

PRESS RELEASE: David Campbell Bannerman MEP
For immediate release

Tory grassroots warn PM reforms could ‘destroy’ Party

Senior Conservative Party figures have joined forces to oppose radical reforms that would strip Party members of power.

Association representatives, including the former Chairman of the Party’s National Convention and Chairmen of Conservative Party associations have written to the Party Leader Theresa May and Party Chairman Brandon Lewis, urging them to abandon the proposed reforms that would scrap local constituency associations and remove the special power of members to select their candidates.

The proposals, which are planned to be discussed at the National Convention on Friday 16th March, are seen as a power grab by Conservative Campaign Headquarters to centralise power and weaken the influence of Party members. This would break the time honoured link between MPs and their local associations and give more control to the centre.

The letter says that the Party needs *“more democracy and local control, not increasing centralisation and dictation from the centre”*. It warns that the proposals could *“destroy the Party”* and that in order to win the next election, the Party needs a *“rejuvenated membership through greater democracy and empowerment”*.

David Campbell Bannerman MEP, a Patron of the Campaign for Conservative Democracy and a signatory to the letter, said:

“There are attempts within the Party hierarchy to strengthen the hold CCHQ has over members and associations.

“These plans to seize power from members could tear the Party apart.

“If associations and hardworking voluntary members are stripped of their rights within the Party, our activist numbers will dwindle even further as people will question what value paying for membership brings.

“The Conservative Party has enjoyed such a rich history of electoral success because of its voluntary campaigners in local constituency associations. If you take them out of the equation, the Party will die.

“Centralising candidate selection threatens the quality of our future parliamentary party which could be filled with ‘yes’ men and women who will not ‘rock the boat’.

“The panicky 2017 candidate selections are a case in point where associations were simply steamrollered.”

“We must oppose these latest plans.”

At a meeting of the National Convention held on 25th November in Birmingham, a number of changes to the Conservative Party Constitution were discussed and passed to be formally proposed at the next National Convention meeting on 16th March 2018.

Only around one hundred members of the convention, out of a potential one thousand plus, attended the meeting in Birmingham and ordinary Party members were excluded from the Convention, even as observers.

Ed Costelloe, Chairman of Grassroots Conservatives said:

“Proposed rule changes delete reference to new candidate selection. After the chaos and questionable tactics around candidate selection at the last election can party members trust these people to act honestly?”

“The Party is a broad church and all must worry that prospective candidates will not be considered if they are not mirror images of what the leader currently wants.”

“Does the Conservative Party believe in democracy in house ?

“What do the rule changes do to answer the question: ‘why should anybody wish to join the Party’?”

“Where do the rules facilitate vision and the need to address a new mass membership?”

ENDS

Note to Editors

Here are the proposed rule changes:

https://gallery.mailchimp.com/7bec7af443885fe23611d0eac/files/11490f31-58cf-4589-afde-4a8e41efa467/National_Convention_Constitutional_Changes_Discussion_Document_03.pdf

This is the full letter sent to the Prime Minister and the Party Chairman:

Dear Prime Minister and Party Chairman,

We are writing to you as loyal party representatives to express our deep concern over proposed changes to the Party Constitution scheduled to be agreed at the 16th-17th March National Convention and Spring Forum, which we believe could destroy the party.

We urge you and the National Convention to stop these proposed reforms immediately - in particular the threat to the very existence of local associations and the centralisation of candidate selection through CCHQ, which will remove the time

honoured right of our local members to choose their candidates and break the vital link between constituencies and their MPs.

These and other reforms will only further damage the value of membership within our great Party. We believe the reforms will be the nail in the coffin to membership of our Party, and are badly conceived.

We urge you to step in to stop these cavalier reforms, which will only serve to strengthen the position of unelected officials at CCHQ at the expense of hardworking and dedicated local associations and their members.

The Party needs more democracy and local control, not increasing centralisation and dictation from the centre.

We urge you to stop these reforms before party membership declines even further from the all-time low we have at present and to rescue the Party from dangerous decline.

The Party needs a rejuvenated membership through greater democracy and empowerment in order to win the next General Election.

Yours sincerely,

David Campbell Bannerman MEP, Patron of the Campaign for Conservative Democracy
Don Porter, former Chairman of the Conservative Party National Convention, Founder of Conservative Voice
John Strafford, Chairman of the Campaign for Conservative Democracy, former-Chairman of Beaconsfield Constituency Association
Geoffrey Vero, Chairman of Chobham Conservative Association, Past President of Surrey Heath Conservative Association
Matthew Dean, Chairman of Salisbury Conservative Association
Garry J Heath, Chairman of Wycombe Conservative Association
Edmund Costelloe, Chairman of Grassroots Conservatives, Past Chairman of Somerton and Frome Conservative Association
Bob Perry, Chairman of Hornchurch and Upminster Conservative Association
Kay Mayor, Chair of North East Cambridgeshire Conservative Association
Brian Hamill, Founder of Conservative Voice, former Co-ordinator for Conservative Southern Region
Cllr. Derek Tipp, former Chairman of New Forest East Conservative Association
Mike Baker, former Chairman of Lewisham & Deptford Conservative Association
Delyth Miles, former Chair of Clayton Conservative Association
Mary Douglas, Conservative councillor, Wiltshire Council
David Gordon Harte, Vice-Chair (Political) of East Belfast Conservative Association
Paul Diamond, Branch Treasurer of South Cambridgeshire Conservatives
Tony Homewood, former Chairman of Morley and Outwood, Wakefield and Normanton Conservative Associations and former West Yorkshire Conservative Area Officer
Roger Gilpin, Chairman of East Belfast Conservative Association
Gary Hynds, 2017 NI Assembly Conservative Party Candidate for South Down

Linda Yeatman, former Chair of Cambridge City Conservative Association
Andrew Fleming, Executive Officer of East Belfast Conservative Association
Helen Roberts, former Area Deputy Chairman, Calder Valley
Philip Booth JP, former Area Chairman, Pontefract