



What are you talking about

**Britain's problems
are real.**

Rising bills, rundown high streets,
long NHS waits, struggling public
services.

No amount of improved messaging
can substitute for change.

But the way politicians talk has become its own barrier to trust.

Across ten focus groups, we didn't find anyone who used the language politicians rely on.

Real people speak in feelings and experiences.

But when many of our politicians speak they sound distant, even when they are trying to do the right thing.

Better language won't fix politics.

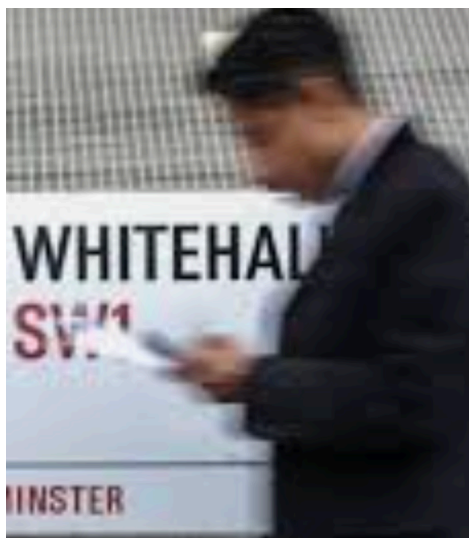
But bad language makes convincing people much harder.

25 things real people don't say but politicians do



Abstract political slogans

Working people
Patriotic renewal
Fixing the foundations
Break down the barriers to opportunity
Mission-led government
Delivering on the plan for change
Unlocking potential
Wrapping digital services around people



Whitehall language

Civic institutions
Stakeholders
Service users
Socio-economic disadvantage
Community wealth building
Inequalities of outcome
Cross-cutting themes
Economically inactive



Technocratic jargon

Joined-up care pathways
Clean local growth
Place-based policing/care
Outcome-based commissioning
Skills ecosystem
Skills pipeline
Barriers to employment
Digital exclusion
Client journey mapping

These phrases appear regularly in government speeches and official communications. Not one of them appeared in ten anonymised More in Common focus group transcripts we analysed across the country over the past year.

Why language matters

When voters hear language like “*patriotic renewal*,” “*breaking down barriers to opportunity*,” or “*unlocking potential*,” they don’t disagree with the ideas behind the words. They just can’t see what any of it has to do with the problems in front of them.

The way politics talks about issues often sounds as if it comes from a different world, one that rarely meets the one people are actually living in.

But once language stops sounding real, people start to assume the politics behind it isn’t real either.

None of this is about intelligence or education. People have no difficulty understanding policy. They just want to hear it described in the way they talk about the world themselves, plainly, directly, with a sense of urgency and with some emotion.

How people actually talk about politics

Outside Westminster the plainness of the language voters use to talk about Britain is striking. “Everything feels broken.” “It’s exhausting.” “Nothing ever changes.”

It’s resignation more than anger. Everyday simple tasks feel like a nuisance. And voters feel like they are left on their own to get on with it.

What they want from politicians, what they’ve always wanted, is just for them to get on with it.

Of course this is not as easy as it sounds. To voters, many of these problems seem straightforward: being able to book a GP appointment, not having the car wrecked by potholes, feeling safer on a high street that’s not all boarded up. These sound like basic functions of a country that knows what it’s doing. But the route to fixing them is anything but simple. The public sees the surface-level problem whilst politicians see the decades of neglect beneath it. Both are real.

The challenge is not only what we do about these problems, but how we talk about them. Talking about them better won’t solve everything. But it gives permission for the harder choices that follow. When people feel spoken to honestly and in their own language, they’re far more prepared to come with you on the difficult parts.

How politicians should actually speak

Patriotic renewal

Making the country work properly again.

Fixing the foundations

Sorting out the basics.

Working people

People who get up every day, go to work and try to do the right thing.

Break down the barriers to opportunity

Making it easier for people to get decent jobs, training and support.

Mission-led government

Focusing on a few big problems and actually sticking to them.

Delivering on the Plan for Change

Showing, step by step, what's going to change and when.

Unlocking potential

Helping people get a fair shot in life.

Civic institutions

Local services, charities, and the places communities rely on.

Stakeholders

The people and groups affected by the decisions we make.

Service users

People who rely on public services.

Socio-economic disadvantage

Growing up or living without the security or opportunities others have.

Community wealth building

Keeping more money, jobs and investment in local areas.

Inequalities of outcome

Some groups keep losing out.

Cross-cutting themes

Issues that affect everything, not just one area.

Economically inactive

People who aren't working.

Joined-up care pathways

Getting services to talk to each other so people don't fall through the gaps.

Clean local growth

Jobs and investment that don't make environmental issues worse.

Place-based policing / care

Policing or services that understand local areas and work differently in each place.

Outcome-based commissioning

Paying for services based on whether they actually help people.

Skills ecosystem

All the training, colleges and employers working together.

Skills pipeline

A clear route for people to get the skills they need for decent jobs.

Barriers to employment

The things that stop people working - health, childcare, transport.

Digital exclusion

People who can't get online or can't use digital services easily.

Wrap digital services around people

Make online services simpler.

Client journey mapping

Understanding what someone actually experiences when they try to use a service.