



Social Justice and Mental Health

All parliamentary candidates in Portsmouth were asked to give their answers to five questions suggested by Mind, the national mental health charity.

Responses were received jointly from the Conservative candidates and sitting MPs, Penny Mordaunt and Flick Drummond, and jointly from Labour candidates Cllr Stephen Morgan and Rupal Khan. On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, Gerald Vernon Jackson responded, and the Libertarian candidate Joe Jackson sent his response too.

Thanks to these candidates for acknowledging the importance of issues around mental health services and mentally healthy communities for the future.

1. Will you and your party make mental health a priority in your campaign?

Conservatives: Yes. The Prime Minister has made mental health a major focus of her programme to address the remaining injustices in our society. In the 10 months she has been Prime Minister she has initiated a number of major reviews into mental health: reviews into mental health in the classroom and the workplace, and a review looking at the equality legislation. We have committed to introducing the first mental health bill for 30 years, giving it parity in law with physical health, requiring health and safety legislation and obligations to also include mental health and introducing more protections for those most vulnerable- those sectioned or detained. There are other commitments to tackle stigma and increase awareness including training mental health first aiders. We are spending record levels on mental health- £11 billion and the manifesto increases the budget further still.

Labour: You all know that Labour supports and protects the National Health Service. During the last Labour government,

- talking therapies were introduced
- stigma and discriminations was challenged through support for Time to Change campaign
- investment in mental health support for children and young people, and early intervention for first episodes of psychosis.

Mental health was a priority then and will be again.

The Taskforce on Mental Health in Society was established by Ed Miliband in his speech to the Royal College of Psychiatrists in **late 2012**, and was asked to set out a roadmap for how society needs to change to prevent mental health problems and promote good mental health and to look at how we can support fuller integration into the wider community of those affected by or recovering from mental health problems.

Our 2017 manifesto makes following commitments:

- we will ring-fence mental health budgets to protect services and ensure funding reaches the frontline
- we will invest in early intervention by increasing the proportion of mental health budgets spent on support for children and young people.
- we will bring an end to the neglect of children's mental health



Repeatedly the Tories give speeches saying they will give mental health parity with physical health, but their record is dismal: spending on mental health fell by £600 million in the last parliament, money intended for children's mental health goes to other priorities and there are thousands fewer mental health nurses than when the Tories came to power.

Liberal Democrats: Yes

Libertarian Party: Yes. Mental health issues do not to be bought to the forefront. While things are now much better than they have been in the past, it is important that more is done.

2. Will you work to reduce mental health stigma in our community and in Parliament?

Conservatives: Yes. This is vital. Only by people really knowing it is OK to talk about and identify if they have a condition or need support will we get people to do that. Having that confidence will make people more able to seek support and ensure that all employers provide an environment where that is possible. There have been many high profile figures talk about their personal experiences, most notably in parliament when my colleague Gavin Barwell brought in his Private Bill, but MPs can do more too. We can help share best practice and challenge negative attitudes.

Labour: Labour supported the Time to Change campaign which has successfully challenged stigma but there's still much to be done. Stigma can prevent people from seeking help at an early stage, and often people reach crisis point before they get the support they need. Time to Change has made great inroads in encouraging people to talk about mental health. We believe there is much to be done locally for young people and ethnic minority communities too, in raising awareness and improving the capacity of local mental health services to respond to increasing problems of anxiety and depression.

Liberal Democrats: Yes

Libertarian Party: Yes. Things are improving, but they are still not at a point where people can feel that they can talk openly about mental health issues. It is only when we get to the point that mental health is no more stigmatised than any physical illness that we will have really reached the point where we have successfully done this.

I suffered from severe depression as a teenager and, to show how the stigma is definitely still there, I had to ask myself whether to say this as a part of my answer.

3. Will you work with our local NHS improve mental health services?

Conservatives: Yes. We have already held a seminar with those working in Mental health in the public and charitable sectors to map the current unmet need, identify where funding need to be bolstered and to really ensure we have good data and information about what services need to be provided. It has always stuck me that we are good at monitoring the physical reasons for someone needing help- for example we screen peoples alcohol habits if they are brought into A&E, but we do not do the same for mental wellbeing. I'd like to help local health services improve the information about mental wellbeing in our community.



Labour: We are concerned that mental health is not highlighted enough locally as a priority area. Last year 11 pledges to improve local mental health services were published by Public Health – what progress is being made with these? There is an urgent need to review crisis mental health care in the city, with far too many people having to be dealt with by police when specialist professional support is what's needed. In Portsmouth the suicide rate is of great concern, above the national average. We need to have more focus on preventive work with children and young people in schools and in the community, so we would support the expansion of the Future in Mind programme already underway.

In 2013 it was estimated that mental health problems cost the UK economy £70-100 billion a year. Surely it makes sense to invest in reducing this cost through properly funded mental health services and real parity within the NHS.

Liberal Democrats: Yes

Libertarian Party: Yes. It is important that the experts are listened to. The academics are one thing, but the people who really know what is happening are those on the ground, working with those suffering from mental health issues. I will always listen to these experts.

4. Will you ensure local community services, like advice centres, are properly funded and able to support people with mental health problems in the community?

Conservatives: Yes. It is clear that early intervention services are vital. We have massively increased access to talking therapies over the last few years and reduced the waiting times for such services, but support comes in other forms too. Peer support and counselling services are also important, and what we help investment into those services is a good and shared understanding across all organizations in our city working in healthcare and support services of the need.

Labour: There are some brilliant community services in the city that are constantly struggling for financial support. It's impossible to overestimate the impact the Tories' austerity agenda is having on mental health and wellbeing in the community.

Labour will invest in mental health services, but also in mentally healthier communities through tackling the housing crisis, low wages, poverty and zero hour contracts etc.

Over the past 10 years, people being diagnosed with mental health issues have increased rapidly. There is growing pressure on daily lives which further entrenches the mental health crisis. This simply cannot be ignored.

Liberal Democrats: Yes

Libertarian Party: Yes. These are the places which will often be the first port of call for many people and it is important that we make these available. As with any illness, the earlier that it can be dealt with, the more likely that a solution can be found.



5. Will you make sure the welfare system properly supports people who are unable to work because of a mental health problem?

Conservatives: Yes, We will always ensure that those who cannot work are supported. We have increased spending on disability and ill health benefits and will always provide that support. The changes we have brought into Personal Independence Payments, mean that now more people with a mental health condition are getting support, and more of that support is at the highest rate, both for the daily living component and mobility.

However we also need to do more to support those people who can and do want to work. The Health and Work Green paper has identified what more we can do for people with mental health conditions, from support for employers, a proper occupational health offer from the NHS and better tailored support for the individual. As part of this we will reform Labours Work Capability Assessment to ensure that the right support is given at the right time for that person. In regard to this give specific mention to those with a mental health condition.

Labour: Nearly half of all those receiving disability benefits, or the new Personal Independence Payments, are diagnosed with mental ill-health. The evidence shows that anxiety and stress caused by the draconian assessment process actually worsens mental health conditions rather than helping people recover.

We are facing a stark choice in this election. The Tories believe that the poor, children, the elderly, the disabled and mentally ill, should be the ones paying off the national debt. Labour believes that with the growing inequality of wealth, the super rich and multi-national corporations should pay their share. We should not be hounding people, literally to death in some cases, who need the support of the welfare system.

At the same time, we know that employers are even less likely to employ someone with a mental health condition than with a physical disability. And we also know that most people with a mental health condition do want to work. So again, this is back to reducing the stigma around mental health, and investing in good quality support to get people back into employment.

Liberal Democrats: Yes

Libertarian Party: Yes. It is important that mental illness is seen to be just as debilitating as any physical illness. This includes causing problems for those in the workplace.