

# New leader

A leader who can appeal to floating voters and lift the flatlining Conservative Party

# Compassionate mission

A one nation Conservatism that seeks to bring Britain together

# Grown-up policies

Turned-off voters deserve serious policies, not opportunistic politics

# Open party

Resources need to be poured into honest and productive relationships with all sections of society

# Change Alliance

The cold war between Conservatism's modernising factions needs to be replaced with warm cohabitation

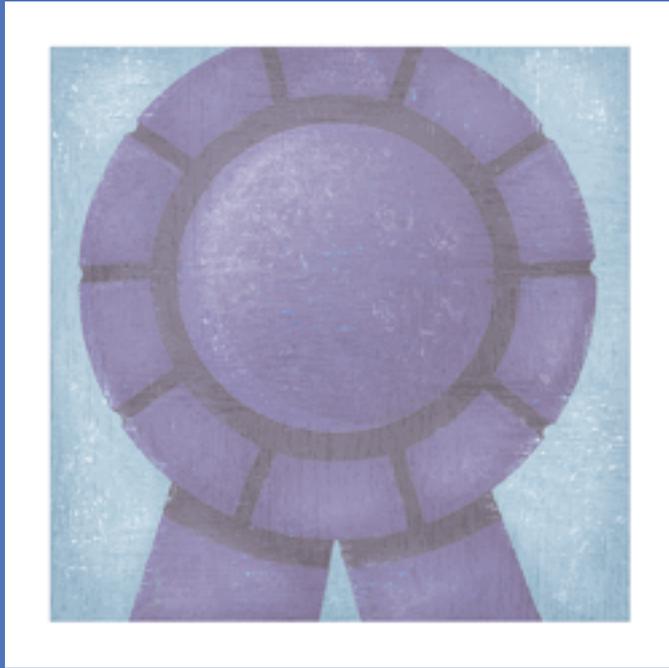
# Electability



**A MANIFESTO FOR A 44%  
CONSERVATIVE PARTY**

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Since 1997 the Conservative Party has zig-zagged between different strategies. It has neither convinced people that it knows what it believes - nor that it has the grit to stick to a course. The end result is that it has suffered another historic defeat. Tories won't win power by simply waiting for Labour's unpopularity to reach a tipping point. Only by adopting a strategy that will also defeat LibDem MPs will Conservatives ever become Britain's majority party again. The Conservative Party must now decide on a radical, reforming mission and have the character to pursue it single-mindedly.



Five burdens the Conservative Party cannot afford by the time of the next election:

- > A leader who cannot inspire floating voters
- > A level of public dislike that provokes hundreds of thousands of people to vote tactically against Tories
- > Shallow policies that do not address the country's fundamental challenges
- > Weak relations with major sections of Britain - including the professions, voluntary society and faith groups
- > Unresolved tensions between the liberal and compassionate modernisers within the Conservative Party.

This manifesto explores ways in which those burdens might be lifted.

THE TORY PARTY  
DID NOT MAKE  
ENOUGH PROGRESS  
AT THE 2005  
GENERAL  
ELECTION...

Although the Tories gained 33 extra seats they have fewer MPs than Michael Foot won for Labour in 1983.

The Tory share of the national vote was up by less than 0.5% on 1997 and 2001 - two election results widely regarded as catastrophic. But, unlike in 2001, when voters were happy to give Tony Blair more time, Michael Howard had the benefit of an electorate eager for change. LibDems and 'other' parties were the overwhelming beneficiaries of that desire.

No real progress was made against the Liberal Democrats. Although Tories won four seats from Charles Kennedy's party - three seats were lost to LibDem control.

The Tories did well in London but in other parts of the country the party's share of the vote was actually down.

Polling suggests that the 'fundamentals' are still stacked against the Tories. The Conservative Party still hasn't recovered a reputation for economic competence - first lost on Black Wednesday. Tories are also still seen as 'nasty'. The high volume emphasis on immigration and the ill-mannered 'Blair is a liar' attacks only reinforced that image problem.

# A new leader tested by an open primary system

The Conservative parliamentary party does not possess an obvious and ideal leader. It should not rush to elect the wrong leader.

The 2005 General Election has yielded a particularly rich parliamentary crop for the Conservative Party. The election of David Burrowes, Greg Clark, Stephen Crabb, Douglas Carswell, Nadine Dorries, Michael Gove and Nick Herbert should reassure those, like *The Economist*, that once worried that the Conservative Party could die from a dearth of talent.

Within its existing number the parliamentary party is blessed with many highly rated young Turks and a number of under-used sages. It does not possess an obvious leader, however. In the wake of the 2005 defeat the Conservative Party should

not rush to elect the wrong person. In order to elect the right person, it should first spend some time getting the election process right. This process could be overseen by an interim leader. If not Michael Howard, Michael Ancram, the party's widely respected deputy leader, could fulfil this task.

**Some MPs want to take the right to elect the Tory leader away from the 300,000 party members. But they revealed their own biases in their choice of Michael Howard.**

Some MPs would like to exclude rank-and-file party members from such a process. They don't trust the judgment of party activists and believe in the superiority of an exclusively parliamentary process. They are wrong.

Tory MPs have a tendency to get trapped in the Westminster way of doing things. In unanimously electing Michael Howard they undoubtedly chose an able parliamentary performer. They also chose someone who would subject Tony Blair to forensic scrutiny. They did not, however, choose someone who could easily command public affection. Conservative Party candidates reported that voters admired Michael Howard's competence but they did not warm to him. Michael Howard often reminded voters of Conservative past, not Conservative future. Again and again he fell into the Labour trap of defending the pre-'97 Conservative Party. Much of the 2005 election's protest vote accrued to the Liberal Democrats as a result.

The parliamentary Conservative Party has also exhibited an unhealthy impatience. It expects strategies to produce immediate opinion poll results. Michael Howard was forced into adopting at least four strategies during his brief eighteen month leadership. In his 'Saatchi Gallery' speech - when first elected - he promised a gentler, more mainstream Conservatism. But the next six months were wasted with the relentlessly negative 'Let Down By Labour' campaign. This campaign only duplicated negative work already being constantly undertaken by newspapers as diverse as *The Daily Mail* and *The Independent*. Then came the expensive launch of the 'Right To Choose' public service policies. Poor focus group reactions to these policies saw them relegated in the Tory strategy. A vacuum existed for a number of months until it was filled by the Timetable for

HOW CAN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY ELECT A LEADER WHO CAN APPEAL TO FLOATING VOTERS?

Action and the famous 'ten words'. The commitment to controlled immigration then came to dominate even that limited set of messages. Despite Michael Howard's excellent record as Home Secretary, crime hardly featured in the Tory campaign. The issue of pensions didn't even make it into the list of ten words.

The Party needs a broader – not a narrower process. A reliance on MPs or rank-and-file members would both be inadequate routes to electing a credible leader. People outside of the Conservative Party should be consulted and maybe even polled or balloted.

### **A US-style primary election would test for stamina, strategic vision and fundraising skills**

The Conservative Party's leadership election



**One of the party's most successful experiments in the last parliament was candidate selection by open primary. In Warrington South that process resulted in the selection of Fiona Bruce, a recent 'small businesswoman of the year'. Fiona identified the hugely troubling NHS experience of pensioner Margaret Dixon. Mrs Dixon's cancelled operations played a major part in the Tories' pre-election campaign and Fiona became an excellent advocate for Conservatism within the North West media.**

could resemble a US-style primary campaign where candidates are tested over an extended period and in multiple ways. As well as an ability to perform in front of diverse audiences, a primary contest could be constructed so that candidates could be tested for stamina, strategic vision, their ability to organise a team, and their fundraising skills.

### **Open primaries - with non-party members taking part and non-MPs able to stand**

In the leadership election between Ken Clarke and Iain Duncan Smith there was only one TV debate. In a US-style primary election (with UK-style limits on spending) there should be numerous debates between candidates – some in front of floating voters and in target seats.

In order to reduce the risk of leadership candidates 'preaching to the choir' there should be open primary elections before a final ballot is held. Non-party members should be able to vote in these open primaries. A handful of Conservative Associations could, perhaps, organise such open contests in representative constituencies.

The process could allow a little-known Member of Parliament to become the next Conservative leader. If a relatively unknown MP has the skills and ideas to lead the Conservative Party a full primary process will allow him or her to be tested and identified.

The leadership election should not necessarily be restricted to MPs. Any candidate who can raise, say, two thousand signatures from party members should be able to stand. The next Tory leader might even be outside of Parliament - in local government, a member of the European Parliament or in one of the devolved assemblies. Such an 'outside figure' might be unlikely to be elected but, by contributing to the leadership election, they could provide desperately needed new ideas.

An open primary election would be longer and potentially more messy than a quick election overseen by MPs. But it stands a better chance of electing the right leader. An extended and potentially messy primary process that proof-tests the next Tory leader is preferable to electing a candidate that is liked by Tory MPs but who can't appeal to floating voters.

# A one nation mission to serve every Briton

The Conservative Party's brand remains deeply flawed

Michael Gove has called the Conservative Party's obsession with leadership its 'Messiah complex'. Changing the leader will not lift the Conservative Party's opinion poll rating if its more fundamental brand problems are not addressed:

\* Opinion polls have consistently suggested that many Tory policies - on immigration, Europe and crime - are more popular than the Conservative Party.

\* Polls suggest that most voters rate the Tories third and many will vote tactically to keep 'nasty Tory party' candidates out of office. Tactical voting is one of the reasons why the Tories get fewer MPs than their percentage of the popular vote deserves.

\* Labour's biggest ploy towards the end of the campaign was to frighten voters with stories of Michael Howard winning power (by the backdoor). Tony Blair's last words at his last rally of the campaign – broadcast at the top of BBC1's Ten'o'clock News - formed a warning not to vote for the "selfish individualism" of the Tory Party.



The Conservative Party suffers from the same kind of brand crisis that dogged Marks & Spencer a few years ago. However good its individual products/ policies, shoppers/ voters don't want to come through its door.

# Why is the Tory Party the 3<sup>rd</sup> choice of most voters?

\* Voters may dislike Tony Blair but his Labour Party still outflanks the Conservative Party on 'image'. 48% of voters (polled by YouGov) thought that the Conservative Party "seems to appeal to one section of society rather than to the whole country". Only 20% thought this of the Labour Party. On "it seems to want to divide people instead of bringing them together" the Tory disadvantage was 41% to 20%. On "even if I don't agree with it, at least its heart is in the right place" the Tories lost 40% to 22%. Labour benefits from its understanding that identity and brand are vitally important. Even when it fails on hospital waiting lists or breaks a promise on tax its avowed 'heart-in-the-right-place branding' encourages many voters to forgive it.

**Theresa May and Iain Duncan Smith were right. The 10% of voters that will lift the Tory Party to 44% want to see a Conservative Party that isn't just 'good for them' - but also 'good for their neighbours'**

Theresa May's 'nasty party' speech was, perhaps, the most important and controversial speech of the last parliament. The curtailment of Iain Duncan Smith's heartfelt strategy of repositioning the Conservative Party as committed to the wealth and welfare of every Briton was the last parliament's greatest tragedy.

This paper is not the place to debate Iain Duncan

Smith's personal strengths and weaknesses. But the Conservative Party's failure to persevere with his 'one nation' mission was a grave error.

During the last General Election the Liberal Democrats presented themselves as 'The Real Alternative'. In reality they were presenting themselves as 'The Nice, Reasonable or Decent Alternative' to Labour. Tories, they suggested, were the nasty, outdated alternative. A *genuinely* one nation Conservative Party would scupper Charles Kennedy's empty positioning.

### **Labour is failing to tackle the deepest form of social need**

Millions of very vulnerable Britons are not prospering under Labour. The deepest forms of poverty are either persisting or growing. These challenges present the Conservative Party with huge opportunities for service. An opportunity for the party of Disraeli, Wilberforce and Shaftesbury to step forward and recover its finest compassionate traditions.

### **Compassionate conservatism reaches the prosperous voters that deserted the Tories in 1997 - and have stayed away**

Unthinking Tories often complained that Iain Duncan Smith's one nation agenda would never shift inner city seats into the Tory column. That was never the point. IDS' target was the middle class voter who had done well out of the Tory years and still liked Tory policies on tax and crime, for example, but wanted to feel good about voting Tory. Such voters didn't just want 'good for me' policies. They wanted a 'good for my neighbour' agenda, too.

### **The Conservative Party cannot wait for Labour's unpopularity to grow - it must also start defeating Liberal Democrats**

The Tories don't just need a strategy to defeat what is already an unpopular Labour government. They need a strategy to defeat Liberal Democrat MPs. Unless the Conservative Party can persuade voters that it represents 'good for you AND good for your neighbour' causes it will struggle to retake Twickenham, Taunton, Romsey and other yellow-coloured seats that it will need to ever form a majority.

The Conservative Party also needs to be seen as

less extreme. On a left-right scale, of -100% (most left-wing) to +100% (most right-wing) Gordon Brown and Charles Kennedy were seen as moderately left-of-centre (-20%) in another YouGov poll. Blair, interestingly, was viewed as slightly right-wing (+6%). Michael Howard, however, was identified as very right-wing at +55. The average voter placed themselves at -6%.

### **The Conservative Party needs a leader who embodies the compassionate mission**

Building a compassionate conservatism cannot be done overnight or in a tick-box-kind-of-way. It needs to be pursued single-mindedly. Language, policies, use of the Leader's time, the selection of candidates must all reflect the new agenda. It must also be part of the new leader's character. Voters will not respect someone who pursues this agenda out of political calculation. Candidates to replace Michael Howard should be examined for their past commitment to 'one nation values'. When the Conservatives have such a leader they will find voters more likely to trust them with sensitive issues like immigration and public service modernisation. Compassionate conservatism is morally right and politically sensible.

# Policies for government and not just a campaign

The 2005 Tory manifesto was thin

*“Lower taxes.  
School discipline.  
Cleaner hospitals.  
More police.  
Controlled immigration.”*

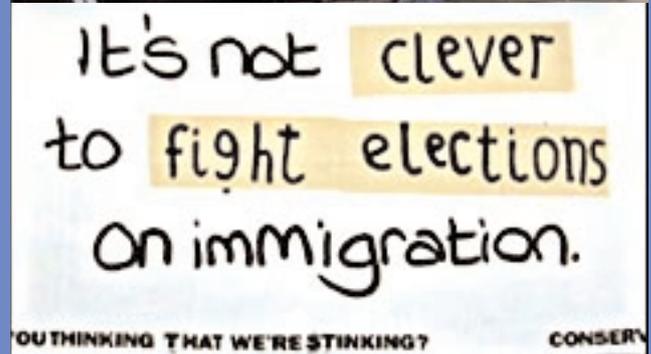
Many intelligent commentators criticised the 2005 Conservative manifesto for its narrowness and emotionally-charged messages. It was certainly a much thinner document than its Labour equivalent. The five headline pledges looked like they were designed to heat up a four week campaign, rather than provide a solid basis for a five year government.

**Alternative solutions to Britain’s major challenges were not offered at the 2005 General Election**

The election campaign became unnecessarily dull because voters were not presented with the possibility of a change of direction on major issues. And it is not as though Britain does not face some major challenges. Britain’s looming energy crisis. Historically unprecedented levels of violent crime. Loneliness amongst the elderly. The pensions timebomb. The persistence of suffocating poverty in an age of prosperity. These and other big issues did not feature strongly at any stage of the campaign.

\* The Conservative message on ‘cleaner hospitals’ certainly had tabloid resonance but where was the policy response to Britain’s globally shameful rates of cancer deaths?

\* Michael Howard promised ‘lower taxes’ but the £4bn of proposed tax relief would do very little to aid Britain’s international



Immigration dominated the Conservative campaign. The Tory call for strict limits on immigration were promoted in expensive newspaper advertisements and on graffiti-style billboards - many of which were defaced. The CBI objected to the Conservatives’ proposed cap on the number of work permits. Human rights organisations rightly objected to the inflexible limit on asylum numbers. The main political problem with the policy was the high volume it was given, however.

When combined with Michael Howard’s ‘Blair is a liar’ attacks it reinforced the Tories’ ‘nasty party’ image.



It is great that Tories want cleaner hospitals. But what about the bigger problems in the NHS? And in schools? And what about pollution, terrorism and...?

competitiveness.

\* A promise of 'school discipline' came in a manifesto that did not even mention family breakdown (a leading cause of classroom misbehaviour).

Costed commitments to 'more police', more prison places and more drug rehab places amounted to a serious crime-fighting programme but were hardly heard above the campaign's high volume emphasis on 'controlled immigration'.

To be fair to the Conservative policy process of the last four years this 'drowning out' problem meant that many powerful policies did not win much public attention. Serious policies on the pensions-earnings link, voluntary sector reform and vocational education were all victims of the narrow Conservative campaign.

**At the next General Election the biggest choice should be between a newly serious Conservative Party versus a still shallow Labour Party**

Labour has wasted the last eight years. Eight years of prosperity have not been used to ease

passage of the reform of Britain's antiquated schools and hospitals. They have not been used to fund serious welfare reform. Labour has consistently ducked the big decisions.

As the Conservative Party renews its policies it should not lose sight of 'the big picture'. Beyond the duty to offer a change of direction on individual issues like crime and taxation the Conservative Party must offer a different kind of government. Voters should be able to choose between a Labour government that has ducked the major challenges and a Conservative Party ready to face up to those challenges.

**The Conservative policy process must include attention to 'unexpected' issues**

The Conservative policy process must be rooted in good links with 'third party' organisations - as discussed in the next theme of this manifesto. It must also take the Conservative Party into new territory. Target voters must, for example, see the Conservative Party taking green and international justice issues seriously.

# Building honest and open relations with a cross-section of British society

**Neither politicians nor the press are trusted by voters**

Today's politicians are not widely trusted and neither are newspapers. The trust problem has grown during the Blair years. Tony Blair's broken promises on tax, WMD and tuition fees have fed public cynicism towards politicians.

Fake prisoner abuse photos in The Mirror, excessive partisanship and a tendency to over-interpret fleeting events have also reduced public respect for the media.

The value of strong relations with third party groups has grown significantly in this sceptical climate. Good relations with third party organisations can:

- \* inform policy development.
- \* provide visits to projects and people with stories to tell of Labour failure or alternative ways of progressing
- \* provide persuasive endorsements of otherwise controversial policies
- \* promote Conservative messages on their websites or in newsletters.
- \* reach volunteers to help 'get out the vote'.

**The Conservative Party must pour resources into building links with the professions, green groups, faith communities and other opinion-forming sections of society**

"Do Tories realise that they don't have all the answers?"

A professional modern political party will not wait for third party endorsements to appear spontaneously. The huge modern investment by political parties in media relations will need to be paralleled with a serious investment in third party relationships.

The Conservative Party should appoint volunteers or professionals to cultivate two-way relations with every leading group within society – the charitable sector, faith communities, field sports enthusiasts, think tanks, environmental campaigners, disability rights advocates and so on.

Systems need to be put in place so that the intelligence that passes between third parties and the political party is not lost because of staff reshuffles. That "intelligence" will include insights into emerging issues and ideas from third parties on how policies can be improved.

The Bush White House already has a highly developed network of third party relations. Senior administration officials regularly hold conference calls with opinion-leaders about major initiatives – often before the press is told. The views of these opinion-leaders then reach the public through conventional media, newsletters, emails and blogs.



**Although the Conservative Christian Fellowship's Listening to Britain's Churches process is imperfect it provides the kind of model of relationship-building that the Conservative Party should pursue.**

**Over six years the CCF has visited hundreds of Christian projects and kept in close contact with many of them. In 1999 William Hague visited the Yeldall drug rehabilitation project (left). Listening to Britain's Churches also provided the contacts for Iain Duncan Smith's Easterhouse visit and the black-majority church at which Michael Howard spoke about international development, during the General Election campaign.**

**Although the CCF has introduced many Christian organisations to Conservative politicians it has managed the relationships - identifying friendly groups, inviting them to contribute policy ideas and communicating Conservative messages through Christian conferences, newspapers and websites.**

# The Conservative Party's modernising factions need to unite

Two major groups within the Conservative Party have consistently understood that politics would never revert to 'normal' after Labour's 1997 victory.

Both groups understood that Labour was a different party under Tony Blair. Its destructive economic socialism was over – forever. Gordon Brown has proved that Labour economic policies remain flawed but they are no longer of the 'Winter of Discontent' variety.

## **The Soho modernisers and their support for gay rights, lone parenthood and a less confrontational style of politics**

By far the most prominent advocates of change have been the 'Soho modernisers'. Michael Portillo and Francis Maude were their early champions. John Bercow became a leading standard-bearer for their ideas in the last parliament. The Soho-mods became most associated with a relaxed attitude to social change. They supported increased gay rights and sought acceptance of lone parenthood. They called for a Conservative Party that looked like contemporary Britain. Soho-mods like Nick Gibb also recommended a less confrontational style of politics to the Conservative Party - and the eschewal of 'oppositionalism' for its own sake.

## **The Easterhouse modernisers and the renewal of Toryism's one nation tradition**

Slower off the starting line were the 'Easterhouse modernisers'. They thought that the Conservative Party needed to change but were

more interested in an emphasis on fighting poverty than accepting alternative lifestyles. They drew inspiration from George W Bush's compassionate conservatism of 2000. Ann Widdecombe talked of 'The Forgotten Decent'. The most prominent values-mod was IDS. He used his leadership to champion some of Britain's poorest communities, like Glasgow's Easterhouse estate. He reworked Beveridge's Five Giants analysis for the modern day, identifying failing schools, sub-standard hospitals, rising crime, child poverty and insecurity in old age as today's top challenges. William Hague, David Willetts and Oliver Letwin have joined the board of the Centre for Social Justice - IDS' continuing one nation crusade.

It is important to state that these are not two wholly distinct groups. John Bercow is essentially a Soho-mod on issues like gay rights but as shadow international development secretary he was a powerful advocate for the world's poorest people. IDS clashed with John Bercow over adoption rights for unmarried couples but as party leader he led the diversification of the party's candidates' base. Peter Lilley's support for cannabis decriminalisation might put him in the Soho group but his opposition to abortion and support for marriage might suggest that he fits more comfortably into the Easterhouse camp.

Will the  
Tories EVER  
understand  
why they  
lost in  
1997?

## The core vote group's emphasis on crime, tax, Europe and immigration

A third group in the party has always resisted any kind of change. The strategy of this group has largely prevailed at the last two elections. They have wanted the party to emphasise core themes of Euro-scepticism, a tough line on immigration, tax cuts and hardline crime-fighting policies.



**The Soho modernisers seek a more liberal Conservative Party. The Easterhouse modernisers advocate a more compassionate Conservatism. The Easterhouse mods believe that the Soho mods' tolerance of family change and drugs undermines social justice. Can these two modernising groups be reconciled?**

## The future of the Conservative Party depends upon fusing the 'Soho, Easterhouse and core strategy' groups

The future for the Conservative Party does not lie in any one group 'defeating' the other groups. Each have something important to say. For example:

- \* The Party should respect people with a homosexual orientation and should further diversify its base of Tory candidates. This diversity must become much deeper still. Skin colour and gender are only part of the diversity challenge. The party has a much greater need, for example, for more state-educated candidates who have worked in the public services or in the voluntary sector.
- \* The Party does need to demonstrate a compassion for society's most vulnerable people. Labour are failing to tackle the problems of family breakdown and drug addiction. Loneliness, addiction and violent crime are symptoms of Labour's dysfunctional Britain. The Soho modernisers who insist that they are interested in communities like Easterhouse need to consider how their own permissive attitudes to debt, drugs and lifestyle may be contributing to intergenerational exclusion.
- \* The Party's 'core vote' group needs to understand that the idea that 'core issues are enough' was tested to destruction at the 2001 and 2005 elections. So little was said at either election about the party's other themes that moderate voters were never

'licensed' to vote Conservative. Some start-again or uber-modernisers would like to take the last two defeats as proof that all of the old core messages need to be junked. That would be wrong. Britain's long-term growth rate does depend upon a more internationally-competitive tax regime. Violent criminals shouldn't be given the vote, as the Liberal Democrats suggest. European integration is a threat to British identity and Britain's global role. The problem with the Tory policy on immigration was not largely substantial – Britain's immigration system has been abused. The problem was of excessive volume and repetition.

What the Tory Party needs is a balanced offering of tough and tender policies. It doesn't necessarily need to abandon a robust policy on immigration. It needs to be twinned with an ambitious commitment to international development. It doesn't need to abandon a belief in lower taxation but it needs to show how tax reform can lift millions of low-paid workers out of the tax system.

The broad Conservative church needs a serious debate about fusing its different congregations. What can they agree upon? How can remaining disagreements be handled amicably? This discussion has often bubbled beneath the surface in recent years. But it has never been seriously pursued. It must start with the leadership election.

**If you have thoughts about this manifesto please express your opinions in the blog at [conservativehome.com](http://conservativehome.com)**