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GK insights on the Labour Party Shadow Cabinet Reshuffle

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For the second time in 2021, the Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer, has undertaken a wide-ranging reshuffle of his shadow cabinet. With Sir Keir promoting a number of key figures from the right of the party, he also effected the removal of several ineffective operators on the soft left and those inherited from Corbyn's leadership. The move appears to point to a fresh shift towards the political centre, with some familiar faces from the Miliband era returned to the front bench, along with significant promotion for some of the party's 'rising stars'.

Reshuffles rarely go smoothly...

For the public, reshuffles often seem largely irrelevant – with one little known Shadow Cabinet member replaced by another by a similarly unknown profile. However, on the scale of past Shadow Cabinet reshuffles, Sir Keir's latest certainly cut through.

While reshuffles rarely go smoothly, Sir Keir's latest reorganisation got off to a somewhat chaotic start, appearing to blindside his deputy, Angela Rayner, who was informed of the reshuffle in the midst of a media round and major speech in the Commons on standards in public life. Briefings and counter-briefings ensued and a row between the Leader and Deputy Leader threatened to bubble over, again.

The rest of the day went much better for Starmer, as he successfully managed to ruthlessly shuffle the pack without any further public drama. Labour now have in place a Shadow Cabinet that the leadership believe are the best people for the job and can lay the groundwork for the next general election.

Left over and out

The first casualty from the reshuffle was surprisingly not a sacking but a resignation: Cat Smith, previously publicly loyal to Starmer, refused an offer to stay in her post, citing concerns over Jeremy Corbyn's suspension from the party and the leadership's lack of enthusiasm for electoral reform. With Andy McDonald and Marsha de Cordova also gone, the Labour left's last remaining foothold on the Shadow Cabinet is over. The soft left also emerges considerably weaker from the reshuffle. While Rayner remains, thanks in part to her elected post, Ed Miliband and Kate Green have lost their respective business and education briefs, while Nick Thomas Symonds is replaced by Yvette Copper at Shadow Home Secretary after his failure to effectively cut through to the public.

Elsewhere, Lisa Nandy, while technically demoted from Shadow Foreign Secretary, will now shadow Michael Gove in a well-suited role as Shadow Levelling Up Secretary, focusing on the newly rebranded department's task of ironing out geographic and socio-economic disparities.

Right time

The promotion of Bridget Phillipson and Wes Streeting, two key figures from the right of the party to education and health respectively, is reward for their position as Labour's most effective media communicators in recent months. Streeting inherits the Shadow Health brief from long-serving Jon Ashworth, who moves in turn to Work and Pensions.

With the Prime Minister under pressure after a series of backbench revolts and falling approval ratings, Starmer's team will feel that this was the right moment for a reshuffle. The hope is that the new team strikes the right balance between experience and youth.

Only time will tell if Starmer's new Shadow Cabinet can sharpen up the Opposition's scrutiny of the Government and begin to make the inroads needed to be seen as a credible Government in waiting.

For more information or you would like to speak to the GK team, please contact Jack Sansum at jack@gkstrategy.com

The image features a dramatic silhouette of the Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben) and the Houses of Parliament in London. The scene is set against a vibrant sunset sky with warm orange and yellow hues and scattered clouds. The Union Jack flag flies from the top of the tower. The text 'Starmer's Top Team' is overlaid in a white, serif font, centered across the middle of the image.

Starmer's Top Team



Wes Streeting MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Overview

Position: Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Party: Labour Party

Constituency: Ilford North

Majority: 5,218

Background

Wes Streeting is the Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, a position he assumed on 29 November 2021. He has previously held the roles of Shadow Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Shadow Minister for Schools, and most recently the Shadow Secretary of State for Child Poverty.

As Shadow Secretary of State for Health, he is responsible for holding the work of the Department of Health and Social Care and that of his counterpart, Sajid Javid to account. He will therefore be responsible for evaluating Sajid Javid's management of:

- Overall financial control and oversight of NHS delivery and performance
- Oversight of social care policy

Health interest

Streeting has held a long-standing interest in health policy throughout his political and pre-political career. As a local councillor for the London Borough of Redbridge, Streeting led a campaign to save services at King's College Hospital as the Cabinet Member for Health.

NHS and Covid-19

Streeting has been vocal in his defence of the NHS throughout his parliamentary career, most recently questioning the Government's policies affecting the health service over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, he has been [keen](#) to ensure that health workers are sufficiently supported by the Government to prevent NHS services being overwhelmed as a result of the pressure caused by the spread of the virus.

He has also been highly critical of the Government's decision to award hundreds of millions worth of contracts to small companies to supply personal protective equipment (PPE) to the NHS frontline.

Waiting lists

Streeting has consistently contributed to discussions on the UK's waiting lists for healthcare, either through debate contributions or questions to the Department of Health and Social Care. He has focused particularly strongly on the waiting times between referral and treatments for [cancer patients](#), and the waiting lists for those suffering from poor mental health.

Young people

Streeting has also been a supporter of greater focus on the mental health of students and young people. This was particularly apparent at the start of 2021 at the onset of the UK's third Covid-19 lockdown period, where Streeting was critical of the Government's handling of school opening/closures – describing them as a '[public health crisis](#)'.

Priorities

Streeting has said that it is his immediate [priority](#) to fight even more determinedly for the NHS after his experience battling liver cancer across the summer of 2021. He has also previously tweeted both his support for greater recognition of the contribution that key healthcare workers have made over the course of the pandemic, and his determination that health services receive enough funding to continue operating effectively.

Parliamentary Career

After becoming MP for Ilford North in 2015, Streeting has held a number of shadow ministerial briefs, firstly becoming Shadow Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury in April 2020, before taking on the Shadow Schools ministerial role in October 2020.

He has sat on a number of select committees during his time in Parliament, spending 4 years on the Treasury Committee. He has also formed part of various All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), although none of these have been focused on healthcare.

He was a consistent opponent of former Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, [insisting](#) that it was now time for the Labour Party to embrace centre left politics.

Career outside Parliament

Streeting graduated from Selwyn College, Cambridge, where he studied history. Following his graduation, he became President of the National Union of Students, a position which he held for a term, after which he became Head of Education for the LGBT rights charity Stonewall. Notably, he headed up Stonewall's campaign to tackle homophobia in schools.

Following his stint at Stonewall, he became a public sector consultant with PwC, before becoming a local councillor for Redbridge Council. He was elected as Deputy Leader of the Labour Group on the council in 2011, and in 2014, when Labour took control of the council, he was appointed Deputy Leader of the Council. He resigned this role upon his election to Parliament in 2015, though he remained a backbench councillor until May 2018.



Bridget Phillipson MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Education

Overview

Position: Shadow Secretary of State for Education

Party: Labour Party

Constituency: Houghton and Sunderland South

Majority: 3,115

Background

Following Sir Keir Starmer's November 2021 Shadow Cabinet reshuffle, Bridget Phillipson was promoted from Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury to Shadow Secretary of State for Education.

In her new role, Phillipson will have responsibility for holding Nadhim Zahawi and the Department for Education to account, as well as to lead on the development of Labour's education policy offering.

Educational Interests

Phillipson has regularly spoken about poor school outcomes in her area in Sunderland, and raised the issue in a Commons debate in March 2020. A year earlier, she had urged ministers to "get to grips" with "deep seated problems" in the North East.

She has also urged for greater certainty for school budgets and catch up funding, so that schools are able to make their own decisions over the years to come.

In June 2021 she opened a debate on the catch up premium, and raised concerns with the Government's response to pandemic-related education disruption, citing Sir Kevan Collins' (the government's former education recovery commissioner) reservations about the distinct underfunding of various education catch up programmes.

Over her parliamentary career, Phillipson has consistently voted against raising university undergraduate tuition fees and voted against ending financial support for some 16 to 19 year olds in training and further education. She has also consistently voted against academy schools.

Parliamentary career

First elected to Parliament as Member for Houghton and Sunderland South in 2010, she became one of the youngest MPs in the House of Commons, inheriting the seat from former Labour MP Fraser Kemp who stood down in 2010.

After her election, she was swiftly appointed to Ed Miliband's first Shadow Cabinet as PPS to Shadow Defence Secretary, Jim Murphy. She left the role in 2013 to become an Opposition Whip, before leaving the Whips' Office in 2015. Between 2010 and 2013, Phillipson served on the Home Affairs Select Committee. In 2010, she also joined the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission and the Procedure Committee.

Since her election, she has been an active member and Secretary of the APPG on Domestic and Sexual Violence and has spoken out in favour of providing legal aid to spousal abuse victims applying for indefinite leave to remain in the UK.

She has made it known that her legislative interests are in care. Speaking to the *New Statesman* in 2012, she lamented that the current care system is complex, unfair and all too often based around where you live. Another issue of interest is the deregulation of bus services outside of London, which she has described as a total failure.

Career outside Parliament

Phillipson joined the Labour Party at 15 and was Chair of the Oxford University Labour Club during her time at university. After graduating, she worked for Sunderland City Council and before standing as Labour candidate, Phillipson worked as a manager for a women's refuge involved with the Wearside Women in Need organisation.

She has also represented the North East on the Labour Party's National Policy Forum.



Ed Miliband MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Climate Change and Net Zero

Overview

Position: Shadow Secretary of State for Climate Change and Net Zero

Party: Labour Party

Constituency: Doncaster North

Majority: 2,370

Background

Following Sir Keir Starmer's November 2021 Shadow Cabinet reshuffle, Mr Miliband was demoted from Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, to a newly created role, the Shadow Secretary for Climate Change and Net Zero. It is thought that this comes after Miliband has clashed with Starmer in recent months over the Party's position on the nationalisation of energy.

In the newly carved out role Miliband will have responsibility for setting out Labour's vision for net zero, and holding the government to account on the legacy of its COP26 presidency and wider government net zero initiatives. With no formal Department for Climate Change and Net Zero, it will likely mean he will be primarily shadowing Alok Sharma in his post COP26 conference capacity.

Climate Interests

Across his parliamentary career, Miliband has served in a number of climate focused roles, including serving as Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change under Gordon Brown from 2008 to 2010. He remained as Shadow Secretary for this department until he became Leader of the Party in September 2010, where he retained the climate change focus, describing climate change as the 'ultimate challenge' to politics.

After a period of time away from the front bench, Miliband returned as part of Starmer's new Cabinet as Shadow Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Secretary from April 2020, before being reallocated to the new climate brief in November 2021.

Based on this experience, Miliband has strong climate interests and credentials, notably piloting the Climate Change Act into law during his time as Secretary of State in 2008. This Act set binding commitments to cut emissions by 80% by 2050. He also proposed an energy price cap during his time as Labour Leader, which was later implemented by Theresa May's government, and also helped launch the IPPR's Environmental Justice Commission, which he went on to co-chair with Caroline Lucas.

Miliband has often voted in favour of green focused policies, including measures to prevent climate change, however, he has also voted *against* greater regulation on fracking and voted for lower taxes on fuel for motorists.

Parliamentary career

Miliband was first elected in 2005 for Doncaster North and, after a year on the back benches, was made Minister for the Third Sector during Tony Blair's final year in office. Miliband then entered Gordon Brown's Cabinet as Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, with the additional task of writing Labour's 2010 manifesto. He was then promoted to Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change in 2008.

Miliband would then serve as Leader of the Party from 2010 to 2015 as he set out to bring about an agenda of 'responsible capitalism' after he had criticised the Blair and Brown era over its record of civil liberties infringements and military intervention.

Miliband resigned as Leader after Labour's 2015 General Election defeat and returned to the back benches, whilst still regularly speaking out on issues of inequality and climate change.

Career outside Parliament

After completing his education at Oxford studying PPE, and then an MSc in Economics at LSE, Miliband worked as a researcher on Channel 4's *A Week in Politics*. He took a sabbatical to teach economics at Harvard as a visiting scholar whilst also working with the then US Democratic Presidential candidate John Kelly.

He has held a number of parliamentary roles prior to being elected, including as a speech writer for both Harriet Harman and Gordon Brown, and his stint as an adviser and speechwriter to Brown from 1997 – 2002.

When Miliband returned from his sabbatical in USA, he served as Chairman of the Treasury's Council of Economic Advisors from 2004 to 2005.



Lisa Nandy MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing, Communities and Local Government

Overview

Position: Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing, Communities and Local Government

Party: Labour Party

Constituency: Wigan

Majority: 6,728

Background

Lisa Nandy MP is the Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing, Communities and Local Government. Nandy assumes a newly-created shadow cabinet role, to mirror the Government's renaming of the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in September 2021.

Although technically a demotion from her role as Shadow Foreign Secretary, the Labour Leader's office have sought to underline that Nandy's change of position is related to her skill at communicating on domestic issues including Levelling Up.

Nandy's specific responsibilities include holding the Government to account on:

- Housing affairs, such as building regulations and planning
- Community issues, including community cohesion and resilience
- Urban Regeneration
- Local Government operations
- Levelling Up policy, including investment in towns, cities and rural and coastal areas, supporting deprived communities, as well as promoting skills using apprenticeships and the National Skills Fund

Interest in Levelling Up, Housing, Communities and Local Government Issues

Having held a number of shadow cabinet positions, including Shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Nandy is well-versed in handling complex and important briefs. She lists housing as a particular policy interest and is also focused on towns policy, having established The Centre for Towns thinktank alongside data analytics expert Ian Warren in 2018.

One of the few Labour MPs who voiced concern over the party's Brexit position prior to the 2019 General Election, Nandy is seen by the current leadership as being more in sync with voters in the 'Red Wall' constituencies which Labour lost across the North and the Midlands during the 2019 General Election.

In May 2019, she contributed to the [Stronger Towns Fund](#) debate, arguing that 'our towns have suffered from chronic under-investment and disrespect from national politicians'. She has also previously written [articles](#) on the subject of 'levelling up' towns across the UK, by implementing 'an economic plan which works for all parts of the country'.

Parliamentary career

Elected to Parliament in 2010 to represent the Wigan constituency, Nandy was appointed to the position of PPS to the Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office, Tessa Jowell MP. She went on to become Shadow Children and Families Minister, following a two year stint on the Education Committee, where she found herself questioning Michael Gove MP, who was at the time Secretary of State for Education. She then served as Shadow Civil Society Minister, before her first Shadow Cabinet role as Shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change under Jeremy Corbyn MP.

Characterised as on the 'centre-left' of the Labour party, Nandy has gained a degree of support for her untribal mentality, her forthrightness in holding the Government to account, along with her willingness to speak out when she feels her own party may need to face up to uncomfortable truths. During her [first speech](#) as Shadow Foreign Secretary, delivered at Chatham House, Nandy stated that she would prioritise countering Russian aggression, whilst developing a trade policy which promotes 'fairness as well as market access, that protects the environment, and champions labour rights from Bolton to Bangalore'.

Career outside Parliament

Prior to her election to Parliament in 2010, Nandy worked as a researcher for the Labour MP Neil Gerrard, before moving to the charity sector to work for Centrepoint and, later, as a Policy Adviser for the Children's Society. She also served as a Labour Councillor for the Hammersmith Broadway Ward on Hammersmith and Fulham London Borough Council and is a member of Unite the Union and the Communication Workers Union.



Jonathan Reynolds MP,

Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Industrial Strategy

Overview

Position: Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Industrial Strategy

Party: Labour Party

Constituency: Stalybridge and Hyde

Majority: 2,946

Background

Jonathan Reynolds MP is the Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Industrial Strategy. As part of the reshuffle, Reynolds' predecessor Ed Miliband was moved to the newly-created role of Shadow Secretary of State for Climate Change and Net Zero, allowing Reynolds to be reshuffled from his previous role as Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary.

Reynolds' specific responsibilities include holding the Government to account on:

- Relationships and policies regarding business
- Industrial strategy
- Science, research and innovation

Business and Industrial Strategy Interests

Having served as Shadow Economic Secretary to the Treasury from 2016 – 2020, Reynolds is well-placed to take on the brief of Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Industrial Strategy. Reynolds has also sat on a number of relevant committees, including the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee and the Finance and Services Committee.

A solicitor by background who is Vice-Chair of the APPG on Financial Education for Young People, Reynolds has often struck a less radical tone than some of his colleagues, particularly during the Corbyn administration, stating during an April 2018 [debate on Financial Services](#) that 'finance plays a major role in the economy' and that 'financial services are a public good'. However, he also conceded, perhaps unsurprisingly, that a 'Labour Government will be more interventionist in financial services'. In previous [debates](#), he has underlined Labour's calls for 'reversal of reductions in the bank levy', arguing that previous reductions to the levy are effectively tax giveaways to large banks, at a time when the relationship between banks, businesses and customers needs to be revaluated.

Parliamentary career

Elected to Parliament in 2010 to represent the constituency of Stalybridge and Hyde, Reynolds served as an assistant whip and an opposition whip under Ed Miliband MP, before taking on the role of Miliband's PPS. He then served as a Shadow Minister for Energy and Climate Change and, later, Shadow Minister for Transport. Before his current role as Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Industrial Strategy, Reynolds held the position of Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary.

An officer of the Labour Friends of Israel group and Chair of the Christians on the Left movement, Reynolds' stated interests include defence, the economy and business. Having supported Owen Smith MP in the 2016 Labour leadership campaign, Reynolds had also previously offered to resign his position on the Shadow front bench following Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader of the Labour Party. Despite this, Reynolds went on to hold a number of Shadow Ministerial positions under Corbyn, including Shadow Rail Minister, Shadow City Minister and Shadow Economic Secretary to the Treasury.

During the Labour Party Conference in September 2021, Reynolds gave a [speech](#) urging the Government to reverse their cut to Universal Credit. As part of a wider plan to reform the welfare system, Reynolds earmarked 'higher wages, increased sick pay, the right to join a union, flexible working for all, protection from unfair dismissal, a real safety net, and real security and prosperity' as areas which Labour were committed to deliver on.

Career outside Parliament

Prior to his election in 2010, Reynolds trained as a solicitor at Addleshaw Goddard LLP in Manchester. Following the completion of his legal training, Reynolds worked as a Parliamentary Assistant to James Purnell MP – the previous Member of Parliament for Stalybridge and Hyde. Following Purnell's decision to step down as MP, Reynolds, who also had a background in local government as a councillor for Tameside Council, was placed on the shortlist of candidates and inherited the seat.
