

New Government: Latest from No10

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Politics of Burnham's premiership

Andy Burnham has spent the opening fortnight of his premiership establishing a clear sense of governing purpose, much more than we saw under the last Prime Minister. Where Starmer struggled to articulate an overarching political narrative, and the change that voters demanded in 2024, Burnham has prioritised a clear theory of government, and a direct connection with voters in his first days in office.

The appointment of his first Cabinet and ministerial team signalled a change in priority. The ruthless dismissal of many of Starmer's allies showed this would not be a continuity administration. Meanwhile the appointment of John Healey as Chancellor, the return of Lucy Rigby as Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and Dan Tomlinson's renewed focus on growth were all interpreted as signals of fiscal discipline and continued engagement with business. The decision to expand the Treasury's business engagement unit further reinforces this emphasis to repair relations with the private sector.

Burnham has also worked on internal party management. The reshuffle inevitably disappointed those who missed out on jobs – particularly the 2024 intake – whilst the return of three of Labour's hard-left caucus demonstrates a willingness to create the broad church that Burnham promised. His decision to strengthen the role of Parliamentary Private Secretaries – the MP aides to ministers – gives them greater responsibility for political communications and media. Alongside the impressive new No.10 comms operation, Burnham is pursuing a strategy to 'flood the zone' with public facing digital media, reducing the reliance on the Westminster Lobby much to their frustration.

Early polling suggests Burnham is benefitting from the bounce that often follows a change in Prime Minister. Labour moves four points clear of Reform UK for the first time since November 2024, and Burnham leads his competitors as "who would be the better prime minister." GK Strategic Adviser Phil Hope, who worked with Burnham, reflected the new government's focus on cost of living resonates with ordinary people outside the Westminster bubble.

The Burnham Bounce is still in its early stages, but the initial signs suggest a government intent on campaigning from within No.10 and conducting politics differently as Burnham has promised. If that momentum can be sustained, Burnham will be well placed to convert an early political honeymoon into his own mandate should he wish to go to the country sooner than 2029.

Andy Burnham's policy priorities

Despite some early retail offers to the electorate in the form of a VAT cut on energy bills and a £2 bus fare cap alongside a widespread commitment to devolution, Andy Burnham's new government is still finding its feet on the details of its emerging policy agenda. What we do know from his early announcements, however, is that the new prime minister has clear ambitions to reform education pathways centred around technical education and set out a long-term programme of reform to the adult social care system.

Expanding access to technical education is, at least in headline terms, one of the key priorities for the new administration. The prime minister has now announced that 14-year-olds will have the opportunity to combine core academic subjects with technical education that's linked to the jobs available in their local area. Burnham has said that this will build on local initiatives, such as the creation of the Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc), and means that young people can develop the knowledge and skills that local employers need.

The government is though facing early questions as to whether schools have sufficient funding and capacity to deliver this shift and how school leaders will work with local employers to design new pathways and determine how they operate. Industry experts have also raised concerns that the proposals could impede social mobility by simply locking young people into the skill needs of their local area rather than providing a platform to pursue opportunities across the country.

Progressing with reform of the adult social care system remains high up on Burnham's list of policy priorities. The prime minister, like many of his predecessors, has committed to end 'decades of political inaction on social care' and has invited opposition parties to come together to identify a long-term roadmap for reform. These political niceties, however, don't actually address the most intractable question of social care reform – how should the system be funded? Until consensus is reached on this question, any cross-party engagement risks becoming simply another talking shop for social care reform.

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For more information about our work and how we can support you, please email one of our Senior Partners:

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