

From Richard Buttrey. Petition Organiser.

What is this petition about?

Why petition for change?

For three years I've been observing and publishing YouTube videos of various Council Meetings. Over that time it has become clear that the quality of debate and decision making is well below that which we have a right to expect. Decisions are often ill-judged and merely rubber stamped resulting in waste of time and money.

The original decision to close libraries, the High Court rejection of the earlier Local Plan, the auditors critical report over the Great Sankey leisure centre, and the current Western Link ever increasing forecast cost are cases in point.

But the ill thought out and badly presented Local Plan Preferred Development Option (PDO) in July 2017 has finally brought things to a head.

So far the PDO has cost council tax payers over £466,000.

With Halton Council's critical observations on the PDO, along with the overwhelming 6000 responses from members of the public, rumour has it that the PDO is seriously compromised and may have to be completely re-worked, wasting thousands of hours of staff time as well as the enormous cost of external consultants.

How can this have been allowed to happen? It's clear that the ten member Council Executive just aren't up to the mark.

All Council Committees are required under the Constitution to be politically balanced. All that is except the Executive Committee where the Labour Leader clearly believes it acceptable that all the members are Labour Councillors. It means that there is no effective opposition to offer checks and balances. An effective opposition is vital to the democratic process as has been well demonstrated at a national level.

An elected Mayor who had campaigned on a manifesto of running the Council with a politically balanced Executive could change this.

What happens next?

By law the council are obliged to hold a referendum on the way the Council is governed if 5% of the electorate sign a petition requesting a change.

This petition calls on the council to conduct a referendum on changing the way the Council is currently run to one where a Mayor elected by the whole electorate appoints their Cabinet.

Unlike other local authorities who have allowed on-line e-Petitions for this purpose, Warrington Borough Council have resolutely refused to do so.

This would have made collecting signatures so much easier and we are therefore left with using a traditional paper petition.

You may form your own opinion as to why Warrington don't want to make this as easy as possible.

If 5% of the electorate sign this petition (currently around 8000 people) then the Council have to conduct a referendum of the whole borough on whether to have an elected Mayor.

What is a directly elected Mayor? Don't we already have a Mayor?

The current Mayor is a Civic Mayor elected by all the councillors. It is a largely ceremonial role and the Mayor has few duties other than chairing full Council Meetings. They can't make decisions about council business.

Why is an elected Mayor better than what we have now?

An elected Mayor could change the way Warrington council is organised and governed. Instead of the Labour Party Council Leader appointing the executive of ten councillors – all Labour, the voters would elect a Mayor who would appoint an Executive cabinet. Currently the Executive Committee of the council is the only committee that is not required to be politically balanced. A Mayor who was elected on a manifesto of ensuring a balanced cabinet would be able to do just that and create a fairer and truly representative Executive.

Who could stand for Mayor and how does the election work?

Anyone may stand, including people from outside the political sphere. The voting would be on the Supplementary Vote system (not first past the post), where a voter's second choice is taken into account if no candidate gets more than 50% of the first preference vote. In that situation the top two candidates continue to a second round and all other candidates are set aside. The second-choice votes of everyone whose first choice has been set aside are then counted. Any votes for the two remaining candidates are then added to their first-round totals. Whichever candidate has the most votes after these second-preferences have been allocated is declared the winner.

Based on the 2015 local election votes if the 10 person Executive Committee were balanced it would consist of five Labour councillors, three Conservative and two Liberal Democrats.

Please help Warrington join the 23 other Local Authorities that are already run by an elected Mayor and Cabinet by obtaining signatories to this petition.

All we need are just over 8000 signatures and given that 6000+ people objected to the Local Plan PDO we can do this and bring about a more representative Council.

Thank you,
Richard Buttrey – Petition organiser.
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