

Bring Back Democracy

Scrap the Mayoral system



Here are some guidelines to help you when asking people to sign the petition to change from a directly elected Mayor to the committee system where all councillors share decision-making.

If you are a member of a political party it is fine to mention that, but probably beneficial to the campaign to point out that it is not being run by your party alone.

If you want to attend a training session on door-to-door signature collecting please get in touch at info@BringBackDemocracy.org.uk

IN BRIEF:

This campaign is supported by citizens of all parties active in Lewisham. Its aim is to collect signatures from 10,000 electors to trigger a new referendum which would decide to change the system of governance in Lewisham to the committee system, abandoning the directly elected executive mayoral system.

IT'S MORE DEMOCRATIC – your councillors can have a say in decision making instead of being observers. Even in Lewisham there are sometimes non-Labour councillors and their electors should also have some input to policy-making

IT'S CHEAPER – When Hartlepool abandoned its Mayoral system the allowance was cut from £61,686 for the Mayor in 2009/10 to £24,756 for the Leader of the council now that all councillors share responsibility and to reflect the average wage in the area. The total cost of all allowances for Hartlepool's 37 councillors is £270,528 (2015/16) whereas Lewisham's 54 councillors and elected Mayor cost £820,595, 3 times as much as Hartlepool and a Mayoral allowance of £77,722 (2014/15) more than 3 times the average wage for Lewisham.

IT IS LESS OPEN TO CORRUPTION AND NEPOTISM – With just one person in charge it is much easier for a developer or a big outsourcing company like Capita or SERCO to offer an incentive to be given a contract. Although Steve Bullock faced allegations of dubious decisions we are not aiming the campaign at him, but at the principle of having an elected dictator.

For an infographic on the whole issue please go to:

<https://magic.piktochart.com/output/24102297-bring-back-democracy>

This is also shown on the first page of the website.

More detail on next page:

MORE DETAILED BACKGROUND: In 2001 a referendum was held and 18% of the electorate voted. The vote was very close with 16,822 in favour of an executive Mayor and 15,914 against.

At that time the only alternative was a Leader and Cabinet and all other London boroughs opted for this except Newham and Hackney which decided to have Mayors. Tower Hamlets chose this later.

In the Mayoral system the Mayor can choose to have all the power to make decisions or can delegate power to a cabinet of up to 9 members. The choice is the Mayor's alone and Lewisham's Mayor for 16 years, Steve Bullock made his cabinet purely advisory with no votes required. Cabinet members are paid large additional allowances (£40,000 for deputy mayor, £15,000 for 5 posts and almost £13,000 for three more) even though they take no decisions and have no responsibility. This is on top of their normal councillor allowance of £9,9812 or £8,308 depending on service. Damien Egan has introduced votes in cabinet although we don't think there have actually been any.

This system of patronage means that many councillors want to be given a post on the cabinet so they tend to toe the line and keep on good terms with the Mayor. Many are reluctant to speak out against bad policies (refusal to build a new school in 2002-2006; demolition of Ladywell Pool 2004-2008; closure of under-5 playclubs 2012; downgrading of libraries 2011; sell-off of council homes 2012; support for Renewal developers at the expense of Millwall and local residents 2014-17; closure of all sports facilities including the last municipal golf course in inner-London at Beckenham Place Park 2016). Demolition of the Tidemill Wildlife Garden 2018. In all these bad decisions, hugely unpopular with the electorate, there have been Labour councillors opposed to them but they have generally kept quiet for fear of rocking the boat. That's not what we elect councillors for!

Now, following the Localism Act 2011, we have a choice of rejecting both the Mayor and Cabinet model and the Leader and Cabinet option and reverting to the Committee system. Hartlepool has done this, scrapping the Mayoral system because councillors felt they were irrelevant.

TECHNICAL MATTERS:

The law provides for a referendum to be triggered on changing the council system if 5% of the electorate support a petition within a 12 month period of signature collecting. The referendum must then be held on the next normal election day (first Thursday in May) which is at least 4 months from the date the council confirms that the required number of signatures has been collected (they are given 4 working days to check them).

If the referendum is successful then that does not require the Mayor to stand down – they are entitled to stay on for their four year term. However, the mayoral system can also be abolished by a resolution of councillors taken at their first meeting following the elections so if a mayor is elected who is in favour of abolition of the post he or she can propose abolition at the first meeting and resign from office, bringing about the change immediately. We think that it will be important to make sure that we ensure that the referendum is held and that council candidates are asked to state clearly their position of whether they support or reject the continuation of the mayoral system in the run-up to the local elections.

For an even more in-depth analysis of the problems go to the link on the website to Peter Latham's backing for abolition. Peter is author of two books on the subject of local democracy including *Who Stole the Town Hall* available at <https://policypress.co.uk/who-stole-the-town-hall> or elsewhere.

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