

**COUNCIL  
19 JANUARY 2022**

**PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF REPORT: NOTICE OF MOTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 4.8.12**

The following motions has been submitted, due notice of which has been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

**A. Motion on Proportional Representation**

To be moved by Councillor Chris Lucas and seconded by Councillor Ruth Brown:

*“Council notes that:*

1. *The electoral system used for local elections in England and Wales, First Past the Post (FPTP), is not a fair system, because it means that votes do not have equal weight and many votes are wasted.*
2. *The alternative to FPTP is a system of Proportional Representation (PR), where votes cast for parties translates more or less directly into seats won. There are many variants of PR. The Single Transferable Vote System (STV) variant of PR is already in use for local elections in Scotland and Northern Ireland. With this system, voters rank candidates in order of preference and those who receive the most backing (including second and subsequent choices) are elected to serve in multi-member wards.*
3. *The introduction of PR for local elections in Scotland has led to an increase in turn-out, which was 44.8% at the last elections held in 2022. The average turnout in the May 2022 local elections in England was 33.6% which was broadly consistent with previous comparable elections<sup>[1]</sup>. Whilst the turnout in the May 2022 local elections in North Hertfordshire District Council was slightly higher than the national average (39%)<sup>[2]</sup> this still falls short of the successes in Scotland and elsewhere.*
4. *When the Electoral Commission surveyed eligible voters who did not vote in the May 2022 local election, 9% cited the reason for not voting as “there is in point in voting because... my vote doesn’t count”<sup>[3]</sup>. This suggests that the improved representation offered by PR encourages greater engagement in local democracy.*

*Council believes that there should be a move to the use of a system of proportional representation for local elections as soon as is practicably possible as this would boost turn-out and elect a council which is more representative of the range of political views of North Hertfordshire District Council’s residents.*

**Council resolves to:**

1. *Call upon the UK Government to commit to changing electoral law to permit such a move and to introduce such a system of voting in any reforms to local government presented to Parliament.*
2. *Instruct the Managing Director to write to North Hertfordshire District Council's three MPs to ask them to call for a change to electoral law to permit such a system and promote the matter for debate in Parliament.”*

References:

[1] <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/england-local-council-elections/report-may-2022-local-elections-england>

[2] <https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/mgElectionResults.aspx?ID=500000004&RPID=502471994>

[3] <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/england-local-council-elections/report-may-2022-local-elections-england>

## **B. Motion on Urgent unlocking the potential of local high streets**

To be moved by Councillor Tom Plater and seconded by Councillor Keith Hoskins:

*“This Council believes that healthy high streets are essential for employment, shopping and leisure but many shops and businesses were struggling even before the Covid pandemic: high street retail employment fell in more than three-quarters of local authorities between 2015 and 2018 according to the Office of National Statistics and more than half of all UK consumers were shopping online before the pandemic. This Council notes retail is among the sectors most affected by the coronavirus pandemic; the almost complete shutdown of non-essential shops between March and June 2020 and subsequent local and national lockdowns and ongoing restrictions has hit businesses hard, and the need for social distancing has changed the way many businesses operate reducing footfall.*

*The pandemic has accelerated what in many cases has been a longer trend of lower footfall and changing shopping habits: as the Portas Review a decade ago acknowledged, the form and function of many high streets needs to adapt if they are to survive.*

*This Council welcomes the willingness of Government to acknowledge the problems and come forward with initiatives in response to these challenges such as the furlough scheme, the Covid support business loans, and the High Street Taskforce. However, as the Treasury Select Committee stated in 2019, the current system of Business Rates places an unfair burden on “bricks and mortar” businesses compared to online retailers, and the Business Rate system needs radical overhaul.*

*The announcements in the Budget, though welcome, fall short of what is required: small changes to revaluation cycles and temporary discounts simply tinker around the edges, and will not deliver the support that local high streets need and deserve.*

### **This Council resolves to**

- *Write to the Government to urge it to scrap business rates and replace them with a system which is fit for purpose and which levels the playing field between bricks and mortar businesses and online retail giants.*
- *Campaign to devolve funds like the Towns Fund, Levelling Up Fund, UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other national funding pots, to give local communities, councils and regions the ultimate say in how it is spent in their area.*
- *Continue to take local action to revive our high streets, including:*

- *Make any data held by the council on ownership of high street properties public and in an accessible format, so that community groups seeking to buy empty shops through a community share offer have the information they need to do so.*
- *Proactively contact landlords of vacant premises (and work with Chambers of Commerce, Landlord Associations and BID managers) to explore 'meanwhile use' options and/or encourage alternative rental models (e.g. turnover rather than market rent) to enable new co-operatives, SMEs, social enterprises and 'community owned' businesses to open their doors on the high street.*

*<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/highstreetsingreatbritain/march2020#:~:text=High%20street%20retail%20employment%20fell,29%25%20in%20Great%20Britain%20overall.> 2 <https://www.retail-insight-network.com/features/uk-online-shopping-growth/> 3*

*[https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmtreasy/222/22203.htm#\\_idTextAnchor000](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmtreasy/222/22203.htm#_idTextAnchor000)*