



Council

Motions

Date: 1 March 2023

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors: Head of Governance and Committee Services

Motion 1 - Extension of the Franchise

Proposed by Cllr James Rathbone

Seconded by Cllr Oana Olaru

The Council notes:

The Elections Act received Royal Assent on the 28th of April 2022.

The Act is a major piece of national legislation with local implications for the residents of the London Borough of Lewisham, including the use of mandatory photographic voter ID at the polling station and changes to overseas voting and voting and candidacy rights of EU citizens.

In 2021 people born outside the UK made up an estimated 14.5% of the UK's population, roughly 9.6 million people. In Lewisham 107,000 people - 35% of our borough's population - were born outside the UK. They live, work, study, make use of public services, and call the UK their home. Many of our foreign-born residents from EU and Commonwealth countries can vote in our local elections. However, it is estimated that over one million residents across England and Northern Ireland do not have a right to

vote. In Lewisham around 5% of the adult population - roughly 10,000 people - do not have the right to vote.

Scotland and Wales have implemented residence-based voting rights where all residents with lawful immigration status have the right to vote in local and devolved national elections.

Polling carried out on behalf of the Young Europeans Network showed that 63% of people agree that all residents with lawful status in the UK should have the right to vote in local elections in England and Northern Ireland.

The Council welcomes:

That all our residents, no matter their nationality, call Lewisham their home and bring significant value to our area.

That the voting and candidacy rights of EU citizens with pre-settled and settled status who entered the UK before 2021 will be maintained.

That the London Assembly passed a motion in support of residence-based voting rights on the 11th of November 2021 and that various organisations in the democracy and immigration sector support the “Our Home Our Vote” campaign for residence-based voting rights.

The Council expresses concern that:

EU citizens who enter the UK from the 1st of January 2021 and are not covered by bilateral voting rights treaties (currently only active with Poland, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Spain) will not have voting and candidacy rights in local elections when the Elections Act is fully implemented by May 2024. This will create an unequal situation where some EU citizens will have the right to vote where others will not.

The complexity in voting eligibility will cause confusion and will reduce voter turnout in local elections amongst migrant voters, a group which already has a disproportionately lower voter registration rate compared to British voters.

Local Authorities will be under-resourced to manage the removal of a significant number of EU citizens from the electoral register and this may result in some being wrongfully removed from the electoral register.

The Council resolves to:

1. Write to the Minister of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities requesting that the franchise for local elections be extended in England and Northern Ireland to all qualifying foreign nationals in line with eligibility criteria in Scotland and Wales. This would ensure a UK-wide and fair approach so that all our residents who are also our council taxpayers are enfranchised.
2. Work collaboratively with other local authorities and voluntary sector organisations in London to develop a strategy of communications about voter eligibility following the Elections Act.
3. Ensure that the responsible council officers have a strategy in place to ensure

that the implementation of the Elections Act, including the removal of some EU citizens from the register, does not wrongfully remove eligible voters from the register.

Motion 2 - Celebrating Lewisham's Tamil Community

Proposer: Cllr Aliya Sheikh

Seconder: Cllr Kim Powell

The Tamil community, originating from Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa and elsewhere, makes a strong contribution to the life of our city, and the Tamil community in Lewisham has always been a strong part of the fabric of our borough.

There are an estimated 15,000 Tamils working for NHS England as doctors, nurses and front-line health professionals, thousands of Tamils serving as teachers and teaching assistants in our schools. Over a hundred adult social care facilities are operated by Tamils in and around London, caring for some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Tamils have made significant contributions to the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of the UK; from serving in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War to Tamil scientists working on the Astra Zeneca vaccine.

This incredible work takes place against the backdrop of persecution and abuse abroad, deeply affecting the wellbeing of the family and friends of Tamils in the UK.

Lewisham Council thanks the Tamil community for their invaluable contribution to our borough. We are profoundly grateful for the work that they do.

Lewisham Council notes that January marks Tamil Heritage Month and that Pongal – the Harvest Festival – commences on 14th January. We call on Lewisham Council to ensure these occasions continue to be marked and that our much-valued Tamil community is supported in Lewisham and across the city.