

Shock message for Government as maverick Mayor takes control

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Doncaster residents sent an overwhelmingly clear message to the Government yesterday – replacing 40 years of Labour rule with a maverick authoritarian pledging to slash "politically correct" council services.

English Democrats candidate Peter Davies pushed Labour into third place in the race for mayor, and will replace the often-controversial Martin Winter whose eight years in charge ends on Monday.

Mr Davies, a former religious education teacher whose son Philip is the Conservative MP for Shipley, campaigned on reducing the mayor's salary from 62,000 to 30,000 and cutting the number of Doncaster councillors from 63 to 21.

But his policies also include bringing in harsher punishment for "young thugs"; introducing zero-tolerance for anti-social behaviour; **stopping translation services for immigrants**; and scrapping "politically correct non-jobs and encouraging the former employees to seek meaningful employment".

Yesterday council officials were ashen faced when it became clear that Mr Davies had pushed Labour candidate Sandra Holland into third place.

Runner-up Mick Maye, an independent candidate with the backing of the Liberal Democrats, had been expected to win.

Mr Davies was elected with 25,344 votes, less than 400 more than his closest rival, Mr Maye. The contest progressed to a second round, factoring in second-preference votes, after neither successfully gained 50 per cent in the first count.

After the count Mr Maye said that it was "one of the saddest days Doncaster has had in its political arena" and that it was a shame that the town had elected a mayor "who has no idea of how to work with other people".

Mr Davies also pledged to lower the council tax by "cutting extortionate levels of bureaucracy" and hold a referendum on the mayoral governance of Doncaster.

Following his surprise victory he said: "Better times are coming for the people of Doncaster. What a wonderful victory for the English Democrats, the first time we have won anything in this city.

"This will be a new brush, I will create a different type of Doncaster Council. I won this campaign because I promised Doncaster the things that it wanted, particularly cutting down on the bureaucracy and getting rid of waste.

"We have had a corrupt and spendaholic council and Doncaster is laughed at all over the country. I will get rid of the dreadful political correctness and introduce a refreshingly open regime."

He said he would be appealing to councillors' "moral consciences" to step down as that was the clear will of the electorate, and said his election pledge to slash his salary was a "cast iron guarantee".

Last night Philip Davies congratulated his father on his shock victory. He said: "I am incredibly proud of him and what he has achieved. It's remarkable, to win an election like that from nowhere is really an astonishing achievement."

Labour grandees in Doncaster put a brave face on their loss, which came on a day of devastating local election results all over England and ahead of what are likely to be terrible results in the European election polls tomorrow.

Speaking before her resignation from the Government and her outspoken attack on Gordon Brown, Don Valley MP Caroline Flint said: "This is a very disappointing result. Sandra Holland ran a positive campaign meeting as many people as possible.

"We now need to listen to what the electorate have said. We've lost votes to independents and the English Democrats, and I think some of that must be to do with anger that people feel because of the expenses situation."

Martin Winter became the first directly-elected mayor of Doncaster in 2002, promising a breath of fresh air after the Donnygate scandals of the 1990s. He represented Labour for most of this two terms but became involved in a series of controversies and personality clashes.

He was expelled from Labour last year and pledged to stand as an independent, but the Government's review into problems with Doncaster's children's services department earlier this year put paid to his electoral ambitions. He was not at the count yesterday.