

# the free e-democracy project

10<sup>th</sup> May 2003

Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP  
Minister of State, Local Government  
and the Regions  
26 Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2WH

cc:  
David Lepper MP, Brighton Pavilion  
Sam Younger, Chairman Electoral Commission

Dear Mr Raynsford,

## LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTION VOTING PILOTS

I am writing to you with regards to the recent voting pilots that were undertaken during the local council elections held on 1<sup>st</sup> May and authorised by your department.

As I have a history in investigating matters relating to electronic voting I found the all postal ballot conducted in Brighton & Hove an interesting new way of looking at the issues surrounding reform of the voting process.

I have attached the report created as the result of collecting feedback from various actors involved in the local elections in Brighton including candidates, canvassers and ordinary voters. The sample was by no means scientifically selected but a sufficient number of worrying issues were raised from the small number of people I did contact that I feel that forwarding it to you (as well as David Lepper and Sam Younger) is more than warranted.

The report raises serious concerns over the delivery, completion, collection and counting of the ballot papers which will need fully addressing before further pilots can be considered.

The discovery of such problems also provides an opportunity for us to debate in a rational manner why we should be implementing such costly and risky new methods of casting our vote. It seems that the primary reason being put forward is that such new voting channels will increase turnout. While it is highly debatable what long term positive impact any of the proposed innovations will have on turnout I would rather address a more fundamental question: Should the goal of the Government, the Electoral Commission and other interested parties be simply to increase the turnout? I don't believe so. I would argue that we need to take a much deeper look at

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democratic participation. On doing so we would realise the need to start reforming our nation's constitutional and institutional processes and structures. Only then will participation be reinvigorated and turnout increase as a result.

My research indicates that the strongest indicator of a high electoral turnout is the proportionality of the voting system used. Thus we need to be looking at reforms such as proportional representation, new methods of drafting and consulting on new legislation, simplifying the Houses and making Government more accountable and open. These are tough reforms which many governments have balked at but the current Labour government does have the majority to make them happen, if it so wishes. Only when such changes are implemented will we see the crisis in democracy, which so many are currently lamenting, come to some sort of resolution.

I look forward to hearing from you and I hope you find the report of interest.

Best regards,

**Jason Kitcat**  
Founder & Co-ordinator

encl.

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