

Respect briefing paper: General Election 2010

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- Sample letter to adapt for use in communication with local candidates
- Respect briefing paper on the **outcomes of perpetrator programmes** on victim safety
- Respect briefing paper on the **main political parties' policies on violence against women**

1. Background – why be concerned? Why bother doing anything?

The next UK general election has to take place on or before 3rd June 2010. The date could be called any day now and once it is called, the electoral roll is closed. At the time of writing, the election had not been officially called but was widely tipped to take place on Thursday 6th May 2010.

All 650 constituency parliamentary seats will be contested, throughout the UK, comprising:

- 533 in England (including four new ones)
- 59 in Scotland
- 40 in Wales
- 18 in Northern Ireland

The result appears to be far from clear and obvious and at the time of writing a hung parliament, with no one single party in overall majority, looks very likely, according to current poll predictions. In any case, the next government will be inheriting significant economic problems and it looks likely that public and voluntary sector cuts will be made whoever wins. However, the party manifestoes are showing some differences, which Respect members may wish to be aware of in their contact with local candidates or even to take into account in their own voting decisions.

Programmes are just starting to benefit from the new commissioning sources Respect Development Director secured from Cafcass via the Department of Children, Schools and Families. 6 programmes are now listed as approved providers and a new round of assessments is just beginning. Others have secured contracts with local authorities for assessing and working with referrals from child protection. Risk assessment services are providing a skilled and much needed service for supporting the safety of women and children in court proceedings and Respect staff and members are having negotiations about the payment for these. Funding is starting to follow accreditation, which in turn appears to be supporting and valuing safe and effective practice. However, this situation is very fragile, with much publicised cuts to public services on the horizon.

The potential effects of political change could be significant: funding streams could end or new ones begin, narrow political majorities can often mean significant successes for campaigning. The candidates for the 1997 election had been made aware of the voter pressure on domestic violence (dv) and some who got informed in the run up to that election subsequently ended up in governmental positions able to make policy and funding changes. Perpetrator programmes are complex systems and sometimes as practitioners we can find ourselves assuming parity of understanding from politicians. This understanding should not be assumed and sometimes keeping things straightforward and in simple lay terms helps facilitate discussions.

2. Promoting the services of perpetrator programmes to candidates

In the run up to the 1997 election domestic violence was kept high on the political agenda through constant lobbying and pressure, formal and informal, from the people working in the domestic violence sector, the women using women's services and the friends and supporters. This amounted to a considerable number of votes. All three main parties made manifesto commitments and the party which eventually won could then be held to account for these. Many of them have been fulfilled during the last ten years but there is still a great deal to do before we end domestic violence and violence against women.

Respect and Respect members can help maintain this pressure during this general election and highlight the role of effective perpetrator programmes in protecting victims and children. We all have influence as voters and we can use that influence nationally and locally. Members can influence local candidates or at least make them aware that this is a live and important matter for you and your friends/family/colleagues. Some of those candidates will end up in the House of Commons after the

election and some will be ministers. Because there may be a hung parliament all parties are potentially likely to be in positions of influence in the government. **YOUR VOTE MATTERS!**

There is little point focusing campaigning solely or mainly on funding – this is highly likely to have a negative effect as it tends to sound self serving particularly in a recession. However, we can ask candidates to state what they and their party would do if elected, to support violence against women and girls (vawg) and dv work generally and the role of perpetrator programmes in particular. This will be asking a direct question, specific to one topic, which directs the candidate to ask questions within their party, raises their awareness of this as a voter issue and helps to keep programmes in their minds if they are elected.

It is vital to be clear and specific: perpetrator programmes protect victims and children, they do so in ways other services can't, domestic violence affects many voters, your views on this could affect my voting decision and that of others in my work place and social life, your response is requested.

3. What Respect is doing and will do

1. Providing this briefing paper to members and advice if needed
2. Providing updated information on any relevant policy briefings throughout the election period
3. Providing information about new ministers when government announced
4. Brief new MPs and ministers on the role and value of perpetrator programmes when parliament reconvenes after the election

4. Things you can do: finding out about your local candidates

1. Details of current MPs and results of last General Election or by-election can be found by going to the Guardian Online website:
<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/person/browse/mps/az/0,9379,,00.html> . Clicking on the relevant MP will provide you with a page about their voting records, positions on major policies, percentage share of last election. However, it will not necessarily tell you if they are standing again at the next election.
2. Candidates' names and contact details will be formally announced within 6 days of the announcement of the General Election. However, most are already known.
3. You can find out the names and contact details of your likely local candidates for all parties by visiting: www.direct.gov.uk

4. There is a clickable map with full results of the last election for all UK constituencies on <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/flash/0,,2226079,00.html>
5. List of current government and shadow ministers and LibDem spokespeople, can be found on each party's website and on www.direct.gov.uk .
6. Remember you can now contact your candidates by many different routes. Most will now have web addresses, facebook and twitter accounts or blogs and can still also be contacted via post, phone or in person.
7. <http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/> is the place for more information about voting and to register to vote.

5. Things you can do: raise awareness of local candidates

1. You can use the sample letter attached to this briefing paper as the basis for communicating with your local candidates, or write one yourself, highlighting the particular things that matter to you, what you want to know from them and what you would want to see in the next government to work towards ending domestic violence and violence against women and girls, or to promote greater gender equality or other related matters.
2. You should adapt the sample letter to suit your local situation, such as stating that there has been a particular programme there for specific number of years, working with estimated number of people (SEE BELOW), or highlighting that you are working with your local refuge or other specialist domestic violence services or other information about domestic violence in the local population.
3. Sample letter could be accompanied by the short research summary (3 page Respect briefing paper on success evidence - ATTACHED)
4. Make sure your friends, family, colleagues and service users are aware of the different policies and approaches the political parties have to these important matters which will affect all our work to protect victims of domestic violence.
5. Let Respect know if you have any responses – please contact Thangam@respect.uk.net and send copies of any written responses.
6. Prepare for election night reporting bingo with some friends: just [click here](#) to find out more.

In marginal seats (where there was a close result at the last election and is likely to be a close result at the next) you can often get greater interest from all parties, particularly if you can show them that you will be passing on any information you get from them to your colleagues, clients, friends and family and tell them that this issue matters to them. These are of critical interest and importance and could well be where our potential influence lies in the next government. For a full current list of target seats for the main political parties [click here](#).

6. Party policies affecting domestic violence perpetrator programmes

Note: as the Labour Party is in government in the UK and the SNP in Scotland, it is possible to find information about activities they are currently carrying out whilst in power. If you want to know more about what other parties would do if they were in power you can examine track records (for the Conservative Party in UK), taking into account changes in policies since then and changing environments.

6.1 Labour party

The Labour party is currently in government and as such is responsible for instigating the current Strategy on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and has a specific policy area for domestic abuse, including coordination of the work tackling domestic abuse across different ministries (such as the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Health). [Click here](#) to download a copy of the **strategy for tackling VAWG** and other related documents. [Click here](#) to go to the **Government's web pages on domestic violence**. The manifesto policies on the Labour Party website mention the work done to improve funding for women's refuges, Specialist Domestic Violence Courts and Sexual Assault Referral Centres but does not mention perpetrator programmes. The following shaded section details the relevant extracts from the strategy.

Probation-run domestic violence programmes

49. For perpetrators convicted of domestic violence and sentenced to punishment in the community, there are two accredited domestic violence programmes which aim to challenge the attitudes and beliefs of the offender.

- Community Domestic Violence Programme.
- Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme.

50. NOMS is also sponsoring three pilot projects to enhance the range of interventions for domestic abuse perpetrators. Two of these are the Integrated Individual Sessions for Domestic Abuse, a one-to-one structured approach developed from the recently accredited Caledonian system; and Caring Dads, a programme developed in Canada for abusive fathers. A third pilot will seek to enhance the regime within Approved Premises as a residence requirement specifically to tackle domestic abuse. The Integrated Individual Sessions for Domestic Abuse and Approved Premises pilots are being run in association with the voluntary organisation Respect.

Attaching requirements to community orders

51. Not all domestic abuse offenders will be suitable for or benefit from the accredited domestic abuse programmes. Domestic abuse offenders have diverse needs, some of which can be met by other interventions.

52. There are a number of requirements that can be attached to community sentences or custodial licences, in addition to a supervision requirement, which may be effective for domestic abuse offenders. Domestic abuse issues can be addressed on an individual basis supported by a probation officer (offender manager) as well as within a domestic abuse programme. Any intervention with an offender should be completed within a framework of inter-agency collaboration and protection of known victims.

Perpetrator programmes outside the Criminal Justice System

53. With funding from the Home Office, Respect has been developing core standards for services offering programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence who are outside of the CJS.⁴⁹ For perpetrators convicted of domestic violence and sentenced to punishment in the community, there are two accredited domestic violence programmes which aim to challenge the attitudes and beliefs of the offender.

- Community Domestic Violence Programme.
- Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme.

Respect hopes to develop a network of accredited services to provide effective interventions with perpetrators of domestic violence across England and Wales. We will be encouraging all commissioners and funders to ensure such programmes have either been accredited or are applying for accreditation.

55. The Home Office has contributed funding in 2009/10 to Respect's four year research project which will find out how, and to what extent, perpetrator programmes improve women's and children's safety and reduce men's violence. Interim reports will be published in November 2010 and November 2011 with publication of the final report in June 2012.

56. Respect has also established a helpline for men worried about their violent behaviour and wanting help. The helpline which is funded by the Home Office is open five days a week.

57. In December 2008 the DCSF launched a range of initiatives to promote safe contact between children and their parents. This includes domestic violence perpetrator programmes to which the family courts can refer parents. This new form of provision is emerging slowly and national coverage is not yet in place. We are working closely with Children's and Families' Courts Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), Respect and providers to build provision and meet demand.

Current Labour Party Government Strategy to tackle violence against women and girls, developed by the Home Office, following public consultation.

6.2 Conservative party

The Conservative party has written its own national strategy on violence against women and girls. [Click here](#) for a copy of this strategy. This strategy mentions the value of criminal justice perpetrator programmes but does not acknowledge the non criminal justice programmes. It commits The Conservative Party to providing funding for 15 new rape crisis centres, to considering the need for changes in the law on crimes of 'honour', to implementing the power under the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act for courts to make restraining orders following unsuccessful convictions. The Conservative Party has not been in power for 13 years nationally but has been in power locally in increasing numbers over the last few years. The following shaded section is the text on perpetrator programmes contained in the Conservative strategy.

“The Government is yet to undertake an assessment of the success of these programmes. However, gauging their success is not necessarily an easy task. Following a conviction and the completion of a programme, a man could go many years without abusing a woman, seemingly indicating the success of a programme. Yet for much of this time the man might not be in a relationship, and it would only take one act of violence to demonstrate that his rehabilitation had not been successful. This does not mean that perpetrator programmes should not be encouraged, but it does mean that their effect needs to be carefully considered.”

Conservative Party strategy to tackle violence against women.

6.3 Liberal Democrat Party

Contained in the policy for women entitled ‘Real Women’ is a specific section on community safety and another one on their commitments to tackle violence against women and the sexualisation of young women. These do not mention perpetrator programmes. [Click here](#) for a copy of **‘Real women’ (policies on women)**.

6.4 Green Party

The manifesto does have a section on domestic abuse. Great stress is made in their manifesto of the value of mediation and reparation as a response to crime. There is no mention of perpetrator programmes. [Click here](#) for a copy of **the crime and justice policy statement**.

6.5 Plaid Cymru

The Plaid Cymru party is the Welsh nationalist party. They have no specific policies on domestic violence or on violence against women. There are some provisions mentioned in their policy document on community safety, which you can download by clicking [here](#).

6.6 SNP

At the time of writing the SNP (click [here](#) for their website) did not have a manifesto for the Westminster General Election. They are the party of majority of the [Scottish Parliament](#) and therefore the Scottish Executive or Government.

7. Party policies on violence against women and related topics

I carried out an extensive search for all relevant party policies on topics related to violence against women and responses to it. This included searching for strategies directly tackling domestic violence or



violence against women, as well as policies on related matters like prostitution, trafficking, rape crisis centres, women's refuges. The results of this search can be found in a separate document accompanying this briefing.

8. Any other parties

If you want information about other parties you can use a search engine or look in the telephone book or wait until the candidates are announced, when their contact details will be available.

9. Any further information

or to inform Respect about contact with local candidates, please email Thangam@respect.uk.net