

Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford



Fundamental shift in our political system means time for change

IT'S now a week since local government elections took place across the country. I'd like to spend a bit of time talking about the results, which I think show a fundamental shift in our political system in the UK.

First, let's talk about why these elections were – and in many places weren't – being held.

The first major result to be declared was a parliamentary by-election in the constituency of Runcorn & Helsby in the North West of England. A by-election at any level of government is the process of electing someone into a vacant seat.

A seat can become vacant for lots of different reasons, including the death of a sitting councillor or MP, a resignation or, in the case of Runcorn & Helsby, because the incumbent Labour MP was convicted of assaulting a constituent and subsequently given a ten-week prison sentence.

This was the only parliamentary by-election being held last Thursday, meaning the only election to elect an MP, but there were quite a lot of other by-elections to elect into council seats being held around the country.

That included by-elections to elect into three vacant council seats right here in Chelmsford: two to elect councillors to Chelmsford City Council, and one to elect a councillor to Essex County Council.

These were all in Moulsham & Central and Moulsham Lodge and they were caused by my resignation as a local councillor (city and county) to concentrate on my role as an MP, as well as the resignation of one of my Lib Dem colleagues at the city council who stood down for health reasons.

It gets a bit complicated, but if you live in Moulsham Lodge, you would have been eligible to vote for a new county councillor, and if you live in Moulsham & Central, you would have been eligible to vote for a new county councillor and two new city councillors.

That's because of the way the city council ward and county council division boundaries work.

The best way to understand these is probably visually, so I highly rec-



The Liberal Democrat council team in Moulsham & Central. From left, Cllr Charlene Adutwim, Cllr Helen Ayres, Cllr David Loxton and Cllr Seán Manley
MARIE GOLDMAN MP

ommend having a look at the election maps on the Ordnance Survey website here: www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/election-maps/gb.

It was a tough campaign and I know the Conservatives threw everything they had at trying to win back these council seats from the Liberal Democrats.

Several Conservative MPs came to Chelmsford to campaign, including the Braintree MP and former Foreign Secretary James Cleverly, and Witham MP and former Home Secretary Dame Priti Patel.

On polling day, even the Leader of the Opposition, Kemi Badenoch MP, was in Chelmsford.

But I'm absolutely thrilled and incredibly proud to say that the lovely people of central Chelmsford chose to elect three new Liberal Democrats instead: Helen Ayres and Seán Manley for Chelmsford City Council (Moulsham & Central ward) and David Loxton for Essex County Council (Chelmsford Central division). And they had stonking majorities too – a resounding rejection of the disappointingly unpleasant

campaign that the Conservatives ran.

A HUGE thank you to everyone who turned out to vote and placed their trust in my party and in our wonderful candidates. These are difficult times and there are tough decisions ahead, so I'd also like to thank them for stepping up to the challenge.

In many other places around the country there were other local government elections.

Some of these were to elect entire county councils. Essex County Council should also have been up for election in its entirety, but earlier this year the Conservatives who run it applied to the Labour Government to cancel the elections and extend the terms of the sitting councillors, probably by up to three years, while local government is reorganised, which I've written about in this column before.

However, several other county councils were going ahead with their elections, as well as elections in some unitary authorities.

There were also elections for regional mayors (also known as metro mayors), including, for the first time, in Hull & East Yorkshire and Greater Lincolnshire.

This column isn't long enough to go into the detail of every result and

anyway, by the time you read this, there will be thousands of column inches elsewhere for you to delve into the detail, but if you take nothing else away from the election results, I would suggest the important thing is this: the results are the clearest indication yet that our traditional two-party (Labour vs Conservative) electoral system is dead.

We are now seeing the emergence of a much more fractured multi-party system. And the implications for our antiquated First Past The Post (FPTP) voting system are immense.

To show you what I mean, let's take an example from last week's results: let's look at the West of England mayoralty. Here are the results in percentages:

- Labour: 25.0 per cent (winner)
- Reform UK: 22.1 per cent
- Green: 20 per cent
- Conservative: 16.6 per cent
- Liberal Democrat: 14 per cent
- Independent: 2.3 per cent.

As you can see, the Labour candidate, Helen Godwin, won with just 25 per cent of the vote. To put it another way, only one out of every four people voted for her.

And to put it a different way again, three quarters of people voted for somebody else and yet, under FPTP, the person with the most votes takes

all the power. Just look at that vote split too – just 11 percentage points separate first and fifth place.

That's really quite incredible and it's not something we're used to seeing in our country. It's also not something FPTP is designed to cope with.

There are various alternatives to FPTP – indeed, we even used to use them for mayoral elections in the UK until the Conservatives scrapped them in favour of a return to FPTP.

Whatever your politics, I would hope that we could agree that a winner-takes-all system, where that winner has such a tiny proportion of support from the electorate as a whole, isn't a fair system.

The Liberal Democrats have long argued for this to be changed. Perhaps now, with such a fundamental and obvious shift in the range of parties gaining votes, the Government will seriously consider moving to a more democratic and fair system. Time will tell.

You can find out more about the different types of voting systems on the Electoral Reform Society's website here: electoral-reform.org.uk/voting-systems.

Thanks for reading – and if you had the chance and did, thanks for voting!

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