

- Stop privatisation by repealing the 2012 Health and Social Care Act – support the NHS Reinstatement Act.
- Get rid of the 'internal market' in the NHS. The cost of managing this bureaucratic market where NHS 'Commissioners' buy services from 'NHS Providers', is estimated to cost the NHS at least £4.5 billion a year – some estimate its cost at over £10.8 billion a year.
- Halt and reverse the awarding of contracts to the private sector: in 2015–2016, the private sector won £2.1 billion worth of contracts, the NHS £2.7 billion.³¹ Each private contract incur transaction, procurement and profit costs, paid by us the taxpayer.
- Fund the NHS properly across the UK instead of making unsustainable cuts.

Save money by ending PFI deals

The private finance initiative (PFI) is a system of financing new building using the private sector. There are over 700 PFI projects in the UK, in a range of services including hospitals and schools.

PFI is a very expensive way of borrowing money. By the time the PFI contracts have all been paid off – in 2049/50 – they will have cost £307 billion in total, according to new figures released by the

Treasury last month.³² This is more than five times the £57 billion the assets are actually worth.

PFI is very inflexible, because it uses long-term 25-60 year contracts with large corporations. While public services get cut, PFI payments are protected. PFI is unaffordable, unaccountable and unfair.³³ We need to stop any future PFI deals and cancel existing deals wherever possible.

7 Education



79% of Leavers and **78% of Remainders** want schools to be in public ownership.³⁴

Education is key to a civilised society and it should work for all of us. Yet over the last decade our education system has been shifting towards privatisation with academies and free schools (which are not accountable to local authorities). Meanwhile as our student loans have been increasing in cost, they are also being handed over to the private sector to make a profit from.

Academies are replacing the public education system as we know it – and we’re losing control of our children’s future. There’s no evidence that academies improve standards. In fact, there’s evidence that academies improve more slowly than state run schools and that council-run schools do better than academies.³⁵

The government is also selling off another tranche of student loans, a policy described as ‘economic illiteracy’ by Martin Wolf from the Financial Times. In the late 1990s, the government sold two tranches of student loans for £1 billion each. Today, the government is £240 million worse off than if it had kept those loans in public ownership.³⁶

Education should be public, accountable and well-funded. There aren’t any shortcuts.

We need to

- Put a stop to academies and free schools in England – each academy undermines our public education system and local democratic accountability. Once we’ve lost control, it’s hard to get it back.
- Focus on teacher and support staff training and funding our schools properly. Staff and parents need to be empowered to work together along cooperative lines to make schools better.
- Stop privatising our student loans.

“ There is no merit in this policy of allowing profiteers in to benefit from our taxes paid to educate our children. Exactly the same policy as bringing for profit companies in to bleed the NHS dry. Where is our democracy? ” **Judith Joy**

8 National assets



The UK has a number of publicly owned institutions which make a profit for the public purse and provide a public service. We should be proud of national treasures like these but instead, the government is putting them under threat.

The Royal Mail, with its 500 year old successful history in public ownership, was sold off by the coalition government – and we'll lose out economically within 10 years as a result.³⁷ Although the government has backtracked on the sales of the Land Registry and Channel 4, the public stake in National Air Traffic Services could still be up for grabs and the government is pushing departments and councils to sell off public land and assets across the country.

Our research with the New Economics Foundation shows that the short term cash injections provided by sell offs are outweighed by the long term loss of ongoing profits.³⁸

We lose out more quickly or slowly depending on the asset, but ultimately we invariably lose out. Sensible economic management should be the priority, not short term cash for investors. The government has a long term duty to manage our public assets well.

We need to

- Change the function of UK Government Investments (UKGI) so that its role is to support good management of assets in the public sector, for the public benefit – including looking at what private assets could be better managed in public hands.
- Introduce legislation to protect public assets by requiring a referendum/public vote before any further sell offs.
- Enable and encourage councils to manage local public assets like public spaces and housing for public good and public profit (in part by reducing the pressure of cuts on councils). Stop the policy of 'right-to-buy' of council housing across the UK – this has already happened in Scotland – and enable councils to borrow so they can build social housing.³⁹

“ They were built by the people for the people and nobody else should have control.” **Ian Thom**

“ We do not elect governments to sell off what we own, they are answerable to us not the other way around.” **Phil Caldwell**



62% of Leavers and **54% of Remainers** want to see more in-house services run by councils, rather than outsourcing to private companies.⁴⁰

Outsourcing companies have been involved in scandal after scandal as they put profit before people. Our polling shows corporations like G4S, Serco, Atos and Capita are thoroughly unpopular with the public.⁴¹ The government encourages councils to outsource and austerity is often a driver for quick savings.

However, research shows that many councils are bringing services in house after the failure of these contracts. They are finding they can save money over time, improve the quality of the service and have more control and flexibility by running services directly.⁴²

The same lessons apply at the national level where outsourced government contracts have caused endless problems. From riots at private prisons to problems with probation, from the Concentrix disaster to the scandal around housing for asylum seekers – it's not working.

Outsourcing has failed on its own terms and we need to take control over our public services to make them work for us.

We need to

- Bring contracts in house as they come up for renewal – this can be done easily as they expire.
- Increase capacity within councils and government to provide services in-house. Half of all participants in a recent local government survey said they only outsource services where there is a business case or clear evidence that a service cannot be delivered effectively in-house.⁴³
- Introduce new procurement rules for any outsourcing contracts – requiring in-house bids wherever possible, transparency about contracts and a right for public recall as well as fair wages, high environmental standards and spending in the local economy.
- Stop the outsourcing of policy advice through the use of management consultants.

“ Shareholders are really thieves and parasites, making profits out of other people's basic needs...The staff should control their workplace and be fully accountable to users and to funders.” **David Kirby**

Creating new public ownership

It's time to think imaginatively about the new public ownership of the future. In this section we explore some ideas for where we need to create new public services that work for all of us – instead of mindlessly allowing the private sector to dominate. These proposals are ambitious, radical and especially in the case of social media, challenging to carry out. But public ownership isn't just about 'classic' natural monopolies like the railways. It's also about new monopolies and new technologies where questions of accountability and ownership are really important. This section is a conversation starter.



10 Driverless cars

Driverless cars make sense as a publicly owned network, as part of the sharing economy. Driverless cars would sit on the streets, awaiting their next passenger. They would use satnav and smartcard technology to provide a seamless service. You hop in, your phone keeps track of your journey and the cost. You set the car to 'shared' if you're willing to pick up fellow passengers, or 'solo' if not. Once you've arrived at your destination, the car awaits its next passenger. At night time, most of the cars take themselves away to be recharged (they are electric) while a few are on night duty. Driverless cars could make cities more liveable. Their efficiency could enable us to free up road space and create more shared green areas. In rural areas they could provide an affordable service which links up to traditional public transport networks.

The technology to make this a reality is fast developing. But it matters who it belongs to. Companies like Uber, Google and Apple are working

on driverless cars.⁴⁴ But a 'WeGo' network that we share makes more sense than a personal 'IGo' that each consumer must buy individually. It's more efficient, more environmentally friendly and more equitable – we can pay as we go.

We can start to make 'WeGo' a reality by working internationally to take control of these global technologies.

We need to

- Work with cities across Europe to bulk buy and test the technology and infrastructure. We could pilot this idea in practice just as London has tried out 'Boris bikes'.
- Cooperate with the European Space Agency 'Galileo' programme to coordinate this.

11 Social media



The internet itself is a public space and so are social media. Facebook and Twitter are places where people share information, explore new ideas, promote products and coordinate political activity. They are places where people spend a huge amount of time. Increasingly, they are places where money buys social reach, meaning that barriers to entry in what is effectively a marketplace are going up. They are places where the rules are set and enforced by unaccountable corporations. For example, Facebook decides on the range of 'reactions' we can give, or what content will be censored. Online spaces are here to stay and they should be places where we can engage thoughtfully with each other instead of automatically responding in a state of addiction manufactured by developers in Silicon Valley. There are tweaks to the technology that could work on a large scale to encourage this but the corporations who control the online landscape want us to spend as much time there as possible. There we are a captive audience for their messages and the messages of their advertisers. We need to be able to manage and regulate social media in the interests of all of us, which means we need democratic control over it.

There are two routes to publicly owned social media. The first is to buy out the existing social networks. This would be a huge challenge, financially and politically. There is a glimmer of hope however – there is currently a project for Twitter users to buy out Twitter, creating a community-owned resource. The second is to create an alternative platform. This is just as challenging. Facebook and Twitter are very strong natural monopolies. Their power and attraction comes from their network benefits – why switch platform if your friends are still on Facebook? A switch would need to be a coordinated, well promoted global effort to have a chance of success. Despite the challenges, social media is hugely important and will only become more so. Ultimately it could provide a space to create more accountability for global decision making – or a place to re-engage people in local decisions.

We need to

- Start conversations internationally about the two routes to create a publicly owned Facebook.
- Support the effort to create a community-owned Twitter.⁴⁵

What else is in public ownership in other countries?

Many other services are provided through the public sector in various countries. There are public sector banks in many countries, such as the French post office's Banque postale, Kiwibank in New Zealand and even in the US state of North Dakota.⁴⁶ Municipalities in German cities like Bochum provide internet, TV and telecom services through fibre cable networks, as well as heating, energy, water and public transport.⁴⁷ In Singapore, over 80% of people, rich and poor, live in public sector housing.⁴⁸

Trade deals after Brexit

The types of trade deals that we negotiate as we leave the EU will have a big impact on our public services. Trade deals like TTIP and CETA have been rightly criticised for having the potential to open our public services even further to the private sector, and for locking-in privatisation through the opaque investor-state dispute settlement mechanism, which gives companies the ability to sue governments through a secret tribunal process if they believe they have been unfairly treated. In effect, this secretive court process could stop us bringing privatised public services back into public hands. New trade deals must not include our public services so that we can protect them from privatisation, and they must not allow for ISDS (the investor-state dispute settlement).

“ We have seen private companies cynically milking every penny from us the public, failing to invest... These private companies are totally amoral and have no commitment to Britain's well being and the common good.” **Judith Hodgson**



Conclusion

We love public services. But whether in the NHS, the railways or council services, privatisation has given us – the public – a bad deal. Costs spiral, profit comes before care and we lose control of our public services. We need to take back what we've lost, protect what we have and create the new public ownership of the future.

Public ownership isn't just a nice idea. It's vital to rebalancing the economy and putting people before profit. And we know how it can be done. These are the principles behind how we do this, step by step.

- We bring contracts in house one at a time, as they come up for renewal. Whenever it makes sense to simply wait for contracts to expire, we need not pay a penny in compensation.
- We enable and support local authorities in setting up their own public companies, accountable to communities. Local authorities also need to be allowed to borrow so they can make smart investments. This is about creating alternatives that simply work better rather than relying on the privatised failures of the past.
- We commit to long term economic management. Buying back infrastructure from the private sector, or investing in local infrastructure does cost money. But the paybacks are huge if we can look beyond the next electoral cycle. Likewise, we can acknowledge the existing paybacks we get, the profits from public assets already in our hands. This is something to celebrate.

We're wasting money on privatisation at the moment. We're wasting money on shareholder profits, higher interest payments and the administrative costs of creating artificial markets where they don't belong.

Just as importantly, we're missing opportunities to maximise public profit and public benefit from both tried and tested and brand new technologies.

Wherever you sit in the Brexit debate, let's take this opportunity to talk about a publicly owned Britain.

**We pay for public services, we use them, we own them.
It's time they belonged to all of us.**



“ Together we can be powerful in defending things that should mark our country as a decent civilised place... Rock on We Own It!” **Ruth Facey**

How you can help

- 1 Ask your election candidates where they stand on this manifesto
- 2 Share this manifesto online
<https://weownit.org.uk/manifesto>
- 3 Donate to We Own It
<https://weownit.org.uk/take-action/support-our-work>

Thank you for building people power behind public ownership.

- 1 <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/>
- 2 Survation interviewed 1,004 UK adults aged 18+ online on 10th-11th May 2017. Survation is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. <http://survation.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Final-WOI-Tables-100517CHCH-1codoh4.pdf>
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- 7 *ibid.*
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