

Written evidence from Mayor of North of Tyne (TEB57)

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee The Elections Bill inquiry

I was elected using the Supplementary Vote system. This system allows a greater number of people a greater say on who represents them using first and second preferences. In my capacity as North of Tyne Mayor I am strongly oppose the imposition of first past the post on Mayoral elections.

As a matter of principle major constitutional changes should not be imposed on local areas without full consultation and without taking into account local preferences. To do otherwise runs directly counter to the principle of local control which devolution is meant to enshrine, and inevitably fuels cynicism and growing loss of trust in our democracy. It is a reckless and self-interested move which threatens to cause major long-term harm to the UK, reducing accountability and reinforcing the division and disillusionment which have already been deeply corrosive to our politics.

The government has not consulted with local communities on this major change, even though the last time a government proposed a reform of the electoral system they put it to a referendum. Greater local consultation would have been carried out for a mid-sized infrastructure project than they have offered for a major constitutional change.

Nor have they attempted to ascertain if there are any issues with the current system. The Supplementary Vote system has worked fairly and transparently in North of Tyne and elsewhere, producing Mayors with the clear backing of a majority of their constituents. There is very little evidence of voter confusion, undemocratic outcomes, or any significant demand for change.

Imposing a major change in the absence of such evidence will inevitably be perceived as motivated primarily by partisan interest. As well as running counter to the basic principles of devolution, the planned changes make a mockery of the Conservatives' stated belief, set out in their Manifesto, that "you can and must trust people and communities to make the decisions that are right for them."

First Past the Post is utterly unsuited for Mayoral elections, where a single postholder is being chosen. It opens the door to Mayors to be elected on far less than the majority support of their constituents, with precedents for FPTP elections being won on as little as 25% of the vote. Rather than promoting accountability, this creates an incentive for Mayors to seek the support of committed minority. In addition, as a single elected official is being chosen, FPTP for Mayoral elections offers none of the supposed advantage of avoiding coalition governments.

The argument for using FPTP for Local Authority Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioner elections is even weaker. With turnout for PCC elections [averaging around 25%](#), using FPTP will allow a tiny minority of voters to decide critical elections. Again, these are elections for single postholders.

The Government refers to FPTP as 'tried and tested'. In Europe the only country apart from the UK which uses FPTP for elections to their primary parliament is Belarus. By promoting

FPTP as the only acceptable electoral system the UK is undermining its credibility to argue against 'managed democracy' in other countries.

The Government should be giving people more power and control over their lives, not taking it away. It should listen to the views of communities on how they elected their own leaders, not imposing their preferred system without the slightest consultation or debate. With this action the government is showing its contempt for local communities and how little it actually believes in genuine devolution, or cares for safeguarding confidence in our politics. I urge them to think again.

October 2021