



HERTFORD TOWN COUNCIL

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Home Secretary
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

5th April 2024

Dear Home Secretary

At a meeting of the Council on Monday 25th March 2024, the Council, unanimously resolved to support the motion:

“This Council resolves to write to the Government calling for a change in our outdated electoral laws and to enable Proportional Representation to be used for UK general elections and local elections in England.”

I have been asked to write to you in relation to the above resolution.

In presenting the motion Cllr Graham Nickson explained that the intention of the motion is to emphasise to the Home Secretary the increasing demand for voting reform and the adoption of the principle of Proportional Representation, but not for any particular form of Proportional Representation.

During the presentation of the motion and the ensuing discussion the following points were made.

International Perspective on Proportional Representation

Proportional Representation is used to elect Parliaments in more than 80 countries – these countries tend to be more equal, have a better regard for human rights and to be more environmentally aware.

In Europe, only the UK and Belarus still use First Past the Post (FPTP) for general elections. England also uses it for local elections.

Local Perspective

Thirty-two Councils, including several local to Hertford including Bishop's Stortford Town Council, Ware Town Council and both North Herts and East Herts District Councils have adopted this motion.

The meeting agreed that Proportional Representation (PR) ensures all votes count, have equal value and that seats won match votes cast. People can vote for the party they want, instead of voting tactically to keep another party out.

The meeting also heard that Proportional Representation would end minority rule where a political party wins a majority of the seats on the council, and therefore administrative power, whilst winning less than 50% of the votes cast.

The Council wishes me to include some examples, provided on a cross-party basis, to illustrate the anomalies that require addressing in the current First Past the Post system.

In 2015, the Conservatives were elected to Government with just 36.8% of the vote, 50.9% of the seats in the House of Commons and 100% of the power.

In the last four elections to Hertfordshire County Council, the Conservatives have never won a majority of the votes cast but they have always formed the majority administration in County Hall.

In the 2023 local elections the Green Party won more seats on East Herts District Council but with 6% less of the vote than the Conservatives.

In 2023 – for Hertford Town Council – Green candidates won 43.3% of the vote yet secured 75% of the seats. Nearly a quarter of the people who voted in the town council elections in 2023 voted Conservative, yet they did not secure a seat.

In 2011 there was a referendum on changing the voting system. Some people believe it was about changing First Past the Post to Proportional Representation, but it was not. It was about introducing the Alternative Vote which is not Proportional Representation and throws up the same anomalies as First Past the Post.

In conclusion, many parts of the UK use Proportional Representation for elections, but not England. The Parliaments and Assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are all elected by Proportional Representation.

It is also used for local elections in Scotland and Northern Ireland and is being introduced in Wales. Its use should now be extended to include Westminster and local elections in England to ensure fairer representation and better governance.

Yours sincerely



Joseph Whelan
Town Clerk