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LCA INSIGHT SPECIAL REPORT

A red dawn?

Looking ahead to a possible
Labour government

Issue 01 | February 2023





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Introduction and foreword

Introduction



Jonny Popper
Partner & Chief
Executive

“ Starmer seems to have proven himself a considered and pragmatic Leader of the Opposition ”

Welcome to the first LCA Insight Special Report!

This new, regular series will take a deep, focused look on a singular topic in each edition – a perfect showcase of LCA’s expertise and intelligence and a complement to our other regular publication, LDN – London in short [link] which is a pithy weekly digest across multiple sectors, local, regional and national politics.

This first report considers from all angles what a new Labour government could look like, its potential impact on the sectors we work in as well as national politics and policy.

Its lead author, Paddy, was Sadiq Khan’s Director of Communications during his first term as Mayor and before that was Deputy Director of Communications for the Labour Party, so he’s well-informed!

And alongside insight from Paddy and the wider LCA team we have a view from a man who was very much on the inside during Labour’s last landslide victory, Stephen Byers.

All of this is supported by our usual forensic analysis on the latest polling, the electoral precedents, the party’s emerging policy agenda and the decision makers and influencers who are likely to make or break Keir Starmer’s fortunes.

Speaking of whom, the London MP and former director of public prosecutions, seems to have proven himself a considered and pragmatic Leader of the Opposition, if not the dynamic showman or ruthless opportunist some may prefer. This can be seen in his unwillingness to be drawn too far towards the Remain side on Brexit, or too

far to the left on industrial action, at least for the moment. The question really is, will this careful long game pay off, or will the electorate get tired or distracted while they are waiting for Keir’s Labour Party to really show its hand?

While you consider that question, we hope that you find this report valuable and interesting – enjoy it and please do let us know what you think. Thank you.

Foreword



Paddy Hennessy
Senior Advisor

“Pick the right priorities, get the narrative right, sum it all up in a great & simple message”

“Get Brexit Done.” “Make America Great Again.” “New Labour, New Britain.” However you may feel politically speaking about these slogans, few could disagree that they are all effective and persuasive pieces of communication, embodying a clear direction of travel.

Labour’s current overall slogan is “A Fairer, Greener Future.” Nothing wrong with it – and it is something most people would broadly agree with. It is unlikely, however, to get hordes of voters racing to the polls to be part of a great movement of change.

One of Tony Blair’s great skills was to use simple, evocative language to encapsulate how his party was different, and how Britain would be different. Today, Keir Starmer’s party has plenty of policies but, as we see on these pages regarding the built environment and other key issues, there remains a lack both of clarity and of that sense of a truly compelling vision.

Labour is currently well ahead in the polls – but there remains a suspicion that much of this lead is ‘soft’ and that the party could still be vulnerable to a Tory comeback, if voters decide there is nothing much to dislike about Rishi Sunak and/or the economy rallies significantly in the next 24 months.

The good news for Labour is of course that there is still plenty of time for this to be addressed. Starmer started the year with the cheeky but clever appropriation of the Brexiteers’ ‘Take Back Control’ slogan to rebrand his devolution plans and a controversial (to some on the left of his party) drive for NHS reform. Pick the right priorities, get the narrative right, sum it all up in a great and simple message and it could make the difference between just limping over the line and a comfortable majority at the next election.



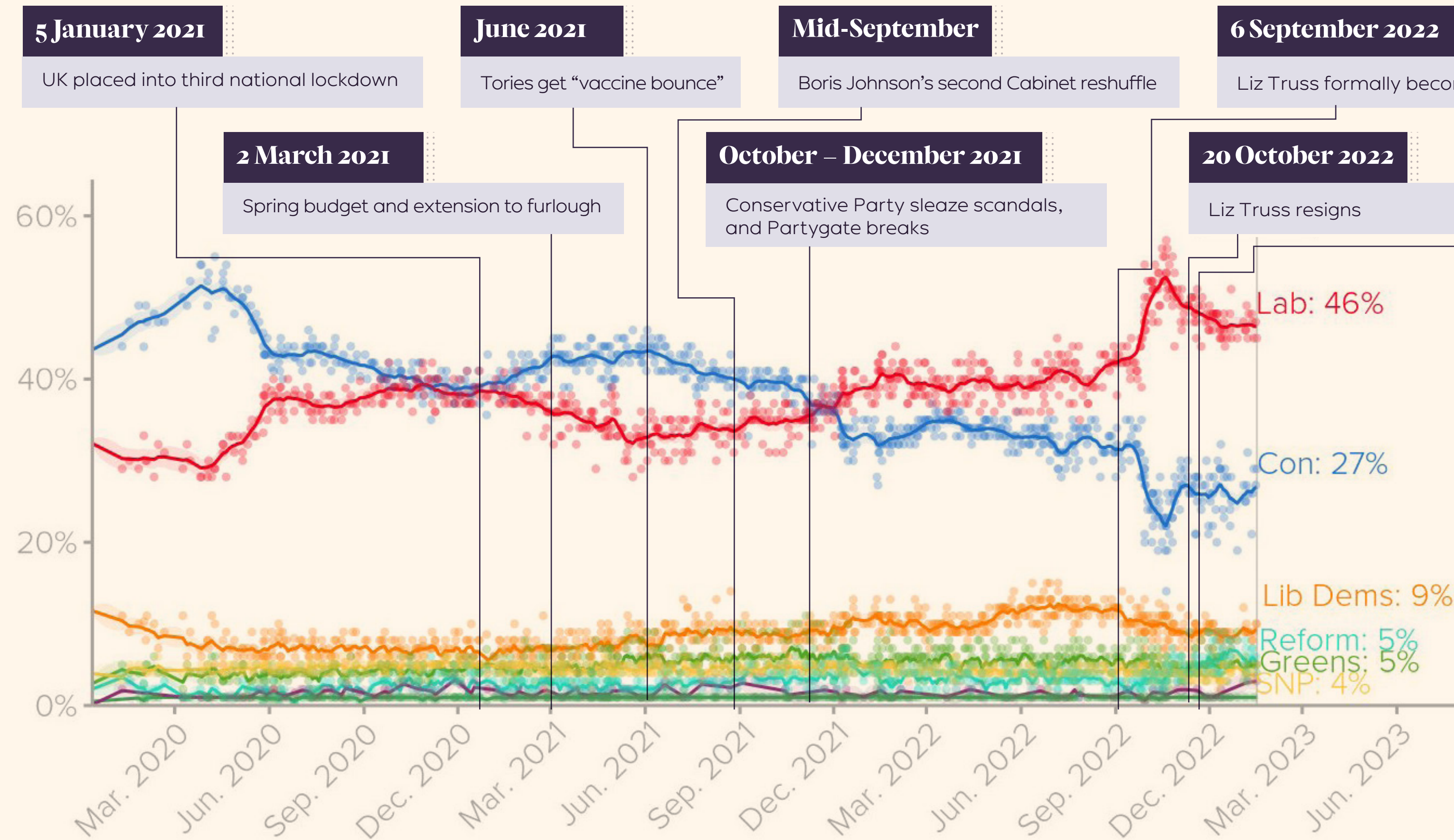
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Reading the runes

Poll of polls



Source: POLITICO

Whilst the last possible date of the next election in late January 2025, it is widely expected to happen during 2024 – in May or October – with most pundits favouring the later date to give longer for the economy to recover, and for the polls potentially to change. So Labour has to maintain its poll lead for another 18 months and translate that into actual election-winning majorities at the constituency level.

Winning an overall majority in Parliament theoretically requires 326 seats – or closer to 320 when accounting for the Commons' Speakers and Sinn Fein's MPs. Labour currently has 195 seats. We outline four possible scenarios below/on the next page.

Four possible scenarios

01 A Labour landslide

In 1983 the Tories won 42.4% of the vote and a majority of 144; 1997 saw Labour win 45% and a majority of 178. A 30-point gap could win Labour a majority of well above 150. This would reflect a reconstruction of the “Red Wall” in the North and Midlands, a renaissance in Scotland and red cracks in the South East’s “Blue Wall”.

Scale of majority

100+

03 A hung parliament

Similar factors could see Labour – on a bad election day – scrape through without quite winning half of the seats in parliament, doing decently in its urban hubs and making sizeable but not quite sufficient gains in Tory and SNP territory. Labour would struggle to pass legislation and consolidate its hold on the levers of executive power, it would have to form a coalition with smaller parties, or attempt to rule as a precarious minority government.

Scale of majority

+/-5

02 A modest win

If the UK escapes the clutches of recession before election, the Conservatives could get a boost, resulting in a Labour win more modest than many recent polls suggest. In this scenario, Labour would consolidate its hold over metropolitan areas including London, win back some ground in the Red Wall and win a scattering of constituencies elsewhere. Enough to govern confidently.

Scale of majority

10 – 50

04 Stranger things

There remains the possibility that the Conservatives could, for the fourth time since 2015, beat all comers and secure another majority – much as they did in 1992. Stranger things have happened and indeed, have repeatedly happened, over the past decade. The Conservative party has held remarkably firm in England at both national and local elections, even as the SNP has consistently kept Labour at bay in Scotland. It may be that, on a truly awful election day for the party, Labour finds itself at the start of five more years in the wilderness.

Scale of majority

n/a



The national view

This is LCA's region-by-region evaluation of Labour's electoral chances across Great Britain*. Our assessments are based on past election performance, representative polls, MRP analyses and other available research to date – plus our gut feeling of how Labour would fare if an election were to be called over the next few months. With a total of 650 seats up for grabs, we stop shy of making specific seat predictions and our focus is on identifying the key battlegrounds where Labour is poised to win ground. A useful pointer will come in elections in May this year – when thousands of local council seats are being contested across England.



1 North West

The Conservatives could fare quite badly in the North West, with Labour seemingly set to regain most, if not all, of the seats lost to the Tories in 2019 as well as seats that it has never won previously. There could also be a couple of gains for the Lib Dems in this prime Red Wall territory.

2 North East

Despite Conservative gains in this region in 2019, the Tories face a possible wipeout in the North East, with Labour poised to benefit the most – even in constituencies that have never before elected a Labour MP.

3 Yorkshire and the Humber

Labour seems likely to perform well here, possibly leaving the Conservatives with just a handful of seats – one of them Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Richmond. Others look ripe for the taking by Labour and perhaps even the Lib Dems.

4 West Midlands

The 2019 General Election saw Labour hold on to its seats in the region, including many in Birmingham. However, the party looks set to do better at the next election, with the Conservatives clinging on to just a handful of constituencies.

5 East Midlands

More Red Wall territory where the Conservatives toppled Labour strongholds in 2019. While the Tories may well retain some constituencies in this region, they could lose a significant number to a resurgent Labour.

6 East of England

While currently only home to just five Labour MPs, the Party could well gain seats from the Conservatives in Norfolk, Suffolk and Hertfordshire. However, Labour will also have to compete with the Lib Dems here.

7 South West

Here, Labour may struggle to make gains, with the Lib Dems likely to be stronger contenders for the 47 seats won or held by the Conservatives in 2019, leaving Labour with six and the Lib Dems with two at present.

8 South East

The capital's hinterland is beginning to reflect its politics. While the Home Counties is historically Tory territory, the urbanisation of key satellite towns as well as the disillusionment of small "L" liberal Tories here could pave the way for Labour wins. However, Labour will have to duke it out with the Lib Dems too – who won Chesham and Amersham in the June 2021 by-election and who seem better-placed to contest some seats in areas like Surrey.

9 London

The capital has trended towards Labour over the years and, whilst many of the Conservatives' remaining 21 London seats can still be described as strongholds, several – from Kensington to Hendon and even Boris Johnson's own Uxbridge & South Ruislip seat – appear vulnerable to a Labour takeover. We expect Labour to sweep up a few more seats in the capital, but suspect that predictions seeing the Tories wiped out entirely will prove somewhat exaggerated.

10 Wales

The next General Election could see well see the majority of the Conservatives' 14 MPs lose their seats in Wales – some to Labour and some to Plaid Cymru. Here, Labour is in many ways the incumbent, as it leads the nation's devolved administration.

11 Scotland

A historic Labour stronghold which has been effectively taken over by the SNP in the last three general elections, greatly hampering Labour's efforts to secure a majority even now. However, polling of Scottish voters specifically, carried out in September and October, found that support for Labour is on the rise. While Labour seems to still be a long way from threatening the SNP in most areas, the Conservatives' remaining six seats could well be lost – though here too we might see Labour vying with the Lib Dems for the spoils of victory.

*A note on Northern Ireland: We have not included Northern Ireland in this section as the Labour Party does not stand candidates here. At the last General Election, Northern Irish voters elected eight MPs from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), seven from Sinn Féin, two from the Social Democratic and Labour Party and one from the Alliance.



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Reflections on 1997

How New Labour won power



Stephen Byers

Former New Labour minister

They need to have a set of promises that actually resonate with where the public is.

Stephen Byers was a cabinet minister under Tony Blair between 1998 and 2002. Before the 1997 general election, which saw Labour regain power after 18 years, he was a key member of Blair's top team as it transitioned from opposition to government. Here he lifts the lid on how 'New Labour', as the party was rebranded at the time, kept a ruthless discipline in messaging, policies and process as it prepared for power – and offers some advice for Keir Starmer and his shadow cabinet as they look to follow in Blair's footsteps.

“ In 1995, a couple of years out from the election, we had a very unpopular government under John Major. But we realised you couldn't just depend on people turning against the Tories. We had to offer a programme that had broad popular appeal.

That's now the situation that Keir Starmer and the Labour Party need to start moving to. They need to have a set of promises that actually resonate with where the public is.

We had some very broad slogans about 'the future not the past' and 'the many not the few'. These sorts of words can be a bit vacuous so after a lot of detailed work led by Philip Gould we identified the key issues that concerned people and as a result decided to have five very simple 'credit card' pledges that made real to people what we were about. Clear commitments like cutting NHS waiting lists, cutting class sizes, reducing youth unemployment. These allowed you to get into the arguments about underfunding the NHS and school standards and the waste of a generation of young people.

We had a very strict regime about frontbenchers making public comments, so there was a communications discipline. There was 'the message' that we were given – to be delivered at every opportunity.

Another thing we did, which we kept very quiet, is that we had workshops and residential weekends preparing us to become ministers. We went to Oxford for a few days to hear from people who had been civil servants or ministers who took us through how to stick to your political priorities, but also how to work with the civil service machine. I think Keir is starting to do this – which is a good move.

The coalition that Boris Johnson brought together in 2019 – the Red Wall and the True Blue Shires – is unsustainable for the Tories. Neither Johnson nor Liz Truss could keep it together and I think Rishi Sunak will have trouble doing it. The Labour Party has always been a broad church and the public are aware of this. That is not the case for the Tories and their divisions are now out in the open and pretty toxic.

Today's Labour Party is making a real effort reaching out the business world. The relationship is much better – I think they will get some serious endorsements from the business community. This may seem strange coming from a moderniser like me but I believe Keir must build a better relationship with the affiliated trade unions. They represent an important voice that needs to be heard.

As we approached the 1997 election we said to ourselves that we need to be seen as the political wing of the majority of the British people and have policies that reflect that. I hope Keir and his team are thinking along similar lines. ”

Stephen Byers



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Policy roulette

A “fairer, greener future”

Under construction

While it brandishes its clearly aspirational three-word slogan with enthusiasm, the Labour Party’s policy agenda is very much work in progress. It is currently hovering in a slightly uneasy limbo between its largely-defunct 2019 election manifesto and a handful of pledges made since. That’s not to say it’s not getting there.

The **A Fairer, Greener Future** and **Labour Works 2022** reports provide crucial clues as to the contents of the party’s fast-evolving policy arsenal. The reports, released in September 2022, are the culmination of the Stronger Together policy review launched by Keir Starmer in May 2021 and led by Party Chair Anneliese Dodds. Another key policy pillar is of course **A New Britain: Renewing our Democracy and Rebuilding our Economy**, the product of Gordon Brown’s Commission on the UK’s Future. This was even longer in the making, having been launched in 2020, (though this has not yet been fully adopted by Keir Starmer).

These signal that Labour in government would be markedly more progressive and interventionist than the Conservatives – if not quite as radically so as it would in the Corbyn era. Indeed, Labour under Starmer has tacked to the political centre (and rightwards of it even) on key issues like Brexit and immigration.



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Leon Neal

What we know: The big ticket items (for now)

Very much in line with the current political fashion of short and simple messaging, Labour is likely to bet big on a limited number of flagship policies.

Part of Labour's strategy is to match the Tories' economy-first approach and prove that it can oversee a growing economy, whilst at the same time making the state more present as an active market player, employer and investor, as well as regulator. It includes:

-  A **"climate investment pledge"** to create "good, green jobs and new high-tech green industries across the UK" – including the creation of "GB Energy", a publicly-owned "clean energy company".
-  A pledge to (finally) **"scrap business rates"** and instead create a system that will "incentivise investment" and crucially, "level the playing field between high-street businesses and global giants."
-  A wider assault on **online tech companies** like Google and Meta, including a demand that they pay conventional news publishers for content.
-  A promise to safeguard the **editorial independence of the BBC and Channel 4**, as publicly-owned but arms-length organisations.
-  A new **"Industrial Strategy Council"** that would "embed long-termism" into the UK's economic strategy and "form a new partnership with business".
-  A pledge to "introduce a **new deal for working people**" in relation to job security, pay and terms of employment. Also a separate pledge to devolve powers and funding for skills and employment programmes.
-  More general pledges to **"buy, make and sell more in Britain"** and create jobs "in all parts of the country" – this includes a controversial "promise to "help the British economy off its **immigration dependency**," with Starmer understood to favour a points-based system.
-  On **NHS reform**, Starmer and rising star Shadow Health Secretary Wes Streeting have courted controversy (with the left of his party and the medical establishment) with promises to slash 'bureaucratic nonsense' and to open up the health service to more private provision.

Beyond the economy – and it is here that Gordon Brown's Commission will prove crucial – Labour is also considering an ambitious programme of constitutional reform, likely to be bundled up into cheekily-named **"Take Back Control" Bill**, including proposals like:

-  Creating a **new set of social rights** to healthcare, education, social welfare, and adequate housing.
-  **Reforming the House of Lords** (possibly abolishing it altogether) and adjusting its role.
-  Widening and deepening the **devolution of powers** from central to regional and local government in England and restructuring the mechanisms through which they cooperate.
-  Giving devolved national administrations in **Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland** some new powers.
-  **"Cleaning up Westminster"** through a new set of mechanisms to enforce ethical standards in politics.

Areas where Labour has barely scratched the surface when it comes to policy also include:

-  How it will navigate a **complex geopolitical environment**, whether that relates to the rise of China, or closer to home, Britain's relations with the EU. Starmer has ruled out a return to the Single Market but has also, tantalisingly, signalled **"closer trading relations" with the EU** (although without providing any detail).
-  The specifics of its positioning stance on sensitive, fraught issues now making a comeback on the political agenda, including **immigration, crime and policing**, and – crucially during a second "winter of discontent" – **industrial action and the trade union movement** in general, although Keir Starmer has made clear he would repeal any fresh Tory legislation restricting the right to strike.
-  Labour has yet to formulate a viable (or at any rate, popular) alternative to **"levelling up"** though Gordon Brown's Commission has taken steps in this direction.
-  The wider **built environment** and interlocking challenges around planning, housing markets and standards, as well as land ownership – which we cover in more detail below.

LCA View:

Crucially, Labour has yet fully to articulate the additional burdens on business necessitated by its pledges (whether taxes or in other forms) and its impact on public finances. Starmer has made overtures to SMEs, as well as to "big business" through the CBI and an extensive "Prawn Cocktail Offensive 2.0" but the private sector will want to see the specifics. Indeed, if the Truss administration taught us anything, it's that investors and businesses do care about the ability of a government to manage both the economy and its own finances.

What of the built environment?

At the 2022 Autumn Conference, Starmer's keynote speech airily promised to "reform planning so speculators can't stop communities getting shovels in the ground" and declared that "Labour is the party of home ownership in Britain today." Briefings to the press and statements by Shadow Levelling Up Secretary Lisa Nandy and her deputy for housing, Matthew Pennycook, over recent months do however give the built environment more to chew on.

Labour has broadly supported the Government's **Levelling-Up & Regeneration Bill (LURB)**, which is maybe telling of the party's ambivalence on key issues, as well as (perhaps) its aversion to having to draw up and pass a similar bill itself if in power. Whilst it objected and submitted amendments to parts of the Bill, Labour remarkably pledged to "lend the government our votes ... and keep this legislation moving" when Tory rebels held it up in November 2022.

We briefly list the known (and unknown) positions of Labour towards key policy areas below.

Planning and regeneration

-  **Give local councils "new powers** to designate sites for large-scale development."
-  **Scrap proposals for a new single Infrastructure Levy** – one of relatively few areas where Labour has actively opposed the LURB.
-  Look at alternative methods to get **"the maximum amount for housing out of developers"**, potentially modelled on the Mayor of London's threshold approach.
-  Ensure council planning departments are "properly" resourced and share expertise "that allows them to **get the most out of Section 106.**"
-  Give **"power back to our people** with a community right to buy land and assets – the football clubs, historic buildings and pubs that make a place home" (more on high streets below).
-  Back **major transport infrastructure projects** up and down the country, with Deputy Party Leader Angela Rayner declaring a Labour Government would support Crossrail 2 and Rail for the North.

Housebuilding and homeownership

-  Set a **new national "target"** of "70% home ownership" up from about 65% currently.
-  **Prevent "buy-to-let landlords or second homeowners getting in first"** and similarly raise stamp duty "paid by foreign individuals, trusts and companies when they buy UK residential property."
-  Help "real **first-time buyers** onto the ladder with a new mortgage guarantee scheme."
-  "Rebalance the market towards first-time buyers and working families" by introducing a system where **meeting rent payments** would be included in mortgage affordability tests.
-  Expand **alternative models of home ownership**, e.g. shared, discounted ownership and community-led and cooperative housing.
-  Centrally imposed housing targets remains a grey zone. Pennycook has said scrapping these (as a result of Tory rebels' amendments to LURB) is "utterly irresponsible." He has separately said that "there's a case for reviewing how housing targets operate" but that "it's absurd to propose scrapping them without an alternative in the midst of a housing crisis."

Social housing

-  **"Restore social housing** to the second largest tenure" after homeownership, "rebuild[ing] our social housing stock and bring[ing] homes back into the ownership of local councils and communities."
-  **Review Right to Buy** – full abolition would appear unlikely and Pennycook has indicated reforming right to buy discounts and covenants are a more likely target.
-  Possibly put a new right to **"decent accommodation"** into law, though the impact of this in practice is unclear, as various legal and regulatory obligations (such as housing standards) already exist.
-  **Strengthen the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill**, currently making its way through Parliament, with Pennycook saying the party would like to see clauses "ensuring all providers are regularly inspected and that all their senior management staff are properly trained and qualified."
-  "Consider" the recommendations of the Better Social Housing Review (commissioned by the NHF and CIH) – Pennycook has suggested Labour supports a **comprehensive audit of all social homes.**
-  Potentially **cap social rent increases at lower levels** – criticising the 7% cap announced by Government in November 2022 as welcome "in principle" but also "too high" for many tenants.

Private rented sector

- Introduce, within its first 100 days, a new **“renters’ charter”** and **“a new decent homes standard”** – written into law – an effort that Nandy has described as “tilting the balance of power in favour of renters.”
- Consider – pending a more detailed review of proposals – **giving Metro Mayors and council leaders more powers** over the private rental market, potentially up to and including rent controls.
- Produce a new private sector white paper likely covering the above, plus measures potentially including making longer-term tenancies with controlled rents the norm, ending automatic evictions for rent arrears, **scrapping ‘no-fault evictions’** and introducing a national register of landlords.

High streets and commercial property

- Further empower local authorities to use **Compulsory Purchase Orders**, regulate short term lets and holiday homes and other means to shape and sustain local town centres – already being pushed through Parliament in the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill.
- As noted above, **abolish business rates** and replace it with an all-new system.

Leasehold reform

- Work to **“get rid of leasehold”**, which Nandy has described as a “feudal system” – also mentioning presumably intermediate measures, such as capping and regulating service charges on leaseholds, as well as other measures to empower leaseholders.

Infrastructure

- Support **green power infrastructure**. Labour has vociferously opposed the approval of a new coal mine in Cumbria, whilst seeking to strengthen clauses in the LURB that would facilitate the development of new onshore wind turbines.

LCA View:

There are some interesting political equations to consider as Labour formulates its position on built environment issues. Young people, who turn into young and then old voters, are increasingly renters not buyers, and form a key part of Sadiq Khan’s coalition of support in the capital. Does Labour lean into that fact (and therefore focus on renters’ charters, a more mature Built to Rent sector and such) or continue to pursue the goal of homeownership across the board? It’s a deeply cultural issue for Britain but potentially one where the tide is turning. Meanwhile, social housing would seem a natural place for Labour to focus but it is currently a sector suffering from major financial, operational and perception issues, there are certainly no easy wins there.





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Starmmer's praetorians

Keir's key advisers

They are Keir Starmer's praetorian guard – the cadre of key advisers surrounding the Labour leader who will map out, they hope, the pathway to the party's return to power.

Last year, Starmer shook up his inner political team, dispensing with the services of chief of staff Sam White, in what he said was a move to put Labour 'on an election footing straight away'.

Some of his key advisers will physically move from the Leader of the Opposition's office (LOTO) inside the Palace of Westminster, to a new party HQ, expected to be in Southwark.

The symbolism is intentionally blatant: everything must be subsumed to winning the general election. However the move also aims to be a fresh start following recent rifts over the Opposition's direction of travel, with some seeing Labour and its leader stuck in a defensive crouch.

Expect those profiled below to fill key roles at 10 Downing Street and across Whitehall if Labour returns to power.

Paul Ounden

Director of Attack and Rebuttal

A Chelsea fan, originally from Portsmouth, Ounden combines a sharp strategic brain with notable abilities as a wordsmith, and has engagement skills which have made him one of Labour's best communicators with Westminster's coterie of Lobby journalists.

Can take credit for Labour's ever-improving 'attack' operation.

KEY TASK: OPPOSITION ATTACK

Morgan McSweeney

Campaign Director

It is impossible to overstate the importance and influence of McSweeney, a top political strategist who cut his teeth in a stint at the Local Government Association before going on to run Starmer's winning 2020 party leadership campaign.

He was instrumental in getting through key internal party reforms designed to 'future proof' Labour from a repeat of the Corbyn years. Originally from Cork, he moved to London at 16 to work on building sites and was politicised by the lack of job stability.

KEY TASK: ELECTION

Stuart Ingham

Executive Director of Policy

Starmer's longest-serving current aide, Ingham knows his boss's mind as well as if not better than anybody in the inner circle and plays a vital role in preparing him for his despatch box outings.

A 'working-class lad from Luton', still only in his early 30s, he is a former Oxford University political history lecturer.

KEY TASK: POLICY

Vidhya Alakeson

Director of External Relations

The former director of Power To Change, a charity which supports community businesses, joined Starmer's operation earlier this year with a brief to improve Labour's relations with the business community. These had fallen into an abyss under Corbyn (a descent which began under Miliband) but are now recovering strongly.

KEY TASK: ENGAGEMENT

Marianna McFadden

Deputy Campaign Director

Known throughout the party as 'Maz', McFadden was head of insight at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change before returning to party HQ. A veteran of general election campaigns – even including some Labour won – McFadden is known for her acute political antennae and sound political judgment. Her husband, Pat McFadden, is shadow chief secretary to the Treasury.

(Also working with McSweeney and McFadden is Matthew Faulding, manager of parliamentary selections – a vital role.)

KEY TASK: ELECTION

Luke Sullivan

Director of Politics

A veteran of the Labour Whips' office, seen by many as the best training ground for the political dark arts, Sullivan was appointed political director last year.

A Bristol City fan, his job includes 'conflict resolution' between squabbling members of the shadow cabinet and overall liaison across the piece, including with MPs.

KEY TASK: POLITICS

Steph Driver

Director of Communications

Driver did an eight-year media stint for the party, between 2011 and 2018, before working in communications in the private sector. She returned to work for Starmer in March 2021. A font of institutional knowledge, she is also respected for her sound judgment.

KEY TASK: MEDIA

Matthew Doyle

Executive Communications Director

Doyle worked in Tony Blair's No10 as a political aide and performed a similar role for David Blunkett as Work and Pensions Secretary when Labour was last in power. Appointed last year to his current role, he has the vital task of honing Labour's message and dealing with an often-fractious media.

Both Doyle and McSweeney worked on Liz Kendall's unsuccessful leadership campaign in 2015.

KEY TASK: COMMS

Jill Cuthbertson

Private Secretary

Tony Blair had Angie Hunter, Gordon Brown had Sue Nye and Ed Miliband had...Jill Cuthbertson. Starmer reappointed Scots-born Cuthbertson to her old 'gatekeeper' role last year following her stints in the private sector, including public affairs for Battersea Power Station. Among many other tasks, she controls access to Starmer.

KEY TASK: ACCESS

Sophie Nazemi

Head of Press and Broadcasting

One of very few members of Starmer's inner circle to have survived from the Corbyn era, Nazemi takes charge of the day-to-day media operation, a job which requires a Stakhanovite work ethic and dedication to the cause.

KEY TASK: MEDIA



Shadow cabinet top eight

Labour's leading line-up

In his November 2021 reshuffle, Keir Starmer announced a “smaller, more focussed Shadow Cabinet that mirrors the shape of Government we are shadowing”. Prior to the reshuffle, the Shadow Cabinet included positions such as Shadow Secretary of State for Child Poverty and Shadow Secretary of State for Young People and Democracy – now scrapped, though it could well be that some existing Cabinet posts would be merged, otherwise changed, or created under a Labour PM.

Departments including Transport and Culture will be key posts in a Starmer government but, currently, these are the eight members of the Shadow Cabinet that LCA feels will form a core political top team who will be front and centre in the campaign and in a Labour Government – the people he will depend on most.

Angela Rayner

Deputy Leader



MP for Ashton-under-Lyne, first elected in 2015. Re-elected in 2019 with a reduced majority of 18,544.

Rayner was elected as Deputy Leader of the Party in April 2020 and was appointed as Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in May 2021, having filled a variety of roles previously.

Rayner supported left-backed candidate Rebecca Long-Bailey in the 2020 Labour Leadership Contest and was also one of just 18 MPs to support Jeremy Corbyn in the 2016 Leadership Contest. Often outspoken, she has invoked criticism for describing the Conservative Party as ‘scum’.

Rayner left school aged 16 without any qualifications. She went on to train in social care at Stockport College and worked as a care worker.

Rachel Reeves

Shadow Chancellor



MP for Leeds West, first elected in 2010. Re-elected in 2019 with a reduced majority of 22,186.

Reeves became Shadow Chancellor in May 2021 after a year as Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Apr 2020 – May 2021), and is working hand in glove with Keir Starmer as Labour seeks to persuade voters it can be trusted on the economy and to present itself as the pro-business party.

She was a rising star after first being elected, but “sat out” the Corbyn years on the back benches and has said she was pleased he never became prime minister.

Reeves has a background in finance and economics having worked both at the Bank of England and the Bank of Scotland.

David Lammy

Shadow Foreign Secretary



MP for Tottenham, first elected in 2000. Re-elected in 2019 with a reduced majority of 35,621.

Lammy was appointed as Shadow Foreign Secretary in November 2021. He served in the Blair and Brown Governments holding a number of posts, including in Minister of State for Culture (May 2005 – Jun 2007) and Minister of State for Higher Education and Intellectual Property (Oct 2008 – May 2010).

Lammy supported Keir Starmer in the 2020 Labour Leadership Contest. In 2015, he was one of the Labour MPs who nominated Jeremy Corbyn as a candidate but stated in Dec 2021 he regretted doing so.

A trained barrister, Lammy has a regular radio show on LBC.

Yvette Cooper

Shadow Home Secretary



MP for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford, first elected in 1997. Re-elected in 2019 with a reduced majority of 18,297.

The only current member of Starmer's top team, apart from Ed Miliband, with full cabinet experience (under Gordon Brown from 2008–2010), Cooper was appointed Shadow Home Secretary in November 2021, having spent the period of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership as Chair of the all-party Home Affairs Select Committee.

Married to Ed Balls, the former Shadow Chancellor, she fought for the party leadership in 2015, ending up third behind Corbyn and Andy Burnham. She supported Starmer in the 2020 Labour Leadership Contest.

A former policy researcher and journalist, she fiercely guards her home affairs brief and is not afraid to slap down colleagues who interfere on policy issues.

Labour's leading line-up (continued)

Lisa Nandy

Shadow Levelling Up Secretary



MP for Wigan, first elected in 2010. Re-elected in 2019 with a reduced majority of 21,042.

Nandy was appointed as Shadow Levelling Up Secretary in November 2021, after a stint as Shadow Foreign Secretary (Apr 2020 – Nov 2021). She served briefly in Jeremy Corbyn's shadow cabinet but left in the wave of mass resignations in June 2016 as MPs revolted citing Corbyn's lack of leadership over Brexit. In 2020, she ran for the party leadership, coming third behind Starmer and Rebecca Long-Bailey.

She previously held roles as a Hammersmith & Fulham councillor, parliamentary caseworker for an MP and as a researcher and policy adviser for charities.

A proud Northerner, she is champion of Britain's 'left-behind towns' and is a frequent critic of the Conservatives over 'levelling up' failures.

Jonathan Reynolds

Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Industrial Strategy



MP for Stalybridge and Hyde, first elected in 2010. Re-elected in 2019 with a reduced majority of 2,946.

Also an experienced Shadow Cabinet member, Reynolds was appointed as Shadow Business Secretary in November 2021, after previous stints covering energy & climate change, transport, and work & pensions.

A moderate, he supported Keir Starmer in the 2020 Labour Leadership Contest. He has been a solicitor and a political assistant.

With Rachel Reeves, Reynolds is charged with re-establishing Labour's business credentials after years when they have been in decline.

Ed Miliband

Shadow Secretary of State for Climate Change and Net Zero



MP for Doncaster North, first elected in 2005. Re-elected in 2019 with a reduced majority of 2,370.

Miliband was appointed as Shadow Secretary of State for Climate Change and Net Zero in November 2021, his first frontbench post since resigning as Labour leader in the immediate aftermath of defeat in the May 2015 general election.

Miliband has spent his whole career in politics, first as an adviser to Harriet Harman and Gordon Brown, then in a variety of roles in the last Labour government, most notably as Energy & Climate Change Secretary from October 2008-May 2010.

He was seen an outsider in Labour's 2010 leadership election but eventually triumphed, beating his older brother David into second place by a narrow margin.

He offers solutions to climate change in his book: *Go Big: How To Fix Our World*, hosts podcasts and is seen the prime mover behind Labour's recent decision to prioritise green and climate issues.

Wes Streeting

Shadow Health Secretary



MP for Ilford North, first elected in 2015. Re-elected in 2019 with a reduced majority of 25,323.

Often cited as a potential future Labour leader, Streeting was appointed as Shadow Health Secretary in November 2021, the latest in a series of rapid promotions under Starmer. Between 2015 and 2020, as a backbencher, he was a consistent critic of Jeremy Corbyn.

Streeting's parents were teenagers when he was born and he grew up in poverty. He became President of the National Union of Students in East London and was Chief Executive of the Helena Kennedy Foundation, an educational charity.

In May 2021 he revealed he had been diagnosed with kidney cancer – but was subsequently declared cancer-free after an operation to remove one of his kidneys.



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Wonk wars

Thinking caps on

For more than a decade, a cluster of right-leaning think tanks – from Policy Exchange to the Institute for Economic Affairs – have influenced, sometimes profoundly, successive Conservative administrations. In a changed world, with Labour installed in power, what would their equivalents be? Who will influence key policy areas and where might Labour draw policy wonks as part of a new generation of Special Advisors?

Progressive Britain

Progressive Britain is formally affiliated with Labour and was created in 2021 when Progress – founded in 1996, specifically to support Tony Blair and New Labour – merged with the Policy Network think tank. It describes itself as being ‘dedicated to national renewal and the intellectual revitalisation of the centre-left’ and has put forward a range of policy proposals, including some focused on how Labour can regain power. Several members of the Shadow Cabinet currently sit on Progressive Britain’s Advisory Panel.

LIKELY INFLUENCE: ACROSS THE BOARD

Fabian Society

First founded in 1884 and a formal affiliate of the Labour Party, championing “gradual reform” as the best way to achieve progressive goals. Following the 1997 General Election, the Society became an influential hothouse for New Labour policy. In recent years it has published reports on a variety of policy areas, from immigration to pensions and electoral strategy. Keir Starmer is a member, as is over half of his Shadow Cabinet.

LIKELY INFLUENCE: GOVERNANCE, PENSIONS

Institute for Public Policy Research

The self-described ‘UK’s pre-eminent progressive think tank’ founded in 1988 by Labour Party supporter Lord Hollick and former Labour advisor Lord Eatwell. The IPPR publishes about 50 reports a year on topics including energy, climate change, transport, immigration and devolution – and has a distinct footprint in the regions, with dedicated also IPPR North and IPPR Scotland branches.

LIKELY INFLUENCE: LEVELLING UP, REGENERATION, TRANSPORT

New Economics Foundation

NEF was founded in 1986 and says that its mission is to ‘transform the economy so it works for people and the planet’. It is currently focused on three urgent missions to transform the economy: a new social settlement, a Green New Deal and the democratic economy. The think tank’s current Chief Executive Miatta Fahnbulleh has been chosen as Labour’s candidate in Camberwell, South London.

LIKELY INFLUENCE: THE ECONOMY, GREEN NEW DEAL

Demos

Demos was founded in 1993 and while it describes itself as ‘authentically cross-party’ it was widely known for being close to Labour Party circles in the late 1990s and indeed its co-founder Geoff Mulgan went on to work for Blair in No 10. The think tank says that it is now focused on ‘ideas for renewal, reconnection and the restoration of hope’ and has remained broadly at the political centre – just where, chance would have it, the Labour Party is headed.

LIKELY INFLUENCE: GOVERNANCE

Resolution Foundation

Founded in 2005, the Resolution Foundation is currently led by Torsten Bell, a former advisor to Ed Miliband as Labour leader. The officially non-partisan think tank focuses on ‘improving the living standards of those on low-to-middle incomes and carries out research on a number of topics, including jobs, housing and the economy. Reports and findings by the Resolution Foundation often receive relatively high-profile coverage and are fairly influential across party lines.

LIKELY INFLUENCE: THE ECONOMY

Compass

Compass was founded in 2003 as a left-of-centre think tank for those unhappy with the direction of the New Labour Government. Compass says that it is ‘a home for those who want to build and be part of a Good Society; one where equality, sustainability and democracy are not mere aspirations, but a living reality’. Now fairly firmly rooted on Labour’s left wing, Compass might struggle to catch the ear of the party’s leadership – but it may well influence a critical mass of backbenchers.

LIKELY INFLUENCE: SOCIAL POLICY



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Media mates?

Inside track

For as long as the party has been in existence, Labour has struggled to get its message across in what many in its ranks see as a largely hostile media environment.

The problem is particularly acute whenever the party is in opposition. Tony Blair went to enormous efforts in the 1990s to charm Rupert Murdoch's empire but, under Ed Miliband and (particularly) Jeremy Corbyn, Labour found it almost impossible to make any headway.

Keir Starmer and his top team are closer to Blair in their approach to the national press, going out of their way to give interviews and comment pieces to both to Murdoch's News UK titles (including The Times and The Sun) and The Telegraph.

There is scepticism at the very top of Labour regarding the BBC's news output: with the corporation's bulletins and set-piece programmes playing such a vital role in establishing the political narrative for the entire media.

Many senior figures feel Tory ministers get favourable treatment by the BBC – and it would not be a surprise to see the party raising the stakes over this in the coming months, particularly if it retains its current big lead in the polls.

The rise in digital platforms – podcasts, blogs, social media – over the last decade or so has given Labour more space in which to compete for the narrative.

However, those close to the Labour leader say he is willing and able to enter the fray against the big tech companies – and that choosing this particular battle could help win him friends among newspaper publishers.

In a media landscape still largely dominated by the goings-on of the governing party, there are nevertheless journalists and commentators who appear particularly well plugged-in to Labour, both in print and on social platforms.

Here we select 12 such figures – divided into two groups: six whose influence is largely felt through their output under the banner of major, traditional press titles, and another half dozen with large social media followings.

Print

Pippa Crerar | Political Editor
The Guardian

Scoop-getter who led the pack on Dominic Cummings's lockdown-busting trip to Barnard Castle and the Partygate scandal which sparked Boris Johnson's eventual downfall. Cut her teeth at the Evening Standard covering both Ken and Boris.

John Stevens | Political Editor
Daily Mirror

Made the switch this year to what he said was his 'dream job' after years in the Lobby for the Daily Mail – where he was well-regarded and trusted by Labour – replacing Pippa Crerar.

Caroline Wheeler | Political Editor
Sunday Times

Delivers scoops – including the Christmas lockdown in 2020 – and big interviews in a paper which seems to carry more and more well-sourced Labour stories.

Gabriel Pogrand | Whitehall Editor
Sunday Times

Rapidly up-and-coming story getter. Co-wrote (with the equally well-informed Patrick Maguire) the definitive book on the chaos of Labour's Jeremy Corbyn years.

Henry Zeffman | Associate Political Editor
The Times

Another rising star of the News UK stable, won Young Journalist of the Year in 2019 National Press Awards and had a stint in Washington.

Rachel Wearmouth | Deputy Political Editor
New Statesman

Former Daily Mirror journalist whose columns in the weekly magazine are seen as essential reading at all levels in the Labour Party.

Social media

James O'Brien | @mrjamesob
1 million Twitter followers

Broadcaster whose daily LBC radio show is a rallying point for progressives, and whose social media output invariably provokes angry reaction from the right.

Jessica Elgot | @jessicaelgot
115k Twitter followers

Well-informed Guardian deputy political editor and one of the new breed of young Lobby journalists who expertly work social media platforms.

Kevin Maguire | @Kevin_Maguire
331.5k Twitter followers

Daily Mirror and New Statesman veteran who picks fights with rival Andrew 'Tory Boy' Pierce on Good Morning Britain and all over social media.

Sienna Rodgers | @siennamaria
38.6k Twitter followers

Senior writer at The House magazine and former editor of the ultimate inside-track Labour List website.

Kevin Schofield | @KevinASchofield
55.8k Twitter followers

Another Lobby veteran who is now political editor of HuffPostUK and whose output is closely studied for Labour-related nuggets.

Adam Bienkov | @AdamBienkov
126.7k Twitter followers

Political Editor at Byline Times, a good example of a new (2018) platform (both print and online) specialising in social affairs and investigations.



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What happens next?

A long two years

15 March 2023

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt will deliver the spring Statement to MPs. He will attempt to steer a steady path amid economic turbulence including strikes, continuing high inflation and possibly rising unemployment.

May 2023

Local elections in England. These include district councils, unitary authorities and some directly elected mayors. Seen as a major test of Rishi Sunak's authority over his party.



May 2024

Mayoral and local elections in England. Sadiq Khan in London and Andy Burnham are the highest-profile Labour mayors set to stand for third terms, as is Tory Andy Street in the West Midlands.

January 2025

Latest possible month for next UK general election. Most pundits favour autumn 2024 but Sunak could go all the way to January 2025.

Ongoing

Labour Party MP selections. The focus of considerable internal party controversy, with Starmer accused of trying to railroad favoured candidates into key seats.

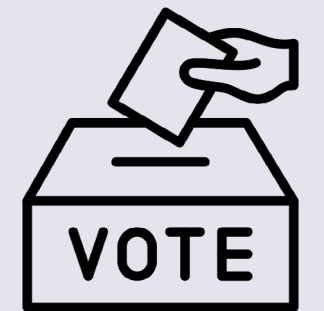


September – October 2023

Party conferences. For the first time for decades, Labour's conference in Liverpool will follow the Tories' (in Manchester). Likely springboard for a gruelling year-long general election campaign.

September - October 2024

Potential for one last round of party conferences if Sunak plays it long with general election timing.



Our insight

LCA's insight and intelligence sets us apart and ensures that our advice and activity is always informed by our knowledge and experience.

We have a dedicated Insight Team who deliver political and issues monitoring and analysis every day for our team and clients. They craft specialist, tailored briefings and commentary and help us to anticipate trends.

We also host regular events to share our knowledge and bring our unrivalled network of clients, associates and contacts together.

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Our Insight Team



Jenna Goldberg,
Partner and Managing
Director, Insight
jeg@londoncommunications.co.uk



Paddy Hennessy,
Senior Advisor
ph@londoncommunications.co.uk



Stefanos Koryzis,
Account Director, Insight
sk@londoncommunications.co.uk



Emily Clinton,
Account Manager, Insight
ejc@londoncommunications.co.uk



Rahul Shah,
Insight Executive
rs@londoncommunications.co.uk



LCA CONTRIBUTORS

Jenna Goldberg, Partner and Managing Director, Insight

Paddy Hennessy, Senior Advisor

Stefanos Koryzis, Account Director, Insight

Emily Clinton, Account Manager, Insight

Rahul Shah, Insight Executive

Emma McKenna, Middleweight Designer

London Communications Agency
8th Floor, Berkshire House, 168-173 High Holborn,
London WC1V 7AA 020 7612 8480

londoncommunications.co.uk

lca@londoncommunications.co.uk

[@ldncomms](https://www.instagram.com/ldncomms)

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