



THE CENTRE FOR
**SOCIAL
JUSTICE**

**PRESS RELEASE FROM GRAHAM ALLEN MP AND IAIN DUNCAN SMITH MP
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Senior MPs launch cross-party bid to avert social collapse

An unprecedented plea for the major political parties to put aside their differences to avert social collapse is issued today by senior Labour and Conservative politicians.

They paint an apocalyptic vision of worsening violent crime and social disorder unless radical steps are taken early in the lives of young children to halt the slide to delinquency.

Former Government Minister Graham Allen and former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith have joined forces to issue the warning in a joint report highlighting the importance of new Early Intervention programmes targeted at boosting the life chances of deprived children aged 0 to 3.

The MPs warn that unless concerted action is taken now to transform parenting skills and revitalise the upbringing of poor children on the worst council estates, Britain will be saddled with a new generation of disturbed and aggressive young people doomed to repeat and amplify the social breakdown disfiguring their lives and others around them.

The call for a cross-party consensus on the importance of measures designed to shore up young families and choke off the emergence of an even bigger and more menacing underclass is made in a report published jointly by the Centre for Social Justice, chaired by Mr Duncan Smith, and the Smith Institute, the left-leaning think-tank set up in memory of the late Labour leader John Smith.

Mr Allen, MP for Nottingham North, says in the report: "We talk from very different political traditions, but our conclusion was that policy failure reaches across all parties and across 30 years of government.

"Polarised thinking (politics as usual) would not provide the basis for the long-term sustainable policies needed to bring about intergenerational change.

"We also share a contempt for the cheap thoughtless soundbites of the party political dogfight, be they from Labour ('hug a hoodie') or Conservatives ('ASBOs on embryos'), which do nothing to help

those we are elected to serve.”

In a joint foreword to the report, ‘Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens’, the MPs say: “We are calling on all parties to unite around the radical new social policy Early Intervention. We are convinced it is cheaper and more sensible to tackle social problems before they begin, rather than spend ever-greater sums on ineffective remedial policies, whether they take the form of more prisons, police, drug rehabilitation or supporting larger and more costly lifetimes on benefits.

“The philosophy of Early Intervention goes much further than prevention. It is about breaking the intergenerational cycle of underachievement.”

The MPs emphasise that government cannot successfully resolve the most serious social problems on its own. They say that many of the current best practice interventions were introduced by the voluntary sector, citing Save the Family, who put vulnerable single mums into a community where a mother figure can help teach them the essential life skills they would otherwise be lacking.

In his contribution, Mr Duncan Smith warns that the ‘creeping expansion of the underclass’ is sucking even ‘decent’ families into the ‘code of the street’.

He cites research showing that a child stands a better chance in life if he or she comes from a bad family in a good neighbourhood than a good family in a bad neighbourhood.

Such research shows that on more and more council estates, anti-social behaviour is regarded as the norm and that it is spreading. People can only survive in such areas if they adopt a menacing attitude to others.

“In neighbourhoods governed by the code of the street, a person’s public bearing must send out the unmistakable, if subtle, message that one is capable of violence.”

Mr Duncan Smith also warns that council estates are increasingly becoming a ghetto for the poor, dominated by low income, single parent families living on benefits.

“Young children suffer life-long damage in a world where they sit in front of the television all day, encounter constant anger and shouting, and witness their mothers being abused by a boyfriend. They arrive at nursery school unable hardly to speak or relate to other children without resorting to violence.”

“And once they fall behind their peer group, they are all too often on a slippery slope to social exclusion, crime or drugs. It costs far more to help a teenager who has become entrenched in this kind of disadvantage, caught up in destructive cycles of behaviour, than it would to stop him or her falling behind in the first place by helping his or her family at the earliest stage of its development.”

They highlight where this has already gone beyond theory. Early Intervention is already affecting dysfunctionality and anti-social behaviour in other countries with similar needs. The tragic shootings in Columbine shocked neighbouring Greater Littleton, in the Denver region, into an Early Intervention strategy.

Mr Allen explains how Nottingham has taken a lead by setting up an Early Intervention programme, which he chairs. Its key features are:

1. A prenatal package
2. Postnatal (Family/Nurse Partnership) support
3. Sure Start Children's Centres
4. Primary school follow-on programmes, focusing on parenting support, language, numeracy and literacy, and the development of children's social competences
5. Anti-drug and alcohol programmes
6. Secondary school pre-parenting (i.e. pre-conception) skilling

The two MPs call on their party leaders to support such programmes across the UK. They urge Gordon Brown and David Cameron to endorse:

1. The Manifesto Framework - A clear commitment to pursue an Early Intervention strategy should be made in party manifestos and party leaders should all make an unequivocal public commitment to the intergenerational change which Early Intervention needs.
2. A Research Base - A commitment that a future UK Government commission a long-term study, similar to the New Zealand Dunedin Study, comparing the development of cohorts of children with and without Early Intervention to inform the policy as it develops.
3. A National Policy Assessment Centre - A pledge to create a National Policy Assessment Centre to assess and recommend the most robust and sustainable Early Intervention policies in the UK.
4. Local Government - The Local Government Association, in cooperation with central Government should host an Early Intervention Leader's Network within the UK.
5. The Comprehensive Spending Review - To help place Early Intervention at the heart of the public policy debate, each party leader should name the next Comprehensive Spending Review the 'Early Intervention CSR', so that steps can be taken now to initiate serious financial reorientation and investment alongside the serious Treasury research and planning which always precedes a CSR.
6. Local Early Intervention vision for each area - Central government should ask every local council and/or Local Strategic Partnership to produce a short Early Intervention vision for their area,

learning from best available practice.

7. A Treasury Study - We urge a modestly funded, multi-departmental study, led by the Treasury and Cabinet Office research, to devise a new form of financial instrument to fund Early Intervention sustainably by releasing for use now some of the massive future savings of Early Intervention.

Ends

Notes to Editors: Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens is being launched by Graham Allen MP and Iain Duncan Smith MP at 11 am on Tuesday, September 16 in the Jubilee Room at the House of Commons.

All media invited.

For media inquiries, please contact Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners Ltd on 07889 617003 or 0203 008 8146 or Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225 or 0203 008 8145.

Graham Allen MP is available for interview on 07802 210179.