

STRO
ECON



Conservative Conference 2025

The DeHavilland Guide

Conservative Conference 2025

The DeHavilland Guide

Contents

Key takeaways	2
Conference atmosphere	4
Policy	5
What's next	8

Authors

Harry Bhattacharyya
Junior Policy Analyst

Michael Cameron
Lead Policy Analyst

Tom Lytle
Senior Policy Analyst

Editorial team

Steve Tolley
Group Political Content Editor

/ Key Takeaways

- After a quiet first year on the policy front – and following a 'policy renewal programme' launched in March – this Conservative conference saw a raft of commitments.
- On business and the economy, the Shadow Chancellor committed to abolishing business rates for shops and hospitality venues while also confirming that a Conservative Government would work to drive down waste, saving £47 billion.
- Kemi Badenoch committed to a new "golden fiscal rule", whereby at least half of savings would be spent on deficit reduction and the rest on tax cuts. Badenoch also announced – in a surprise move – that a Conservative Government would abolish primary residence stamp duty.
- Just before the conference kicked off, Badenoch announced that the party would scrap the Climate Change Act and leave the European Convention of Human Rights, though these commitments did not seem to dominate chatter in Manchester.
- Despite conference unfolding without any real missteps, conversation within the Conservative Party is unlikely to move beyond the possibility of a leadership challenge.
- A persistent topic of conversation was whether it was significantly, or just marginally, quieter than last year, and what this means for the party's fortunes.
- Despite a lack of overt positioning by possible challengers, the key date to watch will be 2 November, when Badenoch can formally be challenged by rivals within the party.



/ Conference atmosphere

Last year, the Conservatives' election loss was overshadowed at conference by the buzz of a leadership contest; four candidates battled with main floor speeches and various forms of merchandise, all seeking to build momentum for a final MP vote. That conference was busy – with many passes and exhibition stands likely bought before the election.

That excitement had naturally dissipated this year. Debate at fringe events and receptions on the Sunday focused on whether it was significantly, or just marginally, quieter than last year.

Much of this was sparked by a story from Sky News on the Saturday before conference, reporting leaked Conservative Party registration figures. Sam Coates [suggested](#) that, as of

August 2025, there were 1,100 fewer member registrations and around 200 fewer business or charity registrations. At a conference site as large as Manchester's, it is hard to gauge how different attendance really was, but you rarely struggled for space at fringe events, drinks receptions, or Midland Hotel bar.

What was notable is that individual figures within the party retain their crowd-drawing ability. DeHavilland attended several fringes with most of the Shadow Cabinet, many of which were overflowing. It seems that while the party itself has lost some of its relevance, figures such as Robert Jenrick and James Cleverly retain their sparkle.

/ Policy

Despite Badenoch having told the Shadow Cabinet earlier this year that the party would not make any big policy announcements until 2027, this year's conference saw a slew of them.

Having [launched](#) a Policy Renewal Programme in March, this conference felt like the first signs of its results emerging. Shadow ministers made multiple references to "showing their working out"; that is to say, they wanted to make clear that the Conservatives would not make policy commitments which they couldn't justify. Therefore, most of the discussions at conference consisted of policy proposals or principles from shadow ministers, rather than firm commitments.

Fiscal responsibility and taxation

In her final-day [speech](#) Kemi Badenoch announced a new "golden rule" in a bid to reduce government borrowing by cutting public spending. The rule, she promised, would mean "at least half of all savings will be spent on deficit reduction and the rest on tax cuts and other priorities", [The Guardian reported](#).

Announcing the rule she said, "We are the only party with a plan to get our economy back on track. It starts with fiscal responsibility. We have to get the deficit down. And we must also show how every tax cut or spending increase is paid for".

In the same speech, Ms Badenoch announced that a future Conservative government would abolish stamp duty on the purchase of principal residences.

She argued the change would "unlock a fairer and more aspirational society" and would "help achieve the dream of home ownership for millions", the [BBC reports](#).

Meanwhile, cuts to public spending were a central theme of Shadow Chancellor Sir Mel Stride's conference [speech](#) with the party pledging to £47 billion a year from a savings drive across government.

He outlined that a future Conservative government would achieve the savings by:

- Cutting £23 billion from the welfare bill, including through stopping claims by those with "less severe mental health problems"
- Saving £8 billion reducing the size of the Civil Service to 2016 levels
- Reducing the overseas aid budget to 0.1% of GDP, saving £6.9 billion
- Saving £3.5 billion by stopping the use of hotels to house asylum seekers
- Restricting benefits and social housing to UK nationals, saving £4 billion

Sir Mel argued his was the "only party that will stand up for fiscal responsibility", which he said meant "we have to face some hard truths to which other parties turn a blind eye".

This fits with polling presented at a fringe event by More in Common which highlighted the Conservatives' strong polling with regards to economic competence in comparison to the two other main parties. The polling company explained this was a clear opening that should be exploited and said more economic announcements should be expected in due course.



Businesses

In his [speech](#) to Conference, Sir Mel announced the party would “abolish business rates for shops and pubs on our high streets”. The proposal would see retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses not having to pay business rates up to an “annual limit of £110,000 per year”, the BBC [reported](#).

Shadow Business Secretary Andre Griffith used his [speech](#) to announce that the party would repeal the “family business tax”, create a tax system “which values those who take a risk”, and scrap the Employment Rights Bill. He also pledged to make it easier for businesses to open bank accounts.

At a fringe event on investment, Stride announced that a future Conservative government would reduce the tax burden, cut red tape, and tackle industrial energy costs in a bid to increase business investment.

Migration, crime, and justice

On the eve of conference, Kemi Badenoch [announced](#) that a future Conservative government would withdraw the UK from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), following a review by the Shadow Attorney General. She returned to this in her Sunday [speech](#).

The move, which comes against a backdrop of the party haemorrhaging support to Reform on the issue of immigration, was described by Badenoch as “necessary” to protect “our borders, our veterans, and our citizens”, the BBC [reported](#).

Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp [announced](#) as part of the “borders” plan that the UK would depart the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking and promised to end immigration tribunals. He also outlined a plan to establish a “removals force” to deport all illegal arrivals within a week.

On crime, Philp pledged to hire 10,000 more police officers, which he argued would cost £800 million a year, funded by the party’s cost-cutting drive. He also promised to triple the use of stop and search powers for police in England and Wales and abolish non-hate crime incidents.

Meanwhile, Shadow Justice Secretary Robert Jenrick [announced](#) the party would abolish the Judicial Appoints Commission, which he argued would “restore the proper role of our judiciary, putting ultimate power back where it belongs, in the hands of Parliament, and ministers”. He also laid out plans to abolish the Sentencing Council arguing it was “not fit for purpose” and argued that “judges who blur the line between adjudication and activism can have no place in our justice system.”

Housing

With the Labour Government still talking lots about housing, the subject was also high up on the Conservative conference agenda. This was cemented on the final day when Badenoch [committed](#) to abolishing stamp duty on primary residences.

The Guardian [reported](#) that the removal is expected to cost around £9 billion annually.

The abolition would not apply to additional properties, properties purchased by companies, or by non-UK residents. It will not apply to Scotland or Wales where separate taxation exists. PA noted that SDLT brought in an estimated £13.9 billion in the last financial year, but a large proportion of this is from additional homes and other buildings.

Shadow Housing Secretary Sir James Cleverly spoke at a handful of housing fringes, making clear that – even if he did not have firm policy commitments yet – he had a conviction to make an impact.

In both a CPS fringe event and his main conference [speech](#), Sir James heavily criticised housing delivery in London. On the “NIMBY” debate, he argued that work is needed to win over people and communities who would object to new homes and developments.

Speaking on Sunday, Sir James was even more critical of the housing system, arguing that housing delivery has fallen not because of market failures but because of a market collapse. He explained that there are areas where supply does not match demand, calling on the Government to restore the market and its ordinary dynamics.

Discussions across fringes frequently turned to the planning system and building regulations, and how they increase the price of building new homes. Chis Bishop brought insights from New Zealand, where he currently serves as Housing Minister. He argued that zoning can play a role, but that getting the rules and regulations in planning and housebuilding right is the way to support more housebuilding.

At an NHBC event on housing quality, the aesthetics of new homes was front and centre, with Sir James arguing that building regulations ought to support the building of beautiful homes.



/ What's next

As ever with a party famed for its ruthless ability to ditch leaders, questions continue to be asked about Kemi Badenoch's long-term future

A persistent undercurrent at this Conservative conference was whether it would be her first and last as leader. At the end of conference, *The Times* [reported](#) that the Shadow Cabinet was "divided" over her future, with some considering the "nuclear" option of resigning to trigger a leadership contest.

The key date to watch will be 2 November; a year since she became leader and the date on which she can formally be challenged by rivals within the party. There is a tricky balancing act to be struck by potential challengers: go too early and risk taking the blame for what is likely to be a difficult set of results at next May's elections, or wait until after May, when Badenoch's position may be improved or the party's decline considered terminal.

It is widely agreed that the raft of policy announced at conference bought Badenoch some time – especially through pledges on scrapping the Climate Change Act and leaving the European Convention on Human Rights. Similarly, her commitment to scrap stamp duty was met with wide approval within the party and provided a welcome boost.

Critics will also have to contend with the view that replacing Badenoch with the seventh Conservative leader in a decade would be "insane" – as one ally put it to *The Times* – and provide further evidence of an unserious party.

There is little doubt that if the party is still in fourth place in polls in 12 months' time that Badenoch will almost certainly be gone. However, she appears to have come out of conference in a relatively stronger position and will be pleased that many of her policy announcements were well received within the party.

Nevertheless, much like with the Prime Minister, her long-term future remains unclear.

Unlike Sir Keir Starmer, Badenoch does not have the comfort of her apparent rival not even being an MP. She will doubtless know this conference must prove a spark for a rise up the polls rather than a one-off boost if she is to be in a position to deliver on her wide-ranging commitments.



DeHavilland

We hope you found this briefing helpful.

This briefing is an example of the in-depth political information we provide to public affairs and policy clients every day.

Our analysts gather vital political content from a range of sources to bring our customers live coverage tailored to their strategic needs.

To find out how DeHavilland's political monitoring and research can help your organisation, and to request a consultation, visit our website: dehavilland.co.uk

Photo credits:

Images on page 1 and 7 courtesy of @Conservatives via X

Images on page 3, 4 and 9 courtesy of @KemiBadenoch via X