

GWE Business West Briefing Note

Conservative Party Policy Overview

Introduction

Conservative Party Policy is organised into 3 main strands:

1. Advancing opportunity
2. Nurturing responsibility
3. Protecting security.

There are then three Overview Papers and a series of Policy Green Papers produced under each strand:

Policy Overview Papers

- Reconstruction – Plan for a Strong Economy
- Repair – Plan for Social Reform
- Renewal – Plan for a Better NHS

Policy Green Papers

- Raising the Bar, Closing the Gap – Policy Green Paper No.1 (Nov 2007)
- Work for Welfare – Policy Green Paper No.2 (Jan 2008)
- Power to the People, The Decentralised Energy Revolution – Policy Green Paper No.3 (Dec 2007)
- Prisons with a Purpose – Policy Green Paper No.4
- A Stronger Society, Voluntary Action in the 21st Century – Policy Green Paper No.5 (June 2008)
- Delivering Some of the Best Health in Europe – Policy Green Paper No.6 (2008)
- Building Skills, Transforming Lives – Policy Green Paper No.7
- The Low Carbon Economy – Policy Green Paper No.8
- Control Shift – Returning Power to Local Communities - Policy Green Paper No.9
- Strong Foundations, Building Homes and Communities – Policy Green Paper No.10
- One World Conservatism, International Development – Policy Green Paper No.11

1. ADVANCING OPPORTUNITY

The focus here is on education and skills, with education seen clearly as the key to opportunity and social mobility.

Education:

The immediate actions include:

- Improving discipline and behaviour in schools by shifting the balance of power in every classroom back in favour of the teacher
- Delivering more teaching by ability which stretches the strongest and nurtures the weakest

The long-term, supply-side revolution will involve:

- Over 220,000 new school places being created
- Freeing up the system whereby new schools are established, to allow charities, livery companies, existing school federations, not-for-profit trusts, co-operatives and groups of parents to set up new schools in the state sector
- Diverting more resources to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds

GWE Business West Briefing Note Conservative Party Policy Overview

Skills:

The proposals in the skills paper include a revolution in skills and training, with:

A massive expansion in the provision of real apprenticeships:

- Measures to make it easier for companies to run apprenticeships
- Creating 100,000 additional apprenticeships every year with a £775 million injection of funds
- A £2,000 bonus for each apprenticeship at a small or medium-sized enterprise

More community learning to improve skills and employability

- A £100 million NEETs fund aimed at youngsters not in any kind of education, training or employment
- A £100 million injection into the adult community Learning Fund

Supply-side reform to set further education fund

- Freeing Further Education colleges from unnecessary bureaucracy
- Allowing new providers to enter the sector

A revolution in careers advice

- Providing a careers adviser in every secondary school and college in the country
- Creating a new all-age careers advice service

NURTURING RESPONSIBILITY

The focus in this strand is strengthening the structures which bring stability and a sense of belonging: home, neighbourhood and nation.

A Conservative government proposes to strengthen families by reforming tax and benefits to support marriage. It proposes to strengthen communities by expanding the role of charities and social enterprises. And to strengthen society with a welfare system that reinforces mutual respect and civility.

Welfare Reform

The proposals outline welfare reform to end the culture of long-term welfare dependence in this country and help make British poverty history.

Respect for those who cannot work

- Those recipients of Incapacity Benefit who cannot work will receive continued support

Employment for those who can

- Every out of work benefit claimant capable of doing so will be expected to work or prepare for work
- A comprehensive programme of support for jobseekers
- Welfare-to-work services to be provided by organisations on a payment by results basis

Assessments for those claiming out of work benefits

- Rapid assessments for new and existing claimants

GWE Business West Briefing Note Conservative Party Policy Overview

Limits to claiming out of work benefits

- People who refuse to join a return to work programme will lose the right to claim out of work benefits until they do
- People who refuse to accept reasonable job offers could lose the right to claim out of work benefits for three years
- Time limits for out of work benefits - so people who claim for more than two years out of three will be required to join community work programmes

Voluntary Sector

The approach is not to change the voluntary sector, but to change government: from being an object that gets in the way of civil society to being a force that gets behind it.

Encouraging giving and volunteering

- Simplify the Gift Aid system to reduce the bureaucratic burden on charities
- Support for volunteering to go through grassroots organisations not government quangos
- Reduce the burden of regulation on volunteers
- Support efforts to establish volunteering as a social norm

Supporting the voluntary sector

- Replace the Big Lottery Fund with a Voluntary Action Fund dedicated to the voluntary and community sector
- Operate a genuine one-stop funding portal for significant government grants
- Create a network of Social Enterprise Zones

Working with the voluntary sector

- Allow voluntary organisations delivering public services to earn a competitive return on investment
- Remove state interference by agreeing on goals and outcomes, not dictating methods of delivery
- Create a powerful Office for Civil Society to fight for the interests of charities and community groups

Health Policy

The focus will be on outcomes, in order to make the NHS more accountable to patients and restore professional discretion over how to treat patients.

The strategy for driving up standards involves:

- Phasing out Labour's process-driven targets
- A national focus on the health outcomes we want the NHS to deliver
- Collecting information about the results of people's treatment in the NHS
- Publishing those results, so we can see where we are making progress and where we lag behind other countries
- Developing outcome measures which patients with chronic conditions themselves provide
- Giving patients a choice of provider so they can use published outcome information to get the care they want
- Introducing payment-by-results within the system

GWE Business West Briefing Note

Conservative Party Policy Overview

Local Communities

The focus here is on the transfer of powers from the central state to local people and local institutions:

- Abolishing all regional planning and housing powers exercised by regional government, returning powers and discretion back to local communities
- Creating bottom-up incentives for house building, by allowing councils to benefit more from the increase in council tax revenues from new homes, rather than being equalised away by Whitehall
- Allowing councils to establish their own local enterprise partnerships to take over the economic development functions and funding of the Regional Development Agencies
- Giving local authorities a new discretionary power to levy business rate discounts, allowing them to help local shops and services, such as rural pubs or post offices
- Provide citizens in all large cities with the opportunity to choose whether to have an elected mayor, through mayoral referendums
- Greater use of direct democracy, including allowing residents to veto high council tax rises, and instigating local referendums on local issues
- Requiring councils to publish detailed information online on expenditure by local councils – including the pay and perks of senior staff, and issuing new guidance to stop ‘rewards for failure’ to sacked town hall staff.

Housing Policy

A radical overhaul of housing policy is proposed in order to promote social opportunity and neighbourhood pride.

The proposals include:

- **Rewards for good behaviour** - tenants with a record of five years’ good tenant behaviour will be offered a 10% equity share in their social rented property, giving them a direct financial stake in the state of their neighbourhood
- **A ‘Right to Move’** - a comprehensive national mobility scheme that will allow good tenants to move to other social sector properties
- **Supporting the low-cost housing sector** – measures will include strengthening shared ownership schemes so that those on intermediate incomes can part-own their home
- **Local Housing Trusts** - villages and towns will be able to create entirely new community-led bodies with planning powers to develop local homes for local people, provided there is strong community backing
- **Break the monopoly on empty government property** - local people will have new powers to demand the Government sell off empty or under-used government property
- **Stopping the Whitehall imposition of unwanted development** - regional planning will be scrapped, enabling councils to revise their current local plans to protect Green Belt land and prevent the unwanted imposition of so-called eco-towns

International Development

A tough new approach to getting value for money from our aid and make sure every penny does the most good possible.

The proposals include:

- Set up an **Independent Aid Watchdog** to scrutinise the impact and outcomes of British aid
- Move towards **results-based aid**, where money is handed to governments only once development results have been achieved - rather than giving all the money up front based on promises that it will be spent well
- **Focus our aid** on the countries where it will make the biggest difference

GWE Business West Briefing Note Conservative Party Policy Overview

- Spend £500 million a year to save lives by **tackling malaria**
- **Empower people** in poor countries by giving them more control over how aid is spent
- Strengthen public support for aid by **giving British people a vote** over where and how some of their aid is spent
- Re-emphasise wealth creation through business development and trade

PROTECTING SECURITY

The focus in this strand is to protect the nation from threats and includes a range of “new ideas” like the introduction of elected police commissioners and crime mapping to make policing more accountable; and a decentralised energy revolution to enable every school, hospital and household to generate their own electricity.

Energy

The aim is to create a decentralised energy revolution in Britain. Instead of relying on the large centralised energy providers of old, the focus will be on micro-generation: small providers, including homes and businesses, producing energy for their own use, using a variety of methods from combined heat and power (CHP) to wind to photovoltaic power.

The decentralised energy paper sets out plans to encourage micro-generation through feed-in tariffs:

- Enable every small firm, local school, hospital and household to generate electricity through micro-generation
- A fixed price to be paid for all electricity produced from decentralised, low carbon sources
- Ensure smart meters are available free of charge to anyone installing micro-generating capacity

Prisons

Britain’s prison system is not working. Half of all crime is committed by previous offenders and 65 per cent of prisoners re-offend within two years of release.

The measures laid out in the policy paper, ‘Prisons with a purpose’, aim to restore confidence in the criminal justice system, re-design prisons for the 21st century, and launch a sentencing and rehabilitation revolution. Proposals include:

- Introduce honesty in sentencing so courts set a minimum and a maximum period of incarceration
- Replace automatic release with earned release
- Make community sentences tough and effective, and withdraw benefits for those who don’t attend
- Enforce Drug Rehabilitation Requirements
- Offenders will compensate victims through a Victims’ Fund. Those serving custodial sentences will pay into the Fund through work in prison
- Prison and Rehabilitation Trusts and private sector prisons will be paid by results - with a premium awarded if the offender is not reconvicted within two years
- Accelerate the deportation of foreign national prisoners
- Increase prison capacity by more than 5,000 places over and above Labour’s plans, to end overcrowding by 2016

GWE Business West Briefing Note Conservative Party Policy Overview

Low Carbon Economy

There is an urgent need to move to a low carbon economy in order to guarantee our energy security, protect the environment for future generations and strengthen our economy by creating hundreds of thousands of jobs.

The policies set out in the policy paper include:

- **An electricity internet** – we will add computing intelligence to electricity networks by introducing a smart grid and the use of smart meters in homes. This will allow demand and supply to be intelligently managed, and pave the way for large-scale use of renewable energy sources.
- **A system of feed-in tariffs** – we will create a decentralised energy revolution by paying people who produce energy from renewable resources
- **A new national recharging network** – this will enable Britain to lead the world in replacing traditional cars with electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles
- **New low carbon energy sources** – we will enable biogas, methane produced from farm and food wastes, to replace up to 50% of our residential gas heating
- **Low carbon buildings, transport and commerce** – including a new entitlement for every home to be fitted with up to £6,500 of energy efficient improvements