

ELECTION 2015

party opinions on key issues

The issues below were identified as the most important issues to Christians in a recent national survey. They are not necessarily listed in order of importance.

Poverty

Conservative Party

The fastest way out of poverty is opportunities and employment. Today the UK has more people in full-time employment than at any other time. We have the fastest falling unemployment in the developed world. The welfare reforms led by Ian Duncan Smith have not been easy, but more people are in employment, more people are coming out of poverty, and the gap between the top and bottom decile has narrowed for the first time since records began.

Labour Party

While executive pay and bonuses continue to spiral, it's a scandal that 950,000 people will have to use food banks this year. Labour will freeze energy prices, increase the minimum wage, raise the child benefit cap, repeal the "bedroom tax", offer a million interest-free loans for home insulation, and cap rail fares.

Liberal Democrat Party

Tackling poverty and addressing wealth inequality is central to our philosophy. It requires an integrated approach that reduces inequalities in health, education, housing, and employment, as well as delivering a fair welfare system, and tackling global poverty primarily through development aid and addressing climate change.

UKIP

UKIP has numerous policies to tackle poverty, from raising the personal tax allowance; to ensuring no one on minimum wage pays any income tax at all; removing green levies from fuel bills to combat fuel poverty; scrapping the bedroom tax; ending the abuse of zero-hours contracts. We favour a simplified welfare system and a benefits cap that will not penalise or discourage claimants from seeking work, but provide security for those who are unemployed or disabled.

Green Party

We stand for social justice and would raise the minimum wage to a living wage (to reach £10 an hour by 2020), invest in affordable social housing, reverse cuts to benefits and public services, introduce a citizens' pension, and cut public transport fares.

Voice for the Voiceless

I am calling on government to form a cross party committee to wage war on poverty. The minimum wage should be raised to £10 per hour immediately. Universal Credit needs urgent and drastic reconsideration. Child care costs need to be affordable. The Welfare Reforms have created poverty / wealth inequality which is utterly

unsustainable, reliance on food banks being just one symptom.

Trade Union and Socialist Coalition

We have suffered the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. Southampton is home to food banks and child poverty at 25%. 15 000 are on the housing waiting list. These figures are a condemnation of austerity politics that has called on ordinary people to pay for a crisis they did not create.

We stand for the immediate implementation of a £10/hour minimum wage and affordable council housing for all.

Southampton needs government funding to meet our needs. A mass campaign of anti-cuts councillors, the trade unions and city's communities needs to come together, united in a call for an end to austerity. The campaign to save Oaklands Pool in Lordshill has shown what is possible.

Euthanasia / assisted suicide

Conservative Party

There are no plans to introduce euthanasia or assisted suicide. David Cameron has been clear that this is something he is not in favour of, however this is an extremely sensitive issue and if it ever came before parliament it would be a free vote.

Labour Party

No plans to change the existing legislation. Gordon Brown famously spoke of his opposition to any change. This would be a free vote on conscience should it be brought before parliament.

Liberal Democrat Party

There are mixed views about this policy area and we'll always allow our MPs a free vote. Nick Clegg recently said he was against assisted suicide.

UKIP

UKIP has no plans to change existing legislation on this.

Green Party

We believe people have a right to an assisted death, within a strong protective framework including: the offer of counselling, full discussion of alternatives such as palliative care, assessment by three professionals of the patient's ability to make the decision, discussion with the patient's close family, and a waiting period of at least seven days.

Voice for the Voiceless

I am against both issues, but appreciate that much needs to be done in the field of palliative care.

Trade Union and Socialist Coalition

On matters of religion, same sex-marriage and voluntary euthanasia, I do not believe these should be matters determined by the state. On such a basis I support the right of people to follow their own religious choices without the domination of a state religion. Such freedoms would assist the development of a tolerant and equal society.

Education

Conservative Party

Bringing up children is the primary responsibility of the parents and a shared responsibility for teachers and local schools. For too long schools have been encouraged to be surrogate parents. We're working to strengthen families and free up schools to reintroduce academic rigour.

Labour Party

Crucial for equality of opportunity. Primary school children would be guaranteed childcare from 8am to 6pm. Free childcare for 3 and 4 year olds would be increased from 15 to 25 hours/wk. Business rate relief to independent schools would be removed unless they can show a "meaningful impact" on state schools through School Partnership Standard. Committed to giving 16 and 17-year-olds the vote.

Liberal Democrat Party

We are passionate about providing equal opportunities for everyone in education, breaking down unfair divisions between rich and poor, by investing in early years education, providing extra parental support and expanding vocational training through apprenticeships.

UKIP

We will introduce apprenticeships that maybe taken instead of four non-core GCSEs and remove tuition fees for students taking approved degrees that fill the UK skills gap. We support the continuation of faith schools but there must be no diminution of the rigour of the National Curriculum. Religious Education must be taught in all schools reflecting the country's religious make-up.

Green Party

We believe education should be freely available and inclusive for all, providing a rounded foundation for a fulfilling life. We would abolish SATs and league tables, scrap tuition fees, increase funding for universities and further education colleges, and bring academies and free schools back under local authority control.

Voice for the Voiceless

A strong and properly funded education system is the only long term way to a strong sustainable economy and better standards of living, even if that means raising taxes. Education should be free from nursery to university. Tuition fees should be reversed. Consideration given to the implementation of a graduate tax. Greater emphasis needed for vocational training and apprenticeships.

Trade Union and Socialist Coalition

We oppose academy schools and funding cuts to colleges and universities. We call for the abolition of tuition fees

Better health services

Conservative Party

The NHS will remain free at the point of delivery. It is one of the jewels in the crown of what makes Britain great. Since 2010 there have been 7,000 more doctors and 9,000 more nurses recruited to the NHS as well as record spending.

Labour Party

Labour will commit an extra £2.5bn a year over Conservative plans. Money will come from a new "mansion" tax, clamping down on tax avoidance, and a new tax on tobacco companies. Patients in England would get a GP appointment within 48 hours. Will end "creeping privatisation" of the NHS. Mental health will be a priority.

Liberal Democrat Party

We want to protect and improve the NHS, and are committed to improving mental health services – breaking down the stigma and reducing waiting times for appointments; investing in the prevention of disease as well as treatment; and linking increases in NHS funding to economic growth.

UKIP

UKIP will ensure the NHS is free at the point of delivery and at time of need for all UK residents. We will ensure GP surgeries are open at least one evening a week where there is demand, and abolish hospital parking charges. We will re-establish the State Enrolled Nurse and train them on wards, not in university lecture theatres. We will also introduce elected county health boards to inspect health services and take evidence from whistle-blowers.

Green Party

We would stop further privatization of the NHS and ensure proper funding, make sure NHS staff receive fair pay for their vital work, and improve public health and wellbeing.

Voice for the Voiceless

The NHS linked to Social Care must be adequately and properly funded. Front line and support staff trained and highly supported. Waste, duplication and bureaucracy must be cut. This is fundamental to the country's wellbeing.

Trade Union and Socialist Coalition

Privatisation of public services in health and education has seen public money used to provide profits for the coffers of big business. The Private Finance Initiative sucks huge amounts of public money out of the NHS. This means essential services to the elderly such as Woodside Lodge are now under threat of closure.

Human trafficking / slavery

Conservative Party

We introduced the modern day slavery bill in order to properly tackle slavery and trafficking in the UK. A lot has been done but we recognise that more is needed to end this hideous scourge.

Labour Party

Have supported the modern slavery bill, but also campaigned tirelessly for changes to make it more effective in all circumstances. Support the crucial work of IJM, Stop The Traffik and Hope for Justice.

Liberal Democrat Party

We're committed to tackling the terrible crime of human trafficking. We've been campaigning for new laws in the EU to crack down on traffickers, including greater EU police cooperation and tougher sentences.

UKIP

Human trafficking has been fuelled by the European Union's insistence on the free movement of people between member countries. Taking back control of our borders and seeing prosecuted traffickers serve their full sentences are the first steps in tackling this detestable crime.

Green Party

Trafficking is a gross violation of human rights, and victims of trafficking should receive legal protection and support rather than be subjected to further victimisation, e.g. through summary deportation.

Voice for the Voiceless

It is abhorrent in the 21st century that this should still be taking place and every effort must be made to bring it to an end.

Trade Union and Socialist Coalition

A socialist economy with full employment, affordable housing for all, a living wage and public services to meet our communities needs would lay the basis for eradicating poverty and scourge of human trafficking.

Religious liberty

Conservative Party

British people are free to believe what they want and to hold to their views because this is a Christian country. All faiths and none have liberty because of the values of tolerance and respect that come from Christian values.

Labour Party

Supports religious liberty and freedom of worship as laid out in Article 18 of the UN Convention. Will appoint new envoy for religious freedom. Government should be doing more to hear the concerns and expertise of British church leaders on this issue at home and abroad.

Liberal Democrat Party

A fair and free society is one where its citizens are treated equally. We therefore stand against religious

prejudice and advocate for rights to religious freedom to be upheld, as outlined in Article 18 of the UN Convention on Human Rights.

UKIP

We're committed to protecting religious liberty and freedom of worship. We recognise and promote an overarching, unifying British culture, rooted in Judaeo-Christian values, which is open and inclusive to everyone, regardless of their religious background.

Green Party

Everyone has the right to follow and practise the religion of their choice without facing discrimination. Equality and antidiscrimination laws should apply to all organisations, including religious ones.

Voice for the Voiceless

The importance of faith must not be undermined, nor legislated against. The value and values of religious faith should be recognised and welcomed whilst guarding against fundamentalist indoctrination.

Trade Union and Socialist Coalition

see answer for Euthanasia / assisted suicide

Economic growth

Conservative Party

The UK has the fastest growing economy in the G7. The long-term economic plan of reducing our inherited debt and balancing our books is well underway. However there is still more to do to ensure that we have sound finances and aren't spending what we don't have.

Labour Party

No additional borrowing for new spending. Reintroduce 50p top rate of income tax for earnings over £150k. Cut income tax for 24 million people by bringing back the 10p rate. A tax on bankers' bonuses. Guarantee a job for adults unemployed for more than two years. Create a million new green jobs by 2025. Ban zero-hour contracts.

Liberal Democrat Party

Our economic plan is to build prosperity that's accessible for everyone, pursuing an economic recovery that's strong, open, fair, green and sustainable, and investing more in manufacturing, building projects and innovation to ensure future growth in the UK.

UKIP

UKIP would lead Britain out of the EU, which would save billions, reoccupy our vacant World Trade Organisation seat and use the money we save to support our own people, our own business, and our own economy.

Green Party

We oppose austerity and would invest in a fairer and greener economy, creating a million jobs and training places in areas including renewable energy, public transport, insulation, social housing and waste management.

Voice for the Voiceless

We need a minimum wage (£10 per hour) that enables families to live not just survive and to pay their share in tax. A taxation system that is fair, affordable and honest (close the loop holes) at all levels. End austerity measures against the poor. Introduce a tax on banker's bonuses. Ban (except under specific circumstances) zero hour contracts. Massive savings could be made by cutting government waste, duplication and bureaucracy.

Trade Union and Socialist Coalition

Council cuts of over 25% to funding, has meant the axing of jobs and vital services. Central to the policies of the Trade Unionist & Socialist Coalition has been to oppose all cuts. We call on councilors to refuse to vote for cuts. To reverse austerity we need to end widescale tax evasion by big corporations and increase taxes on big business and the wealthiest 1% in society

Same sex marriage

Conservative Party

We don't have a policy on this. The same sex marriage bill was a free vote and two thirds of the Conservative MPs voted against it.

Labour Party

No official party position and MPs were given a free vote in parliament. In a recent interview with Premier Radio, Ed Miliband underlined that a Labour government will not pass legislation forcing churches to conduct same-sex marriages

Liberal Democrat Party

As part of our commitment to living in a free and equal society, many Liberal Democrats (but not all) are in favour of same-sex marriage. However we've always stressed that religious groups won't be forced to conduct same-sex marriage ceremonies if they feel it goes against their beliefs.

UKIP

UKIP opposed same-sex marriage legislation because we felt it impinged upon the beliefs of millions of people of faith. We consider the current law to be significantly flawed. We believe it should have been subject to a full review of the role of the state in marriage.

Green Party

We strongly support marriage equality.

Voice for the Voiceless

I would have voted against and am concerned that people of faith are being taken to court and losing jobs because their faith (not just Christian) makes it difficult to comply. Adequate protection must be put in place for churches, other places of worship and people of faith who struggle with this change. If this is about equal rights it should apply both ways.

Trade Union and Socialist Coalition

see answer for Euthanasia / assisted suicide

The party representatives were:

Colin Bloom – Conservative Christian Fellowship of the Conservative Party

Andy Flannagan – Christians on the Left of the Labour Party

Claire Mathys – Liberal Democrat Christian

Forum of the Liberal Democrat Party

Suzanne Evans – Deputy Chairman of UKIP Green Party policy unit

Chris Davis – Voice of the Voiceless

Nick Chaffey – Trade Union and Socialist Coalition

The responses of the 5 national parties were originally published in 'Idea' magazine, March/April 2015, and accessed at election2015.eauk.org. The responses from Voice for the Voiceless and TUSC were added locally.

Other resources:

www.engage15.org.uk encourages Christians to think prayerfully on a number of key issues when deciding how to vote. They have policy papers (and links to relevant party manifesto excerpts) on the following issues: gambling, online safety, marriage support, sex education, family and tax, assisted suicide, abortion, embryology, human trafficking, religious liberty and prostitution.

www.election2015.eauk.org also encourages Christians to think prayerfully on some key issues before deciding how to vote. The areas of concern they focus on include environment, overseas development, foreign affairs, marriage and family, religious liberty, bioethics, education.