

# Fit for the future

A plan to communicate a confident, ambitious  
and compassionate Labour Party

Labour in  
Communications





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The views expressed in each section of the report are those of the section authors and not necessarily of Labour in Communications as a group

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## Who we are

- Labour in Communications is a network of over 1,200 Labour Party supporters working in the corporate communications, public relations, public affairs and government relations sectors.
- The network provides a social environment for like-minded people to meet and discuss political issues; share perspectives; consult on ideas and serve as a platform to publish writing.
- Labour in Communications also runs a mentorship programme called Impact: one to one mentoring advice and skills training to people from minority and disadvantaged communities looking to pursue a career in politics, communications and government relations.
- For media enquiries, please get in touch at: [hello@labourincomms.org.uk](mailto:hello@labourincomms.org.uk)
- You can sign up to receive Labour in Communications updates here: <https://www.labourincomms.org.uk/take-action>

# Foreword

## Labour is at a turning point



**Lord Neil Kinnock**  
Leader of the Labour Party  
1983-1992

*Neil became an MP in 1970, rising to Shadow Education Secretary in 1979 and then Leader of the Labour Party in 1983. He left Westminster politics in 1995 to become The European Commissioner for Transport and then Commissioner for Administrative Reform in 1999, before being elevated to The House of Lords in 2005.*

### **Labour is at a turning point.**

At the last General Election, our packed policy platform, our communication style, and — as the evidence shows, the personality that Labour presented — brought rejection.

Not for the first time, we have to rebuild, modernise our methods, restore relevance to our message, show that we have deep commitment to our country and communities and practical answers to the demands facing the British people.

I am certain that we have the energy and determination to achieve that and again win the support that enables Labour to serve the future.

Over past year and a half, when everyone has, naturally, been preoccupied by the trials and tragedies of the COVID-19 pandemic, Keir Starmer has proved to have the intelligence, maturity, resilience and courage to deal with the challenges of these uniquely testing conditions. The contrasts with the posturing, dishonesty and capriciousness of the Conservatives are plain and increasingly potent.

And, along with long-standing Labour stalwarts, there is a wealth of young and creative talent in groups such as Labour in Communications which, in this #FitForTheFuture report, provides several of the ingredients for up-to-date, forward-looking ways of making a convincing political appeal.

Equipped with this, and with the output of candid reviews being undertaken across the Labour Party, the irreplaceable hard work of campaigning can be given greater focus, coherence, and effectiveness.

Obviously, only change is constant. That reality compels adjustment and adaptation in the strategies and stances of a truly representative political party. Core convictions, however, remain valid and vital — not as dogma, but as values to inspire and guide.

And, in this age of insecurity for individuals, families, communities, our country and our planet, our democratic socialist principles of care, opportunity, justice, equity and liberty have enduring and emphatic significance and utility. They are not staid, worthy abstractions. Those components of security are foundations of life chances, aspiration, enterprise, productiveness, well-being. They are practical purposes that can only be properly fulfilled by being implemented in power.

First, of course, we have to win that democratic power. We can do it by earning fresh trust, showing that Labour is attuned to the times and ready to give progressive, patriotic, accountable Government with integrity.

And, because we can, we must.





# Hello

## We have come into politics to get something done



**Nabhan Malik**  
Co-Founder and Coordinator  
Labour in Communications

*Nabhan works in corporate communications and investor relations. He Co-Founded Labour in Communications in January 2021 and has been an active member of the party since his school days.*

Earlier this year, I co-founded Labour in Communications, a network for Labour Party supporters drawn from businesses, charities, and politics to be a resource for our party and its leadership. When we started, we were convinced that the only way we could progress as a movement is if we function as a broad group, one with a wide range of voices, experiences, and opinions. Our goal was not to be a talking shop or yet another pressure group. We wanted to leverage the energy, ideas, and talent of the whole Labour movement for one simple purpose: to help Labour win power in 2024.

Since January, we have been on a journey to understand what unites our movement. We have spoken to current and former MPs and special advisors and what we learned is clear: our movement is stronger than anyone thought it was. We learned that political organising works best from a foundation of friendship and mutual respect, where we learn from each other and grow with one another, and when we champion the values of ambition, fairness, and compassion.

Today, Labour in Communications has over 1,200 members and I am proud to launch our new report on how we can get Labour #FitForTheFuture.

This report has been authored by communications professionals with a wide array of skills and experience, and it focuses on practical steps we can take to build the best platform for Labour to communicate more effectively.

I am proud that Neil Kinnock, who courageously rebuilt Labour in the 1980s, and paved the way for Tony Blair's win in 1997, has written the foreword.

We are releasing this report now because Britons across our country are waiting for a Labour Government in 2024 to help solve some of the big challenges they are facing, such as falling living standards, growing job insecurity, and shrinking public services.

Today, outside of Westminster, Labour is in action tackling these challenges in Wales, London, Liverpool, Manchester, West Yorkshire, Sheffield, Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and the West of England. We have a lot to learn from these victories, which is why our report recommends giving our directly elected mayors greater representation in the Shadow Cabinet.

That's what building a Labour Party #FitForTheFuture means — we have come into politics to get something done: for too long we have been sayers not doers and we have to have a political party capable of achieving power. Labour was written off as history many times, but it always came back: Labour, when in power, has achieved power because it secured the centre of British politics, addressed the future and broadened its appeal.

We hope that our network, and many others like us, can be a small help with fresh perspective, organising power, and a supportive hand to those who share the interests of making a better Britain.





# Our full recommendations

## Policy

1. Introduce a demands-led framework to provide a policy blueprint to the electorate in place of detailed, fully costed policies.
2. Provide clear explanation for why policies are being announced, harnessing storytelling about the future.
3. Make fewer policy announcements and concentrate on a handful of those already announced.
4. Develop a strategic policy narrative in advance of Conference, and adopt a central message across every keynote speech delivered in Brighton.
5. Bring back a 'pledge card' style of announcement in order to tie different policies together under one banner than fit the overall narrative towards the next General Election.

## Social + digital

10. Think local, think long term. Increase local resourcing and mobilise CLPs, councillors and volunteers through providing a shared set of online campaign tools; tap into local networks in contested areas and provide a human touch by leveraging community influencers.
11. A clearer, sharper message. Simplify content and process – generate a short, consistent and accessible set of core messages outlining what our brand is and what we stand for. Co-ordinate reactive content across multiple channels through a faster, more streamlined sign off process.
12. Integrate and invest in digital. Place digital at the core of electoral communications strategy, hire experienced digital strategists and designers and stress test messages to maximise efficiency, broaden reach to voters and boost organic shares.
13. Escape the echo chambers. Focus less on preaching to the converted and the metrics of likes and shares, instead using comments to measure the impact of communications.

## Delivery

17. Keep it simple: be disciplined and strategic in what we say, what we challenge, and how we do it.
18. Tell the emotive story: focusing on the places we represent and the aspirations of the people who live there, use emotion and positivity to make what we say more compelling and engaging.
19. Reconnect with a winning coalition: our message delivery must focus on reaching out to and rebuilding relationships with a winning coalition of voters.

## Broadcast + print

6. Agree a coherent communications framework for why Labour governments make different (and better) choices to Conservative ones. Stick to it.
7. Stop communicating through the prism of internal battles, which only reinforce that the Labour Party is more interested in itself than the general public.
8. Labour should where possible seek to set its own agenda, forcing the government to respond. Where this often isn't possible, time and resource should be put into rapid response.
9. Use a wider variety of voices, including local councillors and Metro Mayors, as well as create future voices using the party's training programme e.g., Jo Cox Women in Leader and Bernie Grant programmes.

## Shadow Cabinet

14. Labour should form a leaner group from within its Shadow Cabinet to form a 'Political Cabinet' with the central responsibility of framing, developing and communicating Labour's message to the public.
15. Figures in power from across the Labour movement, such as Mark Drakeford, Andy Burnham, Sadiq Khan, Tracey Brabin and Steve Rotheram should be invited to join the Political Cabinet and given the chance to influence the party's national strategy and decision-making.
16. Shadow Cabinet meetings should be held on a rotational basis outside of Westminster to highlight Labour's successes in power across the regions, and detoxify the party's image as a 'London-centric' political party.

## Brand

20. Level with the public on the economy: The post-Covid recovery will require tough fiscal decisions to recoup lost revenue from lower growth, especially as existing government borrowing abates.
21. Back to basics: Labour must learn to embrace business, big and small, if it is to alter its brand amongst the public.
22. Commitment to accepting and reforming capitalism: The Party must re-state its commitment to a market-based economy.



# Strategy

A communications strategy fit to win the next general election



# Policy

## Luke Downham | FleishmanHillard



Luke is a public affairs and policy specialist at FleishmanHillard, having joined the agency with a background in Labour politics. He has worked in Parliament for two Labour MPs; Ed Balls during his time as Shadow Chancellor, and John Grogan after the 2017 General Election. Luke is a Branch Secretary in Dulwich and West Norwood Labour Party.

## Dan Julian | Cicero/AMO



Dan is a public affairs manager at Cicero/AMO having joined the agency after a number of years working with several Labour politicians in the East of England including on two General Election campaigns and the EU Referendum campaign. He now leads Cicero/AMO's Labour analysis work.

## Key recommendations

- Introduce a 'demands-led framework' to provide a policy blueprint to the electorate in place of detailed, "fully costed" policies.
- Provide clear explanation for why policies are being announced, harnessing storytelling about the future.
- Make fewer policy announcements and concentrate on a handful of those already announced.
- Develop a strategic policy narrative in advance of Conference, and adopt a central message across every keynote speech delivered in Brighton.
- Bring back a 'pledge card' style of announcement in order to tie different policies together under one banner than fit the overall narrative towards the next General Election.

There's nothing the Labour Party and its activists like to do more than discuss policy. While policy has an important place in any political discussion, too much policy, or too many policy announcements, risk diluting the party's main aim while in Opposition; to convince voters that it can be trusted to govern Britain, and that it has a vision and a set of political demands to which they can subscribe.

With the Policy Review currently ongoing, and Conference around the corner, there will be clamour from the grassroots for new detailed policies in the months ahead. Our advice would be to take a step back and resist the urge. There's a bigger job at hand first.

## Constructing a demands-led blueprint for power

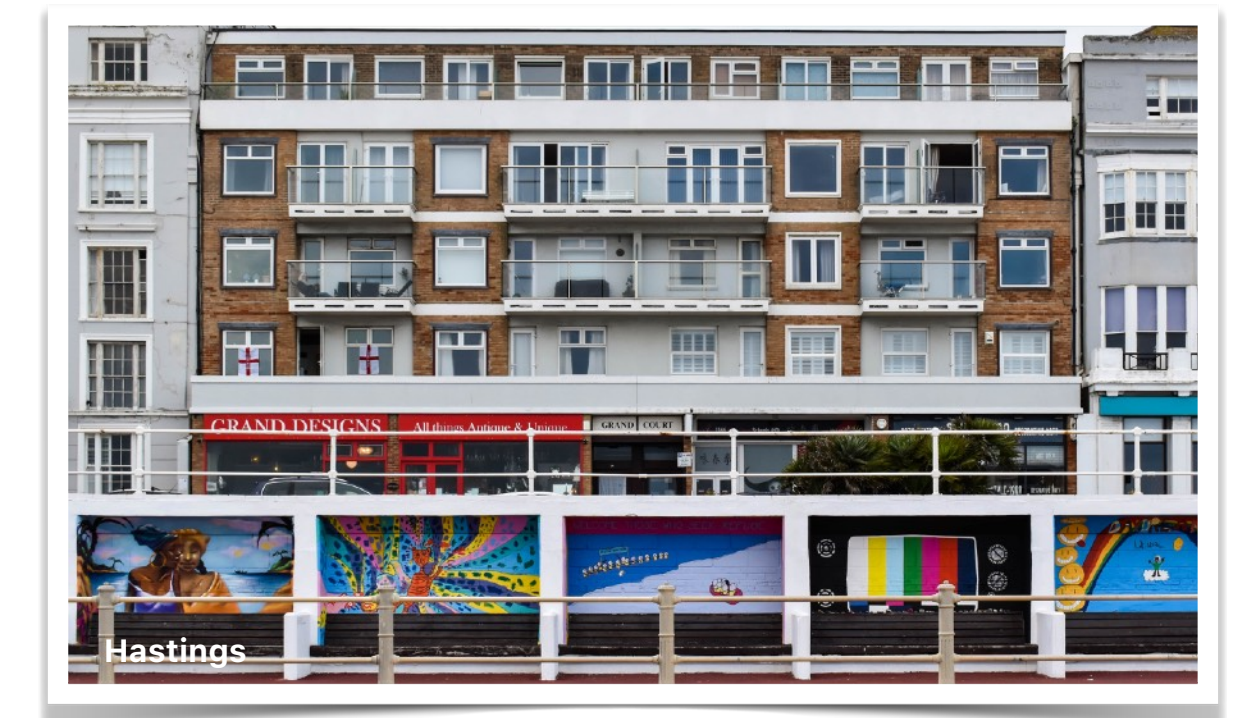
It's striking. Polling and focus groups continuously show that a large proportion of the electorate do not know what Keir Starmer or the Labour Party stand for. Keir has spent a great deal of energy talking about the *values* of his party, and if policy announcements are the articulation of a party's vision for the country, it is even more striking that Labour, with an armoury of detailed policies, has failed to capture the public's attention.

The underlying reasons for this are two-fold, and both have strategic implications for the party's policy platform in the build up to the next election. Firstly, and for context, it should be considered that there has been a long-term misreading of the electoral landscape. The sustained decline of party identification, accelerated from 1987, has seen voters switch political parties more regularly during elections. We know the story by now; "life-long" Labour voters switched to the Conservatives in

steadily increasing numbers from 2015 to 2019, eventually gifting Boris Johnson his huge Parliamentary majority.

While many on the left would cite Brexit as the cause of an assumed short-term volatility, there is evidence demonstrating that a more profound electoral re-alignment has occurred in Britain, centred upon new, but fluid, post-partisan cleavages. Indeed, for most of the electorate, political parties and their values matter much less in choosing how to vote.

The Conservatives, recognising this shift, secured victory by coalition-building around common demands that cut across traditional class and party lines; namely to deliver Brexit and "level up" communities hit hard by the excesses of globalisation. The philosophical values of former miners in the North East, and those of affluent free market fundamentalists in the Home Counties can scarcely be claimed to be aligned. Yet, the desire to unite around a set of transactional policy demands meant that the Conservatives could pragmatically waltz back into Number 10.





The lesson for the Labour leadership is clear; whilst values are an important indicator of the sort of movement we are – compassionate, decent and optimistic – presenting a set of common demands for the sort of country we want to build represents stronger electoral currency in the pursuit of power.

The second issue is closely tied with the first. Labour’s myriad of policies have not been explained through a demands-led framework. The aim of policy announcements should be to tell stories about what a party thinks, and ultimately wants to do, about a set of issues. Perhaps the most famous iteration of this thinking is Tony Blair’s 1995 proclamation that Labour in Downing Street would be “tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime”. In doing so, Blair successfully positioned the party as proactive on law and order, whilst demanding that the poor health and educational outcomes underpinning crime be resolved.

Conversely, the Shadow Chancellor’s recent promise that a Labour government would “make, sell and buy more in Britain”, backed by new state procurement rules, provided little hint about why the policy was being announced. Was it because the party believed in picking winners within the free market? Or was it that Labour was announcing a retreat from globalisation? We simply did not hear the rationale, and the implications are clear. Policies that are announced with no explanation of the underpinning demand create noise and eventually go missing, leading to the confusion we are seeing reflected in polls and focus groups.

Our recommendation to Keir and his team, therefore, is to ensure that policy announcements stemming from the Policy Review possess clear reasoning, and are etched into a blueprint for the future. The titanic issues of climate change, social care reform, unprecedented inequality and the future of the Union are all policy areas that are crying out for Labour to demand change.

We think “fully costed” manifestos can wait.

### **How the Leadership can solve the problem**

There are a set of tactical solutions to the problems Labour face. Over the last year, the party has announced over 200 non-Covid related policies since Keir became Leader. In order to address the problem highlighted, simply announcing fewer policies would ensure that the ones they do announce would get more cut through.

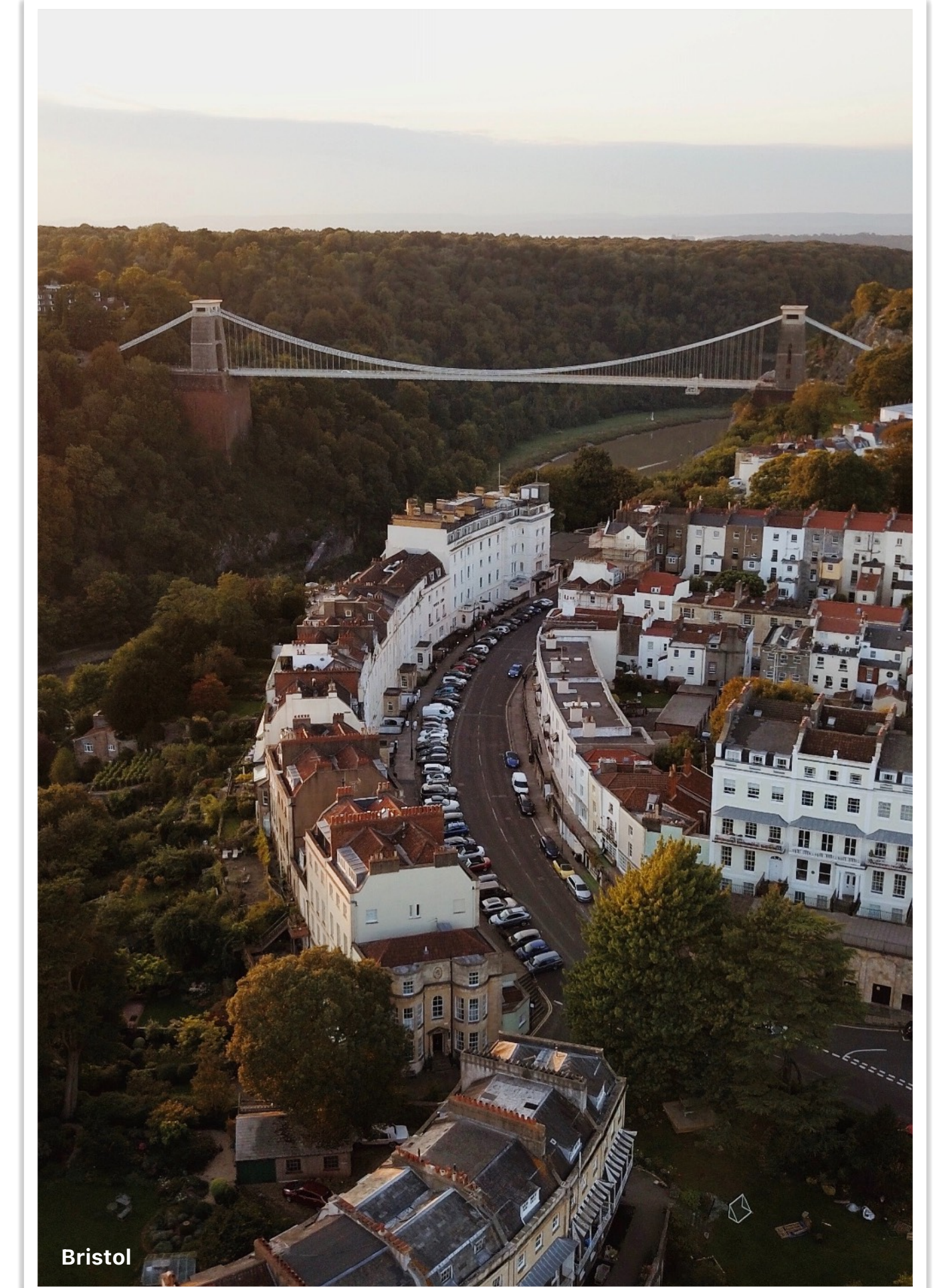
To ensure policies resonate with the public, however, more will need to be done. Crucially, policy demands cannot be announced in a vacuum – they need to be relevant in the moment, salient in the eyes of voters and they need to fit a wider narrative. This is because policy announcements should be a proxy to reiterate the party’s values and core philosophy, but too often it feels like the announcements are made to mask the fact there is a clear lack of vision coming from the Labour leadership.

All too often politicians feel like they have to set out what George H.W. Bush disparagingly called ‘the vision thing’: a West Wing-style speech setting out a political leader’s core beliefs that can get voters’ hearts going. Instead, what Keir Starmer should do is concentrate on answering a simple question: Why are you in politics and what are you setting out to achieve?

Once Keir and his team have answered this question, the wider narrative will stem from there. The pandemic offers a clear opportunity to ‘reset’ British politics, much like the financial crisis helped the Tories create a new narrative to counteract New Labour. COVID-19 has exposed the fractious nature of the British state, be it the lack of preparedness on the health side, the imbalances in resources between private and comprehensive schools, or the insecure nature of many people’s jobs and livelihoods.

A Labour policy narrative about post-pandemic Britain should seek to address these aspects, and policy announcements would be the signal that shows the public what our priorities

are, and how we would tackle them. Instead, the party announces one policy and before it has finished announcing it, it has moved on to another, without linking the two together.





Take one example. The Government's education recovery tsar, Sir Kevan Collins, resigned after the Tories refused to agree to his £15bn catch-up programme. The Labour Party adopted his recommendations, but instead of spending the whole summer talking about education, the party has veered from one issue to another, without a coherent narrative.

The party does seem to be improving on this front however, with the summer recess announcements all under the banner of a 'new deal for working people'. We need to see more of this in the weeks and months ahead.

With Conference coming up, Keir and his team have the best opportunity they will have all year to dominate the news agenda. Before thinking about which policy to announce, they should give more thought to the overall narrative they want to convey and then weave any policies into it.

Going forward, the tried and tested 'pledge card' should make a return – an easy way to set out four or five policies that would address the underlying issues that a Labour Government led by Keir would want to address. It would also have the added value of being easy for activists to remember on the doorstep – a criticism members made of the party's strategy during the May local elections earlier this year.

The Labour Party has faced a difficult time in recent months trying to appear constructive while also opposing the Government's failures during the pandemic. It has done so by setting out policy fixes for every Government announcement, instead of focussing on one or two issues, such as sick pay, which would have allowed it to gain more cut through with the public, while continuing to appear constructive.

As we emerge from the pandemic, the way the leadership announces policy needs to change. The formal Review is underway – in the meantime Keir and his team should focus on finding a unifying narrative that can tie any future announcements together.





# Broadcast + print



## Richard Brooks | Portland Communications

Richard is a Consultant at Portland Communications, specialising in media relations. He previously co-founded For our Future's Sake, the youth and student-led movement part of the People's Vote Campaign, and worked at the Independent. He was a grateful beneficiary of successive Labour governments as a child growing up in Dover.



## Laura Griffiths | SEC Newgate UK

Laura Griffiths works at SEC Newgate UK in the Advocacy Local Team. She is a graduate of the Jo Cox Women in Leadership Programme and Vice Chair Communications for the Watford Labour Party.

## Key recommendations

- Agree a coherent communications framework for why Labour governments make different (and better) choices to Conservative ones. Stick to it.
- Stop communicating through the prism of internal battles, which only reinforce that the Labour Party is more interested in itself than the general public.
- Labour should where possible seek to set its own agenda, forcing the government to respond. Where this often isn't possible, time and resource should be put into rapid response.
- Use a wider variety of voices, including local councillors and Metro Mayors, as well as create future voices using the party's training programme e.g., Jo Cox Women in Leader and Bernie Grant programmes.

Labour's broadcast and print strategy over the last 18 months has been a necessary, but by no means sufficient improvement on recent history.

Previously, mixed messages were an all too regular occurrence, with Shadow Cabinet and other leading Labour spokespeople regularly confused or contradicting each other. Journalists and broadcasters would frequently share frustration at Labour being unable, if not unwilling, to share their coherent thoughts on the issue of the day. This is broadly no longer the case.

Keir Starmer, as both a spokesperson and prospective Prime Minister, clearly exudes decency and integrity; something which was abundantly clear during his broadcast interview on ITV's *Piers Morgan's Life Stories* – a risky move which paid off for the Labour leader and his team.

But political communications are about three things; defining yourselves, defining your opponents and showing as a consequence how you would do things differently if elected. On these three tests, this is where the good news ends.

Since the election of Keir in spring 2020, the Labour Party's broadcast and print media has been at its strongest in two areas. Firstly, on self-analysis and internal battles, and secondly on the issue of 'competence'.

Both are important – the party needed to show that it understands why the public chose to give it one of its worst election defeats in a century two years ago. Labour spokespeople of all factions have spent plenty of airtime and column inches explaining why they think that is. Some of this makes for compelling viewing and brilliant writing. Whether it leads us on the path to a general election victory is something else.

A desire to cut ties with Labour's previous administration led to one of Labour's best pieces of print media in recent history; a Telegraph front page on VE Day with Keir Starmer calling for more support for veterans. It showed a Labour Party confidently talking about patriotism and the armed services, and in a publication who's readers we will need to reach to win a general election.

However, this focus has also led to an unhealthy communications obsession with internal friction, which continues to tell a disinterested public that Labour is not yet ready to govern again.

On defining the Conservatives, Labour's print and broadcast strategy in the autumn of 2020 solidified around the idea that Labour in power would be more competent at running the country than the Tories. This worked well for a short while, before the government's vaccine programme took flight.

Since then, aside from a short drive to define the government as full of sleaze in the run up to local elections in 2021, it is unclear what the strategic communications message is from Labour on what they believe about Boris Johnson's government and why Labour would be better.





The fundamental communications challenge appears to be a lack of agreement on how and why Labour lost its 4th general election in a row in 2019. Should Labour be more culturally conservative to win back red wall voters, or socially liberal to stir up an unenthused base? Is economic interventionism the new centre ground in British politics, as defined by Boris Johnson, or do Labour need to show they would make hard choices about spending in government?

These fundamental tensions bleed into Labour's broadcast and print strategy. Trapped by this choice, Labour's spokespeople often decide not to choose at all. Instead, Labour often acts as the media's press office, supplying quotes on questions they are asked (often about internal party issues), rather than acting as a strategic communications function.

So, to carry out a print and broadcast media strategy which will deliver the general election victory for Labour that this country needs, we make three recommendations:

### **1. Agree a communications framework, and stick to it**

There are many ways in which a Labour government under Sir Keir Starmer would be much better for this country than a Conservative one under Boris Johnson. It would be more serious in tackling injustice, fairer, more competent, less corrupt, far more likely to address the biggest challenges in our society, more diverse and decent.

Among this lengthy list is a coherent framework for why Labour government's make different choices to Conservative ones. Labour need to decide what this framework should be - then the policy issues and communications strategy will follow through.

We should be searching for our very own 'long-term economic plan', 'Get Brexit Done' or to use a Labour example - 'son of a bus driver', underpinned by a relevant policy programme which can be repeated ad nauseam on tv and in the papers. The closest Labour has come to this in recent memory is 'For the many, not the few', which was originally thought of in 1997, nearly 25 years ago.

Most importantly, once this is decided, it should be stuck to religiously, rather than abandoned after several weeks or months.

### **2. Stop talking about ourselves**

As described above, without this framework, the Labour Party's print and broadcast media strategy either resembles a painful process of going back to first principles on every media story or defaulting to introspection.

Sir Keir Starmer rightly won plaudits on his approach to anti-Semitism in the party, but constant internal battles only reinforce to the public that the Labour Party is more interested in itself than the general public.

Little to no print and broadcast media time should be dedicated to tackling internal issues, with that time and resource instead spent tackling the genuine issues across the party.

### **3. Set our own agenda & use variety of voices**

An outward looking Labour Party with an agreed communications framework will be able to do several things that currently eludes it;

- Set its own agenda, rather than responding solely to the governments.
- Where needed, respond decisively and clearly to a breaking media issue.
- Be confident enough to use communications channels and tackle issues which are often not associated with the Labour Party and wider left movement. Labour's recent push on crime and aforementioned Telegraph VE Day front page are great examples of this, but currently too infrequent.
- Use a wider variety of voices, including local councillors and Metro Mayors, as well put more resource into creating future voices using the party's training programme e.g Jo Cox Women in Leader and the Bernie Grant Programme.

While challenging, none of this is unfixable ahead of the next general election, whenever that may be. For many current and former staffers across the party, these recommendations will not be new or ground-breaking, and indeed are based on numerous conversations with them and journalists. Recent changes have been necessary and an improvement. They are yet to be sufficient to deliver a Labour win at the next general election. Time is on our side, but not for much longer.





# Social + digital



**Laura Cunliffe-Hall | Copper Consultancy**

*Laura is the Social and Digital Media lead for Labour in Communications. Outside of the network, Laura is a Senior Account Manager at Copper Consultancy, specialising in complex communications and public affairs for economic development and major regeneration projects. Laura is also the Communications Officer on the Young Fabians National Executive Committee, a member of Labour Women's Network.*

## Key recommendations

- Think local, think long term. Increase local resourcing and mobilise CLPs, councillors and volunteers through providing a shared set of online campaign tools; tap into local networks in contested areas and provide a human touch by leveraging community influencers.
- A clearer, sharper message. Simplify content and process – generate a short, consistent and accessible set of core messages outlining what our brand is and what we stand for. Co-ordinate reactive content across multiple channels through a faster, more streamlined sign off process.
- Integrate and invest in digital. Place digital at the core of electoral communications strategy, hire experienced digital strategists and designers and stress test messages to maximise efficiency, broaden reach to voters and boost organic shares.
- Escape the echo chambers. Focus less on preaching to the converted and the metrics of likes and shares, instead using comments to measure the impact of communications.

Social media and digital communication amplifies and influences all content. Success in subsequent general elections will be contingent on accessing online spaces to reach a diverse range of voters so we can deliver Labour's key messages. And reach is not enough; messaging must resonate with voter audiences.

### **Think local, think long-term**

#### ***Increase localised resourcing***

Labour needs to reflect our 'local first' strength in our digital activism. Elections are won and lost at a local level. Movement generosity is the key to this future social and digital media strategy, as MP Fleur Anderson outlined at a Labour in Communications event focusing on how communications professionals can support CLPs to boost community activism. This means we must empower members and complement strong doorstep operations and grassroots activism with increasingly sophisticated digital campaigning that will resonate with communities. Diverse content can represent and celebrate our diversity.

Labour needs to provide a shared set of accessible online tools to enable members to support and deliver consistent digital campaigns. This echoes the Conservative approach in 2019, where Westminster Digital enabled candidates in 50 target constituencies to produce localised personalised content that tied into wider party messaging.

Local-facing campaign material that is simple to tailor and share will strengthen our digital infrastructure and make life easier for our hard-working campaigners.

#### ***Tap into local networks in key battleground areas***

We need to speak to the electorate in the spaces they are, not where we think they are. Local Facebook, WhatsApp groups and online forums are where we need to be to talk to the older generations of voters that are less likely to vote Labour.

The Conservatives have had a presence in, and therefore been able to leverage, these groups, exemplified in research identifying a Dudley Facebook Group which built followers by posting local news featuring anti-Labour content.

By crossing political divides through interacting with people in local groups and forums we can get across our policies and messages more effectively and reassure voters that may initially be hostile or sceptical about voting Labour. If we don't get into these spaces, we can't change people's minds.

Mobilising our efforts to talk to voters on the fence, as well as those that have moved away to vote Conservative, is important. We can make the most of the fact that the Conservative 'levelling up agenda' is not landing as well with voters in the South, with 2021 Labour gains across the South East and West.





### **Leverage community advocates and influencers – the human touch**

Labour's biggest strength is our people. Our best content amplifies the voices of influencers in the community that people listen to. Leveraging these advocates is crucial during election campaigns. Community case studies are necessary to reflect what Labour in government can do to help specific communities. Kim Leadbeter's honesty and straight-talking approach in the Batley and Spen by-election, which translated both online and on the doorstep, highlights how showing people who we are sets us apart from the slick but often impersonal campaigns from other parties.

Local Instagram influencers are also an avenue to people we may not normally reach – opening up conversations to get people on side needs to be part of our wider strategy. For example, Love Island's Amber Gill and Amy Hart (both of whom encouraged fans to vote Labour), have the ability to cut through and reach different audiences. Much like the 90s 'Cool Britannia' Blair era connected with the culture of the day rather than trying to stand one step removed, we need to make modern culture work for us to win hearts and minds.

### **A clearer, sharper message: simplify content and process**

#### ***Short, consistent and accessible set of core messages outlining what our brand is and what we stand for***

Strong messages will help us reconnect with voters. We need to simplify our messages and how they are communicated via our social media content to make sure people know what Labour stands for and why they should vote for us. 'Get Brexit Done' was trite, but at the end of the day it landed. We can do better. Our core policies need to reflect our values, stay consistent and be clearly communicated in our key messages. At a launch event for the University of Bristol Young Fabians, MP Jon Cruddas discusses the need to ask voters 'who are you and what do you want' based off 1980s Polish documentary Talking Heads. Focusing and simplifying our messaging and

communications around what voters actually want from their government is vital.

Speaking at a Labour in Communications event, former Labour Director of Communications Alastair Campbell similarly highlighted the interdependence between strong policy underpinning a robust strategy that then enables and informs clear political communications. Labour has faced issues previously around a lack of understanding relating to policy proposals. Using social media to clearly communicate our position on major policy issues can break through these barriers. We need to make sure any messaging is accessible and written in plain English. MP Peter Kyle highlights that, "People will pay attention when we speak their language, not if we just continue to expect them to learn ours."



### ***Stronger co-ordination across multiple channels with a faster, minimal sign off process to release more reactive content***

Generating sharper and more timely content will also be fundamental to a successful strategy. Co-ordinating this from a

more centralised point of focus will allow us to learn from 2019, using multiple platforms, channels and messengers across the party effectively to reach different audiences, both members and voters.

We need to organise better and disseminate content across these channels, responding to news stories faster and minimising sign off to empower key people within the party to get content out quickly. Graphics need to adapt to modern attention spans becoming increasingly shorter and more visual. We need to cut through by being more inviting to time poor people that want to be able to understand an issue without wading through unnecessary detail. The best thing we can do is keep it simple.

### **Integrate and invest in digital**

#### ***Integrate digital so it is at the core of electoral communications strategy***

Digital is not an add on. The COVID-19 crisis to an extent forced our hand to amplify digital organising structures ahead of the May 2021 local elections, professionalising and simplifying Dialogue, virtual surgeries and managing to create a sense of community so we could come together even as we needed to stay apart. Moving forward, digital must be integrated further so it is at the heart of our communications strategy, building our brand in election campaigns and directing our broadcast and traditional content.

#### ***Employ experienced digital strategists and designers and match the Tories spend on digital whilst ensuring efficiency***

Investment is imperative in strengthening our digital offer. It is important that Labour's teams continue to utilise experienced and talented digital strategists and designers to ensure that we're prepared for gruelling long-haul election campaigns.

Proportionate spending is key – matching the Tories rather than over-spending to ensure maximum efficiency and results.



***Stress test ahead of time and rely on algorithms and organic shares over individual targeting***

Stress testing in advance of major campaigns is crucial. We must open up our advertising and focus more on categories like constituency and avoid narrower targeting of individuals through more refined categories like age and interests, which are less reflective of how people vote in our more fluid and pluralist modern political era. Encouraging a growth in organic shares and relying more on algorithms will increase our outreach. When combined with simpler messaging and an increased presence in Facebook and WhatsApp groups and community forums, we can then reinforce our core messages to the prospective voters we need to be talking to.

***Escape the echo chambers***

***Focus less on preaching to the already converted***

We must combat disinformation online and challenge people that disagree with us to try and change their minds. We need to spend less time talking to each other in our existing silos on Twitter and instead engage elsewhere to ensure we're not just recycling content on people already likely to vote for Labour.

MP Jonathan Reynolds at a recent Labour in Communications event stressed that now is the time for us to work together to shape Labour's messaging, communications and culture to appeal to a broader coalition of voters rather than preaching to the already converted. Instead of broadcasting into thin air, we need to access different spaces (as outlined above) where we can react to and persuade groups of prospective voters.

***Likes/shares are not a guarantee – look at comments and a wider range of metrics to measure impact of communications***

We outperformed the Conservatives on shares and retweets in the 2019 General Election, but this did not translate over at the ballot box and if anything generates a false sense of security.

Getting stuck into the comments will give us a much greater understanding of where voters heads are at and how we need to adapt our messaging to get through to people who don't understand how voting Labour can benefit them, their families or communities.

Labour is the Party of progressive politics. It is essential that we dominate online media infrastructure with a positive, future focused message, as Lord Kinnock outlines in the foreword to this report, to remind the country that Labour is the Party that will work hard for them. To do so, we need to continue to work hard at our social and digital strategy to ensure it is a reflection of our endurance and commitment to getting Labour into power.





# Structure

Building the best platform to communicate effectively



# Shadow Cabinet



**Pete Turay**

*Peter is the Co-Founder and Media Relations lead for Labour in Communications. Outside of the network, Peter works in corporate communications and previously worked on Keir Starmer's successful campaign to become Leader of the Labour Party. He also serves as the Vice-Chair of the Labour Campaign for Human Rights and as a Committee Member of Labour Digital.*

## Key recommendations

- Labour should form a leaner group from within its Shadow Cabinet to form a 'Political Cabinet' with the central responsibility of framing, developing and communicating Labour's message to the public.
- Figures in power from across the Labour movement, such as Mark Drakeford, Andy Burnham, Sadiq Khan, Tracey Brabin and Steve Rotheram should be invited to join the Political Cabinet and given the chance to influence the party's national strategy and decision-making.
- Shadow Cabinet meetings should be held on a rotational basis outside of Westminster to highlight Labour's successes in power across the regions, and detoxify the party's image as a 'London-centric' political party.

The effectiveness of Labour's Shadow Cabinet and its members has been consistently criticised over the past eighteen months. From its performance in front of the media, to the impression it has made on members of the public, it is clear to see that both iterations of the Shadow Cabinet brought together by Keir Starmer have had their limitations.

## Refocusing the structure of the Shadow Cabinet

Although the Shadow Cabinet is traditionally a way of structuring the Opposition to hold the government of the day to account, it is now an outdated model with which to conduct politics in opposition with the aim of winning elections. The model places too much emphasis on the ongoing machinations of Parliament, and far less on the message and perceived image Labour is projecting to the public. This critique is highlighted by the way in which Labour was solely perceived to be blocking Brexit ahead of the 2019 General Election due to its actions in Parliament, and can be further signalled by the public's consistent criticism in 2020 and 2021 that Labour is 'playing opposition politics' too often.

Moving forward, Labour should look to restructure the Shadow Cabinet and communicate through a leaner group of members to improve the perception and awareness of Labour's Shadow Cabinet amongst the public. The grouping would effectively operate as a 'Political Cabinet' and would have sole responsibility, as Labour's dedicated spokespeople, to frame, develop and communicate Labour's message to the public.

This grouping could be modelled on the Shadow C-19 Committee, created in 2020 with the aim of responding to the COVID-19 outbreak. This model helped structure Labour's opposition to the government effectively and

communicated clearly to the public – as highlighted by Keir Starmer's approval ratings during the Summer of 2020, which are still his highest to date. While this proposed structure should be implemented for political and communication purposes, the formal size of the Shadow Cabinet could remain for day-to-day parliamentary procedures and ongoing policy support if needed.

## Creating a Shadow Cabinet which conveys the message of 'Labour in Power'

After more than a decade of Opposition, Labour is left with two ongoing problems; the vast majority of the Shadow Cabinet have little to no experience of operating under a Labour government; and members of the public have either a negative perception of Labour's time in power, or little to no recollection of this time period at all. This makes Labour's policy commitments and scrutiny of the government seem too distant and unrealistic to the wider public – even when they are within reach. Additionally, the Shadow Cabinet's messaging has often come across as diluted and weak, with government ministers able to refute our message too easily by pointing to ongoing policy commitments and pledges; leaving Labour to describe how its policy would work in practice, rather than pointing to how it has worked already.

To remedy this, Labour's Shadow Cabinet has to communicate the successes from the party's time in government more consistently – something which Keir Starmer has begun to do. Labour should also look to substantiate their messaging by highlighting the successes of Labour in power across the UK – including in the devolved government in Wales, across England with Labour's now numerous Metro Mayors, as well as with Labour led-Councils.





To achieve this, Labour’s Shadow Cabinet, and preferably our recommended Political Cabinet, should include figures in power from across the Labour movement, such as Mark Drakeford, Andy Burnham, Sadiq Khan, Tracey Brabin, Dan Jarvis, Joanne Anderson and Steve Rotheram. A number of these figures are already significantly more popular amongst the public than current members of the Shadow Cabinet and have showcased their ability to connect with the electorate successfully through the political campaigns they have won. As spokespeople, they also have the benefit of being able to point to their own political choices to differentiate themselves – and their policy platforms – from government. Ultimately, as the only figures to successfully hold power on a Labour platform, the party owes them the chance to influence our national strategy and the decisions we take in Westminster.

As a sign of Labour’s commitment to learn from these figures, we would also recommend that Shadow Cabinet meeting locations are rotated on a regular basis outside of Westminster and hosted instead by one of the party’s ‘in power’ figures, for example Dan Jarvis and Tracey Brabin in Yorkshire, or Andy Burnham in Manchester. This would offer the chance for the party to highlight the success stories of Labour’s leadership in that area, as well as de-toxifying the party’s tarred image as a ‘London-centric’ political party.

### **Bringing in external members**

The Labour movement has benefited from a wealth of high-profile supporters and aligned campaigners over the past decades. Over the past eighteen months we have seen the impact non-political figures, such as Marcus Rashford, can have on current affairs by formulating political campaigns through an authentic tone of voice, highlighting their lived experiences, and a mass following. While Labour is often aligned with these figures politically, it has failed to suitably position itself as a central part of these campaigns, despite the work it has undertaken within Parliament to achieve its end goals.

To rectify this, Labour should look to invite campaigners, businesspeople and activists to attend and inform Shadow Cabinet meetings on a regular basis. These meetings would offer Labour the chance to dovetail alongside existing campaigns being driven from outside of Parliament by non-political figures, learn from figures with extensive experience of specific topics, as well as showcasing Labour’s support for their campaign goals.





# Output

Delivering Labour's message to Britain



# Delivery



## Freddie Palmer | Social

Freddie is an account director at Social where he supports clients in the built environment sector to tell their stories. He is also a member of the Labour Party and has campaigned across London and the West of England.



## Alice Pleasant | Lansons

Alice Pleasant is a Senior Public Affairs Account Executive at Lansons, supporting clients in a range of sectors from financial services to transport. As well as being a long-standing member of the Labour Party, she also previously volunteered on Hilary Clinton's presidential campaign in 2016.

## Key recommendations

- Keep it simple: be disciplined and strategic in what we say, what we challenge, and how we do it.
- Tell the emotive story: focusing on the places we represent and the aspirations of the people who live there, use emotion and positivity to make what we say more compelling and engaging.
- Reconnect with a winning coalition: our message delivery must focus on reaching out to and rebuilding relationships with a winning coalition of voters.

Effective message delivery is vital to electoral success. Properly articulating what Labour stands for, what we're against and our vision for the country, is how we win. Through conversations with people from across politics and the knowledge and experience of Labour in Communications we have identified three recommendations to improve Labour's message delivery. These include a consistent simplified messaging style that is positive and emotional, aimed at reconnecting with a winning coalition of voters across the nation.

## Opposition in a pandemic

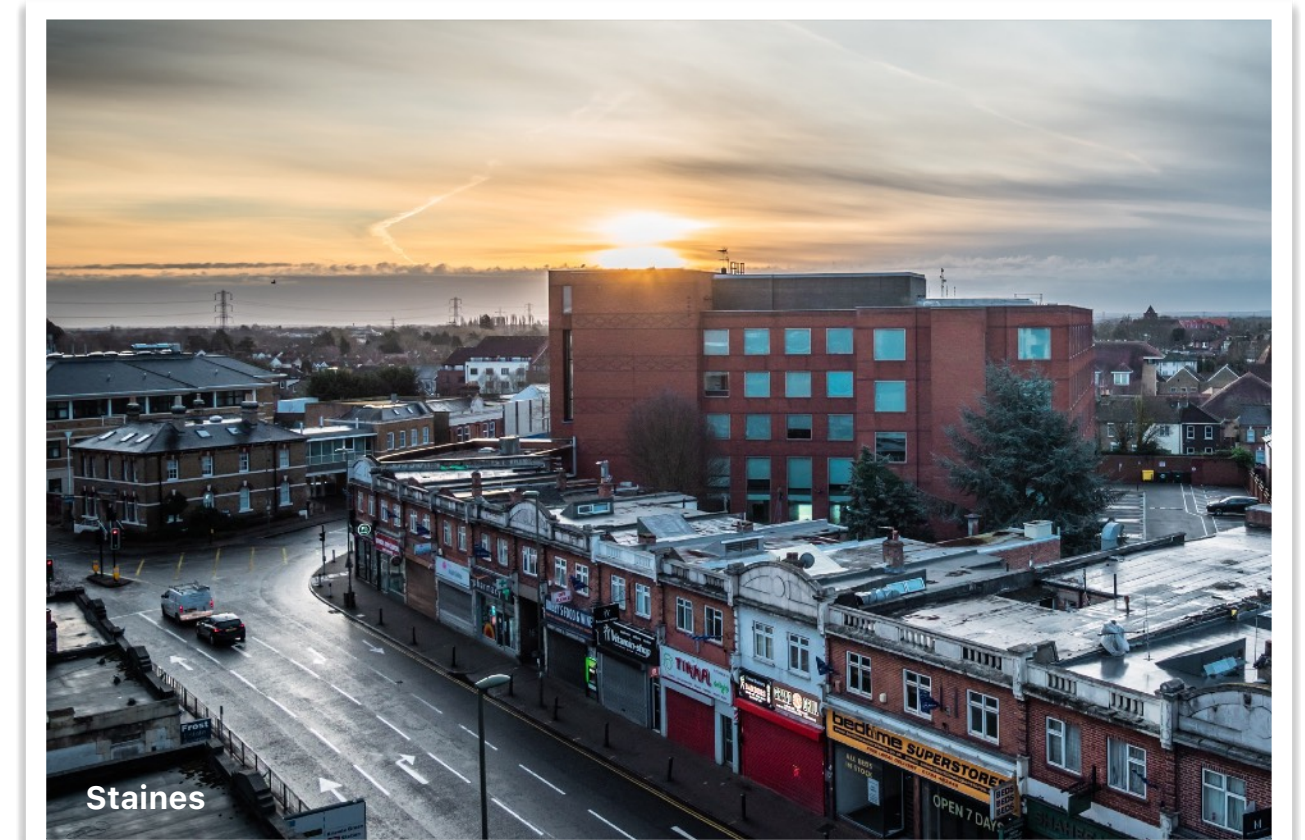
The past 18 months have been dominated by those in power - in a crisis it is those who wield power who people look to first. This creates an incredible challenge for any opposition party. Keir Starmer became Labour leader days into the first lockdown. Delivering his first speech from his front room goes a long way to illustrating the message delivery barriers he has faced. As we explore Labour's approach to message delivery it is vital to bear this context in mind.

## What's gone well

In exploring how to improve Labour's message delivery we've looked at recent successes. There's plenty - Andy Burnham's defiant speeches outside Manchester Library demonstrating how a simple and genuine message can tap into peoples' emotions, the Welsh Labour government saving lives in a pandemic by consistently and openly levelling with people, and electoral successes in places like the West of England reminding us how Labour can win at the ballot box.

## King of the North

In Manchester, Mayor Andy Burnham has provided a case study on how to do message delivery well. Throughout the pandemic he gave people across Greater Manchester a voice. He was so effective because he took people with him. He used every communications channel available to explain the situation and how he was fighting for the people he represents. The media conferences he gave in the height of the crisis last autumn gave us one of the most memorable images of that period - Burnham outside Manchester Library briefing the media whilst responding to events as they changed then and there. The genuine emotion he showed reflected what the people he represented felt. It's never easy to measure good communications but for a northern politician to be dubbed 'King of the North' by so many is an impressive barometer.







### **Storytelling that saved lives**

Wales's devolved status gave Welsh Labour the opportunity to deviate from Westminster's pandemic response. It also gave them the space to tell their own story. Communication focused on Wales doing what's best for Wales. Welsh Labour provides another example of the value of simple, place-based communications that is not afraid to tap into emotion and remain staunchly genuine.

The May 2021 local elections offered glimpses of hope too. The recently elected West of England Mayor Dan Norris showed how Labour can win elections with a narrative focused on pride of place. In a similar way, Scottish Labour Leader Anas Sarwar, although evading electoral success this time, reminded the party of the importance of positivity. Sarwar connected with voters, particularly during the debates,

and made progress in laying the foundations for a Labour revival north of the border.

### **Need for improvement**

Despite these positives, our research has highlighted significant areas where Labour's message delivery could be improved.

#### **1. Simplicity of message**

Our conversations highlighted that one of the biggest issues facing Labour is that people do not know what they stand for. The party needs to improve how it communicates its policies and builds a clear narrative. This was echoed by Opinium pollster Chris Curtis who told us that Labour needs to be more consistent in its message delivery, in particular reiterating policies repeatedly. It is clear that we need simple, short messages that are hammered repeatedly to voters, getting across what Labour stands for.

It is also important that Labour does not get distracted in its messaging. It must not get bogged down in issues that mean little to voters. A good example is offered in Bristol where Labour's Mavin Rees and his team skilfully responded to a potential culture war skirmish in view of the world. Everything the mayor said focused on the local; what it meant for the city and how it should respond. They refused to join the culture war but instead stuck to what mattered for Bristol. Finally, Labour needs to become more strategic in how it challenges the government.

Several of those we spoke to, and as mentioned elsewhere in this report, believed that the party needed to become more thoughtful about when and what to criticise, making sure that it is effective in landing blows that fits into the long-term electoral strategy, not just a short-term punch.

Opposition means we must hold the government to account but it doesn't require us to take every opportunity to criticise.

#### **2. Positive and emotive communication style**

One former red wall Labour MP told us that the party needs to move away from a "transactional" relationship with voters, instead offering a more positive and emotive vision that connects with voters and focuses on the issues that they care about. Benefits of policies are often lost in the tone of messaging and there is a need to convey passion and emotion for what Labour are advocating.

Those we spoke to also highlighted that Labour is often too "paternalistic" in its message delivery to voters on the most salient issues of recent years - Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Scottish Independence. A Labour communications official told us that the party needs to find a way of speaking more positively about these issues if they hope to win over voters.

#### **3. Reconnecting with a winning voter coalition**

Finally, the struggles of the last decade show that Labour need to work on reconnecting with voters and focus on speaking to a winning coalition of the electorate. Often Labour is accused of failing to engage voters - speaking across them instead of to them. Some of Labour's biggest successes in recent years have come from engaging people about things that matter to them, particularly in their local areas, and arguing on their behalf - we must learn from this.

Labour should align its message delivery with the lessons learnt from these successes. It should keep with a simple positive message and avoid being drawn into 'bubble issues' that only appeal to those who already agree with Labour. It is important we continue to reach out to those who have felt disenchanted with Labour in recent elections, whilst continuing to advocate for the values that form our identity. It will take time to rebuild Labour's relationship with voters, therefore the groundwork must be done now. The long-term strategic aim of the Labour Party must be winning elections and Labour can only do this by reconnecting with voters.



# Brand



## Harry McNeill | BCW Global

Harry is an Account Executive at BCW where he joined in 2019, working across a range of corporate, international and public affairs clients. Harry has a background in political campaigning, initially assisting the Labour Party while at University before going on to work on an EU referendum campaign. Most recently, Harry worked on Anas Sarwar's successful campaign to become Scottish Labour leader in 2021.



## Hamza Farooq | Hawthorn Advisors

Hamza is a corporate communications and public affairs professional working at Hawthorn Advisors. Prior to joining Hawthorn, Hamza worked at EY in their global public relations team for their Strategy and Transaction business and the corporate communications consultancy, Brunswick Group.

## Key recommendations

- Level with the public on the economy: The post-Covid recovery will require tough fiscal decisions to recoup lost revenue from lower growth, especially as existing government borrowing abates.
- Back to basics: Labour must learn to embrace business, big and small, if it is to alter its brand amongst the public.
- Commitment to accepting and reforming capitalism: The Party must re-state its commitment to a market-based economy.
- Media interventions: Keir Starmer should make a series of interventions in the media, loudly and publicly criticising this tendency within Labour and setting out the new culture he would like to see.
- Suspensions: To demonstrate to the public he is willing to walk the walk, not just talk the talk, Keir Starmer should consider suspending members of the Party who overstep the mark and indulge in serious cases of online abuse.

Having a political brand that the public can trust is critical for any party seeking power. Yet trust, competence and a deep connection with local communities, attributes that are a pre-requisite for electability, are sorely missing in today's Labour party and have been for some time. A thorough analysis of Labour's brand would require evaluating its relationship with issues as wide ranging as patriotism, law and order, defence of the realm, competence, and leadership. But without the necessary space to explore all of these matters in depth, which would surely be enough to justify a book of its own, we have decided to investigate two that present an old and new problem for the Labour Party.

Trust in handling of the economy, an issue that has dogged Labour leaders for generations, is as important today for Labour to repair as it ever has been. Yet at the same time it faces a new-found problem – the Party is regarded as disconnected from its traditional base on account of its culture. Repairing these two major issues is fundamentally important for Labour if it is ever to recover and build an electoral coalition broad enough to win a general election.

## The Economy and the Labour Party

*"I'm an optimist, but I'm an optimist who takes his raincoat."* Harold Wilson, Prime Minister (1964 – 1970) and (1974-1976).

The public have lost trust in the Labour Party's management of the economy. The Labour brand has become synonymous with economic incompetence, fiscal irresponsibility, and a failure to grasp how wealth is generated. When it comes to a key measure of competence for any party seeking to form a

government in this country, the Labour brand falls woefully short.

As a result, on an issue of fundamental importance to all sections of the electorate, voters would rather prefer a flawed status quo as opposed to trusting the party's stewardship of their taxes. Yet the problem is a long-term one. For too long, the Labour Party has not effectively countered the destructive narrative perpetuated by successive Conservative governments. Instead of taking the fight to the Conservatives, the economic terrain has been firmly established on the government's territory.

Since 2010 and under successive leaderships, the Party has reverted to its default position of tax and spend. Take for example, the last two manifestos. The 2017 manifesto pledged a £250bn "national transformation fund" whilst the subsequent 2019 manifesto outdid it by pledging that by 2024, a Labour government would spend an additional £98bn a year on day-to-day expenditure. Polling showed that several of the Party's spending priorities were popular with the public. Yet, to quote the Party's 2019 election review, "support for individual policies falls when they are attached to the Labour Party" because the leadership was not trusted to deliver on it.





Granted, the past few years presented significant challenges to any opposition party. The government is led by an adept political operator in the form of Boris Johnson whose appeal cuts across multiple classes and regions. The party is experiencing a radical shift in its electoral base, with social identities and cultural imperatives trumpeting traditional economic and social ties which bound the Labour coalition for decades. Communities are shifting, the country is becoming more diverse and the existence of the party as a viable political force is in question because of all this. Adapting and responding to these dynamics in conjunction with dealing with the economic impact of Covid-19, whose effects remain to be seen, is a tall order for any opposition party.

But the Labour brand will only succeed if it can weave these complexities into a compelling economic narrative, one that protects and promotes employment, supports business growth, enables the free flow of trade at a time of growing economic retrenchment and harnesses the future of technological change to navigate a post-pandemic landscape.

For the party's brand to recover, it needs to think big, embrace dynamic economic thinking and constantly re-assure the public that it doesn't pose a threat to the future growth of the country.

So, how can the party achieve that?

**1. Level with the public on the economy:** The post-Covid recovery will require tough fiscal decisions to recoup lost revenue from lower growth, especially as existing government borrowing abates. Labour must be at the forefront of defining what these tough decisions will be. A British 'recovery' bond is a sound idea but must be coupled with the broader choices the party would make to restore health to an economy over-exposed to debt and running a large fiscal deficit.

**2. Back to basics:** Labour must learn to embrace business, big and small, if it is to alter its brand amongst the public. It needs to listen to those that generate wealth and employment and

work to bring them under its umbrella by developing a robust pro-business platform. This is critical to not only replenishing the party's pro-business credentials but essential if it is to understand the aspirations which drives wealth creation.

**3. Commitment to accepting and reforming capitalism:** The Party must re-state its commitment to a market-based economy. Over the past few years, the party's lurch to the left has understandably led to the electorate doubting its commitment to the fundamentals of our economic system. The Labour brand is seen as being too wedded to outdated theories and lacking an understanding of how the modern economy works. Embracing competition, underpinned by an active government enabling a level market playing field, and a globally integrated economy with free and fair trade are critical components underpinning advanced economies. It is the job of the Labour Party to embrace these principles as a starting point and work to develop its platform from it.

### Culture and the Labour Party

No analysis of the Labour brand can ignore its culture and how it is perceived by the wider public. The Labour Party is increasingly allowing itself to be defined by a style of politics imported from US university campuses and it poses a serious threat to our electoral prospects. It has been adopted by a small but loud group of young Labour members who see the world only in black and white with little room for nuance and are intolerant of opposing world views.

This kind of attitude can be best seen on Twitter, where Labour activists are keen to pile on one another for failing to meet the latest purity test. By seeing everything in terms of good and evil, the culture attempts to shame or ostracise everyone who slips up, by, for example, using an outdated word or possessing an unfashionable view. It is both easy and dangerous to dismiss this as exclusive to the Twitter bubble, ignored in the real world, but the evidence shows that it has cut through. In Deborah Mattinson's book *Beyond the Red Wall*, she outlines in depth how many former Labour voters are aware of this kind of

culture, or as one person put it, Labour has become the party of "naive and idealistic middle-class students". If Labour are to shed this image, it needs to tackle 'woke culture' head on. It is important at this stage to emphasise that most people who behave in such a way are well intentioned and genuinely believe their actions make a difference. It is also key to recognise that these traits are no longer the sole preserve of the left, as we witnessed when *GB News* suspended Guto Harri for taking the knee on air following backlash from its viewers. But if Keir Starmer is serious about focusing on what "unites us a country", he should take ownership and show leadership on the issue.





Why? Beyond the toxic atmosphere this creates is, in simple terms, bad politics. It should be obvious but this hysterical, aggressive style of discourse is not conducive to persuasion and in fact does the precisely the opposite, providing oxygen for the alt right. If the new Labour base is metropolitan, middle class and university educated, it is easy to see why voters would conflate 'woke culture' with snobbery.

While that is not to say that everyone has a free pass to behave as they like exempt from criticism, the Labour leadership need to facilitate a change in culture that is both accommodating of mistakes and understanding of nuance. Take Barack Obama's intervention on the matter at a talk in 2019 as an example:

*"This idea of purity and you're never compromised and you're always politically woke and all that stuff, you should get over that quickly. The world is messy. There are ambiguities. People who do really good stuff have flaws... there is this sense sometimes among young people [who believe] the way of making change is to be as judgemental about people as possible. And that's enough"*

Obama's comments are a pitch perfect progressive critique of 'woke culture' that no sensible person could disagree with.

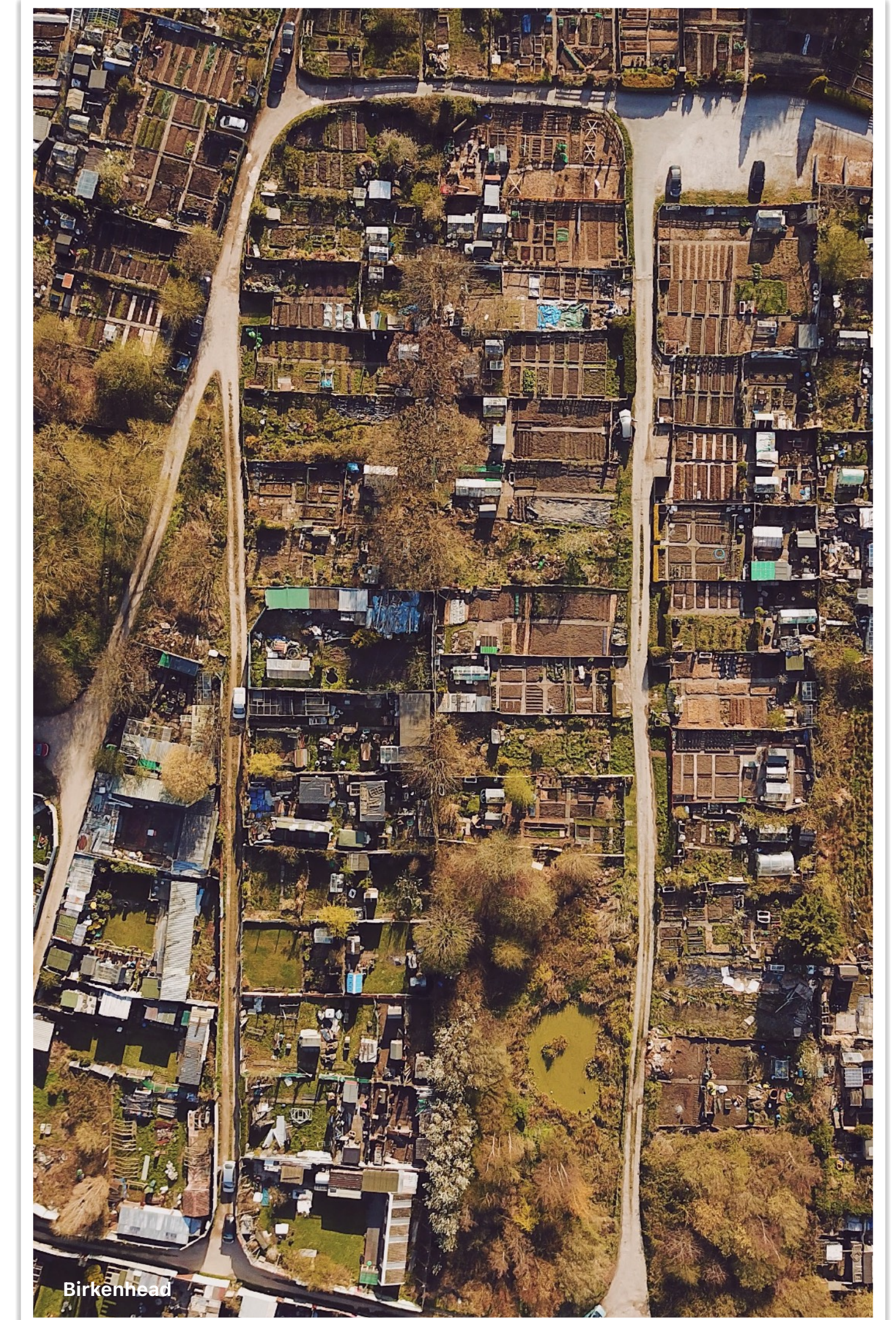
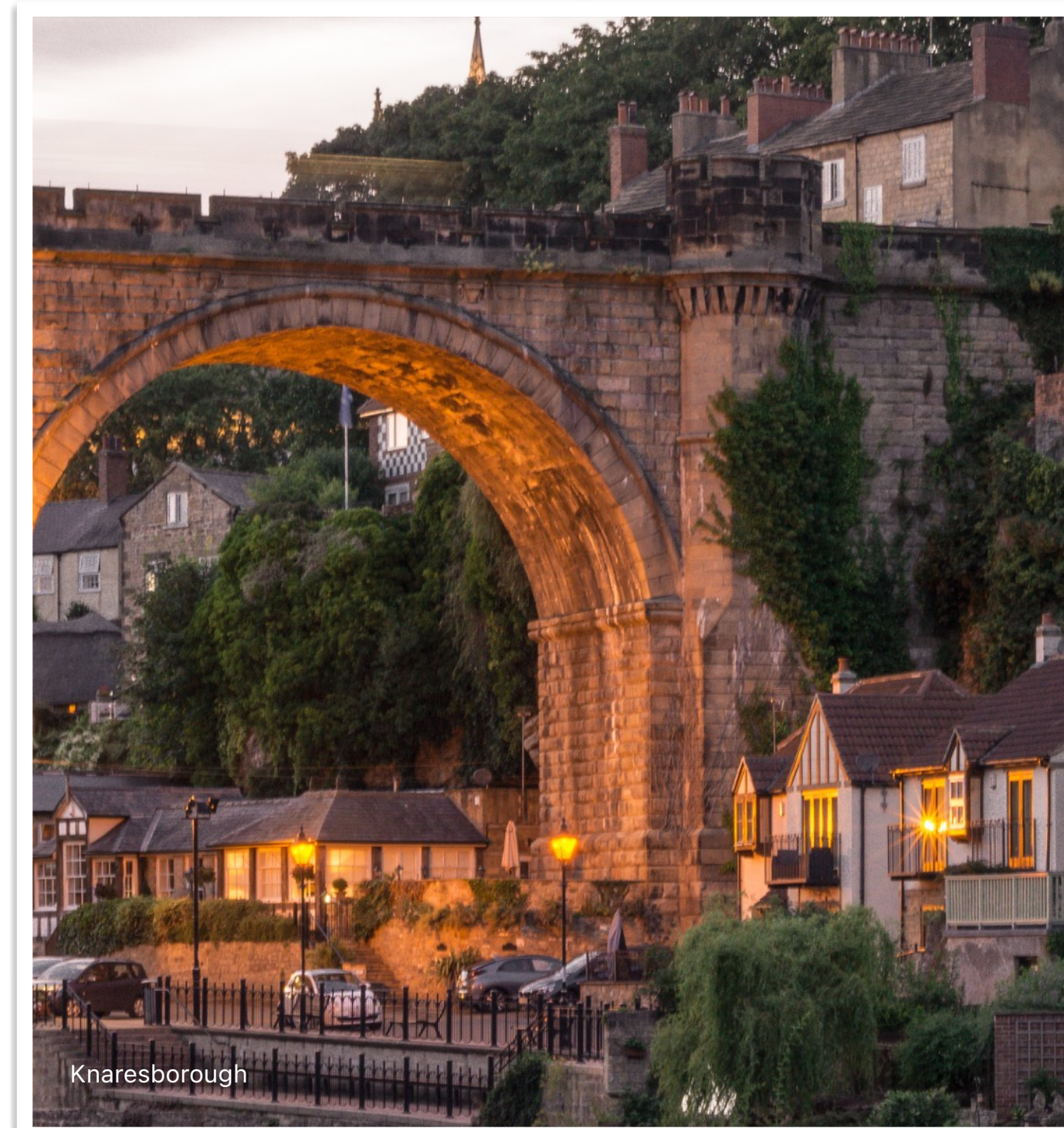
There is a tendency among more moderate elements of Labour to pretend the problem does not exist, no doubt hoping for it to disappear one day. Yet allowing it to fester allows it to become entrenched, and uncomfortable as it may be to take on your own side, it is fundamental to demonstrating to the public that Labour really is changing.

So how does Keir Starmer do this?

**1. Media interventions:** Keir Starmer should make a series of interventions in the media, loudly and publicly criticising this tendency within Labour and setting out the new culture he would like to see. He would benefit from the blanket coverage it will generate from the media who are hungry to cover culture war stories. It would also provide much needed cut through in

the likes of *GB News*, *The Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* – where we need to win round at least some of the readers and viewers to win the next election.

**2. Suspensions:** To demonstrate to the public he is willing to walk the walk, not just talk the talk, Keir Starmer should consider suspending members of the Party who overstep the mark and indulge in serious cases of online abuse. Of course, this should not be weaponised in a factual manner to add fuel to the fire of Labour's civil war. It would send out an important message to the country at large that Labour is serious about transforming its culture.





# Vision

## Emeka Forbes | WA Communications

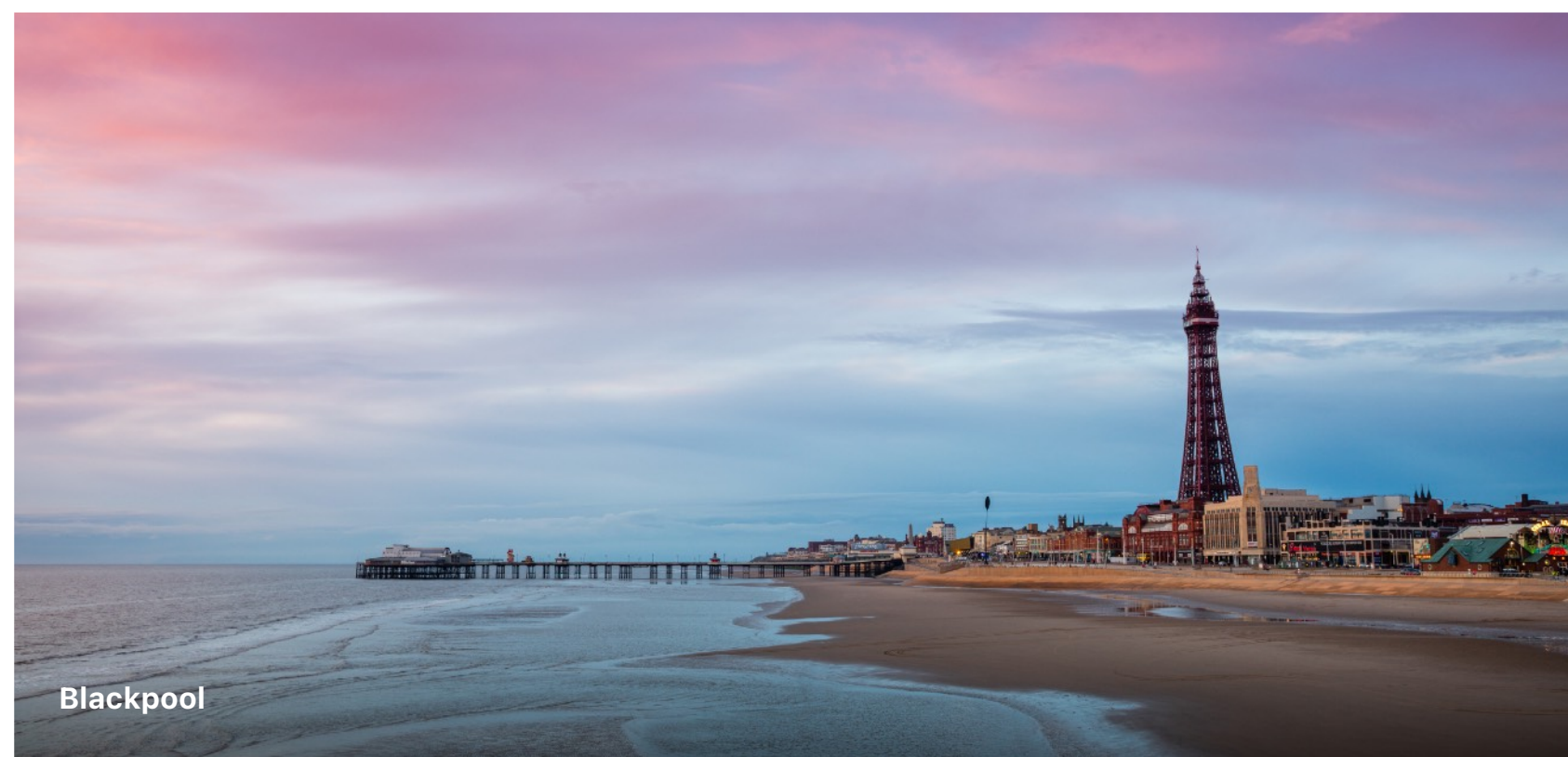


Emeka is a communications consultant, writer and activist. He currently works for consulting agency WA Communications and sits on the board of Room to Heal, a charity supporting refugees and asylum seekers. He previously worked for children's charity Barnardo's providing in-house policy and public affairs support and for a leading global business advisory firm.

## Sarina Kiayani | Interel



Sarina Kiayani is a Consultant at Interel's London office. She is also member of the PRCA's NextGen Public Affairs Committee, which provides support and a network to those in the first 10 years of their public affairs careers. She is a long-standing Labour Party member, having campaigned for Keir Starmer and Andy Burnham in the 2020 and 2015 Leadership Elections, respectively.



Blackpool

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the timing of Keir Starmer's election as Labour Leader during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020 created a uniquely difficult backdrop for his leadership. Starmer has faced an uphill battle to prove he has solutions to one of the country's biggest challenges in living memory.

As well as relegating his victory speech to a mere prerecorded video – a far cry from the roaring speeches to packed out venues of his predecessors – the very nature of the pandemic has forced Starmer to become reactionary from the start of his leadership. He has been buffeted by the changing landscape of the pandemic, which has severely hampered his ability to take a proactive stance and differentiate himself from either his predecessor or from Boris Johnson.

Whilst Boris Johnson has also been forced into a reactionary stance by the pandemic, unable to implement key tenets of his 2019 manifesto, voters have recognised the need for this approach given his responsibility for dealing with the crisis. Starmer meanwhile, is not leading the pandemic response, so is not extended the same sympathy from voters.

This is not to say the problem Starmer faces is entirely the pandemic's making. We cannot shy away from the fact that Starmer's messaging has been muddled at times, his responses slow and his determination not to provide "opposition for opposition's sake" has proved fatal with voters who have seen him as weak. It is for these reasons that Labour's strategy must now radically change.

As noted in this report, we must give voters a viable alternative to the Conservatives, setting out a

proactive vision for a Britain which can rebuild in the aftermath of COVID-19 and respond to the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

We simply cannot achieve this by engaging in tit-for-tat politicking and focusing our energies into policy alone. Whilst this report sets out practical insights and analysis about how Labour can effectively leverage traditional and digital media, and develop timely and impactful policy positions, this must all be underpinned by a strong long-term vision.

We tend to speak about politics in the language of sport or military battles. We talk about scoring goals against ones political opponents, going on the attack, parking tanks on the lawn. The problem with this framing, however, is that it supposes that the so-called game of politics has a clearly defined endpoint.

Labour's crushing 2019 general election defeat seems to have sparked a rise in this short-term thinking. Instead of speaking about its vision for a Britain which works 'for the many not the few' to quote Starmer's predecessor, Labour has become seemingly obsessed with winning the next election. Although this stance is likely, and justifiably, a reaction to being out of Government for over a decade, Labour needs a root and branch overhaul that focusses on the next several general elections – not solely on 2024.

Whilst there is nothing wrong with a focus on winning in principle, too much attention on the short term without an eye on long-term goals is ultimately harmful. In setting a vision, Labour must create a narrative and a goal which stretches far beyond any single person or election.



Crucially, Labour must recognise that a vision is not a roadmap or a plan. A vision should have no logical endpoint in order that it can become a rallying cause for continuous progress. Unlike a plan, which is a practical resource designed to appeal to the rational and thinking side of our brain, Labour's vision must first and foremost be designed to appeal to people's emotions.

It is well known that in order to win an argument, one must win both hearts and minds. That is now the challenge for Labour under Starmer. We must avoid the trap of over-intellectualising the challenge we face, by, for example, assuming that a clearer communications strategy alone or a slightly improved policy on a given issue is the key to winning.

Instead, we must set out a long-term vision and gear our strategy towards achieving it. We must recognise the long-term nature of our challenge, and accept that in our efforts to realise it, we will ebb in and out of power. The marker of success for our vision will ultimately be our impact on people's lives – not the number of year's we remain continuously in Government.

#### **How can this be carried out?**

Britain is in a constant state of change. Its population is both ageing and diversifying, with growing numbers of ethnic minorities and a growing LGBTQ+ community. As such, setting a vision fit for the 21st century calls for an inclusive process which reflects people's lived experiences.

Labour should therefore embrace the principle of co-design, and work meaningfully with communities to establish guiding values and ideas. Our vision should be evolving, recognising the pace of change around us, and should be firmly grounded in the long-term far beyond the scale of individual elections.

Labour has already committed to working to make Britain the best place to grow up and grow old. There are various key pillars which must become part of our vision to support this aim:

- We must commit to making Britain an equitable society, ensuring people have fair access to the opportunities they need to thrive, reducing wealth inequality, eliminating discrimination on the basis of gender, sexuality, race, age, immigration status or other attributes.
- We must reduce our environmental impact, and go beyond net zero to create a positive impact year on year, through rewilding and reducing our overall consumption. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's recent report made clear that we cannot afford to sit idle in the fight against climate change, as we have a limited number of years before damage is irreversible. The climate emergency should therefore be at the very forefront of Labour's vision.
- We must also uphold public safety. We should address the root causes of crime - which in many cases link to poverty, and embrace a new approach to policing and justice which is protective and rehabilitative, not punitive for the sake of being punitive. Our military must work to uphold new values, shedding its legacy of colonialism and acting as a positive force for good in the world. This can be done through both responding to humanitarian crises and protecting refugees and minorities.
- Finally, we must build a future industry which can respond to the opportunities and challenges of tomorrow, upskilling and reskilling workers through lifelong learning and encouraging innovation. Going beyond the Conservatives' Northern Powerhouse and Lifetime Skills Guarantee, this would be clear in communicating how the party supports finding a career for life, not just a job for now.

Only by focusing on the longer-term picture, not short-term needs, can Labour really begin to shed the failures of the last decade and formulate a vision of real success that can inspire a new generation.





## Who we are

- Labour in Communications is a network of over 1,200 Labour Party supporters working in the corporate communications, public relations, public affairs and government relations sectors.
- The network provides a social environment for like-minded people to meet and discuss political issues; share perspectives; consult on ideas and serve as a platform to publish writing.
- Labour in Communications also runs a mentorship programme called Impact: one to one mentoring advice and skills training to people from minority and disadvantaged communities looking to pursue a career in politics, communications and government relations.
- For media enquiries, please get in touch at: [hello@labourincomms.org.uk](mailto:hello@labourincomms.org.uk)
- You can sign up to receive Labour in Communications updates here: <https://www.labourincomms.org.uk/take-action>

