

## **Written evidence from Dan Jarvis MBE MP (TEB60)**

### **Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee The Elections Bill inquiry**

I am writing in my capacity as the Mayor of South Yorkshire to 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 (SV) system has worked fairly and transparently in South Yorkshire 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."

This concern is greatly amplified by the government's use of an Instruction to the Committee of the Whole House, an archaic parliamentary tactic which will allow them to shoehorn major change to Mayoral and PCC voting systems into the Elections Bill at the last minute, avoiding scrutiny or accountability. Because the question of first past the post voting systems was not originally within the scope of the Bill, members of the public bill committee taking oral evidence on the Bill were not able to ask relevant questions. This flies in the face of parliamentary accountability: it is the behaviour of a government that knows its actions will not stand up to scrutiny, and is cynically prepared to push them through whatever the cost to public confidence.

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 a 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.

Legitimate constitutional change is carried out with deliberation, discussion, and not rushed through without justification, without demand, 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 elect 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*