

Andy Burnham Endorses Votes at 16 to Strengthen Democratic Engagement

Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham has formally endorsed the campaign to lower the voting age to 16, calling it a necessary step to rebuild trust between young people and political institutions. His support lends significant political weight to the V16 initiative, led by the national youth democracy organisation My Life My Say, which aims to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in all UK elections.

“Young people in Manchester and across the country are already shaping our society,” Burnham stated. “They’re making their voices heard, building communities, and driving change. It’s time that we updated our democracy to reflect that.”

The V16 campaign seeks to address the growing disconnect between young people and political decision-makers, advocating that the voting system must evolve to reflect the responsibilities already entrusted to 16-year-olds. Burnham highlighted this disconnect, noting that “when one in ten young people feel as though their voice isn’t considered by decision-makers, we know things need to change.”

His remarks align with Labour leader Keir Starmer’s manifesto commitment to introduce legislation enabling votes at 16. While the policy was not featured in the King’s Speech, Starmer reaffirmed during the April Commons Liaison Committee that the pledge remains intact. “We will definitely get it done, it’s a manifesto commitment, and we intend to honour it,” Starmer said. “If you’re old enough to go out to work, if you’re old enough to pay your taxes, then you are entitled to have a say on how your taxes are spent.”

Speaking from Manchester, Dan Lawes, co-CEO of My Life My Say, welcomed Burnham’s support and emphasised the importance of regional leadership in the national debate. “It is incredibly significant that Andy Burnham has backed the right to give young people the vote from 16 years old. This campaign cannot be seen solely as a Westminster issue,” Lawes said. “Democracy affects people far beyond Westminster, and support from local and regional leaders is essential to ensuring young people across the country feel represented and included.”

The campaign has gained momentum across the UK, with advocates citing international examples such as Scotland, Wales, Austria, and Brazil where 16 and 17 year olds already have the right to vote as models of inclusive democratic practice. Supporters argue that extending the vote would not only modernise the UK’s electoral framework but also encourage earlier civic participation and greater political literacy among younger citizens.

Burnham’s endorsement of V16 signals growing cross-level support for enfranchising younger voters. As the campaign continues to build traction, the move to lower the voting age is

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increasingly viewed not only as a matter of democratic fairness but also as an investment in the long-term health and inclusivity of British democracy.