



Labour Party Conference 2025

Bathroom Association Briefing

Headline Overview

Labour's Party Conference was used to project resilience and delivery in the face of political and economic headwinds. While the leadership managed to contain Andy Burnham and confront Reform, the real story for business and industry was the emphasis on building, regulation, and skills.

For the bathroom and water sector, the takeaways are clear. Housing Secretary Steve Reed pledged to "do whatever it takes" to get Britain building, confirming 12 New Town sites with three starting construction before the next election, alongside the £39bn programme for social and affordable housing. Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds placed water reform at the centre of Labour's environmental agenda, announcing a new Water Reform Bill that will abolish Ofwat and create a tougher regulator with a mandate to drive accountability, investment, and efficiency.

Alongside this, Labour reinforced its commitment to skills and training, replacing the 50% university target with a new goal for two-thirds of young people to achieve higher-level qualifications by 25, backed by maintenance grants and a Youth Guarantee offering apprenticeships or training for all. For SMEs, Business Secretary Peter Kyle pledged to be the minister for both small and big business, underlining that fair markets and sustainable growth must go hand in hand.

Taken together, the conference signalled a Government intent on marrying ambitious housing targets with stricter environmental standards and a renewed skills pipeline. For members, this points to a policy environment where water efficiency, sustainable development, and SME innovation will be expected to play a central role in delivery.

Key Speeches

Prime Minister

Framed Labour as the party of patriotic renewal, contrasting optimism with what he called Reform's division. Emphasised balanced regional growth, investment-led delivery, and a major skills pledge: two-thirds of young people to access university or a "gold-standard" apprenticeship by the end of the Parliament. This renewed commitment to 'opportunity' underscores Labour's emphasis on skills pipelines.

Rachel Reeves, Chancellor

Reeves doubled down on fiscal credibility and "Securonomics" (domestic supply chains, procurement, and infrastructure). Announced recommitment to Northern Powerhouse Rail, a Youth Jobs Guarantee, and a new EU youth mobility scheme. While not water-specific, Reeves' investment-first approach shows Labour intends to prioritise infrastructure and growth industries even within tight fiscal limits, an opening for water efficiency and sustainable building standards to be embedded.

Steve Reed, Housing Secretary

Reed positioned himself as the driver of Labour's housing agenda, vowing to "do whatever it takes to get Britain building again." He confirmed 12 New Town sites with Tempsford, Leeds South Bank and Crews Hill identified as priorities, pledging that three new towns will begin construction before the next election. He announced £39bn to deliver 300,000 social and affordable homes, while ruling out council tax revaluation. His "Build, Baby, Build" slogan drew criticism, but the core message was clear: Labour will put large-scale housing delivery at the heart of national renewal. For the BMA, this agenda is directly linked to opportunities for embedding water efficiency and sustainable infrastructure in new developments.

Emma Reynolds, Environment Secretary

Reynolds announced a flagship Water Reform Bill, promising to abolish Ofwat and replace it with a tougher regulator, backed by stronger sanctions including prison sentences for polluters, a ban on executive bonuses, and reinvestment of fines into waterways. She framed sewage pollution as the "perfect metaphor for Tory failure" while positioning Labour as pragmatic environmentalists: tough on polluters, supportive of farmers, and ambitious on nature recovery with new budgets, forests, and protections. For the BMA, her speech confirms water reform as a top legislative priority, signalling tighter regulation but also opportunities for innovation in water efficiency and conservation.

Peter Kyle, Business Secretary

Kyle positioned himself as the minister for both small and big business, pledging to deliver the Employment Rights Bill in full while framing rights like day-one parental leave and sick pay as drivers of productivity. He defended digital ID as a pro-business tool to enforce fair

competition and prevent exploitation, and pledged that Labour would be the “party of the white heat of technology,” harnessing AI for workforce transformation. Emphasising support for SMEs as well as global investors, he cited trade deals and industrial investment as proof of renewed international appeal.

Fringe & Reception Intel

- Housebuilding & Planning:
 - Reed confirmed three new towns will be named in spring.
 - The “build, build, build” rhetoric was welcomed by industry on lots of panels, though there were concerns raised with the progress made so far.
 - Emma Antrobus (North West Director of the Institute for Civil Engineers) pushed for SUDS to be mandated in the upcoming Planning & Infrastructure Bill. ICE are currently doing a lot of thinking around water infrastructure.
 - Panel debates highlighted frustration with planning blockages, e.g. UNESCO blocking 10k homes, and calls to move beyond ideological divides on greenfield vs brownfield.
- Water and the Environment:
 - Emma Reynolds confirmed Labour will abolish Ofwat and replace it with a single, more powerful regulator under a new Water Reform Bill. This will tighten accountability and oversight, with direct implications for water efficiency and industry standards.
 - Labour pledged the biggest budget for sustainable farming and nature recovery in UK history, signalling an integrated approach to land, water, and environmental resilience.
- Skills & Education:
 - The 50% university target will be replaced with a goal for two-thirds of young people to achieve higher-level qualifications by age 25, whether via university, FE, or apprenticeships.
 - Targeted maintenance grants for low-income students will be reintroduced, funded by an International Student Levy expected to raise £600m annually.
 - A new national guarantee will ensure every young person has access to an apprenticeship, training place, or work experience, with youth hubs doubled across the country.
- Financing & Investment:
 - Talk of a National Housing Bank in the Autumn Statement, potentially at Public Works Loan Board scale, suggests new financing routes for development.
 - Scale-up capital and SME-friendly procurement were live topics, with broad agreement on the need for long-term certainty.

Implications

- Opportunities

- The Water Reform Bill and new regulator will create a major policy lever for embedding household and product-level water efficiency standards. Early engagement will be essential to ensure members' priorities are reflected in the new framework.
- The housebuilding drive and new towns agenda offer a clear route to push for mandatory water efficiency standards in planning and building regulations.
- Labour's skills and education reforms, particularly the new qualification target, maintenance grants, and the Youth Guarantee, open the door for members to expand the case for specialist training in plumbing, installation, and water-efficient technologies.
- The possibility of a National Housing Bank creates a new financing mechanism where conditions could be attached to encourage sustainable, water-efficient development.
- Labour's pledge on sustainable farming and nature recovery reinforces a broader sustainability narrative in which water efficiency can be positioned as a climate resilience measure, complementing energy efficiency.
- Risks
 - A more powerful water regulator may impose stricter compliance costs on suppliers and manufacturers if efficiency obligations cascade down the supply chain.
 - Persistent planning delays and blockages could slow housing delivery, reducing the pace at which new water-efficient standards can be embedded.
 - Fiscal discipline means delivery will rely more on regulation and standards than subsidies, which may place pressure on SMEs to adapt without financial support.
- Action Points
 - Engage directly with Emma Reynolds' team to shape the Water Reform Bill and secure a voice for manufacturers in the new regulator's framework.
 - Engage with ICE on their work on water scarcity, aligning messaging to position bathrooms and water systems as part of the solution.
 - Feed into the skills agenda, working with DfE and business groups to ensure bathroom and plumbing apprenticeships are part of Labour's expanded training guarantees.
 - Develop case studies showing how SMEs in the bathroom sector already deliver on sustainability and cost savings, reinforcing Labour's SME and pro-worker narrative.