

Some of you will already be aware that I came to the council with a promise to residents to argue for openness, transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. And I see those values not just as niceties, but as absolute necessities in any healthy democracy.

This policy motion, I fear, highlights why I have been talking about these things.

Whilst I don't for one second imagine anyone has consciously, deliberately attempted to avoid the values referred to, this motion reads as an attempt to stop or diminish local democracy. It reads as an attempt to get things done efficiently, which I commend, but in an attempt to improve process it seems prescriptive to the point of exclusion of any individuals who, for whatever reasons, are unable to meet the narrow process expressed in the motion.

It is imperative that local councils are perceived to be open and inclusive by the public. Inclusivity is a cornerstone of effective governance, and local councils must embrace transparency by providing ALL accessible avenues for public engagement, not seek to narrow options available to the public. Inclusive processes for public speaking at council meetings allows as many residents as possible to actively participate in the decision-making process. This open and participatory approach not only increases transparency but also fosters trust in the council's actions and decision-making. When residents feel that their voices are being heard and valued, they are more likely to trust the council's intentions and be supportive of its endeavours.

Nobody ever claimed democracy was the most efficient model for running anything. It was Winston Churchill who said democracy was "the worst way to run a country, except for the others."

Democracy, the ample right to free expression, doesn't exist because it's the most efficient model. It exists because it is the most representative.

The Western world faces a problem the 21st century as it has to try, through democracy, through what can sometimes be longwinded and time-consuming processes, to be able to counter the threat of authoritarian, dictatorial, unaccountable nations where such necessary checks and balances on power do not exist. The challenge of doing that within a democracy is considerable. Here, we have a microcosm of the problem. A desire to remove avenues of and for public expression would no doubt save the council some time, money and effort. That I do not wish to dispute. But that does not override the imperative for the council to have, and to be seen to have, policies and processes which seek to increase, not limit, public engagement.

To all members then, I ask you to vote against this policy motion. And I ask you to do so for two reasons:

Firstly, to uphold principles of democratic inclusivity.

Secondly, to enhance the reputation of Havant Borough Council.