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Henry Downey  
Belfast City Council  
Chief Executive's Department  
City Hall  
Belfast  
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12 December 2017

Dear Henry,

#### **LOWERING OF VOTING AGE**

Thank you for your letter to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland advising of the motion passed in relation to the lowering of the voting age at the meeting of Belfast City Council on 1 November. I am responding as the Minister responsible for elections policy in Northern Ireland. I understand you have written to the Minister for the Constitution on this matter and he is content that I also respond on his behalf.

The Government recognises and hugely values the contribution young people make to society.

It is important to recognise however, that most democracies consider 18 the right age to enfranchise young people. For example, within the EU only Austria has lowered the voting age to 16 for national elections. The Government continues to hold the view that 18 is the age at which most young people are likely to be sufficiently politically aware, mature, and independent to make up their minds as to who should represent them.

I hope this response has been helpful and I would like to thank the Council for their engagement and interest in this issue.

**LORD DUNCAN OF SPRINGBANK**  
**PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**