

Pagefield



Pagefield Parliamentarian Awards

FEBRUARY 2023

Foreword



By Pagefield Chief Executive, Oliver Foster

This time last year, Pagefield launched our ‘Backbencher of the Year’ award and we were pleased to crown Daisy Cooper MP as the worthy winner. Following such positive feedback about the award – and the accompanying report ‘Backbenchers: the real powerbrokers?’ – in 2023 we have decided to build on the first year’s success to create the [Pagefield Parliamentary Awards](#), celebrating more broadly the work of all parliamentarians from both Houses, with categories focusing on the most impactful frontbenchers, Committee Chairs and parliamentarians who made the most memorable and moving speeches of 2022.

2022 was a year in which even the most seasoned observers of Westminster politics were taken aback by the level of change and political theatre. Three Prime Ministers, four Chancellors and enough scandal to sate every political gossip column across the length and breadth of the country meant 2022 was a year none of us in and around politics will quickly forget. It also underlined more than ever the vital role individual parliamentarians play in our democracy.

When Daisy Cooper was awarded our ‘Backbencher of the Year’ award last time round, we wanted to dispel the idea that influence is only found along the corridors of Whitehall departments or on the frontbenches. The machinery of Westminster is vast, and when the Government itself is in a state of flux, other parts of our parliamentary democracy step up. These awards intend to shine a light on those often less recognised, but equally essential, players that uphold and restore faith in our democracy.

I would like to thank Deputy Speaker Nigel Evans MP for very kindly reviewing our final shortlists before they were shared with our panel of judges, all of whom I would also like to thank for the time and effort they’ve put into assessing the merits of each and every one of the parliamentarians we have put forward. They are: Jason Groves (Daily Mail), Ailbhe Rea (Politico), Seb Payne (Onward), Caroline Wheeler (Sunday Times), Giles Winn (former special advisor to the Chancellor) and our own Rebecca Lury (Pagefield Partner).

I do hope you enjoy reading each of the individual entries and reaching your own conclusions as to who deserves to win each category.

With best wishes,

Oliver Foster

Judging Panel



Jason Groves
Daily Mail

Jason Groves has had two decades experience in Westminster, latterly as political editor of the Daily Mail, where for the last six years he's tried to keep up with Brexit, Covid, Corbyn and a long list of Tory Prime Ministers.



Rebecca Lury
Pagefield

Rebecca Lury is a Partner at Pagefield, overseeing clients in defence, energy, property and the charity sector. She has 15 years experience in PA and communications, and was a Labour Councillor in Southwark from 2012 – 2022.



Seb Payne
Onward

Sebastian Payne is the Director of Onward. He was previously Whitehall Editor at the Financial Times, where he also held the position of political leader writer and digital opinion editor. He is the author of Broken Heartlands and The Fall of Boris Johnson.




Ailbhe Rea
POLITICO

Ailbhe Rea is the host of the Westminster Insider podcast from Politico and a regular broadcaster on British and Irish politics. She was formerly the New Statesman's political correspondent.



Giles Winn
Former Special Advisor to the
Chancellor of the Exchequer

Giles Winn is a former Special Advisor to Philip Hammond during his time as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Giles is also currently a Senior Strategic Advisor to Channel 4 and a Specialist Partner at Pagefield.

A row of large, stylized letters on pedestals, with the letter 'P' in the foreground. The letters are dark and have a metallic sheen. The background is a solid dark blue.

1. Backbench MP of the Year

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1. BACKBENCH MP OF THE YEAR

Mike Amesbury MP

Labour MP for Weaver Vale



LABOUR

“Operating more under the radar, Amesbury has achieved the feat of seeing a backbench bill become law.”

Rebecca Lury

“By gathering cross-party support for new legislation he showed what a determined backbencher can do, earning the thanks of millions of parents along the way.”

Jason Groves

MP for Weaver Vale, Mike Amesbury is a vocal champion for a wide range of issues, including housing, education, and workers’ rights.

Amesbury joined the Labour Party as a 17-year-old after moving with his family to Yorkshire, where he said he was politicised by the impact on local families of Thatcher’s policies and the subsequent miners’ strike. At the start of his career, Amesbury worked as a manager with the Connexions careers advice service. Amesbury then became the director of City South Manchester Housing Trust, an award-winning social enterprise providing affordable housing in south Manchester. He also served as a policy advisor to Tameside Council.

Boasting a diverse political background before becoming a Member of Parliament, Amesbury worked as Senior Parliamentary Advisor to Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner MP and as a political advisor and stakeholder manager on Andy Burnham’s successful campaign to become Mayor of Greater Manchester. An avowed trade unionist, Amesbury is also an active member of the UNISON and GMB trade unions.

Having been elected at the 2017 General Election, Amesbury has championed an array of issues through his work in Parliament. In 2020, Amesbury became one of four vice-chairs of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Whistleblowing, which has been subject to criticism by some campaigners on whistleblowing law reform. Amesbury is also a strong supporter of campaigns such as ‘Save the NHS’, affordable housing and the rights of workers.

In March 2020, Amesbury brought forward a Private Member’s Bill which would require schools to provide affordable uniforms to their students after seeing costs spiral in recent years. Despite being an opposition Member of Parliament, Amesbury successfully saw his Bill make its way through each legislative stage before becoming an Act of Parliament in April 2021.

The Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act means that schools are now required to review their uniform policies to see how they can be made more cost-effective. This involves consultation with families and pupils to understand their views on the uniform.

Amesbury’s law followed a campaign by The Children’s Society and the National Education Union supported by parents and carers. After a seven-year campaign, started by a group of young people and fought for by people like Amesbury, all schools in England will have to make sure uniforms are affordable. This will make a huge difference to families across the UK.

1. BACKBENCH MP OF THE YEAR

Tracey Crouch MP

Conservative MP for Chatham and Aylesford



CONSERVATIVE

“In the year when the Lionesses celebrated great success, Tracey has been one of the most vocal advocates for the women’s game, as well as inspiring a collegiate, authentic approach to politics.”

Ailbhe Rea

“Tracey Crouch is one of those rare backbenchers who enjoys more influence than most ministers.”

Jason Groves

Tracey Crouch CBE has represented Chatham and Aylesford in the House of Commons for the past 13 years. She has been a trailblazer throughout this period as the first Government minister to take maternity leave when she had her first child in 2016 and more recently in overcoming breast cancer and returning to Parliament following a successful course of radiotherapy.

Crouch has covered a wide range of policy areas as an MP, but her passion for sport has been ever-present, both as a former Sports Minister in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and from her experience coaching girl’s football as an FA football coach.

It was for this experience that Crouch was chosen by the Government to lead a major independent fan-led review of football governance in 2021. The report was commissioned following fallout from the proposed European Super League, which led to widespread protests from football fans against club owners who had prioritised future profitability over fan experience.

Involving more than 130 clubs across all tiers of the game, the Review Panel, chaired by Crouch, heard hundreds of hours of evidence from fans, owners and stakeholders before reaching its final recommendations. The resulting report called for an improved test for those looking to take control of local clubs and for fans to have greater input in decision-making in their clubs.

The key recommendation was to appoint an independent regulator with the primary role of maintaining financial stability in the sport. The regulator will have oversight of club finances and permanent information gathering, investigation and enforcement powers. Furthermore, the regulator will have the responsibility of assessing owners and their ability to run clubs.

In 2022, the Government committed to implementing all 10 of Crouch’s key recommendations. Crouch will now represent fans across the UK in holding the Government’s feet to the fire and scrutinising its progress in setting up an independent regulator.

Crouch’s substantial work on the fan-led review of football governance and continued advocacy in Parliament was deservedly recognised formally in 2022 with a CBE as part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations for parliamentary and public service. It is for similar reasons that she has been nominated as Pagefield’s Backbencher of the Year Award.

1. BACKBENCH MP OF THE YEAR

Cherilyn Mackrory MP

Conservative MP for Truro and Falmouth



CONSERVATIVE

“Cherilyn Mackrory has shown that she is truly representing her constituents at all times.”

Rebecca Lury

“Cherilyn has secured some key wins in debate around the second homes. She has successfully elevated a local concern to become a national issue, getting it firmly on the radar of government.”

Giles Winn

Truro and Falmouth MP Cherilyn Mackrory has had a busy year representing her coastal constituency. She is passionate about protecting the environment, investing in the NHS and local infrastructure, and increasing opportunities and housing availability in the constituency.

Before becoming an MP, Mackrory had a career spanning multiple fields, having worked in the private sector as an IT Project Manager and Account Manager, a wholesale money broker and even as a sports massage therapist, where she specialised in maternity massages and massages for cancer patients and those in recovery.

She was selected as the Party's candidate for her constituency in the lead-up to the 2019 election where she focused on issues such as Brexit, the economy, and healthcare.

Since becoming an MP, Mackrory has been a vocal advocate for her constituents and has taken an active role in parliamentary proceedings. At home, for example, Mackrory has reopened the Hall for Cornwall which has welcomed more than 100,000 people through the door.

In Parliament, Mackrory is involved in several All-Party Parliamentary Groups, placing Truro and Falmouth at the heart of national policy discussions. Mackrory has been a prominent voice on the issue of sewage discharge in her capacity as co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ocean Conservation, where she continues to seek progress and hold water companies in her constituency to account.

As a result of Mackrory's vociferous campaigning on second homeownership, she has helped to bring about changes to the tax system preventing second homeowners from avoiding paying council tax. As part of a consortium of Cornish MPs, Mackrory has also secured commitments from the Government to launch a registration scheme and consult on new planning rules for second homes and short-term holiday lets.

Previously, owners of second homes in England were able to avoid paying council tax and access small business rates relief by simply declaring an intention to let the property out to holidaymakers. However, concerns were raised that many never actually let their homes, leave them empty, and are therefore unfairly benefiting from the tax break.

The Government is now closing the controversial loophole that allowed some second homeowners to get out of paying any rates at all on properties inaccurately registered as businesses. From April 2023, second homeowners will have to prove holiday lets are being rented out for a minimum of 70 days a year to access small business rates relief, where they meet the criteria.

1. BACKBENCH MP OF THE YEAR

Layla Moran MP

Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West and Abingdon



LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

“Layla Moran’s long campaign to repeal the Victorian Vagrancy Act is richly deserving of recognition.”

Ailbhe Rea

“At a time when the Lib Dems seem to have close to zero presence in any key national debates, Layla’s personal profile continues to improve – and she has successfully used that to bring about some meaningful changes.”

Giles Winn

Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran was first elected for Oxford and West Abingdon in 2017, having previously stood for the seat in 2015 and for Battersea in 2010.

Since entering Parliament, Moran has served as a spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats on Education and DCMS, and she currently serves as the Liberal Democrats’ Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and International Development.

One campaign Moran has focused on since entering Parliament has centred on issues affecting the homeless. In 2018 she began a national campaign to repeal the Vagrancy Act when a group of Oxford students brought the issue to her attention.

The campaign centred around the fact that the Vagrancy Act of 1824 made it a criminal offence to beg or be homeless on the street in England and Wales. Anyone convicted under the Vagrancy Act faces a fine of up to £1000 and a possibility of gaining a criminal record.

Over four years, Moran fought to repeal the legislation, raising the issue in Prime Minister’s Questions, leading debates in Parliament, and writing cross-party letters. As a result of her efforts, In January 2022 the Liberal Democrats joined a cross-party effort in the House of Lords which saw the addition of a clause to the, then, Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which would repeal the Vagrancy Act.

Thanks to the hard-fought campaign, led by Moran, the Vagrancy Act was officially scrapped in June 2022 when the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act came into force.

Moran has also focused her efforts on health policy since the start of the pandemic. She was a co-sponsor of the Down Syndrome Bill that led to the Down Syndrome Act 2022 being enshrined in law. She also led calls for the return of virtual meetings for local councils in response to increased restrictions in January 2022, and further highlighted the effects of the pandemic on GP waiting times, which led to half of GP appointments lasting fewer than ten minutes.

Moran’s nomination for Pagefield’s Backbench MP of the Year stems from her perseverance in campaigning to overturn the Vagrancy Act, which stands as a fine example of the power of backbench campaigning, alongside her continued advocacy for her constituents.

1. BACKBENCH MP OF THE YEAR

Zarah Sultana MP

Labour MP for Coventry South



LABOUR

“Zarah has proved to be a passionate campaigner. 2023 could be the year she gets mainstream media cut through for the issues she clearly cares a great deal about.”

Giles Winn

“The youthful Left-winger has a great social media game and a flair for issues that get Labour activists fired up.”

Jason Groves

MP for Coventry South, Zarah Sultana, is known for being a champion for young people, working communities and ethnic minorities. As one of the youngest MPs in Parliament at 28, Sultana was part of the small group of new Labour MPs elected at the 2019 election. Sultana herself was elected with a slim majority of 401 in her Coventry South seat.


Sultana studied International Relations and Economics at the University of Birmingham, and it was here that she got involved in political campaigns on issues from free education to anti-racism. Straight after graduating, Sultana went into the third sector and later became a community organiser for Labour in the West Midlands. She helped to organise community campaigns against the closure of public services where she saw first-hand the devastating effects of a decade’s worth of cuts and stagnating wages.

Sultana became an MP in December 2019, with a campaign heavily backed by Unite the Union, Momentum, the Fire Brigades Union, the Communication Workers Union and the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union. Just under a month after she’d arrived, Sultana made her maiden speech in the Commons. Over the course of eight minutes, she railed against austerity and made an impassioned call for a Green New Deal.

Since then, Sultana has had a very successful career, having claimed the honorary title of 2021 Young People’s MP of the Year. Her time in Parliament has seen her champion a range of issues including trans rights, migrant rights, free school meals and the climate crisis – to name just a few.

Sultana is currently bringing forward a Bill that would see millions more schoolchildren across the UK entitled to free school meals. The aim of the scheme – which would be given the title Free School Meals Act 2023 – is to extend the eligibility of free school meals to all children in state primary schools in England and Wales. According to government figures, just under 1.9 million children are currently receiving free school meals.

Sultana sponsored the legislation to provide support to the 800,000 children living in poverty who are not currently eligible for free school meals. She said the Bill will “ease the pressure for every family, and help ensure every child has the basics to learn, grow and thrive”. Despite its delay, Sultana has confirmed that the battle to get the Bill passed is “not over”.



2. Frontbench MP of the Year

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2. FRONTBENCH MP OF THE YEAR

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities



CONSERVATIVE

“When it briefly appeared to be the case that Michael Gove was leaving frontline politics for good, Westminster paused to consider what a loss that would be... Thankfully his brief period as a backbencher came to an end sooner than he or we might have expected.”

Ailbhe Rea

“Gove has reasserted himself well after being briefly knocked out of government.”

Sebastian Payne

Referred to by many commentators as one of Britain’s most effective Ministers, Gove briefly left the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities during Liz Truss’ time in Number 10, but has returned to Marsham Street with unfinished business.

He started his career as a journalist in Aberdeen at The Press and Journal, quickly becoming a well-recognised voice in Conservative circles, with The Guardian even referring to him as representative of a “new breed of 21st-century Tories” in 1995. He went on to join The Times as its leader writer and contributed to the Times Literary Supplement and The Spectator until his election as Surrey Heath’s Member of Parliament in 2005.

With a CV that boasts roles as the Secretary of State in the Education, Justice, Environment and Levelling Up departments, Gove can seemingly turn his hand to any political challenge.

However, he is also well-known for his ability to fall out with even his closest allies. Once a member of the so-called ‘Notting Hill set’, Gove would later fall out with David Cameron over the Brexit referendum, and Boris Johnson for the role he played in scuppering his leadership ambitions in 2017.

Once referred to as being a “bit of a Maoist” by David Cameron, in 2022, Gove has been praised by some for his “no-nonsense” approach to the building safety crisis, as well as being tasked with keeping his former boss Boris Johnson’s levelling up dream alive – whether this particular mission will be remembered successfully is a different conversation altogether.

He was also rightly praised for his emotive and rapid response following the fallout from two-year-old Awaab Ishak’s death as a result of failures by Rochdale Borough Housing.

He is also known for his vocal approach to challenging business and industry, and continues to name and shame housing associations and social housing providers up and down the country for failing to provide decent housing to social tenants, with his Department looking to pass the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill in 2023.

His undoubted experience of various Cabinet roles, coupled with an unorthodox and ruthless way of doing things, sees Gove recognised for the Frontbench MP of the Year award.

2. FRONTBENCH MP OF THE YEAR

Lisa Nandy MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities



LABOUR

“Lisa Nandy is a great asset to Labour’s front bench. She is passionate, hard-working and smart.”

Giles Winn

“An authentic, compelling media performer, Lisa Nandy is one of Labour’s greatest assets.”

Ailbhe Rea

After finishing third in the 2020 Labour leadership election, Lisa Nandy has remodelled herself as a highly respected, straight-talking counterpart to Michael Gove as Shadow Levelling Up Secretary.

Since taking on the role in late 2021, Nandy has undoubtedly become one of Labour’s most exciting stars on the frontbench, and she has become one of the most frequent spokespeople for Labour on the morning media rounds, second only to the Shadow Chancellor.

Elected as MP for Wigan in 2010, Nandy has held a wide variety of Shadow Ministerial roles since first joining the Shadow frontbench in 2012. She was first appointed as Shadow Minister for Children and Young Families, later becoming Shadow Minister for Civil Society in 2013.

After Jeremy Corbyn became Labour Leader, she moved into the Shadow Cabinet as Shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. After spending some time on the backbenches following her resignation in 2016 prior to the Labour leadership election, Nandy re-joined the Shadow Cabinet under Keir Starmer’s leadership in 2020 as Shadow Foreign Secretary, before taking on the Shadow Levelling Up, Housing and Communities brief in 2021.

Since Boris Johnson’s departure from Number 10, Nandy has been on the front foot at every opportunity to argue that the Conservative’s flagship ‘Levelling Up’ policy is dead in the water, comparing it to a “Hunger Games-style contest between local communities who must bid against each other for their own money back”.

While the Conservatives have enjoyed a long-standing reputation as the Party of homeownership, Nandy’s robust critiques of the Government’s housing policy have allowed Labour to target voter groups on both sides of the aisle. Leading on Labour’s Community Right to Buy policy, which will give communities the chance to crack down on holiday lets and take control of community assets, Nandy has generated a growing appreciation for Labour in coastal and rural areas. Meanwhile, she has remained firm on supporting mandatory housing targets and restoring social housing to the second largest form of tenure in order to tackle the housing supply crisis in other areas of the country.

Nandy may have ruled out another leadership bid, but with support from across Labour’s broad church of MPs, and an aspiration to see a woman eventually lead the Party, Nandy may yet become Labour’s first ever female leader.

2. FRONTBENCH MP OF THE YEAR

Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP

Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer



LABOUR

“Rachel Reeves has really come into her own this year, she would be my pick for this award.”

Sebastian Payne

“Rachel Reeves played a pivotal role in dragging Labour back towards economic credibility – and electability – after years in the wilderness.”

Jason Groves

Forming one half of Westminster’s newest double acts, Rachel Reeves could soon become the UK’s first female Chancellor.

Having earned plaudits from seasoned politicians of all stripes, Reeves looks to have successfully restored economic credibility to Labour after thirteen years in the wilderness, with the Labour Party currently leading the Conservatives in the polls, and she has even won praise from former Conservative Chancellor George Osborne – an unlikely supporter if there ever was one.

Following stints at the Bank of England, the British Embassy in Washington DC, and for Halifax Council, Reeves entered Parliament in 2010. During the Miliband years Reeves was quickly promoted to the frontbenches as a Shadow Minister of State for Work and Pensions. A year later, she became the youngest member of the Shadow Cabinet since Labour’s internal annual elections were abolished when she became Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

She returned to the backbenches under Corbyn’s leadership of the Party, later returning as Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when Starmer was elected Leader. However, it wasn’t until her promotion to Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer that she would be seen as one of the main drivers behind Labour’s redemption as a viable alternative government.

Starmer’s Labour has often been accused of being light on policy, but it is Reeves and her boss’ firm belief that the Party must not repeat the mistakes of the last two elections, having “offered long lists of policies which voters just didn’t believe”, and should instead go into the next election with a “tight” manifesto.

Forming the basis of the manifesto, for Reeves, will be a commitment that Labour will run the economy more responsibly than the current government, and that it could do so while being the Party of social justice.

It is this message that she has taken to the airwaves through regular TV and radio spots, for which she has been praised for her clear delivery.

The Shadow Chancellor’s headline economic pledge of 2022 has been Labour’s Green Prosperity Plan, aimed at delivering a new era of green economic growth and permanently lowering energy bills by turning the UK into an independent green “superpower” before 2030 through a massive expansion of wind and solar energy. This coupled with Labour’s Great British Energy plans could cement Reeves as the Chancellor for a new, greener future outside of Conservative politics for the first time in 14 years.

2. FRONTBENCH MP OF THE YEAR

Jonathan Reynolds MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy



LABOUR

“He is well respected, and in leading much of the Labour Party’s engagement with business, is becoming more well recognised in his role.”

Rebecca Lury

“Jonny Reynolds has played a key role in quietly rebuilding Labour’s relationship with business to the extent where a number of bosses are now openly backing the Party.”

Jason Groves

Alongside the remarkable progress made by Labour’s Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves, Shadow Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds has rebuilt the Party’s often fractious relationship with business.

In early 2022, Reynolds set out his clear offer to the private sector to work with Labour on a reform agenda to help make business taxation fairer, more transparent and supportive of investment in entrepreneurship. Since then, he’s set about on a mission to replace the Conservatives as the natural trusted Party of business. From attending events supporting the financial services sector to collaborating with industry stakeholders to develop Labour’s long-term industrial strategy proposal, Reynolds has helped Labour’s policy announcements receive warm welcomes from executives up and down the country.

Having been awarded the Freedom of the City of London in recognition of his contribution to the capital’s hub of financial services, Reynolds has managed to take full advantage of the Government’s deteriorating relationship with business. From Boris Johnson’s infamous CBI speech and expletive comments about industry concerns around Brexit, to Truss’ abandonment of stakeholder engagement in the build-up to her mini-Budget, it’s fair to say Reynolds has been presented with a series of open goals.

As a result of these efforts, Labour’s annual conference in Liverpool last year saw the conference hall filled once again with suits and deep-pocketed donors, setting the mood music for the Conservatives’ fall from corporate grace. This was also the case with Labour’s Business Conference in the Autumn being a sellout, and commentators were quick to praise the Party for its efforts.

Reynolds has also been an important source of party discipline in response to ongoing strike action across the country, with a laser focus on holding the Government to account on its lack of negotiation, and obfuscation, rather than wading in on the heart of the disputes and undermining the cohesion that Starmer has helped instil over the past year. As a result, Reynolds has had to navigate the tightrope of echoing grassroots support for industrial strike action without alienating the Party’s newfound voter base.

As Labour builds towards its election campaign, Reynolds’ ongoing work with business will form one of the key pillars of the Party’s potential success at the ballot box. By continuing to position himself as the hands-on strategic partner for industry alongside the Shadow Chancellor, his role will only grow in importance in 2023.

2. FRONTBENCH MP OF THE YEAR

Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP

Secretary of State for Defence



CONSERVATIVE

“His media performances are assured and he has maintained a position of influence under successive PMs.”

Ailbhe Rea

“Ben Wallace had an extraordinary year, helping galvanise western support for Ukraine, both behind the scenes and in front of the cameras. No wonder Tory activists wanted him to run for leader.”

Jason Groves

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace was thrust into the limelight in 2022 and has been widely praised for his effective and emotive response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. A more than able Defence Secretary, Wallace has built a strong relationship with the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and has led the way in urging the UK’s closest allies to extend their ongoing support to Ukraine at a time of acute crisis.

Wallace is a natural supporter of the armed forces, having served in the British Army after attending Sandhurst Military Academy. Throughout his military career Wallace served in Northern Ireland, Germany, Cyprus, and Central America.

His political career has been long, and varied, having entered the Scottish Parliament in 1999 before being elected to UK Parliament in 2005. Since then, Wallace has held numerous Shadow and Ministerial positions including as a Government Whip and Security Minister at the Home Office.

Wallace was one of the earliest supporters of Boris Johnson, having called for him to be the next party leader in 2014, and maintained this support in the Cabinet, becoming a vocal supporter and ally of the former Prime Minister’s international response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. He stayed in post during the wave of ministerial resignations which marked the end of the Johnson Premiership. Yet despite this obvious alliance with the former Prime Minister, has managed to retain his role under both Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak.

Wallace also surprised many last year by choosing not to stand for the Conservative Party leadership both when Boris Johnson stood down, and again when Liz Truss resigned after her short tenure in Number 10.

Considered by many to be disinterested in courting publicity and factional infighting, his decision to stay out of the leadership race was viewed by many as evidence of his commitment and dedication to his current role and the Ukrainian war effort. There have also been whispers that Wallace has his eyes on the Secretary-General of NATO role in the future, and may attribute more importance to this than the top job in Westminster.

Ukraine has, naturally, been Wallace’s focus in 2022. He has constantly held the Government’s feet to the fire in terms of committing funding and military support to Ukraine, as well as setting an example to the rest of Europe and the UK’s other allies in the west.



3. Select Committee Chair of the Year

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3. SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIR OF THE YEAR

Clive Betts MP

Chair, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee



LABOUR

“Clive Betts knows more about housing than any of the 14 housing ministers since 2010 and uses his knowledge to good effect.”

Jason Groves

“Clive has done an excellent job of steering the Committee through a huge range of topics over the past year, demonstrating his knowledge of the brief.”

Rebecca Lury

The longest-serving Committee Chair to be shortlisted in this category, Clive Betts is now in his thirteenth year chairing a Committee which has changed its name and adapted its focus three times, now taking the form of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee.

Betts first entered the world of politics as an economist at the Trades Union Congress (TUC), later becoming a member of the radical Sheffield City Council in the 1980s. It was during this period that Betts first honed his interest in housing, spending six years as Chair of the Council’s Housing Committee. He later succeeded Labour grandee David Blunkett as the council leader in 1987, bringing the World Student Games to the city four years later. Despite contesting several elections, the first being in 1974, Betts was eventually elected to the safe Labour seat of Sheffield Attercliffe in 1992.

As an MP, Betts has specialised in Treasury matters, housing and development, and even spent a period of time in the Opposition Whips’ Office before Tony Blair’s landslide election victory in 1997. He’s also known for his long-term support for giving local authorities more autonomy, prefacing the current Labour leadership’s plans for devolutionary expansion.

The Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee has spent much of 2022 focused on two matters closely aligned with the public’s priorities – regulation of social housing and long-term funding for adult social care. Since the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, the Government has prioritised overhauling the country’s inadequate and loosely regulated building safety regime. What’s followed has been a raft of new legislation in the form of the Fire Safety and Building Safety Acts, both focused largely on the remediation of blocks with building safety defects.

Betts’ Committee published a report on ‘The Regulation of Social Housing’ in July 2022. It made a series of recommendations which are likely to be absorbed by government legislation, such as placing a requirement on social housing providers to support tenants who cannot properly heat or ventilate their homes. It also recommended sweeping changes to the Housing Ombudsman’s assessment of the performance of social housing providers. With Betts leading his Committee through a year in which levelling up continues, the transition to the new building safety regime is concluded, and the potential abolition of leasehold as a tenure – his Committee will play a central role in scrutinising the Government’s ability to deliver all it’s promised.

3. SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIR OF THE YEAR

Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP

Chair, Defence Committee



CONSERVATIVE

“Tobias’ profile is far greater than that of the Select Committee itself. This has its pros and cons – but the respect he commands on Defence issues from across the House, can only be a good thing.”

Giles Winn

“Tobias Ellwood is one of the go-to names for media covering defence issues, with in-depth knowledge of a complex subject.”

Jason Groves

Tobias Ellwood’s parliamentary career has been defined by his enduring focus on defence policy. Following a decade in the army, his first Government role came in 2010 as a Parliamentary Private Secretary to then Defence Secretary Liam Fox. He brought his expertise to several Committees scrutinising defence policy including the Armed Forces Act 2011 and Defence Reform Act 2014, before going on to serve as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Veterans, Reserves and Personnel from 2017-2019.

Having stepped down from the Government, Ellwood was successfully elected as Chair of the Defence Committee in 2020.

With Ellwood as Chair, the Defence Committee has undertaken a number of inquiries in 2022, scrutinising the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in policy areas including defence and climate change, aviation procurement, and UK Defence and the Indo-Pacific.

The defence and climate change inquiry has seen the Defence Committee examine the impacts of climate change on future conflict and how the UK’s Armed Forces are adapting to them. This inquiry has taken on added importance given defence alone accounts for half of central government’s greenhouse gas emissions.

The Committee’s inquiry into aviation procurement has seen it examine the impact of planned fleet reductions as well as interoperability with other global forces, particularly in light of recent security situations in Europe. Areas of focus include the impact of reductions on combat air, fleet mobility, and airborne early warning and control. With the oncoming Future Combat Air System likely to change the nature of air warfare significantly in the decades to come, the Committee will also be examining proposals for future capabilities.

On the state of the UK’s defence policy in the Indo-Pacific region, the Committee has carefully navigated the complex threats posed by China and its wider role in the region. Increasing ambition and dangerous mobilisation has necessitated investigation into ‘flashpoints’ such as the straits of Taiwan and the India-China border, and the Committee has heard testimony from experts in this area before considering recommendations on policy reacting to China’s defence industry developments and military modernisation.

All of these inquiries have taken place while the Committee has considered the predominant issue facing the MoD in 2022 – Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. One-off sessions have been held to discuss Russia’s military build-up, military procurement, the UK’s role within the NATO alliance and more.

Ellwood’s leadership of the Defence Committee, through complex inquiries during a turbulent year for defence policy, has been commendable.

3. SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIR OF THE YEAR

Darren Jones MP

Chair, Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee



LABOUR

“Jones has been very effective on the Post Office scandal.”

Sebastian Payne

“His forensic grillings of unscrupulous bosses have gone viral on social media and he is becoming a thorn in the side of government. One to watch.”

Jason Groves

Darren Jones was first elected as the Labour MP for Bristol North West in 2017. Prior to becoming an MP, Jones worked as a solicitor in both private practice and as an in-house counsel at BT, no doubt laying the groundwork for his future success as a widely respected forensic Select Committee Chair.

Jones has previously admitted that he knew he wanted to be a politician early on but understood the pitfalls of becoming a career politician and decided that training as a lawyer would give him the lived experience to further his political ambitions. He balanced his career as a solicitor, while honing his skills as a grassroots campaigner. After unsuccessfully contesting the Bristol North West constituency in 2015, Jones joined Labour leadership hopeful Andy Burnham’s campaign as its South West Co-ordinator. He later chaired Marvin Rees’ successful campaign to become Mayor of Bristol in 2016.

Cutting his teeth on Committee corridor after becoming a member of the cross-party Science and Technology Committee, Jones was later elected as Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee in 2020. Under his Chairmanship, Jones has been a prominent campaigner on issues ranging from labour disputes, including the withholding of redundancy payments from Astra Zeneca workers, the campaign to increase miners’ pensions through the Mineworkers Pension Scheme, and the historic miscarriage of justice behind the British Post Office scandal.

Jones’ Committee was tasked with scrutinising the Government’s handling of the energy crisis, intensified by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and leading to huge increases in the price of wholesale gas. The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee opened an inquiry into ‘Energy pricing and the future of the Energy Market’, publishing their final report in July 2022.

It recommended that Ofgem make full and proper use of its enforcement and compliance powers to clamp down on rule breaking by suppliers, particularly relating to the abuse of customer service standards. The report also criticised the Government’s delayed publication of its Strategy and Policy Statement for Ofgem, calling on Boris Johnson’s Government to provide further guidance to the regulator and clarify the split of responsibilities between Ofgem and BEIS.

In 2022, Jones and the Committee were also in part tasked with trying to understand where responsibility lay for the fallout from the Post Office and Horizon scandal. Jones’ leadership of the Committee in 2022 has even seen him tipped for a role in Starmer’s Shadow Cabinet if he’s to embark on another reshuffle before the next election.

3. SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIR OF THE YEAR

Huw Merriman MP

Former Chair of the Transport Committee



CONSERVATIVE

“His role leading the Committee was clearly well recognised, given he was then moved to a Ministerial role.”

Rebecca Lury

“Merriman made a name for himself speaking up for the concerns of the transport sector during the pandemic and has overseen a number of influential reports.”

Jason Groves

Huw Merriman MP has represented the safe Conservative seat of Bexhill & Battle since 2015. After the 2017 election, he became a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Department of Work and Pensions. In 2018 he moved to the Treasury and a few months after that became Parliamentary Private Secretary to then-Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond.

Merriman has been a member of the Transport Select Committee since September 2017 and was appointed as Chair of the Committee in January 2020, receiving the nomination from former Chair Lilian Greenwood.

Merriman stepped down from the Committee in October 2022 after being appointed as Minister for Rail and HS2 in Rishi Sunak's Government, evidence of his expertise and knowledge of the sector.

Under Merriman's leadership in the first ten months of 2022, the Transport Select Committee conducted inquiries into the Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands (IRP), Maritime 2050, and the road freight supply chain.

Merriman has been particularly hawked in his scrutiny of the Government's rail policy, an attribute that no doubt influenced Rishi Sunak's decision to bring him into Government with a portfolio including Rail and HS2. He led the Transport Committee's inquiry into the Integrated Rail Plan, which looked at the implications of the IRP for the economy, rail capacity and connectivity. The inquiry considered the contribution IRP will make to rail capacity and connectivity, whether and how it will “level up” communities in the Midlands and the North, and the challenges in delivering it.

The report he authored as Chair following the inquiry included numerous recommendations to the Government on how to deliver the policy most effectively, focusing on the cancellation of HS2's eastern leg, the absence of “levelling up” within the plan, and the infrastructure investments that would be necessary to deliver efficient services.

Merriman's highlights in 2022 include pushing DfT to intervene in the P&O fire-and-rehire scandal with passionate speeches in the Commons chamber, criticising the Government for lack of clarity in their rail policy, and submitting his letter of no confidence in Boris Johnson while he was questioning him in a Liaison Committee meeting on the Government's transport policy.

His commitment to holding the Government to account on its transport policy has been consistent during his time as Chair of the Transport Select Committee, and it is this experience which will serve him well in his new role overseeing rail policy within the Government as Minister for Rail and HS2.

3. SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIR OF THE YEAR

Baroness Stowell of Beeston

Chair, Communications and Digital Committee



CONSERVATIVE

“The former Charity Commission chief has proved a forensic select committee chair – and been willing to think the unthinkable on issues like the future of the BBC licence fee.”

Jason Groves

“Tina is a highly respected voice in the digital and creative sectors. She has ensured that the Committee has a key role in shaping Government policy.”

Giles Winn

Tina Stowell has been at the heart of politically charged discussions about the future of Channel 4 and BBC funding this past year. As the Chair of the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee, she has taken the lead calling for the depoliticisation of these debates and advocating for the broadcasters to spearhead changes themselves.

The Committee’s report on the BBC – *Licence to change: BBC future funding* – outlined the promises and perils of different funding models, along with concerns the government should be aware of in order to preserve the BBC’s unique status in the UK and across the world. Her interventions on the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill have been as sensible as those on public service broadcasters, while the Committee’s report on digital regulation in 2021 put forward a clear understanding of where Parliament needs to step in to regulate the digital space.

Before her appointment to the Lords, Stowell worked in the civil service at the Ministry of Defence, The British Embassy in Washington DC, and in 10 Downing Street in the press office of John Major. She went on to be William Hague’s Deputy Chief of Staff during his tenure as Conservative Party Leader and, before she became a peer, she was the BBC’s Head of Corporate Affairs and worked as an adviser to three BBC Chairs.

In 2011, the same year she was appointed to the Lords, she joined David Cameron’s Government as a junior minister. Stowell most notably led the landmark Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act through the House of Lords in 2013, successfully ensuring the equal marriage legislation gained more support than ever envisioned at the time. She was subsequently promoted to Cabinet as Leader of the House of Lords and the Lord Privy Seal. In 2016, she returned to the backbenches and continued her professional career outside of Parliament. She was appointed Chair of the Charity Commission in February 2018 before she became Chair of the Communications and Digital Committee in January 2022.

Apart from her notable work on the Communications and Digital Committee, she has also contributed frequently to debates in the House of Lords on a wide range of topics. For example, in December, she asked the Government what steps they could be taking to support journalists and public bodies impeded by strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) and she has also provided valuable knowledge to debates on the BBC, Channel 4, and the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill as well as the Health and Care Bill and the Nationality and Borders Bill.



4. Speech of the Year

Pagefield

4. SPEECH OF THE YEAR

Baron Agnew of Oulton

Resignation from the Johnson Government while at the despatch box



CONSERVATIVE

“That’s the way to go if you want to make an impact!”

Giles Winn

“Completely unexpected, which meant Lord Agnew got a huge reaction in the chamber of disbelief. This cut through to the media effectively given his scathing words about the approach that the government was taking.”

Rebecca Lury

Baron Theodore Agnew of Oulton was a joint Cabinet Office and Treasury Minister when he resigned from Boris Johnson’s Government from the despatch box in the House of Lords. Outlining his frustration working between the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy and the Treasury, he argued: “Given that I am the Minister for counter-fraud, it would be somewhat dishonest to stay on in the role if I am incapable of doing it properly.”

Agnew was supposed to be standing before peers to update them about the £4.3 billion of Covid loans that Labour was saying had gone to ‘fraudsters.’ Instead of rebutting this claim, he announced his resignation with immediate effect. Agnew’s statement surprised those in attendance, not least because as soon as he was finished, he said goodbye, closed his binder with a slam, and defiantly walked straight out of the chamber, head held high.

His short, frank, and honest speech shone a light on the “combination of arrogance, indolence, and ignorance” that was “freezing the government machine” and allowing fraudulent activity to go on unchecked. It was a bold and dramatic move by Agnew that sent shockwaves through the Government and press. However, despite his clear indignation that saw him argue “schoolboy errors were made,” Agnew kept his composure, spoke the truth, and left the chamber to applause and his reputation not simply intact but enhanced.

“I hope that, as a virtually unknown Minister beyond this place, giving up my career might prompt others more important than me to get behind this and sort it out... Total fraud loss across government is estimated at £29 billion a year. Of course, not all can be stopped, but a combination of arrogance, indolence and ignorance freezes the government machine.”

Baron Agnew of Oulton

4. SPEECH OF THE YEAR

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP

Response to No.10 Christmas party during Covid-19 lockdown



LABOUR

Rosena Allin-Khan MP gave a searing speech at Prime Minister's Questions over the issue of Christmas parties taking place in 10 Downing Street while the country was in lockdown.

Speaking directly to Boris Johnson, she opened the speech with the powerful line: "This country is angry." Allin-Khan went on to recount a heart-breaking experience she witnessed while working as a doctor in an intensive care unit at the time, explaining how she wept behind her mask while watching children speak to their dying mother through an iPad. "People died without that last touch from their daughters, their sons, and their wives" she stated, receiving outrage from the Conservative benches as she argued that the Number 10 parties were "an insult to everyone who followed the rules." Concluding on the question, "How does the PM sleep at night?", Allin-Khan showed her courage as well as her care for both patients and healthcare workers alike. This speech was part of a wider series of embarrassing moments for Johnson over the incident, which ultimately helped lead to his removal from the Prime Minister's Office.

Rosena Allin-Khan has been the Shadow Cabinet Minister for Mental Health since 2020 and previously was Shadow Minister for Sport. Prior to her election in 2016, she worked as a junior doctor in the A&E department of St George's Hospital Tooting (her constituency) and was a councillor on Wandsworth Council. She still takes up shifts at the hospital during parliamentary recesses and particularly did so during the Covid-19 pandemic. Allin-Khan has also worked as a humanitarian aid doctor in Palestine, Africa, and Asia and has undertaken trips to Ukraine to assist medically while serving as an MP.

"Delivered with real heart, Rosena demonstrated why she is seen as a real asset to the Labour Party."

Rebecca Lury

"Rosena Allin-Khan drew on her personal experience as an intensive care doctor to deliver a powerful and emotional denunciation of Partygate. It even left Boris Johnson looking chastened."

Jason Groves

"This is disgraceful. This is an insult to everyone who followed the rules. It is an insult to everyone who was not allowed to say their final goodbye. This happened on the Prime Minister's watch, so my question is very simple: how does the Prime Minister sleep at night?"

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP

4. SPEECH OF THE YEAR

Mhairi Black MP

Speech during 'Scotland, Cost of Living' debate



SNP

"A typically powerful intervention from one of Parliament's great young orators."

Jason Groves

"Mhari Black was thrown into the spotlight when she was first elected, and has continued to make an impact from the backbenchers."

Rebecca Lury

Making her entrance to politics as the youngest MP in the House of Commons, Black ousted former Foreign Secretary Douglas Alexander to take Paisley and Renfrewshire South in 2015 whilst completing her undergraduate studies at Glasgow University.

Following her successful defeat in overturning a 16,610 majority, and ending with a 5,500 one herself, Black's maiden speech was widely anticipated. Challenging both benefit sanctions and Labour to be a true opposition (alongside the SNP), the speech was viewed more than 10 million times online within a week of it being made.

After witnessing the widespread level of poverty and injustice whilst travelling around the country for the referendum, Black has previously stated that her priority as a Member of Parliament is to fight for social justice.

As the UK's cost-of-living crisis ramped up earlier this year, Black, in the House of Commons, called out the Conservative's "useless" advice – that those facing financial hardships should work more hours or get a better paid job and those in poverty should buy value products.

In doing so, she also emphasised the Scottish Government's efforts to mitigate Conservative cuts against the backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis, including increasing Scottish benefits and doubling the Scottish child payment.

Black's mission to ensure that Scotland receives the extra powers as promised, alongside her dedication to social justice, has made her a popular member of the SNP, resulting in her promotion as the SNP's Deputy Leader in Westminster in December 2022.

"The Secretary of State... advised people in poverty to buy value products, the safeguarding Minister suggested that people should just work 'more hours' or get a 'better-paid job', and the Chancellor said that it would be 'silly' to help people struggling with the cost of living crisis. Does the Minister have any equally useless advice to add to that of his colleagues for the people facing destitution?"

Mhairi Black MP

4. SPEECH OF THE YEAR

Rt Hon Theresa May MP

Speech remembering the late Queen Elizabeth II



CONSERVATIVE

“One of May’s best ever moments.”

Sebastian Payne

“Theresa May kept her sense of humour well hidden during her years in government, but deployed it to good effect in this warm tribute to the late Queen.”

Jason Groves

Theresa May has enjoyed a long parliamentary career with numerous important, evocative and statesmanlike speeches and interventions, so it should come as no surprise that she finds herself nominated for Speech of the Year.

The speech in question came during a unique session in the chamber, as MPs on both sides of the aisle commemorated Queen Elizabeth’s reign and paid tribute to her 70 years of service. As she rose to speak in front of a packed and black-clad House of Commons to share her memories of the late Queen, many expected her speech to follow the sombre tributes that came before.

Instead, having eulogised over the “most remarkable person I have ever met”, she opted to share one particular memory with the House; that of dropping a plate of cheese on the floor whilst attending a garden party hosted by the Queen.

The light-hearted anecdote brought noticeable joy to those in the chamber, and was met by irrepressible laughter from members hearing how May’s moment of clumsiness was observed by the Queen who was “carefully watching my every move”. Proceeding to inform the House that she had hurriedly picked up the cheese and placed it back on the table, her report that this had been met with a smile from Her Majesty brought yet more laughter.

Light-hearted moments were few and far between during this unprecedented time of national mourning, both within the Commons and around the country. Through her delivery of the 8-minute speech, May was able to bring a rare smile to the faces of those around her while paying tribute to the huge impact the late Queen had on the nation.

“The cheese fell on the floor. I had a split-second decision to make: I picked up the cheese, put it on a plate and put the plate on the table. I turned round to see that my every move had been watched very carefully by Her Majesty the Queen. I looked at her, she looked at me and she just smiled.”

Theresa May

4. SPEECH OF THE YEAR

Anna McMorris MP

Leaving an abusive relationship



LABOUR

“A hugely important subject, Anna McMorris should be commended for speaking about her own experiences to help colleagues understand the reality of the situation facing those trying to leave abusive relationships.”

Rebecca Lury

“It took guts, and moved fellow MPs to tears.”

Jason Groves

A former special advisor to the Welsh Government, Anna McMorris has served as MP for Cardiff North since 2017.

Following Keir Starmer’s election as Labour leader in April 2020, McMorris was appointed as Shadow Minister for International Development, before succeeding Peter Kyle as the Shadow Minister for Victims and Youth Justice following a minor reshuffle in 2021.

As Shadow Minister for Victims and Youth Justice, McMorris has shared her own experiences of an abusive relationship with Westminster, recalling her experiences of lying, cheating, gaslighting and controlling behaviour in a discussion on the challenges women face within the justice system.

Emphasising the importance of breaking down the stigmas of abuse, McMorris’s brave decision to share her own story has been a powerful reminder that the violence and abuse that women around the UK face is at no fault of their own: “I consider myself a strong, independent woman with a thick skin having to navigate the brutal reality of being a woman in politics. Yet it still happened to me”.

With the past year bringing to light the level of systemic misogyny across the country’s police force, McMorris has been integral to conversations around protecting women and restoring public trust – and her bravery in sharing her own story has been no small part in that.

“I still felt trapped, trying also to navigate the lying, the cheating, the gaslighting and the controlling behaviour—living in a permanent state of anxiety, unable to function at times, and not knowing what was real or what was not. It took all my strength to leave the relationship I was in. I left one evening last year with just a single bag under my arm.”

Anna McMorris MP

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