

Local and Police and Crime Commissioner Elections

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Summary – local elections

- Local elections were held for over 2,700 seats in 124 authorities in England – 35 metropolitan boroughs, 19 unitary authorities and 70 district councils. Mayoral elections were held in three local authorities outside London.
- More than 10,000 candidates contested the local elections, yielding a candidate/seat ratio of 3.9 overall.
- Of the nearly 2,200 wards with elections, candidates were returned unopposed in just two.
- The 2016 local elections gave nearly 15.72 million registered electors the opportunity to vote at a contested election – about 40% of the total local government electorate in England.
- The names of some 3.0% of those on the ‘final’ register were added between December 2015 and 13 March 2016, and a further 1.6% between 13 March and the deadline of 16 April.
- Some 5.3 million local election votes were counted in the ballot box, making the overall turnout 33.8%.
- The proportion of local ballots rejected at the official count was 0.62 per cent – a figure in line with previous local elections.
- Over 2.66 million postal votes were issued -17.0% of all those with a contested election in their ward. In eight council areas more than 25% of the electorate had a postal vote; in another seven fewer than 10% did so.
- More than two thirds (67.9%) of those with a postal ballot returned it. In contrast turnout among those required to vote ‘in person’ was 27.5%.
- The proportion of postal votes rejected or otherwise not included in the count was 3.6% compared with 3.8% at the local elections coinciding with the general election in 2015. Rejection for a mismatch of signature and/or date of birth was twice as common as rejection for incomplete information.
- In about a quarter of cases voters returned their postal voting envelopes but failed to include either the ballot paper itself or the verification statement or both.
- Just over a half of one percent of electors with a postal vote were granted a waiver to use their date of birth as their sole identifier.
- Just over 12,700 of those with local elections in their area (0.08% of the total eligible electorate) appointed proxies to act on their behalf. In addition 239 emergency proxy votes were noted as being granted.

Summary – Police and Crime Commissioner elections

- Of the 36 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) contests in England, 20 were won by the Conservatives, 13 by Labour and 3 by Independent candidates. In Wales, Labour and Plaid Cymru won two posts each.
- The electorate for the PCC contests was nearly 33.7 million –31.4 million in England and 2.25 million in Wales.
- The names of some 3.0% of those on the ‘final’ register were added between December 2015 and 13 March 2016, and a further 1.5% between 13 March and the deadline of 16 April.
- Nearly 9.2 million votes were cast, making the overall turnout 27.3%. This is much higher than in 2012 but clearly influenced by combining the PCC contests with other elections in both England and Wales.
- The proportion of ballots rejected at the count (3.4%) was higher than at any other nationwide electoral event in recent years.
- The large majority of those rejected were deemed either ‘unmarked’ or ‘void for uncertainty’, but in more than a quarter of cases more than one candidate had been chosen in the first preference column.
- Some 24% of ballots were rejected at the count of second votes. In over 80% of cases this was because voters had failed to record any such second preference.
- More than 5.5 million postal votes were issued - 16.4% of the entire eligible electorate. In five English counting areas more than 30% of the electorate had a postal vote.
- In England, more than 60% of those with a postal ballot returned it. By way of contrast, however, fewer than 20% of those electors required to vote ‘in person’ did so.
- The proportion of postal votes rejected or otherwise not included in the count was 4.4% – 4.4% in England and 5% in Wales.
- Rejection following a mismatch of signature and/or date of birth was more common than rejection for incomplete information. Failing to include either the ballot paper itself or the verification statement or both was the cause of nearly a third of rejections in England but more than a half in Wales.
- More than one half of one percent of electors with a postal vote were granted a waiver to use their date of birth as their sole identifier.
- Just 27,500 electors (0.08% of the total) appointed proxies.

Summary – combined elections

- In Wales every elector had the opportunity to vote in both National Assembly and PCC contests. In England 114 local authorities had both council and PCC elections and 169 had PCC contests only.
- The ballot box turnout was 32.8% in those areas of England with combined local and PCC elections; 20.2% in those places with standalone PCC contests.
- 4.0% of PCC ballots cast at combined elections were rejected at the count; 2.0% of those at standalone contests.
- In areas with combined elections 67.2% of postal electors returned their ballots; in PCC only areas 54.7% did so.
- Of those required to vote 'in person' the turnout was 26.6% where local elections were also being held; 14.0% where they were not.
- Some 5.4% of the 'votes' of those returning postal ballots at combined elections were not sent to the count because of documentation errors compared with 3.2% of those where only a PCC election was being held.

Summary – GLA elections

- The names of some 4.3% of those on the 'final' register in London were added between December 2015 and 13 March 2016, and a further 2.4% between 13 March and the deadline of 16 April.
- More than 3,500 postal electors were granted a waiver (0.42% of all such electors); proxies were appointed by over 9,000 London electors (0.17% of the total electorate) with about 550 emergency proxy votes recorded as being issued.
- Over 860,000 postal votes were issued – 15.0% of the eligible electorate.
- Some 71.2% of those with a postal ballot returned it. In contrast turnout among those required to vote 'in person' was 42.1%.
- The proportion of postal votes rejected or otherwise not included in the count was 3.7% compared with 4.6% at the last GLA elections in 2012. Rejection for a mismatch of signature and/or date of birth was three times as common as rejection for incomplete information.

Local elections

Local elections were held for over 2,700 seats in 124 authorities in England. The whole council was elected in 11 district councils, 3 unitary authorities, and two metropolitan boroughs following boundary changes. In the metropolitan borough of Rotherham the whole council was elected on current boundaries. In 32 metropolitan boroughs, 16 unitary authorities and 52 districts one third of the council was elected; in seven districts half the council seats were up for election. In addition (excluding London) mayoral elections were held in three local authorities - Bristol, Liverpool, and Salford.

Contestation

Local elections were scheduled in 2,181 wards with a total of 2,744 seats at stake. Table 1 gives the breakdown of vacancies by type of authority. In addition a number of casual vacancies were contested on the same day.

Table 1: Wards/seats falling vacant local elections 2016

	Wards	Seats
Metropolitan boroughs	788	918
Unitary authorities	349	459
District councils	1,044	1,367
Total	2,181	2,744

More than 10,000 candidates contested the local elections, yielding a candidate/seat ratio of 3.9 overall.

Of the nearly 2,200 wards with elections, candidates were returned unopposed in just one unitary ward and one district ward. In addition one district contest was postponed following the death of a nominated candidate.

Electorate

The 2016 local elections gave nearly 15.72 million registered electors the opportunity to vote at a contested election – about 40% of the total local government electorate in England. Local election votes were cast at more than 11,000 polling stations as well as by post.

All voters except those in the 10 metropolitan boroughs in Greater Manchester also had the opportunity to vote in the coincident Police and Crime Commissioner elections –see below.

With the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and media campaigns to encourage people to register to vote, there was considerable interest in new additions to the register in the months and weeks leading up to May 2016. Electoral Registration Officers in each of the 124 councils with elections were asked a range of questions about the situation in their own authorities, with the large majority being able to provide reasonably comprehensive information. The next paragraph is based on those cases.

It appears that the names of about 3.0% of those on the ‘final’ register were added between December 2015 and 13 March 2016, and that a further 1.6% were added between 13 March and the deadline of 16 April –see Table 2. Another 1.4% of the total electorate then applied for registration after the deadline. The application figures in the two time periods were rather higher – about 7.8% of the total electorate, but a quarter of those applications duplicated an individual already on the register at the same address. Record keeping for the number of unregistered electors who tried to vote on polling day is poor, but in most councils numbers seem to be in the low double figures at most.

Table 2: Registration for local elections 2016 as % of total electorate

	Added Dec to March	Added March to April	Duplicates as % of all applications	Late applications
Metropolitan boroughs	2.6	1.5	25.1	1.3
Unitary authorities	3.7	1.9	25.3	1.5
District councils	3.3	1.7	24.0	1.6
Total	3.0	1.6	24.8	1.4

Turnout

Across the country nearly 5.32 million local votes were counted at the ballot box, making the overall aggregate ‘ballot box’ turnout 33.8%. Taking into account those who tried to vote but had their postal vote returns rejected, the level of participation rises to 34.2%. In Table 3 and subsequently we use the term ‘valid vote turnout’ to refer to calculations based simply on the number of valid votes cast; ‘ballot box turnout’ to refer to calculations taking into account valid votes plus those which were considered but rejected at the count; and ‘total turnout’ to refer to calculations which take into account valid votes, those rejected at the count *and* those rejected at the postal ballot verification stage. Table 3 also breaks these figures down by the type of local authority. Turnout was highest across the district councils and lowest in the metropolitan boroughs.

Table 3. Turnout at English local elections 2016

	Total turnout including rejected postal votes	Votes counted in ballot box	Valid vote turnout
Total	34.2	33.8	33.6
Met bors	33.6	33.2	33.0
Unitaries	34.0	33.6	33.3
District councils	35.2	34.9	34.7

In Table 4 we compare turnout in 2016 with a number of previous years. Although a different range of councils has elections in each year, the influence of other electoral events in boosting local turnout is apparent. At the time of general elections local electoral participation is up to twice ‘normal’ levels; in 2009, 2011, and 2014 when other UK-wide contests were held, turnout also seems to be above the long-term local election average. The turnout this year was higher than at the same point in the electoral cycle in 2012, but lower than four years before that in 2008. We consider what impact the PCC contests had on turnout below.

Table 4. Turnout at English local elections 2005-2016*

	Total turnout	Ballot box turnout	Valid vote turnout
2016	34.2	33.8	33.6
2015	65.2	64.6	64.0
2014	36.2	35.7	35.5
2013	31.2	30.9	30.8
2012	31.5	31.0	30.8
2011	42.7	42.0	41.6
2010	63.1	62.6	62.2
2009	39.7	39.3	39.1
2008	35.5	35.1	35.0
2007	38.3	38.1	37.9
2006	n/a	n/a	36.5
2005	n/a	n/a	63.9

*Local elections which coincided with a general election are highlighted in bold. The local elections in 2011 were held on the same day as a referendum on the parliamentary voting system. Those in 2014 and 2009 on the same day as a European Parliament election.

Naturally, there are variations from the mean when turnout is examined at the local authority level as set out in Table 5. The highest individual turnout was in South Lakeland (48.4%); the lowest in Knowsley (25.9%) which had all-out elections following boundary changes. Bristol (44.7%), which had all-out elections and a mayoral contest, stands out among the unitary authorities. At

the level of wards, the highest recorded turnout can be up to twice or more that of the lowest in each type of authority. In 54 cases turnout at this level exceeded 50%; in 15 cases it was less than 20%.

Table 5. Highest and lowest % ‘ballot box’ turnouts by local authority 2016

Local authority	Highest	Lowest	
Metropolitan boroughs			
Trafford	40.9	Sandwell	27.1
Newcastle upon Tyne	39.9	Barnsley	26.6
Stockport	38.4	Knowsley	25.9
Unitaries			
Bristol	44.7	Hartlepool	27.5
Blackburn	36.4	Halton	27.4
Peterborough	36.2	Kingston upon Hull	26.4
Districts councils			
South Lakeland	48.4	Runnymede	29.7
Winchester	43.4	Cannock Chase	28.9
Mole Valley	42.0	Broxbourne	26.7

Rejected ballots

The number of ballots rejected at the count was a small fraction of the total number cast – 0.6% in the metropolitan boroughs; 0.8% in the unitaries; and 0.6% in the districts. Table 6 shows the proportion of ballot papers examined at the count and subsequently rejected at a selection of recent elections in England. In 2015, as in 2010 and 2005, local election votes were more likely to be rejected than general election ones. At the 2016 local elections more than 32,500 votes (0.62% of the total) were rejected at the count – a figure in line with previous local elections. However, at the coincident PCC elections no fewer than 3.4% of votes were similarly rejected.

Table 6. Rejected ballots as % of total included at count – elections in England 2005-16*

2005 general election	0.3
2005 local election	0.6
2006 local election	0.6
2007 local election	0.4
2008 local election	0.4

2009 local election	0.8
2009 European Parliament election	0.7
2010 general election	0.3
2010 local election	0.6
2011 local election	1.0
2011 AV referendum	0.6
2012 local election	0.6
2012 PCC election (November)	2.8
2013 local election	0.5
2014 local election	0.6
2014 European Parliament election	0.6
2015 general election	0.3
2015 local election	0.9
2016 local election	0.6
2016 PCC election	3.4

*different electoral events held on the same day are marked in bold.

Although not all councils were able to provide a breakdown, it is clear the most common reason for rejection is an unclear ballot paper –‘unmarked or wholly void for uncertainty’ in the technical language. In 2016 these accounted for more than 60% of rejections in those cases for which we have complete data - see Table 7. Electors can also fall foul of one of the other three criteria against which a vote’s validity is checked –that they should not have voted for more candidates or parties than allowed at that election; that they should not mark the ballot paper in such a way that they can be personally identified; and that the ballot paper itself should contain the official mark.

Table 7: Reasons for rejection of ballot papers at 2016 local elections (% of total rejected)

	No official mark	More votes than allowed	Voter could be identified	Ballot paper unmarked/unclear
Total	2.2	32.4	1.7	63.8
Mets	1.7	36.9	1.5	60.0
Units	3.4	31.2	2.4	63.1
Dists	2.4	26.4	1.8	69.4

Postal voting –uptake and turnout

More than 2.66 million postal votes were issued at the local elections –a record 16.96% of all those with a contested election in their ward (Table 8). Comparisons with previous years are necessarily inexact because of the varying electoral cycle, but it can be noted that 16.8% of local electors had a

postal vote in 2015, 15.8% in 2014, and 16.6% in 2012 when most of the seats contested this year were also fought.

Table 8. Postal electors and local votes 2016 –overall and by type of authority

Number of postal ballot papers issued	2,666,564	as % of electorate	17.0
Number returned	1,809,816	as % of issued	67.9
Number included 'in count'	1,744,184	as % of votes at count	32.8
Rejected or otherwise not included in count	65,632	as % of those returned	3.6

Metropolitan boroughs

Postal ballot papers as % of electorate:	18.1 (18.1 in 2012)
% 'Turnout' among postal voters:	67.3 (67.9 in 2012)
Rejected ballot papers as % of those returned:	3.6 (4.3 in 2012)
Postal ballots as % of those at count:	35.4 (37.6 in 2012)

Unitary authorities

Postal ballot papers as % of electorate:	15.3 (14.6 in 2012)
% 'Turnout' among postal voters:	68.0 (67.9 in 2012)
Rejected ballot papers as % of those returned:	4.2 (5.4 in 2012)
Postal ballots as % of those at count:	29.7 (31.7 in 2012)

District councils

Postal ballot papers as % of electorate:	16.0 (14.9 in 2012)
% 'Turnout' among postal voters:	68.8 (68.3 in 2012)
Rejected ballot papers as % of those returned:	3.4 (3.5 in 2012)
Postal ballots as % of those at count:	30.5 (31.4 in 2012)

In eight council areas more than 25% of the electorate had a postal vote; in another seven fewer than 10% did so –see Table 9. These councils make a regular appearance on this list. There are, of course, even sharper variations when ward level turnout data are examined.

Table 9. Largest and smallest take up of postal votes - % electorate by authority 2016

Local authority

	Largest by type		Smallest by type	
Mets	Sunderland	43.4	Birmingham	9.5
Unitaries	Blackburn	20.4	Halton	7.8
Districts	Stevenage	35.1	Epping Forest	8.5

The proportion of postal voters returning their ballot papers always exceeds the turnout among 'in person' voters. To an extent this can be explained by

the fact that applying for such a vote in the first place often indicates a higher than average level of interest in and engagement with political events. This year more than two thirds of postal electors used their vote (67.9%) compared with 27.5% among those obliged to visit a polling station. Table 10 contrasts postal and 'in person' participation at recent local elections in England. Turnout at polling stations appears especially to be hit when the local elections are stand-alone events as in 2008, 2012 and 2013. We comment on this in the context of the 2106 PCC elections below.

Table 10. Postal and 'in person' turnout at English local elections 2008-2016*

	Postal voter turnout	'In person' turnout
2016	67.9	27.5
2015	84.8	61.2
2014	69.5	30.0
2013	67.1	25.0
2012	68.0	24.2
2011	72.8	36.7
2010	80.9	59.7
2009	68.7	35.2
2008	71.5	28.7

*Local elections in 2010 and 2015 coincided with a general election. The local elections in 2011 were held on the same day as a referendum on the parliamentary voting system. In 2009 and 2014 they coincided with European Parliament elections.

This phenomenon also means that postal votes form a disproportionate number of those at the count. In 2016 nearly a third of all local votes counted (32.8%) were cast by post: in Sunderland the figure was no less than 75%. Indeed some argue that the success of postal voting acts to disguise a continuing problem of low electoral participation among those who choose not to take advantage of this facility.

Postal vote rejection

Under the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, postal voters must first meet the statutory requirements for the documentation they return by supplying personal identifiers in the form of their date of birth and signature both when they apply for a postal vote and when they return a ballot paper. Votes submitted by those whose details are deemed to match are then added at the count to those of electors who have voted in person.

As outlined earlier some electors who try to vote by post are found to have completed the documentation incorrectly and their ballot papers never reach

the count. The introduction of personal identifiers before the 2007 elections appeared initially to have led to a small increase in the proportion of postal votes rejected or otherwise not included in the count –see Table 11. However, the average figure has now settled at about 4% - or four in 100 of all postal ballot documentation returned. This year the rejection rate was 3.6% compared with 4.7% in both 2014 and 2009 when the local and European Parliament elections coincided and 3.8% and 4.0% respectively at the combined local and general elections in 2015 and 2010.

Table 11. Postal vote rejection at English local elections 2006-2016*

% returned postal voting envelopes/contents not included in the count	
2016	3.6
2015*	3.8
2014*	4.7
2013	3.1
2012	4.2
2011*	5.2
2010*	4.0
2009*	4.7
2008	3.6
2007	3.2
2006	3.0

*The local elections in 2010 and 2015 were held on the same day as a general election and in 2011 they coincided with a referendum on the parliamentary voting system. In 2009 and 2014 they coincided with European Parliament elections.

In order to obtain more information on the reasons for postal vote rejection than the statutory forms allow and to try to overcome inconsistencies within and between local authorities in the recording of answers, each returning officer was asked to compile and submit additional data on the outcomes of their verification process. Table 12 makes clear that rejection following a mismatch of signature and/or date of birth is twice as common as rejection for incomplete or missing information. The former accounts for about a half of all rejections in each type of local authority. This is in line with data from previous years.

Around one quarter of electors returned their postal voting envelopes but failed to include either the ballot paper itself or the verification statement or both (varying from 22% in the metropolitan boroughs to 28% in the unitary authorities). The proportion doing this was less than in 2015, 2014 and 2011 when local elections were also combined with other electoral events. These figures of course represent percentages of the already small number of rejected ballots. In fact, just 0.8% of all returned postal votes were recorded as being rejected for a missing ballot or verification statement. The vast

majority of postal voters did correctly file their returns complete with all necessary documents and matching signature and date of birth.

Table 12. Reasons for rejection of postal votes at verification by % of total rejected at 2016 local elections

	Met	Unit	Dist	Total
PV statement rejected (No signature)	12	6	7	10
PV statement rejected (No DoB)	5	7	6	6
PV statement rejected (Both)	10	11	10	10
Proportion rejected (incomplete information)	27	24	23	26
PV statement mismatched signature	21	24	20	22
PV statement mismatched DoB	19	17	21	19
PV statement mismatched both	10	9	8	9
Proportion rejected (mismatching)	51	49	49	50
Proportion rejected (ballot paper or statement missing)	22	27	28	24

Waivers

A concession granted under the terms of the Electoral Administration Act 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. Table 13 shows that the proportion of postal electors granted such a waiver was just over a half of one percent. These figures are similar to those in previous years with perhaps some suggestion of a small increase in take up over the past half dozen years. There remain variations at local authority level suggesting that the grant of waivers is at least in part attributable to how far the local authority publicises the availability of this concession.

Table 13. Postal electors granted 'waivers' at the 2016 local elections

	As proportion of postal electors	Average per local authority	
Total	0.51	(2015 0.56; 2011 0.47)	111
Met boroughs	0.46	(2015 0.42; 2011 0.35)	193
Unitaries	0.49	(2015 0.51; 2011 0.44)	105
District councils	0.62	(2015 0.67; 2011 0.57)	71

Proxy votes

The introduction of postal voting on demand has had a downward impact over time on the number of electors appointing proxies, especially when there is no

concurrent general election –see Table 14. This year the level of proxy voting at the local elections was at its lowest recorded level (12,734 such voters or 0.08% of the electorate) with, in addition, just 239 emergency proxies noted as being issued.

Table 14. Proxy voters as percentage of electorate in England 2001-2016

2016 Loc	2015 Gen	2015 Loc	2014 Loc	2013 Loc	2012 Loc	2011 Loc
0.08	0.32	0.29	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.15
2010 Loc	2010 Gen	2005 Gen	2001 Gen			
0.28	0.32	0.22	0.47			

PCC elections

The second round of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections was held on May 5 2016. They covered 40 Police Authority areas in England and Wales outside London and Greater Manchester. On the same day local authority elections were held in 124 councils in England and National Assembly elections throughout Wales.

The PCC elections use the Supplementary Vote (SV) electoral system which allows voters to record first and second choice votes. First preference votes are tallied across each police authority area and if one candidate has a majority of these s/he is elected. If no candidate receives such a majority, the top two candidates continue to a second round and all other candidates are eliminated. Any second choice votes cast for the top two by those who initially supported one of the eliminated contenders are then redistributed with the winner being the person with the largest total number of first and second preference votes.

Results

Of the 36 contests in England, 20 were won by the Conservatives (up five on 2012), 13 by Labour (up two) and three by Independent candidates (down seven). Each of the Independents was a re-elected incumbent. Four contests were determined after the first ballot –in each case because the winning (Labour) candidate received more than 50% of first preference votes.

In Wales, Labour and Plaid Cymru both won 2 posts. Plaid gained one from the Conservatives and one from Independent; Labour gained one from Independent.

In no case (compared with 8 incidences in 2012) did the candidate who had been in second place after the first preference votes emerge as the winner following the count of eligible second preferences.

Electorate

The franchise for the PCC elections was the same as for a local government election. A total of nearly 33.7 million individuals were registered to vote – 31.4 million in England and 2.25 million in Wales. The Police Authority with the largest electorate was West Midlands (over 1.93 million electors) and that with the smallest was Cumbria (0.38 million electors).

With the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and media campaigns to encourage people to register to vote, there was considerable interest in new additions to the register in the months and weeks leading up to May 2016. Electoral Registration Officers in each of the 323 counting areas were asked a range of questions about the situation in their own authorities, with the large majority being able to provide reasonably comprehensive information. The next paragraph is based on those cases.

It appears that the names of about 3.0% of those on the ‘final’ register were added between December 2015 and 13 March 2016, and that a further 1.5% were added between 13 March and the deadline of 16 April. Another 1.3% of the total electorate then applied for registration after the deadline. The application figures in the two time periods were rather higher –about 7.4% of the total electorate, but more than a quarter of those applications duplicated an individual already on the register at the same address.

Turnout

Turnout at the PCC elections can be measured in a number of ways. Taking into account the total number of votes at the ballot box (that is, including all those votes rejected at the count), the turnout was 27.3% - see Table 15. A more traditional measure of turnout, valid votes cast as a proportion of the eligible electorate, gives a rate across England and Wales of 26.4%. These figures are much higher than in 2012 and appear to have been significantly influenced by combining the PCC contests with other elections. We say more about the effects of such combination later in this report.

Table 15: Turnout at the 2016 PCC elections

	<i>Electorate*</i>	<i>Total votes cast*</i>	<i>% 'ballot box' turnout 2016</i>	<i>% 'ballot box' turnout 2012</i>
England and Wales	33,669,842	9,195,181	27.31	15.13
England	31,422,427	8,179,139	26.03	15.11
Wales	2,247,415	1,016,042	45.21	15.36

*There were occasionally very slight discrepancies in the electorate and rejected ballot figures provided by Police Area Returning Officers (PAROs) and individual counting areas. These are the PARO figures.

We are also able to examine ‘total participation’ turnout which adds those who tried to vote but whose postal vote returns were deemed invalid and therefore not forwarded to the count – see Table 16. This adjustment has the effect of

fractionally increasing the % of the electorate who participated at the election, but makes little difference to the overall pattern.

Table 16: Different turnout measures at the 2016 PCC elections

	<i>Valid vote % turnout</i>	<i>'Ballot box' % turnout</i>	<i>'Total participation' % turnout</i>
England and Wales	26.4	27.3	27.8
England	25.2	26.0	26.5
Wales	42.8	45.2	45.9

Rejected ballots

The number of ballot papers rejected at the first count was a small fraction of the total cast (3.4%), but as in 2012 (2.8%) very high compared with all other recent nationwide electoral events – see Table 17. The previous highest rejection rate was 1.0% at the coincident local elections and AV referendum in 2011; the lowest was 0.3% at the 2005, 2010 and 2015 general elections.

A majority of ballots were rejected because the voter had either not marked the ballot paper or made their intention clear –see Table 18. In about a third of cases, votes were rejected because more than one candidate had been chosen in the first preference column. The highest proportions of rejected ballot papers were in the four police authorities in Wales (more than 5% in each case); the lowest in Nottinghamshire (1.6%).

Table 17: Rejected ballot papers at the 2016 PCC elections and comparisons

	<i>Ballot papers rejected at the count</i>	<i>% of ballots at count</i>
England and Wales	311,789	3.39
England	257,554	3.15
Wales	54,235	5.34

Table 18: Reasons for rejection of ballot papers at the first count at 2016 PCC elections

	<i>No official mark (%)</i>	<i>Voting more than once (%)</i>	<i>Voter could be identified (%)</i>	<i>Ballot paper unmarked (%)</i>	<i>Ballot paper void for uncertainty (%)</i>
England and Wales	0.7	29.1	0.8	41.2	25.2

England	0.9	30.4	1.0	39.4	24.9
Wales	0.0	23.0	0.2	50.1	26.7

The ballot papers in the 36 contests where voters' second preferences had to be taken into account were scrutinised again with the exception of those where a valid first vote had been cast for one of the top two candidates and those already deemed invalid. The formal rejection of ballots was for reasons similar to those for the first count. As illustrated in Table 19, in over 80% of cases it was because voters had failed to record any second preference.

Table 19: Reasons for rejection of ballot papers at the second count at 2016 PCC elections

	<i>No official mark (%)</i>	<i>Voting more than once (%)</i>	<i>Voter could be identified (%)</i>	<i>Ballot paper unmarked (%)</i>	<i>Ballot paper void for uncertainty (%)</i>
England and Wales	0.01	4.5	0.5	84.7	10.3
England	0.01	4.7	0.6	85.3	9.4
Wales	-	3.6	0.01	80.9	15.4

It is impossible to know from these data whether this was due to a misunderstanding of the electoral system or a deliberate wish to vote for one candidate only. Doubtless many of those voting for one of the top two candidates similarly did not mark a second preference, but those figures were not collated. The average proportion of second votes rejected was 23% in England and 28% in Wales.

Postal voting – uptake and turnout

More than 5.5 million electors were issued with a postal vote for the PCC elections -16.4% of the total electorate (see Table 20). In both England and Wales the level was fractionally below that at the 2015 general election.

In terms of individual counting areas, Sunderland had the largest proportion of postal electors (43.6%) and Barrow in Furness the smallest (6.9%). In Wales, 23.9% of electors in Llanelli had a postal vote compared with 11.7% in Cardiff South & Penarth. In five areas of England more than 30% of electors were on the postal vote register – Gateshead, Newcastle upon Tyne, South Tyneside, Stevenage, and Sunderland.

Table 20: Postal voting at the 2016 PCC elections

	Postal ballots issued	%electors with postal ballot
England and Wales	5,512,806	16.4
England	5,116,925	16.3
Wales	395,881	17.6

As noted in previous elections, turnout among postal electors was again significantly higher than that among in-person voters –see Table 21. In England six in ten returned their ballots compared with the fewer than 20% who voted if obliged to go to a polling station. In Wales the turnout among both groups was higher. The implications of the figures in this table will be discussed in the section on ‘combination’ below.

Table 21: Turnout among postal and in-person electors at the 2016 PCC elections

	Postal ballot papers returned	Ballot box turnout (in-person electors)	Difference
	2016	2016	
England and Wales	61.6	20.6	41.0
England	60.6	19.3	41.3
Wales	73.9	39.1	34.8

Postal voting – invalid returns

Under the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, all those electors opting to vote by post are required to provide two pieces of personal information both when they apply for a postal ballot and when they return it. This record of their signature and date of birth is then used to verify their ballot paper and so provide additional security against personation or other electoral fraud. A number of electors who try to vote by post are found to have completed the documentation incorrectly and their ballot papers are rejected before the count.

A total of more than 150,000 individual postal ballots were rejected or otherwise excluded from the count – 136,000 in England and nearly 15,000 in Wales. This amounted to 4.4% of all those returned. The proportion rejected was 4.4% in England and 5.0% in Wales –see Table 22. In England the rate of rejection was somewhat lower than at the comparable contests in 2012; in

Wales it was rather higher. In both countries, however, it exceeded the level at the 2015 general election.

Table 22: Invalid postal vote returns at the 2016 PCC elections and comparisons

	Invalid as % of returned 2016 PCC elections	Invalid as % of returned 2012 PCC elections	Invalid as % of returned 2015 general election
England and Wales	4.4	4.7	3.3
England	4.4	4.8	3.3
Wales	5.0	3.8	3.1

Table 23 makes clear that rejection following a mismatch of signature and/or date of birth was more common than rejection for incomplete or missing information. In a further third of cases voters returned their postal voting envelopes but failed to include either the ballot paper itself or the verification statement or both. The discrepancy between the figures for England and Wales in this final category in particular will be addressed in the section on combination.

Table 23: Reasons for rejection of postal votes at verification by % of total rejected at 2016 PCC elections (rounded)

	E and W	England	Wales
PV statement rejected (No signature)	6	6	5
PV statement rejected (No DoB)	6	5	6
PV statement rejected (Both)	10	10	5
Proportion rejected (incomplete information)	22	22	16
PV statement mismatched signature	19	20	8
PV statement mismatched DoB	19	19	14
PV statement mismatched both	8	8	3
Proportion rejected (mismatching)	45	48	25
Prop rejected (ballot paper or statement missing)	33	30	59

Waivers

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. Some 30,225 waivers were issued in England and 3,287

in Wales. Table 24 shows that the proportion of postal electors granted such a waiver at the PCC elections was 0.59% in England and 0.83% in Wales.

Table 24: Postal electors granted ‘waivers’ at the 2016 PCC elections

	As proportion of postal electors	Average per counting area
England	0.59	107
Wales	0.83	82

Proxy voting

Proxies were appointed by nearly 28,000 electors -see Table 25. This equated to 0.08% of the total electorate in England and 0.13% of that in Wales. In addition 393 emergency proxies were issued in England and 93 in Wales.

Table 25: Proxy voting at the 2016 PCC elections

	<i>Proxy votes issued 2016</i>	<i>as % of electorate</i>
England and Wales	27,502	0.08
England	24,491	0.08
Wales	3,011	0.13

The impact of combined elections

In both England and Wales the Police and Crime Commissioner elections were combined with other contests.

In Wales every elector had the opportunity to vote in both National Assembly and PCC contests. However, this universality of combination offers limited scope for comparing voter behaviour at the two elections. For example, as noted in the accompanying report on Wales, only 9,000 fewer first votes were cast at the ballot box at the PCC elections than at the NAW constituency level. On the other hand, a much higher proportion of those who did vote were found to have done so invalidly in terms of their PCC ballot paper – 5.3% of all those at the ballot box or ten times more than for the NAW elections. There was a similar, if less dramatic pattern among postal voters where ballots were rejected in 5% of cases compared with 3.5% for the NAW constituency vote. Moreover, 45% of these occurrences were for a failure to enclose a ballot paper. At the NAW elections the comparable figure was 19%.

These clues can be subject to more systematic analysis in the English case where a direct comparison can be made between the 114 local authorities (counting areas) with both council and PCC elections and the 169 which had PCC contests only – see Table 26¹. Data on registration suggest little difference between the two types, but levels of turnout are another matter entirely. The ballot box turnout in ‘combined’ authorities was 32.8% compared with 20.2% where there were only PCC elections. Although the latter is higher than the 15.1% turnout at the standalone PCC elections in November 2012, it is a clear indicator of the failure to engage a section of the electorate who would normally vote in a local election. Participation by postal electors shows a similar pattern. In areas with combined elections 67.2% returned their ballots; in PCC only areas 54.7% did so. The turnout of those obliged to vote in person at the two types of election was 26.6% and 14.0% (compared with 9.2% in November 2012) respectively.

Table 26. Comparison between areas of England with combined local/PCC and standalone PCC elections, 2016

	Ballot box turnout	Postal voter turnout	‘In person’ turnout	% rejected at count	% postal ballots disallowed
Combined	32.8	67.2	26.6	4.0	5.4
Standalone	20.2	54.7	14.0	2.0	3.2

¹ Local elections only were held in the 10 metropolitan boroughs within Greater Manchester. Comparisons are not always exact elsewhere as a few wards in councils with local elections did not have scheduled contests this year. This section is based on data from the PCC elections.

There are differences too in the behaviour of those who did vote. 2.0% of those participating in Police only elections had their ballot papers rejected at the count – more than half because more than one candidate had been chosen in the first preference column. On the other hand, twice that proportion (4.0%) of those with combined elections had their PCC ballot invalidated – seven in ten of them because their first preference vote was unmarked or uncertain. Such a figure far outweighs the 0.6% of local ballots rejected at the count.

Some 5.4% of the 'votes' of those returning postal ballots at combined elections were not sent to the count because of documentation errors (including a quarter of cases where a PCC ballot paper was not enclosed) compared with 3.2% (a tenth for no ballot paper) of those where only a PCC election was being held.

Together with the evidence from Wales, the data for ballot rejection at both the count and postal vote verification stages support the contention that many voters deliberately chose to ignore the PCC election while participating in the concurrent local or NAW election.

Addendum: GLA elections – postal voting and additional data

As in 2012 the body responsible for conducting the GLA elections, *London Elects*, collected and published data on voting patterns and rejected ballot papers at ward, local authority, Assembly constituency, and cross-London levels – see www.londonelects.org.uk. The valid vote turnout at the Mayoral election was 45.2% compared with 38.1% in 2012 and 44.6% in 2008. The proportion of ballot papers rejected at the Mayoral count was 1.9% (1.8% in 2012 and 1.7% in 2008) making the overall turnout 46.1% (38.8% in 2012 and 45.3% in 2008). The analysis here is confined to information especially collected for the Commission on postal voting and other aspects of electoral administration.

Electoral administration

With the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and media campaigns to encourage people to register to vote, there was considerable interest in new additions to the register in the months and weeks leading up to May 2016. Electoral Registration Officers were asked a range of questions about the situation in their own authorities, with the large majority being able to provide reasonably comprehensive information. The next paragraph is based on those cases.

It appears that the names of about 4.3% of those on the ‘final’ register were added between December 2015 and 13 March 2016, and that a further 2.4 were added between 13 March and the deadline of 16 April. Another 1.7% of the total electorate then applied for registration after the deadline. The application figures in the two time periods were much higher –about 11.8% of the total electorate, but almost a quarter of those applications duplicated an individual already on the register at the same address. Record keeping for the number of unregistered electors who tried to vote on polling day is particularly poor, but in most boroughs numbers seem to be in the low double figures.

More than 3,500 postal electors were granted a waiver under the terms of the 2006 EAA (0.432% of all such electors). This is somewhat lower than the proportion in the rest of England –see Table 24. Proxies were appointed by over 9,000 London electors (0.17% of the total electorate) with about 550 emergency proxy votes recorded as being issued.

Postal voting

Postal votes were issued to more than 860,000 London electors (15.0% of the total) -see Table GL1. At the time of the 2015 general election 14.8% had a

postal vote and at the previous GLA elections in 2012 it was 14.1%. The largest proportions of postal electors were in the City of London (28.2%) and the borough of Barnet (19.9%), and the lowest in the borough of Brent (11.6%). 71.2% returned their postal ballots, varying from 78.6% in Richmond upon Thames to 58.8% in Newham. This compares with 68.8% at the 2012 contests and 82.7% at the 2015 general election. The turnout among those obliged to vote 'in person' was 42.1%.

Table GL1. Postal electors in London 2016

Number of postal ballot papers issued	860,271	as % of electorate	15.0
Number returned	612,732	as % of issued	71.2
Number included 'in count'	590,004	as % of votes at count	22.3
Rejected or otherwise not included in count	22,728	as % of those returned	3.7

Postal vote rejection

The overall proportion of postal votes rejected or otherwise not included in the count was 3.7%, compared with 4.6% in 2012 and 5.2% in 2010 when the general and London borough elections were combined. Table GL2 makes clear that rejection following a mismatch of signature and/or date of birth was much more common than rejection for incomplete or missing information. Some 15% of potential voters returned their postal voting envelopes but failed to include either the ballot paper itself or the verification statement or both. In each case these figures are rough accord with the pattern seen in English local elections and described above.

Table GL2. Reasons for rejection of postal votes at verification by % of total rejected at 2016 GLA elections

PV statement rejected (No signature)	3
PV statement rejected (No DoB)	9
PV statement rejected (Both)	7
Proportion rejected (incomplete information)	19
PV statement mismatched signature	30
PV statement mismatched DoB	25
PV statement mismatched both	11
Proportion rejected (mismatching)	66
Prop rejected (ballot paper or statement missing)	15