



**Smart School Councils**

# DEBATE PACK

Are you passionate about sharpening your critical thinking and speaking skills?

**DOES OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM LISTEN TO LOCAL PEOPLE ENOUGH?**



[WWW.SMARTSCHOOLCOUNCILS.ORG](http://WWW.SMARTSCHOOLCOUNCILS.ORG)

# How to Use this Debate Pack

Whether you have just a few minutes or a full lesson, this Debate Pack has got you covered. Check out the Certificates at the end too.

## How to find the debate video and send to teachers

1. Log in to the [Smart School Councils platform](#) using your school details.
2. Click on the blue Class Meeting Tool button in the dashboard.
3. Click on 'Next Meeting' at the top of the page.
4. To get started, click on 'click here' to browse existing questions and options.
5. If the debate topic is part of this week's question, it will appear there. Otherwise, click 'Search All' and type in the debate topic you're looking for.

### Got five minutes?

Play the debate video straight through and dive right into the debate. No need to pause at the prompts. It's a quick, engaging way to get your students thinking.

### Got 10/15 minutes?

Pause at the prompts in the video to explore additional ideas your class might have. Use the additional points or Power Facts if you'd like.

### Want to extend to 30 minutes or a full lesson?

Check out the lesson plan and writing tasks below. There is also a full Fact Sheet with amazing further reading if your students want to go deeper on the topic.

## What do the icons in the pack mean?



This is what the presenter says on the video



This is a Power Fact to explain or prompt debate that's not in the video



This is an additional debate point that's not in the video

# Introduction and Brain Gym Question

## Introduction



Welcome to Big Debate Club!

My name is Becky and today we are debating the question...

Does our political system listen to local people enough?

Have you ever thought about what changes you would make to help the people if you were prime minister? Would you ask the people or decide for them? Smart School Councils and the new chartist movement, Our House, want you to debate if you think our political system listens to us to make the best decisions or if you think we need to make demands to give more power to local people.

We all want to see a democracy that is powered by people and their communities, and in the UK there are opportunities to be heard like protesting or signing a petition. But does it listen enough? If it doesn't, we need to create People's Charters to demand what our communities need. People's Charters are a set of shared values and demands that we can use to bring power closer to the people, something the British has been doing for 800 years, starting with the Magna Carta in 1215, took power from King John and made him listen to his people. So does the political system listen to us enough or do we need to demand change? You decide.

## Brain Gym Question

Before we get started with the debate, I have a question for you...

Which of these is not a good way people can share their opinion with leaders?

- a) Writing a letter to your MP
- b) Reposting a social media post for friends
- c) Joining a protest or parade for a particular issue
- d) Sign a petition on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website

The political system listens to its people through voting, for instance, in the 2019 UK General Election, over 32 million people voted. This shows many people still turn out for elections as they feel they are listened to and want to take part in decisions. But is this enough? (Source: *Parliament*, [LINK](#))



## FOR: Our political system does listen to local people enough

We're going to share reasons for both sides of the debate, then it's up to you to think of the rest!


### There are many opportunities to make change and be heard



You might be thinking that there are many opportunities in our political system to make change and have our voices heard. Our political system has opportunities to be listened to, such as voting for a party you like, being allowed to protest or through petitions. If a petition receives 100,000 signatures, its topic is talked about by parliament and our ability to protest has made positive change such as the suffragettes' protests meaning women can vote or getting rid of damaging laws impacting the LGBTQ community.

### Devolution spreads the power more locally

You could say that devolution spreads the power more locally. Devolution means rather than decision making being focused in London at Parliament, elected representatives in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have some power to make decisions too, and have since 1998. This means that chosen local people can make the best decisions for other local people rather than people in England who don't understand what that community needs.

Can you think of another reason why you might argue that our political system does listen to local people enough? 

### Petitions can be a good way to be heard by the political system



Several GOV.UK petitions have successfully influenced the government, once they have been signed by over 100,000 people. For instance, Marcus Rashford's child food poverty petition caused a massive response after collecting over 1 million signatures, forcing government action to extend free school meals and support. (Source: GOV.UK, [LINK](#))

### The system means that there are many people to represent you



Whether it is through your MP, each representing around 70,000 - 80,000 people, who can discuss your issues in Parliament; or the more local council, who are responsible for services like education, housing, and waste collection making decisions closer to local communities, you can contact your representatives to make sure your community has everything it needs. (Source: GOV.UK, [LINK](#))



## AGAINST: Our political system does not listen enough

Now let's change positions and consider why you might argue that our political system does not listen to local people enough.


### When voting in elections, most people's choices are not listened to



You might think that when we take part in elections, most people's choices are not listened to. A key part of our political system is voting for the people who will make decisions on our behalf. Did you know that at the last election, 57.8% of people didn't vote for the person who represents them? If we don't get heard through voting, maybe we should demand a better system that listens to us through a local or national charter?

### If people are listened to more in other countries, why can't we?

Or you could also ask if people get listened to more in other countries, why can't we? Some countries allow their citizens decision-making power. Countries like France and Finland allow residents of some cities to make proposals on how local budgets are spent to improve their neighbourhoods. Other countries have had a citizen's assembly, which, similar to jury service, selects people randomly to form a representative group of people to make decisions for the community. This has been done in Ireland, where a randomly selected group of people recommended the legalisation of abortion and gay marriage, policies that politicians had failed to make progress on. We could also demand to be involved in decisions that impact us through a People's Charter.

Can you think of another reason why you might argue that our political system does not listen to local people enough? 

## Most people want the political system to change



Across 17 countries surveyed by Pew Research, an average of 56% believe their political system needs major changes or needs to be completely reformed. Roughly two-thirds or more hold this view in Italy, Spain, the United States, South Korea, Greece, France, Belgium and Japan. (Source: Pew Research, [LINK](#))

## Election voting does not represent voters well enough

In the 2024 election, 20 million voters did not vote, showing how many people do not take part in the system. The amount who did not vote is actually double the amount of people who voted for Labour, the winner, suggesting the system is broken because more people do not involve themselves with politics than the winning option. (Source: Electoral Reform Society, [LINK](#))



# FactSheet: Does our political system listen to local people enough?



Here's six key facts - three on each side - if you'd like to go a little deeper.

## Our political system does listen to local people enough

### ***So many people still turn out to vote in elections to be listened to***

In the 2019 UK General Election, over 32 million people voted. This shows many people still turn out for elections as they feel they are listened to and want to take part in decisions. (Source: Parliament, [LINK](#))

### ***Petitions can be a good way for people to be heard by its political system***

Several GOV.UK petitions have successfully influenced the government, once they have been signed by over 100,000 people. For instance, Marcus Rashford's child food poverty petition caused a massive response after collecting over 1 million signatures, forcing government action to extend free school meals and support. (Source: GOV.UK, [LINK](#))

### ***The system means there are many people to represent your issues***

Whether it is through your MP, each representing around 70,000 - 80,000 people, who can discuss your issues in Parliament; or the more local council, who are responsible for services like education, housing, and waste collection making decisions closer to local communities, you can contact your representatives to make sure your community has everything it needs. (Source: GOV.UK, [LINK](#))

## Our political system does not listen to local people enough

### ***Election voting do not represent voters well enough***

In the 2024 election, 20 million potential voters did not turn up to vote showing how many people do not take part in the system, despite being allowed to vote. The amount of people who did not vote is actually double the amount of people who voted for Labour, the eventual winner, suggesting the system is broken because more people do not involve themselves with politics than the winning option. (Source: Electoral Reform Society, [LINK](#))

### ***Most people want the political system to change***

The majority of people in the world want their political systems to change, showing that most people believe it is not working well enough or listening to its people. Across 17 countries surveyed by Pew Research, an average of 56% believe their political system needs major changes or needs to be completely reformed. Roughly two-thirds or more hold this view in Italy, Spain, the United States, South Korea, Greece, France, Belgium and Japan. (Source: Pew Research, [LINK](#))

### ***Other countries have found ways to listen to their people more***

In Helsinki, Finland's capital city, they have a participatory budgeting opportunity, where residents aged 12 and above can suggest and vote on how to spend €4.4–8.8 million euros annually to improve their neighborhoods and the city. Managed through an online platform, the process involves brainstorming, co-creation, voting, and fostering community engagement and inclusivity. (Source: Participedia, [LINK](#))



# Has this debate inspired you? – Let’s build a democracy that works and get involved in the Our House campaign!

## Follow us

Newsletter: <https://ourhouseuk.org/get-involved/>

Social media: [Instagram](#)

## Build a charter and share with us

[Add your ideas and vote on others through the digital people’s charter](#)

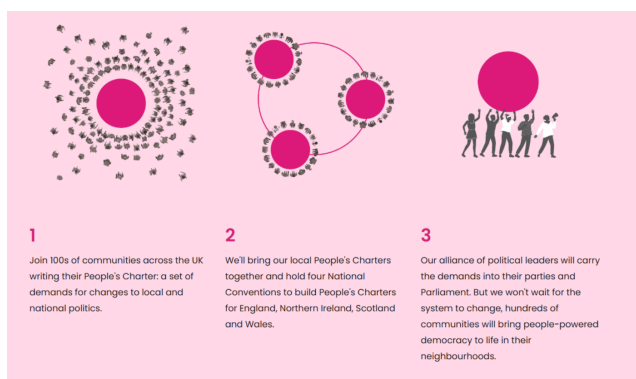
[Download the game and build a charter](#)

[Upload your charter here](#)

## Become a part of the movement

[Attend a monthly call to learn more about organising around, talking about, and building a people’s charter with your community](#)

[Reach out to us to organise a charter mobilising day with your community to jumpstart the charter building in your area](#)



# Sentence Starters

## POINT

LEMON & HERB: One reason why I (agree/disagree) with this debate is because...

MEDIUM: One point I have for this debate is...

HOT: You could say that...

## EVIDENCE

LEMON & HERB: One way I can prove my point is through this example...

MEDIUM: I can show this works through the fact that...

HOT: I know this because...

## EXPLANATION

LEMON & HERB: The evidence I have discussed above proves my point as...

MEDIUM: This example proves my point because...

HOT: Therefore, this proves my point as...

## LINK

LEMON & HERB: All together, this answers the debate question asked by...

MEDIUM: This point answers the overall question because...

HOT: These ideas answer the debate as...





**Post your debate on  
social media!**

# **SHARE YOUR VOICE**

**We shout out the best opinions each week**

**#BIGDEBATECUB**

**TWITTER @SSCCTY**

**INSTAGRAM @SMARTSCHOOLCOUNCILS**



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# DEBATER OF THE WEEK

We are proud to present this certificate to...

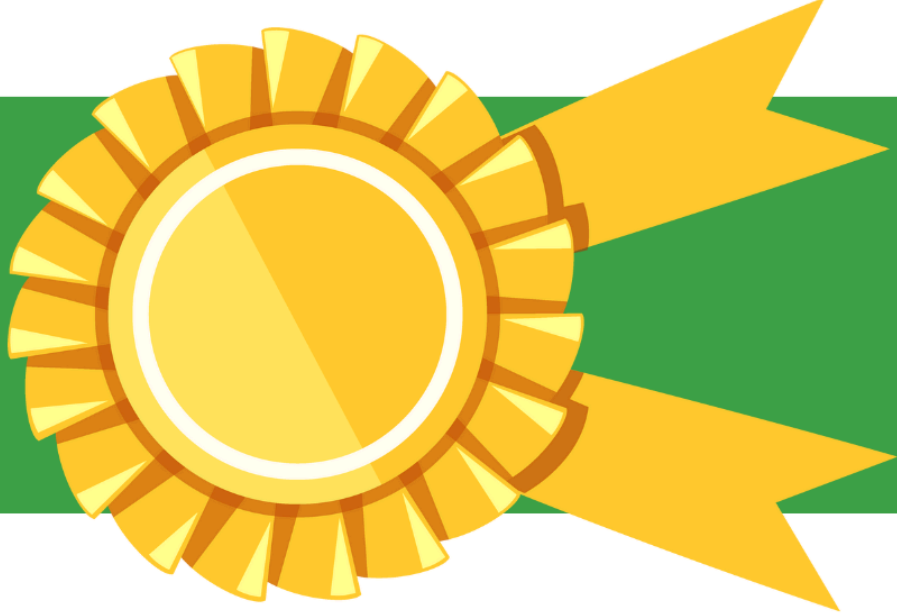
For debating fairly, respectfully and persuasively. Well done!

*Share a snap or video @SSCCTY on Twitter for a national shoutout and a prize!*



Greg Sanderson

Founder, Smart School Councils



Smart  
School  
Councils  
Community



# CLASS MEETING LEADER OF THE WEEK

We are proud to present this certificate to...

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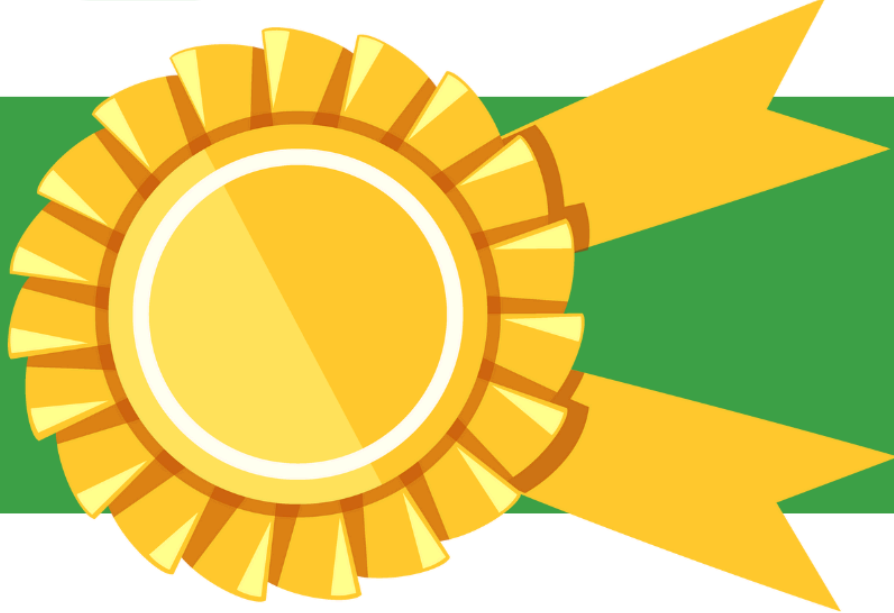
For showing skill and confidence in leading today's Class Meeting.

*Share a snap or video @SSCCTY on Twitter for a national shoutout and a prize!*



Greg Sanderson

Founder, Smart School Councils



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# BEST IDEA OF THE WEEK

We are proud to present this certificate to...

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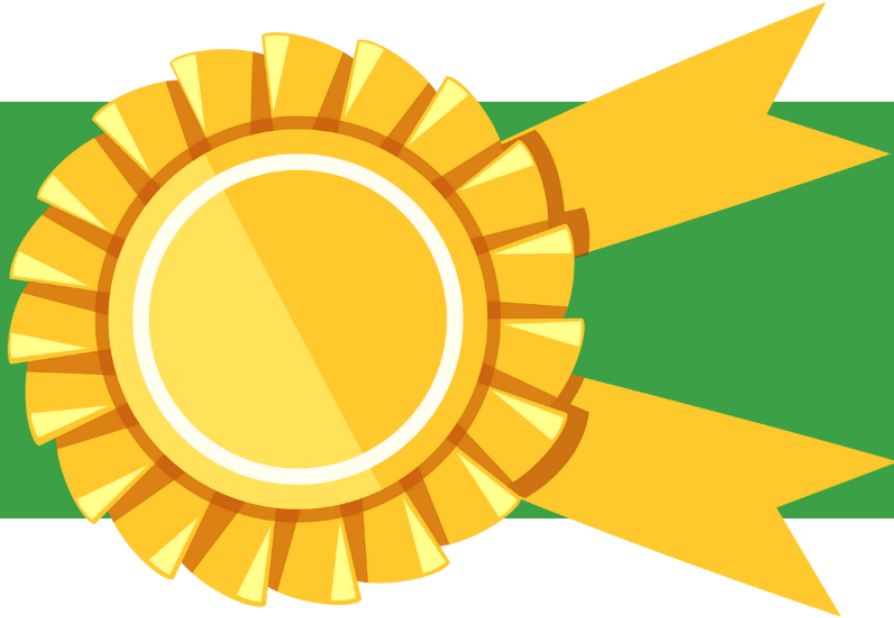
For speaking up with a great new idea on today's topic. Amazing.

**Share a snap or video @SSCCTY on Twitter for a national shoutout and a prize!**



Greg Sanderson

Founder, Smart School Councils



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