

Letter to Michael Gove

Dear Michael

Congratulations on your new Cabinet appointment. Levelling up and the defence of the Union are two huge topics of great importance.

Levelling up is sometimes seen through the narrow focus of place. Attention is given to the built environment and the public service fabric. Of course providing capital to allow replacement school buildings or better hospitals can be an important decision for a local community. These can be necessary to show commitment to high quality public services with good working conditions for valued staff. Providing funds for a new community centre or a tram system will not in themselves transform the lives of the many people who live in the place though there may be a case for them.

What many voters want from levelling up is tangible improvement in their own lives. If there is a gap in public money between the more prosperous communities and the less so in our country, it is one where the lower income community receives more per head for its school places or its health provision than the higher income area. It is true that the more prosperous south and London does attract substantial capital for additional facilities and especially for transport, but that is because there is rapid population growth in these areas. London and the south attracts a disproportionate amount of the new private sector housing investment and in turn needs the roads, schools and surgeries to service the new estates.

I suggest that we need to pull together current and prospective policies around the theme of improving people's personal journeys through life. There need to be better pathways to owning your own home, to gaining a good education, to acquiring necessary qualifications, to working your way up to a better paid job, to setting up your own business, and to expanding a business to take on others as staff. The places that want to level up need to attract more housing investment to attract people with high qualifications or established entrepreneurial skills to help lead the local economic recovery. Policies to raise school standards for all, to expand vocational qualifications that enhance a person's earning power, to make it easier to set up and expand a business and which encourage buying British and buying local are all crucial to this task.

The vision of everyone an owner, with the chance to own a home, own their own business, own a share in a bigger business, have some savings for a rainy day should be our vision. It is still too hard for many people to get that better job, to get that qualification, to get that mortgage to get on the property ladder. I look forward to an opportunity to discuss these matters with you, and wish you well with this great task.

Yours

John Redwood