

Mick Whitley, Labour MP for Birkenhead

Background

Mick was born and brought up in Birkenhead, where many of his family worked in the ship building trade. After leaving school, Mick served in the merchant navy before getting a job with Vauxhall Motors. He worked for Vauxhall for almost 30 years and became a trade union organiser during that time.



Constituency

Birkenhead has traditionally been a very safe Labour seat, having returned a Labour MP at every election since its creation in 1950. In 2019, on a bad night for Labour nationally, Mick won 59% of the vote and was elected with a 42% majority. However, after proposed boundary changes scrapped neighbouring Labour MP Alison McGovern's seat (Wirral South), Whitley was pitted against McGovern in the selection contest for Birkenhead, which McGovern won. As a result, Mick **will not be representing Birkenhead after the 2024 election**. See later in this document for what this means for any potential engagement.

The latest [figures](#) (from April 2023) put fuel poverty rates in Birkenhead at around 38%, well above the national average.

[The Local Government Association](#) estimates that almost 3,000 jobs will be needed in low-carbon sectors in Wirral by 2030 in order for the area to meet its share of national climate targets. These would largely be in the low-carbon heat and energy efficiency sectors.

Political Activity

Mick was first elected to Parliament in 2019. In this short and interrupted time, Mick has joined ten select committees (and remains a member of four) and 8 All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs). Select Committees scrutinise the government on a particular issue or bill and require additional work from an MP on top of their other duties. The fact that Mick has been a member of ten shows that he is an engaged parliamentarian.

APPGs are made up of MPs and Lords who share an interest in a particular issue. They do not have any formal powers but act as a forum for discussion. Mick is not currently a member of any APPGs but has previously been a member of Downstream Energy and Fuels, Hydrogen and 'Left Behind' Neighbourhoods.

Mick briefly served as Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) to the Shadow Climate Change Minister, Ed Miliband. PPSs are unpaid assistants usually given to backbench MPs in order to give them experience of ministerial or shadow ministerial work. Mick resigned from this role after a disagreement with the leadership on policy.

Mick regularly mentions climate change and discusses the need for action in Parliament. In response to the announcement of new North Sea oil and gas licences in 2023, Mick [called](#) for a 'worker-led just transition that establishes the right to high quality, green jobs for all and brings the energy sector under democratic control.' Recently, Mick has been an [advocate for tidal power generation](#) (Jan 2024), he [asked a parliamentary question on carbon neutral transport funding for local authorities](#) (Dec 2023), he [expressed solidarity with migrants to the UK](#), and asked a parliamentary question about [extending the Warm Homes Discount to renters](#) (Nov 2023).

Tailored Strategy

The fact that Mick is being forced to stand down complicates any engagement with him, in some senses limiting what he can be expected to do, whilst also opening up other possibilities. For instance, given the closeness of a General Election, any long term actions are unlikely, as Mick won't have the time necessary to complete them. Nevertheless, the fact that he is standing down will also mean that he isn't as constrained by the party as he would otherwise have been.

If we take into account the [context](#) in which he lost his seat – as well as his remarks at the time warning that trade unionists and the “industrial working-class” must remain an “integral” part of Labour – we can also see that he might be open to being more vocal about the direction of the party that he otherwise would be.

Recently, the key environmental controversy within the Labour party has been over their commitment to the £28 billion they pledged to invest on climate friendly investment. In response to pressure from the Conservatives over the economic feasibility of this pledge, leading voices from the party, such as Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves, have [suggested](#) that it will be withdrawn.

In recent years, the constant pivots, u-turns and delays from the UK Government have been damaging to the UK's economic future. Business and civil society need certainty about the scale of investment. Time and time again, economists, industry

and the Government's own analysis suggests Labour's current plan is of the order of magnitude necessary for the UK to seize the greatest economic opportunity of the 21st century. The transition cannot be funded by the private sector alone, and government investment is needed.

- **Possible Ask 1: Write to Rachel Reeves MP, Shadow Chancellor, outlining the importance of the Green Prosperity Plan to working class communities such as those in the Wirral, stressing the opportunities offered by green jobs and climate stability, and strongly urging the Labour Party to stick to its initial announcement of £28 billion in climate friendly investment per year, and be proud of a bold, ambitious plan that makes the case for the scale of investment needed**

Equally, given that he will not be running again, Mick might be able to be more publicly critical of the current direction of the Labour party. A SMART ask to explore this could be:

- **Possible Ask 2: Will Mick write an article, either for national or local news, outlining why a worker-led just transition is so important for communities like those in Birkenhead, and use this to urge the Labour Party to stick to its original pledge of £28 billion in climate friendly investment per year.**

Finally, another way in which a departing MP can still be an effective individual to engage with is when they can connect you to another MP. Given Mick's previous position working for Ed Miliband as a PPS, this could be a potential avenue. However, it will work best if you have a specific issue they wanted to talk with Ed about.

- **A possible third ask could be: Would Mick put us in touch with Ed Miliband MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, in order to discuss [insert relevant issue]**

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