

# **London Mayor and Assembly Elections 2008**

## **Report to the Electoral Commission**

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### **Introduction**

The third set of elections for the directly-elected London mayor and Assembly were held on May 1 with electronic counting commencing the following day. The results, declared that evening, saw the incumbent mayor, Ken Livingstone, defeated by his Conservative party challenger, Boris Johnson. In the battle for the 25-member Assembly the Conservatives fell two seats short of an overall majority. Reflecting perhaps the intense media attention that had followed the struggle between Livingstone and Johnson and the perceived closeness of the contest, the level of electoral turnout rose sharply compared with the two previous elections. At the inaugural election in 2000 only a third of electors (33.6%) turned out to vote and in 2004 turnout rose by little more than three points to 36.9%. At this election, however, it was 44.6%, smaller than that for the elections in 2007 to the Scottish Parliament but higher than that for the National Assembly for Wales.

The structure of this report is as follows. The first section outlines the voting systems used to select the mayor and the assembly. Sections two and three analyse the pattern of voting and the operation of the voting systems in the mayoral and assembly elections respectively. Section four addresses issues of electoral administration including voter turnout, rejected ballots, and postal voting. A concluding section summarises the main points of the research.

### **Voting systems**

The London mayor is chosen by the Supplementary Vote (SV) method. Under this voting system electors are offered a ballot paper with two columns printed alongside the list of candidates. In the first column voters mark a single cross alongside the name of their most preferred candidate - in much the same way that voting takes place at parliamentary elections. This is termed the 'first vote'. Each elector then has the option of placing another cross against the list of candidates but this time in the second column – the 'second vote'. The count of these 'first' votes is conducted and should any one of the candidates receive an absolute majority, i.e. 50% plus 1 or more of the votes, then that candidate is immediately declared the winner. Should no candidate emerge with an absolute majority then all but the top two placed candidates are eliminated from the contest. The ballots cast in favour of eliminated candidates only are then scrutinised for votes cast in the second column – the

ballots for the two remaining candidates are ignored. Some of these ballots with a first vote cast for eliminated candidates may have blank second columns or have second votes cast for other eliminated candidates and are therefore rejected. The only second votes that are taken into account are those cast in favour of one or the other of the two candidates still in the mayoral race. These are, in effect, the second or 'supplementary' votes that are then transferred over to each candidate's total. Thus, the final vote for each of the two candidates that make it to the final stage comprise first votes cast directly in their favour combined with the supplement of second votes gained from eliminated candidates. The candidate who simply has more votes than their competitor is declared the winner: the winning candidate is not required to receive an absolute majority of all votes cast.

A system of proportional representation, the Additional Member System (AMS), is used to elect the 25-member assembly. It is similar to that used to elect both the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales. Under this system each elector is provided with two votes, one to elect a constituency-based assembly member, the other to elect a London-wide seat. The constituency election is determined by 'first past the post' rules, i.e. the candidate with the most votes in a given constituency wins. For this purpose London is divided into 14 constituencies, each an amalgam of whole London boroughs. The remaining seats, 11 in all, are for the additional members and are allocated on the basis of party-list voting. Voters are presented with a list of parties and asked simply to place an 'X' against the one of their choice. Candidates standing on this list as independents comprise a list on their own account.

The allocation of the additional or 'top-up' seats is intended to make the electoral outcome more proportional; i.e. each party's share of assembly seats reflects its overall vote share. A legal electoral threshold operates, stating that no party receiving less than 5 per cent of the total list vote is eligible to receive a 'top-up' seat. The votes cast for the various party lists are counted for the whole of London. These totals are then each divided by one plus the number of constituency seats already won by the relevant party. If, for example, a party has won seven constituency seats, its total of list votes is divided by 1 plus 7. Should that party be allocated a list seat then its list vote is now divided by 1 plus 8, reflecting the seat that it has just acquired. The outcome in all 14 constituencies must be known therefore before the allocation of the 11 additional member seats proceeds. They are allocated in turn to the parties in order of the party list vote after the various divisors are applied. The first seat goes to the candidate heading the successful party's list; if that party should win a second list seat, then the candidate in second place is deemed elected...and so on. This process continues until all 11 seats are allocated.

### **Mayoral Election**

Ten candidates contested the 2008 mayoral election – the same number as in 2004 and one fewer than in 2000. The incumbent Ken Livingstone, the only person to contest all three mayoral elections, was aiming to win a third consecutive term. He won the first election as an Independent candidate after being expelled by the Labour party. In 2004 he was formally selected as the Labour candidate, defeating the Conservative, Steve Norris, for whom it was a second successive defeat. This time the Conservatives selected a sitting MP, Boris Johnson, the member for the Henley. A former metropolitan police officer, Brian Paddick, contested the election for the Liberal Democrats.

The results of the voting are set out in Table 1. The election brought defeat for Livingstone with the final tally of votes giving him a 47% share to Boris Johnson's 53% share. Trailing

Johnson by 148,884 votes after the first vote Livingstone recovered some of the deficit after the count of second votes among the eliminated candidates, but the gap proved too large for him to overcome. Johnson's final tally of 1.17 million first and second votes was 48.4% of all valid first votes recorded. It was the third time in succession that the winning candidate's total number of votes was less than an absolute majority of votes cast.

It was clear from pre-election polls and campaign coverage that the contest was essentially a two-horse race between Livingstone and Johnson and that these two would feature in the count of second votes which would determine the eventual winner. Voters choosing either of these candidates with their first vote, therefore, might know that any second votes that they cast would make no impact. Eight in ten voters cast a first mayoral vote for either Livingstone or Johnson. This helps to explain, in part, why the number of second votes, 2,004,078, is more than four hundred thousand fewer than first votes cast. But it is also clear that many voters voted twice for the same candidate. This practise is not forbidden under SV, but the second vote is literally wasted. For example, Table 1 shows that Livingstone received more than three hundred thousand second votes but that only 135,089 (44.5%) of these counted. The remaining 55.5% were ballots cast by people who had already supported Livingstone with their first vote, together with a likely small number of those who cast a first vote for Johnson and a second vote for Livingstone. A similar pattern applies in the case of Johnson's second vote, and doubtless other candidates as well.

There is some *prima facie* evidence that a large number of voters misunderstand some of the subtle aspects of SV. Confirmation of this can perhaps be taken from the pattern of voting for the Liberal Democrat candidate. Brian Paddick received roughly one in ten of all first mayoral votes cast, in line with pre-election polls, but no less than 32% of second votes. The inescapable conclusion is that many people switched their support to him for the second vote having previously voted for one of the nine other candidates, even though there was little likelihood that the vote would count. Similarly, the Green party candidate received four times as many second votes as first votes, while for UKIP the ratio was five to one. Such switching may be a consequence of voters wishing to invest some symbolic meaning to their vote (a slight preference towards the Liberal Democrats; an expression of protest towards competitors) but it is probable that some voters at least remain unaware of the precise workings of the voting system.

In fact, as stated earlier, the only second votes which count in the sense of contributing to the competition between the two top-placed candidates are those where the first vote is cast for a candidate that is about to be eliminated AND a second vote cast for one of the two front runners. The total pool of potential second votes was just under half a million (i.e. 478,320 first votes not cast for either Livingstone or Johnson). A proportion of these voters would not have cast a second vote at all, while others would have either voted twice for the same candidate or cast a second vote in favour of another eliminated contender. The number of valid second votes counted was 260,066, meaning that just 54% of the eligible number were counted. Indeed, of more than two million second votes cast, only one in eight actually contributed towards the final outcome.

**Table 1: London mayor result, 2008**

Candidate	Party	1st votes	%	2nd votes	%	Valid 2nd votes	Total votes
Boris Johnson	Conservative	1,043,761	43.2	257,792	12.9	124,977	1,168,738
Ken Livingstone	Labour	893,877	37.0	303,198	15.1	135,089	1,028,966
Brian Paddick	Liberal Democrat	236,685	9.8	641,412	32.0		
Siân Berry	Green	77,374	3.2	331,727	16.6		
Richard Barnbrook	British National Party	69,710	2.9	128,609	6.4		
Alan Craig	Christian Peoples Alliance	39,249	1.6	80,140	4.0		
Gerard Batten	UK Independence Party	22,422	0.9	113,651	5.7		
Lindsey German	Left List	16,796	0.7	35,057	1.7		
Matt O'Connor	English Democrats	10,695	0.4	73,538	3.7		
Winston McKenzie	Independent	5,389	0.2	38,954	1.9		
	Total	2,415,958		2,004,078		260,066	2,197,704

Source: [www.londonelects.org.uk](http://www.londonelects.org.uk)

### Assembly election

The results of the election for the London assembly are summarised in Table 2 and show the separate votes for the 14 constituency and 11 list seats. The number of valid votes cast in the competition for list seats was 6,318 more than were cast for candidates standing in the constituencies. In 2004 the gap between these votes was ten times larger, at 69,790 votes. In 2008, just 3,351 more valid votes were cast in the mayoral election than for the party list vote – in 2004 the comparable figure was a difference of 60,504 votes. This probably reflects both greater familiarity with the electoral systems in use, as well as electors not being faced with voting in entirely separate contests for synchronous European Parliament and GLA elections as was the case in 2004.

As expected under a first past the post system and where constituency size is rather large, the 14 constituency seats were shared between the two most popular parties -Conservative and Labour. The allocation of list seats, designed in part to compensate smaller parties, reveals that almost half also went to the two major parties. The Conservatives lost a constituency seat to Labour, but gained three list seats. The list position for both Labour and the Greens was unchanged, but the Liberal Democrats slipped from five list seats to three and UKIP lost both the seats it was defending. The BNP won a seat for the first time.

**Table 2: London assembly result, 2008**

	Constituency			List			Total
	vote	%	seats	vote	share	seats	Seats
Conservative	900,569	37.4	8	835,535	34.6	3	11
Labour	673,855	28.0	6	665,443	27.6	2	8
Lib Dem	330,018	13.7	0	275,272	11.4	3	3
Green	194,059	8.1	0	203,465	8.4	2	2
BNP	18,020	0.8	0	130,714	5.4	1	1
Other	289,768	12.1	0	302,178	12.5	0	0
Total	2,406,289		14	2,412,607		11	25

Source: [www.londonelects.org.uk](http://www.londonelects.org.uk)

It is sometimes difficult under AMS to assess how far the voting method has produced a proportional outcome. This is especially the case when some parties choose not to compete for constituency votes and instead campaign largely to attract electors' list votes. The BNP, for example, contested only a single constituency, City and East (coming fourth) but polled more than 5% of list votes overall. To measure proportionality, therefore, we summed both the constituency and list votes, calculated each party's share of the overall vote, and then compared this with its share of assembly seats. The proportionality index score for the 2008 election is 13.1, which is rather high (disproportional) for an elected assembly using AMS.

The explanation for this is partly related to the ratio between constituency and list seats. Overall proportionality under AMS is greatest when the ratio between these types of seat is 50:50. Where the proportion of list seats falls below 50%, the system is constrained from equalising vote and seat shares. In the London assembly the ratio is 14:11 (56:44), similar to that in Scotland (57:43) and rather closer than in Wales (60:40). Another factor contributing to a relative lack of proportionality is the size of the vote for the myriad of individuals and small parties characterised as 'other'. They secured one in eight of all votes cast in both the constituency and list ballots, but won no seats. UKIP, for example, polled 2% of constituency and 3% of list votes but lost its representation in the assembly. Respect, which had missed winning a seat in 2004 only because of the operation of the 5% threshold rule, attracted just 2.5% of constituency votes this time. Would proportionality have been improved if the number of list seats had been increased by one and the constituencies reduced by one, taking the ratio to 13:12 (52:48)? In fact, such a twelfth list seat would have been won Labour which already enjoys an advantage of seats over vote share.

A final feature of the assembly election is the closeness between each party's share of constituency and list votes. Under AMS we might expect to find substantial differences between each party's share for the two different kinds of seat, especially for smaller parties that are disadvantaged by simple plurality voting. Even the third-placed Liberal Democrats performed better at constituency than list level, though their third of a million votes were insufficient to win any constituency seats. The Greens did attract additional support on the list, but their increment was fewer than 10,000 votes. One party that does appear to have

understood the voting system and adjusted its campaign accordingly is the BNP. It fielded a candidate in just one of the 14 constituencies, where it stood no realistic chance of victory, but explicitly asked voters instead for their list vote. These patterns provide further evidence that some voters do not appreciate the strategic value of the different kinds of vote. Many constituency votes went to parties whose candidates were not going to threaten the two-party dominance of these seats, while the pattern of list voting mirrored to a remarkable degree the distribution of constituency votes.

## **Electoral Administration**

### **Turnout**

The electorate for the London elections increased by 4.3% compared with 2004 to a total of 5,419,913. The number of electors rose in every constituency except Croydon and Sutton, and West Central. Under the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, 64,775 names (1.2% of the total) were added to the register between 10<sup>th</sup> March (the previous last date for registration to take effect before the election) and 16<sup>th</sup> April (the new closing date). In the Borough of Hammersmith the electorate increased by 2.3% during this period. Votes were cast at 3,618 polling stations as well as by post.

Table 3 (see also Appendix A1) shows percentage electoral turnout calculated in two separate ways (adjusted and unadjusted) for each of four votes (mayor first vote, mayor second vote, constituency vote, and list vote). The adjusted turnout uses only 'good' (i.e. valid) votes as the numerator while unadjusted turnout additionally includes those ballots rejected during the count. Overall, mayoral turnout was 45.3% unadjusted, 44.6% adjusted. The differences between adjusted and unadjusted turnout are rather small for most votes (normally within one percentage point) with the exception of the mayor second vote. This is because the number of ballots classified as rejected (the criteria for the second mayor vote being threefold – a ballot unmarked, the elector voting for too many candidates, or the elector's intention being uncertain) are highest for this vote. If the ballot papers of those whose postal votes were rejected prior to the count as being incomplete or deficient are further added to the total, turnout rises another half a percentage point to 45.8%. The issue of rejected ballots is discussed in more detail later.

For all types of contest the highest turnout (both adjusted and unadjusted) was in Bexley and Bromley and the lowest in the City and East constituency, with a more than ten point range between the two. Within constituencies there were only very small differences (0.0 – 0.2) in the levels of unadjusted turnout for the first mayoral, constituency and list ballots. In other words, voter 'roll off' was minimal with the vast majority being prepared to use all their voting opportunities once the decision to vote at all had been taken. Adjusted turnout showed greater though still small variations, reflecting perhaps both the pattern of party competition in individual constituencies and the judgements of local returning officers as to which ballot papers should be rejected. However, as hinted at in section 2, adjusted turnout for the second mayoral vote was always some way below that for the first vote, ranging from ten points lower in West Central to six points lower in Greenwich and Lewisham.

**Table 3: % turnout at the mayoral and assembly election, 2008.**

	Mayor1		Mayor2		Constituency		List	
	Adj	Unadj	Adj	Unadj	Adj	Unadj	Adj	Unadj
Barnet and Camden	47.2	47.9	38.4	47.2	46.9	47.8	46.9	47.8
Bexley and Bromley	49.3	49.9	41.5	49.3	49.1	49.9	49.2	49.9
Brent and Harrow	42.2	43.2	33.7	42.2	42.2	43.1	42.2	43.1
City and East	38.8	39.8	31.0	38.8	39.0	39.8	39.0	39.8
Croydon and Sutton	48.4	49.1	40.9	48.4	48.2	49.0	48.3	49.0
Ealing and Hillingdon	43.2	44.1	35.8	43.2	43.1	44.0	43.2	44.1
Enfield and Haringey	45.2	46.1	36.6	45.2	45.0	46.0	45.1	46.0
Greenwich and Lewisham	42.4	43.0	36.2	42.4	42.3	43.0	42.4	43.0
Havering and Redbridge	44.8	45.5	37.7	44.8	44.6	45.5	44.8	45.5
Lambeth and Southwark	41.5	42.2	35.2	41.5	41.3	42.1	41.4	42.1
Merton and Wandsworth	46.6	47.2	38.8	46.6	46.2	47.2	46.3	47.2
North East	43.2	43.9	36.4	43.2	42.9	43.8	43.0	43.8
South West	45.6	46.2	38.9	45.6	45.4	46.1	45.5	46.2
West Central	47.9	48.6	38.2	47.9	47.3	48.5	47.5	48.5
Total	44.6	45.3	37.0	44.6	44.4	45.3	44.5	45.3

Source: Compiled by the authors from data supplied by [www.londonelects.org.uk](http://www.londonelects.org.uk)

Compared with the previous election in 2004, overall adjusted turnout rose by almost nine percentage points in the case of the mayoral vote, and by nearly ten points in respect of the constituency vote (Table 4 -see also Appendix A1). The biggest increase in mayoral turnout was in West Central (13.6%), with three other constituencies recording a double-digit rise. The increases in Brent and Harrow (5.5%) and South West (6.3%) were less than half that in the best performing constituency. West Central again topped the list for the constituency and list votes with a turnout increase of 14.4% and 13.1% respectively. Almost half its electors participated in 2008 compared with fewer than a third in 2004. It is also interesting to note that the gap in turnout between the constituency and list vote was much smaller in 2008 than in 2004. Whilst no constituency experienced more than a 0.2% difference in turnout at the 2008 election, in 2004 the range was from 0.6% to 2.3%.

**Table 4: Change in adjusted turnout 2004-2008.**

	Mayor 1 <sup>st</sup> vote	Mayor 2 <sup>nd</sup> vote	Constituency	List
Barnet and Camden	9.8	7.0	10.5	9.4
Bexley and Bromley	8.8	6.5	9.1	8.5
Brent and Harrow	5.5	3.6	6.9	5.3
City and East	7.0	4.5	9.0	6.8
Croydon and Sutton	11.6	9.1	12.1	11.3
Ealing and Hillingdon	7.1	5.6	8.0	7.0
Enfield and Haringey	10.2	7.2	11.2	9.9
Greenwich and Lewisham	8.2	6.4	9.3	8.1
Havering and Redbridge	7.0	5.1	7.7	6.8
Lambeth and Southwark	9.1	7.1	10.6	9.0
Merton and Wandsworth	9.0	6.6	9.7	8.7
North East	10.3	8.0	11.6	10.0
South West	6.3	4.4	6.9	6.0
West Central	13.6	9.0	14.4	13.1
Total	8.7	6.4	9.7	8.5

Source: Compiled by the authors from data supplied by [www.londonelects.org.uk](http://www.londonelects.org.uk)

#### Rejected ballots (see also Appendix A1)

The overall number of votes rejected at the count was lower than in 2004. For the mayoral first vote they amounted to 41,032 ballots, just 1.7% of all votes cast (good votes and rejected votes combined) compared with 3.0% in 2004. Of this number approximately two-thirds were rejected because the voter had voted for more than one candidate, while almost a third were rejected for being blank. Slightly more votes, 47,799 or 1.9%, were rejected at the constituency count, representing a sizeable reduction on 2004 when 6.2% of such ballots were rejected. Overall, more than eight in ten of these constituency votes were rejected because the ballot was left blank. However in the City and East constituency, where the BNP fielded its sole constituency candidate, just 69% of all rejected ballots fell into this category. Instead, in 28% of cases, the rejection was because more than one vote had been cast – a figure twice that in any other constituency. The figures for rejected list votes are similar again. Some 41,593 votes were rejected (1.7% of the total). In eight out of 10 cases this was because the ballot was blank; in almost one in five because of voting too many times. However, in City and East some 32% of rejected list ballots fell into the latter category.

Table 3 made clear the significant difference in adjusted (valid vote) turnout between the mayoral second vote and the three other types of vote. An explanation for this can be found in Table 5 which demonstrates that a very large proportion of the ballots so rejected were

because the elector had not placed any mark at all on the ballot paper. Not marking the ballot is an entirely understandable response, for example, if the voter has supported either of the two likely front runners with their first vote and rightly observes that a second vote will not count towards the final outcome. In West Central virtually all (99.6%) rejected ballots fell into this category and the lowest proportion of such cases, in Brent and Camden, was nevertheless 97.1%. By including these ballots in the calculation of turnout we virtually eliminate the observed differences. It is perhaps more pertinent to focus on the two other reasons for rejecting ballots. There was little variation across constituencies in the proportion rejected for multiple voting, but greater variability in terms of those rejected for uncertainty. For example, in Barnet and Camden these amounted to 868 ballot papers whereas in Ealing and Hillingdon just 12 ballots were so rejected. It is likely that the stance of individual returning officers can more satisfactorily account for this than can differences in the behaviour of voters.

**Table 5: Mayoral second votes and rejected ballots, 2008**

	Total rejected second votes	as % of all 2 <sup>nd</sup> votes	unmarked	% rejected as: multiple voting	uncertain
Barnet and Camden	33,287	18.7	97.1	0.3	2.6
Bexley and Bromley	31,970	15.9	99.1	0.2	0.7
Brent and Harrow	31,161	20.1	99.3	0.6	0.1
City and East	36,317	19.9	98.8	0.6	0.6
Croydon and Sutton	26,676	15.3	99.3	0.4	0.3
Ealing and Hillingdon	29,724	17.1	99.4	0.6	0.0
Enfield and Haringey	30,282	19.1	98.2	0.4	1.4
Greenwich and Lewisham	21,676	14.7	98.3	0.5	1.2
Havering and Redbridge	26,317	15.9	99.4	0.5	0.1
Lambeth and Southwark	24,949	15.2	99.0	0.3	0.7
Merton and Wandsworth	28,010	16.6	99.3	0.4	0.3
North East	30,737	15.8	99.2	0.4	0.4
South West	27,699	14.6	99.6	0.3	0.1
West Central	33,249	20.2	99.6	0.3	0.1
Total	412,054	17.0	99.0	0.4	0.6

Source: Compiled by the authors from data supplied by [www.londonelects.org.uk](http://www.londonelects.org.uk)

## Postal voting –uptake and turnout\*

\*In this section all 2008 data refer to the mayoral contest only. Not all authorities were able to provide a breakdown between the mayoral and assembly elections and, where they did, any differences were invariably very small.

London, as other areas of Great Britain, has seen a sizeable increase in the number of electors applying for and being granted a postal vote since the introduction of postal voting on demand in 2000, with the proportion almost trebling between the 2001 and 2005 general elections. At the 2008 GLA elections nearly one in eight electors (634,725 or 11.7%) had the facility to vote by post, compared with 8.4% in 2004. The ‘postal electorate’ has also increased since the last general election following the introduction of new rules on providing personal identifiers at both the application and voting stages (Table 6 -see also Appendix A2). The local authority with the highest proportion of postal electors was City of London (27.3%), followed by Hackney (19.8%) and Richmond upon Thames and Sutton (both 16.7%). The lowest proportion was in Ealing (6.5%), followed by Brent (7.0%) and Haringey (8.8%). Variations in the take up of postal votes between boroughs remain quite striking. It is likely that they are related more to mobilisation exercises conducted by parties and local authorities (together perhaps with prior experience of all-postal pilot elections) than that they have a distinct and/or consistent socio-economic dimension.

The proportion of postal electors who return their ballot papers has always exceeded the turnout among ‘in person’ voters. This year 72.0% of them did so. To an extent this can be explained by the fact that applying for a postal vote in the first place indicates a level of interest in and engagement with political events. However, especially in the case of second order elections, the convenience and flexibility of postal voting is also likely to boost participation. Table 6 shows that at both the 2004 and 2008 London elections postal electors were getting on for twice as likely to turn out as those voting in person. The local authority with the highest ‘turnout’ of postal voters was Richmond upon Thames (80.9%); that with the lowest, Newham (65.0%). This phenomenon also means that postal votes form a disproportionate number of those at the count. In 2008 nearly one in 5 of votes counted (17.8%) were cast by post. In the City of London postal votes made up more than a third of the total (37.5%) and in Hackney they comprised 30.3%; at the other end of the scale just one in 10 of the votes in Ealing (10.7%) and Brent (10.8%) were postal ballots.

**Table 6. Postal electors and votes in London, 2004-2008**

	2008 GLA	2005 General	2004 GLA
Number of postal ballot papers issued	633,659	551,242	423,488
Postal electors as % of electorate	11.7	10.9	8.4
Number returned	456,985	410,941	263,784
Postal ballots returned as % of issued	72.0	74.5	65.9
Number included 'in count'	432,336	398,843	253,467
Postal votes as % of votes counted	17.8	13.6	13.3
Rejected or otherwise not included in count	22,122	11,897	10,317
Rejected postal ballots as % of returned	4.8	2.9	3.9

Source: Compiled by the authors from data supplied by returning officers.

Some electors who try to vote by post are inevitably found to have completed the documentation incorrectly and their ballot papers never reach the count. It seemed that the proportion of such cases might increase this year following the requirement for electors to provide personal identifiers in the form of their signature and date of birth both when applying for a postal vote and when voting. The proportion of postal votes rejected or otherwise not included in the count was, at 4.8%, indeed rather higher than at previous contests, but the difference was not dramatic. Put another way, about one in 21 postal votes were disallowed compared with about one in 34 at the 2005 general election. Of perhaps more interest is the considerable variation between authorities in the proportion so rejected. Almost a sixth of postal vote returns were rejected in Redbridge (17.3%) and one in 10 in Tower Hamlets (10.1%), but only a little more than one per cent in Barnet (1.2%). Such extremes are more likely to reflect the judgement and discretion of individual returning officers than gross differences in the success of postal electors in completing their forms correctly. These issues will be dealt with in more detail in a separate report on postal vote examination processes and rejection rates covering this year's elections in England, Wales and London.

#### Postal voting –Verification

The new regulations required returning officers to verify the personal identifiers on an at least 20% sample of all postal ballot papers returned. With the single exception of Enfield, all borough returning officers claimed to have verified 100% (or very nearly) of all returns. Enfield checked just over half its returns (50.3%). More systematic analysis is made difficult by apparent inconsistencies in the ways in which the categories 'Number of postal voting statements rejected following verification -not completed' and 'Number of postal voting statements rejected following verification -personal identifier match' were reported by respondents to our data collection exercise. For what it is worth 4,416 postal returns fell into the first category and 14,046 into the second. However, in 8 out of 33 cases only one of the columns was completed, and there were several instances where the first column outscored the second. Similarly, there were inconsistencies in the data provided as additional information concerning whether it was problems with the signature, or date of birth, or both that caused the postal ballot to be rejected. These issues will be dealt with in more detail in a

separate report on postal vote examination processes and rejection rates covering this year's elections in England, Wales and London.

### Proxy votes

The liberalization of postal voting also appears to have had an impact on the number of electors appointing proxies (Table 7). Fewer than 7,500 electors (0.14% of the total) appointed a proxy to vote on their behalf, continuing a trend that dates back to the 2001 general election. Just 39 emergency proxies were issued across the whole of London.

**Table 7. Proxy voters as percentage of electorate in London 2004-8**

	2008 GLA	2005 Gen	2004 GLA	2001 Gen
% proxy voters	0.14	0.20	0.11	0.30

Source: Compiled by the authors from data supplied by returning officers.

### Conclusions

- Turnout rose by nearly 8 percentage points compared with the previous contest in 2004. This probably reflected the heightened sense of political competition across Britain as a whole and, in particular, the personalities of the two main mayoral contestants who attracted considerable media coverage and the perceived closeness of the likely outcome.
- There is evidence, also supported by opinion research for the Commission, that many voters do not understand the nuances of the Supplementary Vote system used in the mayoral election. Hundreds of thousands voted for the same candidate with both their first and second vote; others gave their second vote to a candidate who stood no chance of making it through to the 'run off'.
- There was a considerable reduction in the proportion of ballot papers rejected at the count. This probably reflects both greater familiarity with the electoral systems in use, as well as electors not being faced with voting in entirely separate contests for synchronous European Parliament and GLA elections as was the case in 2004.
- Nearly one in eight electors successfully applied for a postal vote under the new regulations, and almost three-quarters of them used it. There remain sizeable constituency/local authority variations in the take-up and use of postal votes.
- The enhanced security measures relating to postal voting appear to have had only a modest impact on the number of returns deemed invalid compared with the previous 2004 election. In 32 of 33 local authorities in London returning officers verified the personal identifiers on every (or very nearly every) postal return.

## **Appendices**

A1. Constituency level turnout and spoilt.xls. Detailed information on turnout and rejected votes for each of the four ballots –Mayor x 2; constituency; list.

A2. Borough level postal + additional data.xls. Detailed information on postal voting (Form K) plus data from additional questionnaire.