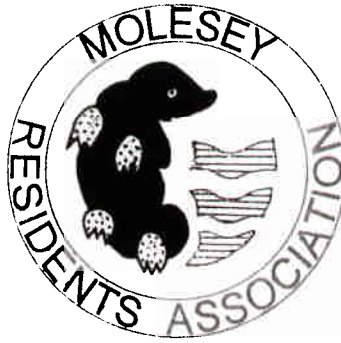


MOLESEY Residents Association

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DCMS PUBLIC CONSULTATION-PARTY POLITICAL BROADCASTING
Non-Confidential Reply available for any use.
(Closing Date for Representation 14.10.2004)

Thank you for consulting our organisation, which, under the relatively new rules which apply to organisations seeking seats on Councils, is therefore formally registered as a 'Political Party'.

We do not wish to make detailed comments on most of the issues which are raised in your document, these primarily being those concerned with the proposals for a statutory regulatory committee to control Political Broadcasting and the subservient issues of programming between channels and between TV and Radio, other than to say that we do not not favour increasing the formal bureaucracy in this area, since it is unlikely to produce a cost benefit over the present system. One would also expect that a statutory committee, responding to whatever brief it was given, would feel obliged to extend continually its regulatory role and thereby become an increasing costly overhead to the electoral system without a direct relation to any benefits which might possibly be apparent.

What we are concerned about, on which we would wish to comment, are those issues which are largely dealt with in section 10.

SECTION 10 ISSUES

Section 10 raises the issue of Qualification of Political Parties for Broadcasting and very quickly, in 10.2., arbitrarily dismisses virtually all, if not all, of smaller parties from any rights to time for broadcasts, the simple excuse being given: ...'that the amount of time given to Party Political Broadcasts would (otherwise) be unworkable'....

In respect of this sweeping exclusion we would make a number of points:

1). In the introduction to your document, Tessa Jowell only once, in para 2 (out of 10 paragraphs), refers to 'Qualifying Parties'. Other than this the whole introduction is about fairness and transparency by which political parties can access people. In fact para 5 sums up the prime objective:

...'*The Electoral Commission's recommendations are directed at*

ensuring we have a robust and effective means by which political parties can communicate with people across the United Kingdom at the time of elections'.....This is immediately followed by a statement that....'The Government fully supports the Electoral Commission in this aim'.

Clearly, all small parties are now, by government definition, 'Political Parties' and yet we and all other small parties, are nevertheless, then arbitrarily excluded from these objectives.

2. Looking at the tables for General Election broadcasts for the 2001 elections, there are no broadcasts listed for 'Resident' or 'Local Amenity' types of party. There are, however, a number of smaller parties listed which had never previously held parliamentary seats and which continued in the election to be unsuccessful, e.g. Workers Party, Prolife and others. This compares badly to many small Independent, R.A. or Amenity Groups, up and down the country, which do hold seats regularly in County, Borough or District Councils. Yet when non-parliamentary elections are held, these same organisations get no broadcast time.

3) It is the case that some Councils are wholly dominated by Independent, Residents or Amenity Groups. In Surrey, Elmbridge B.C. has, since 1986 to 2001, wavered out of the normally recognised major political party type of control. The Council has been administered by the Residents Group, from 1986 to 1988 and again from 1993 to 2001. From 2001 to the present time of 2004, the Council is majority controlled by the 'Residents Group'. This Group has no allegiance to any of the main political parties.

In Epsom & Ewell a similar but much longer and consistent, if slightly less 'allegiance' defined, situation, exists where the Council is dominated by a mixture of true Independents and Residents related independents to the Conservative party.

We are also aware that 'New Forest' recently became an 'Independent' Council.

Clearly, in all of these cases, the Independent and nationally small Political Groups involved have a large support amongst the electorate and yet, at election time, only the formally recognised larger Political Parties, are granted broadcast time even though they have minority local support in certain areas..

4). In 10.3. you state that the current criteria for party political broadcasts is that the political party must be fielding candidates in at least one sixth of the seats being contested. Whilst individual Independent organisations cannot, by definition, ever meet this for their individual wards as related to the whole number of wards in a local election, such organisations, when operating as a group as in Elmbridge, clearly achieve a level of one half or greater, yet are still denied any broadcasting rights.

5). In 10.3, you pose the question, (almost as a throw away line with no explanatory subscript), ... 'What scope is there for using any increased provision to accommodate broadcasts by a greater

number of political parties(?).

We would say that it is not a question of rather languidly considering such scope, but that in view of the general 'Fairness' and 'Transparency' arguments promoted in the document and the obvious absolutely unfair situation which does actually obtain, that the question of broadcasting time for small political parties needs urgent and equitable addressing.

6) In your document, under section 5, concerned with paid political broadcasting, you comment on the Electoral Commissions examination with regard to the Human Rights Act. Under section 10, with which we are concerned, no such consideration is applied. Surely, in view of the total unfairness of precluding small parties from the broadcasting process and the fact that in so doing, it completely runs counter to all the objectives of fairness and transparency referred to several times in your document, then there must be considerations in respect of the Human Rights Act which are being ignored and infringed in both the letter and spirit of the Act.

In conclusion, we have previously made some of these points in respect of previous consultations, but the situation has not been satisfied.

We believe that the present situation in respect of the lack of broadcasting time for small political parties is totally unfair and is biased against small party interests in favour of the normally recognised larger parties.

It is time that the Government and the Electoral Commission gives serious consideration to an equitable solution to the unfair situation outlined and it is incumbent on both bodies to do so.

I respectfully submit the above comments on behalf of the Molesey Residents Association and I am certain that these comments will also represent the views of similar small political parties affected by the present situation, even if such parties give up on making a similar representation, feeling that the wall of indifference on this issue is too great to scale,

Molesey Residents Association

MOLESEY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION (MRA)-PEOPLE & ORGANISATION SUMMARY

Paid-up Molesey Household Membership:

1600 households at any one time from 8100 households.

Currently holds 8 seats out of 9 local Molesey ward seats on Elmbridge Borough Council.

Organisation by Main Committee of 18 members, with additional ex-officio 8 sponsored councillors. Various sub-committees formed for appropriate specialist matters.

Also on Main Committee, ex officio, one representative each from our 2 local affiliated Residents Association, Hurst Park & Rivermead.

One ex-officio member from the local Molesey Trade & Commerce Group. Main Committee meets once a month and with normal AGM.