Andy Burnham — Labour Candidate

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Update 14 Jun: ◫ Opinium/Forward Democracy data tables published (14 Jun) — Lab 46%, Ref 41%, Restore 7% among likely voters (7/10+). Burnham 5pt lead but Opinium warns: "Labour's five-point lead is smaller than Restore Britain's current vote share." GE question: Reform 42% vs Lab 34% — Burnham outperforming party brand locally. Telegraph: "Labour already treating Burnham as PM" — party treating him as PM-in-waiting. BBC: "Why the Makerfield by-election could bring down Starmer." Sky News focus group: "Little love lost for Labour government" but Burnham's slogan "Vote Andy, for us" resonating. Reddit: local "under siege" thread (349 upvotes) re: campaigning intensity; Burnham AMA on r/Wigan (279 comments). Rupert Lowe thanks 1,000+ Restore volunteers flooding in. 4 days to poll. Ladbrokes: 1/7 favourite.

| **Last updated:** 14 Jun 2026 (NEW: Opinium data tables published, Telegraph PM-in-waiting, BBC Starmer piece, Sky focus group, Reddit threads, Restore 1000+ volunteers) | **By-election date:** Thursday 18 June 2026 |

Bio

Detail	Info
Full name	Andrew Murray Burnham
Age	56 (born 7 January 1970)
Born	Aintree, Merseyside
Home	Leigh, Greater Manchester
Occupation	Politician (former GM Mayor, former Health Secretary)
Education	St Aelred's Catholic High School; Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge (English & Drama, BA 2:1)

Detail	Info
Family	Married to Marie-France van Heel (since 2000), three children

Political History

Role	Years
MP for Leigh	2001–2024
Chief Secretary to the Treasury	2007–2008
Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport	2008–2009
Secretary of State for Health	2009–2010
Shadow Health Secretary	2010–2011, 2015–2016
Shadow Home Secretary	2011–2015
Shadow Digital, Culture, Media & Sport	2016–2017
Mayor of Greater Manchester	2017–2026 (three terms)

Selection as Makerfield Candidate

Josh Simons stood down as Makerfield MP to make way for Burnham, who wants to return to Westminster as a springboard for a potential Labour leadership challenge against Keir Starmer. Burnham was confirmed as Labour candidate on 19 May 2026.

Key Statements & Quotes

- **CONFIRMED LEADERSHIP INTENT (4 Jun, BBC Question Time)**: "I would take the fight to change politics, and change this country, as high as I can." Said he would seek to enter any Labour leadership contest triggered by a Makerfield win. Named Wes Streeting as already having "launched" one. Claims Labour MPs privately urged him to challenge Starmer.
- **On Henry Nowak murder (4 Jun, QT)**: Called for review of religious knife-carrying laws. Said "it cannot be right that anyone can carry a blade in public" under religious exemption. Starmer met Nowak's parents separately; Hampshire Police now under emergency inspection.

- Called his campaign a **"vote to change Labour"** — positioning himself as an alternative to Starmer
- On immigration: says a **"stronger grip"** is needed, blaming Boris Johnson's government for letting it "drift"
- On the EU: says there is a **"long-term case"** for UK to return, but won't make it a campaign issue in Makerfield
- Campaign launch (22 May): pitched as a **"clarion call for change"**, promising to shake up "tired" British politics
- **Seeking advice from Sue Gray** on forming a future Labour government (24 May, Guardian) — signalling he is preparing for government transition post-Starmer
- **Guardian podcast** (25 May): "The byelection, Wes Streeting and Europe: your questions answered" — Pippa Crerar and Kiran Stacey answering listener questions about Burnham's campaign
- **MEN vox pop (26 May):** Bakery worker Sue in Platt Bridge asked Burnham: "Why are you coming here all of a sudden? Where have you been?" — reflecting voter scepticism that Burnham is parachuting in
- **Guardian Today in Focus podcast** (26 May): "Andy Burnham's (third) bid for the Labour leadership" — 29:53 podcast covering his by-election campaign as a launchpad for a leadership challenge
- **Sky-YouGov poll analysis (26 May):** In this week's national VI, Labour trails Reform by 8pts. But when asked who you want to win in Makerfield — naming Burnham as Labour candidate — Labour is ahead by 8pts. Among Northern voters, Labour leads by 16pts. Cross-party support includes 16% of current Tories, 46% of Lib Dems, 6% of Reform voters, and 35% of Greens — showing the "Burnham factor" significantly outperforms Labour's national brand.
- **Tony Blair backs Burnham (27 May):** Sir Tony Blair told BBC Radio 4's Today programme "I hope Andy wins Makerfield, I think he's a great guy, I want to see him in Parliament" — but also warned Labour MPs to "force people to say where they stand" before backing a leadership change. He said Labour is "playing with fire" and lacks "a coherent plan." In a 5,700-word essay, Blair said the Government is governing from "an essentially traditional Labour 'soft left' position, parked firmly in the party's comfort zone."
- **"Only positive vibes" from Burnham (26 May):** In a new series of regular teatime updates from the campaign trail, Burnham shared what he's hearing on doorsteps in Hindley, insisting he doesn't want "point scoring" and is running a "positive, unifying campaign."
- **Lemn Sissay endorsement (26 May):** The celebrated poet and Wigan-raised writer described Burnham as "impressive", "authentic" and said there was "no BS" with him after a chance meeting.
- **31 May — Farage vs Burnham clash over immigration:** Farage posts AI-altered image of Channel migrants holding "Vote Andy for us" signs. Burnham hits back: "Are you getting desperate, lad? Maybe keep your crypto millions for something else." Refers to Farage's £5m undeclared gift controversy. (MEN, Stephen Topping)
- **1 Jun — New campaign logo revealed:** Burnham unveils new logo containing phrases "Change Labour" and "Keep the Faith" (Politics UK). Kenyon mocks it: "Andy wants to change Labour. I want to change Makerfield." Deputy Labour leader Lucy Powell posts from Burnham campaign rally (MEN Live Blog) ||- **4 Jun — Politico: Labour fighting two**

campaigns in Makerfield: John Johnston analysis reveals Burnham sticking to upbeat pitch (£1,000-£1,500 positive Meta campaign; £700 stump speech) while Labour press team runs brutal attack ads on Kenyon branding him "completely unfit for office." Burnham declined to comment on the dual-track strategy. Reform running personal attack ads calling Burnham a "power grab" and mocking trans rights. (Politico, John Johnston, 4 Jun 4am CET)

- **3 Jun — FT: Starmer "bucket list" policies:** Financial Times reports PM could be ousted within weeks if Burnham wins Makerfield. Starmer's agenda described as "bucket list" by insiders, with fatalistic mood in government. (Financial Times)

Policy Platform

- On the soft-left/social democratic wing of Labour
- As GM Mayor: prioritised integrated transport (bus franchising, Metrolink expansion), social housing, devolution
- Hillsborough campaign: key figure in pushing for full disclosure and justice
- Advocates for proper social care settlement

Polling

Date	Pollster	Burnham %	Kenyon %	Margin	Notes
16 May	Survation	45%	42%	LAB +3	
23 May	Survation / Sunday Times	43%	40%	LAB +3	
	26 May	Sky-YouGov	+8 lead in Makerfield	—	—
	29 May	BMG / The i Paper	20% nationally	—	—

Key Partnerships & Endorsements

- **Keir Starmer**: confirmed he WILL campaign for Burnham ("It is Labour versus Reform")
- **Lucy Powell** (Deputy Labour Leader): campaigned with him in Makerfield
- **Darren Jones**: senior minister confirmed he'd campaign, said "I do want the Prime Minister to stay and get on with the job" — walking the line between backing Burnham and supporting Starmer

- **Wes Streeting**: backed Burnham as "best chance", said he'd have been accused of "pulling a fast one" if he'd triggered a leadership contest before giving Burnham the chance
- **Jo Platt** (Labour MP, Leigh & Atherton): out campaigning for Burnham in Orrell (24 May)
- **Alan Johnson** (former Home Secretary): said Labour MPs would be **"daft"** to back a Burnham leadership bid, called for Starmer to stay — a notable voice against the Burnham bandwagon
- **Annunziata Rees-Mogg**: called for the right to unite behind Reform to stop Burnham (25 May) — evidence the right sees him as the real threat
- **Nigel Farage**: urging right-wing voters to unite behind Reform to **"stop Andy Burnham"** (25 May, Daily Mail)
- **Lemn Sissay** (poet): endorsed Burnham after chance meeting, described him as "authentic" (26 May)
- **Sir Tony Blair**: said "I hope Andy wins Makerfield, I think he's a great guy" (27 May, BBC Radio 4 Today) — but warned Labour MPs to force leadership candidates to set out detailed policy before backing change

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What It Means

- If Burnham wins: Labour holds Makerfield but with vastly reduced majority. Labour leadership contest likely — Jess Phillips says change is inevitable regardless.
- If he loses: seismic shock — Reform taking a safe Labour seat would trigger immediate leadership crisis for Starmer
- The race is a knife-edge — Burnham leads Kenyon by just 3 points (within margin of error)
- Burnham does not have to step down as GM Mayor unless he wins the seat
- **Jess Phillips intervention (Hay Festival, 25 May):** Former minister publicly says "I think even if Andy Burnham doesn't win in Makerfield there will be a change of the Prime Minister" — this is a significant signal from a prominent Labour figure
- **Ellie Chowns ambiguity:** The Greens won't step aside for Burnham but also won't "throw the kitchen sink" — which is probably the best outcome for Burnham (Green presence splits the anti-Reform left-wing vote less aggressively than a full campaign)
- **Sky-YouGov poll (26 May) — the "Burnham factor":** A new Sky-YouGov poll reveals a striking contrast — nationally Labour trails Reform by 8pts, but when Burnham is named as Labour candidate in Makerfield, Labour leads by 8pts (+16pt swing). Among Northern voters the lead is +16pts. Cross-party switching data shows 16% of Tories, 46% of Lib Dems, 6% of Reform, and 35% of Greens would back Burnham — confirming the personal vote effect is real and significant. This is the most compelling evidence yet that Burnham's candidacy changes the race fundamentally.
- **Harriet Harman warns of early GE (27 May):** Former deputy Labour leader said at the Hay Festival that the UK could be "tipped into a general election" if Burnham replaces Starmer as PM. She said Burnham may feel he needs his own mandate, especially if Nigel Farage accuses him of being a "usurper." Harman called stability "fusty and unsexy" but said "people just want to get on with their lives."

- **Greens scale back campaign (27 May, Guardian exclusive):** The Greens have decided to devote only limited resources to Makerfield — a potentially significant boost to Burnham. The party will instead focus on the GM mayoral by-election that would be triggered if Burnham wins. Senior Green figures including Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley called for the party to scale back, particularly if Burnham commits to electoral reform.\n- **Blair's full interview — net zero, "playing with fire", RAF bases (27 May, MEN live blog):** Sir Tony Blair's full Today programme interview and 5,700-word essay produced multiple new angles:\n - **"Rip up net zero targets":** Blair said Starmer should tear up Ed Miliband's net zero targets, arguing that the three biggest emitters (China, America, India) pursue "cheap energy and electrification" and Britain's lens should be the same, especially in the age of AI\n - **"Playing with fire":** Blair's central essay claim — the Government is "governing from an essentially traditional Labour 'soft left' position, parked firmly in the party's comfort zone" — with specific criticism of employer NI rises, the workers' rights bill, minimum wage increase\n - **RAF bases / Iran:** Said the Government should NOT have stopped the US from using its RAF bases during the attacks on Iran — a significant foreign policy intervention\n - **"Honest debate with the public":** Called for an honest conversation about taxing "too much, spending too much, borrowing too much", warning that the triple lock on pensions and incapacity benefit increases are creating a situation "where economically we're not able to grow"\n - **On Labour's 2024 mandate:** "I don't think Labour won the last election because people read the manifesto and said, 'this is what we want'... people thought Conservatives have behaved completely unacceptably, and to Keir Starmer's great credit, the Labour Party was an acceptable alternative"\n - **10-point plan:** Laid out a 10-point plan for the future of Government, emphasising AI's impact on society, warning of "Britain will continue its long slide towards relegation from the Premier League of nations" without a radical agenda\n- **Farage "Open Borders Burnham" claim fact-checked (27 May, MEN):** Nigel Farage posted on Facebook that "more illegal migrants have been dumped in the North West than any other part of Britain because Andy Burnham welcomes them", dubbing him "Open Borders Burnham" with an avatar from Burnham's own campaign posters. **MEN fact-check:** The MEN examined the data behind Farage's claim — the article assessed whether Burnham is really to blame for the number of illegal immigrants placed in the North West — giving voters a data-driven rebuttal to the attack line.

Twitter/X Discussion

> *Source: Nitter search, 26 May 2026*

Burnham is the dominant figure in Twitter discourse around the by-election. Key themes:

- **Jess Phillips says PM must go even if Burnham loses** (25 May, Hay Festival): "I think even if Andy Burnham doesn't win in Makerfield there will be a change of the Prime Minister" — widely shared, damaging for Starmer regardless of outcome
- **Ellie Chowns won't "throw the kitchen sink"**: Green Party leader says Makerfield is "a different kettle of fish" to Gorton and Denton — won't step aside for Burnham but won't go all-in either
- **Matt Goodwin predicts Burnham win + snap election**: "I think unless all patriotic voters unite behind Reform in Makerfield then Andy Burnham will win, call an early snap general election and put Britain under a hard left government until 2031"
- **The "King of the North" framing**: Twitter commentary consistently frames the by-election as a referendum on Burnham's future — "Makerfield is a set piece by-election for/against Andy Burnham for a GE against 'the King of the North'". The race is seen as a proxy battle between Burnham and Farage.
- **Senior Greens urged to stand aside**: A Telegraph story about senior Greens telling the party to "make way for Andy Burnham" was widely shared, with users debating whether tactical voting could help or hurt Labour
- **Restore Britain vote splitting**: Multiple tweets discuss how Restore Britain's Rebecca Shepherd could split the right-wing vote — ironically helping Burnham. "It makes no difference if Restore's share of the vote enables Andy Burnham to become PM" — Restore Britain framing this as a feature not a bug
- **Polling data shared and debated**: A widely-circulated polling tweet showed Lab 43%, Reform 40%, Restore 7% — debated intensely with accusations of bias from both sides
- **General Election implications**: The dominant narrative is that Burnham's performance in Makerfield determines whether he can challenge Starmer for the Labour leadership and become PM
- **Farage urging right to unite behind Reform** (25 May): "Nigel Farage urges voters on the Right to unite behind Reform to 'stop Andy Burnham'" — widely shared as evidence the right sees Burnham as the real danger
- **Annunziata Rees-Mogg on TalkTV** (25 May): "'The right should come together and make sure they can win' — calling for right-wing parties to unite behind Reform to stop Burnham
- **Burnham doesn't "want Makerfield. He wants No.10"**: Jessica Caine (Tory member) urging her fellow Conservatives to vote Reform in Makerfield to stop Burnham — shared widely (25 May)
- **Sue Gray advice story**: "Andy Burnham seeks advice from Sue Gray on forming future Labour government" widely shared as evidence Burnham is already planning for a post-Starmer transition
- **Sun exclusive — "Allies of Andy Burnham are privately delighted"** (26 May): The Sun reported that Burnham's inner circle is delighted that the Reform/Restore row is boosting his chances. Story shared widely: "Allies of Andy Burnham are privately delighted his chances in Makerfield are being boosted by the Reform/Restore row."
- **Telegraph — "Labour MPs planning to defect to the Green party if Burnham loses"** (26 May): A Telegraph story reported that Labour MPs are preparing to defect to the Green Party if Burnham loses the Makerfield by-election — framed as a shock to the Labour establishment if Starmer can't hold the seat even with Burnham as candidate

- **Green Party replacement narrative**: Sarah Wakefield's selection as Green candidate was widely shared, with the Green Party announcing a Manchester councillor as candidate. Twitter commentary focused on the chaos of three Green candidates in five days
- **Libertarian Party candidate Dan Clarke**: Coverage of the new Libertarian candidate was shared, noting "The establishment media is so obsessed with the Burnham leadership soap opera they are refusing to even acknowledge the existence of other candidates" — libertarian criticism of the media focus on Burnham
- **Goodwin prediction repeated**: Matt Goodwin's prediction (Burnham will win, call early GE, Labour government until 2031) continued to circulate, especially among right-wing accounts urging Reform/Restore unity
- **Harriet Harman GE warning shared widely (27 May)**: Harman's comment that the UK could be "tipped into a general election" if Burnham replaces Starmer circulated widely across political accounts
- **Tony Blair interview clips (27 May)**: Blair saying "I hope Andy wins Makerfield" shared alongside his warnings about Labour being in its "comfort zone" — mixed reception from both Burnham supporters and critics
- **Lemn Sissay endorsement**: Poet's description of Burnham as "authentic" and "no BS" shared by Labour-supporting accounts

Reddit Discussion

> *Source: Self-hosted eddrit frontend (Windows PC Docker), 27 May 2026*

On r/ukpolitics, Burnham's candidacy is discussed in the context of Labour internal politics — whether this is a launchpad for a leadership challenge. The tactical voting debate (Greens standing aside, Lib Dems squeezing) is a recurring topic.

eddrit search reveals additional threads (27 May):

- "Do we think Andy Burnham will even win the bi election for makerfield?" — r/AskBrits, discussing the risk given Reform's 50% in recent local elections
- "How likely do you think Andy Burnham is to win a by-election in Makerfield?" — r/LabourUK, tactical analysis
- "What happens if Burnham loses the Makerfield byelection?" — r/LabourUK, 5-scenario breakdown
- "Do Brits really want Andy Burnham to stand as PM for Labour Party?" — r/AskBrits
- "Who do you expect to win the Makerfield by election?" — r/UnitedKingdomPolls
- "Greens to run scaled-back campaign in Makerfield byelection in potential boost for Burnham" — r/ukpolitics (26 May)

New threads (24-25 May):

- "Senior Greens urge party to step aside for Andy Burnham in Makerfield" (r/ukpolitics, score 65, 58 comments, 24 May) — The Times story about Greens urged to stand aside to help Burnham
- "Musk backs Restore Britain in Burnham by-election" (r/ukpolitics, score 115, ~187 comments, 24 May) — Elon Musk endorsement discussed as helping Burnham by splitting the right

New threads (27 May):

- "What should the Greens do in the Makerfield by-election?" — r/UKGreets, debating whether to support Burnham if he promises PR before 2029 to prevent a Reform majority. One user: "Burnham's a nothingy, Blairite, corporate centrist, who'll screw us over almost as much as Starmer. But if he promises PR before 2029, that will hands down prevent a Reform majority."
- "How do we all feel about an Andy Burnham Labour + Green coalition?" — r/UKGreens, discussing a potential coalition deal
- "makerfield by-election: position of local green party?" — r/UKGreens, asking about local party's stance on standing down
- "Greens for Palestine's Statement on the Candidate for Makerfield Standing Down" — r/LabourUK, pro-Palestine group's statement on Kennedy resignation, calling it a "smear piece"
- "A chance to vote for what you want, not just against what you don't" — r/Wigan, a Restore Britain supporter making their case locally
- The Guardian — Burnham confirmed as candidate
- The Guardian — Burnham starts campaign with pitch for No 10
- BBC — Burnham by-election launch
- ITV — Burnham says backing him is 'vote to change Labour'
- HuffPost — Burnham launches campaign with 'clarion call for change'
- The Guardian — Burnham seeks advice from Sue Gray on forming future Labour government
- Guardian Politics Weekly UK — The byelection, Wes Streeting and Europe podcast
- The Guardian — UK may be tipped into a general election if Burnham replaces Starmer, says Harman
- The Guardian — Greens to run scaled-back campaign in Makerfield in boost for Burnham
- The Guardian — Carol Vorderman demands apology from Reform candidate
- The Guardian — Reform candidate appeared to doubt seriousness of Covid on X
- BBC News — Burnham says he would seek to enter any Labour leadership contest (5 Jun)
- ITV News — Andy Burnham confirms he would run in race to replace Keir Starmer (4 Jun)
- Reuters — Labour mayor Burnham signals leadership contest intent (4 Jun)
- Independent — Burnham verdict on religious knife carrying after Nowak death (5 Jun)

- Express — Burnham savaged by QT audience member over leadership challenge (5 Jun)

5–6 June 2026 Updates

Leadership Challenge Explicitly Confirmed

On BBC Question Time (4 Jun), Burnham confirmed he would "seek to enter any Labour leadership contest" if he wins Makerfield — his first unambiguous declaration. Asked team to "develop a platform." BBC/ITV confirm (5 Jun). Previously said a Makerfield vote would "change Labour."

Henry Nowak / Religious Knife Law Intervention

On QT, Burnham said carrying knives for religious reasons "needs to be looked at" following the murder of Henry Nowak (18, British-Polish student, Southampton, Dec 2025). Positioned to the right of Starmer on law-and-order. Controversial framing. BBC published Nowak explainer (6 Jun).

Question Time Performance

Guardian: "takes round one" but "fighters pull their punches." Independent's Sean O'Grady: "unconvincing on every level" on leadership. Express: "savaged by audience member" over leadership challenge. Narrow win on points but no knockout.

Polling

Survation #2 (4 Jun): Burnham 49% (+6 from first poll). 10-point lead over Kenyon. Personal premium over Labour party brand ~15 points.

Reddit AMA (completed 5 Jun)

r/Wigan AMA ran successfully under verified u/AndyForMakerfield account (171 comments). Earlier file entry saying mods removed it was wrong. Key answers: committed to proportional representation; described "place first, not party first" approach as Mayor; cited deliberate use of Bee symbol on GM buses as unity branding; referenced Hillsborough justice work, Platt Bridge flood funding, Bickershaw illegal waste dump fight. Said he'd represent all Makerfield voters regardless of who they voted for.

BBC Newsnight Interview (5–6 Jun)

Victoria Derbyshire pressed him on leadership challenge. Declined to add to QT comments in this sit-down but reiterated he would enter any future contest and wants to "save" Labour and cut small-boat crossings. BBC published clip as "Are you ready to take on the Prime Minister?"

Lord Ashcroft Focus Groups (5 Jun)

Ashcroft's qualitative research among former Labour voters in Makerfield found Burnham widely seen as using the seat as a "stepping stone" — "his heart's in Manchester" was a recurring line. Voters applauded Simons stepping aside ("hats off") but suspected a backroom payoff. Framing: voters weighing Burnham-vs-Reform, not Burnham-vs-Kenyon specifically.

PR Commitment (Observer, resurfacing 7 Jun)

Observer interview quoted Burnham: "I am committed to proportional representation." Circulated on r/Wigan 7 Jun.

Lemn Sissay Times Piece (6–7 Jun)

Prominent poet and Makerfield native Lemn Sissay OBE published major Times interview defending constituency against "racist" label — recounted racist abuse at Byrchall High and being thrown out of foster care at 12, but called Makerfield "salt-of-the-earth people, strong people, kind people." Race/identity narrative enters the campaign through a respected local voice, indirectly softening ground for Burnham's anti-Reform messaging.

Campaign Fatigue Signal (7 Jun)

r/Wigan post "I'm sick of the flyers" (photo of letterbox stuffed with leaflets) attracted 226+ comments in 21 hours. Sentiment: democracy vs. spam. Labour and Reform both called out; no party-specific backlash against Burnham personally.

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