

David Cameron: Fixing our Broken Society

In a speech today in Glasgow, David Cameron outlined how the Conservative Party plans to fix our broken society including proposals to cut down on the incidence of knife crime and deal severely with those who commit these kinds of crime.

The plan consists of long-term measures to deal with the causes of crime, tough policing to catch those who carry and use knives, robust sentencing and a system of rehabilitating young offenders to stop them committing knife and other crimes in the future.

David Cameron said:

(Check against delivery)

“I’m so pleased to be here in Gallowgate with Davena Rankin and Iain Duncan Smith to launch our by-election campaign for Glasgow East.

“Gallowgate has a very special place in the story of the modern Conservative Party. Iain first came here as leader of our Party and it inspired his crusade for social justice. He set up the Centre for Social Justice, fast becoming the nation’s leading voice on British poverty and how to end it. With his poverty-fighters’ alliance, he has built an inspiring and ever-growing army of charities, community groups and social entrepreneurs who are bringing new ideas and new energy to some of our country’s toughest places and toughest problems.

“And under Iain’s leadership, the Social Justice Poverty Group produced two landmark reports, Breakdown Britain and Breakthrough Britain. Together, they have played a big role in shaping our arguments and policies.

“Like Iain, Davena is a fighter for her beliefs. To be a Conservative trade unionist in Glasgow – that takes some bottle. She may not start this by-election as the

favourite to win. But if Glasgow East is looking for someone to speak up for the people who live here and to speak out against the Labour neglect that has done so much damage here they will not find a better local champion than Davena.

LESSONS FROM GLASGOW EAST

“There has been a lot written about this constituency since this by-election was called. Most of it has been negative. People have focused on the fact that public health is so bad, you’re likely to live longer in Gaza or North Korea. That welfare dependency is so bad, half the adults are on out of work benefits. “That social breakdown is so bad, Channel 4’s Dispatches documentary on knife crime found kids here talking about being stabbed as if it was no worse than grazing your knee.

“And it’s important that we learn the lessons from Easterhouse, from Shettleston, from Gallowgate but today I don’t want to focus on the negative. Or even on Glasgow East alone. Because the social breakdown you can see here is just an extreme version of what you can see everywhere.

“With over five million people in our country on out of work benefits, many of them on Incapacity Benefit, welfare dependency is now a crisis for the whole country, not just this corner of it. And you don’t need to come to Glasgow East to know that the casualisation of carrying a knife, and the horrific crime that goes with it is now keeping mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters awake at night in London, in Leeds, in Manchester, in Bristol. It feels as if none of our towns and cities is safe from the tide of violence.

“So I don’t want to come here to Glasgow and make out that this is some uniquely damaged community. It’s a community that’s been damaged all right: but the cause of that damage is wreaking havoc not just here, but everywhere. That’s why we’ve got to learn the lessons properly, and that’s what I want to do today.

THE BROKEN SOCIETY BY-ELECTION

“This is the broken society by-election. It comes in a place where the people are

shouting: “Gordon Brown, wasn’t Labour supposed to end this degrading poverty?” It comes at a time when the country is asking: “what is going on with the knife crime and violence on our streets?” And it comes at a point when the voters are saying: “yes, the Conservative party may now be addressing these issues – and we like what we hear - but what would you actually do?”

“So let’s make it clear in this by-election. We have a clear mission and a clear plan. Everything depends on a strong economy, so we will rebuild our economy, battered by the Brown years of reckless spending and borrowing, taxing and regulating.

“The NHS is our number one priority, so we will improve it by ending the top-down targets and micro-management, making doctors answer to patients, not politicians. Strengthening our economy and improving our NHS: these are essential tasks for the next Conservative government.

“But our mission is to repair our broken society - to heal the wounds of poverty, crime, social disorder and deprivation that are steadily making this country a grim and joyless place to live for far too many people.

“Because while our society is broken today, it is not broken for ever. We can and will repair it. We can and will bring hope and aspiration to places where there is resignation and despair.

“Whether it is knife crime or any other symptom of our broken society, we will repair the damage by treating not just the symptoms but the causes too. I want the strength of our commitment to inspire faith; faith that our present social breakdown is not inevitable; that this is not a one-way street, faith to replace the disbelief we feel as it dawns on us that we are living in a country where being stabbed is no longer the dark make-believe of crime fiction but the dreadful reality of our children’s daily lives.

“And there is a thread that links it all together. The knife crime. The worklessness. The ill health. Above all, the wasted lives:

“A sixteen year-old boy stabbed in north London; a sixty year-old man sitting around in Easterhouse who’s never had a job. A twenty-eight year-old woman stabbed in south London; a forty-eight year old woman dying from heart disease in Gallowgate.

“The thread that links it all together passes, yes, through family breakdown, welfare dependency, debt, drugs, poverty, poor policing, inadequate housing, and failing schools but it is a thread that goes deeper, as we see a society that is in danger of losing its sense of personal responsibility, social responsibility, common decency and, yes, even public morality.

“In this by-election campaign, we will explain what we’re planning to do about it. How we will focus on the radical social reform required to deal with these problems. How we’re going to be uncompromising in taking on any vested interests or establishment cultural attitudes that stand in our way. And how we won’t pretend that politicians, politics and policy alone can do the job.

KNIFE CRIME ACTION PLAN

“So first, people can expect a Conservative government to take tough action to deal with the symptoms of crime and disorder.

“Today we publish our knife crime action plan. It includes policies to prevent knife crime. Policies to crack down on knife crime and criminals. And policies to deal with young offenders once they've been convicted. Above all, we have to send a clear message that carrying a knife on our streets is completely inexcusable and unacceptable in a civilised society.

“So we are proposing that anyone convicted of knife crime should expect to go to jail. I don’t believe that the government’s ‘presumption to prosecute’ is enough. It doesn’t send a strong enough signal. We need a ‘presumption to prison.’

“Tougher punishment, better policing, better rehabilitation – these are all vital in

the fight against knife crime. But if anyone thinks that criminal justice measures alone will halt the violence on our streets, then they do not understand the scale and the nature of the social breakdown that is its cause.

UNCOMPROMISING ON SOCIAL REFORM

“That is why we have to be utterly uncompromising on the key social reforms that will together help us repair our broken society.

“On school reform, we think the current school system must be replaced with a new system that breaks the stranglehold of the educational establishment and gives parents what they want and what their children deserve: innovation, choice and competition that delivers high standards for everyone, everywhere. We will simply not tolerate objections to our plans from the people and organisations who are responsible for the continuing failure of too much of state education in this country.

“On welfare reform, we think we need to end the idea that the state gives you money for nothing. If you can work, you must work. We will insist on it, and believe me, we will stick to our guns when the going gets tough.

“And when it comes to perhaps the most important area of all, families we will take action not just to support marriage and family stability, but on business too, to make Britain more family-friendly.

“This is a bold, reforming policy agenda. But there is more to repairing our broken society than policy and politics.

MORALITY

“I think the time has come for me to speak out about something that has been troubling me for a long time. I have not found the words to say it sensitively. And then I realised, that is the whole point.

“We as a society have been far too sensitive. In order to avoid injury to people’s feelings, in order to avoid appearing judgemental, we have failed to say what needs to be said. We have seen a decades-long erosion of responsibility, of social virtue, of self-discipline, respect for others, deferring gratification instead of instant gratification.

“Instead we prefer moral neutrality, a refusal to make judgments about what is good and bad behaviour, right and wrong behaviour. Bad. Good. Right. Wrong. These are words that our political system and our public sector scarcely dare use any more.

“Of course as soon as a politician says this there is a clamour – “but what about all of you?” And let me say now, yes, we are human, flawed and frequently screw up.

“Our relationships crack up, our marriages break down, we fail as parents and as citizens just like everyone else. But if the result of this is a stultifying silence about things that really matter, we re-double the failure. Refusing to use these words – right and wrong - means a denial of personal responsibility and the concept of a moral choice.

“We talk about people being “at risk of obesity” instead of talking about people who eat too much and take too little exercise. We talk about people being at risk of poverty, or social exclusion: it’s as if these things – obesity, alcohol abuse, drug addiction – are purely external events like a plague or bad weather.

“Of course, circumstances – where you are born, your neighbourhood, your school, and the choices your parents make - have a huge impact. But social problems are often the consequence of the choices that people make.

“There is a danger of becoming quite literally a de-moralised society, where nobody will tell the truth anymore about what is good and bad, right and wrong. That is why children are growing up without boundaries, thinking they can do as they please, and why no adult will intervene to stop them – including, often, their

parents. If we are going to get any where near solving some of these problems, that has to stop.

“And why would a different government be any different? Not least because we understand that the causes of our broken society lie not just in government policies but in our national culture.

“Changing our culture is not easy or quick. You cannot pull a lever. You cannot do it top-down. But you can give a lead. You can give a nudge. You can make a difference if you are clear where you stand.

“Imagine if there was a Government that understood, really understood, that encouraging personal and social responsibility must be the cornerstone of everything that it did and that every move it took re-inforced that view.

“Saying to parents, your responsibility and your commitment matters, so we will give a tax break for marriage and end the couple penalty. Saying to head teachers you are responsible and if you want enforceable home school contracts and the freedom to exclude you can have it and we will judge you on your results. Saying to police officers you are responsible and the targets and bureaucracy are going but you must account to an elected individual who will want answers if you fail. Saying to business, if you take responsibility you can help change culture and we will help you with deregulation and tax cuts ... but in the long run they depend on the steps you take to help tackle the costs of social failure that have driven your costs up and up.

“It is the responsibility agenda and it will be the defining thread of any government I lead.

CONCLUSION

“Above all, I believe that this cultural change needs to start at home. The values we need to repair our broken society and to build a strong society are values that should be taught in the home, in the family.

“That is why I have put the family right at the heart of my programme. Action on knife crime. Better policing and criminal justice reform. Reforming schools. Reforming welfare. These are all vital components of the social reform we need so urgently.

“But in the end, the state cannot do it all. In the end, the best regulation is self-regulation, not state regulation. That’s why the family comes first. That’s where we can really turn things around and start to repair our broken society.

“My focus on social reform does not mean for one second that I don’t believe the next Conservative government won’t have urgent work to do – to rebuild our economy or improve our NHS. But the nature of the changes will be different in those areas.

“It is in social policy that we mean to be most bold and radical, and for that I need a mandate. I need to make clear today the scale of our ambition so that everyone knows what they will be voting for at the next election.

“I want a mandate for restoring responsibility to our society. A mandate to call time on the twisted values that have eaten away at our social fabric. A mandate for tough action to repair our broken society.”