

Combined Authority Mayor (CAM) elections in England, May 2017

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The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. We work to promote public confidence in the democratic process and ensure its integrity.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. We undertake the collection and analysis of electoral data after all elections and referendums.

1.2 The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 gave UK Government Ministers powers to devolve powers and responsibilities to new combined authorities. Following devolution agreements with existing local authorities in six areas of England, the first Combined Authority Mayor (CAM) elections took place in 37 local authorities across the six combined authority areas on 4 May 2017: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City, Tees Valley, West Midlands, and West of England.

1.3 This report provides analysis on participation in and the administration of the first CAM elections in England. For this, data was collected from Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers. This comprised the Form K 'Statement as to Postal Ballot Papers' and an additional data form, specified by the Commission, which included data relating to electoral registration, turnout, absent voting and rejected ballots.¹

Electorate	6.8 million
Turnout	Ballot box: 27.8% (1.9 million votes) Postal vote: 59.0% In-person: 22.6%
Rejected ballots	Ballots at the first count: 1.3% Ballots at the second count: 8.1% ² Postal votes: 2.7%
Proxies appointed	4,993 (0.1% of the electorate) 179 emergency proxies

¹ Tameside were unable to supply the Form K Statement as to Postal Ballot Papers or additional data form. Figures relating to postal voting and fields on the additional data form exclude Tameside.

² Calculated as proportion of total possible second preference votes i.e. total number of valid first preference votes for eliminated candidates.

2 Electorate

2.1 The CAM elections gave 6.8 million registered electors the opportunity to vote.

2.2 62,580 electors were added to the electoral register during the weeks leading up to the election. As a proportion of the electorate, this was highest in West of England, where additions represented 1.2% of the electorate, and lowest in Tees Valley where additions represented 0.7% of the electorate.

2.3 A total of 72,160 applications to register were received in the weeks leading up to the election. More than a quarter (26.8%) of these were recorded as duplicates. At a local authority level, duplicates were reportedly as high as 36.4% in South Gloucestershire.³

2.4 In addition, 125,485 people tried to register after the registration deadline. This is likely to be attributable to the announcement of the general election, which came after the deadline for registration for the CAM elections.

2.5 Based on data from 29 local authorities, 347 individuals were recorded as trying to vote on election day itself despite not being registered.⁴

2.6 Votes were cast at 4,611 polling stations as well as by post.

3 Turnout

3.1 The measure of turnout referred to in this report, 'ballot box turnout', includes all valid votes cast ('valid vote turnout') and votes rejected at the count. Total turnout refers to valid votes cast, votes rejected at the count, and those rejected at the postal ballot verification stage before the count.

3.2 At 27.8%, ballot box turnout was higher than at the first elections for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in November 2012 (15.1%), and at a similar level as the second PCC elections in May 2016 (27.3%).⁵

3.3 Turnout was significantly lower than turnout at the 2017 English (35.1%) and Welsh (42.0%), and Scottish (46.9%) local elections, which were all held on the same day.

³ Three local authorities – Rochdale, Tameside, and Bath and North East Somerset – were not able to provide data on duplicate applications

⁴ Eight local authorities were not able to provide information on the number of individuals trying to vote on election day despite not being registered.

⁵ PCC elections are based on the same election rules as CAM elections. At both elections, electors voted for a newly created elected position using the Single Transferable vote. For further information please refer to our PCC election reports available at <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-data/electoral-data-new>

Table 3.1: Turnout

Combined authority	Ballots at the count	Turnout (%)
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough (C&P)	204,302	33.6%
Greater Manchester	573,543	28.9%
Liverpool City	291,449	26.1%
Tees Valley	103,767	21.3%
West Midlands	523,201	26.7%
West of England	199,519	29.7%
Total	1.9 m	27.8%

Rejected ballot papers

3.4 Combined Authority Mayors were elected with the Supplementary Vote (SV) electoral system. This, also used at elections for the Mayor of London, directly-elected mayors for local authorities in England, and for Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales, gives voters the opportunity to vote for both their first and second preference candidates, (although they do not have to cast a second preference vote).

3.5 Table 3.3 shows that first preference rejection rate at CAM elections was higher than at all 2017 elections that use the First Past the Post system (local elections in England and Wales and UK Parliamentary general election) but lower than at the Scottish councils elections which uses Single Transferrable Vote (STV)

Table 3.2: 2017 elections – Rejected ballots

Election	Voting system	Rejected ballots (%)
UK Parliamentary general election	FPTP	0.2%
English local government elections		0.3%
Welsh local government elections		0.5%
Northern Ireland Assembly election	STV	1.1%
Combined Authority Mayoral elections	SV	1.3%
Scottish council elections	STV	2.0%

3.6 Ballot paper rejection rate at the first round of the 2017 CAM elections was 1.3%, ranging from 1% in Liverpool to 1.9% in C&P. The proportion of rejected ballots at the second count was significantly higher at 8.1%. Rejection rate at the second count is calculated by dividing the number of

rejected ballots – including those not marked at second preference - by the total number of valid first preference votes cast for the eliminated candidates.

Table 3.3: Ballots rejected at the first and second counts

Combined authority	Ballots rejected at the first count	% of ballots at the count	Ballots rejected at the second count	% of ballots rejected at the second count
C&P	3,924	1.9%	7,419	9.6%
*Greater Manchester	6,808	1.2%	-	-
*Liverpool City	2,789	1.0%	-	-
Tees Valley	1,667	1.6%	2,942	13.4%
West Midlands	7,268	1.4%	7,515	8.4%
West of England	2,572	1.3%	5,437	5.5%
Total	25,028	1.3%	23,313	8.1%

**The winning candidate in Greater Manchester and Liverpool City received more than 50% of the valid first preference votes and were therefore declared elected without requiring second preference votes to be counted.*

3.7 The majority of all first preference rejections (57.5%) were due to voting for more than one first preference candidate.

3.8 At the second count, the vast majority (99.8%) were rejected due to being either unmarked or their being uncertainty as to the second preference vote.⁶

Table 3.4: Reasons for rejected ballots

Reason for rejection	First count	Second count
No official mark	0.1%	0.0%
Voting for more than one preference	57.5%	0.2%
Mark by which the voter could be identified	1.0%	31.7%
Unmarked or uncertain ⁷	41.4%	99.8%

⁶ Figures for 'unmarked' and 'void for uncertain' ballot papers were reported together by some Combined Authority Returning Officers (CAROs).

⁷ Ibid.

4 Postal voting

4.1 The total number of postal votes issued for these elections was one million, 14.9% of those with an election in their authority. This compares with 15.9% in the local elections across England.

4.2 Of the one million postal votes issued, 600,707 covering envelopes were turned making postal vote turnout 59.0%.⁸ This compares with an 'in person' turnout of 22.6%. Postal vote turnout was lower than at the England local elections where postal vote turnout was 68.7%.

Postal vote rejection

4.3 Postal voting packs (PV) require voters to provide their signature and date of birth (DOB). These identifiers are then matched against those provided at the time of application. If the signature or date of birth is missing or does not match, the postal vote is rejected and is not included at the count.

4.4 Since 2014, Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) have been required to notify electors if their postal vote has been rejected and give the reason(s) for rejection. They can also request the elector to provide an up-to-date signature.

4.5 Of the 600,707 covering envelopes returned, 2.7% were rejected.⁹ Of the postal votes rejected, almost two-thirds (59.2%) were rejected due to mismatch of signature and/or date of birth.

Table 4.1: Reasons for postal vote rejection

		C&P	Greater Manc.	Liverpo ol City	Tees Valley	West Mid.	West of Eng.	Total
Missing information	Signature	5.0%	8.8%	13.5%	5.9%	6.1%	6.4%	8.2%
	DoB	5.6%	3.5%	5.1%	3.0%	6.0%	4.2%	4.4%
	Both	9.5%	9.6%	10.5%	22.0%	12.9%	10.0%	11.0%
Mismatched information	Signature	23.5%	27.4%	16.0%	18.2%	19.9%	21.8%	22.6%
	DoB	20.9%	33.0%	26.5%	24.6%	26.6%	17.2%	27.5%
	Both	4.5%	8.5%	7.9%	15.4%	9.8%	4.9%	8.3%

⁸ There is no statutory field that captures the number of postal voting statements received by the Returning Officer. In practice, we use field B6, 'Number of covering envelopes received by the Returning Officer or at a polling station before the close of poll' as a surrogate but we know that, as mentioned, electors can return multiple postal ballots in one envelope or return envelopes without any ballots.

⁹ As figures reported for field C19 were inconsistent, we used a calculation of field B6 minus field C18 as a surrogate for the total number of postal votes rejected. This approach is consistent with previous years.

Missing forms	Ballot paper	23.9%	4.9%	6.2%	1.2%	8.4%	17.6%	9.4%
	PV statement	7.1%	4.3%	14.3%	9.7%	10.3%	17.9%	8.6%

5 Proxies and waivers

5.1 The number of electors who appointed a proxy was 4,993 (0.07% of the electorate). This is similar to the level of proxies appointed for the May 2016 PCC elections (0.08%) but lower than the equivalent at the England local elections held on the same day (0.12%). The number of emergency proxies issued was 179.

5.2 A concession granted under the terms of the EAA 2006 was that postal electors who either had a disability, or were illiterate, or were unable to furnish a consistent signature could apply for a waiver to use their date of birth as their sole identifier. 6,007 waivers were granted for this election, representing 0.6% of postal electors.

6 Appendix A

6.1 All information contained within this report and the accompanying dataset is based on data received from Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers.

6.2 There remain inconsistencies in the ways in which local authorities record and report information.

6.3 We continue to notice differences in the coding of information by different electoral management software. For example, customers of one electoral management software supplier consistently report a higher proportion of 'mismatching' than others.

6.4 Inconsistencies relating to the reasons for and total number of postal vote rejections on the Form K appear to result from the potential for differences in interpretation and treatment. For example, in the treatment of the numbers of covering envelopes and ballot papers returned, covering envelopes may be sent in without the A envelope or postal voting statement enclosed, while the missing document may or may not be sent in a separate covering envelope later, or multiple ballots may be returned in one envelope.

6.5 When local authorities are contacted about such anomalies they are often unable to provide revised figures or clarify why the data were coded in that way. In practice, we use a calculation of field B6 minus field C18 as a surrogate for the total number of postal votes rejected regardless of whether or not it is the same as recorded in field C19.

6.6 The different breakdown of reasons for rejection collected on the additional data form does not always match this B6 minus C18 calculation. However, the discrepancies seem less severe and the categories have the advantage of being embedded in software and of having greater 'common sense' meaning. It would seem sensible to consider replacing fields B15-17 on Form K with three other aggregated categories: rejections for mismatching; rejections for missing identifier information; rejections for absent documentation. As it is, field B15 is largely redundant given that almost all authorities now verify 100% of PV returns.

6.7 There is no field that captures the number of postal voting statements received by the Returning Officer or at a polling station before the close of poll. In practice, we use field B6, 'Number of covering envelopes received by the Returning Officer or at a polling station before the close of poll' as a surrogate but we know that, as mentioned, electors can return multiple postal ballots in one envelope or return envelopes without any ballots.

7 Appendix B

Form K: STATEMENT AS TO POSTAL BALLOT PAPERS
REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACTS
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION
Ward:
Date of Poll:
A. Issue of postal ballot papers
1. Total number of postal ballot papers issued under regulation 71
2. Total number of postal ballot papers issued under regulation 77 (spoilt and returned for cancellation), regulation 78 (lost or not received) and regulation 78A (cancelled due to change of address)
3. Total number of postal ballot papers cancelled under regulation 86A (where the first ballot paper was cancelled and retrieved)
4. Total number of postal ballot papers issued (1 to 3)
5. Total number of ballot papers cancelled under regulation 78A
B (1). Receipt of and replacement postal ballot papers
6. Number of covering envelopes received by the Returning Officer or at a polling station before the close of poll (excluding any undelivered or returned under regulation 77(1) (spoilt), regulation 78(1) (lost) and regulation 86A (cancelled ballot papers))
7. Number of covering envelopes received by the returning officer after the close of poll, excluding any returned as undelivered
8. Number of postal ballot papers returned spoilt for cancellation in time for another ballot paper to be issued

9. Number of postal ballot papers identified as lost or not received in time for another ballot paper to be issued
10. Number of ballot papers cancelled and retrieved in time for another ballot paper to be issued
11. Number of postal ballot papers returned as spoilt too late for another ballot paper to be issued
12. Number of covering envelopes returned as undelivered (up to the 25th day after the date of poll)
13. Number of covering envelopes not received by the Returning Officer (by the 25th day after the date of poll)
14. Total numbers 6 to 13 (this should be the same as that in 4 above)
B (2). Receipt of postal ballot papers – Personal Identifiers
15. Number of covering envelopes set aside for the verification of personal identifiers on postal voting statements
16. Number of postal voting statements subject to verification procedure rejected as not completed (excluding prior cancellations)
17. Number of postal voting statements rejected following verification procedures due to the personal identifiers on the postal voting statement not matching those in the personal identifiers record (excluding prior cancellations)
C. Count of postal ballot papers
18. Number of ballot papers returned by postal voters which were included in the count of ballot papers
19. Number of cases in which a covering envelope or its contents were marked “Rejected” (cancellations under regulations 77, 78, 78A and 86A are not rejections and should be included in items 2, 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 above)
Date:
Signed: Returning Officer
Authority:

Additional data form
1) How many proxies were appointed for these elections?
2) How many emergency proxies were appointed for these elections?
3) How many waivers were granted for these elections?
4) How many postal votes were rejected for:
a) Want of a signature
b) Want of a date of birth
c) Want of both
d) Mismatched signature
e) Mismatched DoB
f) Both mismatched
g) Ballot paper unreturned

h) Postal voting statement unreturned
5) What was the total number of polling stations used?
6) How many covering envelopes were returned on polling day before 10pm?
7) How many covering envelopes were returned on the day after polling day before 10pm?
8) Total number of new electors added to the register after the publication of the revised register (01.12.16) up to and including those added via the first interim notice of alteration (04.04.17)
9) Total number of new electors added to the register via the second and final notices of alteration (26.04.17).
10) Total number of applications to register received after the registration deadline.
11) Total number of applications received between the last date for applications to be included on the December 2016 revised register (22.11.16) and the last date for applications for the first interim notice of alteration (24.03.17)
12) Total number of duplicate applications received between the last date for applications to be included on the December 2016 revised register (22.11.16) and the registration deadline for the first interim notice of alteration (24.03.17)
13) Total number of applications received between the day after the last date for applications for the first interim notice of alteration (25.03.17) and last date for applications for the final notice of alteration (13.04.17)
14) Total number of duplicate applications received between the day after the last date for applications for the first notice of alteration (25.03.17) and last date for applications for the final notice of alteration (13.04.17)
15) How many people tried to vote on polling day and were found not to be registered?