

Ruth Malloy Statement on VOTING RIGHTS FOR EU CITIZENS

This Council has been interested in the issue of voting rights for some time.

We've also been interested in the situation faced by EU citizens in Bath and North East Somerset, following the UK's departure from the European Union.

I want to bring the issue of voting rights and EU citizens back into the spotlight, because changes brought in very recently, as part of the Elections Act 2022, will have a negative impact on local democracy.

(The Elections Act 2022 has, among other changes, also meant the introduction of compulsory photo ID at polling stations.)

I wish to express my concern about the disenfranchisement of some of our residents, which will clearly reduce their ability to engage in our local democracy.

Unless they also have UK or Irish nationality, or that of a Commonwealth country, EU citizens cannot vote or stand as a candidate in UK Parliament elections. This is not new.

However, since the 7th of May 2024, the rights of many EU citizens to engage in our local democracy has been further curtailed.

For EU citizens residing in England, this new legislation applies to local elections, mayoral elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

From now on, the only EU citizens living in Bath and North East Somerset who will be able to register to vote - or to stand as a candidate - in these elections, will be:

Citizens of Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain who here here permanently, and have permission to enter or stay in the UK;

citizens of the Republic of Ireland - because of the Common Travel Area arrangements between the two countries, which predate their membership of the European Union;

and citizens of Malta and Cyprus - because in addition to being member states of the European Union, these are also Commonwealth countries.

Any citizen of another EU member state, who on or before 31st December 2020 was legally resident in the UK and has continued to reside here without a break, (someone, in other words, with 'settled status') may also continue to vote and stand as a candidate in any of the afore-mentioned elections.

HOWEVER, if you are an EU citizen who arrived here on or after 1st January 2021, and you are not from one of so-called eligible EU countries already mentioned, with which the UK has a reciprocal agreement, you will no longer be able to vote (or to stand as a candidate) in local elections, mayoral or Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

This reduced political participation cannot be good for our local democracy: we need a fair and just system of representation.

In the meantime, we should always remember that we are here to serve and help everyone living in the district, whether or not they are able to vote and participate in the democratic process.