

Council – 15 March 2023

Liberal Democrat Amendment to Motion 8b – Making Votes Count with Proportional Representation

This Council notes:

Within Europe, only the United Kingdom and authoritarian Belarus still use the archaic First Past the Post (FPTP) system for general and local elections. Internationally, Proportional Representation (PR) is used to elect parliaments in more than 80 countries.

At the 2019 general election:

- The SNP won one seat every 25,883 votes.
- The Conservatives won one seat for every 38,264 votes.
- Labour won one seat for every 50,837 votes.
- The Liberal Democrats won one seat for every 336,038 votes.
- The Green Party won one seat for every 866,435 votes.
- The BREXIT party received no seats despite winning over 600,000 votes (2%) nationwide.

FPTP returns a government that doesn't represent the will of the voters. FPTP also permits the basic unfairness of minority rule. In 2019, 43.6% of the vote produced a government with 56.2% of the seats but 100% of the power.

The impact of FPTP is to leave millions of voters feeling unrepresented and unheard.

Under a PR voting system MPs, councillors and other elected representatives would better reflect the views of their communities. This would lead to improved decision-making, higher turnout and increased levels of ownership of decisions taken.

PR is already used to elect the parliaments and assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and at local elections in Scotland. Welsh councils also now have the right to adopt a PR system for their local elections if they so choose.

With 2.8 million people, Greater Manchester is almost as populous as Wales with 3.1 million people, yet the citizens of Greater Manchester do not enjoy the same devolved powers to decide their own electoral systems for local elections as the citizens of Wales.

This Council believes that:

- The FPTP system has contributed to dangerous levels of distrust and disillusionment with our democratic processes and politicians.
- 3 elections between 2015 and 2019, and 3 Prime Ministers in the last year, shows that FPTP does not lead to stable government.
- It is essential that faith is restored in our democratic system and that the public see Parliament as fairly reflecting their views.
- Our FPTP voting system is a significant barrier to restoring this faith and all but guarantees that the balance of opinion among the electorate is not reflected in Parliament or in council chambers.
- A system of proportional representation in which seats match votes and all votes count equally would help to rebuild public trust. It would ensure that all political views are represented in Parliament and councils in proportion to their level of public support.

Council therefore resolves:

1. To request that the leader of the council writes to the Government asking it:
 - to change our outdated electoral laws to enable proportional representation to be used for general elections,
 - and to (following the Welsh Government's example) allow Councils to use a PR system if they so choose.
2. To request the leader to sign, on behalf of this council, the Electoral Reform Society petition calling for fair votes in English local government.
3. To call upon Trafford's MPs to push for a change to electoral law to permit proportional representation and to promote the matter for debate within Parliament.
4. To call upon Greater Manchester's Mayor to use his office to push for our region to have the devolved powers necessary to switch to proportional representation for the local election of Councillors to the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester.