COMMUNICATING ON REGULATION WITH RIGHT OF CENTRE AUDIENCES

1) KSBR Research

The first part of this memo draws on six focus groups conducted in 2018. The groups were run by KSBR Brand Futures (four in St. Albans, two in Bexleyheath). Participants were 40 or under, and had voted Conservative or UKIP in the last General Election, and indicated that they may vote the same way in the next General Election, or had not voted in the last General Election and were open to voting Conservative in the next General Election. The great majority had voted Leave in the 2016 referendum, or would have done so had they voted.

The do's and don'ts recommendations below, and the suggestions for how to talk to this audience (in italics) are very likely to look and feel different to the way in which your organisation talks about regulation at the moment. This is intentional. These are recommendations for how to talk to young conservative and UKIP voters, rather than your natural supporter base.

Top-level findings

- Respondents were broadly pro-regulation, although it was not something they gave much thought to day-to-day. When prompted to think more about regulations, they realised we 'take a lot for granted' and felt that we are 'lucky' to have these rules in place.
- Their overall willingness to accept the need for regulation was founded and contingent on fairness (in social behaviour and business), enforcement and discipline.
- Their overall judgement about the amount of regulation in Britain was based on patriotism: Britain has most things about right so it follows that our regulation strikes 'the right balance'.
- The word "regulation" was not their natural way to talk about the issues or examples discussed. They used terms like 'warranty', 'Rules of the Road' and 'safeguards'. Respondents were unclear as to how 'regulations' differed from policies, procedures, laws or sometimes, social conventions. There was little understanding of when disobeying regulations becomes a criminal offence but a consistent desire to prevent or punish that.
- This audience was not connected to the 'anti Red Tape' political agenda. They did not use politically inflammatory language, like 'Snowflake', 'Red Tape', 'Nanny State', or suggest 'regulations' as a class were a 'burden'.
- Respondents could cite examples of frustrating regulations regarded as 'ridiculous' and 'lacking in common sense' (generally this is when regulations threaten to constrain their own, immediate liberty).
- Respondents quickly became indignant at cases of any person or organisation failing to act fairly, e.g. big businesses hiring lawyers to find ways around rules, or individuals who take more than their fair share of resources. They have a desire to see strong enforcement (i.e. impose rules to stop 'others' cheating, e.g. fly-tipping).
- These people do not use high level analytical language like 'a stable social order' but see rule-following as vital to keep Britain functioning fairly.
- If prompted to think in national terms they cite other countries which are less 'ordered', and more 'chaotic' (e.g. in Africa with too little regulation) or too oppressive (e.g. North Korea, too regulated) as evidence of Britain getting the balance right.
- Participants' support for regulation is strong where rule-breaking or a lack of enforcement impacts on vulnerable groups (including children), and an initial frustration with a rule can turn to support if such a rationale is provided.

- Respondents were vague but optimistic about how Brexit would affect UK regulation. They strongly hope Brexit will make the UK a better (more British) country and expect regulation to be much the same but a bit better (less EU influence).
- If Government and the 'Red Tape' campaigners believe this segment of the public share their strong antipathy to regulation then they are wrong. This segment's natural position is that well-enforced and justified regulations are a positive force, but NB that this part of the public are vulnerable to being swayed to support less regulation if it was 'needed' to secure Brexit.
- Respondents wanted to be protected against self-interested behaviour by big business although small businesses are assumed to need less regulating. There was, however, also distrust of politicians as a class.
- Respondents could identify pros and cons of three cases for regulation: a) protect-me/us from risks; b) stop others doing bad things that affect me; and c) stop me doing things, for my own good. Of these, 'stop others' (breaking norms/rules) evoked the strongest and clearest response and is about enforcement of existing rules/norms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY RE. REGULATION <u>WITH THIS AUDIENCE</u>
[The kind of language that could be used is in italics]

DO

- Emphasise the need for enforcement, fairness and discipline as the basis for regulation.

- Develop the idea that enforcement in particular is at risk. Highlighting instances where enforcement is weak will play to concerns that regulation without enforcement is shambolic, and point to the fact that agency and local authority resourcing is a key part of ensuring that rules are adhered to. Focus on and promote cases with a clear need for enforcement of existing rules, where these involve stopping others doing things that might harm or cheat 'us'.

People expect fair and effective enforcement of our essential safeguards. They rightly become frustrated when they make sure they and their own family adhere to high standards and do 'the right thing' and then others don't. Unfortunately you can't trust everyone else to do the same, and so I think it's important to have controls in place to keep bad behaviour in check.

- Talk about regulation as the 'sensible solution' - the rules of the road - helping Britain to maintain the right balance, and promote reasons why regulations are in place. Use of "rules" rather than "regulations" will create a sense of shared responsibility, and help to move the debate away from images of the person-with-clipboard stopping people from doing things for no good reason. "Balance" in this context is a useful idea: too little regulation means people get hurt, too much regulation ties everyone in knots.

People expect the state to 'have their back'. They feel they shouldn't have to worry about things like clean water, food contamination or unsafe road conditions, this is the state's responsibility. They pay their taxes and that creates a binding contract: the state should protect us from the things we don't know about, without us needing to be involved.

- Avoid characterisations which pit regulations against business, individualism and modernisation. instead, use "regulation-as-enabler" frame, for instance:

Progress requires competition and that competition requires rules. This creates a level playing field in which the 'fittest' businesses should thrive. Fair business rules have enabled British progress, including strong markets, innovation, and entrepreneurship, by enabling competition.

- Recognize and reward the hidden (unsung) heroes of Great British Regulation. Promote stories of people quietly working making sure that our food is safe, our water is clean, our wildlife is protected, our roads are safe, etc.

These are the people who, unseen and unrecognized, keep Britain running safely and successfully: from traffic and sewer systems that work, to flood prevention, to child protection, to fair access to the NHS. They deserve recognition and not to be taken for granted.

- Celebrate when regulation prevents 'bad things' from happening. For example, food hygiene standards mean that on average X break outs of E.coli are prevented a year, which stops Y amount of people from getting ill.

- Appeal to Conservative voters' instinct that rules and regulations are a bit of a hardship for a reason.

You don't get anything for nothing. We must teach our children this. Fair rules are part of what makes 'us' (i.e. Britain) great. Big businesses are not exempt from these rules.

- Uphold fairness and 'close all the loopholes', i.e. 'loopholes' that let big business avoid paying tax, 'loopholes' that mean 'others' can claim benefits when they shouldn't, or allow companies to get away with polluting activities.

- 'Normalise' regulation, by showing that we all self-regulate (or follow 'rules of thumb') all the time: in the kitchen, on the road, on the internet, in the workplace. Most people accept the need for, and benefits of, daily rule-following. Where necessary these are codified into guidance, standards or regulations - this is one end of a very wide spectrum that we all benefit from as a society.

- In response to political calls to cut "red tape", acknowledge that this is a political argument in Westminster but point out that our research shows this is not a priority of the public. Indeed, it is a distant political idea. For example:

Politician: "young people want freedom from unnecessary Red Tape"

Response: "That's a common assumption of some MPs in Westminster" [Acknowledgement] "but what our research shows" [Bridge] "is that the under 40s, including those who voted Brexit and support the Conservatives, have other priorities: in fact they value enforcement of regulations to stop cheating and bad behaviour like fly-tipping or child abuse, like food inspections to keep us safe, and want a more positive attitude from politicians, to celebrate Britain's success at getting regulation about right, and honour its Hidden Heroes. They see this anti-regulation dogma as a Westminster Bubble obsession divorced from real life".

DON'T

Things not to do with this audience.

- Challenge Brexit as a process. Instead, call for British regulatory standards to be upheld post-Brexit, and emphasise the need for strong enforcement to support these.

- Criticise Britain too much. This audience is proud of Britain. Avoid focusing on 'missing' or weak regulation, as this could be taken as a criticism. Instead, focus on the risk of regulation going unenforced, which may undermine the high standards that we are aiming for as a society.

"Most people in Britain are proud to be British and feel Britain has things about right, including regulation, but we don't want to lose those safeguards in the future. To ensure we continue to strike the right balance, it is important to make sure that these standards are being respected. This means taking a firm approach to those who flout the laws, taking action to close any loopholes, and celebrating those who work hard to uphold our shared standards."

- Talk about rules and regulations as an objective in themselves. For people with a sense of conservatism this can translate into support for a world of totalitarianism and doctrine, identified, rightly or wrongly, with Jeremy Corbyn.

2) Climate Outreach research

In addition to the KSBR focus groups, climate communications specialists Climate Outreach ran two narrative workshops, one in Gloucester and one in Manchester. These were comprised of demographically representative participants, weighted towards those who had voted Leave in the referendum. This research independently suggests many of the same things as the KSBR research. Some of the key findings and recommendations are included here.

Top-level findings

- What resonates with the mainstream public is language which *balances support for regulations against the need to respect people's freedom and ability to exercise their own common sense*. There is a desire to see regulations applied in a fair and consistent manner, and not being abused by organisations who, running scared of a compensation culture, pile up unnecessary health and safety regulations simply to protect themselves from being sued.
- Most people in our discussion groups expressed the view that regulations are a necessary part of a stable social order but have to be balanced and fair. While there was a recognition that regulations can get in the way of people using their 'common sense', these grievances did not amount to a wish to see 'a bonfire of regulations', and there was a widespread distrust of businesses ability to regulate themselves.
- Our findings point to an important disconnect between the way in which public opinion is presented in anti-regulatory media (as vehemently opposed to regulations), and actual public opinion (which is far more positive towards regulation, across the political spectrum). 'Common sense' is a concept that looms large in discussions around regulation, but there is a battle to be fought with anti-regulatory voices around what the 'common sense' position on regulations and standards actually is.
- Anti-regulation language was powerfully personal and 'embodied', focusing on an easily identifiable character: the entrepreneur striving to better themselves, but being held back by regulation. Those suffering the 'burden' of 'spirit-crushing' regulation were described as being 'shackled', 'strangled', 'smothered' or 'choked'. Pro-regulation narratives, in contrast, tended to either ignore the public or construct them in quite passive terms - as those who need protecting from the risks around them (i.e. not a particularly empowering frame). There was no obvious pro-regulation 'character' in pro-regulation narratives.
- While the term 'regulation' can evoke negative connotations, it is when people feel that regulations are not being enforced in an even-handed and transparent way that that they feel angry. We found particular frustration with regulations in the workplace, including businesses introducing excessive Health and Safety regulations to 'cover their own back'.

- Evocative anti-regulatory language is effective because it is personal, relatable and direct. In contrast, we observed discomfort around overly emotional pleas for greater regulations, which were perceived as inauthentic. Striking the right balance between 'head and heart' is important in order to provide relatable pro-regulatory narratives - and pointing to tangible, concrete examples that people can observe with their own eyes is one way to do this.

DO

- Use narratives that employ the language of balance (between the absence of rules and stifling regulation), which previous Climate Outreach research has found resonates well with the political centre-right and people of faith. Don't claim every regulation is perfect, or that there isn't room for improvement, but stress that life is better overall thanks to regulation.

"We have built a prosperous and secure country, with rising life expectancy and a decent quality of life for our citizens. Good regulations – balancing the risks against the gains – are part of this positive story. To improve living standards we will need to continue making sure they are fair and balanced. No-one wants to be stifled by regulations we don't need, but fair rules for everyone are essential so we don't have a repeat of the banking scandals and financial crisis."

- Focus on highlighting and promoting the positive social norms that exist around many aspects of regulation. Showing that, despite media messages to the contrary, there are broadly positive views around regulation is a crucial way to counter anti-regulation messages.

"Most people – whether they voted Leave or Remain – want sensible protections to be in place after we leave the EU. No one wants to rip up regulations and risk losing everything we love. Keeping ourselves and our families safe, and protecting our environment is common sense."

- Develop pro-regulatory narratives that are people-focused, and paint a vivid human picture of people (or 'characters') benefiting from higher standards. The narratives should be 'empowering' in the sense of emphasising the agency and control that regulations allow people to have.

"Whether it's being ripped-off by unregulated builders, or having their data stolen and misused by dodgy firms on the internet, most people know what it feels like when protections for the public are not high enough or policed properly: ordinary people lose out and the cowboys win. From renting a flat, to picking a good nursery for your child, to getting work done on your house, having the right rules in place lets people make the right choice, and make the decision that's best for them."

- Pro-regulatory narratives should focus on fairness, and be provided by trusted voices (a local small business speaking positively about the benefits of regulations will be more trusted than Sainsbury's communicating the same message). Show how regulations provide the conditions under which people have greater choice and the freedom to make the most of the opportunities available to them, as well as be protected from unscrupulous landlords or faceless corporations.

"We are all familiar with the frustration when rules and regulations get in the way of doing our job and using our common sense. This is made even worse when we see big business and the banks getting away with flouting the rules ordinary decent people live by. Regulations are there for everyone, not just for us, and the government needs to make sure we can trust that the regulations we have are being fairly put into practice."

- There are many vivid examples (chlorinated chicken, air pollution, plastics) that provide tangible hooks for more effective pro-regulatory narratives. They should evoke relatable emotions and experiences without becoming overly-emotive and therefore appearing inauthentic.

"You only have to look at the litter on our streets, and the plastic clogging up our beaches: you can see with your own eyes that there's a problem. Most of us have fond memories of family holidays at the seaside or playing in parks. It's sad to see them not looked after properly - they're everyone's responsibility."