

I got it wrong on problem families, admits Blair

By Toby Helm, Chief Political Correspondent Daily telegraph

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Tony Blair makes a startling admission today that his approach to dealing with the most unruly in society has been "misguided" throughout his 10 years in Downing Street.

As he prepares to mark a decade as Prime Minister, he concedes that he got it wrong by presuming that public investment in poor neighbourhoods would rid society of dysfunctional families and their "out of control kids" who "leech into drugs and gangs".

Writing in The Daily Telegraph today, he argues that this approach - while it has brought great benefits - is flawed because it is insufficient and fails to target the real "menaces" in society.

"What I have learned over those 10 years is that the original analysis I had was incomplete and therefore literally misguided, ie, guiding us to the wrong policy conclusion."

He defends Labour's huge investment in public services and run-down areas which he says has raised standards in schools and created jobs in communities such as Moss Side, Manchester.

But he says it has failed "in the sense that it will not deal with this small and unrepresentative minority". Mr Blair says he now realises as he prepares to leave office that policies are needed "that target failing and dysfunctional families early and place those families within a proper, structured, disciplined framework of help and insistence on proper behaviour".

He now sees that "the rising tide had not lifted all the ships".

He uses this rare admission of error to make a political point at the expense of David Cameron, the Tory leader, ahead of Thursday's local elections in England and polls for the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament.



Tony Blair released a 25-page dossier outlining Labour's achievements during his 10 years as Prime Minister

Comparing himself in 1997 with Mr Cameron now, he says the Tory leader is making the same mistake by suggesting that the most irresponsible in society will be cured if society as whole is strengthened.

"He too sees this as I did in 1997 as about society as a whole," Mr Blair says.

Mr Blair says he made his name as a Labour "moderniser" by ditching the old Left-wing idea that crime should only be tackled by addressing the social conditions that caused it.

He coined the phrase "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" to show that New Labour had also come to recognise the need for tough policing and sentencing.

"The 'tough on the causes of crime' bit was all about social investment," he argues.

He recognises that intervening early with problem families will be controversial. "For some of these families and their children, a nanny state is what they need - for their sake as much as ours," he says.