

Greens call for contingency plan to ensure free and fair elections amid pandemic



Green Party

5 February 2021

- **Local elections should be delayed if there's any risk to democracy or public health say Greens**

This year's local elections must be postponed unless the whole country is back in the equivalent to tier 3 or below by the end of March in order to ensure a free, fair and safe election, the Green Party has warned.

Despite guidance from Cabinet Office minister Chloe Smith that the government will work with political parties to ensure the elections can take place [1], the Greens have not had any reassurances from government over how the elections can go ahead if parties are not allowed to campaign.

This follows previous government guidance that leafleting by political parties was not exempt from the current coronavirus restrictions. [2]

Now, amid increasing uncertainty over councils' ability to hold the May elections safely [3] and the ability for candidates to campaign, the Green Party has called on the Government to set out contingency plans to make sure we can hold free, fair and safe elections.

Green co-leader Jonathan Bartley has said in the interests of both people's health and the integrity of the UK's democratic values, the Government must prepare to move the elections to a new date if the current time frame is not safe or fair.

Bartley said:

"We expect elections in this country to be both free and fair. People have a right to vote in safety and candidates have a right to engage with their communities in order to put their case forward in calling for votes.

"The Government's dithering on the election date and their direct instruction on campaigning means serious questions have been raised over who is making such decisions when there is clearly a conflict of interest.

“Our democracy is too precious for the rules governing it to be determined by one political party. Any decision on campaigning should be decided by a body such as the Electoral Commission, in consultation with Public Health England, not a party that may stand to gain from such a decision.”

The official election period starts on 29th March [4]. The Greens have said the government must now look at whether any part of the country is likely to remain above tier 3 by the end of March, and if so the election has to be postponed. If the current restrictions continue beyond this time, then major concerns will be raised over how fair the election will be.

Bartley said:

“Unless the whole ‘official election period’ from late March can be conducted under open conditions, allowing free campaigning, and voters can vote in safety, then the elections should be delayed. And that decision should be taken as soon as possible to avoid any further damage to the integrity of the UK’s democratic system.”

ENDS

Notes

1

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/local-elections-in-england-and-wales-are-given-green-light-for-may-6/ar-BB1dpD23>

2

<https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/local-elections-2021-campaigning-coronaviruses-criticised-liberal-democrats-green-party-844145>

3

Report of Council CEOs and electoral returning officers: <https://lgiu.org/publication/free-fair-and-safe/>

4

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/Election-timetable-LGE%20election.doc>

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