

Onkar Saini statement

Hello, thank you for allowing me to address council this evening...for the sake of full disclosure, I intend to be a candidate for the Liberal Democrats in the upcoming election'

I trust the below does what it needs to do, and will leave it to you to finesse it!

Community engagement :

One of the major ways a community involves itself in indicating what they want for their area is by expressing a preference at the ballot box. There are also many other ways including everything from joining litter picks, community campaigning and activism, setting up local groups etc, all of which contribute to a vibrant and thriving local area.

But concentrating on the democratic right to vote, two elements are very necessary to ensure this right is protected...a system which allows all those with the right to vote to do so fairly and equally, and an agreement that the data on which they make their voting decisions is rooted in fact, not in disinformation.

Later in the meeting the LibDems are proposing a motion on the introduction of voter ID and outside we saw a demonstration about how iniquitous this proposal is as it clearly discriminates between voters with "acceptable" photo id, and those without. I fully support their stance and will resist most vigorously any attempt to disenfranchise those who are eligible to vote, and regret that those willing people who have manned polling stations up till now will be put in the position of ballot box bouncer "you havent got the right ID, you aren't coming in"

But I'm equally concerned with disinformation.

Everyone has the right to their own opinions, everyone doesnt have the right to their own facts.

Communities must engage with the local government's proper channels to avoid falling victim to false information, primarily through mediums like social media. Unfortunately, we live in a world where social media has become a primary source of information and quickly falls victim to misinformation. More often, these pieces of information come across through unrecognised / non-verified social media handlers, resulting in distress.

We have seen quite a few examples lately and I'd hope that everyone here would agree we want our residents to vote based on facts, not rumours.

And it is more important than ever that local communities find a suitable medium of local information and source to engage with local government so they can rely on the authenticity of any local information and engage effectively to get an accurate response.

As we enter the election period, I'd like to wish all those putting themselves forward for election a good campaign, it takes courage to want to do this and being in the firing line. In the end, the electorate will decide, lets ensure they are enabled to do so by making it as accessible as possible at the ballot box, and by ensuring they can access the right information on which to base their choice.