

## **AGM Agenda**

### **Saturday 4 December**

<b>13.20</b>		<b>Zoom waiting room opens</b>
<b>13.30</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Annual General Meeting opens and welcome from the Chair</b>
<b>13.35</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Minutes of the Annual General Meeting on 5 December 2020 and the General Meeting on 30 July 2021 and matters arising</b>
<b>13.45</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Receiving and adopting the Financial Statements for the year to 31 Dec 2020</b> Andrew Copson, Treasurer (statements previously circulated to members on 6 September 2021)
<b>14.00</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>ERS Investment Fund</b> Presentation and Q&A with Elliot Bancroft, Rathbone Brothers plc (ERS Investment Manager)
<b>14.15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Appointment of Auditors</b> Following a tender selection process, the Council recommends that MacIntyre Hudson be appointed as the Society's new auditors for 2021-22
<b>14.20</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Member resolutions</b> We have three resolutions from members to be debated at the meeting: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Voting reform for English local government (proposed by David Green)</li><li>2. Mild civil disobedience (proposed by Brigid Gardner)</li><li>3. AGM notice and order of motions / statements (proposed by Philip Cole)</li></ol>
<b>15.05</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Results of the resolution polls</b>
<b>15.10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>AOB</b>
<b>15.15</b>		<b>Close of meeting</b>

### **Resolutions for debate**

This year we have three Member Resolutions for debate. Whilst the Member Resolutions are not legally binding, they do provide a useful indication of the views of members about the resolution for the Council to consider.

Please read the resolutions, supporting statements and Council recommendations before voting.

## Member Resolution 1:

### Voting reform for English local government (proposed by David Green and seconded by Keith Sharp)

“This AGM calls on the Council to hold a public campaign for voting reform for English local government in every spring of future years, and to launch said campaign in London next year, in advance of the London Borough Council elections.”

#### Supporting statement (by David Green):

Given the decline of liberal democracy worldwide and the abysmal state of the UK's own governance, it is surely time for the Society to come out from behind the filing cabinets to take the campaign for voting reform to the voters.

Moreover, perhaps we should consider that too much effort has been expended on Westminster, when campaigning for voting reform on local councils might have proved more productive, providing a more gently graded learning curve for both voters and government alike. After all, our Victorian voting system does far more damage in local government where single parties can rule forever, untroubled by any meaningful opposition, which can lead to complacency, inefficiency and, in extremis, malfeasance.

So, let's make a start in London next year, coterminous with the 2022 round of London Borough Council Elections. London is where our main staff and office are located, it's where the nation's media is concentrated, and it's where 21% of our membership resides. Moreover, the 2018 London Borough results give us plenty of ammunition, as can be seen from the table on the right drawn from the consolidated stats. on Andrew Teale's Local Elections Archive website.

The table shows that there's not a London Borough where representation accurately reflects how people voted and some of the results are not so much undemocratic as downright obscene. London 2022 has the potential to revolutionize the campaign for voting reform and serve as a testbed for new terminology, new branding, new slogans, crowd-funded banner ads, leaflet distribution, local & national press releases and a petition to Parliament, a multi-faceted template which could be improved in the light of experience and rolled out for use in the English provinces in future years

London's Rotten Boroughs	Winner	Vote %	Seats %
Barking/Dagenham	Labour	74	100
Barnet	Tory	44	60
Bexley	Tories	50	75
Brent	Labour	57	95
Bromley	Tories	44	83
Camden	Labour	47	80
Croydon	Labour	44	58
Ealing	Labour	51	83
Enfield	Labour	49	73
Greenwich	Labour	52	82
Hackney	Labour	61	91
Hamm'smith/Fulham	Labour	53	76
Haringey	Labour	56	74
Harrow	Labour	44	55
Havering	Tories	34	46
Hillingdon	Tories	52	68
Hounslow	Labour	52	85
Islington	Labour	57	98
Kensington/Chelsea	Tories	48	72
Kingston 'on Thames	LibDem	49	81
Lambeth	Labour	51	90
Lewisham	Labour	52	100
Merton	Labour	44	57
Newham	Labour	67	100
Redbridge	Labour	55	81
Richmond ' Thames	LibDem	45	72
Southwark	Labour	52	78
Sutton	LibDem	38	61
Tower Hamlets	Labour	42	93
Waltham Forest	Labour	51	77
Wandsworth	Tories	38	55
Westminster	Tories	42	68

## **Statement by the Council on Member Resolution 1:**

Council agrees that securing voting reform for English local elections is important, both in its own right and as part of a strategic approach towards reforming the House of Commons.

### **Council recommends that you vote FOR this advisory motion.**

The Society has been at the forefront of securing STV for local government in recent years, firstly in Scotland more recently with success in making it an option in Wales. This makes it more and more obvious just how disproportional local election results are across England.

Council agrees that this provides a valuable opportunity for campaigning.

Our work in Westminster is a central part of the strategy for securing voting reform for local government in England. Just as Holyrood and the Senedd were the decision-making bodies for local government reform in Scotland and Wales, so shall Westminster be for any changes in England. We are building allies there just as we did for our campaign victories in the other nations.

This work at Westminster can be reinforced by campaigning activities at local level. In recent years, the Society has made significant progress in engaging media outlets and voters in local areas. In relation to other elections in 2021, we used the English local elections to showcase the shortcomings of FPTP, via highlighting highly disproportional results. Our analysis was picked up by local media in Buckinghamshire, Surrey, Reading and beyond. After the election, about 3,800 people read our blog about extremely disproportional results in the 'rotten boroughs' of Redditch, Newcastle and Dudley.

<https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/elections-2021-rotten-boroughs-are-rife-in-england-as-voters-are-hit-by-warped-results/>

We spent the day after the 2021 local elections highlighting these results on social media. Our research on progressive vote splitting got some pre-election coverage, and featured in a lot of the local election liveblogs as results came in. We used a selection of these results to reach a wider new audience via Facebook adverts, and created local campaigns on Facebook for areas with particularly disproportionate results – reaching more than 26,000 people from Harlow to Nuneaton. We added a further 6,000 signatures to our local STV petition and signed up an additional 40 members, as a result.

The geographic voting base for the two main parties has shifted significantly at Westminster but not all city, town and county halls reflect this due to First Past the Post. This provides new angles for campaigning for voting reform for English local government during local elections in future years, including upcoming local elections in London and elsewhere.

Our work building a diverse coalition to challenge retrograde measures in the Elections Bill gives us an opportunity to reach a much broader audience than before, and to link voting reform for local government in England to other issues that people care about. We have new tools at our disposal which allow us to analyse results quickly, engage local audiences in targeted ways, and make the link between interest and outrage at local level, and the urgent need for reform at Westminster. The mover and seconder of the motion have also suggested additional communication techniques which the Society will look to incorporate as appropriate.

## **Member Resolution 2:**

### **Mild civil disobedience**

**(proposed by Brigid Gardner and seconded by Philip Cole)**

“This AGM requests Council to investigate the possibility of the Society’s leading a campaign of mild civil disobedience by calling on voters to express preferences on their ballot papers as they would be able to do under STV proportional representation.”

### **Supporting statement (by Brigid Gardner):**

When you go to the polls for a general or English and Welsh local election, you are instructed to express your democratic right with an X. **But**, the Electoral Commission’s latest “Doubtful Ballot Paper” guidance booklet, states that a ballot paper completed with numbered preferences in the style of a single transferable vote is **NOT** void. The example on page 70 of this booklet makes this absolutely clear.

So, why don’t we actively promote the casting of single transferable votes in this way, enabling a lawful but effective protest against FPTP X voting? Voters will be able to register their displeasure with the current voting system in a peaceful and constructive way without invalidating their votes or having to vote on the basis of a single issue.

While the expression of preferences is somewhat symbolic inasmuch it will make no difference to the way the votes are counted for a FPTP result, it will help to destroy the myth that PR has to be determined by party lists rather than by voting for individual candidates for each constituency.

Moreover, if sufficient numbers of voters can be called upon to do so, piles of STV votes are going to make an impression on politicians and their supporters at the count, who are also bound to be intrigued as to how preferences are expressed.

This motion does not demand action, rather it requests an investigation because there may be legal ramifications to consider.

Moreover, the Society does not currently command the firepower to roll this out nationwide so we would need to do some careful targeting. For example, concentrations of ERS, MVM, LibDem & Green Party members and of rebellious youth in the form of students in university towns would assist the success of this direct action which is why the Society might identify and target elections in communities thus endowed.

**Statement by the Council on Member Resolution 2:**

*For this member resolution, the Council has decided not to provide a recommendation on how to vote, but instead provide some additional context to inform discussions.*

This member resolution asks the Society to “investigate the possibility” of leading a campaign to vote preferentially rather than by marking the traditional X associated with First Past the Post elections.

As the proposer recognises, there are issues that ERS would need to weigh up before making a final decision.

These would include whether potential upsides outweigh any downsides or risks to the Society; who the audience would be and whether it would be an effective action with them; how success could be measured (in light of a range of factors, including the resources required to achieve a critical mass); whether there is sufficient potential to put together a coalition and gain media attention; and potential impacts on our existing relationships with a wide variety of stakeholders and political actors, across the political spectrum.

### **Member Resolution 3:**

#### **AGM notice and order of motions / statements**

**(proposed by Philip Cole and seconded by David Brandwood)**

“This AGM calls on Council:

- to include, as a standard feature of all future initial notices of annual general meetings, an invitation to members to submit motions for debate, incorporating a deadline for receipt and some guidance;
- to publish any such member’s motion, supporting statement and Council response in that order.”

#### **Supporting statement (by Philip Cole):**

The ERS is a members’ organisation but in practice members have little say in how the Society is run. It is therefore important for any member feeling strongly about something to be given the chance to have it formally debated at the annual meeting and be provided with timely information about how this should be done.

In the normal course of any debate, somebody with a proposal will table it, speak to it and only then is any case against considered - as part of a general debate on the proposal.

In recent years, however, we note with concern that the papers for the agenda are ordered in such a way as to present the Council’s position before the proposer’s statement. This is both bizarre and counterintuitive. It is no more acceptable than allowing somebody to speak against a motion before it has been formally proposed and spoken to.

### **Statement by the Council on Member Resolution 3:**

*For this member resolution, the Council has decided not to provide a recommendation on how to vote, but instead provide some additional context to inform discussions.*

Whenever the ERS speaks on our campaigns, our legitimacy stems from the democratic foundations of the Society. Those foundations are built out of the passion and involvement of our membership in our internal governance. We now have 5,000 members and more than 75,000 supporters – the largest number of members in two decades. In our internal elections this year, we saw the highest turnout on record.

Besides voting in the ERS elections, Council is keen to see members engage with the Society in other ways – from attending interactive workshops at our annual conference, and using the campaign resources on our website, to standing for election to Council.

In the past, one of the main ways that members engaged with the Society's work was by bringing resolutions for debate at the Annual General Meeting. Some members found this enjoyable, but others told us that they found the format off-putting and at times overly adversarial. This format can create barriers for participation, meaning that we miss out on hearing from the full diversity of perspectives represented by our growing membership.

In recent years, the ERS has been at the forefront of campaigning for deliberative processes to be embedded in our democratic institutions. These can ensure that citizens are informed, are able to hear each other's views in a reflective and respectful environment, and can make decisions that have real impact.

In our report [Westminster Beyond Brexit: Ending the Politics of Division](#), we set out a radical vision for how we can achieve a flourishing democracy where power is dispersed across political institutions and citizens are empowered and engaged.

As well as campaigning for changes in our democracy, we are keen to ensure that the Society's own internal governance creates opportunities for constructive, collaborative engagement.

Each year we hold an annual conference alongside the formal AGM. In 2019, our conference featured a taster Citizens' Assembly session. In 2020, we moved our conference online. Hundreds of you took part in interactive sessions, discussing the state of democracy and how we can step up the fight for political reform in the year ahead. The feedback showed the real benefits of experimenting with new ways of taking part.

In developing our new strategy earlier this year, we conducted a survey for all members to feed in their ideas, then followed up with a zoom workshop, inviting a small diverse group of our members to have further discussion on how we might campaign over the next few years. [You can hear from members who took part about how they found the experience in our blog.](#)

The Society is keen to engage as diverse a group of members as possible, from a wide variety of demographics and political affiliations. We especially want to hear from members who haven't had much involvement with the Society previously. The AGM is a good opportunity to engage with those members who attend – and members have the opportunity to put forward resolutions for debate at the AGM if they wish. Council is also committed to exploring different formats and opportunities for engagement to make sure that there are ways that everyone can get involved.