



Industry Forum May Newsletter

A real prospect for change

The May local and mayoral election results show that the coming general election will almost certainly bring a new administration with a mandate for radical change. Until a general election, however, the country is in a state of planning limbo affecting government and business. After the election a new, likely Labour-led, administration would be constrained in improving public services, raising defence spending, and investing in infrastructure, by the high level of taxes and high borrowing costs.

The private sector could help to restart growth as there is a real prospect of new investment from companies who have been waiting for a stable policy environment. A successful recovery will, however, need a transformation in conventional economic thinking to restore purpose and optimism to all sectors of the economy. What will be needed will be unified economic policies that recognise the benefits of a comprehensive industrial policy, as well as adequate housing, health and social services. For the dynamic industries that will reinvigorate the economy it will be particularly necessary to work together to provide the skills, industrial environment, and trade environment that they need. At the Industry Forum, we are optimistic about the future and the vital contribution of dialogue and planning as new ministers grapple with turning manifesto promises into credible plans and budgets.

We have two important meetings coming up and many more in planning. Our major House of Commons Business Reception for members and guests is planned for the evening of 11 September. It will be sponsored by Workday and Vodafone and Darren Jones MP, Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury will be the keynote speaker. Looking towards the end of the year, almost certainly after the general election, we are planning a Christmas reception for members and guests to meet some of the next government.

Tackling our immigration issues



20 May 2024

Speaker: Stephen Kinnock MP, Shadow Minister for Immigration

A big factor in the Brexit debate was the perceived need to exercise control over immigration from other EU countries. Since Brexit, the loss of access to EU workers has caused disruption in healthcare, social care, agriculture and construction, and the needs of such sectors have caused immigration from non-EU countries to surge.

There has also been no progress in dealing with the immigration backlog and the level of illegal immigration via small boat crossings. The high cost solution of sending some asylum seekers to Rwanda has so far not deterred asylum seekers or reduced the backlog. Stephen Kinnock MP, Shadow Minister for Immigration will lead a roundtable on 'Tackling our immigration issues.'

Fallout from the HS2 cancellations



12 June 2024

Speaker: Sir John Armitt CBE, Chair, National Infrastructure Commission

It is now over six months since the government's surprise, and to many unwelcome, decision to scrap the planned HS2 extensions north and east of Birmingham. At the time, it was unclear whether the collection of replacement schemes announced

would address the gaps left and form part of a coherent rail strategy. Also uncertain were the implications for UK rail equipment manufacturing, and the goal of economic levelling up for some northern regions of the UK. To address such questions, Sir John Armitt, Chair, National Infrastructure Commission, will lead an Industry Forum roundtable discussion on the 'Fallout from the HS2 cancellations.'

Industry Forum Business Reception



11 September 2024

Keynote speaker: Darren Jones MP, Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury

UK prosperity and our standing in the world depend heavily on economic success which, in turn, depends a lot on our success in harnessing digital technology. We are therefore delighted that our House of Commons Business Reception this year will be sponsored by two leading international digital sector companies Workday and Vodafone. The keynote speaker will be Darren Jones MP, Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury who was, until recently Chair of the Business and Trade Select Committee. Others speakers will be added.

Other meetings, currently in planning include:

- Strengthening the SME sector
- Policy priorities for building safely
- Future UK environment and climate policy, and business engagement
- Delivering real benefits from science, innovation and technology
- Improving our digital infrastructure would be a win/win for businesses and the economy
- Reforming UK corporate governance is key to invigorating the UK economy
- Funding radical change
- Building a new positive relationship with Europe

These are all major topics which we hope to cover in some depth at meetings and policy workshops.

In addition, in the coming year, we are planning to host House of Commons dinners to discuss key sectoral issues with policymakers, and another House of Commons Reception for members and guests.

As well as members, we invite diplomats, academics, union representatives, and business guests to participate in our meetings.

Our most recent Industry Forum meetings have focused on managing parliamentary business and reforming the Civil Service.

Managing the business of the House of Commons



16 April 2024

Speaker: Lucy Powell MP, Shadow Leader of the House of Commons

The critical importance of managing the business of the House of Commons is not widely understood. Should Labour win the coming general election, this vital role would likely fall to the current Shadow Leader of the House, Lucy Powell. Clearly relishing the prospect, Lucy Powell led a wide-ranging Industry Forum roundtable on how she would approach this challenge. An incoming reformist government would clearly have a lot of work to do in rapidly turning policies into draft bills and then legislation. In addition, there are major challenges for big cross-departmental projects or missions which are currently not well managed by the Cabinet Office. It is important to restore standards in public life and restore controls on the executive exercised by, for example, the select committees. Large issues such as House of Lords reform will also need to be considered. Bearing in mind the current poor fiscal situation all changes will need to be accomplished without the luxury of generous budgets. The business audience at the roundtable could fully appreciate these constraints; the potential bonus for Lucy Powell and Labour is that they also indicated that clear and consistent plans and policies would be valuable to business and could be the key to unlocking private investment in the UK. This meeting was hosted by Workday, a leading provider of cloud based financial and personnel management services.

Reforming the Civil Service for the 21st Century



7 March 2024

Speaker: Rt Hon Lord Maude of Horsham

Joining us for an Industry Forum roundtable hosted by Workday, in March, the Rt Hon Lord Maude of Horsham, argued that addressing Civil Service governance and accountability shortcomings should be a top priority for the new, post general election, UK Government. From his government commissioned 'Independent Review of the Governance and Accountability of the Civil Service', he quoted some key findings:

- The arrangements for governance and accountability of the Civil Service are unclear, opaque and incomplete.
- There has been a failure over decades to implement or sustain uncontroversial reforms and improvements.
- There should be a comprehensive and transparent scheme of delegation of the Prime Minister's statutory power to manage the Civil Service and the appointment of a dedicated and full-time head of the Civil Service.

The significance of these points, coming from a consummate Westminster insider with experience at the top levels of government and business, was not lost on those attending. It became clear that for the UK to tackle its many challenges and become an agile, prosperous state with good public services, Lord Maude's findings need to be addressed as a bi-partisan priority.

New members welcome

The Industry Forum was established in 1993, and has held over 500 meetings with top policy-makers since then. It is one of the most experienced, and well-networked, business policy think tanks in the UK. If you're not already a member, and would like to help shape our agenda, host events, and receive invitations to all meetings, get in touch by email at info@industry-forum.org, or give us a call to find out more on 0207 434 0090.