AEO & AEV CEO SUMMIT · 2026

The highlights, in seven slides

Politics, the economy and people - what this year's speakers told event industry leaders, and what it means next.

THE BIG PICTURE

Every event sits within a much bigger picture

Political priorities change. Economic conditions shift. Organisations have to adapt. Three speakers explored what that means for business events in the months ahead.

Economy

Strength, then uncertainty - Henry Glasspool, EY Parthenon

Politics

Westminster in flux - Nick King, Henham Strategy

People

Go slow to go fast - Hannah Alexander-Wright

ECONOMY

Henry Glasspool EY Parthenon

A stronger start than expected - then fresh uncertainty

- The UK entered 2026 in better shape than forecast, before renewed Middle East conflict weakened the outlook.
- Incomes have recovered, but discretionary spending hasn't - hospitality, leisure and live events are competing harder for the same pound.
- Higher-income households aren't cutting back because they have to. Many are choosing to save.

FOR LEADERS

The opportunity is there - but you must give people a compelling reason to spend.

POLITICS

Nick King Henham Strategy

Westminster in flux – and what it means for events

- The push continues for a dedicated government strategy for business events, built on the sector's economic contribution.
- Devolution is moving up the agenda - stronger local and regional support for attracting investment, visitors and major events.
- Watch-outs: ministerial churn, employment reforms and a possible mandatory overnight visitor levy.

FOR LEADERS

Keep making the economic case - and build relationships beyond Westminster.

Hannah Alexander-Wright

Go slow to go fast: helping teams adapt

- Organisations often mistake constant activity for progress — teams rarely stop to ask if they're solving the right problems.
- "Stinky Fish" surfaces the concerns everyone senses but nobody voices.
- The Role Expectation Matrix exposes assumptions between colleagues before they become frustrations.

FOR LEADERS

Create space for honest conversations before small problems become big ones.

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

Three themes ran through the day

1 **Uncertainty is everyday business**

Political priorities and economic forecasts can shift in weeks - readiness beats prediction.

2 **Value matters more than ever**

To government or to customers, organisations must communicate clearly why they matter.

3 **Leaders shape the response**

You can't control politics or the economy - but businesses that question assumptions and keep learning will be best placed.

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The conversation didn't stop there

These sessions set the scene for the organiser and venue roundtable discussions that followed — highlights coming soon.