

# Are we in safe hands?

In the run up to the election, we look at some positions being taken by the main political parties. Adam Knight-Markiegi summarises what the three main political parties think of the Vetting and Barring scheme. Lucy Woodbine provides a summary of a range of policy areas.

## Safeguarding – an election issue?

With a general election around the corner, it's important to understand what the three main parties think about the Vetting and Barring Scheme. With so much work and funding having been put into it, will a change in government knock the train off track – or even keep stop it coming out of the depot?

## Labour supports the status quo

The Vetting and Barring Scheme has been developed by a Labour government, so it's unsurprising that this party supports the scheme. It sees the introduction of the scheme, along with other safeguarding measures, as one of its key achievements.

Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, says: "Our aim throughout has been to develop an approach which is proportionate, balanced and effective, with the scheme operating in a way which is neither burdensome nor bureaucratic, or off-putting to potential volunteers in children's settings, while still meeting the concerns of parents."

Labour recognises, however, that more needs to be done to stop children and vulnerable adults being abused. The Government's recent announcements following the No Secrets' consultation<sup>1</sup> set out some key areas, such as setting up a new Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group, putting safeguarding adults boards on a statutory footing, and updating the guide to multi-agency working. In addition to this, Labour proposes to work harder to improve information sharing between agencies.

## Conservatives vow to reduce 'big government'

The Conservative Party, on the other hand, is suspicious of the Vetting and Barring Scheme and sees it as part of 'the surveillance state' and 'big government'.

David Cameron places the new safeguarding measures as firmly in Labour's "big government approach", focused on centrally imposed targets, regulation and bureaucracy. The Conservative's believes the new Vetting and Barring Scheme, in particular, risks creating a "false sense of security". They say the new measures rely too much on structures and processes rather than measures to equip vulnerable people to better protect themselves.

The Conservatives also fear that people will be put off volunteering with children and vulnerable adults because of the Vetting and Barring Scheme, because of "the rigmarole of a vetting procedure", as Cameron calls it.

In a report published last September<sup>2</sup>, two senior Conservative MPs state that "a Conservative government will review this arbitrary scheme to ensure a better, common sense, balance between privacy and the presumption of innocence on the one hand, and child protection on the other".

So their alternative to regulation and bureaucracy is the duty and responsibility of "big society". They plan to reduce the interference of the state, with fewer national databases, fewer personal details held by the state and giving individuals the right to decide which agencies can access or modify their personal data.

## Scheme is 'unbalanced', say Lib Dems

The Liberal Democrats are also critical of the Vetting and Barring Scheme and share some of the Conservative's criticisms. In particular, they call the scheme "heavy-handed", "expensive and bureaucratic" and question whether it "is a proportionate response to the problem of child safety". They particularly say this as one in four adults will have to register through the scheme, even police officers! And like the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats fear that people will be put off volunteering because of the need to register.

Instead, the Liberal Democrats would like to see a better balance. For example, they are in favour of CRB checks but believe that one should do for various employments rather than one per job.

Their other proposals focus on children, although the approach could reasonably be extended to vulnerable adults. All professionals working in child protection should work together in a better way, they suggest, and develop a true understanding of one another's roles. They would also like to see a campaign to raise awareness of child safeguarding, reminding everybody of their responsibility to safeguard vulnerable people.

So the colour of the next government – whether Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat (or a combination) – will determine whether the scheme will continue as planned or be derailed.

1. See Knight-Markiegi, A, "Government reveals its secrets", *Sitra Bulletin*, March 2010, p6.

2. Grieve, D and Laing, E, *Reversing the rise of the surveillance state*, September 2009, Conservative Party. Available at [www.conservatives.com](http://www.conservatives.com)

## Who are the politicians who lead on housing related support?

Labour	Conservative	Liberal Democrat
Rt Hon John Denham MP Minister for Communities and Local Government Southampton, Itchen MP since 1992 Majority, 9,302 votes <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.johndenham.org.uk">www.johndenham.org.uk</a>	Grant Shapps MP Shadow Minister for Housing Welwyn, Hatfield MP since 2005 Majority: 5,946 votes <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.welwynhatfieldconservatives.com">www.welwynhatfieldconservatives.com</a>	Sarah Teather MP Shadow Housing Minister Brent East MP since 2003 (By election) Majority: 2,712 votes <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.brentlibdems.org.uk">www.brentlibdems.org.uk</a>

# Policy areas affecting housing related support: what are the differences

**Housing** - Housing is high on all of the political parties agenda, they all state a desire to build more homes, and make the housing market more accessible for all. In terms of the supported housing sector, policies around affordable housing and allocations are important. The only reference to specific housing for the supported housing sector is Labour's commitment to develop more extra care housing for older people.

## Labour\*

Develop 112,000 more affordable homes in the next two years  
 Develop new council housing stock for the first time in two decades  
 Ensure that building continues on brownfield land (there has been a 56 percent increase in developments on brownfield sites since 1997)  
 Develop more Extra Care services  
 Continue to support Regional Development Agencies.

## Conservative

Abolish the regional planning system and regional housing targets  
 Incentivise new house building, and provide special incentives for affordable housing development, in order to ensure that there is enough funding for local services  
 Allow the creation of 'Local Housing Trusts' which will give new freedoms to develop homes for local people  
 Broaden access to vacant government land to develop new homes  
 Social housing tenants will be given a 'Right to Move' by allowing them to either to exchange social housing or to obtain an equity stake.  
 Social housing tenants will have an opportunity to access a 10 percent equity share in their property.

## Liberal Democrats

Scrap regional housing targets by allowing local authorities to determine how many and what type of homes are needed in their area  
 Ensure that council housing sold under the right to buy is replaced, so that the provision of council housing does not dwindle.  
 Make public sector land available to build 100,000 more affordable homes.  
 Provide a loan scheme for a 'Repair and Renewal Fund' which would provide a loan to bring empty properties back into a use at a low rate if the property was used for social housing for five years.

**Local governance** - All three of the main political parties have moved in the direction of localisation in terms of local governance. They all have stated a need to reduce the amount of bureaucracy which local authorities are subject to. While Labour plans to continue the current localisation policy, both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have stated that they will reduce bureaucracy even further.

## Labour\*

Give councils an even stronger role at the heart of public sector spending  
 Labour has reduced national indicator performance standards from around 1,200 to less than 200  
 Continue with 'Total Place' reforms which will help cut down on bureaucracy.

## Conservative

Give local councils greater freedom to determine how they carry out their statutory duties  
 Abolish all process targets applied to local authorities, and free councils from intrusive and ineffective inspection regimes by abolishing the Comprehensive Area and Assessment (CAA)  
 All local authorities will be required to publish comprehensible and standardised information about the quality and quantity of frontline services  
 Councils will be required to publish basic information about their spending online  
 Phase out ring fencing of local funding from central government  
 Abolish all regional planning and housing powers.  
 Devolve a proportion of spending responsibility to local councillors.

## Liberal Democrats

Create directly elected health boards and police authorities  
 Local authorities will work with communities to set their own priorities and targets  
 Abolish regional planning.

**Older people and social care** - With a changing demographic makeup of the country, ensuring that older people receive the care and support they need is high on the political agenda. The policies which surround the care and support of older people also are related to social care policies. All of the three main parties have stated a desire to move to more personalised services for older people but none appear to want to commit how to fund social care for older people.

## Labour\*

Free personal care for those with the highest needs  
 Labour has launched the first National Dementia Strategy  
 Extension of personal budgets for those receiving social care services  
 Investing £80million in Extra Care housing  
 A targeted package of extra support for charities who provide debt advice, mental health and family support services in the most deprived areas of England  
 Continue the extension of personalised care.  
 \*We assume that Labour will continue to implement their current proposals if re-elected.

## Conservative

Look at ways at creating more personalisation in the delivery of health and social care  
 Develop a 'home protection scheme' that will end older people having to sell their homes to pay for residential care, by paying a one off insurance premium of £8,000  
 Make greater use of direct payments and individual budgets.

## Liberal Democrats

Invest in public health  
 Set up a cross party commission to reach a consensus on social care funding. The Liberal Democrat preference is a partnership model, where the state and the individual contribute, with a guaranteed contribution to the cost of care  
 Non mean tested free personal care for all older people who need it  
 Introduction of a carer's guarantee for access to respite care, continuing support and access to information and advice  
 More support for end of life care  
 Promote new learning opportunities for older people.

Note: This information has been collated from the parties' websites at [www.labour.org.uk/home](http://www.labour.org.uk/home), [www.conservatives.com](http://www.conservatives.com) and [www.libdems.org.uk](http://www.libdems.org.uk)