

# Spotlight

Thought leadership and policy

## Path to Power: Mission-led government? Peter Kyle | Louise Casey Clive Betts Sarah Ronan



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# Labour's opportunity

One of the policies most emblematic of Labour's desire to prove competence – and prudence – on the economy is its £28bn pledge on climate action. In June, Rachel Reeves announced that the party would postpone the long-trailed spend, building up to it by the middle of a first parliament.

But survey data indicates that the public does want climate action to be prioritised. Recent polling from Ipsos found that more than three quarters (77 per cent) of Britons are concerned about climate change.

Ahead of a general election, and with Rishi Sunak having rowed back on

key net zero policies, now is the time for Keir Starmer to show voters what values his party represents. The UK is facing the biggest fall in living standards since records began, with unaffordable housing, crumbling infrastructure, and an NHS in crisis. Our exclusive polling of councillors across England (see pages 4-7) shows that almost a quarter think their councils are likely to go bankrupt.

Another emblematic policy is childcare reform. As Sarah Ronan, director of the Early Education and Childcare Coalition, explains (see page 21), Labour has scaled back its plans for free childcare, while the shadow health secretary has gone quiet on creating a National Care Service.

And there's more: the party has yet to outline how it will ensure new technology is regulated safely (see pages 20-21), despite the existential fears around AI that have dogged us throughout the year. And, as Hamish Sandison, chair of Labour Business writes (see page 13), businesses want to know that Labour really has become "the natural party of business".

This is a gap, and an opportunity, for the party to signal to voters that it's on their side, making clear, beyond the five missions, what Labour stands for. The opposition must show, as Louise Casey notes (see pages 18-20) that it can make the "systemic change" this country needs. ●

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## Spotlight

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# A pathway to power – and a poisoned chalice

By Jonny Ball

Our survey of councillors from across English local government has revealed a bleak mood among the Conservative grassroots, and a grim snapshot of a depleted public realm. We sent surveys to councillors in every local authority and received more than 500 responses, from all parties.

After the 2019 general election, Labour was left with its lowest seat tally since 1935. While its share of the vote held up at around 32 per cent – a little higher than Ed Miliband’s in 2015 – the party had become woefully inefficient at turning its national percentages into the requisite parliamentary seats. Its support was concentrated in safe constituencies in large cities, and its historic heartlands had turned into Tory marginals.

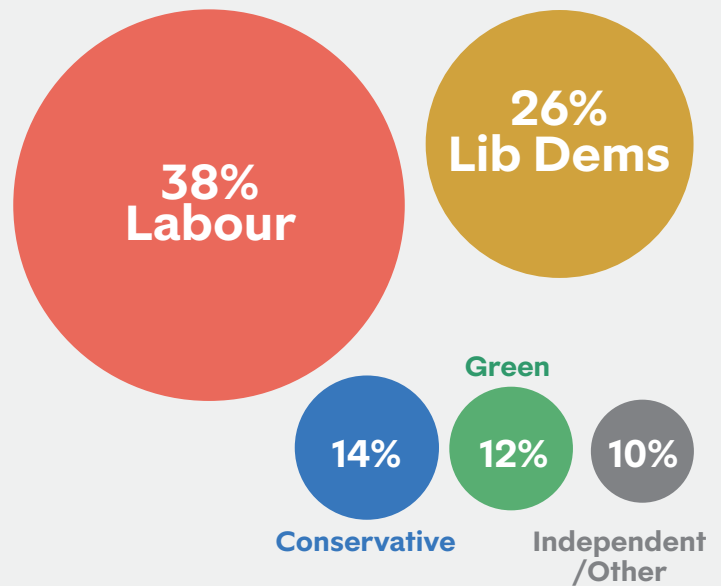
A psephological post-mortem by the Fabian Society, *Another Mountain to Climb*, said that Keir Starmer would need a record swing to enter Downing Street at the next election – an unlikely prospect, it concluded. Instead, it soberly reflected that Labour would have to make “major progress in this parliament to have a hope of winning power within 10 years”, suggesting that the opposition “may need to consider formal alliances” with the Greens and Liberal Democrats.

Today, the world seems very different. Since that report, two prime ministers have been ignominiously ejected from office, only to leave a third without a mandate from his own party members or the country. Covid-19 wreaked havoc on a global economy that is now battered by inflation and multiplying geopolitical crises. Labour is consistently double digits ahead in opinion polls.

Only 7 per cent of Tory respondents to our in-house polling predicted a Conservative majority at the next election. Two thirds expected Labour to form the next government. And their assessment of No 10’s policy agenda was withering. Boris Johnson delivered a Brexit realignment that now looks temporary, with the coalition of the more affluent, true-blue Home Counties and the post-industrial Red Wall ripped apart by partygate, Trussonomics and a rudderless Rishi Sunak. Johnson promised

**Our 528 respondents by party\***

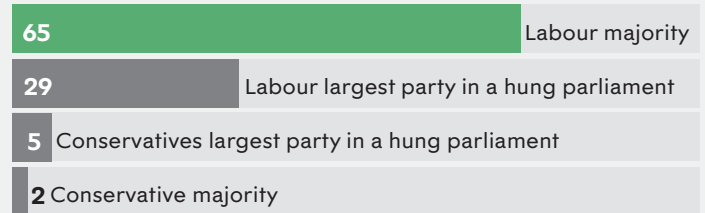
\*Some totals do not add up to 100 per cent because figures have been rounded up or down



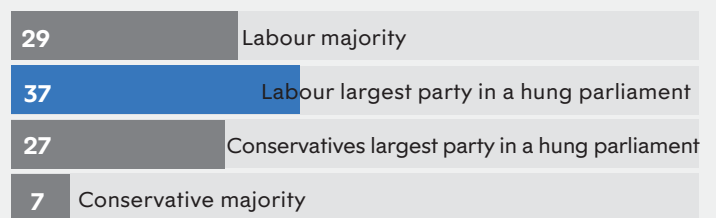
**General election predictions**

Less than 7 per cent of Conservative councillors expect their party to win a majority. **What do you think the outcome of the next general election will be?**

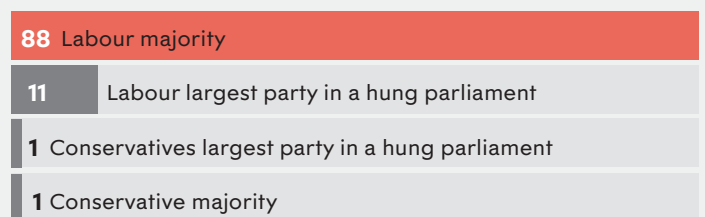
**All respondents**



**Conservative**



**Labour**



**In their own words**

**“The massive worry is that Labour won’t make that much difference. I haven’t seen any signs of a better settlement for local authorities, and without that we are all slipping closer to the abyss.”**

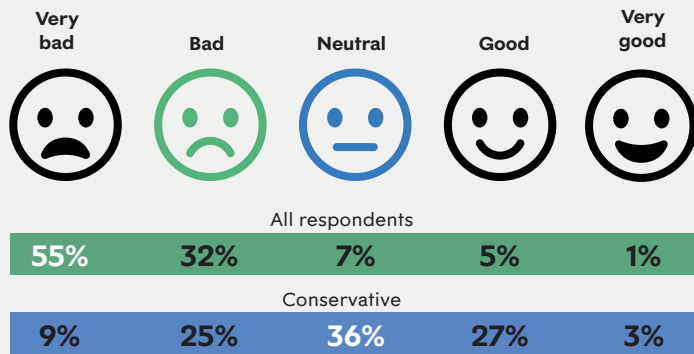
**“Austerity has killed local government”**

“Conservatives are losing votes because of the way Rishi is running the country. We work hard on the front lines and he’s always backtracking and bringing daft policies that people didn’t vote for.”

**“Bad governance and waste are endemic”**

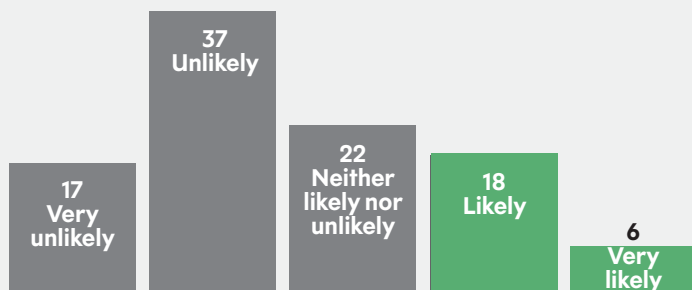
**On the ground**

Only 6 per cent of councillors say Westminster policies are having a positive effect on their areas, including under a third (30 per cent) of Tories. More Conservatives (34 per cent) said government policies were having a negative impact. **What effect do you think the government’s policies are having on your local area?**



**Bankruptcy**

Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of councillors say it’s likely or very likely their local authority will go bankrupt. **This year, Birmingham council issued a section 114 notice, effectively declaring bankruptcy. How likely would you say it is that your local authority will have to take similar action in the next five years?**



sunlit uplands and a “roaring Twenties”, but today, 34 per cent of Conservative councillors say Westminster policies are having a negative or very negative effect on their areas, against just 27 per cent who say positive – and a tiny 3 per cent who say very positive. Among all respondents, only 6 per cent of councillors think they are seeing positive outcomes from policies passed down from Whitehall.

Our previous poll of councillors, in May, exposed the failures of devolution and levelling up, with over 84 per cent reporting “no tangible benefits” from the regional policy agenda and 92 per cent saying funding for their councils was inadequate.

In this survey, with questions focused on Labour’s five missions, councillors describe a similar picture of a depleted local authority sector after 13 years of budget cuts and austerity. Councils have absorbed much of the fiscal tightening that has occurred since the financial crisis – with some metropolitan authorities losing two thirds of their government grant. Birmingham joined Woking, Thurrock and others in issuing a section 114 effective bankruptcy notice this year. Twenty-four per cent of survey respondents said it was likely or very likely their authorities would have to do the same. And this wasn’t just profligate Labour members exaggerating their predicament – 18 per cent of Tory councillors said their council was on a financial precipice (see Clive Betts on page 6).

In such negative circumstances, it seems the opposition has a clear path to victory. The ruling party is devoid of ideas and presides over managed decline, unable to stir enthusiasm even from its own elected local representatives.

But the impression left by our survey results shows the scale of the challenge for any incoming government: only a third trust Starmer to deliver on his five missions should he win power. Only around 10 per cent of councillors say the economy in their areas is now in a better state than in 2010. Even 63 per cent of Conservatives say their high street has got worse or much worse since 2010 – another damning indictment of their own party’s record in power. Eighty-eight per cent say local NHS and social care services are in a worse state, including a third of Tories; 52 per cent say crime rates are higher. Of Labour’s missions, only the one on education stands out as a positive outlier for Starmer’s party, with a solid base upon which to build: 58 per cent of councillors say schools in the areas they represent are good or very good.

Given its poll lead, one might expect a mood of optimism from Labour’s council cohort, with a feeling that things can only get better. And yet while they have near-universal confidence in their party’s ability to overturn the historic, seismic defeat of 2019, one summed up an attitude of caution: “The massive worry is that Labour won’t make much difference... Without [a new funding settlement] we are slipping closer to the abyss.” ●

# Councils have been on the brink for years

By Clive Betts MP

The House of Commons Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (LUHC) Select Committee, which I chair, has been looking at the issue of financial distress in local authorities for some time. We've been hearing from a range of local government bodies for our inquiry. The message we've been getting loud and clear, which is shared by the results of this survey, is that it is not just individual councils, but councils across the board that are facing really serious financial challenges.

The LUHC Committee has frequently heard that councils face being on a "knife-edge", or that local-authority finances are reaching a "tipping point". These weren't all authorities hit by specific, one-off issues and financial outlays such as historic pay claims (as was the case in Birmingham recently). Rather, they were councils tipped into difficulty by other, more generalised factors, including problems meeting the rising costs of social care, and tackling the housing crisis and homelessness. Considering councils have been looking at a reduction in their resources since 2010, an increase in their responsibilities, and then having to deal with the hammer-blow of inflation, it is not surprising when polling like this reveals widespread fears over the financing of their areas, with 24 per cent reporting it is likely they'll have to issue a section 114 notice.

The findings on councillor concerns about government policy very much chime with the findings of the committee in a number of inquiries we've held. (Only 6 per cent say Westminster is implementing measures that have a positive effect on their areas). We have been critical of government policies across the board, including planning policies to deliver sufficient numbers of new homes. We have also expressed strong concerns over lack of funding and workforce for social care, no long-term strategy for moves towards net zero at local level, and piecemeal efforts at devolution to councils and regional bodies. ●

Labour has pledged on five "missions":

**"Get Britain building again"**  
with the highest sustained growth in the G7

**"Switch on Great British Energy"**  
with a zero-carbon electricity grid by 2030

**"Get the NHS back on its feet"**  
cutting waiting lists down from their record highs

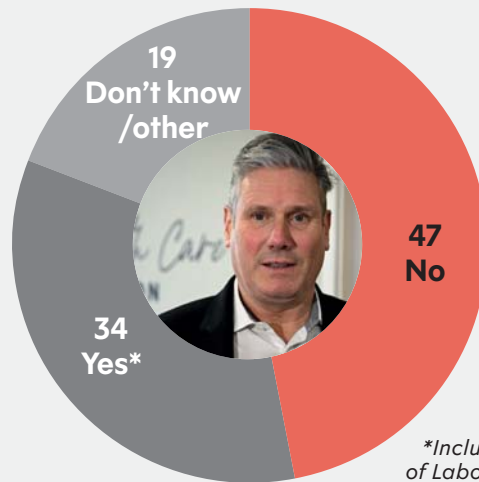
**5 Missions**

**"Breaking down barriers to opportunity"**  
improving education, skills training and childcare

**"Take back our streets"**  
cutting crime and halving violence against women and girls

**Can they deliver?**

Just over a third of councillors trust Keir Starmer to achieve his five missions. **If Labour were to win the next election, would you trust a Starmer-led government to achieve its five missions?**



**Climate & net zero mission 1**

**75%**

of Labour councillors say the green transition will have a positive or very positive effect on their areas

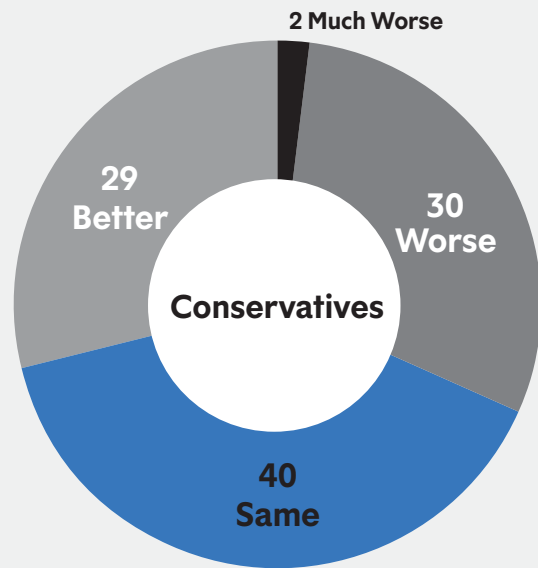
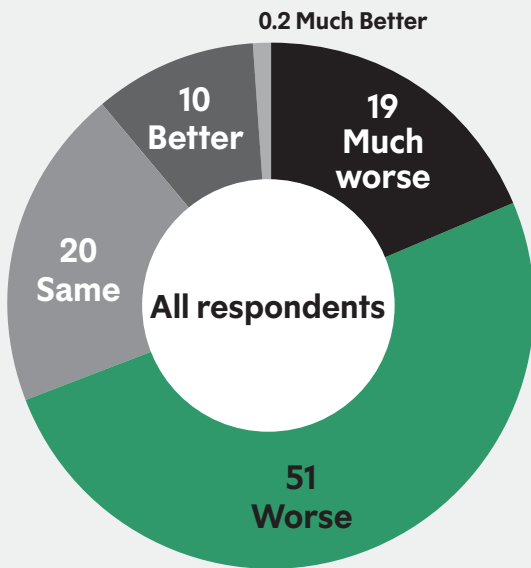
**35%**

of Conservative councillors say the same

**Economy mission**

Less than a third (29 per cent) of Conservative respondents say the economy in their areas has improved since 2010\*

How would you describe the state of the local economy in the area you represent compared with 2010?

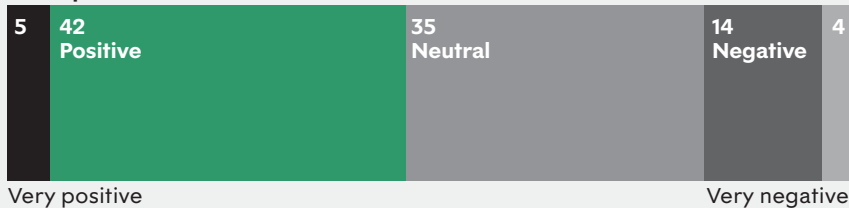


**Climate & net zero mission 2**

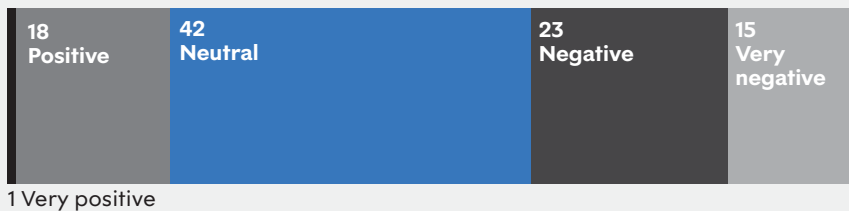
Labour councillors are more than twice as likely to report positive feelings among people in their wards and council areas towards the green transition.

How would you describe people in your area's feelings about the move to net zero?

**All respondents**

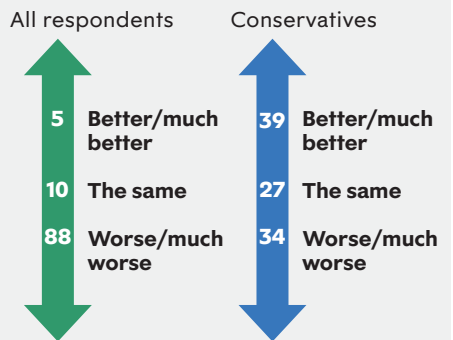


**Conservatives**



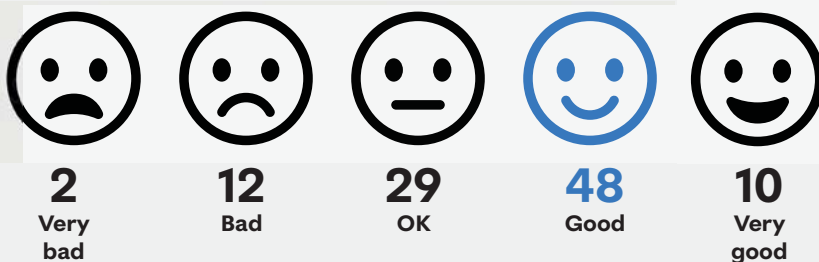
**NHS pledge**

Less than a quarter (24 per cent) of Conservatives said the NHS was in a better state now than it was when they entered government; 88 per cent of all councillors said it was worse or much worse. How would you describe the state of health and social care services in your area compared with 2010?



**Education pledge**

Councillors of all parties are positive about the state of schools in their local areas. Which of the below best describes the state of schools in the area you represent?



**Crime pledge**

Would you say that there is more or less crime in your area than in 2010?



# Why the next government must bolster mutuals

Diverse business models in the finance sector can help beat the housing crisis and fight fraud

In association with



Nationwide holds a unique position in UK financial services. As the largest building society, we can deliver the valuable banking products and services and mutual good to our customers that others cannot.

As a building society, we are owned by our members – our customers who have their current account, mortgage or savings with us. We do not have to pursue profit to pay shareholders dividends. Instead, we balance our need to retain sufficient profit to remain financially strong with rewarding members and our commitment to share our success. We aim to return additional value to our members as owners through our Nationwide Fairer Share products and payments. And we know the importance of face-to-face banking; if we have a branch in your town or city, we'll still be there until at least 2026.

To help us deliver fairer banking, Nationwide believes there are some key policy changes that would tackle issues faced by our customers every day. These changes would be a starting point to help address some of the challenges that will be facing any future government.

Home ownership is increasingly out of reach for many people but remains an aspiration for most. For example, one poll has shown that 80 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds would prefer to own a home than to rent. To help make clear the challenges of becoming a homeowner and ensure a long-term coordinated strategy to address the housing crisis, Nationwide would like to see a first-time-buyer review to increase the supply and ownership of homes.

This review, with an independent chair, would cover mortgages, housing supply, planning reforms, house-building and the house-buying process. It could incorporate measures to support mortgage lending, including increasing the current 15 per cent limit on lending at more than 4.5 times income. It would look at issues around affordability and mortgage deposit requirements which remain a major barrier. A 10 per cent deposit on a typical first-time-buyer property is equivalent to almost 60 per cent of annual gross earnings.

One policy this review should look at is reintroducing Help to Buy ISAs. This would provide much-needed financial support for first-time buyers. The original Help to Buy ISA was a popular product that helped many people build



a deposit before it closed for new applications in November 2019.

An ISA specifically for first-time buyers was a key factor in encouraging younger people to save for a deposit. It helped provide fairer access to mortgages by providing some support to people without family support. The original scheme has been used to help 558,176 property completions. The median age of a first-time buyer using the scheme in 2015-20 was 28, compared with a national first-time buyer median age of 30 in the same period. An updated version, taking into account changes in interest rates and house-price increases, would provide vital support.

One of the key reasons that Nationwide can help first-time buyers is our status as a mutual. Mutual organisations are owned and run for the benefit of members, unlike PLCs. Such a diverse range of business models in different sectors gives consumers more choice. Mutuals do not have to pay dividends to shareholders so they are able to reinvest profits in better pricing or services for members. For Nationwide this means we are able to offer more competitive savings rates, keep branches open and, for the first time this year, make a direct profit-sharing payment, Fairer Share, to eligible members.

But mutuals often have to work

within structures designed for more common business types. For example, they have less scope for generating capital, making it harder for them to grow. The current regulatory and legislative framework is agnostic towards mutuals and tends to lean towards the traditional stock company model, causing additional cost and leading to competitive disadvantage.

This is another area in need of change. A government commitment to double the size of the cooperative and mutual economy would be an important sign of support for diversity of business models, as would the strengthening of mutuals in the financial services sector.

Nationwide would like to work with politicians and government to create a better policy understanding of mutuals. Government should collaborate with mutuals on the creation of data that monitors the health of UK mutuality. Specific policy measures could include protecting the longevity of building societies by updating the Building Societies Act 1986, and introducing mutual capital instruments to support the entry and growth of new players.

Nationwide's mutual status enables us to focus on protecting our customers from fraud and scams, too. Fraud is the most prevalent crime in the UK, costing victims £12.8bn in

2021-22. Research from the Social Market Foundation shows that the impact of fraud on victims is wider than purely economic, with 35 per cent reporting detrimental impacts to their confidence, and 25 per cent to their mental health.

Banks and building societies are focused on tackling fraud but we are calling for a great share of liability for the cost of reimbursement across all organisations in the "fraud chain". In particular, we would like to see big tech, social media and telecoms play their part to help block and prevent crimes. Fake adverts on social media, spoofed messages and scam calls can and must be cut off at the pass.

Nationwide is calling for the creation of a central "hub" that brings together multiple industries, government and law enforcement, to share data and collaborate to tackle fraud. By doing this we hope to protect more consumers from becoming victims of it.

Protecting people from crime, helping them into a secure home, and supporting consumers are areas where business is ready to work with government in order to deliver the support people need. A future programme for government should take an optimistic view on solutions that can be delivered – and help secure genuine collaboration that would benefit us all. ●



FIZKES / SHUTTERSTOCK

Home ownership is increasingly out of reach for many – but it remains an aspiration

# The big tech opportunity

## Labour must strike a balance on innovation and regulation

By Sarah Dawood

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The government spent months trailing its AI summit – the UK’s assertion of its relevance to the global debate on how to regulate the technology of the moment. But the resounding image from this month’s meeting was of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak interviewing Elon Musk. With a series of softball questions, Sunak and the richest man in the world had a quasi-philosophical discussion about how AI could make humans obsolete.

And yet, despite the existential concerns over artificial intelligence that have accompanied us throughout 2023, the Prime Minister seems in no hurry to act. Ahead of the conference at Bletchley Park – the location of Allied code-breaking in the Second World War – Sunak said that the government would “not rush” to regulate AI, though he did announce the creation of an AI safety institute, tasked with researching and testing new technologies.

And during Sunak’s speech at the summit, the word “regulation” was not mentioned once. Meanwhile, the

# business connect

RISHI SUNAK X ELON MUSK



Rishi Sunak interviewing Elon Musk at the end of the AI Summit this month

European Union's AI Act and the US's Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights are already under way.

Following the summit, Keir Starmer accused Sunak of “fanboying” over Musk – who, alongside wealth, wields significant political power – rather than drawing firm red lines on nascent AI technology. But what would Labour do differently if it wins the next general election? The Tories are “starry-eyed and subservient” towards the tech sector, Kirsty Innes, director of technology policy at the think tank Labour Together, tells *Spotlight*, while Labour's approach is “much more down to earth”.

There is a real opportunity for the party, says Innes. “[Rather than] concerning [themselves] with what's going on in Silicon Valley or what might happen in 50 years' time, there is a clear determination to make improvements to people's lives here and now.”

A recent survey from Labour Together found that the public's main concerns over AI are immediate: the spread of misinformation, job losses, and the use of

AI to monitor or control people at work.

In the shadow cabinet reshuffle in September, Labour mirrored the structure of the government after it split the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport into two distinct entities. Peter Kyle, shadow secretary for the new Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, has since announced several policy interventions. These include regulating developers of “frontier AI” – the most advanced general-purpose AI models – with requirements around reporting, safety testing their training models, and ensuring security is in place to limit the unintended spread of dangerous tech.

Labour also plans to set up a Regulatory Innovation Office – a “pro-innovation” body to expedite regulatory decisions; ten-year research and development (R&D) budgets to encourage longer-term investment into technology; and Skills England, a new body to meet UK skills needs, as well as reforming the Skills and Apprenticeship Levy to focus it more on training

young people for “modern technological demands”.

Kyle told *Spotlight* that working in partnership with the private sector, “science and technology will have a central role in delivering Labour's five national missions” – economic growth, green energy, an NHS fit for the future, tackling crime, and increasing opportunity. For example, the new Regulatory Innovation Office would speed up the roll-out of new technologies, and would be applied in areas such as clinical trials to get new medicines to NHS patients more quickly. The ten-year budgets for R&D institutions would unlock private sector investment in key industries through longer funding cycles than those the existing public body, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), offers.

“The AI summit was an opportunity for the UK to lead the global debate on how we regulate this powerful new technology for good,” he says. “Instead, the Prime Minister has been left behind by the US and EU, who are moving ahead with real safeguards on the technology.”

Kyle adds that the party's plans for regulating AI and tech “will build public trust and deliver security and opportunity for working people”.

Industry sources tell *Spotlight* that technology is increasingly becoming a policy priority for the party, with many members of the shadow cabinet having “tech literacy” – such as Darren Jones, shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, and Alex Davies-Jones, shadow minister for tech and digital economy, respectively the past and current chairs of the think tank Labour Digital. “Tech had fallen between the cracks for Labour, but since the appointment of Peter Kyle, it's a good sign for the industry,” says Neil Ross, associate director of policy at TechUK.

But the party has not set out a full position on regulation, including whether it would create an independent regulator or give new powers to an existing one, such as the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The former shadow digital secretary Lucy Powell suggested making AI a “licensed” industry, like medicines and nuclear power. An industry source tells *Spotlight* that licensing has been discussed among Labour frontbenchers but warns that this would need a “tiered approach” to ensure smaller businesses are not disadvantaged. ▶



**Peter Kyle, the shadow secretary for science, innovation and technology**

◀ Labour should look to “set a regulatory environment which is supportive of innovation and agile enough to keep up with the pace of change”, says Innes. The Online Safety Act has become law six years since it was first conceived, in which time social media has changed immeasurably.

“You need more agile regulators, and you need a better, more flexible approach,” she says. But “regulating complicated and fast-moving industries isn’t a wholly new science”, and learnings can be taken from sectors like financial services, where “sandboxes” are used to support innovation while mitigating risk. These are controlled environments which allow businesses to test new products with oversight by a regulator.

The need to legislate AI is urgent, says Michael Birtwistle, associate director of law and policy at the Ada Lovelace Institute, given the “unusually fast” pace with which it is being adopted across society. “It’s much harder to regulate something after it’s integrated into economies, as we’ve seen with social media,” he adds. Without legislation, developers will not be incentivised to build in safety, and consumers will have fewer rights of redress when things go wrong. An incoming government could also learn from existing regulation, he says – self-driving vehicles already have far more robust safety laws than comparable autonomous systems.

Major incidents where tech went wrong, such as scandals over Cambridge Analytica or the Ofqual exams algorithm, have damaged trust: robustness and transparency is vital to rebuilding that, says Kriti Sharma, chief product officer of legal technology at Thomson Reuters.

There are easy wins, such as adding a kitemark on online chats to indicate whether someone is speaking with a human or a robot, and adding source citations for information produced by AIs. More complex solutions include ensuring AI models are trained on diverse, trusted data sets. Regulation should follow the “high bar” set by other high-risk industries, such as law, financial services and health, Sharma says.

“To not put legislation in place is to gamble on trust being lost,” adds Birtwistle, as well as “us not being able to deploy and use that technology fully, and people not being willing to share the data necessary to train those technologies”.

Skills gaps and a lack of new talent are some of the biggest issues facing the industry, while job losses are a key

## Technology can help Labour transform public services

concern for the public about AI. Polling from BMG Research found that more than half of 18-24-year-olds are worried about the impact of technology on their future employment prospects. Meanwhile, industry sources tell *Spotlight* they were broadly pleased to see Labour focusing on specialist training through Skills England.

Tech skills can boost productivity and “unleash human potential” to improve society, as well as contribute to the economy, says Sharma. For example, an AI assistant could help lawyers draft documents more quickly, freeing them up to do pro bono work. An incoming government should hold itself to account with “hard numbers”, she says, setting targets for increasing productivity levels, skill-level improvements, and new jobs generated.

To be globally competitive, a Labour government will need to work in partnership with the tech industry. The plan for ten-year R&D budgets shows that Labour is “listening and engaging with the sector”, says TechUK’s Ross, but the party could go further by exploring collaborative taskforce models. For instance, TechUK runs an online steering group, made up of representatives from the tech and banking sectors, regulators and the government, which convenes to create solutions to tackle fraud. The partnership has helped to reduce online financial scams “without having to default to slow-moving legislation or complex regulatory consultations”.

Labour also has a huge opportunity to transform public services with technology, says Innes of Labour Together. While the rest of the economy has adopted tech rapidly, government services still seem slow and outdated by comparison. “Labour’s ambition should be to make it so that the public sector is equally as ambitious and innovative when looking for ways to serve citizens better, as the private sector is in serving its customers better,” she says.

Most of all, an incoming government should focus on learning from experts in the field. “Listen more to the people building [AI],” says Sharma. “Don’t get fascinated by tech celebrities or headline-grabbing messages. Whoever’s coming in next has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to drive real change.” ●



**Hamish Sandison**  
Chair, Labour Business

# “Labour must be unashamedly pro-business and pro-worker”

“It’s the economy, stupid.” Bill Clinton’s campaign manager put it rather crudely in 1992, explaining the primacy of his economic recovery plan in helping to secure business support and unseat an incumbent Republican president. The same holds true for Britain today, although Keir Starmer has phrased it rather more elegantly in the first of his five “missions”, which commits a Labour government to securing “the highest sustained growth in the G7”. But how is Labour’s case to be made when the Conservative Party has held a historic monopoly over claiming to be “the party of business” that can be trusted with the economy?

Well, the Tories have certainly assisted in recent years by trashing their own historic brand, from Boris Johnson’s infamous “f\*\*k business” jibe, to last year’s Truss/Kwarteng mini-Budget meltdown. But nobody I know in the business community

believes that Tory incompetence on the economy will be enough to convince businesses to support Labour. This has always been one of Labour’s greatest electoral challenges, as Ed Miliband found to his cost in 2015, when Labour was painted – however unfairly – as an “anti-business” party.

To establish its economic credibility, our members are clear: Labour must do nothing short of replacing the Tories as the natural party of business.

Three things are needed to achieve this historic turnaround. First, Labour must heed Harold Wilson’s warning from the opposition benches in 1972, when he and a few far-sighted allies in the business community founded the group now known as Labour Business, the party’s affiliated business membership group, of which I am chair. “If we don’t listen to business,” he said, “there is no reason why business should listen to us.” Second, Labour must make clear that it is unashamedly pro-business. That was a difficult message to get across in 2015-2019 when the then Labour leader’s first-hand experience of business was limited, to say the least. At the same time, Labour must not be ashamed to assert that it is still a pro-worker party committed to a partnership of government, businesses and trade unions. Otherwise, what distinguishes Labour from the Conservatives?

Today, I am pleased to say that the “pro-business, pro-worker” mantra, coined by Labour Business to encapsulate our view of a successful partnership economy, is on the lips of every shadow cabinet member I listen to, from Angela Rayner to Rachel Reeves and Jonathan Reynolds. Successful businesses are already on the same page.

Third, Labour needs to explain what it means to be “pro-business”. The people I speak to in industry want to know: what policies will Labour deliver in government to earn this moniker?

We already have promising indications of the direction of travel, which businesses and trade unions can support. These include business rates reform, a modern industrial strategy, updating the planning system, reforming the British Business Bank and unlocking institutional investment, setting up a National Wealth Fund to invest in new industries, and a Green Prosperity Plan worth £28bn year as soon as affordable. The bare bones are there. But businesses want to see more before they go public in declaring their support for a putative Labour government trusted to deliver economic growth. A public imprimatur from businesses won’t guarantee election victory, but it will boost Labour’s economic credibility, which is an essential condition for success at the polls.

That is why the members of Labour Business will be working with all businesses and all trade unions over the coming months to ensure their voices are heard before the ink is dry on a manifesto. This must be unashamedly, and in detail, pro-business and pro-worker. ●

# How UK ports are unlocking green growth

## A five-step plan for harnessing the energy and talent of coastal towns

In association with



The Port of Barry was once the UK's leading port for shipping coal. Long before *Gavin and Stacey*, it was a cacophony of trains, cranes and people sending coal from the South Wales valleys to the world. No more. But recently Associated British Ports (ABP), Barry's current owner and the UK's largest port operator, signed a deal to explore how the port could be a hydrogen hub to decarbonise surrounding industries, protecting and growing good jobs. The port is already a net exporter of solar-generated electricity.

Barry is not alone among ABP's network of 21 ports across Britain in seizing the opportunities that green growth offers for investment and jobs. The Port of Hull hosts the Siemens Gamesa wind turbine blade factory. The Port of Grimsby is Europe's largest offshore wind turbine operations and maintenance centre, with other significant hubs at our ports of Barrow and Lowestoft. Seventeen of our ports already generate green electricity on site.

And we have even more ambitious plans for the future, including a transformational project to develop a port worth £1bn of investment at Port Talbot to support growth in floating offshore wind in the Celtic Sea. In the Humber, as well as wanting to grow our offshore wind activities, we're also looking to develop major projects for hydrogen generation and carbon capture and storage with our partners.

All of this activity is not just about utilising our ports to enable rapid and large-scale emissions reduction. It is also about supporting good, existing jobs in sectors like energy, steel and manufacturing. And it's about growing the new jobs, investment and prosperity that can come from coastal communities that have plenty of potential but currently often face significant socio-economic challenges.

So the question for ABP is not if we agree with Labour's missions for building economic growth and a rapid green energy transition. Not only do we agree but we are already well advanced on making them a reality in coastal communities all around Britain with, we hope, plenty more to come. Our question is how do we and a Labour government work together most effectively to deliver the change we all want to see at pace and make best use of stretched public finances?

It's not just about the use of government money. Sometimes huge amounts of public spending are less important than the right, consistent long-term policy environment. It may even, in some circumstances, actually do more harm than good. How can that be? Because there is a lot of private investor capital looking for high quality green infrastructure projects to invest in.

That investment can often go anywhere in the world and the UK can't and shouldn't attempt a subsidy race to the bottom against the US and EU. What we can and must do is make sure we are the best place to invest in green energy according to other measures. So what are these measures?

In sectors such as ports where infrastructure can be around for decades and even centuries, it's essential to have clarity on the long-term plan and confidence that the plan will be stuck to, and to break down long-term targets into stages where success can be demonstrated and breed more success. At the moment for the Celtic Sea, although there's a long-term goal for the amount of floating offshore wind capacity the government wants deployed, we lack clarity on some of the practical steps needed to get there, such as how to allocate sufficient seascape to deploy turbines.

Second, we need to have the right rules – carrots and sticks – to encourage builders to use UK supply chains and infrastructure. The UK has been a world leader in the deployment of fixed bottom offshore wind. But many of the supply chain jobs – people building the wind turbines and the components and services that go with them – have too often gone to other countries. The UK stands at the cusp of the next great phase of wind energy (floating rather than fixed) and the serious growth of areas like hydrogen and carbon capture and storage. The government should put in place measures for companies to commit to UK infrastructure and supply chains, embedded into the subsidies and licences it provides to project builders.

Third, fix the grid. Grid capacity issues are rightly now on the agenda. Ports are a part of that story. We are going to go through a transformation in the amount of electricity we and our customers will need to decarbonise and improve air quality. But right now we are facing estimates of the mid-2030s



**Ports and coastal communities have a key role to play in the UK's economic revival**

for significant new electricity capacity. This is the single biggest brake on ABP's own commitment to hit net zero by 2040, a key commitment in our sustainability strategy.

Fourth, make the planning rules sufficiently agile that we can change and grow at the speed required to hit Labour's ambitious growth and green energy targets. Port development must be responsible and sustainable – economically and socially as well as environmentally. There is of course an essential role for local scrutiny and accountability. But overarching priorities like green growth must also play a role and be recognised in strategic spatial planning and consenting processes.

And then there's money. Money isn't the only thing but – used in a limited and targeted way – it is an important part of the overall package of making investment

happen. There is a role for government funding in, for example, bridging a gap between when port development has to start and when customers of the port are willing to pay to use the built infrastructure. But the government funding isn't a substitute for long-term private investment, and must be used to crowd in private capital.

The UK, perhaps in future under a Labour government, will have the opportunity to seize the opportunities of green growth, delivering lower emissions and more jobs. Ports are a cornerstone for realising the generational opportunity. But that won't happen without real effort and partnership between government and progressive businesses. Here at ABP we recognise that the green growth potential of our ports is not just an opportunity, it's also an obligation. ●

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# Can Keir Starmer transform the sickness service?

## What experts think of Labour's plans for the NHS

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### WE NEED A NATIONAL RETENTION SCHEME

**Professor Kamila Hawthorne**

Chair, Royal College of GPs

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General practice is in crisis, and we need a bold plan to improve care for patients. This September, general practice delivered more than 32 million appointments, five million more than in September 2019, despite a fall in qualified GPs.

The statement that primary care will be at the heart of Labour's NHS plan is a promising start. We have called for a shift in focus from hospitals to the community, but extra responsibilities have not come with the requisite funding. If you want to improve access to GP services, resources need to follow.

Labour's plans to expand training places for GPs is another positive. This is essential, but only one part of the puzzle. It takes at least ten years to train new GPs, and GPs are leaving the profession at a greater rate than they're joining.

It also leaves the question of where these extra GPs are going to train and work. Eighty four per cent of practice staff tell us they do not have room for more trainees, and so far, no party has committed to the capital investment required. Visa rules also need to change to ensure GPs from overseas who train in the UK can stay to work in the NHS once qualified.

Other proposals include more direct referrals to specialist services and incentives to support patients to see their doctor of choice, which we are keen to explore. We agree with Labour's focus on prevention, and want measures to reflect this.

There is more we would like to see. Our manifesto sets out seven solutions, including a national retention scheme, cutting bureaucracy so GPs can spend more time with patients, and giving primary care the premises and tools it needs to keep patients healthier for longer.

Practices in the poorest communities – including those in rural and coastal localities – have more patients and fewer GPs. To truly tackle health inequalities, funding streams should change so greater spending goes to the areas of greatest need.

Overall, Labour has positive ambitions. We hope its manifesto will back these up with the pledges required to turn them into reality. ●



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## DETAILED POLICY WILL TURN VISION INTO REALITY

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### Sally Warren

Director of policy, the King's Fund

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Labour's health and care plans centre on three big "shifts": shifting care outside of hospitals by boosting primary, community and social care; moving from a sickness service to one based around preventing poor health; and embracing the full potential of digital.

Alongside these, the party has made ambitious commitments to expand the workforce, and quickly improve waiting lists to levels not seen since 2015.

Does the vision stack up? It is what a lot of people in the sector say is needed. But the sting in the tail is that the vision is what has been promised for more than two decades. National policy has been to shift care outside of hospitals for years, but the exact opposite has happened – a greater proportion of NHS staff and budget are now spent on hospitals.

We've lived through many a false start of an NHS technology revolution; robots and AI are exciting, but feel a long way off for the nurse taking 30 minutes to log into their computer.

So, a vision isn't enough. Labour will have to develop and share the detailed plans, policies and actions that turn that vision into reality.

Second, to achieve its vision, Labour needs to be clear about its plans for investment in the NHS. Whether that's about pay for staff, structural reform, or improving buildings and kit, the level of funding will be a key constraint to how fast waiting lists can be improved.

Third, the pace of change relies on staff. Yes, training more staff is needed, but so is action on working conditions, culture, leadership, and flexibility to make the NHS a more attractive career. On this we need more detail, or its vision will fail through a lack of staff to deliver it.

Finally, it's encouraging to see recognition that the NHS doesn't operate in a silo – from commitments to improve children's health through breakfast clubs and mental health hubs in schools, to taking action to bolster social care. This is critical for a sustainable NHS, but more importantly for a healthy, happy and productive society. ●

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## IT IS MUCH EASIER TO MAKE PLANS THAN DELIVER THEM

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### Professor Jane Dacre

Emeritus professor,  
University College London (UCL)  
Medical School

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As a former president of the Royal College of Physicians, current president of the Medical Protection Society, and a longstanding clinical academic and doctor, it saddens me to see that our NHS is struggling to cope, with reducing patient satisfaction and long waiting lists. This is worsened by the ageing population and chronic illness. Workforce shortages, staff burnout, patchy IT and poor buildings haven't helped, and these issues have been exacerbated by the pandemic and staff strikes.

Labour's Mission for Health pledges to "build an NHS fit for the future: that is there when people need it". This commitment is welcome, and has the potential to make a significant difference, but the implementation of health pledges is complex; it is much easier to make plans than deliver them.

Shifting the focus of care into the community is an excellent aspiration, but so far, following the expansion of community pharmacy and other roles in support of primary care, the number of GPs is still falling, due to poor retention and early retirement. Addressing the mental health crisis is vital, but previous government pledges, such as to increase the mental health workforce, have not actually resulted in more mental health doctors and nurses.

The shift away from treating sickness to prevention is potentially transformational, so the aim to create longer-term funded plans is essential. This has been recommended by many medical royal colleges, and tried before.

The pledge to move from analogue to cutting-edge technology should improve care, but this is hampered by patchy implementation of electronic health systems, and low levels of digital literacy among some staff, patients, and service users.

A National Care Service would be a big opportunity to improve struggling social care services – but data is lacking as the sector is not joined up, making it difficult to measure outcomes.

These commitments are great, but successful implementation will be very important and ultimately, very difficult. ●

AI feels a long way off for the nurse taking 30 minutes to log into their computer

# “The Tories are done, spent”

## Social policy fixer Louise Casey on how to deliver in government

By Alona Ferber



After the kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by Metropolitan Police officer Wayne Couzens in 2021, the force’s failings became impossible to ignore. A much-needed review into how the Met dealt with misogyny in its own ranks was launched in February 2022. It was led by someone uniquely qualified for the task: the former senior civil servant Baroness Louise Casey.

The crossbench peer, 58, was the UK’s first ever victims’ commissioner, and she had led reviews and been appointed as a “tsar” on myriad difficult public service failings and policy challenges, from the Rotherham child sexual exploitation scandal, to the Respect task force, to community cohesion and extremism.

But Casey, sometimes referred to as a “social policy fixer”, had a record of achieving results in government, as well as identifying the causes of failure. “I haven’t done as many reviews as people think I have,” Casey told me in a recent video call from her kitchen in north London, dressed casually in a zip-up



Louise Casey heads to a press briefing on her Metropolitan Police review, March 2023

sweatshirt. “I’ve done more doing.”

Casey, the former deputy director of the homelessness charity Shelter, was appointed by Tony Blair to head his Rough Sleepers Unit in 1999. In the following years under New Labour, the number of rough sleepers in the UK dropped dramatically.

By contrast, “initiativitis” is the opposite of clear achievement. Casey recalled confronting Rishi Sunak in a police station when she was carrying out the Met review. “He just looked across the table as if I was completely mad when I said ‘you’re not making a dent in violence against women and girls.’”

The Prime Minister responded by listing “initiative after initiative after initiative”, she says. “But you can imagine what I think about initiativitis. It doesn’t change anything, it just makes governments feel better.”

If Casey is against a glut of state initiatives, she is a fan of mission-led government – “Brown and Cameron didn’t have a plan, all credit to [Labour] for the missions” – but she has plenty of

advice for Keir Starmer on how to ensure that his five national missions on economic growth, green power, fixing the NHS, reducing crime, and expanding opportunity don’t get lost in the fog of running a country.

Clarity is vital, whether for missions or targets. “Nobody likes the word ‘targets’ because it’s associated with Blair,” she says, “but his domestic work was extraordinary, and a lot of the time he set targets.” There is a problem there too, though: “You can hit the target and miss the point.”

The five missions “need quite tight control” without too much bureaucracy, she says. It’s also easy “to manipulate targets” or to create unintended consequences, displacing “problems from one place to another”. Casey is disparaging of “deliverology”, and the jargon that goes with it (“drill down” is a pet peeve). “There are books written about it, and presumably consultants make money out of this,” she says.

Still, the five missions “are the right missions”, she explains carefully, if

Labour wants to aim for national renewal: Casey believes unity and renewal are what the country needs. “I don’t feel like we’re a unified country in so many ways,” she says, “Not just politically, but the rich and the poor, and the fact that people who are aspirational can’t see their way through.”

But Starmer must beware of “mission creep”. Overarching missions shouldn’t “turn into massive hedgerows of every single thing”, or else they will be impossible to negotiate, as will the many people with “bright new ideas... it can get a bit exhausting when you’re the tsar in charge of it”.

What would Casey do if she had five missions to make good on? She would appoint a secretary of state for each one, alongside independent tsars, she says. Like her, I ask? “Like me.”

Prime ministers have to be selective, she warns. Tony Blair and David Cameron both associated themselves with key things. “The Prime Minister only has a certain amount of time, and I’ve worked for five of them.” They vary in how hard they work and how much work they get done, as well as “how good they are at decision-making, what their cabinets are like, whether they’re collegiate and all pulling in the same direction. All of those things vary.”

In 2011, she recalls, then prime minister David Cameron announced that he wanted to help 120,000 “troubled families”. This was a “nice Conservative policy”, she says. Cameron had a feeling that “a small number of people had a large number of problems, and often therefore caused problems in many ways”. (In November 2011, Casey became director general of the Troubled Families Unit at the Department for Communities and Local Government).

She has a lesson, here, in the options an administration has for solving problems: Jeremy Heywood, then Downing Street chief of staff, “very quietly said to me, ‘Can you have a look at whether anybody’s doing anything to meet this?’ I went, I looked, and I went in to see them.”

Casey presented Cameron and Heywood with three alternatives. Either “set up a target and take responsibility for it. Find some money and get the job done;” or “say you’re doing it” but set up a pilot, call it “innovation”, and then ▶



Keir Starmer announcing the fifth of his five national missions in July

◀ point to some minor success; or, third, collect evidence of things that the government is already doing. “Get the secretary of state to chair a group with committee meetings driven by the Cabinet Office,” she recalls suggesting. “Then ministers will turn up and take lines to take on: ‘somebody’s got a knife crime strategy, so that will help, someone’s got something on food strategies.’”

Her least favourite is the pilot option: “In a funny kind of way, one and three are the most honest things that you could be doing. So you either do it, or you say that these strategies will help with it.”

From her decades working on social policy, Casey knows of other potential pitfalls. Projects that don’t change a fundamental problem with a system, that don’t take the opportunity for “revolution”, are ultimately a distraction. This is particularly salient now, given the state of the country. “Everywhere I go, the trains don’t run on time,” she says. The Conservatives are “spent, they’re done and they need to go away for a while”.

Casey has worked under both the Tories and Labour, but she describes herself as “more than left-leaning”, and she has a world-view.

“I don’t think we can have a world, let alone a country, where people don’t have food and they don’t have love and kindness... But we don’t have a country where that’s possible. And I think there

are just some basics about why we work, why we earn money, why we pay taxes. There’s a deal between us all: I don’t expect somebody to pay for me, but I expect to have the opportunity to be able to pay for myself.”

In Starmer she believes “we have a man of integrity” and an opposition that, though inexperienced in government, “is busting to get some stuff done”. The five missions should bring focus, but Labour has only one chance to get things right.

Whether Labour can stick to all of its five missions is another matter. Casey identifies two 21st century trends that show society has lost its way: in-work poverty and “food hunger – the street homelessness of the 2020s”, with its apparatus of food banks and food kitchens. This month Casey launched the Coronation Food project, which will fight against food waste and hunger.

There have been reports that Casey could lead a William Beveridge-style intervention for Starmer – referencing the 1942 report that laid the grounds for the modern welfare state. But, rather

Britain needs a “breathtaking series of things that change”

than “have an argument about the two-child limit on child tax credit”, she says, “we need to think about what a welfare state would be in the 21st century. Our whole economy has changed, our population has changed.”

Casey is full of ideas on how to solve the most difficult problems facing government, and clear on the need for clarity of definition and purpose. On violence against women and girls she would “call it male violence against women and children”. The fact that “we can’t name the major reason... irritates the hell out of me”.

On crime, fairly fresh from her review of the Met, she notes that the police service “is old-school, very male, run largely by men with men. Sorry, that’s the brutal reality of it.” She believes that they didn’t think through what dealing with violence against women required. With rape victims waiting more than two years for their cases to get to court, a decision could have been made for temporary nightingale courts to prioritise that backlog, for instance. “That’s the sort of tough decision which I don’t think is as tough as people think it is,” she says.

As our call is about to finish, she volunteers, eyebrows raised, almost conspiratorial, that “We could even sort out the NHS and social care, if we wanted to.” How? Social care “is not just about money”, says Casey. “They’ve got a split delivery model. That’s the first mistake, and Labour aren’t rejecting it.” Splitting responsibilities on social care between local government and the health department was a mistake of the former Labour government. Casey believes that “you should never leave something that’s about human beings and their care” across two different bodies. That’s fine for railways, but not human beings, she argues.

Wes Streeting’s “National Care Service” doesn’t shift the model, either. And this highlights an additional risk for Labour’s missions: “Don’t put on a front, don’t paint the door to make a disused building [in a deprived area] look better.”

Casey thinks that we need “a five to ten-year period” for “a breathtaking series of things that change Britain”. Labour mustn’t overpromise ahead of the election – and it must think carefully about what it does in the “first two or three years that allows the country to feel that systemic change”. ●

## Comment



**Sarah Ronan**  
Director, Early Education  
and Childcare Coalition

# “Finances should not constrain Labour’s ambition on childcare”

Labour wants to reform childcare. We have known this for quite some time. What we don’t yet know is what Labour’s reform of the broken childcare system will look like.

When pressed for more detail, the party reminds us that it will introduce breakfast clubs in every primary school. Aside from the fact that the term “breakfast clubs” now feels as ubiquitous as “pebbledash semi”, the policy does nothing to help children under the age of five or their parents.

The party will no doubt say that much has

changed in the past year, and it is right. Pressures on the public finances have led to more measured language when it comes to reform. The party’s talk of a childcare plan that will be comparable to the birth of the NHS has been replaced with “a review”. Alongside this, in its March Budget the current government raised the hopes of struggling families with a promise of more “free childcare” despite the sector having neither the staff nor the space to deliver on the policy.

Public finances might constrain the pace of Labour’s reform, but it should not constrain the party’s ambition.

If Labour is serious about breaking the “class ceiling” it must look at the way in which existing government schemes perpetuate that inequality. Nowhere is this more evident than in our early-years system. The eligibility criteria of the current model keeps the poorest parents out of work and their children out of early education, exacerbating economic, social and educational inequality.

A 2021 report by the Sutton Trust found that just 20 per cent of families in the bottom third of the earnings distribution are eligible for the current 30 hours entitlement, while 70 per cent of those who can claim the hours come from homes in the top half of earners. Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies in September found that the poorest third of families won’t get any direct benefit from the new entitlements the government pledged to parents earlier this year.

Supporting these families is in everyone’s interests. Not only does childcare support enable these parents to get into, and get on in, work, but decades of evidence shows that investing in the early years improves the life outcomes of the most disadvantaged children. It makes them higher earners, more likely to go on to university, and less likely to be reliant on means-tested benefits.

A reformed childcare system will break down barriers to opportunity, plus it will drive so many of Labour’s other missions. Some of the worst childcare deserts in the country are in the north-east, Yorkshire and the West Midlands where there are three children for every one childcare place. How do we expect to level up these local economies without the social infrastructure that allows parents and their children to thrive? It’s a green investment too; analysis of Eurostat data by the Women’s Budget Group in 2021 found that care-based sectors are three times less polluting than construction.

If Labour is to rebuild Britain, as Keir Starmer has promised, it must commit to bold reform of early years, ensuring that all children have access to high-quality early education and care – starting with the most disadvantaged.

Rebuilding must start with strong foundations. For everyone in society, those foundations are the first five years of our lives. ●

# Ryan Wain: “Democracy is under threat – it’s becoming introspective, it rewards mediocrity”



The executive director, politics, insight and engagement of the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change on the Great Man Theory, AI, and immigration reform

### How do you start your working day?

Stuff too much information into my bleary mind with the early headlines on a packed commuter train; through a combination of podcasts, Twitter (X, if you must) and news apps. The *New Statesman* first among them of course.

### Which political figure inspires you, and why?

Never a subscriber to the Great Man Theory, I can't pick one. Witnessing the collective spirit and determination of the Liverpool dockers was my formative political memory. I have been inspired by them ever since.

### What has been the most politically challenging moment of your career?

We're in it now. Democracy is under threat. It is becoming introspective. It rewards mediocrity. It responds to the loudest voices – and it has an efficacy problem. Democracy is the best idea we've got; its flawed execution just now mustn't be its undoing.

### What one thing would improve our political culture, and why?

Listening to the grievances of Britain's

working-class communities. Don't exploit them as the populists do. Don't ignore them as mainstream politics does. Build a policy agenda that responds to them.

### What policy or fund is the UK getting right?

Finally recognising that technology has changed everything through the AI summit.

### And what policy should the UK government scrap?

Short custodial sentences. They destroy lives and families – and mean more victims of crime in the long-run.

### What upcoming UK policy or law are you most looking forward to?

Planning reform. In the next decade, we must build more and better than we've ever built before – infrastructure, housing, green industry. Let's make it as easy as possible to do so.

### What piece of international government policy could the UK learn from?

A smart piece of legislation merged Canada's bitty pension pots into megafunds and they now own more of the UK than our own pensioners do. We should follow suit. It's never been more important and necessary to have alternatives to yet more tax increases to fund the big projects of our time.

### What policy would help Labour win the next election?

Immigration reform that offers an alternative to Rwanda, fixing the small boats problem, while answering Britain's economic woes and cultural challenges. Make it easier to bring overseas workers into sectors where high vacancies mean inflation is stuck – hospitality, construction etc – and ensure those who do make Britain their home are able to integrate fully. Britain isn't anti-immigrant, but it does want clear and competent control.

### Looking back at your career, what one thing would you do differently?

Think about the future of Britain. It's the sort of thing that's on the curriculum at Eton and Harrow but definitely not a Liverpool comp. I'll be forever grateful to my current employer for giving me permission to think. ●

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## Competition

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# Why we're launching a £5k prize for progress

Britain is stuck. How do we get the country moving again?

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In association with



NEW STATESMAN Spotlight

Britain is stuck. Sewage flows almost freely into our rivers. Our most productive regions and those with the greatest potential are held back by restrictive planning rules and bureaucratic government. Frontier, public-interest technologies are blocked from realising their impact by under-resourced regulators. From infrastructure projects and passport offices, to hospital waiting lists and clinical trials, little seems safe from an increasingly sclerotic state.

Every month, as delays and backlogs stack up, the temptation to give in to a declinist narrative gets stronger. We are ensnared in a web of our own making, with seemingly little real interest in solving these problems.

But this is a dangerous place for a country to be, psychologically. It is all too easy for concern about decline to morph into self-fulfilling prophecy, to reach for knee-jerk responses to profound problems. In the process, we fail to acknowledge progress when it does happen: when passport timelines return to days not weeks, when new transport lines open, or when renewable energy allows us to shut down every last coal power station. And while demand for lab space is high, this is more a sign of potential than stagnation.

Whatever malaise Britain finds itself in, we must not let a declinist narrative snuff out any space for optimism, ambition and agency. As marginal losses accumulate and the pressure for radicalism grows, this can lead to deep political entrenchment which dissuades action. So we need a “whatever it takes” approach to escape the downward spiral, and there are flickers of hope to inspire us.

A new movement around science, technology and economic progress is evolving – particularly in the US – and offers a way forward. It champions abundance, not scarcity; state capacity, not decline; and supply-side action alongside demand-side subsidy. Above all, it is proudly solutionist. It recognises that golden ages don't happen by accident: they are made by political choices.

In the UK, this movement is taking form in the energy of young, emerging, frontier talents who share a frustration at the squandering of Britain's enormous

opportunity. When Keir Starmer promises planning reform and to back the builders over the blockers, or when Michael Gove outlines his plans for a beautiful, ambitious expansion to Cambridge, they are tapping into a nascent, energetic coalition that crosses traditional party lines.

But there are still many barriers to these efforts going mainstream. When the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) and the Frontier AI Taskforce can entice rising scientists and technologists to work in the public interest, they remind us that the UK can remain at the frontier and secure its stake in the future. But these new institutions can thrive only because they are cleaved from the wider system they interact with.

The next government cannot afford to be complacent. A new hand on the rudder will need to be more than steady; it will need to change our course. Now, ahead of a general election, we need to fill the pipeline of ideas and talent with those who can wield technology and policy in pursuit of progress. This is key for the economy and for society: a Britain out of its rut can be one of greater equality, and also of opportunity.

To that end, we are excited to announce the Progress Prize, organised by TxP in partnership with Civic Future and *New Statesman Spotlight*. The prize exists to identify antidotes to Britain's malaise and provide a platform for emerging and frontier individuals who can go on to make these solutions real.

We want to hear from emerging scientists and students, technologists and technocrats. Anyone with no more than ten years of professional or postgraduate experience is invited to enter before the deadline on 7 January 2024. A prize of £5,000 will be awarded to the best response to the most urgent question there is: “Britain is stuck. How can we get the country moving again?” ●

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To find out more, visit: [txp.fyi](https://txp.fyi)

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