



# Local elections in Wales 2012

Report on the administration of the elections held  
on 3 May 2012

July 2012

## **Translations and other formats**

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version, please contact the Electoral Commission:

Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: [publications@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:publications@electoralcommission.org.uk)

© The Electoral Commission 2012

# Contents

	Summary	1
1	Trust	3
	About the elections	3
	Were the elections well run?	4
2	Participation: voters	8
	Registering to vote	8
	Voting in the elections	11
	Voting in polling stations	12
	Voting by post	13
	Voting by proxy	16
	Completing the ballot paper	16
3	Participation: candidates	18
	Standing for election	18
	Campaigning in the election	21
4	No undue influence	24
	What people thought about electoral fraud	24
	Preventing and detecting malpractice	25
5	Counting votes	27
	Count management	27
	Challenging an election result	29
	After the declaration of results	29
	Appendix	
	Research methodology	

# Summary

## About this report and our role

This report is about the administration of the local elections held in Wales on 3 May 2012. It reflects the experience of voters, based on public opinion research and electoral data provided by Returning Officers. It also reflects feedback and views received about the administration of the election from those responsible for delivering the elections and from election campaigners.

The Electoral Commission is an independent body which reports directly to the UK Parliament. We regulate political party and election finance and set standards for well-run elections. We put voters first by working to support a healthy democracy, where elections and referendums are based on our principles of trust, participation, and no undue influence. We are responsible for publishing reports on the administration of elections and referendums.

Our report focuses particularly on the experience of voters, based on public opinion research and other research data.

## Facts and figures

Local elections were held in 21 of the 22 local authorities in Wales. Elections in the Isle of Anglesey have been postponed until May 2013.

2.26 million people were registered to vote in the elections and 39% of them did so.

In total, 17.5% of the electorate, or 370,000 people, had a postal vote for these elections and 68% of them used their postal vote. Postal votes accounted for 30%, or around 240,000, of all votes counted at the elections.

A total of 3,305 candidates campaigned to be elected for 1,224 seats in 841 wards. 99 seats were uncontested.

Table 1: Turnout in local elections in Wales

	2012 <sup>1</sup>	2008	2004
Registered electorate	2.26 million	2.26 million	2 million
Turnout	39%	43%	42%

## The experience of voters

No significant issues arose in the administration of the local elections in Wales, which ran smoothly. The result of one ward election is, at the time of compiling this report, being challenged in the courts on grounds that, in error, votes were incorrectly assigned to a candidate with a very similar name to the candidate declared successful.

People continue to have high levels of satisfaction with their chosen method of voting. Of those voting in polling stations, nearly all (97%) were satisfied with the experience. 76% were very satisfied and only 1% were dissatisfied. Nearly everyone who voted by post, 99%, said they were satisfied with the process.

In our public opinion survey, the most common reasons people gave for voting related to a sense of having a civic duty to vote and feeling that it is important to do so. Nearly two-thirds of people gave this reason. Other common reasons given were: expressing a view (45%) and helping create change (18%).

People who did not vote typically said this was because of circumstances preventing them from doing so, in line with previous election surveys. However, non-voters in Wales were less likely to give circumstantial reasons (43%) than in Scotland (52%) or those areas with local elections in England (53%).

Of those surveyed, 64% said they had enough information to make an informed decision on how to vote in the elections. Voters were more likely to say they had enough information than non-voters (81% compared with 48%).

---

<sup>1</sup> Figures for 2012 are for the 21 local authorities in Wales with elections. Figures for 2008 and 2004 are for all 22 local authorities in Wales.

# 1 Trust

1.1 People should be able to trust the way our elections and our political finance system work. This chapter looks at whether people thought the elections were well run and gives an overview of the performance of local Returning Officers in Wales.

## About the elections

1.2 Local elections in Wales are normally held on a four year cycle. However, to avoid a clash with the National Assembly for Wales general election in May 2016, the Welsh Government have postponed the next set of local elections until 2017<sup>2</sup>. This meant that people were voting for candidates standing for a five-year term of office.

1.3 People were voting in 21 of the 22 unitary local authorities in Wales, where all of the seats were up for election at the same time. The local ('principal area') elections were combined with elections to town and community councils.

1.4 The elections were conducted on the first-past-the-post electoral system, where the candidate with the most votes wins. In multi-member wards, voters were able to elect a number of councillors to represent them, in some cases up to five for principal area elections and up to 12 for community council elections.

1.5 However, not every elector in Wales had the opportunity to vote. A candidate is elected without the need for a vote if they are the only person standing for election. In total, 99 seats were uncontested and 98 councillors were elected unopposed<sup>3</sup>. In Powys, 23 out of 73 seats were uncontested, as were 19 out of 74 in Gwynedd. In eight local authorities there were no uncontested seats.

1.6 On the Isle of Anglesey, people will vote in elections in May 2013. The Welsh Government postponed the elections in Anglesey following consultation with stakeholders<sup>4</sup>. The Minister for Local Government and Communities, Carl Sargeant AM, had asked the Local Government Boundary Commission for

---

<sup>2</sup> The Isle of Anglesey Local Authorities (Change to the Years of Ordinary Elections) Order 2012, SI 2012.

<sup>3</sup> One vacancy remained because no candidates stood for election.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Sargeant, Welsh Government Minister for Local Government and Communities Written Statement, *Delaying the year of local government elections in Anglesey* (January 2012)

Wales to conduct a review of electoral arrangements in Anglesey, following a report and recommendations from the Auditor General for Wales. The Minister concluded that the outcome of that review could not be concluded and implemented in time to hold elections in May 2012.

1.7 At the same time as elections in Wales, elections were held in all 32 local authorities in Scotland and 143 local authorities in England. Elections were held across London for the Mayor of London and 25 London Assembly members. Mayoral referendums took place in 10 English cities<sup>5</sup> to determine whether or not to introduce directly-elected mayors, and a referendum was held in Doncaster to decide whether or not to retain their existing elected mayoral system. There were mayoral elections in Liverpool and Salford.

## Were the elections well run?

1.8 No significant issues arose in the administration of the local elections in Wales, which ran smoothly. The result of one ward election is, at the time of compiling this report, being challenged in the courts<sup>6</sup>.

1.9 There were no changes in election law to be implemented and no new electoral systems or practices to be put in place by those running the elections locally. This steady state meant there were no new challenges; the sheer number of local elections was the main issue for electoral officers to manage. Many seats involved hard fought contests with political change resulting in a number of areas across Wales<sup>7</sup>.

## What voters thought

1.10 Our public opinion research<sup>8</sup> found that 77% of people surveyed in Wales were confident that the local elections were well run and, of those voting, 91% were confident. This is broadly similar to Great Britain as a whole, where 74% and 89% respectively were confident that elections were well run.

## Performance of Returning Officers

1.11 Returning Officers (ROs) in local authorities are responsible for the conduct of local elections. We use a performance standards framework to highlight where elections are well run and to challenge ROs where the service

---

<sup>5</sup> Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Coventry, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield and Wakefield.

<sup>6</sup> For further details, see Chapter 5.

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of political change, see Chapter 3 of this report, and for a summary of the election results, see National Assembly for Wales Research Service Paper 12/020 *Local Election Results 2012* <http://www.assemblywales.org/12-020.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A for information about our public opinion research.

received by electors is below standard<sup>9</sup>. We publish on-line guidance to ROs on all aspects of the administration of elections, along with templates and resources, which also assist them in meeting the performance standards. We also provide specific guidance and advice on request. Our guidance and performance standards have been developed in consultation with Returning Officers, electoral administrators, and other key stakeholders.

1.12 Underlying our performance standards framework, and published guidance, is a commitment to ensuring that elections and referendums are conducted with the interests of voters in mind, in line with our key objectives, of participation, trust, and no undue influence. Our standards focus on outcomes and we believe that the completion of some key processes (with measurable outputs) is predictive of well-conducted elections.

1.13 Rather than ask Returning Officers (ROs) to report on their performance after the poll, we now assess performance in the run-up to polling day. All Returning Officers were required to submit monitoring returns at pre-determined points demonstrating their performance against the standards. This enables us to monitor performance throughout the process of planning for and delivering the election, and to intervene where any issues are identified, in order to recommend improvements prior to polling day. We also separately monitor the performance of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain<sup>10</sup>.

1.14 We also assessed supporting data and evidence from 15% of all ROs<sup>11</sup>. Our pre-poll monitoring and follow-up activity with ROs provided us with sufficient assurance that the polls were being planned for and delivered effectively. In addition we also provided feedback to each of the ROs in our sample, including in some cases to make recommendations where the quality of evidence could be improved for future elections.

1.15 This report contains a summary of ROs' performance in Wales against the recently revised standards<sup>12</sup>. In addition to this summary, information about the

---

<sup>9</sup> The Electoral Administration Act 2006 gave the Commission powers to determine and publish standards of performance for ROs, direct them to provide the Commission with reports regarding their performance; and publish its assessment of the level of performance by relevant officers against the published standards.

<sup>10</sup> Our latest (4<sup>th</sup>) annual assessment of ERO performance can be found on our website: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards>

<sup>11</sup> We select ROs for our sample based on a number of factors, including past performance, length of time that the RO/Electoral Services Manager has been in post, and any other local knowledge that we hold.

<sup>12</sup> A summary of Returning Officer performance in England (and separately on London) and Scotland will be included in separate reports on these elections.

performance of individual ROs is available on our website<sup>13</sup>, in a chart-based format that enables comparison with ROs from other local authorities.

### Summary of performance

1.16 Our performance standards and our published guidance are grouped into five key subject areas representing the most important areas that ROs should focus on when preparing for and delivering a well-run election<sup>14</sup>:

- Planning and organisation
- Administering the poll
- Absent voting
- Verifying and counting the votes
- After the declaration of results

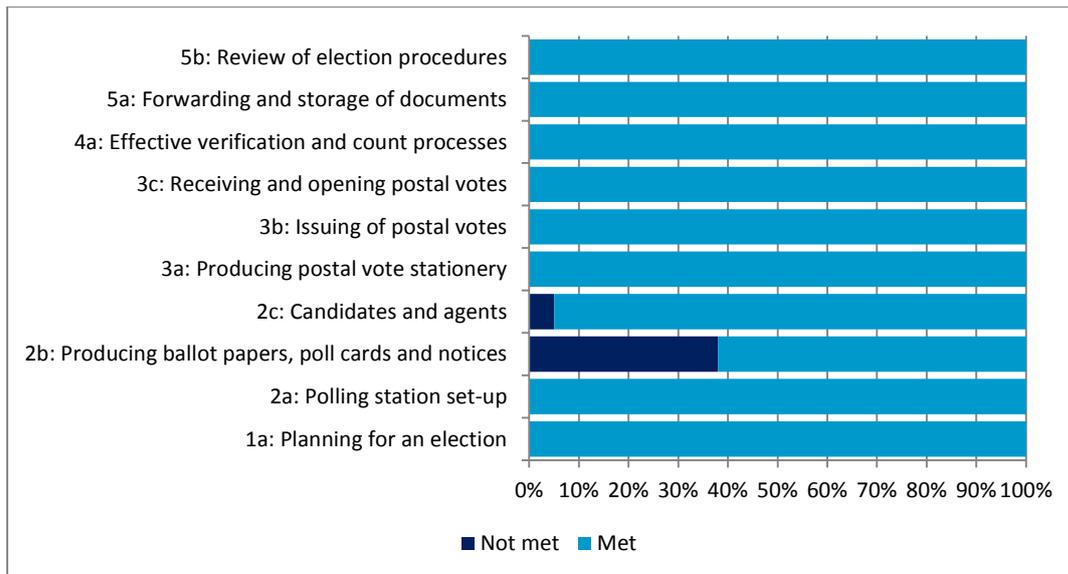
1.17 No major issues arose in the administration of the local elections in Wales and the majority of Returning Officers in Wales met the requirements of our performance standards

1.18 The chart below shows the proportion of ROs in Wales who met (or did not meet) all of our standards for administering elections held on 3 May 2012. Our revised performance framework gives ROs the opportunity to show where they have performed beyond the requirements of our standards, and to demonstrate creativity and innovation. We are currently assessing the evidence supplied by those ROs who have reported performing beyond the standards and have submitted examples to support this. We will publish the results of these assessments in September 2012, in line with our summary report on the May 2012 elections. We will also consider all examples of good practice and will use these to keep our guidance and the standards themselves under review.

---

<sup>13</sup> This information can be found on our website at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards/results\\_and\\_analysis/assessment](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards/results_and_analysis/assessment)

<sup>14</sup> The Electoral Commission, *Performance Standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain* (December 2011), available [here](#)



## Planning and organising the elections

1.19 This report looks in detail at the delivery of the elections, but before doing so an important issue to consider is planning. The objective of our performance standards for ROs is to make sure that adequate preparations are made in advance. This is to ensure that specific risks to the successful conduct of the election are identified and properly managed and that the poll is well-run.

1.20 All 21 ROs confirmed to us that they had plans and risk registers in place and that these contained detail addressing the criteria set out in our performance standards.

1.21 We reviewed in detail copies of the plans and risk registers from a sample of 15% of ROs. The original plan submitted by one of the sample did not meet our performance standard, as key tasks and dates were missing. Following guidance we gave on how the plan could be improved, the plan was improved and resubmitted and we assessed it as meeting the standard. Feedback was given to another RO in the 15% sample that their plan was at standard but could be improved further before the next election. We have provided guidance on the improvements which could be made.

1.22 At a wider level, we coordinated pre-election regional planning meetings for ROs and organised a Wales-wide event for electoral administrators, in February 2012.

1.23 The final outcome of our monitoring of ROs' planning of the elections was that all 21 ROs met the performance standard. This showed that suitable and sufficient preparations had been made across Wales for the delivery of the elections.

## 2 Participation: voters

2.1 It should be straightforward for people to participate in elections, whether voting or campaigning, and people should be confident that their vote counts. People in Wales, and voters in particular, had a generally positive view of the process of voting in the elections held on 3 May.

2.2 This chapter focusses on whether people felt they were able to participate in the election easily and confidently and whether they felt that they had received enough information to be able to make an informed choice.

### Registering to vote

2.3 A complete and accurate electoral register underpins any election, as inclusion in the register of electors is essential for people to be able to vote.

2.4 The main focus of electoral registration activity is the registration of electors within households undertaken annually in the autumn, usually known as the 'annual canvass'. Individuals may also register or amend their existing details at any time of the year, a process known as 'rolling registration'. This enables people who have moved home during the year or missed the annual canvass to register.

### Who could vote

2.5 The following people were eligible to vote in the elections if they were aged 18 or over and on the electoral register on polling day:

- a British citizen living in the UK
- a qualifying Commonwealth citizen<sup>15</sup> living in the UK
- a citizen of the Irish Republic living in the UK
- a European Union citizen living in the UK
- registered to vote as a Crown Servant
- registered to vote as a service voter

2.6 British citizens living abroad and registered as overseas electors are not eligible to vote in local elections.

---

<sup>15</sup> To qualify Commonwealth citizens must live in the UK and either have leave to enter, remain, or not require such leave.

## Number of people registered to vote

2.7 A total of 2.26 million people in the 21 local authorities with elections were registered to vote on 3 May. At the previous local elections in 2008 the same number, 2.26 million,<sup>16</sup> were registered to vote in all 22 local authorities holding elections.

2.8 People could register to vote up to 11 working days before the election, that is, 18 April 2012. Data collected from local Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) suggests that a total of around 10,000 people, that is 0.5% of the electorate, successfully applied to be included in the registers in the week leading up to the 11-day deadline, after the formal election campaign period began.

2.9 Data collected from EROs also suggests that at least 260 people went to polling stations wishing to vote without being registered<sup>17</sup>, probably because they mistakenly believed they were.

2.10 The facility to allow voters to register close to the election must be weighed against the need to maintain the integrity of electoral registers, by allowing time for EROs to complete processes that limit fraudulent registration. We continue to view rolling registration (that is updating the register monthly) and the 11 day deadline as valuable facilities for voters.

## People's experience of registering to vote

2.11 People were largely satisfied with the process of registering to vote. In our public opinion research<sup>18</sup>, 84% of people surveyed in Wales were very or fairly satisfied with the procedure for getting their name on the electoral register. This figure was consistent across all polls in Great Britain and very similar to the level of satisfaction we found after the National Assembly for Wales general election, combined with a UK referendum, in May 2011.

2.12 Only three per cent said they were dissatisfied with registering to vote.

## Information about registering to vote

2.13 We want to ensure that people are aware of the need to register to vote in order to take part in the elections. We undertook a media campaign aiming to increase public awareness about registering to vote.

---

<sup>16</sup> Source: University of Plymouth Elections Centre

<sup>17</sup> These figures are approximate as not all EROs kept full records.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix A for information about our public opinion research.

2.14 Part of this campaign focussed on how to register, through the Commission's website [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk), whilst another part was to make it clear that those who wished to take part needed to register by Wednesday 18 April 2012.

2.15 The campaign in Wales was part of a larger national campaign which was taking place across the areas of Great Britain where elections were taking place. Similar advertising was also used for the local elections in Scotland and England, all of which focussed on the key message of "It's your vote, don't lose it".<sup>i</sup>

2.16 Online advertising ahead of the elections began on 19 March, with radio advertising beginning on the 26 March and TV advertising commencing on 1 April 2012. We used some press advertising in the last week of the campaign, concluding on the last day to register to vote, that is, 18 April.

2.17 The proportion of people in Wales who said they were 'definitely' registered to vote increased after our advertising campaign. 84% of those surveyed said they were definitely registered to vote after the registration deadline compared with 76% before the advertising campaign began<sup>19</sup>.

2.18 Of those surveyed, 74% said they were aware of at least one element of our registration campaign, with 64% saying they saw the TV advertising and 27% hearing the radio advertising. Awareness among the 18-24 year old group was higher than expected (73%) and also in the 25-34 group (77%). 86% of people said that the adverts made it quite clear that you have to register to be able to vote and 71% said it was clear where to go for further information

2.19 As with previous campaigns, our website for voters [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk) was used extensively in messaging as a hub to gather any additional information or to complete any necessary registration forms. During the public information campaign period, the website home page received around 732,000 visits with 146,000 downloaded voter registration forms across Great Britain.

2.20 We also set up a campaign helpline to answer voter queries from across Great Britain during the public information campaign period. Our helpline received around 12,500 calls during the campaign period.

---

<sup>19</sup> See Appendix A for information about our advertising campaign tracking research.

# Voting in the elections

2.21 813,000 people voted in the elections in 21 local authorities, that is, 39% of those eligible to vote. Turnout was down somewhat compared with the last local elections in 2008, when 43% voted in all 22 local authorities in Wales.

## Why people did and did not vote

2.22 We want to ensure that there is better understanding of why people do and do not cast their vote, and what changes could be made to remove any practical barriers.

2.23 In our public opinion survey, the most common reasons people gave for voting related to a sense of having a civic duty to vote and feeling that it is important to do so. Nearly two-thirds of people gave this reason. Other common reasons given were: expressing a view (45%) and helping create change (18%). These findings were similar across all elections in Great Britain held on the same day and reflect what we have found in surveys following previous elections.

2.24 People who did not vote typically said this was because of circumstances preventing them from doing so, in line with previous election surveys. However, non-voters in Wales were less likely to give circumstantial reasons (43%) than in Scotland (52%) or those areas with local elections in England (53%).

## Did people feel informed about the elections?

2.25 Of those surveyed in Wales, 55% said they knew what the local elections were about, with 14% saying they knew 'a great deal' and 41% saying 'a fair amount'. However, 30% said they knew 'not very much' and 14% said they knew 'nothing at all'.

2.26 Sixty-four per cent of people surveyed agreed they had enough information to make an informed decision on how to vote in the elections. Voters were more likely to say they had enough information than non-voters (81% compared with 48%).

2.27 These survey findings were similar across all local elections in Great Britain held on the same day.

## Poll cards

2.28 Poll cards contain information that tells voters what election is taking place, when it will be held, where they can vote and the last date for applying for a postal or proxy vote. The law requires that poll cards are dispatched 'as soon as practicable' after the notice of election has been published.

2.29 Our performance standards for ROs set deadlines for dispatching poll cards. For these elections, the deadline was no later than 24 days in advance of the election – that is, no later than 28 March.

2.30 Our performance monitoring identified this standard was not universally met by ROs across Wales. Eight ROs in Wales did not dispatch poll cards by 28 March. However, of those eight, three dispatched poll cards just one day later and a fourth dispatched poll cards on 30 March.

2.31 One RO was obliged to delay dispatch of poll cards until 2 April owing to a technical problem with data from a new software system. Another RO dispatched around 20% by the 28 March deadline and the remainder by 8 April.

2.32 Two ROs decided to dispatch poll cards after the deadline for withdrawal of candidates had passed so that poll cards were not printed and dispatched to areas where elections were not contested. Poll cards in these two areas were therefore dispatched on 11 April 2012.

2.33 There were other areas where elections were not contested but nevertheless poll cards had been issued. Relevant electors were informed that no election would take place in their particular ward because only one candidate was standing. While we understand that not printing poll cards where candidates are elected unopposed is a means of saving costs, poll cards tell people about the elections and often prompt them to update their registration details. For these reasons, we assessed those who did not issue poll cards by 28 March as having not met the standard.

## Voting in polling stations

### People's experience of voting in polling stations

2.34 Of those surveyed in Wales, 74% believed that voting at a polling station was convenient.

2.35 Of those who do vote in polling stations, nearly all (97%) were satisfied with the experience. 76% were very satisfied and only 1% were dissatisfied. This is consistent with our findings in Wales after the elections and referendums in 2011.

### Accessibility of polling stations

2.36 Nearly all voters at polling stations (98%) said it was easy for them to get inside their polling station to vote, with 90% saying it was very easy.

2.37 When asked about the atmosphere inside polling stations, 99% of voters agreed that it was 'well ordered'. A similar proportion (98%) said that it was 'safe' and 97% thought their polling station was 'well run by staff'.

## Information for voters in polling stations

2.38 Over two-thirds of voters in Wales felt that the help and support available from polling station staff was useful.

2.39 A slightly smaller proportion, 62%, said that the written instructions – posters or guidance – on display in the polling station were useful. This is a fall from our post-election and post-referendums surveys in 2011, when 74% of those surveyed found the displayed guidance was useful. However, more people said that they didn't use or need the written instructions than at the referendums and Assembly elections in 2011 (32% compared with 21% in 2011). We will examine further why fewer than two-thirds of voters found the written instructions useful, to see what improvements can be made for future elections.

## Accessibility of information for voters

2.40 We want to ensure that all voters share a consistent experience and receive the same high quality service irrespective of where they are registered to vote. Our performance standards aim to ensure that all ROs provide all materials in accessible formats that are easy for voters to use and understand

2.41 We provided template poll cards; postal voting statements, guidance for voters notices and instruction to voters notices for ROs to use. Our templates are produced in line with our published good practice design guidance for voter materials<sup>20</sup>, based on research conducted with voters and existing good practice for accessible communications.

2.42 All ROs in Wales met our performance standard for production of voter materials, telling us that they either used our best practice templates or used their own forms and notices designed in line with criteria set out in our guidance.

## Voting by post

### People's experience of voting by post

2.43 Six in ten people surveyed thought that voting by post was convenient. Those who actually voted by post were much more likely to think it was convenient, with 98% rating it as such compared with 52% of polling station voters.

2.44 Nearly everyone who voted by post, 99%, said they were satisfied with the process. 95% said that it was easy to understand what had to be done in order

---

<sup>20</sup> Electoral Commission *Making your mark* (2009)

to return their postal vote. The vast majority of postal voters, 98%, also found the written instructions on how to return their vote useful.

2.45 We set performance standards for ROs to ensure that the absent voting process is conducted in a professional, transparent and secure manner and to ensure all absent voters share a consistent experience and received the same high-quality service irrespective of where they vote.

2.46 ROs were asked to confirm that postal voting statements were produced in accordance with the template statements we provided or designed in line with the criteria set out in our published guidance. All 21 ROs gave this confirmation and met the performance standard.

2.47 To meet our performance standards, ROs were also required to tell us their scheduled and actual dates of dispatch for postal votes, enabling us to monitor that postal votes across Wales were dispatched in a timely fashion in accordance with legal deadlines. All 21 ROs met the performance standard.

## Levels of postal voting

2.48 In total 17.5% of electors had a postal vote, meaning that 370,000 postal votes were issued. This compares with 14.4% at the last local elections in 2008. The deadline for applying for a postal vote was 11 working days before the election at 5 pm, which was 18 April 2012.

2.49 The proportion of people in Wales with a postal vote has increased slightly over the last two years. Following significant increases since it became possible for any elector to choose to vote by post in 2000, the proportion of those with a postal vote at the National Assembly for Wales general election in 2011, the Wales referendum in March 2011 and the UK Parliamentary general election in 2010 was similar, moving from 16.4 - 17%.

2.50 People who vote by post continue to be significantly more likely to vote than people who vote in polling stations. Of those registered to vote by post, 250,000 people did so, accounting for 30% of all votes counted at the election. However, turnout of postal voters was down slightly on previous years, at 68% compared with 71% at the Assembly election in 2011.

## Invalid postal votes

2.51 Of the 250,000 postal votes returned to ROs, 11,000 were reported by ROs as having been rejected as invalid that is 4.4% of the total returned<sup>21</sup>. This is

---

<sup>21</sup> These figures should be treated with caution owing to some inconsistencies in reporting. We will address these inconsistencies in future guidance on reporting.

similar to both the National Assembly for Wales general election in 2011 and the UK Parliamentary general election in 2010, at just less than 5%.

2.52 Returned postal votes must be rejected by ROs if:

- the postal vote statement<sup>22</sup> or ballot paper is missing or
- the personal details supplied by voters with their postal vote cannot be successfully matched with those previously provided by the voter and held on the EROs' records.

2.53 There is a legal requirement to match these personal identifiers, designed to prevent voting fraud. The legal requirement is to check a minimum of 20% of returned postal votes. Our performance standards require ROs to check all returned postal votes to ensure that the personal details supplied by voters match those previously provided by the voter and held on the EROs' records. All 21 ROs checked 100% and met the performance standard.

2.54 The following table shows the reasons why ROs rejected postal votes as invalid and reflects trends at previous elections.

**Table 2: Reasons for postal vote rejection<sup>23</sup>**

Rejected for	%
Want of signature	9
Want of date of birth	7
Want of both	5
Mismatched signature	20
Mismatched date of birth	23
Both mismatched	9
Missing ballot paper	11
Missing postal voting statement	17

---

<sup>22</sup> This is a form that all postal voters must complete and return with their postal ballot paper. Voters must include on this their date of birth and signature.

<sup>23</sup> Not all ROs returned data to us identifying the reasons for postal vote rejection.

2.55 While it is clearly important that measures are in place that are effective in detecting and preventing fraud, these measures should not inadvertently disenfranchise voters who simply make mistakes on their postal voting statements. Allowing EROs to request a refreshed identifying signature and also to provide electors with feedback if their postal vote statement has been rejected, would help address this problem.

2.56 We first raised this issue with the UK Government in 2007. We welcome the inclusion of a clause in the Electoral Registration and Administration Bill currently before the UK Parliament that will allow EROs to request a refresh and for electors to be notified that their postal vote statement was rejected. The change will be implemented through regulations.

2.57 We see no reason why these new arrangements should not apply to the first set of elections after the Bill receives Royal Assent, which should be those held in May 2013. This would give absent voters the opportunity to update their personal identifiers in good time ahead of the next European Parliamentary election in 2014 and the UK Parliamentary General Election in 2015.

## Voting by proxy

2.58 If an elector had a valid reason why they were unable to vote in person, such as illness, physical incapacity, work commitments, or being overseas, they could appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf. The deadline for applying for a proxy vote was 5pm on Wednesday 25 April. In total, around 3,100 people asked for a proxy vote which, as a proportion of the electorate, was 0.1%.

2.59 Of the total number of proxy voters, 28 were appointed as a result of medical emergencies. After the deadline for applying for a proxy vote, anyone who was taken ill and unable to vote as a result could appoint an emergency proxy, up to 5 pm on polling day itself.

2.60 The UK Government has announced plans to extend the emergency proxy voting provisions to those unexpectedly called away on business or military service. Though we support this proposal, we have recommended that it be further extended to apply to those who have other reasons for not being able to attend the polling station at short notice, such as caring responsibilities or a recent bereavement.

## Completing the ballot paper

2.61 We want to ensure that materials used by electors to cast their vote are consistently designed to a high standard. People should be confident that they know how to cast their vote successfully.

2.62 Our public opinion survey asked whether voters found it easy or difficult to complete their ballot papers. Nearly all, 97%, said they found it easy, with 84% finding it very easy and just 1% reporting difficulties. Of those who found it difficult, the reasons given related to not having clear instructions or the layout being confusing.

2.63 The number of ballot papers rejected at the count by ROs as invalid was approximately 5,000, that is, 0.6% of the total. This is the same proportion as were rejected as invalid at the last local elections in Wales in 2008 and the same as at the local elections held in England in May 2012.

2.64 Our performance standards require that ROs ensure that a process is in place for proof-checking ballot papers, in order to eliminate errors on ballot papers issued to voters. We advise ROs to have in place arrangements to check the actual ballot papers being produced, which will highlight if any of the signed-off proofs have been inadvertently altered. We also advise a final check of batches of printed ballot papers before any are issued as postal votes or supplied to polling stations.

2.65 We asked ROs to confirm that arrangements were in place for proof-checking of ballot papers. All ROs in Wales confirmed that they had made such arrangements.

2.66 However, printing errors on ballot papers did occur in three local authorities. In Ceredigion, instructions to voters were printed incorrectly on ballot papers in two electoral districts. In Wrexham, there was a printing error on the ballot paper in one ward where one party emblem was overprinted with another. In Monmouthshire, candidates' names were printed in the wrong order on the ballot papers in one ward. These printing errors were spotted after the postal votes had been issued and dispatched and not picked up in the proof checking processes that were in place.

2.67 In all three cases, ROs reissued the postal ballot packs to the voters in the areas affected with a letter of explanation and instructions to the voter regarding how to ensure their vote was counted. ROs explained the situation to affected candidates and to the local media where needed. Because of the speedy remedial actions taken, there were no repercussions affecting the particular elections.

# 3 Participation: candidates

## Standing for election

3.1 3,305 candidates stood for election in 841 local wards, contesting a total of 1,224 vacant seats.

3.2 This is a similar picture to 2008, when there were 3,200 candidates standing in 881 wards.

3.3 98 councillors were elected unopposed. This meant that voters in those wards did not have an opportunity to vote on 3 May. A subsequent by-election was held in one ward because no candidates stood for election on 3 May.

3.4 The table below shows the number of council seats won by party in 2012, compared with the 2008 local elections.<sup>24</sup>

Table 3: Number of council seats by party

Party	2008	2012	Change	% Change
Conservative	172	105	-67	-39.0
Labour	340	577	237	69.7
Liberal Democrat	164	72	-92	-56.1
Plaid Cymru	197	158	-39	-19.8
Independent	323	293	-30	-9.3
Others	28	18	-10	-35.7

3.5 The large number of changes is indicative of the degree to which contests were hard fought. Hard fought contests tend to generate campaign issues between local candidates. The large number of independent candidates in local elections in Wales, who do not have access to advice from a professional party organisation, also tends to generate local issues and requests for advice.

---

<sup>24</sup> National Assembly for Wales Members' Research Service briefing *Local Election Results 2012*

## Advice for candidates from the Commission

3.6 It should be easy for people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are and what they have to do to comply with these rules. We publish general advice for candidates standing for election and give specific advice on request.

3.7 We published bilingual guidance on our website for candidates and their agents ahead of the formal period during which candidates' election expenditure is regulated. To complement the guidance, we published accompanying resources such as template nomination forms and campaign spending returns and declarations.

3.8 In response to feedback received from political parties and candidates at previous elections, we also simplified the format of the candidates and agents 'landing page' on our website so that our guidance was more easily accessible. Feedback we received from political parties and candidates after the May 2012 elections welcomed the improvements to format, but identified that more needs to be done to improve the navigability of our website. Experienced party officials also asked for more detail in the 'expert' level of our guidance. We will look to address these points in further revisions to our website and in developing our guidance for future elections.

3.9 In addition to producing online guidance, we also offered briefings to candidates and agents. We held sessions at local political party candidate briefing events and at party conferences, as well as at ROs' candidate and agent briefings where we were invited. For the first time, we also trialled three regional sessions for independent candidates in order to address the fact that independent candidates do not have the same access to training and support networks as their party counterparts. There was positive feedback from those who attended and we will provide more sessions at the next local elections in Wales.

3.10 The nature of our briefing sessions depended on whether they were being held as 'stand-alone' events or as part of a wider programme, but in all cases the main points covered were issues around nominations, candidate spending, donations and imprints.

3.11 In total, approximately 300 candidates attended our candidate and agent briefings. All of these sessions aimed to serve the dual purpose of enhancing compliance through our presentations and subsequent contact with attendees as well as the promotion of our guidance materials. It has also helped meet our commitment to promote our Welsh language output following recommendations made by the Welsh Language Board on our Welsh language scheme.

3.12 During the run-up to the election and the formal election campaign period, we received over 350 queries in Wales on specific issues from election candidates, political parties, electoral administrators and the general public.

3.13 The most common types of queries we received were about the nominations process, campaigning and electoral integrity issues.

## Advice for candidates from Returning Officers

3.14 We want to be satisfied that candidates and agents are provided with clear and timely information to enable them to engage effectively in the election process. ROs advise candidates on standing for election in their localities.

3.15 Our performance monitoring of ROs requires that they:

- confirm that candidate and/or election agents were issued with written guidance on the election process, including local arrangements, and
- confirm that briefing sessions were offered, the dates of any briefings and that briefing resources were prepared

3.16 We were encouraged that all ROs reported that they were meeting our standards for issuing written information to candidates and agents on the election process, including local arrangements in advance of polling day.

3.17 20 ROs confirmed that they offered and held briefing sessions for candidates and agents. One RO did not hold briefing sessions but offered to brief candidates on an individual basis on request. The reason given was that the number of candidates made holding briefing sessions impracticable, although as this was not a general problem we were unable to accept that as a reason for not meeting the standard. Feedback from political parties shows that they continue to value candidate briefing sessions.

## Eligibility to stand for election

3.18 The vast majority of the queries the Commission received on the nomination rules before the election related to whether or not individual candidates were eligible to stand for election. Local ROs also told us they received an increased number of queries on this issue compared with previous elections.

3.19 One of the reasons for the increase is likely to be because of heightened awareness in Wales of the need to be qualified and not disqualified from standing for election, following a high profile issue at the National Assembly for Wales general election in 2011<sup>25</sup>. There also appears to have been an increase in the number of people employed in local consortium arrangements, with potential candidates not always clear whether working for a consortium

---

<sup>25</sup> For further explanation of this matter, see our *Report on the National Assembly for Wales general election (2011)*

precludes them from standing for election in any local authority which is part of the arrangement.

3.20 Although we publish guidance for candidates and agents on the qualification and disqualification rules, neither we nor ROs can give definitive guidance on whether or not individual candidates are eligible to stand for election, having regard to the precise detail of their personal employment, business or residency arrangements. Candidates themselves are required to sign their nomination paper confirming that they are qualified and not disqualified (for a range of specific reasons) from standing for election. It is an offence knowingly to make a false statement on a nomination form.

3.21 When we received requests from candidates asking us to confirm whether or not they were eligible to stand, we recommended that if they were in any doubt they must do everything they can to check their own position before submitting their nomination papers. To do this we advised that, after consulting our guidance, candidates should seek advice from their political party if they are standing on behalf of one; contact their employer for details of their contractual position if needed and, if necessary, take their own independent legal advice.

## Campaigning in the election

3.22 A high proportion of the queries we received related to campaigning issues. The number of candidates campaigning and the local nature of the elections inevitably means that campaigning will be strongly-fought and sometimes rancorous. In our published guidance to candidates, we provided information on the process candidates should follow if they believed an election-related offence had been committed by another candidate.

3.23 A number of the complaints we received related to instances where candidates felt that statements made about their character or their political views constituted illegal practices. As the Commission does not regulate the content of campaign material, we were not able to comment on the legality of any particular electoral material beyond what was covered in our guidance, where we outline the nature of offences relating to false statements. Where appropriate we recommended that complainants contact their RO in the first instance, or if they had been referred to us by their RO, their local police Single Point of Contact (SPOC) if they believed that an offence may have been committed.

3.24 We also received a number of complaints regarding errors relating to the requirement on candidates to include imprints on their election publicity. All printed election material must carry an imprint with details of the name and address of the printer and promoter of the material, as well as the name and address of the person, organisation or group on whose behalf the material has been printed.

3.25 The intention of the imprint requirements is to enable anyone to contact or trace the source of the material, for example, in case of any issue about its content. A breach of the imprint requirements where it is unclear who has produced the material is potentially a criminal offence and a complaint has to be made to the police. As with complaints regarding false statements, our guidance outlined the process for doing this. In some cases, minor issues relating to the election campaign were also addressed by the four main political parties where such disputes arose between their candidates. The main parties told us after the election that disputes between their own candidates and independent candidates proved more difficult to resolve.

3.26 We also received a small number of queries regarding the conduct of sitting councillors during the campaign period, for example on issues such as the use of council logos or stationery. We referred enquirers to the statutory Code of Conduct for local authority members or the local authority monitoring officer where it was appropriate for us to do so.

3.27 We received feedback from Returning Officers after the election that there had been a small number of incidents in polling stations relating to the campaigning activities of candidates and their supporters outside polling stations, which voters can find intimidating and potentially a deterrent to voting. We also received queries on this issue from candidates and political parties.

3.28 Incidents were generally low-level and were able to be addressed by polling station Presiding Officers with the additional assistance of Returning Officers where necessary. It continues to be important that Presiding Officers are fully briefed on how to respond to any incident involving complaints about intimidating campaigning in the environs of a polling station.

3.29 It is equally important that campaigners and their supporters are aware of what is acceptable conduct in and around polling stations. To this end, we will look to strengthen our guidance in this area with the aim of making clearer to all involved in the process what is, and what is not, acceptable. Our guidance is intended to be read in conjunction with any guidance issued by the Returning Officer; as they are ultimately responsible for the conduct of elections their decision is final.

## Campaign spending and donations

3.30 There are rules on candidates' campaign spending at local elections. At the time of publication we have not identified any breaches of the rules on candidates' spending and donations at these elections. Candidates were due to provide their spending return to the relevant Returning Officer by 7 June if their result was announced on Thursday 3 May and by 8 June if their result was announced on Friday 4 May. If we carry out any enforcement work in connection

with potential breaches of the rules at these elections, we will publish information about these in due course in accordance with our disclosure policy.<sup>26</sup>

3.31 Candidates' spending and donations at these elections were controlled from 27 March onwards. We published guidance for candidates and agents on the spending rules in December 2011. From March 2012 to the latest date that candidates could submit spending returns we received 118 queries about the spending rules at the local elections in Wales. We registered eight new parties that intended to field candidates in Wales between January and March 2012.

3.32 Our post-poll public opinion survey also included questions relating to the rules on the money that political parties and others use when campaigning<sup>27</sup>. The responses were obtained before the deadline for candidates at the elections to submit their spending returns. In comparison to the results from the 2011 post-poll survey, some of the findings indicate an increased concern about the fairness of the current rules. We will take the results into account in our ongoing policy work and in our discussions with UK Government on the regulatory regime.

---

<sup>26</sup> More information on our enforcement role can be found on our website at <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement>

<sup>27</sup> These results can be found on the 'Publications and Research' section of our website.

## 4 No undue influence

4.1 There should be no undue influence in the way our elections and political finance system work. This chapter looks at how far people were concerned about electoral fraud at the elections and to what extent malpractice or fraud was reported.

### What people thought about electoral fraud

4.2 Our public opinion research found that about four in ten people in Wales said they knew about fraud relating to elections and voting, with a quarter saying they knew nothing at all. This reflects similar findings at our surveys following the elections and referendums in 2011.

4.3 Six per cent said they knew a lot about fraud, with voters more likely than non-voters to say so (10% compared with 2%). The same proportion, 6%, said that voting is very or fairly unsafe from fraud or abuse. These proportions are similar across Great Britain.

4.4 Seventy-nine per cent said they thought voting in general was safe from fraud and abuse. More people think that voting in a polling station is safe, 88%, compared with just over half, 55%, who think voting by post is safe.

4.5 Four per cent of people surveyed thought that 'a lot' of fraud or abuse took place at the local elections. A quarter thought that 'a little' took place and a third thought that fraud happened 'hardly at all'. 12% thought that fraud didn't happen at all on 3 May and a quarter said they didn't know. These findings are similar across Great Britain.

4.6 In our survey, those that said that fraud or abuse happened 'a lot' or 'a little' were then given a list of options and asked which best describes why they think fraud took place at the elections. The most common answer given was that 'identity fraud is on the increase' (36%) followed by 'a general impression that fraud is a problem' (29%). 2% said they had first-hand experience of fraud and 1% said they had heard from someone else that fraud took place.

4.7 All survey respondents were given a list of options and asked how effective each one would be in preventing electoral fraud. 91% said a requirement to show some form of identification at their polling station would be very or quite effective at preventing fraud. 74% thought that 'People being required to sign in order to check their identity before being given their ballot paper in the polling station' would be effective. Just over half of those surveyed, 53%, thought that stopping postal voting on demand would be an effective measure to stop fraud.

# Preventing and detecting malpractice

4.8 In order to meet our performance standards, ROs are required to confirm that their election plans detail the processes they have in place to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity issues and what steps are to be taken to deal with any problems that might arise. All ROs confirmed that their election plans contained such details.

4.9 In partnership with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), ahead of the elections we issued a revised 2012 version of *Guidance on preventing and detecting electoral malpractice* to police forces in Wales, as well as copies of our pocket guide for police officers on duty during the election period. These documents continue to form part of our response to a demonstrated need for more information and support for police forces on this specialised area of law.

4.10 We continue to monitor adherence to our *Code of conduct for political parties, candidates, canvassers and campaigners on the handling of postal vote applications*, which we reissued for the 2012 elections. The pocket guide issued to police officers was included as an appendix to the Code. We also provided parties and Returning Officers with copies of our pocket guide to the postal vote Code of conduct that could be referred to by party activists during the election period.

4.11 Following their creation within each police force in time for the 2007 elections, dedicated officers, or SPOCs (Single Points of Contact) again acted as a focal point for both police officers and electoral offices in relation to electoral malpractice and allegations of offences. In addition, the 'Super-SPOC' for Wales attended our pre-election planning seminar for electoral administrators held in February 2012 to give advice on preventing and detecting malpractice.

4.12 SPOCs from police forces in Wales also took part in a UK-wide training seminar, held in February 2012 and jointly organised by the Electoral Commission and ACPO.

## Specific issues

4.13 We work with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Police National Information and Coordination Centre (PNICC) to ensure a consistent and complete record of allegations of malpractice throughout the year. Each police force sends PNICC a monthly return detailing any allegations of malpractice. We will continue to track these allegations, and will report on the outcome of these in annual report on allegations of electoral malpractice in 2012, which will be published in early 2013.

4.14 However, our initial research shows that the number of allegations received by police for the 2012 local elections in Wales was notably higher than in the local elections in 2008. The number of allegations reported in Wales also constituted a high proportion of the total number of allegations reported across

Great Britain. However, caution should be taken in interpreting the increase in the number of allegations received. The vast majority of allegations were low-level and related mainly to perceived false statements in candidates' election materials and alleged imprint offences.

4.15 One allegation that a candidate had not provided their correct home address in order to stand for election in the Splott ward in Cardiff was referred to the police by Cardiff Council on 20 April 2012, and reported in the national media.<sup>28</sup> After investigating the complaint, South Wales Police concluded on 27 April that no criminal acts had been committed, and confirmed that no further police action was being taken in relation to the matter.<sup>29</sup>

4.16 A specific issue arose with regard to the availability of a SPOC for North Wales police during the election period. Feedback from ROs was that in some cases lack of availability caused difficulties in dealing with certain allegations in accordance with the process outlined in the joint guidance produced by the Commission and ACPO. We have subsequently addressed this matter with North Wales police who will ensure that the problem does not arise at future polls.

4.17 As we move beyond the May 2012 polls and towards the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in November 2012 we intend to focus our resources for the immediate future in terms of "anti-fraud" activity. We have identified areas which may be at greater risk of electoral malpractice at the PCC elections and will work with the relevant EROs and ROs, as well as the local police, to ensure appropriate preventative measures are in place in advance of the elections and that they are equipped to deal with any allegations of criminal activity. We will target our observational activity accordingly.

4.18 We will continue to work with parties and candidates, the police and prosecutors to ensure that they understand their responsibilities in preventing, responding to, and dealing with, concerns about electoral fraud.

4.19 Whilst we are very pleased that the UK Government is bringing forward legislation to introduce Individual Electoral Registration (IER), which will make the process of registering to vote more secure, we are disappointed that they have not taken forward our recommendation to review the need for ID in polling stations. We now propose to take forward a review of the process of absent voting and voting in polling stations in the light of the introduction of IER, focusing on any changes that may be needed to ensure confidence in the integrity of the system. We intend to publish this review in time for legislation to be brought forward during the life of this Parliament.

---

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-17788742>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-17874256>

# 5 Counting votes

5.1 We want to ensure that voters and candidates are confident that count processes are transparent and produce secure accurate results.

5.2 The volume of elections taking place, with local authority and town and community wards being counted, and the number of candidates involved, were the main challenges in organising the election counts. Bearing in mind these factors, very few difficulties were reported to us in feedback from political parties, candidates and ROs. The outcome of two ward elections was tied and had to be decided by drawing lots. At the time of compiling this report, one ward election result is being challenged in the courts<sup>30</sup>.

## Count management

5.3 The relevant election rules require that counts must take place 'as soon as practicable' after the poll, with Returning Officers determining what is practicable in their locality. In order to manage the volume of counts, one or other of the following arrangements took place in local authorities across Wales:

- verification<sup>31</sup> of principal area and community councils on Thursday night immediately followed by principal area counts, concluding in the early hours of Friday morning. Recounts were sometimes deferred to Friday and community council counts started at an appointed time on Friday. ROs in 14 local authorities managed counts in this way.
- verification of principal area and community councils on Thursday night, with both counts starting at an appointed time on Friday. ROs in 6 local authorities managed counts in this way.
- one local authority verified and counted the votes from 9:15am on Friday morning.

## Time taken to complete counts

5.4 The main issue arising about the management of the election counts, from reviewing evidence available on count times and our own observations of a number of election counts, was the variation in time taken to complete some

---

<sup>30</sup> For further details, see later in this chapter.

<sup>31</sup> Before votes for any poll are counted, ballot paper accounts must be verified. The verification of ballot paper accounts is the process for checking that the number of ballot papers in each box either matches the number of papers recorded by the Presiding Officer as having been issued in the polling station, or if it does not, that the source of the variance can be identified or explained.

local counts compared with others of similar size. Political commentators in election broadcast coverage highlighted the fact that some election counts took longer than others to reach conclusion.

5.5 The aim of an election count is to achieve an accurate and timely result in which voters, candidates and political parties have confidence. A long overnight count has the potential to compromise accuracy if count staff are working up to and beyond 3 or 4 am – some of those, especially senior managers, also having worked throughout polling day. At that sort of time, tiredness is an increasing risk to accurate counting, while tension can be mounting among waiting candidates and agents. Count management, therefore, needs to be as efficient and effective as possible in order to minimise this risk.

5.6 It was apparent that some ROs and electoral services managers had evaluated their usual count practices and managed the large volume of counts more proactively, ensuring that teams of counters were not waiting around for long periods to be deployed.

5.7 One notable example of proactive management was Wrexham council, where the RO and electoral services manager had reviewed and made a number of changes to count plans and former practice. One change was the simple one of employing more count staff. The measure proved to be cost neutral, since although more staff were taken on, they were employed for a shorter time.

5.8 Similarly, Neath Port Talbot, holding counts in three local centres, increased the number of count staff usually employed by a quarter.

5.9 The outcome of these revisions was that Wrexham and Neath Port Talbot were the first to conclude their election counts, by some distance.

5.10 Of those local authorities counting principal area elections overnight on 3 May:

- Wrexham was the first to conclude counting its principal area elections at 1:15am. Neath Port Talbot concluded half an hour later at 1:45am.
- No other count concluded before 3am and most concluded between 4:30 and 6am, with recounts deferred to later on 4 May.

5.11 Of those local authorities verifying immediately after the close of poll but counting principal area elections on 4 May:

- Powys were the first to conclude counting, at 11:30am (but had the highest number of uncontested seats)
- Most others concluded between noon and 2pm.

5.12 The key objective of our performance standards on election counts is to ensure that the verification and count processes are administered consistently

and effectively, and produce an accurate result that everyone can have confidence in. The standards require:

- verification and count processes carried out in clear view of all those entitled to attend, with a clear and unambiguous audit trail and information provided to attendees on the processes to be followed.
- count processes capable of producing an accurate result, with a clear audit trail.
- verification and count processes are timely, with appropriate resources in place to ensure that outcome.

5.13 All 21 ROs reported to us that they had such processes in place.

5.14 However, although in advance of the elections ROs had indicated that appropriate resources were in place to ensure a timely outcome of verification and count processes, we noted the variations in time taken to count votes in some comparable areas. In light of these variations, we reviewed count management with electoral services managers at our post-election seminar in May. The electoral services manager from Sunderland, traditionally among the first to complete counts at UK Parliamentary general elections, explained how counts were managed proactively in that local authority. The electoral services manager from Wrexham explained how the changes they had adopted had significantly improved their count management and efficiency of counting.

5.15 We will continue to provide advice and guidance to ROs and electoral services managers on effective count management and continue to encourage the review of local practice. Our published guidance to ROs for local elections includes a count model, aimed at ensuring that verification and count processes are transparent, accurate, timely, and secure. We will also look in more detail at the cost and resources issues involved in effective count management.

## Challenging an election result

5.16 The result of a ward election in Denbighshire has been challenged. The process of challenging an election result requires an election 'petition' to be lodged with the courts within 21 days of the election result being declared. In relation to Prestatyn North Ward, Denbighshire, the petitioner alleges that bundles of ballot papers were incorrectly assigned to the candidate declared successful who has a very similar surname to the petitioner. The outcome will be decided by a court.

## After the declaration of results

5.17 We set standards and monitor performance to ensure the appropriate storage and disposal of documents, and to ensure that a full review of all procedures takes place to inform lessons learned and planning for future events.

5.18 All 21 ROs confirmed that that they had appropriate arrangements in place with a clear audit trail to cover the packaging and forwarding of documents. This includes a legal duty to complete a statement as to postal ballot papers, which provides an audit trail for the postal voting process throughout the election and helps to ensure confidence in the results.

5.19 The election plans of all 21 ROs identified that they planned to evaluate their election procedures post-election to identify lessons learnt and incorporate these into future election plans. At the time of compiling this report in mid-June, not all ROs have yet completed their post-election evaluations.

# Appendix: Research methodology

## Public opinion survey

ICM interviewed a representative sample of 750 voters and non-voters in Wales by telephone on 4–22 May 2012. Across Great Britain, 4,104 voters and non-voters were interviewed in the same period. The sample breakdown for other areas is as follows: England (excluding London) 1,354, Scotland 1,000 and London 1,000.

The profile of the contacted sample was designed to match that of the eligible population by key demographics such as gender, age and work status. In line with previous research, roughly equal numbers of voters and non-voters participated on the survey. Findings are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level or above.

Comparisons made between these polls and those held in previous years are indicative and should be treated with some caution.

## Public information campaign tracking survey

TNS BRMB conducted pre and post advertising campaign tracking research. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in-home, with a demographically and geographically representative of adults. In Wales, 287 interviews took place from 17-18 March and 309 interviews from 20 April – 1 May 2012.

## Electoral data

Professors Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher at the Elections Centre, University of Plymouth collected and collated data from Returning Officers on the Commission's behalf. This included data relating to electoral registration, turnout, absent voting and rejected ballots. Findings are based on data for all those local authorities where elections in Wales were held, although in some cases there are a small number of wards for which we did not receive all data. In some wards with more than one vacancy we have not been provided with an exact count of the number of ballot papers issued, and a statistical algorithm has been used to estimate turnout.

## Returning Officers' feedback

The Commission issued an optional qualitative feedback form to Returning Officers (ROs) in Wales. We held a post-election seminar for ROs and electoral administrators in Wales at which feedback was given, and had meetings with number of individual ROs during the election period. We have also taken account of the topics covered in over 350 telephone and email queries logged

during the election period. The feedback from Returning Officers referred to in this report comes from all these sources.

---

The Electoral Commission  
Caradog House  
1-6 Saint Andrews Place  
Cardiff CF10 3BE

Tel: 029 2034 6800  
Fax: 029 2034 6805

[infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk)  
[www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

To contact our offices in Scotland,  
Wales, Northern Ireland and the  
English regions, please see our  
website.

We are an independent body set up by the  
UK Parliament. We regulate party and  
election finance and set standards for well-  
run elections. We work to support a healthy  
democracy, where elections and  
referendums are based on our principles of  
trust, participation, and no undue influence.

Putting voters first