

Motion for Time Limited Debate: Electoral reform in Kent

Proposer: Mr Richard Streatfeild, MBE

Seconder: Mr Antony Hook

This Council notes:

- a. Public trust in the UK Government and local government has sunk to its lowest-ever recorded level. In 2023, the Office for National Statistics published data from a survey of UK adults with 34% saying they trusted local government, and 27% the UK Government.
- b. The 2024 UK General Election was the most disproportionate ever, with the new Government winning 411 of the 650 available seats in the House of Commons, whilst only receiving 33.7% of the total number of votes.
- c. A majority of votes cast in the 2024 General Election were for candidates who were not elected - at 58%, the highest in seventy years.
- d. Turnout at the 2024 General Election in the South East was 64%, the lowest since 2001.
- e. Many Kent citizens have not registered to vote.
- f. In the previous Parliament, the former Conservative Government weakened the independence of the Electoral Commission, removed the right of people to express a 2nd preference for the vote systems for mayoral elections in England, and introduced the Voter ID scheme.
- g. The work of organisations like Make Votes Matter, Unlock Democracy and the Electoral Reform Society, amongst others, in building the case for electoral reform.
- h. The new Government has not committed to reform of the voting system.
- i. Other parts of the UK, use the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system, and have done so for many years. In Northern Ireland, STV has been used in local elections since 1973, and in Scotland STV has been used for council elections since 2007.

This Council believes that:

- a. The current electoral system used in English local elections, referred to as 'first past the post' underpins the adversarial and divisive nature of Kent politics, and feeds public disillusion.
- b. Kent's electoral system leaves thousands of people feeling that their votes are irrelevant and their views unrepresented.
- c. It is undemocratic that, under the electoral system in Kent, not all votes count the same, which leaves thousands of people feeling disempowered and without a proper say in how the county is run.
- d. Improving our democracy is an important end in itself, but also a necessary step to building a better county with good schools and hospitals, affordable housing and safe communities.

This Council resolves to:

Request that the Leader writes to the Prime Minister, and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, requesting the following:

1. Replace the 'first past the post' system for Kent County Council elections, with proportional representation by the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system.
2. Implement a system for elections for single positions such as directly elected mayors that enables voters to express an order of preference and require a winning candidate to achieve more than 50% of the vote after lower placed candidates are eliminated.
3. The UK adopts an automatic system of inclusion on the electoral register.
4. Scrap the Voter ID requirement.
5. Lower the age of universal suffrage to 16.
6. Extend the right to full participation in civic life, including the ability to stand for office or vote in UK referendums, local elections and general elections, to all EU citizens with settled status, and to anyone else who has lived in the UK for at least five years and has the right to stay permanently.
7. Extend political education in Kent secondary schools, to prepare future citizens to participate in public life.