



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
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Our Ref: ER/ER/013163/14

15 JUL 2014

Dear Jeremy

Thank you for your email of 9 April enclosing one from your constituent, Mr Peter Webb of Romilly Cottage, 139 Binscombe, Godalming, GU7 3QL, on his concerns regarding the behaviour of Surrey County Council and, more generally, falling electoral turnouts. I apologise for the delay in responding.

As you will know we have taken a number of steps to make local authorities more accountable and transparent in their dealings. This means that, when it comes to the ballot box, voters can more easily consider the performance of their local authority and on the way it has conducted its affairs. For instance the scheme recommended by the council's Independent Remuneration Committee and the allowances paid to councillors are now made public as are the annual statements articulating their policies on a range of matters relating to senior pay and reward, with the details of salaries awarded to senior staff now required to be placed on line. These measures have helped create the conditions in which local decisions on such matters are rightfully subject to significantly greater scrutiny by local taxpayers and ensure that authorities recognise the need to demonstrate restraint in the way they spend taxpayers' money on remuneration.

Finally I am pleased that Mr Webb has taken the time to give evidence to the Political and Constitutional Inquiry on Voter Engagement in the UK. He is right to point out that falling turnout and a lack of engagement with the political process are issues that need to be addressed. I believe that action does need to be taken to encourage greater participation in elections and hopefully greater transparency and openness is a step in the right direction as it gives people the tools and information they need to enable them to play a bigger role in local decision-making processes and shaping local services.

Joan er
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THE RT HON ERIC PICKLES MP