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Mayor urged to scrap 'undemocratic' rule which limits campaigning in Leicester city centre

Campaigners could be hit with a £100 fine if they use banners, tables or speakers without permission



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PREMIUM NEWS By [Caitlin James](#) Local Democracy Reporter

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Michael Barker, second from the left, campaigns with other activist groups (Image: Michael Barker)

Campaigners have called on Sir Peter Soulsby to scrap an "undemocratic" rule which limits political campaigning in Leicester city centre.

The Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), introduced last April, was designed to reduce anti-social behaviour, with the order enabling officers to issue **on-the-spot £100 fines to anyone caught engaging in prohibited activities** such as street drinking or begging.

However, political campaigners say the Labour-run council's order which also bans the use of gazebos, banners, flags, tables, or speakers is against the principles of free speech.

Josie Appleton, director of Campaign for Freedom in Everyday Life, wrote to [Sir Peter, the city mayor](#), last week to challenge the rule.

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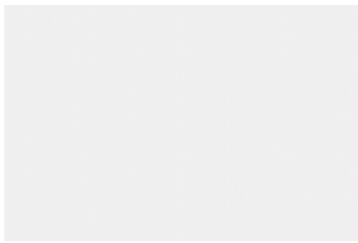


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In the letter, she said the PSPO is a “serious breach of democratic and free speech rights”, which are protected under national law.

She told Sir Peter: “I understand that you want to restrict anti-social behaviour, but your law is drawn so widely as to restrict ordinary democratic campaigning, which cannot be right.

“I’m sure you don’t want Leicester to become known as the city that restricts democracy and free speech, especially when it has such a rich tradition of both.”



Campaigners have called on Sir Peter Soulsby to scrap the PSPO (Image: Darren Staples/Getty Images)

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Ms Appleton added: “If you have a campaign you want to portray to residents, that’s democracy. That’s a good thing.

“To confuse that with spitting and throwing bottles at people is really awful.”

The council says campaigners can apply for special permission to erect stands. However, those who have tried say it’s virtually “impossible” to get authorised.

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Michael Barker, who tried on two occasions to gain permission to [erect a Your Party stand](#) near the city centre's Clock Tower, said both applications were rejected.

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He said it was a “convoluted process” and was “put off” when he was asked to upload a specific insurance policy for the event.

Mr Barker also said the site hire pricing schedule indicated that there was an “eye-watering” £900 cost for hiring the Clock Tower space on a Saturday.

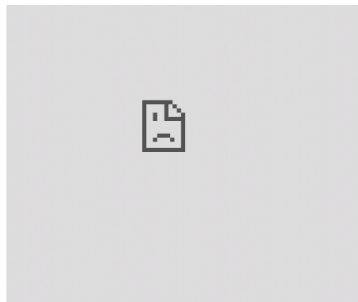
In the first instance, the city council responded with a rejection two days after a proposed campaign on November 15.

When Mr Barker re-applied for a second campaign on January 4, Leicester City Council’s reply was on time, but authorisation was still not granted.

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Mr Barker told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “When Leicester City Council introduced their antidemocratic PSPO [...] they said it was to stop anti-social behaviour, but campaigners and trade unionists from across Leicestershire are not stupid and we rallied around to oppose its introduction.

“As it now stands, campaigners now have to seek authorisation from our Labour-run council to oppose Labour Party austerity. This is a nonsense.

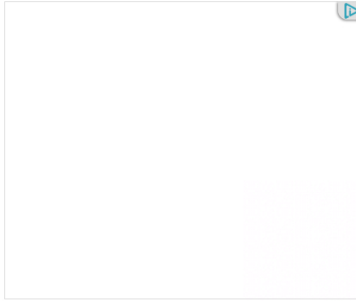
“Labour is the real nuisance and what they are really scared of is political opposition especially from socialists. This seems to be why the council authorities blocked the two recent attempts of my local Your Party branch from booking anti-austerity stalls in the city centre.

"This act of authoritarianism on the part of our Labour authority, however, will only build popular resistance to Labour's latest attempt to silence dissent."

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At the time of writing, campaigners had not yet had a response from the city mayor.

A Leicester City Council spokesperson said: "Almost a year on from the introduction of the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO), anti-social behaviour in the city centre has greatly reduced, helping to create a safer and more welcoming environment for residents, visitors and businesses.

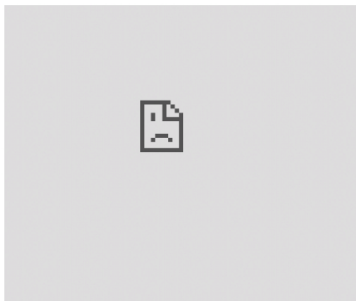
"Public feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many people welcoming the improvements the PSPO has brought.

"We have also listened to feedback from a few individuals who have raised concerns about some aspects of the order, including the clarity of the rules and the processes involved.

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"With nearly 12 months of monitoring and evaluation now complete, we have reviewed the PSPO and identified areas where guidance can be clearer and more visible.

"Revised guidance will be published on our website in April which will provide clearer information on the process for booking event space and restrictions under the PSPO.

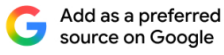
"This will coincide with the launch of a new public realm team, which will patrol the city centre, speaking with the public and enforcing the PSPO where necessary, to ensure the city centre remains safe and welcoming for everyone."

Recently a [pensioner who refused to pay a fine after being caught](#)

campaigning against council cuts in **Leicester city centre** has had her case dropped.

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