

COUNTING WOMEN IN: BRISTOL GENERAL ELECTION CANDIDATES 2015 BRISTOL SOUTH

WHAT HAVE THE CANDIDATES SAID ABOUT WOMEN'S INTERESTS & SUPPORTING WOMEN'S EQUALITY?

Bristol's political candidates need to address issues of concern to women in the run-up to election day in order to demonstrate that they will represent women's interests effectively and take action for women's equality after the election.

Every candidate standing in the 2015 General Election has been invited to attend a "Women's Question Time" for each of the four constituencies, hosted by Bristol Women's Voice, to set out their pitch to women and to respond to questions posed by women living and working in Bristol.

This report, by Bristol Fawcett, summarises and offers some thoughts on what the candidates for Bristol South said at the Women's Question Time Event on Wednesday, 18th March 2015.

Obviously, this report is no substitute for learning more about the candidates and their parties' policies and commitments through their manifestos and events (and we have included links to all the candidates' web pages as far as we can find them). Neither is this a comprehensive report on everything the candidates have said on all issues affecting women, or about women's equality. This report can only capture the responses given to the questions raised on the day. We have not scored opening and closing statements; nonetheless these will of course be of interest to readers seeking to discover how the candidates present their key messages for women.

What we did ...

We attended the question time event and noted the candidates' statements and their responses to questions determined by Bristol Women's Voice in consultation with their members. We then compiled some brief comments on the following basis:

1. 'What the candidate said' is a summary of candidates' statements and responses given at the Women's Question Time event based on combining the notes of three non-political party affiliated Bristol Fawcett members present at the meeting. Sometimes candidates were asked for a personal view and sometimes they were asked to talk about their party policy.
2. Where we have commented our commentary was agreed with full consensus by three members of the Bristol Counting Women In group – none of these members has a party political affiliation and none is active in any candidates' campaigns.
3. We were interested in the questions: Did the candidate demonstrate awareness of the issues as they relate to women? Were they knowledgeable about the current policy position? Did they demonstrate commitment to key policy changes as recommended by authoritative cross-party or non-party sources? Are their commitments likely to make a significant impact for women and are they party or manifesto commitments?

The candidates will have views, and their parties will have policies, that are not captured in this report and we strongly encourage all voters to investigate the candidates and their political parties' manifestos.

If candidates had said something relevant in response to an earlier question or during their opening statement during the question time event, we took this into account when commenting.

There are two parts to this report – the first part lists the candidates who attended the event and the second part reports on those who sent a representative. Clearly, a representative can only provide information about party policy and not about the personal views of absent colleagues.

General Notes:

Given the timing of the hustings, no candidate was able to speak to their party manifestos, so their capacity to give commitments on any issue was limited.

Part one – those who attended in person

Candidate:	Karin Smyth	
Party:	Labour	
	What the candidate said.....	Our comments.....
Opening Statement	First encountered discrimination at age 8 or 9 when I was religious and wanted to serve at the altar at church but this was not allowed as I was a girl – told could help with flowers or do cleaning instead. As a teenager I saw women in unpaid and low paid work, trapped in a way of life with no way out and abusive relationships. Was determined to go to university & met people who told me politics changes things and equality and social justice are at heart of Labour which introduced Equal Pay Act, Equalities Act, increased childcare support, introduced Sure Start Centres. We will protect these / increase childcare support. Labour introduced minimum wage and will increase it – low pay is scourge of women's lives. Pay, affordable homes, NHS are priorities for me, the constituency, the Labour Party.	Policy commitment
Q: Transport What does the candidate think about the safety issues associated with the reduction of pavement space in the latest Metrobus plans?	In favour of Metrobus. We all have to feel safe on transport to feel safe using it. Noted importance of proper consultation. Labour will give Bristol Manchester-style transport control.	Policy commitment Women's perspective not mentioned.
Q: Health What would the candidate do to make it easier to get GP appointments in the light of possible local surgery closures; what are the healthcare needs of women in South Bristol?	Works for the Health Service. Blamed removal of Labour targets for GP appointment problems. Respiratory disease & cancer are a legacy of South Bristol industries. Hidden cancer – ovarian cancer – also major issue for women in area. She said Labour plans for NHS are costed but didn't elaborate.	Good understanding of older women's health issues in the area, but referenced no plans to tackle them.
Q: Economy	Candidate had come straight from work and hadn't had a chance to study the budget.	Policy commitment

<p>What does the candidate think will be the impact of today's (18 March) budget on women and child poverty?</p>	<p>Child poverty a shocking waste of human potential generally consigning children to a lifetime of poverty. Labour in government lifted a million children out of poverty and since 2010 under this government a million children have gone into poverty.</p> <p>Labour have a commitment to a living wage, rather than a minimum wage. Childcare and care for older people essential to allow people into work.</p>	
<p>Q: Audience What would the candidate do to reduce the sexual harassment faced by young women on buses and at school?</p>	<p>Candidate acknowledged that this is a major issue and is about the abuse of power. Credit to Jo Swinson in government. What do we want our young boys and men to think about women in society? Shocked that this has become such a massive issue and it is up there as major issue for Labour. Bills in first Labour parliament would include violence against women and girls commissioner and bill. Targets for police should be on violence against women.</p>	<p>Policy commitment</p>
<p>Q: Audience How would the candidate change the House of Commons to make it more women-friendly e.g. late night sittings and absence of childcare?</p>	<p>Candidate supports all-women shortlists. They are the only way progress is made. Childcare and hours are important but also confidence and the way we are treated in the media.</p>	<p>This is a Labour party policy.</p>
<p>Q: Audience What does the candidate think is the role of education in boys <i>and girls</i> to changing attitudes? Young women aren't fighting back like they were in the 70s/80s</p>	<p>Women are active and are running things in South Bristol like the Health Park and community centres but not in public spaces being seen to lead. There is a lack of confidence which can be debilitating. It's important to train women in confidence, encourage women into public spaces & taking leadership roles.</p>	
<p>Q: Audience What does the candidate think should be the drugs policy for South Bristol?</p>	<p>Can be a severe public health problem. We used to have community-led projects but now we have commissioning system meaning local knowledge is lost and people are struggling to support people.</p>	<p>After the drugs question had been answered by everyone on the panel, a member of the audience involved in drugs/alcohol/addiction treatment informed the room that alcohol is the most widespread drugs/addiction concern in Bristol South. The candidate chased this up, wanting to ensure local needs were being incorporated into her plans/campaign</p>

Final comments	Key issue we haven't talked about is social care a very important issue for women. Also housing is a priority for me in the election. Honoured & proud to be chosen to follow Dawn Primarolo. South Bristol needs a high wage economy.	
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Candidate:	Mark Wright	
Party:	Liberal Democrats	
	What the candidate said.....	Our comments.....
Opening Statement	Grew up locally in Hartcliffe, have been a councillor for 10 years. Brought up by a single mother, we lived on benefits, have a keen understanding of issues facing single mothers and the deprived. Lynn Featherstone & Jo Swinson have been really good Lib Dem equality ministers. We haven't done everything we would have wanted to in coalition but have criminalised controlling behaviour, criminalised revenge porn, did great work on body image and media sexism. In future much more to be done on sharing parental leave, addressing insanely expensive childcare in this country. Need to increase female membership of boards on major companies perhaps via mandatory quotas. More to do on equalised pensions. Women need a sound economy,	
Q: Transport What does the candidate think about the safety issues associated with the reduction of pavement space in the latest Metrobus plans?	Candidate noted that no one used the pavement and that lighting and CCTV cameras would address safety concerns for using only covered space. Lighting is a major issue for people feeling safe. Candidate a big fan of Metrobus. We need to take control of the bus routes as in London. Noted importance of proper consultation.	Candidate referenced the specifics of the loss of pavement location, which no one else did.
Q: Health What would the candidate do to make it easier to get GP appointments in the light of possible local surgery closures; what are the healthcare needs of women in South Bristol?	NHS budget has increased every year in real terms – demands are growing because of ageing population and new treatments. Liberal Democrats have a commitment of £8bn in additional NHS funding. In Bristol South average population is deprived & suffers accordingly – poor diet, low life expectancy, disability. Dementia and mental health issues are problems.	Policy commitment Candidate showed a good understanding of general health issues in the area (e.g. limited access to healthy food) but didn't mention the particular impact of this on women.
Q: Economy What does the candidate think will be the impact of today's (18 March) budget on women	Candidate had come straight from work and hadn't had a chance to study the budget. Noted it would be a safe people-pleasing budget, given its timing. To deal with inequality needs big radical ideas. Bristol South has a lot of deprivation and	Policy commitment

and child poverty?	unemployment. Candidate mentioned the Liberal Democrat commitment to higher wages, boosting tax allowance and reducing childcare costs.	
Q: Audience What would the candidate do to reduce the sexual harassment faced by young women on buses and at school?	Candidate mentioned the importance of FGM – in particular, prosecuting parents - and said that it was disturbing that there's only ever been one prosecution ever and no conviction. We need to be a lot braver on going forward on that despite cultural issues. Child abuse is child abuse. Big fan of PSHE, educating boys in particular about healthy relationships, respect, coercion across all school years. Was a school governor for 6 years.	
Q: Audience How would the candidate change the House of Commons to make it more women-friendly e.g. late night sittings and absence of childcare?	Candidate credits Labour Party for changing atmosphere in House of Commons. Supports all-women shortlists. This is not the party line. Lib Dems have been trying hard but have had no effect – time to call it quits and try something different, all women shortlists for the next election.	Personal view on All Women Shortlists as favoured by Fawcett is not Liberal Democrat policy
Q: Audience What does the candidate think is the role of education in boys <i>and girls</i> to changing attitudes? Young women aren't fighting back like they were in the 70s/80s	Candidate was surprised by the statement that young women aren't fighting and didn't believe it to be true. Laments disappearance of challenge culture in society maybe because of fear of retaliatory violence.	
Q: Audience What does the candidate think should be the drugs policy for South Bristol?	Candidate stated that the war on drugs has been a disaster. Drugs should be treated as a health issue, not a legal issue, and noted that it affects women, since they are often the ones who pick up the pieces in the aftermath of abuse. Hoping for changes in drug laws in near future.	
Final comments	Want people like Lynn Featherstone and Jo Swinson to be in government again. People like them will make a difference and improve the lives of women.	

Candidate:	Tony Dyer	
Party:	Green Party	
	What the candidate said.....	Our comments.....
Opening Statement	Born locally, brought up in Hartcliffe. This building was a girl's school which is now gone, but we still have gender divisions across society to the detriment of women. Greens want to	

	address some of the attacks particularly on women who have suffered 75% of welfare cuts and due to suffer even more as a result of the budget announcement today. Most public transport users are women, we plan to reduce costs. We will increase council homes and we will increase the minimum wage. We will reinstate NHS as service free at point of use.	
Q: Transport What does the candidate think about the safety issues associated with the reduction of pavement space in the latest Metrobus plans?	Candidate has serious doubts about Metrobus and wants to halt the scheme until more consultation has happened. Pavement being lost in Bedminster too. We need to reduce bus fares. Pointed out lack of women's input in transport planning, designed by men for men.	
Q: Health What would the candidate do to make it easier to get GP appointments in the light of possible local surgery closures; what are the healthcare needs of women in South Bristol?	A local GP had to close down recently and there are others close to that situation. Funding gap is supposed to be matched by efficiency savings – fantasy economics. Now we have a community hospital the bus links are about to be cancelled. Health issues certainly in candidate's family concerning smoking and the local tobacco industry.	Although women's health issues were understood, there were no clear plans stated to address them. Identified funding gap but there was no clear plan identified to narrow the gap.
Q: Economy What does the candidate think will be the impact of today's (18 March) budget on women and child poverty?	Candidate had some knowledge of the budget. Noted the OBR and IFS predict huge cuts in future with households with children suffering most. Child poverty costs this country billions and it makes every sense to reduce it. Candidate wants to see ending child poverty as a priority.	
Q: Audience What would the candidate do to reduce the sexual harassment faced by young women on buses and at school?	Agrees with TUSC spokesperson (who spoke just before). Referenced the Ched Evans case as signal that something is terribly wrong with our society. Sexist role models like footballers, Page 3, sex clubs, Hooters – objectify women and we are fighting losing battle until we address those issues. We must start with mandatory PSHE in schools. Candidate mentioned FGM and Bristol-based campaigns against it as a credit to the city.	This was the first mention of FGM from any of the candidates. Personal commitment to mandatory PSHE
Q: Audience How would the candidate change the House of Commons to make it more women-friendly e.g. late	MPs seem to be more concerned about bars than childcare facilities. Cannot bear to watch Prime Minister's Questions, the atmosphere is so offputting not just for women.	

night sittings and absence of childcare?		
Q: Audience What does the candidate think is the role of education in boys and girls to changing attitudes? Young women aren't fighting back like they were in the 70s/80s	There is intensification of idea that girls are only allowed pink toys and boys blue toys. Candidate noted that the recent Green surge is predominantly led by younger women.	
Q: Audience What does the candidate think should be the drugs policy for South Bristol?	Drugs should be treated as a health problem not so much a criminal problem. Re poverty as a cause - you won't find many people addicted to cocaine in Hartcliffe or Filton – more the Bullingdon Club. Women in sex trade also addicted to drugs. Prison is not going to help.	
Final comments	It's no good saying we cannot pay for stuff it we desperately need it – we need to find a way to pay for health and all the public services we need.	

Candidate:	Isobel Grant	
Party:	Conservatives	
	<i>What the candidate said.....</i>	<i>Our comments.....</i>
Opening Statement	Candidate wants a system that protects & supports the vulnerable but also helps those who can to support themselves and make decisions for themselves about what they & families need. Candidate is an engineer in profession that has even less women's representation than politics – 5%. Key choice at this election is same for men and women, between putting our national finances onto a long term sustainable footing or the alternative which candidate believes is chaos. We know the vulnerable are most affected when there is economic crash – women, the low paid, the less skilled all suffer more. Would like you to judge us on our record, making realistic promises based on things we have achieved. We've taken 1.5 million women out of tax. 12 million women pay less tax than in 2010. Childcare for 2 year olds in low income families is now free.	Referenced government policy
Q: Transport What does the	Metrobus not perfect but generally needed. We need to sort out consultation to make sure measures such as lighting are part of it and	Candidate spoke last and reiterated what the other candidates had already said.

<p>candidate think about the safety issues associated with the reduction of pavement space in the latest Metrobus plans?</p>	<p>paid for by Metrobus. Excited by some new initiatives like Ashton Gate station, link road. Strategic thing is to get Bristol able to think as a metropolitan area and punch at its weight like Manchester for coherent transport strategy.</p>	
<p>Q: Health What would the candidate do to make it easier to get GP appointments in the light of possible local surgery closures; what are the healthcare needs of women in South Bristol?</p>	<p>Candidate defended the Conservative's health policy and said that there was no plan to privatise; not attacking the NHS. Can we carry on with the same NHS with increasing health problems and ageing population – we are not having a debate. Candidate's party like every other backs NHS free at point of use. We have a funding crisis, we need a debate, we need to do things better. Acces to hospitals & services in Bristol South is key. We've increased doctor and nurse numbers by thousands.</p>	<p>Referenced government policy</p>
<p>Q: Economy What does the candidate think will be the impact of today's (18 March) budget on women and child poverty?</p>	<p>Candidate had not had a chance to study the budget. If children are growing up in poverty this is unacceptable. Candidate argued that the percentage of child poverty was a bad statistic – more children in poverty in this country than in Bangladesh - and cited better education as the solution to make for fewer children lacking opportunities in the future.</p>	
<p>Q: Audience What would the candidate do to reduce the sexual harassment faced by young women on buses and at school?</p>	<p>Candidate said that sexual harassment which is absolutely unaccepable is not a new thing but now we can talk about it more. Access to media and pornography objectifying young women perpetuates the problem. We need to have conversations in schools about women's self worth and calling out behaviour before PSHE or SRE. One must expect an increase in reporting before a decrease in it happening.</p>	
<p>Q: Audience How would the candidate change the House of Commons to make it more women-friendly e.g. late night sittings and absence of childcare?</p>	<p>Completely allergic to macho culture. Culture in House of Commons is unwelcoming to women. We need to change it to get more women attracted to being political representatives, women aren't putting themselves forward. All-women shortlists not used in Bristol for Conservative selection and only women candidates are running. We are setting women up to fail if we don't change the system first.</p>	<p>Against all women shortlists</p>
<p>Q: Audience What does the candidate think is the role of education in boys and girls to</p>	<p>Sad that older women value their vote more than younger people who tend not to vote. There are many things still unequal especially around the world. We have just got legislation about revenge porn. We need to promote</p>	<p>Muddled response. Seemed surprised and unsure of how to answer.</p>

changing attitudes? Young women aren't fighting back like they were in the 70s/80s	positive body image for girls.	
Q: Audience What does the candidate think should be the drugs policy for South Bristol?	Legalisation of drug laws does nothing to stop the causes of addiction: primarily poverty. Only way to tackle hideous scourge of drugs is to fight with the laws and give police more power. Driver of drug abuse is often poverty. It's about opportunity and enterprise and jobs. Eradicating poverty should be a higher priority.	
Final comments	Have learned a huge amount. We can't do any of the things it would be nice to do or have things it would be nice to have if we can't afford them. We can't spend more than we have, it's not fair on our children. First we have to get our finances in order.	

Part three – those who sent a representative

Representatives should only give a party overview and cannot represent the personal views of absent candidates.

Candidate:	Tom Baldwin (represented by Frankie Langland)	
Party:	TUSC (Trade Unionists and Socialists Against Cuts)	
	What the candidate said.....	Our comments.....
Opening Statement	TUSC developed as a response to austerity. Opposition to cuts. Believe 3 main parties offer the same and do not challenge big business. Labour have not challenged the cuts effectively. The cuts have hit women hardest, women more likely to claim benefits, universal credit will affect women more. Women also affected more by extra responsibility of care & childcare – people are dying. The rich never richer, the gap never wider.	
Q: Transport What does the candidate think about the safety issues associated with the reduction of pavement space in the latest Metrobus plans?	We live in an old city. Any new work that we do should be done with women and all citizens in mind, maybe consultation needs to happen again if women are concerned for their safety. Council subsidies are going to be reduced – women use buses more than men. Will cause issues for employment, social isolation. Dayrider price has gone up. Unreliability of public transport also a safety issue for women.	Showed a good awareness of women's issues regarding bus prices and routes.
Q: Health What would the candidate do to make it easier to get GP appointments in the light of possible local surgery closures; what are the healthcare needs of women in South Bristol?	Cuts have shown how important NHS is to women's health. Spokesperson linked cuts to GPs/NHS to reduced employment for women. Health and Social Care Bill needs to be reversed. Mentioned importance of sexual health.	Candidate showed awareness of younger women's health only in the area. Policy commitment
Q: Economy What does the candidate think will be the impact of today's (18 March) budget on women and child poverty?	There is an increased wealth gap and austerity is not the answer. The Conservatives, Lib Dems and Labour have promised ongoing cuts and these will continue to hit women and children harder than men. 40% women and children in East and South Bristol live in poverty. That people can say these policies are still needed is	

	disgusting.	
Q: Audience What would the candidate do to reduce the sexual harassment faced by young women on buses and at school?	We are still operating under a patriarchy. We need to go beyond legislation to cultural change. Strip clubs cause violence against women and should not be allowed to open. Projects exist in Bristol schools and we need to educate boys and young men about respect and against violence.	
Q: Audience How would the candidate change the House of Commons to make it more women-friendly e.g. late night sittings and absence of childcare?	Spokesperson is against “positive discrimination” and said that government should be like any other place of business with all of the accompanying rules. Long term solution needed for long term problem. Childcare should be free at point of use. Working hours should not exclude women from participating in democracy.	Against all women shortlists
Q: Audience What does the candidate think is the role of education in boys and girls to changing attitudes? Young women aren't fighting back like they were in the 70s/80s	Her experience is that feminism is on the rise over the last 10 years, and that young women are very involved in politics and promoting feminism.	
Q: Audience What does the candidate think should be the drugs policy for South Bristol?	TUSC does not have policy on these issues. South Bristol has lost its NHS Drugs and Alcohol support which has moved to Fishponds. Spokesperson reiterated health issue and added that most women in prison are there on drugs charges; keeping them away from family is not helping the problem.	
Final comments	TUSC are disgusted by the austerity measures and disproportionate impact on women. They are set to continue and we believe they don't need to. Crisis was caused by bankers and big business who are friends of 3 main parties. We need to build a party for normal people. TUSC elected MPs would accept average wage for their constituency.	Policy commitment

