

The Supervote Project has compiled a “Top 20” of the most undemocratic results last time London Borough elections were held in 2022:

Bexley’s were ranked 20th

The last time elections for the Borough were held in 2022:-

- The Conservatives were over-represented with nearly three quarters of the seats taken, even though they had won less than half of the vote;
- Labour was short-changed, with under 3 out of 10 seats to show for 4 out of 10 votes;
- Other parties had nothing to show for their 1 out of 10 votes;
- Over 7 out of 10 of the Borough’s voters did not vote at all.

Not much of a democracy is it?

...and it’s our dodgy voting system that is to blame!

To elect the Borough’s Councillors in 2022, residents were obliged to use an inefficient Victorian voting system known as First-past-the-post, which wasted many of the votes cast and produced a distorted result with the remainder. These are the party percentages in the London Borough of Bexley for 2022:-

Party	% Votes Won	% Seats Taken
Conservative	47.4%	73.3%
Labour	41.2%	26.7%
LibDem	6.9%	None
Green	1.8%	None
Others	2.7%	None

There is something very wrong with a voting system that has the ability to award a large majority of the seats to a party that has won less than half of the vote.

Moreover, drilling down to ward level reveals poor levels of representation. Bexley has 17 wards each returning 2 or 3 councillors but, the way our outdated voting system works, all wards were monopolised by one party, no matter how people had voted. In 5 of these wards, the dominant party took all the seats on a minority of the vote, resulting in the ridiculous situation such as in East Wickham Ward, where a minority of voters (44%) enjoyed 3 councillors of their political persuasion, while the majority of ward voters (56%) had none.

And then there is the abysmal Borough turnout – just 27%. Perusal of the ward results reveals that 16 of the 17 ward turnouts were below 30%, with Slade Green & North End Ward taking the wooden spoon with just 19%. Evidently, over 7 out of 10 Bexley voters felt so disconnected with the democratic process that they chose not to vote. After all, why bother voting when the result is a foregone conclusion? It doesn’t bode well for the forthcoming Borough elections in 2026; declining public interest and participation in local elections spell disaster for our democracy unless something is done.

The extent of the disparities between votes won and seats taken in English local government can be seen by visiting the 2024 edition of the “Awful A-Z of Local Election Disasters”,

accessible on the home page of www.supervote.org.uk, where it is estimated that, thanks to the First-past-the-post voting system, over 4 out of 10 councils have disparities between votes won and seats taken of over 20%. On the same page, a “Top 10” of the most undemocratic local election results in May 2025 shows that there was no Reform UK landslide as the media claimed, with that party taking a majority of seats, but with a minority of the vote in all cases.

First-past-the-post is past it and continued use of this Victorian museum piece makes about as much sense as using Stephenson’s Rocket to haul trains on the HS2. The London Boroughs need to have their voting system brought up to date so that results reflect votes cast, transforming the Boroughs’ elections into a vibrant, diverse and inclusive event where there is everything for everyone everywhere to play for, whether they be voters, local party organisations or candidates.

To achieve this, the Borough needs to conduct its elections using a system of proportional representation, a type of voting system which shares out seats in proportion to votes cast. So, if Labour were to poll 6 out of 10 votes, they would be awarded 6 out of 10 seats. Our current outdated Victorian voting system does not do this.

The Supervote: the most powerful and democratic vote on Earth.

The Single Transferable Vote (STV) is the British system of proportional representation. While Continental list systems of PR are designed simply to deliver proportionality of parties, STV allows voters to cast preferences for candidates in multi-member wards, which gives them more choice of candidates and an ability to vote according to what is important to them, whether it be according to party affiliation, independence of thought, gender, culture or position on an issue. Wasted votes are minimised because in the counting, the votes are distributed among the candidates according to the expressed preferences of each individual voter, allowing votes for a no-hoper or those surplus to a candidate’s requirements to be recycled. The way the votes are counted ensures that the corporate will of the voters in the ward is reflected in the result and that seats are awarded in proportion to votes cast. STV is the most powerful vote you can bequeath to an electorate and has justifiably been described as “**the Supervote**”.

The Irish Republic has used STV since the 1920s. In the UK, Conservative and Labour Governments have supported STV’s use in Northern Ireland for local council, Assembly and European elections over a 50 year period. In 2007, STV was successfully introduced for local elections in Scotland, and the Welsh Senedd has passed legislation that allows local councils in Wales to use it if they so resolve. English Councils need to catch up.

Introducing STV should be straightforward even though English local governance is currently a hotchpotch of single and multi-member representation. While STV operates best in 4-6 member wards, the system can still function at a reduced level of efficiency in 1,2 and 3 member situations. This would allow for the system to be introduced immediately for all local elections pending boundary reviews for each council by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. It would also enable all local elections to be held in one hit on the same day every 4 years, thereby saving considerable amounts of money.

A new dawn for UK democracy and an end to “King of the Castle” Politics.

According to a recent YouGov poll, only 19% of respondents believed the British political system was working well, while 74% believed the system to be broken. Maybe the problem is that all the adversarial party political punch-ups alienate most voters whose adult lives are

spent trying to get along with family, neighbours and work colleagues, even those they don't particularly like. Ordinary folk look askance at "King of the Castle" politics, all the hate, all the posturing and the name-calling. Our politics seems to have degenerated into a round-the-clock combative sport rather than a means of considered decision-making and so we need to reform the way we go about the governance of our country. The introduction of STV should help by increasing voter participation, by breathing new life into local party politics and thereby strengthen our democracy at the grassroots. Hopefully this will in turn open the door to a new dawn for our representative democracy, leading to more consensual and less adversarial "King of the Castle" politics, with more input from people with different ideas and a better quality of decision-making as a result.

Additional Notes

- *Voting figures have been taken from the 2022 edition of the Local Elections Handbook published by Professors Rallings and Thrasher. Please note that, where more than one councillor is elected in a ward then the vote of the best placed candidate for each party in that ward is used in calculating the total vote. This is standard practice to ensure that the percentage vote is not skewed in favour of a party contesting all the seats over an independent or a party that is putting up, say, just one candidate.*
- *The Top 20 of the most undemocratic London Borough Election Results in 2022 is as follows:-*

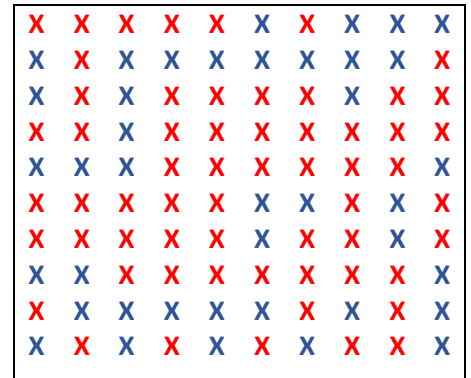
London Borough	Dominant Party	Dominant Party's Votes	Dominant Party's Seats	Disparity	Turnout
1. Lewisham	Labour	52.2%	100.0%	47.8%	33%
2. Kingston on Thames	Liberal Democrat	43.9%	91.6%	47.7%	46%
3. Islington	Labour	52.5%	94.1%	41.6%	36%
4. Greenwich	Labour	53.1%	94.5%	41.4%	33%
5. Newham	Labour	56.0%	97.0%	41.0%	29%
6. Lambeth	Labour	51.6%	92.1%	40.5%	31%
7. Ealing	Labour	46.1%	84.3%	38.2%	40%
8. Richmond on Thames	Liberal Democrat	51.1%	88.9%	37.8%	48%
9. Redbridge	Labour	54.5%	92.1%	37.6%	34%
10. Hounslow	Labour	47.8%	83.9%	36.1%	34%
11. Haringey	Labour	52.3%	87.7%	35.4%	35%
12. Hackney	Labour	53.4%	87.7%	34.3%	34%
13. Camden	Labour	51.4%	85.4%	34.0%	35%
14. Brent	Labour	52.6%	86.0%	33.4%	31%
15. Barking and Dagenham	Labour	69.0%	100.0%	31.0%	25%
16. Southwark	Labour	51.9%	82.5%	30.6%	35%
17. Waltham Forest	Labour	50.1%	78.3%	28.2%	33%
18. Kensington & Chelsea	Conservative	43.9%	70.0%	26.1%	33%
19. Hammersmith & Fulham	Labour	54.0%	80.0%	26.0%	33%
20. Bexley	Conservative	47.4%	73.3%	25.9%	27%

- *Other groups campaigning for voting reform include:-*
 - The Electoral Reform Society(www.electoral-reform.org.uk)
 - Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform (www.labourforelectoralreform.org.uk)
 - Conservative Action for Electoral Reform (www.conservativeelectoralreform.org.uk)
 - Liberal Democrats for Electoral Reform (www.lider.org)
- *Please note that, while best endeavours have been used to ensure that the information in this document is accurate and correct, this is an amateur publication.*
- *On the following page, there is an annex with a brief description of how STV works and why First-past-the-post does not. **More information is available at** www.supervote.org.uk*

David Green
Autumn 2025

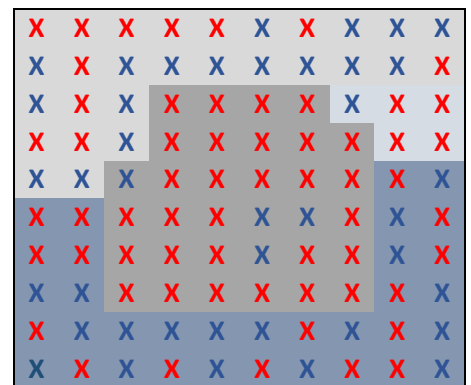
Annex: The nuts and bolts of voting systems for English local elections

All English councillors serve a 4 year term, but practice varies when it comes to how many councillors there are per ward and whether the entire council is elected in one go or whether elections are spread over 4 years. Unfortunately, the continued use of the First-past-the-post voting system (FPTP) in English Council elections distorts the results, no matter which permutation of ward representation is chosen. A simple 2-party model shows what can go wrong in the most straightforward of circumstances using the two First-past-the-post voting methods in common use in English local elections. The same model can then be used to show how these discrepancies can be mitigated by using the Single Transferable Voting system (STV) of proportional representation in multi-member wards. Alongside is a diagram comprising 100 X's in a grid to represent a community we shall call Smalltown. Each X is coloured to depict supporters of the Red or Blue parties.



First-past-the-post in single member wards

With this method, Smalltown is divided into 3 areas known as wards, each ward returning a single councillor. The Red and Blue Parties field one candidate apiece in each ward and ward residents have one vote each, cast using a single X. The map alongside shows Smalltown divided into North, South and Central Wards, and below, the ballot papers as Red supporters would complete them, together with the results for each ward.



The winner with the most votes in each ward is highlighted in yellow, showing that the Blues have won 2 out of the 3 seats in Smalltown using this method.

BALLOT PAPER NORTH WARD You have one vote	
Harry Hardnose <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	
Max Momentum <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	X

NORTH WARD RESULT	
Harry Hardnose <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	18
Max Momentum <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	15

BLUE WIN

BALLOT PAPER CENTRAL WARD You have one vote	
Linda Likeable <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	X
Reggie Rightwing <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	

CENTRAL WARD RESULT	
Linda Likeable <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	29
Reggie Rightwing <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	4

RED WIN

BALLOT PAPER SOUTH WARD You have one vote	
Katie Commerce <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	
Priti Practical <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	X

SOUTH WARD RESULT	
Katie Commerce <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	18
Priti Practical <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	16

BLUE WIN x

But all is not what it seems. If we add the total Smalltown votes for each party, we will find that, while the Blues polled 40 of the votes to win 2 seats, the reds have only one seat to show for their 60 votes. How did that happen? Well, if you look at the Smalltown map, you will notice a concentration of Red voters in Smalltown's Central Ward. While Linda Likeable's 29 votes were impressive, she needed only 5 of those votes to defeat her opponent, who had 4. The remaining 24 could have been put to better use in the other wards where support for the Reds was not as strong. Let's try another way of using First-past-the-post.

First-past-the-post in multi-member wards

With this method, Smalltown has 3 councillors as before, but now the North, Central and South wards are all merged, so the 3 councillors all represent the entire town in one large 3-member ward. As a result, Smalltown voters will have 3 votes each to cast on one ballot paper, with the Reds and the Blues fielding 3 candidates apiece. Below is the ballot paper of a Red Party supporter casting three Xs for the Red candidates, together with the multi-member ward map and the results table.

BALLOT PAPER SMALLTOWN WARD	
Katie Commerce <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	
Harry Hardnose <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	
Linda Likeable <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	✗
Max Momentum <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	✗
Priti Practical <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	✗
Reggie Rightwing <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	

X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

SMALLTOWN WARD RESULTS TABLE	
Katie Commerce <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	40
Harry Hardnose <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	40
Linda Likeable <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	60
Max Momentum <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	60
Priti Practical <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	60
Reggie Rightwing <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	40

RED WIN

RED WIN

RED WIN ✗

Now we have a quite different result - 3 Red wins this time - even though the electorate is exactly the same and has voted the same as they did in the single member method. According to this result, Smalltown is now a Red Party stronghold, even though it clearly is not if you look at the vote totals – 180 votes (60%) for the Reds versus 120 votes (40%) for the Blues.

Evidently, all it took to change the result of the election was to change from a single-member to a multi-member ward system and even then neither result accurately reflected the corporate will of the voters of Smalltown. While the creation of a multi-member ward should in theory have enabled different political persuasions to be represented, the way the votes were cast and counted ensured that the Reds swept the board. Some councils have multi-member wards but elect just one member per ward per year. In theory, this allows for a change of support to another party in future years but, more often than not, the dominant party's candidates prevail year after year. There is no point in having multi-member wards if the way the votes are counted determines that, while 60% of Smalltown voters have 3 councillors of their political persuasion, 40% of Smalltown voters have none.

The Supervote: The Single Transferable Vote in Multi-member Wards

As in the previous method, the multi-member ward is retained but, crucially, the way the votes are cast and counted is entirely different in the quest to achieve fair shares for all.

As the name of the system suggests, each voter has a single vote which can be transferred from one candidate to another according to the expressed instructions of the voter who numbers the candidates in order of preference. Should the voter's first preference have so much support that further votes are not required to achieve election, or so few that further votes will not help, then the vote is transferred to the voter's next preference, and this process is repeated until the vote is spent or the election concluded. The recycling of votes in this way reduces the number of ineffective votes and gives most ward voters a councillor of their choice

X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

With STV, there will be more ward activity as the parties contest every vote and as more voters participate in the election as a consequence. For a start, voters will realise that they now have a choice of party candidates; Red supporters in Smalltown North who had previously been lumbered with Max Momentum can now choose between 3 Red Party candidates, so many have switched to Linda Likeable. Moreover, voters will appreciate that the expression of preferences means that they can vote for who they please – even across party divides if they so desire - without having to think tactically, or worry about wasting their vote; for example, the Red supporter's ballot paper alongside suggests that perhaps the voter attaches as much importance to gender as to political affiliation. Note also that this voter has no more preferences after Max Momentum, at which point the vote, if unused, is counted as “non-transferable”.

Smalltown STV Ballot Paper	
Katie Commerce <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	3
Harry Hardnose <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	
Linda Likeable <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	1
Max Momentum <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	4
Priti Practical <i>Red Party Candidate</i>	2
Reggie Rightwing <i>Blue Party Candidate</i>	

Smalltown STV Results Table							
3 to elect. The Quota, the number of votes for a candidate to be elected, is 25							
Stages	First Choices	Transfer Linda Likeable's surplus		Eliminate Max Momentum		Eliminate Reggie Rightwing	
Katie Commerce Blue Party	17	+ 1	18	+ 1	19	+6	25
Harry Hardnose Blue Party	12		12		12	+4	16
Linda Likeable Red Party	39	-14	25		25		25
Max Momentum Red Party	6	+ 4	10	-10			
Priti Practical Red Party	15	+ 7	22	+ 3	25		25
Reggie Rightwing Blue Party	11		11		11	-11	
Non-transferable Votes		+ 2	2	+ 6	8	+1	9
Total Vote	100		100		100		100

RED WIN

RED WIN

BLUE WIN



STV: It's fair, with everything for everyone everywhere to play for.

As the above simplified results table shows, there's a lot going on at an STV count. The drama unfolds in stages as winners emerge and losers are eliminated, with the arithmetic checked to ensure that the votes total 100 at each stage. Unlike some other PR systems, a candidate needs a sizeable chunk of the vote to be elected under STV. This is called the quota, the minimum required for election, 25 in this instance. Surpluses and votes from eliminated candidates are transferred stage by stage until the 3 winners emerge - Linda Likeable and Priti Practical for the Reds, and Katie Commerce for the Blues. The combination of quota counting and transferable voting in multi-member wards ensures that proportional representation is achieved, with 2 seats awarded to the Reds for their 60% of the vote and 1 seat to the Blues for their 40%. Note that this process would have worked just as well if all of the candidates had been independents. Note also that, while the effective votes percentage for the two First-past-the-post methods was just 38% and 41% respectively, under STV it was 75% and this figure would have been even greater had the number of seats per ward been increased to between 4 and 6, as is recommended by the Electoral Reform Society. In this way, STV will invigorate our democracy at the grassroots by ensuring fair shares for all, with everything for everyone everywhere to play for.