

## VIOLENCE

# Partner assault MP Ruffley must face strong sanctions, say women's rights activists

by Joana Ramiro

A TORY MP who assaulted his partner should “face strong disciplinary sanction,” women’s rights campaigners said yesterday.

David Ruffley announced last week that his now former partner had accepted an apology for the assault in March.

The Bury St Edmunds MP was let off with a police caution and a Conservative Party spokesman said he believed the case was closed after having been “dealt with at the time by the police.”

But feminist organisation Women’s Aid expressed concern over the whole procedure.

The charity’s chief executive Polly Neate argued that “physical violence in relationships is almost always accompanied by ongoing psychological control and abuse.”

Ms Neate added that she was

surprised with the sluggishness of the Conservative Party to address the issue.

“We would expect that a parliamentarian who admitted committing a violent crime would face strong disciplinary sanction,” she said.

Mr Ruffley said he hoped the episode would “remain private” as a sign of respect for his ex-partner.

However Ms Neate pointed out that “domestic violence is a criminal, not a private matter” and that authorities should “take action accordingly.”

In Mr Ruffley’s constituency many have also come out with complaints about the MP’s actions, arguing his position is now “untenable.”

The Conservatives have referred him to new Chief Whip Michael Gove.

St Edmundsbury cathedral dean the Reverend Dr Frances Ward sent a letter to Mr Ruffley urging him to step down

and arguing that he had “lost the confidence” of his constituents.

She sent copies of the letter dated July 18 to several several Tory frontbenchers — including Mr Gove.

“It is my belief that you have lost the confidence of a significant proportion of your former supporters,” she wrote.

Dr Ward added that

she “received sufficient comment and concern from a wide circle of people, both within the cathedral and through the town and county, to

have arrived at the opinion that [Mr Ruffley’s] position is untenable.”

When contacted by the Star, the Conservative Women’s Organisation declined to make an extensive comment, but national chairwoman Niki Molnar labelled the case an “unfortunate incident.”

Bury St Edmunds Conservative Association has brought its annual meeting forward to next week given Mr Ruffley’s behaviour.

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**CAUTIONED:** Tory MP David Ruffley assaulted his partner

