

RECONNECTING LABOUR

SUMMARY OF INITIAL FINDINGS

DAN JARVIS MP

KEY POINTS

- Labour has been in denial for too long about the challenges posed by UKIP. They cost Labour a lot of votes in constituencies we needed to win back from the Tories and they won a lot of votes in Labour heartland seats.
- There are no quick fixes for stemming the rise of UKIP, but we won't achieve it by out-UKIPing UKIP or our-Torying the Tories, nor by lurching to the left to make ourselves feel better but do nothing for those who have lost faith in us.
- We need to revitalise local party engagement, recruit candidates from more representative backgrounds, and make it clear what we stand for as a Party and our policy response must include reassurance on issues like work and immigration, an economic plan to extend opportunity to communities that feel forgotten, a distinct message for older people, and reclaiming our mantle as a patriotic party.



INTRODUCTION

The first step towards solving any problem is acknowledging that one exists in the first place.

Frankly, the devastating nature of the General Election result has presented Labour with no shortage of challenges. Labour didn't just lose an election on May 7th – we lost our connection with millions of people across the country.

As we look to renew and rebuild, we know we need to win back votes from the Tories. But it is also clear they are not the only opponents we need to overcome across England and Wales. Labour needs to tackle UKIP too.

If we are honest with ourselves, we know Labour has been in denial about the problem posed by UKIP for too long. For years we tried to shrug it off as a threat only to the Tories. We talked about taking on Farage, but in reality we were more comfortable picking fights with Nick Clegg.

The consequences of this were evident on Polling Day. UKIP may only have retained a single seat, but they cost Labour many constituencies we needed to win and contributed to our defeat in several communities we never expected to lose.

The same winds of political discontent are blowing across the Continent and fuelling a rise in support for populist parties all over Europe – from the Danish People’s Party, the Swedish Democrats, to Front National leading recent polls in France.

Sustained pressure on living standards, rapid global change and declining trust in mainstream political leaders is meeting with falling election turnout and the loosening of traditional party loyalties.

In short, UKIP and the forces behind them are not going anywhere. Labour needs to take them on.

Our country faces big, difficult challenges today, but the greatest obstacle we face is the increasingly widespread belief that our problems have outgrown our politics.

Some of the longest conversations I had while campaigning across the country over the last year were with people who had lost faith in the idea that politics of any colour can make a positive difference to their lives.

In an age where our livelihoods can be thrown into chaos by property speculators on the other side of the Atlantic, it is not an unreasonable question.

Many of the most disillusioned people I spoke to felt shaken by global forces beyond their control. Too many felt cut-off by an economy that simply doesn’t work for them, left behind from the rest of society and powerless to change their own lives. Some thought that UKIP might be the answer.

That’s why Andy Burnham was right to make this a priority in his campaign for the Labour leadership, and I would like to thank him for asking me to lead this piece of work.

Andy recognised that taking on UKIP is essential both to making Labour relevant again to millions of people and laying the foundations for a Labour majority government.

The initial findings in this report seek to throw further light on this challenge. It outlines the shape of the UKIP threat Labour must now face in different parts of the country, and suggests some of the building blocks that could form part of our response.

I am indebted to everyone who has taken the time to contribute to this report.

I would especially like to thank the hundreds of party members, councillors, candidates, members of the public and the ex-Labour supporters now voting for UKIP who submitted thoughts and local feedback to my consultation.

We will only succeed in reconnecting Labour by working together, in the best traditions of our party. In that spirit, I am also pleased to incorporate insights from colleagues who have long been dedicated to tackling UKIP, including John Healey and Jon Cruddas.

This interim report would also not have been possible without the support of The House of Commons Library.

Overall, I hope it will serve as a useful starting point for a wider debate across the Labour movement about how we can renew our party, overcome UKIP's pessimistic brand of politics, and return Labour to government. I look forward to seeing the responses.

Winning again won't be easy, but our bottom line is straightforward. Nigel Farage has made good on his promise to park UKIP's tanks on Labour's lawn. Our response now as a Labour Party should be simple. Bring it on.

DAN JARVIS MP
LABOUR MP FOR BARNESLEY CENTRAL

SUMMARY OF INITIAL FINDINGS

The 2015 General Election result underlined that Britain is not immune to the sense of discontent and disillusionment with mainstream politics sweeping across much of Europe. 'Challenger' parties other than the Tories, Labour and the Liberal Democrats won a quarter of the popular vote – the highest share since 1945.

Although Nigel Farage's party did not make as great a breakthrough as some had predicted, it left an undeniable mark on the British electoral map. Even when the question of choosing a government and a Prime Minister was on the table, more people went to the polls and voted UKIP than ever before.

Just under 4 million people voted for UKIP on Polling Day – a 9.5% increase on its vote in 2010. This gave it 13% of the popular vote and a clear third place finish on the basis of votes cast. UKIP won its first parliamentary seat at a General Election, and underlined this with 120 second place results across the country – from Merthyr Tydfil in Wales to Middlesbrough in the North East, and Folkestone on the south coast.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR LABOUR?

There were three broad trends in how UKIP damaged Labour's prospects across England and Wales. While they are not perfect, they are a useful rule-of-thumb for the complex nature of the populist threat in different parts of the country.

LABOUR WAS CHALLENGED IN OUR TRADITIONAL HEARTLANDS

UKIP achieved dramatic swings in seats like Heywood & Middleton, Dagenham & Rainham and Hartlepool. 63 of the 100 seats where UKIP made their greatest inroads were Labour constituencies, helping them achieve 44 second places in communities that elected Labour MPs.

OUR PATH TO VICTORY WAS BLOCKED IN MANY MARGINAL BATTLEFIELDS

There was a UKIP swing of 10% or greater in more than a third of the 106 key marginals that Labour was targeting in order to form a government. This contributed to defeats all over the country, including Morley & Outwood and both Plymouth seats. Even smaller UKIP gains were enough to make the difference in crucial contests like Croydon Central.

LABOUR IS AT RISK OF SOUTHERN RETREAT

Labour is at risk of Southern Retreat: UKIP also helped entrench Labour's southern discomfort, eroding our foothold in seats we used to hold and would need to regain to win a majority.

UKIP even succeeded in pushing us into third place in constituencies that had Labour MPs as recently as 2010. In places like Basildon and Sittingbourne & Sheppey, Labour is in danger of becoming irrelevant.

THERE IS ALSO A DISTINCT CHALLENGE IN COSTAL COMMUNITIES

These often provide a cocktail of the key factors fuelling support for UKIP, including significant numbers of older voters and blue collar workers left behind by cultural and economic change.

UKIP is effectively serving as a barometer for Labour's shortcomings. Too many no longer trust us and do not think we are on their side – particularly on issues such as welfare and immigration. Many voters were pushed into the arms of the Conservatives for similar reasons. Labour must address these issues if we want to rebuild trust with these communities and govern Britain again. Our ability to win a General Election and form the next government is dependent on meeting this challenge.

BUILDING A LABOUR RESPONSE

There are no quick fixes or silver bullet solutions for stemming the rising UKIP tide. Many people have turned to UKIP due to long-held frustrations with Labour and the wider political establishment. There is little evidence to suggest they will return swiftly or easily.

The challenge ahead for Labour is to build an effective response based on listening and genuine engagement, rooted in the realities facing these communities.

We will not repel UKIP or the populist brand of politics it represents by trying to 'out-UKIP UKIP' and simply taking a tougher line on Europe. Nor should Labour lurch to the left in search of answers that make ourselves feel better but do nothing for the people who have lost faith in us.

There is equally no neat 'one-size-fits-all' formula that will work for every community and we should be wary of trying to create one. The weaknesses of this approach were exposed by *'More Tory than the Tories'* – the response Labour deployed against UKIP from 2014.

This was a valid political critique and it did have some resonance – particularly with older voters in traditional Labour areas where memories of Thatcherism were still long and bitter. It helped secure a clear Labour victory over UKIP in the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner by-election in November 2014 – despite challenging circumstances.

'More Tory than the Tories' was, however, much less effective in constituencies that had voted for Tory governments in the recent past. In some places, it was counter-productive. A number of local Labour campaigns in Southern marginal seats deliberately chose not to use the material – even though they were identifying significant support for UKIP on the doorstep.

It highlights the fact that while UKIP has held up a mirror to Labour's shortcomings, we have yet to develop an effective counter-attack as a party.

If Labour is to reconnect with the people we have lost, we need a fresh approach to the **story** we want to tell as a party, how we express our values through **policy**, and how we do our **politics**.

DEFINING WHAT WE STAND FOR - THE 'STORY' WE WANT TO TELL AS A PARTY

Labour is seen less and less as the party of working people. Too often voters did not know what we stood for. The fault for this must lie with us rather than the public. Labour needs to develop a positive narrative about who we are as a party, what we are about, and the kind of country we aspire to build.

POLICIES - HOW WE EXPRESS OUR VALUES

There are several areas that should form part of any policy response to the concerns that have given rise to UKIP. This includes reassurance on issues like work and immigration, an economic plan to extend opportunity to communities that feel forgotten, a distinct message for older people, and reclaiming our mantle as a patriotic party. As our policy platform is developed between now and the next Election, we must address the legitimate concerns of millions of British people about these issues.

HOW WE DO OUR POLITICS

Different communities face different challenges in reconnecting with the public. We need to ensure that local Labour campaigners are given the capacity, confidence and flexibility to respond effectively to the issues on their doorsteps and rebuild trust at a local level. We must explore ways to revitalise constituency parties, encouraging effective community campaigning and recruiting candidates from more representative backgrounds.



CONCLUSION

The Labour Party has no divine right to expect the support of the British people. We have to earn it.

The relative success of UKIP at the General Election underlined that there is no core vote that will always support Labour, or a golden rule that people dissatisfied with the Government will always give their support to the official party of opposition.

These initial findings do not pretend to hold all the answers for how Labour can win these people back. Instead, it hopes to spark a debate about how our party can regain the trust of the public in the months and years ahead. If there was a lack of proper discussion about taking on UKIP in the last Parliament, there now needs to be a strong focus on how Labour reconnects with the British people in this one.

What is certain is that Labour cannot ignore this issue any longer. UKIP has gained a foothold in our political landscape and the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union will provide it with a significant platform over the coming months.

The referendum presents Labour with the opportunity to take UKIP's arguments head-on, but this is not without risks. The experience of the SNP in Scotland should make us guard against the idea that UKIP will disintegrate if only we can defeat them in a referendum on their central issue.

Labour needs to ensure that we not only win the referendum, but we are also ready for what comes afterwards.

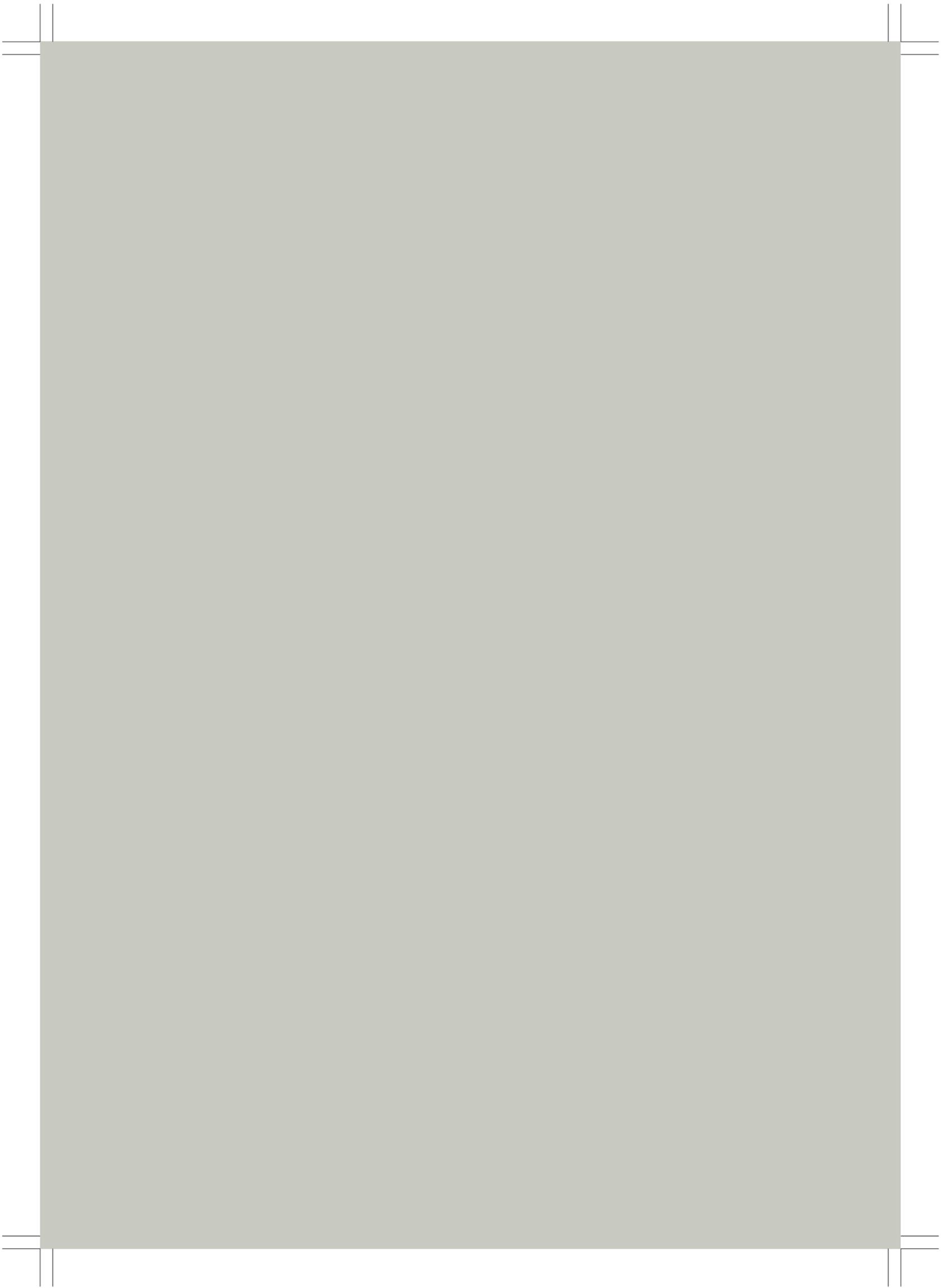
Taking on UKIP also speaks to the broader challenge of reinvigorating Labour and renewing our party's mission. This is a battle we need to win not out of electoral practicality but out of principle – because UKIP represents a direct challenge to what we stand for.

Labour has always been about putting our values into action so that people can succeed in a changing world. Nigel Farage's success, by contrast, has been built on airing grievances with how the world is changing and pretending we can solve them by going back to an easier time. But we will not help Britain succeed tomorrow by yearning for yesterday.

Rather than longing for the world as it was, Labour should lead the debate about what our country is today, and offer a brighter vision for what it could be in the future.

This is important not only in winning back the support of UKIP voters, but in winning again against the Conservatives as well. If Labour cannot produce a vision for our country's future that is more attractive, credible and optimistic than the pessimism offered by Nigel Farage, then we won't defeat David Cameron or whoever comes after him.

The rise of UKIP is a test for Labour. The British people are telling us something. We must show that we have heard them, and that we are up to passing that test.



ANDY BURNHAM
BE PART OF THE CHANGE