

## **Sian Cox contribution to STV debate by Powys county council on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

I do think STV will improve democracy for citizens of Powys and their engagement in it.

Where STV happens already, practice shows that voters aren't confused by the STV ballot paper, and that voter turn-out at elections is higher. Ranking our preference for things isn't complicated. We all do it every day, routinely, about all sorts of things. 'I like this one best and this one second best'. If our voters think it's complicated, it's up to us to explain the system to them.

Cllrs Richard and Jeremy have mentioned wasted votes. In Powys in the 2022 local elections 40% of votes were wasted. For example, I know that 319 people voted for me. 441 people voted for other candidates. Under First Past the Post, that's 441 wasted votes. Their guy didn't win; they got me, someone they didn't want. Also, of the 319 who did vote for me, how many didn't really want me, but wanted someone else even less?

STV gets rid of wasted votes, and gets rid of tactical voting. If you're a member of a political party but you don't rate the candidate your party has nominated, and you think another candidate would be better for your community or the issues you care about, but you have an aversion to the political party they belong to, FPtP forces you to choose one or the other. Under STV, you can vote for both; you can remain loyal to your party and at the same time to other things you care about.

It's right that the political system should be nuanced. Life is.

It's right that people should have choice. A key component of our wellbeing is that we are able to make choices that will improve our lives. Multi members wards - in Powys there would be 3-4 councillors per ward\* - give us a choice of different councillors to help us with different things: this councillor for this issue because they have the right skill set for this; that councillor for that issue because they have useful connections for that; this third councillor for this issue with my street because she lives in this community. It gives us more councillors up there, with ideas about how to make our communities better, and doing things about it.

And seats should match votes. If you're a party with widespread support but it's low level, and dispersed across the county, you're unlikely to win many seats because you won't have the concentrated numbers in any one ward to win that seat. But you should have seats. People support you and want your candidate to represent them. STV brings you to the table.

This isn't about whether we as councillors will like being in multi member wards; or whether it will make our jobs harder, trying to connect with more people, across bigger

wards. We will find a way to overcome those challenges, like councillors all over Scotland already do.

First Past the Post was built for one big party versus another big party. It's not fit for the system we have – multiple parties, some of them small.

It's not fit for the reality we face – systemic, existential challenges, needing all of our brains around the table, working together.

I'm not saying STV is perfect. The world is nuanced, not perfect.

We're not aiming for perfect.

We're aiming for better.

\* The Electoral Reform Society Cymru advise that 6 member wards happen in very big cities, not in rural regions. There are no 6 member wards in Scotland, and ERSC advise that there would be none in Powys.