



# Local Authority Elections

In England and Wales, over 21,000 people represent their communities by serving as Councillors on a local authority. Councillors are elected to represent an individual geographical unit on the council, known as a ward or division.

## Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission is responsible for reviewing ward boundaries and the number of councillors in a local authority to ensure consistency. It has overall control of the conduct of elections and referendums in the UK.

The Commission has taken over the work of the four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions and the Local Government Commissions for England and for Wales. The Commission reports on elections and referendums, reviews electoral law, promotes understanding of electoral and political matters, the administration of referendums as well as acting as registrar of political parties and supervising spending by, and donations to, political parties. It also takes on a number of functions from the Home Office and act as a general reference point on elections and referendums, conduct of political parties, broadcasting organisations and others.

## Divisions and Wards

County councils divisions are represented by a single councillor. Multi-member wards (generally with three members, sometimes two) are the norm in urban areas, i.e. in unitary councils, in London and the metropolitan boroughs, and in the urban parts of district councils. Wards in rural parts of district councils generally have a single member. All

local elections take place on the first Thursday in May. If a councillor dies or resigns during their term of office, a byelection is held in the ward they represented to elect a replacement.

## Candidates and Restrictions

To stand as a candidate, you must be 18 or over and on the electoral register of the authority for which you wish to stand or worked in the area for the preceding 12 months.

An employee of a local authority is not allowed to stand for election to it. In addition, many local authority employees working at middle management level and above are not allowed to stand for any local authority; other people ebarred from standing for election include undischarged bankrupts, people convicted of corrupt or illegal electoral practices, and people who, within the previous five years have been sentenced to more than three months' imprisonment.

*The Local Government Act 1972 (s. 79)* sets out in full the qualifications for standing as a councillor. A list of the main legislation affecting Local Elections can be found at the end of this information sheet.

## Voting

Before they can vote, electors must be on the electoral register, which is drawn up by the registration officer. To be on the register you must be entitled to vote. You may be barred from voting on several grounds - for example, if you are convicted of certain offences. Those entitled to vote must be resident in the council's area, be British subjects or EU citizens, aged 18 or over and not

subject to any legal incapacity. Their names must be included in the register of electors.

## Frequency of Local Elections

In England and Wales, councillors are elected to serve for four years. In Wales elections will be held in 2004, and every four years. In England, county council elections will take place in 2005, 2009 etc. Elections to London borough councils will be held

in 2006 and every four years. All district councils will be electing in 2003. In all the metropolitan borough councils and in some district councils one-third of the members (i.e. one in each multi-member ward) retire each year, except in the year of county council elections; thus these councils hold elections every year except 2005, 2009 for example. Unitary authorities have a mixed cycle and some will be electing each year either whole council or by thirds.

Type of Authority	Electoral Cycle and Warding Arrangements	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
County Councils	Full council elections. Single member electoral divisions			FC		
London Boroughs	Full council elections Multimedia wards				FC	
Metropolitan Districts	By thirds All wards have three members	1/3	1/3		1/3	1/3
88 Shire Districts and various unitaries	By thirds. Almost all wards have between 1-3 members	1/3	1/3		1/3	1/3
150 Shire Districts and various unitaries	Full council elections Almost all wards have 1-3 members	FC			FC	
Greater London Authority	Full Council elections and Mayor who is directly elected London wide		FC			FC
Welsh Unitaries	Full council elections. Around half are single member		FC			FC

## Electoral System

In England and Wales, elections take place on the first-past-the-post system. The candidate with the highest number of votes is elected, or in the case of multi-member wards, the two or three top candidates. It is only necessary to come out on top, not to gain 50 per cent or more of the total votes cast. Indeed, in contests where three or more parties stand the victorious candidate frequently receives less than 50 per cent of the votes cast. Between 1979 and 1992 the average turnout in local elections in Britain was 43 per cent. Recently this figure has been around 30 per cent.

Elections for a Directly Elected Mayor use the **Supplementary Vote (SV)** system. The Greater London Authority also uses **SV** for Mayor and the **Additional Member System (AMS)** for the assembly both systems are explained below: Under **SV** voters mark their first and second choices of candidates on the ballot paper. They do this with an X - as in other elections. Voters' are not required

to make two choices if they do not want to. Voters' first preferences are counted and if one candidate gets 50 per cent of the vote or more, he or she is elected. If no one gets 50 per cent of the vote, all of the candidates, except the two who received the highest numbers of votes, are eliminated. The second preferences on the ballot papers of the eliminated candidates are examined and any that have been cast for the two remaining candidates are given to those candidates. Whoever has the most votes at the end of the process, wins.

**AMS** is used to elect members of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly and some seats for the Greater London Authority. **AMS** allows each elector two votes the first vote is for a constituency member to represent their area. The votes are counted on the 'first-past-the-post' system. The elected constituency member will be the candidate who receives the greatest amount of votes.

In London there are 14 constituencies each encompassing adjacent boroughs. The second vote

is for a party. These votes determine the number of additional members for each party. In London 11 seats in the Assembly are for additional members. They are allocated to parties so that their total number of seats in the Assembly (constituency and additional) is roughly proportional to the number of party votes they have won. This is calculated by taking the number of party votes cast for each party and dividing it by the number of constituency seats won by each party plus one. The party with the highest total gains the first additional member seat. Subsequent additional member seats are allocated by the same process.

## **Representation of the People Act 2000: Pilot Schemes**

The Act changes procedures in relation to electoral registration (in order to make it easier for people to register) and to obtain absent votes. It also introduces a piloting regime to test possible changes to when, where and how people voted in order to modernise the voting procedure and make it more accessible to the electorate. The local authority running the pilot must produce an evaluation report within 3 months of the election for the Secretary of State. It is expected that there will be further rounds of pilot schemes in future years. The Secretary of State has the power to 'roll-out' successful pilots generally and permanently.

On 5 February 2002 the DTLR approved 30 councils to pilot alternative voting arrangements on the 2 May 2002. The authorities were:

**Borough of Basingstoke and Deane** - All postal

**Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council** - Evoting (kiosk) and ecounting

**Borough of Broxbourne**- E-counting

**London Borough of Camden** - Early weekend voting (27/28 April) in addition to 2 May

**Chester City Council** - E-voting (touch screen machine) and ecounting

**Chorley Borough Council** - All postal and ecounting

**Crawley Borough Council** - All postal

**Borough of Crewe and Nantwich** - E-voting (option of voting on line via Council's web site prior to 2 May) in addition to traditional methods

**Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council** - E-counting of elected Mayoral votes

**Epping Forest District Council**- E-counting

**Gateshead Council** - All postal

**London Borough of Greenwich** - All postal

**London Borough of Hackney** - All postal and ecounting for local elections and mayoral referendum

**London Borough of Havering** - All postal

**Hyndburn Borough Council** - Leaflet address from all parties to each voter

**The City of Liverpool** - E-voting and ecounting (telephone.internet, digital TV or text messaging) early voting , Real time on-line, register at any polling station in voters ward

**London Borough of Newham** - E-voting and e-counting. Early voting, mobile voting and use of languages in voting

**North Tyneside Council** - All postal in local and mayoral elections, and e-counting

**North West Leicestershire District Council** - All Postal

**Preston Borough Council** - All postal

**Rugby Borough Council** - E-counting (use of optical scanners)

**South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council** - All postal with electronic counting option

**St Albans City and District Council** - Evoting (kiosk and internet) and e-counting

**Sheffield City Council** - E-voting (kiosk, internet and SMS mobile phone text) and ecounting in addition to traditional methods

**Stevenage Borough Council** - All Postal

**Stratford-on-Avon District Council** - Evoting (kiosk) and ecounting

**Swindon Borough Council** - Early voting (25-30 April) by internet or touch tone telephone (with in-built security measures) in addition to traditional methods

**Trafford Metropolitan Borough** - All postal

**London Borough of Wandsworth** - Extended hours from 7.00am to 10.00pm

**City of Westminster** - E-counting and extended hours (0700-2200 hrs)

The LGA has published "*the Implementation of Electronic voting in the UK*" which looks at future trends and options.

A LGA report "*Elections in the 21st Century*" was published in November 2000. The report outlines the different types of electoral pilots, its impact on turnout, views of voters, impact on expenditure, and the future lessons to be learnt from the 2000 pilots.

Copies of both publications can be purchased from LGconnect : 020 7644 3131

### **Local Elections 2003**

A list of authorities holding local elections in 2003 is available on request from LGconnect on: 020 7664 3131 or the LGA website at:

<http://www.lga.gov.uk/Category.asp?lsection=120>

### **Main Legislation for Local Elections**

*Local Government Act 1972*

*Representation of the People Act 1983*

*Representation of the People Act 1985*

*Representation of the People Act 2000*

*Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000*

For further information on elections in the UK please contact the UK Electoral Commission at:

<http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk>

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