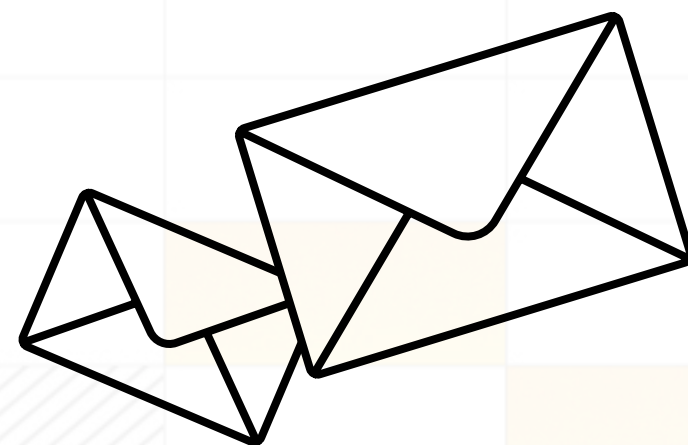


Reforms? For spring?
Groundbreaking.

There's nothing like making a statement to see in a new season, and this edition looks at the promises from Reeves in the fiscal statement – the latest in a long, *long* line of Labour announcements over the last month. We contemplate whether her controversial welfare cuts will permanently divide the Labour party, whether there's finally a solution in sight for the UK-vs-potholes battle, and the power of TV to shape public policy.

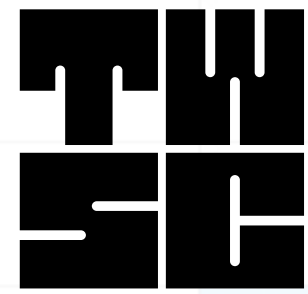


THE POLITICAL FORECAST

PARLIAMENTARY PULSE

Against a backdrop of lacklustre growth forecasts, geopolitical turbulence, and Labour's self-inflicted welfare war, the Chancellor managed to strike a tone of precarious positivity during her Spring Statement. Yes, she blamed the Tories (and Liz Truss' ghost) for the fiscal hangover. Yes, she mentioned "stability" 14 times. And yes, she doubled down on those wildly contentious welfare cuts – freezing the Universal Credit health element and slashing it for new claimants. The Opposition's response? Mel Stride branded it an "*emergency budget of reckless choices*," while the Greens accused Reeves of "*doubling down on austerity*." The Office for Budget Responsibility's revised projections underscored the challenge: GDP growth halved to 1% for 2025, with inflation set to peak at 3.7% and pre-policy

fiscal conditions eroding earlier headroom. Reeves countered by prioritising defence spending (2.5% of GDP by 2027, funded by cuts to overseas aid), unveiling a £13bn infrastructure investment package, and pledging £3.25bn for public sector "*transformation*" – a mix of AI-driven efficiency programs and civil service restructuring. With June's Spending Review looming, Labour's banking on its majority to muzzle dissent. But as the CBI warns of "*damaging*" regulatory burdens and the IFS shrugs "*this isn't austerity, but...*" the cracks in Starmer's growth narrative are showing. For now, the Chancellor's crossing her fingers that voters – and her party – will swallow the pain for promises of a sunlit upland. Or at least smoother roads ahead, more on that on the next page...



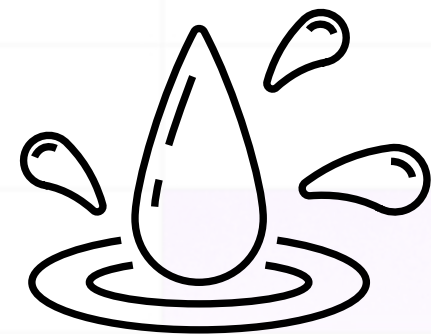
BEYOND THE BUBBLE

Councils in England will be ranked on their pothole-filling efforts under new government plans, with those failing to publish progress reports set to lose out on a quarter of their extra funding. The Department for Transport has announced a £500m boost for road maintenance, but *only* for councils willing to document their repairs.

The move comes as the Local Government Association warns that the UK's road repair backlog would take over a decade and £17bn to clear. Critics argue that the plan adds bureaucracy rather than fixing the problem, while the government insists the new "RAG" rating system will hold councils accountable. In any case, local authorities now face the choice of filling potholes or filling out paperwork.

MAKING A SPLASH

The First Minister, John Swinney, was unequivocal at the start of March that there should be no state visit for President Trump. But that sentiment didn't seem to extend to Trump's business interests in Scotland. Less than two weeks later, Eric Trump, a senior advisor in the family business, was meeting with the First Minister in Bute House. Apparently, the discussion focused solely on business, but as Co-leader of the Green Party Lorna Slater pointed out, the lines between business and politics for Trump have always been blurred. It's worth remembering the Greens might be power brokers again come the 2026 Holyrood election. But Swinney, much like Starmer, is walking a tight rope, desperate for investment in Scotland and probably willing to take a little flak for the visit.

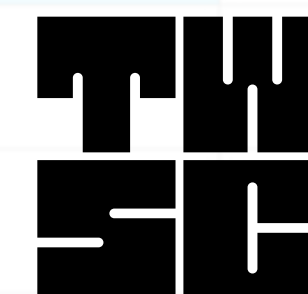


VIRAL VIEW

Netflix's new mini-series 'Adolescence' has captivated the country. Its story has ignited extensive discussions on social media and within political spheres.

Adolescence's portrayal of 13-year old Jamie's involvement in a female classmate's death, influenced by online culture, has prompted senior political figures (including Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson and First Minister John Swinney) to advocate for measures such as smartphone bans for children, measures to tackle misogyny and violence in schools, and challenging toxic influencers. The series has pushed political conversations across the UK to focus on how social media can influence young people's behaviour and societal norms.

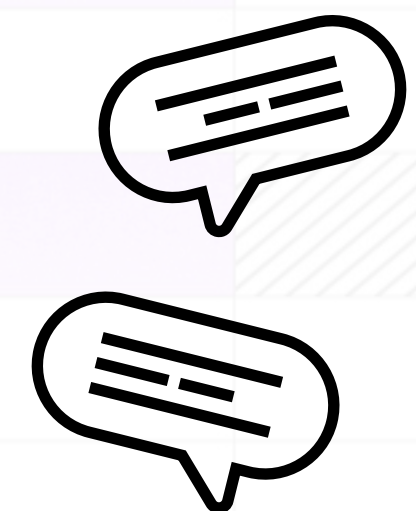
Like *Mr Bates vs the Post Office*, this shows the power of TV and film to drive political change. Bates' relentless pursuit of justice for sub-postmasters led to public apologies and policy reforms. In a world dominated by TikToks, it shows the power of longer-form content is not to be ignored.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"I have done nothing wrong, and I don't think there was ever a scrap of evidence that I had done anything wrong."

Nicola Sturgeon

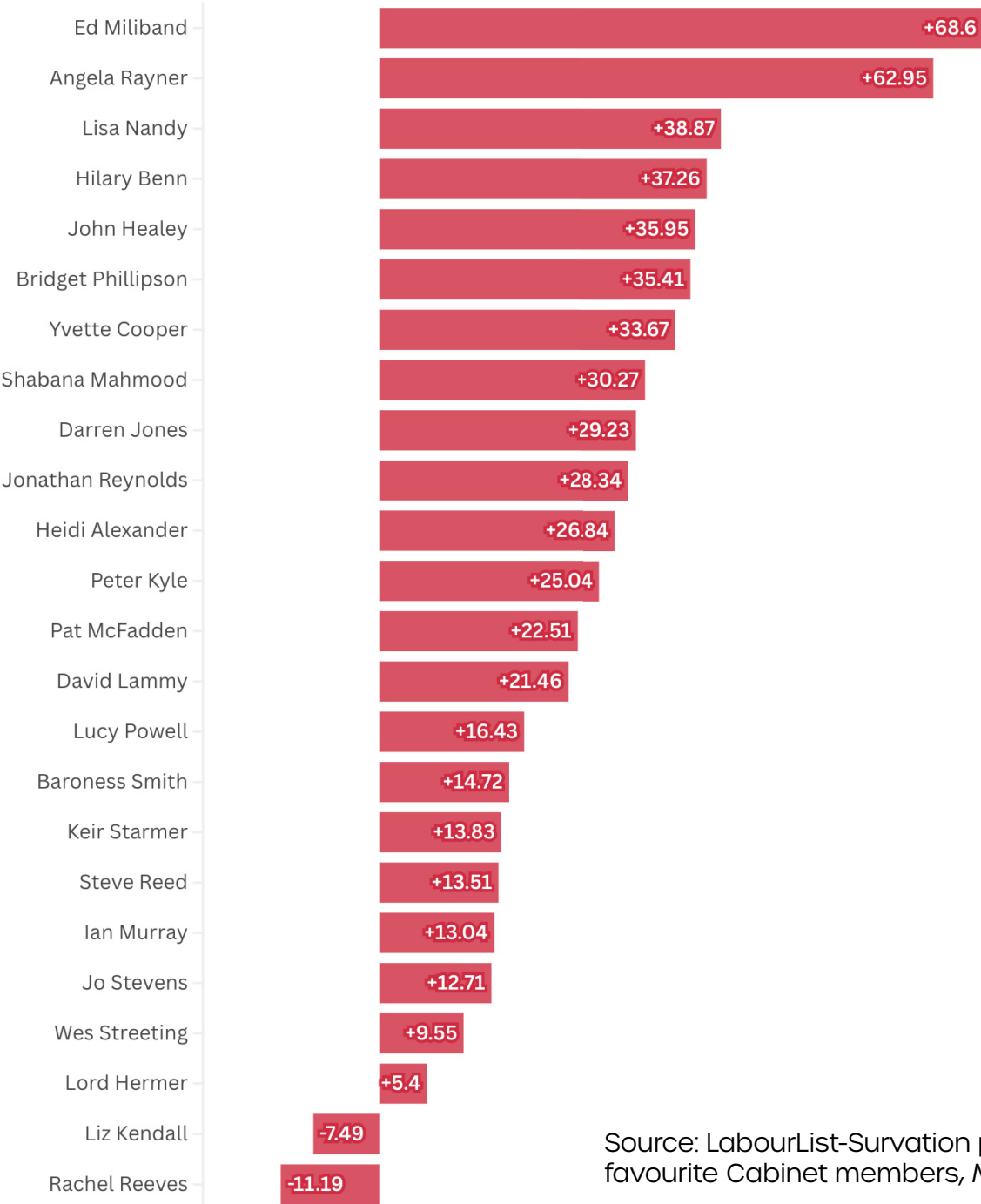


POLITICS IN NUMBERS

Ed Miliband is enjoying a political comeback! The former Labour leader-turned-Energy Security and Net Zero Secretary has topped a LabourList-Survation poll as the most popular Cabinet member among party members, boasting a stellar net favourability of +68.6. Who'd have thought a man once mocked for that bacon sandwich moment would be the darling of the Labour Party? Hot on his heels was Housing Secretary Angela Rayner with +62.95, while Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy trailed

in third with +38.87. Meanwhile, Keir Starmer didn't exactly set hearts racing, landing 17th with a lukewarm +13.83, and facing huge regional and age-based variations (Scotland gave him a frosty -14. Ouch!) Adding to the drama, Chancellor Rachel Reeves (-11.19) and Pensions Secretary Liz Kendall (-7.49) earned negative ratings amid grumbles over fiscal cuts. And while 52% of members want Starmer to lead Labour into the next election, Andy Burnham - despite not even being an MP - has emerged as the fan-favourite for future leadership, leaving us wondering if "King of the North" might be his next title!

LabourList/Survation Cabinet league table
Net favourability



Source: LabourList-Survation poll of members' favourite Cabinet members, March 2025

INSIGHTS FROM ANTHROPY

Whilst the Chancellor welcomes spring with her statement in Parliament, Weber's Head of PA Ella has been looking for literal green shoots at the Eden Project for the Anthropy Conference.

This annual gathering of individuals with backgrounds in sustainability, communications and politics boasts an impressive line-up of speakers and discussions which has led it to be dubbed the UK's Davos by some. Weber Shandwick hosted and spoke at sessions on the role of creative industries in harnessing the UK's soft power, the role of corporate advocacy when politics is broken, and whether the anti-ESG movement means an end to corporate purpose.

There were uplifting insights from businesses and third sector leaders who highlighted the positive impact of focusing on purpose, and how this discussion can be reframed to show business benefits alongside societal benefits. Discussions on the potential of AI to revolutionise society are predictably everywhere and there is a certain sense of preaching to the converted across many of the sessions. But the overall positivity and drive for change is palpable and we can only hope it has a lasting impact outside of the microclimate of the beautiful Eden Project.