

Results and turnout at the May 2017 England local elections | Electoral Commission Search

You are in the England local council elections section Home England local council elections On this page Introduction Electorate Turnout Rejected ballot papers Postal voting Rejected postal ballots Proxies and waivers First published: 5 July 2019 Last updated: 5 July 2019 Download You can download our: full dataset as an XLS full dataset as a CSV (zip file) Introduction This report provides analysis on participation in and the administration of the local government elections in England, held on 4 May 2017. For this, data were collected from Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers. This comprised the Form K 'Statement as to Postal Ballot Papers' and an additional data form, specified by the Commission, which included data relating to electoral registration, turnout, absent voting and rejected ballots. Local elections were scheduled in 27 counties and seven unitary and metropolitan authorities on 4 May 2017. There were also city mayoral elections in Doncaster and North Tyneside. In just four wards and divisions were candidates elected unopposed 1 . Electorate 18.6 million Turnout Ballot box: 35.1% (6.5 million votes) Postal vote: 68.7% In-person: 28.8% Rejected ballots Ballots at the count: 0.3% Postal votes: 2.3% Proxies appointed 22,029 (0.1% of the electorate) 641 emergency proxies Electorate The elections gave 18.6 million registered electors the opportunity to vote 2 ; 16.4 million in county councils, 2.0 million in unitary and metropolitan authorities, and 376,295 in city mayoral elections 3 . A total of 174,238 electors (0.9% of the electorate in contested wards) were added to the electoral register during the weeks leading up to the election. As a proportion of the electorate, this was highest in Shropshire where additions represented 2.0% of the electorate in contested wards, and lowest in Norfolk, where additions represented 0.5% of the electorate in contested wards. A total of 204,845 applications to register were received in the weeks leading up to the election. Almost a quarter (22.3%) of these was recorded as duplicates 4 . In addition, 332,004 individuals applied to register to vote after the registration deadline. This is likely to be attributable to the announcement of the UK parliamentary general election which came after the deadline for registration for the council elections. Based on data from 155 local authorities, 1,288 individuals were recorded as trying to vote on election day despite not being registered 5 . Votes were cast at 16,977 polling stations as well as by post. Turnout The measure of turnout referred to in this report, 'ballot box turnout', includes all valid votes cast ('valid vote turnout') and votes rejected at the count. Total turnout refers to valid votes cast, votes rejected at the count, and those rejected at the postal ballot verification stage before the count. Table 3.1 confirms that only a small fraction of the total votes cast are not valid Table 3.1: Turnout Electorate Valid vote turnout Ballot box turnout Total turnout Difference valid vote - total (pp) 2017 18.6m 35.0% 35.1% 35.3% 0.4 County 16.4m 34.8% 35.0% 35.2% 0.3 Unitary / Met 2.0m 36.4% 36.6% 36.9% 0.5 City mayoral 376,295 31.0% 31.4% 32.0% 0.9 2013 18.4m 30.8% 30.9% 31.2% 0.5 County 16.4m 30.7% 30.8% 31.1% 0.4 Unitary / Met 2.0m 31.6% 31.9% 32.3% 0.6 City mayoral 380,832 29.3% 29.6% 30.0% 0.7 Ballot box turnout was 35.1%, which is higher than turnout at the comparable stage in the electoral cycle in 2013, but still lower than turnout at the 2009 elections (39.3%), when European Parliament elections were held on the same day. Turnout increased across all counties, unitary and metropolitan authorities, and city mayoral elections. At a division/ward level, turnout ranged from 18.1 in Tidworth, Wiltshire to 60.1 in Hexham West, Northumberland. In five divisions/wards, turnout was less than 20%. Table 3.2: Ballot box turnout 2013 – 2017 Area 2013 2017 Change (pp)

Buckinghamshire 30.3% 34.8% 4.5 Cambridgeshire 31.0% 36.2% 5.2 Cumbria 32.0% 37.2%
 5.2 Derbyshire 33.3% 35.3% 2.0 Devon 33.3% 37.9% 4.5 Dorset 34.1% 38.0% 3.8 East
 Sussex 33.4% 37.8% 4.4 Essex 27.8% 31.1% 3.4 Gloucestershire 31.9% 37.1% 5.2
 Hampshire 30.8% 36.1% 5.3 Hertfordshire 29.0% 34.1% 5.0 Kent 29.4% 32.2% 2.8
 Lancashire 31.3% 35.9% 4.6 Leicestershire 30.0% 32.7% 2.7 Lincolnshire 29.4% 32.1%
 2.7 Norfolk 32.3% 34.6% 2.4 North Yorkshire 31.5% 35.3% 3.8 Northamptonshire 30.9%
 33.4% 2.5 Nottinghamshire 33.3% 36.8% 3.6 Oxfordshire 29.4% 38.4% 9.0 Somerset 34.5%
 38.6% 4.1 Staffordshire 28.0% 31.5% 3.6 Suffolk 31.7% 35.2% 3.5 Surrey 30.0% 35.8%
 5.8 Warwickshire 31.3% 36.4% 5.1 West Sussex 30.1% 34.3% 4.2 Worcestershire 30.7%
 34.8% 4.1 Total counties 30.8% 35.0% 4.2 Area 2013 2017 Change (pp) Cornwall 33.3%
 39.9% 6.6 Durham 27.8% 31.3% 3.4 Isle of Wight 35.6% 38.7% 3.2 Northumberland 34.1%
 40.7% 6.6 Shropshire 33.3% 36.4% 3.1 Wiltshire 34.3% 39.6% 5.3 Total unitaries/mets
 31.9% 36.6% 4.7 Area 2013 2017 Change (pp) Doncaster 27.8% 29.4% 1.6 North Tyneside
 32.1% 34.3% 2.2 Total city mayorals 29.6% 31.4% 1.8 Rejected ballot papers The
 proportion of ballots rejected at official counts was 0.3%. This compares with 0.5%
 at the 2013 local elections. The rejection rate at unitary and metropolitan elections
 was higher than at county elections (0.5% compared with 0.2%). Table 3.3: Proportion
 of ballots rejected at the count Counties Proportion Kent 0.17% Hampshire 0.19% Essex
 0.19% Somerset 0.19% Derbyshire 0.19% Gloucestershire 0.20% West Sussex 0.20% Devon
 0.22% Surrey 0.22% Warwickshire 0.22% Worcestershire 0.22% Hertfordshire 0.22%
 Buckinghamshire 0.22% Cumbria 0.22% East Sussex 0.22% Northamptonshire 0.22%
 Leicestershire 0.23% Dorset 0.24% Suffolk 0.24% Nottinghamshire 0.24% Oxfordshire
 0.25% Lancashire 0.27% Norfolk 0.27% Staffordshire 0.27% North Yorkshire 0.28%
 Lincolnshire 0.30% Cambridgeshire 0.51% Total 0.23% In six county divisions, the rate
 of rejected ballots was more than 1%. Three of these were in county Cambridgeshire,
 where Combined Authority Mayoral elections were held on the same day. In unitary and
 metropolitan authorities, 32 wards had a rejection rate higher than 1%. One authority
 in Cornwall rejected 3.8% of ballots at the count. The majority of rejected ballots
 (69.6%) were rejected due to being unmarked or wholly void for uncertainty. More than
 a quarter (26.5%) were rejected due to voting for more than one candidate. Table 3.4:
 Reasons for rejected ballots No official mark Voting more than once Mark by which the
 voter could be identified Unmarked Rejected in part 2017 County 1.3% 25.5% 1.6% 70.7%
 0.8% Unitary / Met 2.1% 26.4% 2.2% 68.7% 0.5% City mayoral 0.0% 54.7% 1.8% 43.5% 0.0%
 2013 County 1.3% 22.0% 2.7% 71.4% 2.5% Unitary / Met 2.1% 17.9% 0.9% 69.8% 0.1% City
 mayoral 1.5% 21.1% 2.4% 71.1% 2.0% Postal voting The total number of postal votes
 issued for these elections was 3.1 million, representing 16.6% of all electors with a
 contested election in their division/ward. This compares with 14.9% at the 2013 local
 elections. At a division/ward level, electors registered for a postal vote ranged
 from 2.8% in University Parks, Oxford, to 39.2% in Cramlington South East,
 Northumberland. Postal voting remains more common in unitary and metropolitan
 authorities. 19.5% of the electorate (384,079 electors) in unitary and metropolitan
 authorities were issued with a postal ballot paper compared with 16.2% in county
 districts (2.7 million electors). At the City Mayoral elections in Doncaster and
 North Tyneside, more than a quarter of electors (26.0% or 98,001 electors) had a
 postal vote. Table 4.1: Highest and lowest proportions of postal voters Fewer than
 10% postal voters Fewer than 10% postal voters Percentage Barrow-in-Furness 7.4%
 Oxford 9.4% Epping Forest 9.5% Higher than 25% postal voters Percentage Doncaster
 27.0% Rushcliffe 28.4% Chorley 28.7% Stevenage 34.6% The proportion of postal voters
 returning their ballot papers always exceeds the turnout among 'in person' voters.
 This year, 68.4% postal electors used their postal vote compared with 29.1% who

turned up to vote in person 6 . Table 4.2: Postal vote vs in-person turnout Postal vote turnout In-person turnout 2017 68.7% 28.8% 2013 67.1% 25.0% 2009 68.7% 35.2% Postal votes accounted for 31.7% of all votes included at the count. This compares with 31.3% in 2013 and 22.7% in 2009. Rejected postal ballots Postal voting packs (PV) require voters to provide their signature and date of birth (DOB). These identifiers are then matched against those provided at the time of application. If the signature or date of birth is missing or does not match, the postal vote is rejected and is not included at the count. Since 2014, Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) have been required to notify electors if their postal vote has been rejected and give the reason(s) for rejection. They can also request the elector to provide an up-to-date signature. Table 4.3: Rejected postal ballots Rejected postal ballots as % of envelopes returned 2017 2.3% County 2.3% Unitary / Met 2.4% City mayoral 3.5% 2013 3.1% County 3.1% Unitary / Met 3.0% City mayoral 2.6% 2009 3.2% The total rate of rejection across elections was 2.3%, which represents a decrease from 3.1% in 2013 and 3.2% in 2009 7 . The overall fall in levels of rejected postal votes suggests that the new policy may be having a positive impact overall. More than half (51.6%) of rejected ballots were rejected due to mismatched information. In almost a quarter of cases (24.6% and 23.8% respectively), postal ballots were rejected due to missing information, or because voters returned their postal voting envelopes but failed to include either the ballot paper itself or the verification statement or both. Table 4.4: Reasons for postal vote statement rejection 2013 2017 Change (pp)

Reason	2013	2017	Change (pp)
Missing information	Signature 6.8%	7.3%	0.5
	DoB 4.7%	5.4%	0.7
	Both 9.5%	11.9%	2.4
Mismatched information	Signature 24.2%	20.3%	-3.9
	DoB 20.8%	23.6%	2.8
	Both 9.5%	7.7%	-1.8
Missing forms	Ballot paper 8.5%	11.0%	2.5
	PV statement 16.0%	12.8%	-3.2

These figures are percentages of the total, small number of rejected ballots. For example, although 51.6% of rejected postal votes were rejected due to mismatched information, this represents 1.1% of covering envelopes received and 0.4% of all votes cast. The vast majority of postal voters did cast their vote correctly. Proxies and waivers A total of 22,029 electors appointed a proxy (0.1% of the electorate). This is consistent with levels in 2013 and 2009. The number of emergency proxies issued was 641. This is more than nine times higher than in 2013, when emergency proxies were granted only on disability grounds resulting in 67 being issued. The provision has since been extended to occupation or military service. A concession granted under the terms of the EAA 2006 was that postal electors who either had a disability, or were illiterate, or were unable to furnish a consistent signature could apply for a waiver to use their date of birth as their sole identifier. A total of 19,583 waivers were granted, representing 0.6% of postal electors. The proportion of postal electors granted such a waiver ranged from 0.3% in Doncaster to 1.3% in West Sussex. 1. Stillington (Hambleton), Thirsk (Hambleton), Much Wenlock (Shropshire), Bulford Allington & Fiheldean (Wiltshire) ■ Back to content at footnote 1 2. Excluding 20,441 in four uncontested wards/divisions. ■ Back to content at footnote 2 3. Doncaster held both county council and city mayor elections. Doncaster is captured under both unitary and metropolitan authorities, and city mayoral, but counted only once in the total figures. ■ Back to content at footnote 3 4. Three local authorities were unable to provide information on applications. Eight were unable to provide information on duplicate applications. ■ Back to content at footnote 4 5. 53 local authorities were not able to provide this information. ■ Back to content at footnote 5 6. There is no statutory field that captures the number of postal voting statements received by the Returning Officer. In practice, we use field B6, 'Number of covering envelopes received by the Returning Officer or at a polling station before the close of poll'

as a surrogate but we know that, as mentioned, electors can return multiple postal ballots in one envelope or return envelopes without any ballots. ■ Back to content at footnote 6 7. As figures reported for field C19 were inconsistent, we used a calculation of field B6 minus field C18 as a surrogate for the total number of postal votes rejected. This approach is consistent with previous years. ■ Back to content at footnote 7 Related content Past elections and referendums Read our reports and view data about past elections and referendums Local councils Find out about local councils and how to vote in local council elections. Types of elections about the types of elections in the UK. Results and turnout at the 2018 May England local elections View the results and turnout at the 2018 local elections in England