

# The 2017 local government elections in Wales

Report on the administration of the elections held  
on 4 May 2017

**September 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.

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# Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to be able to present the first election report in my capacity as Electoral Commissioner for Wales.

On Thursday 4 May, 2017 we saw elections taking place across all of Wales' 22 local authority areas. This report is our account of the administration of those elections – the Commission is producing a separate report on the UK Parliamentary election which took place on 8 June 2017.

I'm pleased to say that the evidence from our analysis and research with voters and campaigners shows high levels of satisfaction and confidence in the way in which these elections were run across the country.

The registered electorate for these elections was 2.28 million with turnout being 42%, higher than the 38.9% who cast their vote at the last set of local government elections.

We are very grateful to all those involved in the planning and management of these elections. These include Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers, Electoral Services Managers and all of their staff. The challenge in managing these elections was significant, and this intensified on the 18 April when the Prime Minister announced that there would be a UK Parliamentary general election taking place on 8 June. The fact these local government elections were successfully held without any significant problems reflects the hard work undertaken by all those involved and we are grateful for their input.

We are also grateful to the newly established Wales Electoral Coordination Board for its work in helping to coordinate and manage this election. We believe that this group, formally established at the beginning of 2017 and led by senior Returning Officers in Wales, is critical in the future management of effective electoral events in Wales and we look forward to seeing how this group can improve working practices as well as continue to develop itself as the point of expertise for electoral management in Wales.

We do make recommendations in the report which are specific to future electoral events in Wales including:

- The development of the Wales Electoral Coordination Board
- Ensuring that the Welsh language is properly considered by law-makers and that all necessary resources and material are produced bilingually in a timely manner
- The compilation of national turnout data for the local elections in 2022

As well as considering these Wales-specific changes, we also want to see progress towards implementing more significant reform in two areas:

- Improving electoral registration, to make sure the process is more joined-up and integrated with other public services and better reflects the citizen's expectation.
- Modernising and streamlining electoral law, in line with the UK's Law Commissions' 2016 recommendations.

The Wales Act 2017 provides Welsh Government with legislative competence for future National Assembly for Wales and local government elections. On 18 July 2017, Welsh Government published its consultation document on electoral reform in local government in Wales, which outlined a number of modernisation proposals for future elections. We look forward to contributing to this work and working with Welsh Government in future to improve the electoral process for administrators, campaigners and voters taking part in these critical elections.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elan Closs Stephens". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Professor Elan Closs Stephens CBE**  
**Electoral Commissioner, Wales**

# Summary

On 4 May 2017, elections were held across all 22 local authority areas in Wales. The Electoral Commission, in its statutory capacity of over-seeing and reporting on elections, has written this report to highlight key findings on how the elections were run, and to bring forward recommendations to government(s) and electoral administrators for future elections.

As with previous election reports in Wales, we have taken into account the views of key partners, including Returning Officers (ROs) and their staff, political parties, candidates and agents, and voters.

## Key findings

A total of 2.28 million people were registered to vote in the May 2017 local elections in Wales, a small decrease from the previous local government elections in 2012 and 2013.

A total of 895,943 votes were cast, representing a turnout of 42.0% of the eligible electorate, a slight increase in turnout compared with the elections in 2012 and 2013. Turnout ranged from 36.3% in Newport to 53.0% in Ceredigion.

The 2017 local government elections were well run. However election rules remain complex and outdated. The need for change is underlined by Electoral Commission recommendations in this report, as in our previous reports. The UK's Law Commissions have also made recommendations to simplify and reform electoral law. Most recently the Welsh Government has published a White Paper suggesting reforms that are required to improve elections in Wales.

Our public opinion research with voters found that 82% of respondents were generally satisfied with the procedures for voting, up slightly from 80% in 2012. The research also showed that:

- 95% thought that the ballot paper was easy to complete
- 96% of polling station voters were satisfied with the process of voting at a polling station.
- 100% of postal voters were satisfied with their experience
- 89% were satisfied with the electoral registration system, up from 84% in 2012. 18 to 34 year olds were the most satisfied group (95%).
- 81% were confident that the polls held on 4 May were well run, up from 77% in 2012

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** The Welsh Government should continue to participate in the Wales Electoral Coordination Board. It should also consider how the role of the Board could be developed in the medium to long term to support Welsh Government's overarching electoral modernisation programme. This might include, for example, considering if the Board should become a statutory group, as is the case in Scotland.

**Recommendation 2:** We recommend that the Welsh Government and The National Assembly for Wales Commission should implement the Law Commissions' recommendations, in so far as they apply to Welsh local government elections, and National Assembly for Wales's elections, when law-making powers for these elections are devolved in 2018.

**Recommendation 3:** We recommend that the Welsh Language Legislation Advisory Group undertake a review of relevant legislation, to ensure ballot papers and any necessary accompanying materials are scrutinised and any improvements identified. This review should be completed in time to enable the Welsh Government and Assembly Commission to make any legislative amendments to deliver these improvements, and ensure they are in place at least six months ahead of the next scheduled elections.

**Recommendation 4:** We want to work with the UK's governments, including the Welsh Government, to consider how to incorporate more automatic checks into the online application service, for example to highlight if an applicant is already registered or has recently submitted an application.

**Recommendation 5:** We recommend that the Welsh Language Legislation Advisory Group and other related partners work to create resources to encourage the continued development of bilingual elections in Wales.

**Recommendation 6:** We recommend that the Wales Electoral Coordination Board consider how turnout data should be properly collected and published at the 2022 local government elections.

**Recommendation 7:** We continue to recommend that governments should amend the law to enable candidates to use any of their given names, such as their middle name, as a commonly used name, not limiting commonly used names to only those which are different from any given forename or surname.

# 1 The 2017 local government elections in Wales

1.1 On 4 May 2017, elections were held across all 22 local authority areas in Wales.

1.2 Local elections in Wales are normally held on a four year cycle. However, to avoid combination with the National Assembly for Wales's elections in May 2016, the Welsh Government published The Local Authority Elections (Wales) Order in 2014, postponing the local elections by a year, and moving them to May 2017.

1.3 The May 2017 elections were conducted using the first-past-the-post electoral system. Some wards are 'single-member' wards where the candidate with the most votes is elected. There are also 'multi-member' wards, where voters can mark their ballot paper for as many candidates as there are vacancies. The candidates receiving the most votes are elected.

1.4 In wards where there are not enough candidates validly nominated to trigger an election, the candidates who have been nominated are automatically elected without the need for a vote. Across Wales in 2017, a total of 92 candidates were elected unopposed. This meant that voters in those wards did not have an opportunity to vote. This equates to 7% of the total number of seats available in Wales, which is a higher proportion of uncontested seats than at the latest local government elections in England and Scotland.

1.5 On 18 April 2017, the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon Theresa May MP, announced plans to call a snap UK Parliamentary general election to take place in June. After a debate in the House of Commons on 19 April, MPs passed a motion in favour of the election which would take place on 8 June. This announcement was made just 16 days before polling day for the local elections in Wales. This had a significant impact on the local elections due to the overlapping of administrative processes, which was reported to us by administrators and ROs.

## 2 Registration and turnout

2.1 A total of 2.28 million people were registered to vote in the May 2017 local elections in Wales, a small decrease from the previous local government elections in 2012 and 2013<sup>1</sup>, when 2.31 million people were registered.

2.2 Turnout at the 2017 local government elections in Wales was 42%, which is slightly higher than the 39% at the 2012/ 2013 local government elections, but similar to turnout at the 2008 and 2004 elections. The measure of turnout referred to in this report includes all valid votes cast plus those which were rejected at the count.

2.3 Turnout ranged from 36.3% in Newport, to 53.0% in Ceredigion, and increased in all but two local authority areas compared to the 2012/ 2013 local elections.

**Table 1: Turnout in local elections in Wales 2004-2017**

	<b>2017</b>	<b>2012/ 2013</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>Registered electorate</b>	2.28 million	2.31 million	2.11 million	2 million
<b>Turnout</b>	42.0%	38.9%	44.0%	42%

Note: 2012 figures have been adjusted to include the Anglesey local elections which were deferred until 2013.

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<sup>1</sup> In May 2012 there were local elections in 21 of the 22 unitary local authorities in Wales. On the Isle of Anglesey, the elections were deferred until May 2013.

## 3 Planning

3.1 In our statutory report on the National Assembly for Wales election in 2016, we recommended that a permanent Wales Delivery Group should be set up to improve and streamline planning further for future electoral events, and to provide opportunities for discussing key areas of common concern.

3.2 The group, now known as the Wales Electoral Coordination Board (WECB), met for the first time in February 2017 to begin its work ahead of the local government elections. The membership includes Regional Returning Officers, Welsh Government, the National Assembly for Wales, officials from the Cabinet Office and Wales Office, the Association of Electoral Administrators (Wales), and the Electoral Commission.

3.3 In preparation for these elections, the Board discussed various issues including project planning, risk management, nominations, timing of the count, public awareness and partnerships, electoral integrity, and dealing with complaints.

3.4 While the Board is not a statutory group, it has an important role to play in bringing together the various stakeholders, and offering coordinated and coherent views on electoral matters in Wales. We believe that the development of this group is vitally important to ensuring consistency in electoral management across the country, in a similar way to the operation of the Electoral Management Board in Scotland.

3.5 This is especially important at the current time; in the light of the electoral proposals put forward by the Welsh Government in its White Paper earlier this year, and the more recent consultation document, [Electoral Reform in Local Government in Wales](#). The Assembly Commission have also appointed an Expert Panel on Electoral Reform who will report their findings in the autumn.

### **Recommendation 1: The Wales Electoral Coordination Board**

The Welsh Government should continue to participate in the Wales Electoral Coordination Board. It should also consider how the role of the Board could be developed in the medium to long term to support Welsh Government's overarching electoral modernisation programme. This might include, for example, considering if the Board should become a statutory group, as is the case in Scotland.

## 4 Legislation and the ballot paper

4.1 The law for conducting local government elections in Wales is set out in a large number of separate pieces of legislation, some of which date back to the nineteenth century or earlier, and is no longer fit for purpose. The complexity of the legislation can make managing an election difficult for Returning Officers (ROs) and their staff, and participating in an election challenging for parties, candidates and their agents.

4.2 In 2016, the UK's Law Commissions set out recommendations for consolidating, simplifying, updating and improving electoral legislation.<sup>2</sup> Implementing these changes would make it much easier for ROs and their staff to administer elections, reducing the risk of errors and resulting in a better experience of elections for voters and those standing for election.

4.3 Welsh Government is currently consulting on changes to the law on local government elections in Wales, and The National Assembly for Wales Commission has established an Expert Panel to look into the law governing National Assembly for Wales's elections. Given the possibility of future combined elections, any new rules that are produced should be as compatible as possible, and consideration should be given to consolidating them.

### **Recommendation 2: Welsh Government and the Assembly Commission to implement Law Commission recommendations**

We recommend that the Welsh Government and The National Assembly for Wales Commission should implement the Law Commissions' recommendations, in so far as they apply to Welsh local government elections and National Assembly for Wales elections, when law-making powers for these elections are devolved in 2018.

4.4 The existing law makes it particularly difficult for ROs and their staff to produce bilingual ballot papers. In order to assist administrators, we prepared a guidance note which included a template bilingual ballot paper. However, it became clear, when developing this template, that a Welsh translation for the heading on the ballot paper had not been included in the relevant pieces of legislation.

4.5 We brought this to the attention of Cabinet Office officials, who drafted and laid The Local Elections (Principal Areas) (Welsh Forms) (Amendment) Order 2017, which included the relevant translations.

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<sup>2</sup> The Law Commissions' report can be downloaded from their website here: <http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/electoral-law/>

4.6 The lack of templates for poll cards, notices, postal voting packs and ballot papers, was raised as an issue in the feedback we received from members of the Wales Electoral Practitioners Working Group. Early provision of templates would reduce duplication of work, errors, and inconsistency between authorities, and is something that we believe the Wales Electoral Practitioners Working Group and the Welsh Language Legislation Advisory Group should work on together.

4.7 Our public opinion research showed that 95% of respondents, who had voted on 4 May, said that they had found it easy to complete their ballot paper.

## Welsh Language Legislation Advisory Group

4.8 Following our report on the National Assembly for Wales's elections in 2016, a Welsh Language Legislation Advisory Group (WLLAG) was set up. The role of the group is to scrutinise current Welsh language electoral legislation, note any discrepancies, and offer corrections and improvements to ensure Welsh documentation is of a similarly high standard to English documentation, for voters in Wales.

4.9 The group's first act was to respond to the Cabinet Office on the Amendment Orders for the ballot papers for the May elections, mentioned above. The group agreed that the Welsh wording accurately reflected the English wording, but also raised other issues in their response:

- That the wording which refers to parish councils could be misleading to some ROs. The group wanted consideration given to not including 'parish council' on forms relating to elections in Wales, and to amend the use of the word "councillors / cynghorwyr", to reflect accurately the position in single member wards, a point which had been raised previously by ROs and the Commission<sup>3</sup>.
- That all relevant legislation should be in place at least six months before polling day so that ROs can properly prepare for the upcoming election, in keeping with the Commission's previous recommendations.

4.10 This group, which has not existed in the past, has created a forum to ensure that Welsh language legislation matters are discussed in a coherent manner. It has also ensured that a consistent response is given to consultations on Welsh language forms Orders and other such legislation.

4.11 The group aims to look next at voter-facing materials contained in electoral legislation for National Assembly for Wales's elections. The group

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<sup>3</sup> The issue around the use of councillors/cynghorwyr in single member wards is that there is no provision to use councillor/cynghorydd on the ballot paper, thus making it potentially confusing when voters are instructed to vote for no more than one candidate.

will outline a broader programme of work, which they will share with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, before going ahead.

**Recommendation 3: Reviewing legislation for ballot papers and voter materials**

We recommend that the Welsh Language Legislation Advisory Group undertake a review of relevant legislation, to ensure ballot papers and any necessary accompanying materials are scrutinised and any improvements identified. This review should be completed in time to enable the Welsh Government and Assembly Commission to make any legislative amendments to deliver these improvements, and ensure they are in place at least six months ahead of the next scheduled elections.

# 5 Our public awareness campaign

5.1 We ran a campaign encouraging people to go online to register to vote by the 13 April deadline. Our aim was to reach both a general audience and under-registered groups, including students, home movers, 18-34 year olds and private renters.

5.2 The campaign used TV, radio and online advertising as well as partnership and public relations activities.

5.3 Between 20 March when our campaign started, and the registration deadline on 13 April, there were 25,000 additions to the electoral registers in Wales.

5.4 Awareness of our campaign was high, with 76% of people polled afterwards saying they recognised at least one element of it, exceeding our 75% target.

## Partnership work

5.5 Working in partnership with other organisations can be a powerful way to help raise awareness about electoral registration. This is particularly important when reaching those people who are least likely to be registered to vote.

5.6 Building on our successful partnership work from previous electoral events, we worked with existing partners and sought out new opportunities to promote our voter registration message.

5.7 We worked with the social media platforms Facebook and Nextdoor to ensure that a reminder to register to vote appeared in the newsfeed of users in Wales.

5.8 We produced and shared resources for partner organisations, including images and copy for social media, as well as poster templates and content for websites and newsletters.

5.9 We also worked with specific partners to produce joint resources. This included RNIB Cymru, with whom we worked to produce a [factsheet](#) detailing the help available to voters with sight loss, such as tactile voting devices in polling stations.

“RNIB Cymru is pleased to support the work being done by the Electoral Commission, to make voting as accessible to all voters as possible. We have worked with them a lot over the course of the elections between 2015 and 2017, and are pleased to be able to raise awareness of the accessibility features all blind and partially sighted people should be able to access from registering to vote, to casting their vote in secret at the ballot box.”

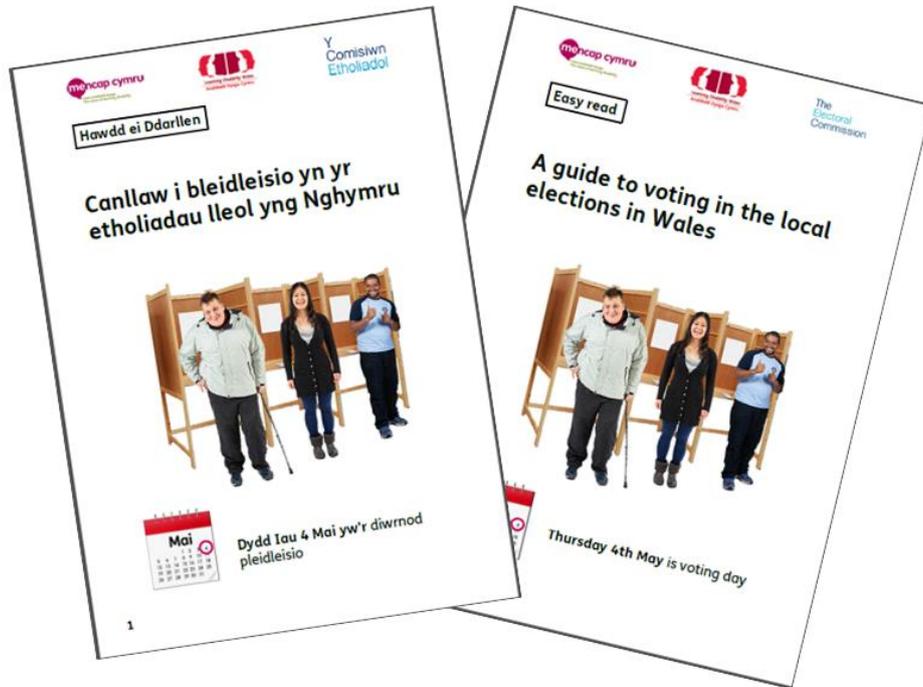
Emma Sands, RNIB Cymru



5.10 We produced an Easy Read [guide to voting](#) for voters with learning disabilities, working with Mencap Cymru and Learning Disability Wales.

“We were delighted to work with the Electoral Commission to create resources, designed to support people with a learning disability to understand and participate in the election. High quality and accessible information about elections and politics is crucial to ensuring that people with a learning disability are able to engage fully in the democratic process.”

Glenn Page, Mencap Cymru



5.11 We also worked with homelessness organisations, The Wallich and Cymorth Cymru, to tell people with no fixed address how they could take part in the elections.



“It was great to work with the Electoral Commission again during the local elections. Together we produced in depth factsheets and posters providing information to those who are homeless or have no fixed address. We promoted these materials in our projects and with partner agencies, encouraging our clients to register to vote.

Most of the clients we spoke to had assumed that because of their housing situation they couldn't vote, and were pleased to learn that this was not the case.

Our clients know first-hand the importance of how local decisions affect those experiencing homelessness, and wanted to have their say on future policy in their area. The right to vote is fundamental, and making sure everyone know their rights is crucial.”

Mia Rees, Public Affairs and Research Manager at The Wallich

# 6 The administration of the poll

## The electoral register

6.1 The [online registration system](#) has significantly improved access to elections in Great Britain since it was introduced in June 2014. Our public opinion research in Wales found that satisfaction with the registration process increased from 84% in 2012, to 89% in 2017. Those aged 18-34 were the most satisfied with the system (95%).

6.2 The deadline for applications to register to vote in the local elections was midnight on Thursday 13 April, and 27,903 applications were submitted from 20 March until the deadline. In addition to processing the late surge in registration applications, elections staff also needed to process postal vote applications made before 5pm on Tuesday 18 April, and proxy vote applications made before 5pm on Tuesday 25 April.

6.3 Electoral administrators reported that a significant number of the applications were duplicate applications, where voters had submitted new registrations, not realising that they were already registered to vote. This added substantial pressure during an already very busy period for elections staff.

6.4 We have previously recommended that an online 'look up' facility should be provided on a UK-wide basis for electors to check whether they are already registered, and we are keen to explore options for enhancing the existing online registration service. It may be possible, for example, for the online service to notify applicants if they have recently submitted an online application before they complete a further application, to tackle the cause of the problem at source.

6.5 In 2016, the UK's Law Commissions also recommended that Electoral Registration Officers' (EROs') systems for managing registration data should be capable of being exported to, and interacting with, other EROs' software, which would pave the way for voters to be able to check whether they are already registered.<sup>4</sup>

6.6 In its July report on [electoral registration at the 2017 UK Parliamentary general election](#), the Electoral Commission has already noted that the UK's governments need to work together to consider how existing systems could be improved to address the administrative impact of duplicate applications on

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<sup>4</sup> Recommendation 4-13 of the Law Commission's interim report (available here: <http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/electoral-law/>).

EROs and their teams, as well as to help detect potential electoral fraud such as double voting..

#### **Recommendation 4: Reducing the number and impact of duplicate applications**

We want to work with the UK's governments, including the Welsh Government, to consider how to incorporate more automatic checks into the online application service, for example to highlight if an applicant is already registered or has recently submitted an application.

## Absent voting

6.7 Absent voting remains popular with 100% of postal voters in Wales saying they were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with their experience. 87% said they found it easy to understand what to do in order to complete and return their postal vote, and 82% said that they had found the guidance provided on how to vote and return their vote useful.

6.8 The total number of electors registered for a postal vote in areas where there were contested elections was 387,909, representing 18.2% of the electorate, up from 17.4% in 2012.

6.9 Turnout amongst postal voters was 69.7%, with 270,024 postal votes returned. This compares to a turnout of 36.3% for those voting at polling stations. Postal votes accounted for 29.2% of all votes included at the count.

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

6.11 The total number of postal votes rejected by Returning Officers was 8,695. This represents a rejection rate of 3.2%, down from 4.4% in 2012.

6.12 Since 2014, Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) have been required to notify electors if their postal vote has been rejected. They can also request the elector to provide an up-to-date signature. The fall in the levels of rejected postal votes suggests that the new policy may be having a positive impact.

## Performance standards

6.13 We set, monitor and report on performance standards for ROs across Great Britain. Our performance standards framework is designed to support ROs in delivering a consistently high-quality service for voters and those standing for election. The framework reflects what we and the Elections Coordination Advisory Board (ECAB) agree ROs need to do to prepare for, and deliver, well-run elections. The RO performance standards framework does not relate to the work of EROs, which is covered by a separate framework.

6.14 Ahead of the May elections, we selected a risk-based sample of eight ROs for detailed monitoring, taking into account factors such as the experience of the RO and any previous issues. We spoke to each of the authorities in the risk sample to discuss their plans, and to assure ourselves that the arrangements in place for the poll were satisfactory. We also collected management information from all 22 local authorities.

6.15 We continued to monitor all authorities until polling day, and were satisfied that all authorities had adequate plans in place for delivering the election. We provided support as necessary to ROs who experienced issues in the election period.

6.16 In the run up to polling day we became aware of a procedural issue in Gwynedd, where the ballot papers for North Dolgellau had been issued incorrectly to voters in South Dolgellau. The RO quickly corrected this issue, and the correct ballot paper was sent out to the voters in the South Dolgellau ward. The result of the election was not affected. We considered the detail of the issue and the RO's response and our final assessment was that Gwynedd had met the performance standards. We will be reporting separately on the performance of ROs in Great Britain at the May and June elections in October.

## Polling day and the count

6.17 No significant issues were raised on polling day, and any minor problems brought to our attention on the day were dealt with effectively by ROs and their staff. Similarly, we are not aware of any significant issues relating to the verification and counting of the votes at these elections.

6.18 Since 2016, we have provided bilingual scripts for ROs to use in all elections in Wales. The scripts for this election were well received and were praised by the Welsh Language Legislation Advisory Group, and by the Wales Electoral Coordination Board. Working with the Welsh Language Legislation Advisory Group, we will continue to make this resource available, and look to develop it and the use of the Welsh language at elections, wherever relevant and appropriate.

### **Recommendation 5: Resources to encourage bilingual elections in Wales**

We recommend that the Welsh Language Legislation Advisory Group and other related partners work to create resources which will encourage the continued development of bilingual elections in Wales.

6.19 One issue raised on numerous occasions related to the publication of details of the results and turnout.

6.20 The results of elections are usually made available at the count venue and then published on the relevant local authority's website. Following the 2017 elections, however, there were some instances of authorities not

publishing turnout data, making it difficult for the media, academics and voters to calculate a national turnout figure for Wales.

6.21 The availability of turnout figures was discussed at the post-election meeting of the Wales Electoral Coordination Board, where it was agreed that the group would look at ways of improving the collation and publication of data for the next elections in 2022. Having rapid and reliable data about turnout and results is a legitimate demand of the electorate, media and politicians, and we believe further efforts should be made to achieve this objective at the next set of elections.

**Recommendation 6: Collating turnout data for future elections**

We recommend that the Wales Electoral Coordination Board considers how turnout data should be properly collected and published at the 2022 local government elections.

# 7 Candidates and campaigners

7.1 Of the 1,254 seats available at the May elections, 1,161 were contested, with 92 candidates returned unopposed. Elections were postponed in two wards due to the death of candidates, and one seat in Powys had no candidates standing for election.

7.2 The elections in the two wards that were postponed, one in Merthyr and the other in Ceredigion, were held on 8 June 2017. The election in Powys was held on 22 June 2017.

7.3 Table 2 below shows the number of councillors elected in 2017 by party, and the number of seats that changed hands since the previous local government elections. The figures include the results of the two postponed elections that took place on 8 June 2017, and the election in Powys on 22 June 2017.

**Table 2:**

<b>Party</b>	<b>2012/ 2013</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Change (+/-)</b>
Welsh Labour	579	473	-106
Welsh Conservatives	105	185	+80
Plaid Cymru	170	203	+33
Welsh Liberal Democrats	73	62	-11
Green	0	1	+1
Independent	308	323	+15
Other	19	7	-12

## Candidate and agent briefing sessions

7.4 We took a proactive approach in raising awareness about the rules for candidates and agents, political parties and non-party campaigners. This included circulating our guidance to political parties, attending party conferences, and providing guidance to non-party campaigners.

7.5 A number of ROs invited us to their pre-election briefing sessions, which provided an opportunity to speak to candidates and agents regarding campaigning and post-poll reporting. The Commission also arranged four separate briefing sessions for independent candidates across Wales.

7.6 Positive feedback was received from all sessions. Our over the phone advice service during the regulated period was available to all candidates and agents, as well as political parties and campaigners. These activities aimed to ensure a high level of compliance to the rules.

## Candidates' home addresses

7.7 A number of candidates contacted the Commission during the election period to express their concern that their home address would be included on the ballot paper for the upcoming elections. Many felt that this posed a significant risk to their personal safety.

7.8 For local government elections, there is a requirement that the nomination form should include the candidate's full home address, which then appears on the statement of persons nominated and the ballot paper. For UK Parliamentary general elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections, candidates must provide their home address on their nomination papers, but can request that it does not appear on the statement of persons nominated or ballot paper, which instead states the constituency where the address is situated.

7.9 The safety of candidates is of course important, but so is transparency of information for voters, many of whom wish to know where their candidates live. The issue is how to balance these two principles.

7.10 In its recent consultation paper on electoral reform, the Welsh Government has suggested that it should no longer be necessary to publish a candidate's home address in election literature. The Commission supports the Welsh Government's decision to explore this requirement, and we will respond to the consultation in due course.

## Candidate nominations

7.11 As at previous elections, questions were raised regarding the use of a commonly used name on the nomination forms, the statement of persons nominated, and on the ballot paper.

7.12 The law provides that if a candidate commonly uses a name that is different from any of their actual names, they can ask for their commonly used name(s) to appear on the ballot paper.

7.13 It is our view that candidates should be able to use any name that they are commonly known by, providing that the name is neither confusing nor offensive to the electorate. A candidate known only by their first name should not have to use their middle name on the ballot paper, and likewise candidates known by their middle name should not be obligated to include their first forename on the ballot paper.

### **Recommendation 7: The use of commonly used names**

We continue to recommend that governments should amend the law, to enable candidates to use any of their given names, such as their middle name, as a commonly used name, not limiting commonly used names to only those which are different from any given forename or surname.

## Monitoring and compliance

7.14 We monitored campaigning by candidates, political parties and non-party campaigners across Wales for the May 2017 elections. The purpose of this work was to promote compliance by gathering information on campaigns, and taking action if necessary.

### Campaign issues

7.15 In the run up to the election, we identified a number of compliance issues, including the incorrect use of imprints on campaign material.

7.16 We also received many questions regarding social media and online campaigning. Although we provide guidance to candidates and campaigners, these areas fall outside of our remit.

7.17 Rules surrounding the use of imprints and campaigning by candidates are covered under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA), and any complaints in these areas need to be directed to the police. We have previously made recommendations in our election reports<sup>5</sup> regarding a change to the legislative framework on these issues, and we will continue to work towards such changes being made ahead of future elections.

7.18 The Law Commissions' recommendations to modernise electoral law include the extension of imprint requirements to online material<sup>6</sup>.

### Candidate spending returns

7.19 After the election, candidates and agents are required to submit a completed spending return, along with invoices or receipts for spending incurred. Candidate returns are made to the RO, and are available for public inspection upon request.

7.20 Principal area candidates must submit their returns no later than 35 days after the election result has been declared. Community council candidates must submit their returns no later than 28 days after the election result has been declared.

7.21 A number of local authorities have reported that not all candidates at the local government elections in May 2017 submitted their returns and declarations by the deadlines. As set out in s.85 (2) of the RPA<sup>7</sup>, if a candidate has been elected but has not submitted their return or declaration by the deadline, they are barred from sitting or voting, and can be subject to a forfeit or fine of £50 per day if they do so.

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<sup>5</sup> Election reports (available here: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/election-reports>)

<sup>6</sup> Recommendation 11-6 of the Law Commissions' interim report (available here: <http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/electoral-law/>).

<sup>7</sup> S.85 RPA 1983 (available here: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1983/2/section/85>)

7.22 We will look at ways to strengthen our guidance to ensure that the rules set out under s.85 (2) of the RPA are made clear to all successful candidates. The Law Commissions have made several recommendations that would significantly simplify the law in this area, making it easier for candidates and agents to know what is required<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Chapter 12 of the Law Commissions' interim report (available here: <http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/electoral-law/>).

# 8 Electoral integrity

8.1 In February 2017 we held an Integrity seminar bringing together the dedicated SPOCs (Single Points of Contact) within each police force area, who act as the key contacts for all electoral integrity matters.

8.2 We also held a briefing session with the new North Wales Police Force SPOC lead, and a wash-up session with all force leads in Wales. SPOCs from Wales also attended a UK wide training seminar, held in Birmingham on 3 February 2017, which was jointly organised by the Electoral Commission and ACPO.

8.3 These seminars provided opportunities to share guidance, advice and good practice on preventing and dealing with malpractice ahead of the elections.

8.4 The majority of voters in Wales continue to believe that voting is safe from fraud and abuse, with 75% of respondents in our public opinion research stating that voting in general is safe, down from 79% who believed this to be the case in 2012.

# 9 Conclusions and next steps

9.1 Returning Officers and electoral administrators worked hard to deliver the 2017 local government elections in Wales, and evidence from our analysis and research with voters and campaigners show that there were high levels of satisfaction. Nevertheless, we have highlighted in this report continuing challenges to the successful delivery and regulation of elections, as we have done at previous elections in Wales and elsewhere in the UK.

9.2 Given the electoral modernisation proposals currently being consulted on by the Welsh Government and the Assembly Commission, it is important that both bodies continue to play an important role in the development of the Wales Electoral Coordination Board, to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to electoral management and voter participation across Wales.

9.3 As well as considering changes which we have recommended in this report, we also want to see progress in Wales towards implementing more significant reform in two key areas:

- Improving electoral registration, to make sure the process is more joined-up and integrated with other public services, and better reflects citizen's expectations
- Modernising and streamlining electoral law, in line with the UK's Law Commissions' 2016 recommendations

9.4 The Wales Act 2017 gave the Welsh Government and the Assembly Commission, policy and legislative responsibility for the administration of future local government elections, as well as those for the National Assembly for Wales. There are now opportunities for the Welsh Government and Assembly Commission to develop an ambitious agenda for change. We look forward to contributing to the current consultation on local government elections, which we hope will identify more significant reform of election procedures to help make sure they continue to meet citizens' expectations.

# Appendix A: Research methodology

## Electoral Data

The Electoral Commission collected and collated data from Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers across Wales. This comprised the Statement on Absent Voters and an additional data form, which included data relating to electoral registration, turnout, absent voting and rejected ballots.

## Public opinion survey

Between Friday 5 May and Monday 5 June 2017, ICM interviewed a sample of 451 adults aged 18+ across Wales. Data was weighted to match the profile of the population.

This survey was carried out by telephone using a random digit dialling methodology and demographic quotas. This means that telephone numbers were randomly selected for interview. 85% of the sample was made up of landline numbers, and 15% was mobile.

More information on our public opinion research can be found on [our website](#).

## Public awareness campaign tracking research

Fieldwork was conducted by ICM, who interviewed a total of 2,435 people across Wales as part of campaign tracking research:

- A **'pre-wave'** which fielded between 15 February and 7 March, before the launch of our public awareness activity. [N=1,209]
- A **'post registration wave'** which fielded after the register to vote deadline on 17 April and before polling day and was designed to measure the impact of our registration campaign. [N=1,226]

All interviews were conducted online. We oversampled the key target audiences of the campaign to ensure we could confidently assess the performance of our content among these groups. These audiences were: 18-34s, recent home movers, private renters, students and Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. All overall figures reported are weighted to nationally representative quotas.

More information on our public awareness activity can be found on [our website](#).