The Electoral Commission

Local elections May 2013

Report on the administration of the elections held in England and Anglesey on 2 May

July 2013

Translations and other formats

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Foreword

The local elections held in many parts of England and the Isle of Anglesey on 2 May 2013 went well. Our research with voters shows very high levels of confidence, with nine in ten voters telling us they were confident that these elections were well run, and 97 per cent of polling station voters and 96 per cent of postal voters saying they were satisfied with their experience of voting. This reflects positively on the work of Returning Officers and their staff to deliver a high-quality service to voters this year.

The challenges facing all of those involved in delivering successful elections in the coming years will be significant, and should not be underestimated: there will be major UK-wide elections with the 2014 European Parliament elections and the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election; the referendum on independence for Scotland in 2014; and the implementation of major changes to the registration system in Great Britain, beginning later this year, will last until after the 2015 elections. And all of this important work is taking place in the context of significant pressures on both central and local government budgets. The successful delivery of these elections is a good place to start.

But there is still more that can be done to reduce the risk of poor service to voters and candidates, including by reviewing the management of ballot paper and poll card printing processes and the management of counts. We are clear about where changes need to be made to improve performance, and we will focus our support and challenge in those areas. Overall, the findings in this report give us cause for optimism and confidence about the future.

There were also fewer allegations of electoral fraud at these elections, compared with recent years. We know that elections next year will be held in areas where there has been a history of concerns about fraud, and we will continue our programme of targeted monitoring and support in those areas to help Returning Officers and police forces prevent electoral fraud as well as investigate any allegations. We have also begun a major review of electoral fraud vulnerabilities, and we aim to publish any recommendations for changes to current legislation later this year. No one can be complacent about the risk of electoral fraud, but voters and candidates should be confident that it will be tackled robustly.

The challenge for the coming years will be to maintain and build on the capacity demonstrated at these elections, and to identify and take advantage of opportunities to deliver even better services for voters and candidates.

We look forward to playing our part in this by revising our performance standards for Returning Officers, to support them in delivering the best outcome for voters, and those standing for elections. We will also develop a model to support Returning Officers in managing the count – an area likely to come under increased scrutiny at elections over the next two years.

Jenny Watson
Chair

July 2013

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Summary

We want people across the UK to be confident that electoral registration and electoral events are well run, and that they will receive a consistently high quality service, wherever they live and whichever elections or referendums are being held.

This report provides our assessment of how well the elections held on 2 May 2013 were run. It reflects the experience of voters, based on public opinion research and electoral data and feedback provided by Returning Officers.

Our assessment of the local elections held on 2 May show that, overall, the elections were well-run and that voters had a positive view of the election process.

We have, however, identified further lessons that can be learned, improvements that can be made, and significant planning activities which need to take place now, for elections in 2014 and 2015 - to ensure that the interest of voters comes first.

Elections held in England and Wales on 2 May

On 2 May 2013 local government elections were held across England to 35 councils (27 county councils covering 201 districts, and 8 unitary councils). Elections were also held for the Isle of Anglesey County Council, in Wales. A separate summary on the elections held in Anglesey can be found on our website.

On the same day there was a UK parliamentary by-election in South Shields, two local authority mayoral elections (in North Tyneside and Doncaster), two neighbourhood planning referendums,[1] held in Thame and Exeter, and more than 900 parish councils[2] were also up for election.

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[1] The Localism Act 2011 provides for local referendums to be held on a range of issues, and sets out a new statutory framework for neighbourhood planning, under which town or parish councils, designated neighbourhood forums or community organisations can put forward proposals for neighbourhood planning which may (or will) be subject to referendums: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/notes/contents

[2] This figure is an estimate. Details of parish elections and contested parish polls are not recorded centrally. We know that full parish council elections were held in the unitary county areas of Cornwall, Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire and Wiltshire and there would also have been other parish elections held across England.

Key facts and figures

Just under 18.4 million people were registered to vote in the elections held across England on 2 May. A total of 5.68 million ballot papers were at the count[3] representing a turnout of 31%.

Just over 51,000 people were registered to vote for elections in the Isle of Anglesey on 2 May. A total of 25,800 ballot papers were at the count[4], representing a turnout of 51%.

Turnout at the different elections held on 2 May 2013 is shown below.

Table 1: Turnout at the 2 May elections

Poll	Turnout (%)
Local elections England	30.9
Local election Anglesey	50.5
Mayoral election Doncaster	27.8
Mayoral election North Tyneside	32.1
UK parliamentary by-election South Shields	39.3

Postal voters
Across England, a total of 2.71 million postal votes were issued – 14.8% of the electorate. Turnout among postal voters was 67% and postal votes accounted for 31%, or just over 1.75 million, of all votes at the count.

On the Isle of Anglesey a total of 8,600 postal votes were issued (17% of the total electorate) and 6,500 were returned. Postal votes accounted for 24%, or around 6,300 of all votes at the count.

Candidates
More than 9,500 candidates stood for election in over 2,300 seats in 34 local authorities across England. Approximately 900 of these were candidates independent of a political party. In Anglesey, 107 candidates stood for 30 available seats. Nine candidates stood in the South Shields by-election, 10 in the Doncaster mayoral election and 3 in the North Tyneside mayoral election.

The experience of voters

A key priority for the Commission is that voters are able to vote easily and know that their vote will be counted in the way they intended. We want to ensure that people are aware of the need to register to vote in order to take

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[3] Includes local elections only and excludes ballots rejected at the postal vote verification stage.
[4] ibid.

part in the elections. Overall, confidence in the registration and voting process remains high and relatively stable.

Our public opinion research carried out after the May 2013 elections found that:

- Almost nine in ten (88%) people said that they were satisfied with the process for registering to vote, and 65% were very satisfied.

- 90% of those who voted in the 2 May elections were confident that they were well run.

- Nearly all voters were satisfied with their experience either voting in person at their local polling station (97%) or by post (96%).

- Almost half of all people surveyed (47%) said they felt they knew a great deal or a fair amount about the elections. People in Wales were more likely than those in England to say that they knew a great deal or a fair amount – 61% compared to 47%.

- Just under half of people surveyed said that they found it easy to access information on parties and candidates, compared to 32% who said it was difficult. A similar proportion of people (49%) said that they had enough information on parties and candidates to make an informed decision on who to vote for.

- In Anglesey, where turnout was higher, people were more likely to say they had enough information on parties and candidates (59% of people survey compared with 49% in England) and that it was easy to access this information (57% compared with 49% in England).

Full details of our research findings can be found on our website[5].

Electoral integrity

We are aware from data provided by police forces that approximately 140 potential cases of alleged electoral fraud were reported in relation to the 2 May elections. A large proportion of these cases relate to complaints about false statements in nomination papers or false statements of fact about the personal character or conduct of candidates, or were about incorrect or missing imprints on election material.

Almost half of people in surveyed in our public opinion research (48%) thought that hardly any (33%) or no (15%) electoral fraud took place at the 2 May elections. Only 1% thought that a lot of fraud had taken place and 21% thought that a little had.

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[5] http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/publications-and-research/our-research

1 Introduction

About this report and our role

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

- **Trust:** people should be able to **trust** the way our elections and our political finance system work
- **Participation:** it should be straightforward for people to **participate** in our elections and our political finance system, whether voting or campaigning; and people should be confident that their vote counts
- **No undue influence:** there should be **no undue influence** in the way our elections and our political finance system work

1.2 We are responsible for publishing reports on the administration of elections and referendums.

1.3 This report provides our assessment of how well the May 2013 elections held in England and in Anglesey in Wales were run. It also includes our assessment of any issues relating specifically to the UK Parliamentary by-election in South Shields and the two mayoral elections held in North Tyneside and Doncaster on 2 May. It comments on any issues that occurred at the mayoral and parliamentary by-elections but does not address in detail the administration of any parish elections or the two neighbourhood planning referendums also held on 2 May.

1.4 Our analysis reflects the experience of voters, based on public opinion research, and electoral data and feedback provided by Returning Officers. It also includes an assessment of how Returning Officers performed against the standards we set for well-run elections, to ensure that voting is as straightforward, accessible and secure as possible and that voters receive a high quality experience irrespective of where they live.

1.5 This report also provides a forward look to future elections with a particular focus on ensuring that the elections due to take place in 2014 and 2015 are well run. Local government elections in parts of England and European Parliament elections across the UK are scheduled to take place in May 2014; and in 2015 a UK Parliamentary general election will be held at the same time as local government elections in parts of England. Building on our assessment of recent elections, it highlights issues which the Commission considers need to be addressed to make sure that the interest of voters continues to be put first at future elections.

2   Trust

2.1   People should be able to trust the way our elections work. This chapter looks at whether people thought the May 2013 elections were well run and gives an overview of the performance of Returning Officers at the elections.

About the elections

2.2   On 2 May 2013 local government elections were held across England to 35 councils (27 county councils covering 201 districts, and 8 unitary councils) and to the Isle of Anglesey County Council in Wales. The Welsh Government[6] postponed the Isle of Anglesey elections from 2012 to 2013, in order to enable the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales to conduct a review of electoral arrangements on the island.[7]

2.3   On the same day there was also a UK parliamentary by-election in South Shields, two local authority mayoral elections (in North Tyneside and Doncaster), two neighbourhood planning referendums,[8] held in Thame and Exeter, and more than 900 parish councils[9] were up for election.

2.4   In the majority of county council areas voters were only required to complete one ballot paper at their polling station.[10] The local elections and the South Shields by-election were held using the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, and the Supplementary Vote (SV) electoral system was used for the two mayoral elections in Doncaster and North Tyneside.

Were the elections well run?

2.5   We have not identified any major problems with the administration of the elections held on 2 May 2013, although there were some specific issues in a small number of areas which we have highlighted below.

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[6] The Isle of Anglesey Local Authority (Change to the Years of Ordinary Elections) Order 2012, SI 2012

[7] Political problems in the running of the Isle of Anglesey County Council had culminated in a decision by the Welsh Government in March 2011 to remove the executive functions from the authority and install five appointed Commissioners to run the Council until September 2012. This was the first time in Wales that executive power had been transferred away from elected councillors.

[8] The Localism Act 2011 provides for local referendums to be held on a range of issues, and sets out a new statutory framework for neighbourhood planning, under which town or parish councils, designated neighbourhood forums or community organisations can put forward proposals for neighbourhood planning which may (or will) be subject to referendums: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/notes/contents

[9] This figure is an estimate. Details of parish elections and contested parish polls are not recorded centrally. We know that full parish council elections were held in the unitary county areas of Cornwall, Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire and Wiltshire and there would also have been other parish elections held across England.

[10] In some areas, local elections where combined with other electoral events – either with parish elections or with neighbourhood planning referendums.

2.6   Our public opinion research found high levels of confidence that the elections were well run. Ninety per cent of voters who were surveyed said that they thought the elections were well run on 2 May. Voters in England were slightly more confident than those in Anglesey (90% compared to 83% of people survey respectively).

Roles and responsibilities for managing and delivering the elections

2.7   County Returning Officers (CROs) are responsible for the administration of the county council elections in each county. CROs have varying levels of experience and involvement in the administration of the elections. In practice, CROs tend to discharge their duties by appointing as Deputy Returning Officers (DROs)[11] the local Returning Officer in each district council, with full powers to conduct the election on the CRO's behalf. The CRO is responsible for county council elections which take place every four years and for any by-elections held in between these scheduled elections. CROs, unlike the majority of Returning Officers in district councils, are not involved in the electoral registration process.[12] Consequently, county councils do not have a permanent team of elections staff.

2.8   Prior to May 2013, the last stand-alone county council elections were held in 1993. Since the Commission came into existence in 2000, county council elections have been held in combination with the UK Parliamentary General election in 2005 and the European Parliamentary elections in 2009.

2.9   We took this opportunity to work on better understanding the role and the approach taken by CROs to administer the county council elections in practice, and what lessons could be learned for the future. Prior to the elections on 2 May we met each CRO to discuss the arrangements that were in place for managing the administration of the elections in their area.

2.10 We found a range of approaches in managing the administration of the elections. These ranged from CROs having significant involvement and seeking to manage the administration of the elections through the provision of detailed instructions to DROs, to DROs making their own detailed arrangements for the delivery of the poll with only minimal oversight by the CRO. The evidence suggests that these differing approaches can work equally well, so long as the CRO has put in place appropriate mechanisms for assuring themselves that all voters and those standing for election receive a consistently high-quality service.

2.11 Looking ahead to the next county council elections in May 2017, we intend to undertake engagement with CROs from 18 months in advance, to support them in making decisions as to how to manage the elections most effectively in their area given their own particular local circumstances.

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[11] Deputy Returning Officers' refers to district council Returning Officers who have been appointed as Deputy Returning Officers for the purposes of administering the county council elections in their area. County councils are made up of varying numbers of district councils, ranging from four, to twelve.
[12] Returning Officers at the district level are, in many cases, also the Electoral Registration Officer, responsible for registering electors within the authority.

Performance of Deputy Returning Officers (DROs)

2.12 We want people who are entitled to vote to be confident that registering to vote, and voting, is as straightforward, accessible and secure as possible. We also want them to receive a consistently high-quality service wherever they live.

2.13 The performance standards we set for Returning Officers (ROs) are used to provide assurance that the necessary planning and preparation is carried out, to ensure that the elections are well-run, and to identify and address any performance issues that may affect the successful delivery of the elections[13]. We also publish guidance for ROs on all aspects of the administration of elections, along with templates and resources, to support ROs in delivering well-run elections.

2.14 Our performance standards framework monitors the performance of ROs in the following key areas:

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

2.15 Taking into account how county council elections are typically administered, we undertook to monitor the performance of DROs rather than CROs, and in December 2012 we issued a direction to all DROs to report on their performance against these standards. All DROs were required to submit monitoring returns at pre-determined points demonstrating their performance against the standards. We also assessed supporting data and evidence from a sample of DROs[14].

2.16 Following each reporting deadline, where it appeared that the criteria for the standard had not been met, we followed up with the relevant DRO to offer them additional guidance or support as appropriate in each case.

2.17 In addition, highlight reports on the performance of DROs were provided to each CRO, to provide them with information on how well the elections were being planned and prepared for in their county, as well as highlighting any areas of concern that we had identified. General feedback from CROs was that this information was helpful and supported them in their management of the delivery of the elections in their county.

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[13] We have set and reported on performance standards for Returning Officers at scheduled elections in Great Britain since 2009. The performance standards for Returning Officers were last revised in 2011, and can be found on our website:
http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards
[14] In England, a sample of 15% of counties was selected. In Wales, local elections to the Isle of Anglesey County Council were held outside the usual four year cycle, and that authority was also included in the sample.

Summary of performance

Overall, based on our analysis of the performance of DROs against our performance standards, our assessment is that these elections were well run, with the majority of DROs meeting our standards, as shown in chart 1 below.

Chart 1: Performance of ROs in England and Anglesey
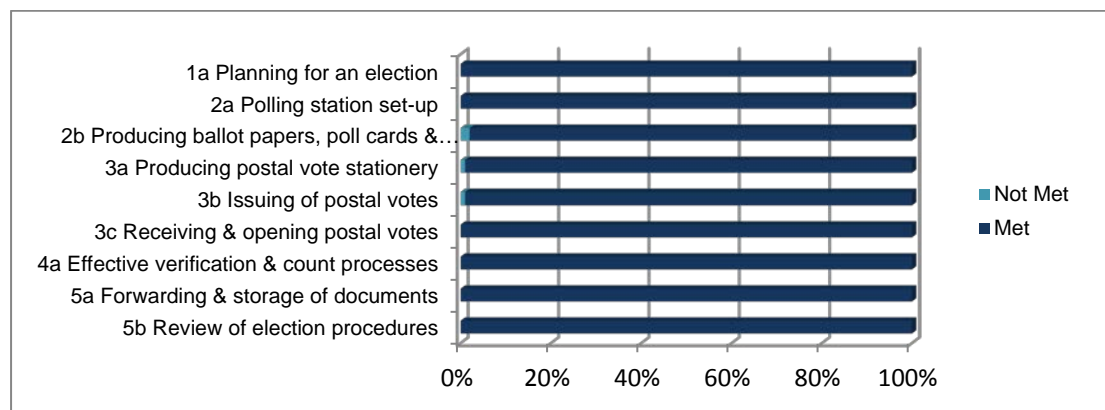
2.18 In addition to this summary, information about the performance of individual ROs is available on our website,[15] in a chart-based format that enables comparison with ROs from other local authorities.

2.19 While the majority of DROs met the standards, there were some instances where this was not the case, which primarily related to errors in the production of postal voting stationery, reflecting issues with the proofing processes they had in place.

2.20 In order to meet our performance standards for absent voting, ROs must ensure that processes are in place for proof-checking ballot papers and postal voting stationery so that the absent voting process is conducted in a professional, transparent and secure manner, with a clear audit trail, and in such a way as to ensure that all absent voters share a consistent experience and receive the same high-quality service irrespective of where they are registered to vote.

2.21 10 ROs did not meet the performance standard relating to absent voting. In these cases, although ROs had confirmed that they had processes in place to proof-check postal vote stationery and ballot papers, subsequent events proved that the necessary checks had not been made either at the proofing stage or after materials were printed by contractors, or that where checking had been undertaken the processes were not sufficiently robust to effectively manage the risk of human error leading to mistakes. We became aware of errors including:

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[15] This information can be found on our website at:
www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards/results_and_analysis/assessment

- incorrect instructions on postal voting statements referring to how many candidates to vote for
- emblems for a political party appearing against independent candidates or candidates of a different political party, and
- candidates' names missing from ballot papers

2.22 While we have not received any complaints or concerns directly from electors in these areas, we believe it is reasonable to assume that these errors could have caused unnecessary confusion for at least some voters. It is also likely that some voters would have been unable to successfully vote by post because of delays and the necessity to re-issue postal ballot packs to correct the errors.

The South Shields parliamentary by-election

2.23 The Rt Hon David Miliband announced that he would be standing down as the MP for South Shields, on 27 March 2013. The timetable for a UK Parliamentary by-election broadly follows the principles for a general election, but can be much shorter. The formal timetable for the South Shields parliamentary by-election (held on 2 May 2013) could not begin until the writ for the election had been issued following a motion in Parliament after the Easter recess. This meant that the timetable for the by-election was the shortest possible, at 13 days. Such an unusually short timetable placed pressures on the administrative process of conducting an election, and also contributed to a significant shortening of the nomination period for candidates.

2.24 The Electoral Registration and Administration (ERA) Act 2013 has lengthened the parliamentary by-election timetable by eight working days - from between 13 to 19 days to between 21 and 27 days. The ERA Act has also lengthened the statutory timetable for UK Parliamentary general elections from 17 to 25 working days. These new provisions have not yet been commenced, but we expect them to be in force from 2015.

2.25 The Law Commission review[16] offers the opportunity for a more comprehensive review of election timetables, including whether the writ should be able to be issued during a Parliamentary recess.

Counting votes

2.26 In previous reports on the administration of elections in the UK we have highlighted issues relating to the verification and count processes, and this remains an area where lessons can be learned. Count management needs to deliver accurate results, but should also be as efficient as possible to support a transparent verification and count, to ensure confidence in the results for both voters and those who stand in elections.

2.27 The Commission's observation of counts in England found that provision of information in count centres was patchy, with some DROs making better

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[16] Further information about the Law Commission's work on reforming electoral law can be found on our website:
http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/law-commission-review-of-electoral-law

use of announcements than others to keep everyone informed as the event progressed. In some cases announcements were infrequent, or inaudible. Commission representatives also commented that in some cases the layout of tables at some counts made it difficult for observers, candidates and agents to see the ballot papers as they were counted.

2.28   There were also significant variations in the time taken to count votes between different areas.

2.29 We are currently undertaking a pilot study reviewing the efficiency of procedures for managing the verification and count, with a view to identifying more accurately the resources required, and to understand how spend relates to the detailed activities undertaken in respect of verification and count processes and how effectively they have been delivered. As part of this work, we are looking to identify whether there is any correlation between count costs in specific areas and good practice in delivering the count.

2.30 ROs and DROs at four local authorities[17] have been assisting with the pilot study and once detailed costs have been collected and collated we will begin a closer examination and evaluation. We will use this evidence to decide how best to expand the study in 2014 which in turn will inform the development of a robust count 'model' in time for the 2015 UK general election, aimed at supporting ROs' work to ensure that verification and count processes are transparent, accurate, timely, and secure.

2.31 We will continue to provide advice and guidance to ROs and electoral services managers on effective count management and continue to encourage the review of local practice. ROs in England and Wales should ensure that they review and evaluate their approach to planning for and delivering the verification and count, to identify what worked well as well as areas where performance could be improved.

Looking ahead

Reviewing our performance standards framework for Returning Officers
We are planning to review our approach to performance standards for Returning Officers (ROs) during 2013, in advance of the local government and European Parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in 2014.

In developing the new performance standards framework, we will build on lessons we have learned from monitoring ROs over the last four years. Our focus is on how our framework can deliver the best outcome for voters, and those standing for election, and to ensure that resources are used most effectively in the process. We will also seek to respond to feedback we have received, including through our recent stakeholder survey.

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[17] We are grateful to the local authorities taking part in this pilot: Mendip District Council (Somerset) and North West Leicestershire District Council (Leicestershire) who had county council elections; and North Tyneside Council and Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, who had mayoral elections.

We will consider how the new framework can ensure that voters, and those standing for election, can receive a consistently high standard of service without seeking to prescribe how this is delivered in each area. This approach would ensure that local knowledge and experience can be taken into account in considering the most appropriate way to deliver services but still seeks to guarantee that they are provided in such a way as to meet an agreed standard. We will also look at what the standards cover, including whether they focus on the right things and ask for the right information at the right time.

The review will also consider how our guidance and performance standards framework should operate for elections where there are statutory office holders with a power to direct local ROs.

We intend to consult on proposed new performance standards from August, with a view to having an agreed framework in place by the end of December 2013. We will work closely with the UK Electoral Advisory Board (EAB)[18] in developing the new framework, with a view to ensuring that it reflects what we and the EAB agree that ROs need to do to prepare for and deliver well-run elections.

County Returning Officers (CROs)

From autumn 2015 we will begin engaging with CROs to support decisions on how to manage the elections in May 2017. As part of our review of current performance standards for ROs, we will also consider how the framework can be used to support CROs in making decisions about how elections are delivered in their areas, and how those decisions are implemented.

Verification and counting of votes

ROs should review and evaluate their plans for managing the verification and counting of votes in advance of elections in 2014. ROs need to consider the specific challenges that they will be faced with at the 2014 and 2015 elections, ensuring proper consideration is given to scale of the task in these years, including the particular challenges that will be faced in areas with combined elections.

ROs should focus on providing candidates, agents, and observers with clear and appropriate information at regular intervals during the verification and counting of votes. This is particularly important for those candidates and agents who are less experienced in the electoral process, and to ensure confidence in the process and results.

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[18] The UK Electoral Advisory Board is chaired by our Chief Executive, Peter Wardle, and aims to ensure continued improvements in elections management across the UK in order to deliver consistently high standards of service to voters and those standing for election or campaigning. We will also consult with the Elections, Referendums and Registration Working Group, which provides the Commission with advice and support in the development and delivery of election and electoral registration guidance and resources, including performance standards. Membership and terms of reference for both groups can be found on our website.

We will continue to provide advice and guidance to ROs and electoral services managers on effective count management and continue to encourage the review of local practice. This will include having a robust count 'model' in place for use at the 2015 elections aimed at supporting ROs' work to ensure that verification and count processes are transparent, accurate, timely, and secure.

3   Participation: voters

3.1   Participation in elections and referendums should be straightforward, and people should be confident that their vote counts.

3.2   This chapter looks at participation by voters at the 2 May elections across parts of England, and at the election for the Isle of Anglesey County Council in Wales. It focuses upon people's experience of registering to vote and casting their vote (whether by post, at a polling station or by proxy) and whether they felt that they had received enough information to be able to make an informed choice.

Registering to vote

Who could vote

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

- a British citizen living in the UK
- a qualifying Commonwealth citizen[19] living in the UK
- a citizen of the Irish Republic living in the UK
- a European Union citizen living in the UK
- any person registered to vote as a Crown Servant
- any person registered to vote as a service voter

3.4   British citizens living abroad and registered as overseas electors are not eligible to vote in local elections, but would have been able to vote in the by-election held in South Shields.

Number of people registered to vote

3.5   A total of 18.4 million people were registered to vote in the elections across England, and just over 51,000 were registered to vote in the elections on the Isle of Anglesey, Wales.

3.6   The deadline for applications to register to vote to be submitted to Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) was Wednesday 17 April – 11 working days before the election. According to data from EROs, around 81,000 (or 0.5% of the electorate in England and 1% in Anglesey) people took advantage of the ability to register after the formal election period began on 26 March.

3.7   From data provided by Returning Officers (ROs), we are aware that just under one thousand people who were not on the electoral register tried to vote on polling day.

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[19] To qualify Commonwealth citizens must live in the UK and either have leave to enter, remain, or not require such leave.

People's experience of registering to vote

3.8   People continue to be satisfied with the process of registering to vote. In our public opinion survey almost nine in ten (88%) of those surveyed said that they were satisfied with the procedure for registering to vote, including two thirds (65%) who said that they were very satisfied. Only 1% said that they were dissatisfied with the process.

Voter registration campaign

The Commission's campaign

3.9   We want to ensure that people are aware of the need to register to vote in order to take part in elections.

3.10 Before the elections we undertook a media campaign for the local elections in England and Anglesey, Wales, specifically on increasing public awareness of the need to register to vote by 17 April. Our campaign ran from 1-16 April on TV and radio in England (excluding London) and on radio and local press on the Isle of Anglesey; online advertising ran in both England and the Isle of Anglesey from 4 March.

3.11 The main message of our campaign was to highlight that if you are not registered, you cannot vote, and was aimed at increasing the number of eligible people registered to vote, particularly under-registered groups such as young people, home movers, and certain black and minority ethnic groups.

3.12 As with previous campaigns, all advertising directed people to the Commission's www.aboutmyvote.co.uk website where they could download registration forms and find further information. There was also a telephone helpline set up for the campaign period, which people could call for more information or to request a registration form.

3.13 We worked closely with Democracy UK on Facebook to generate awareness of our campaign and produced a suite of resources (including a poster, press ad and digital banners) that local authorities, charities and community groups could use to promote and increase voter registration ahead of the elections.

3.14 For the 2 May elections we also developed new media advertisements, using an online platform (www.itsyourvote.org.uk) to encourage interaction and as an opportunity to target under-registered groups. We used these adverts a small test this year and considering their success we would look to use them in the future, particularly ahead of the European elections in 2014 to boost registration among young people, ahead of the introduction of IER.

3.15 To evaluate the effectiveness of our campaign, we carried out tracking research in two stages - before the campaign launched and just after the campaign ended. Results show that 62% of eligible electors recognised an element of the campaign, which exceeded our target. Results for the whole campaign show that 85,267 registration forms were downloaded during the campaign, which exceeded our target. Our call centre sent out over 2,000 forms, making a total of 87,449. The total campaign budget was £1,194,000.

Electoral Roll UK - paid for register to vote service

On 3 April 2013 we were alerted by Stockton-On-Tees council to the website electoralroll.uk.com, offering a paid-for register to vote service. The service charged £30-a-time to complete customers' electoral roll registrations and also used a £1.53 a minute premium rate number to take customer questions. We also received a complaint from a member of the public about the website.

We are firmly against this service, as registering to vote is free of charge, with no associated costs to complete and return a form to an individual's Electoral Registration Office. We want to make sure that no one uses this or any other service that charges for something that is straightforward and free.

We took immediate action to address the issue to ensure that voters were not caught out paying for a free service, ahead of the registration deadline for the May elections.

We contacted:
- electoralroll.uk.com, asking them to immediately stop offering the service and to cease any advertising relating to it
- a number of regulatory authorities to ensure that any legal and regulatory issues that needed to be investigated were appropriately dealt with including the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), Action Fraud and Phone Pay Plus who regulate premium rate numbers
- Google to ask them to remove all advertising for electoralroll.uk.com

We also issued an alert to all electoral administrators, and a press release to local and national press to raise awareness of the issue.

Google suspended search results for electoralroll.uk.com for a period ahead of the register to vote deadline. Phone Pay Plus suspended the premium rate helpline number whilst they investigated the website, and requested that Electoral Roll UK replace their premium rate number with a local rate one, which they have now done. Action Fraud collated the information about the website onto their internet scam database.

We have received no further complaints regarding Electoral Roll UK, however we are continuing to monitor the situation and considering what further action might be available should they resume their advertising at any point in the future.

The Returning Officer's promotional campaign in Anglesey

3.16 The Returning Officer (RO) for elections in Anglesey adopted a strategic and pro-active approach to promoting the elections, which we monitored through our performance standards framework.

3.17 Concerns had been expressed by political party representatives and in the media that the negativity attached to the authority in previous years, intervention from the Welsh Government and the appointment of

Commissioners to administer local services could result in people feeling disenchanted and having little interest in the election.

3.18 Consequently the first part of the local authority's campaign focussed on promoting the role of the council and encouraging individuals to stand as candidates in the elections.

3.19 The local authority used a variety of different promotional methods, including press releases, radio interviews with the RO, adverts in local newspapers / council publications and material relating to the elections in public buildings. The local authority also used social networking, including Twitter, to provide information to voters on the island.

3.20 In our public opinion survey immediately after the election, we asked people if they had seen or heard any advertising, publicity or other information about the election itself and what they needed to do, rather than information from election campaigners. 72% of people said they had, comparing favourably with 62% of people in England where local elections were taking place on the same day.

Voting in the elections

Turnout

3.21 Turnout at the local elections in England was 31%, which was lower than the previous comparable local elections held in 2009 and 2005 when turnout was 39% and 64% respectively. The elections in 2009 were, however, held on the same day as elections for the European Parliament, while the elections in 2005 were held on the same day as the 2005 UK Parliamentary general election.

3.22 By comparison, turnout in Anglesey was 51%. This compares with 53% in 2008 when elections were held across the rest of Wales. Turnout remained significantly higher in Anglesey than the average across Wales at local elections held in 2008 (43%) and 2012 (39%).

3.23 Turnout at each of the relevant elections held on 2 May 2013 is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Turnout at the different elections on 2 May

Poll	Turnout (%)
Local elections England	30.9
Local election Anglesey	50.5
Mayoral election Doncaster	27.8
Mayoral election North Tyneside	32.1
UK parliamentary by-election South Shields	39.3

Why people did and did not vote

3.24 Our public opinion research explored why people did and did not vote in the May 2013 elections. Consistent with findings from previous elections, the most common reasons given for not voting were circumstantial (mentioned by

57% of those surveyed overall), including people saying that they were too busy to vote or didn't have enough time (22%), while others forgot (11%) or were away on polling day (12%).

3.25 Respondents in Wales were more likely to report administration reasons[20] (10% against 3% in England) and reasons connected to parties and candidates (17% against 9% in England) such as 'I didn't like the candidates and parties' and 'you just can't trust politicians to keep their promises'.

3.26 Again, consistent with findings from research at other elections in recent years, the most common reasons given for voting were related to perceptions of civic responsibility (70%), either because it was their 'civic duty' (49%) or that they always voted (27%).

3.27 Voters in Anglesey were less likely to report civic duty as the main reason for voting (55% against 70% in England) and more likely to say they voted to 'help create a change' (27% against 8% in England).

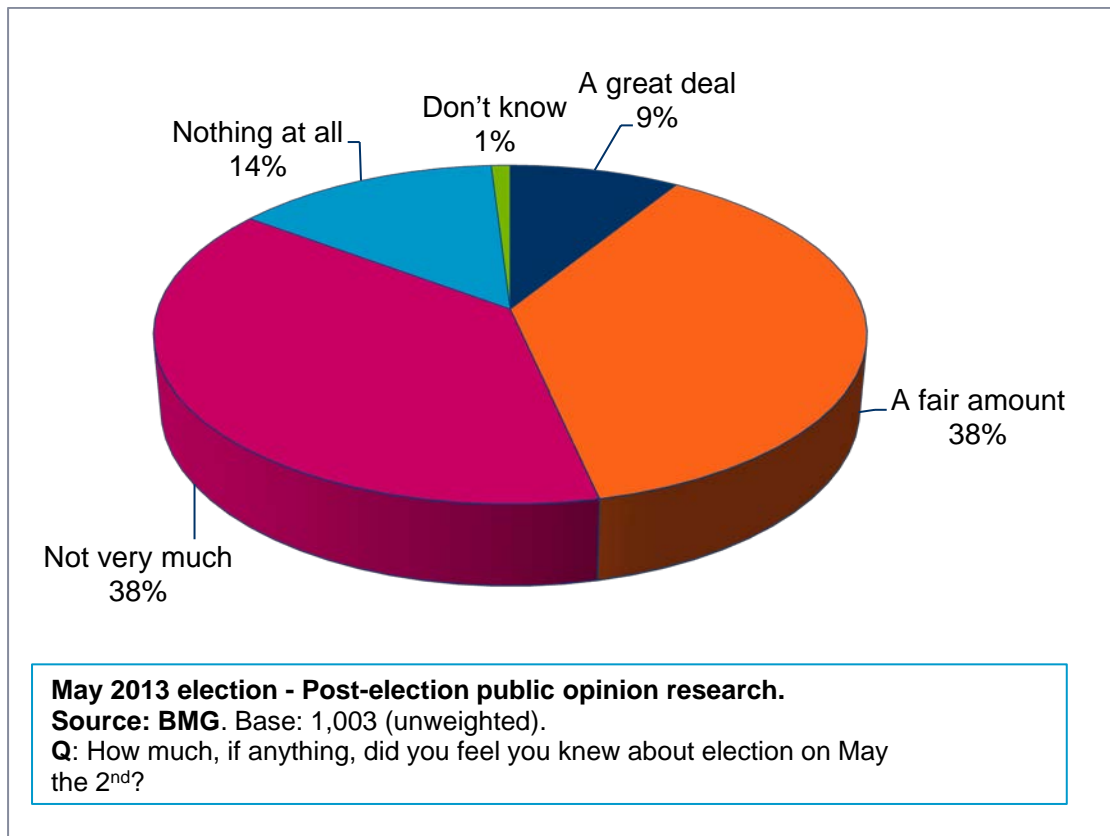# People's experience of casting their vote

Did people feel informed about the elections?
3.28 Almost half of all respondents to our public opinion research (47%) said they felt they knew a great deal or a fair amount about the local elections, including one in ten (9%) who felt they knew a great deal. This compares with 24% of people who said that they knew a great deal or a fair amount about the PCC elections (November 2012) and 52% about the local elections held in England in May 2012.

3.29 As shown in chart 2 below, however, over half of respondents (53%) felt they knew not very much or nothing at all about the elections, including one in seven (14%) who felt they knew nothing at all. Respondents in Anglesey were more likely than those in England to say that they knew a great deal or a fair amount – 61% compared to 47%. Voters were, unsurprisingly, more likely than non-voters to know a great deal or a fair amount about the elections – 59% compared to 34%.

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[20] This would include for example not being registered; didn't receive polling card or postal vote or not knowing where their polling station was.

Chart 2: Knowledge of the May 2013 elections

Don't know 1%

A great deal 9%

Nothing at all 14%

A fair amount 38%

Not very much 38%

May 2013 election - Post-election public opinion research.
Source: BMG. Base: 1,003 (unweighted).
Q: How much, if anything, did you feel you knew about election on May the 2nd?

3.30 Three quarters of people (73%) who responded to our public opinion survey agreed that they had enough information on how to cast their vote.

3.31 Just under half of people surveyed (49%) said that they found it easy to access information on parties and candidates, compared to 32% who said it was difficult. And a similar proportion (49%) said that they had enough information on parties and candidates to make an informed decision on who to vote for, 43% said that they did not.

3.32 In Anglesey, where turnout was higher, people were more likely to say they had enough information on parties and candidates (59% compared with 49% in England) and that it was easy to access this information (57% compared with 49% respectively).

3.33 Of those who agreed that they had enough information about parties and candidates, most (63%) found the information from leaflets or flyers from a candidate/political party. This was also the preferred method of communication by all respondents – 62% said they preferred to receive information about parties and candidates in this way.

3.34 The November 2012 PCC elections were the first where we asked people about whether they had enough information on parties and candidates to make an informed decision on who to vote for. We will continue to monitor trends and report on these annually in our election reports.

People's experience of voting

3.35 Around 4 million people or 25% of the 'in person' electorate chose to cast their vote in their local polling station in the elections held on 2 May.

3.36 2.71 million people (or 15%[21] of the total electorate where elections were held in England), were issued with a postal vote. The number of postal ballots as a percentage of all ballot papers at the count in England was 31%. In Anglesey, 8,600 postal voters were issued with a postal vote (or 17% of the electorate). 19,000 people chose to appoint a proxy. 1.81 million postal vote envelopes were returned by voters – 66.6% of those who were issued with a postal vote.

3.37 Nearly all polling station voters surveyed (97%) were satisfied with their experience of voting – 77% said that they were very satisfied. Similarly, 96% of postal voters survey said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the postal voting process, with 87% saying that they were very satisfied.

3.38 We are not aware of any specific difficulties that people had completing and returning their postal vote – 99% of postal voters surveyed said that they found it easy to understand how to complete and return their postal vote.

Completing the ballot paper

3.39 Consistent with public opinion results since 2009, we found that almost all (98%) of those respondents who said that they had voted in the May 2013 elections felt it was very or fairly easy to complete their ballot paper – and close to nine in ten (88%) said it was very easy. Voters in Anglesey were more likely to say it was difficult than voters in England (8% compared with 1% respectively).

Rejected postal votes

3.40 Returned postal ballot packs must be rejected and ballot papers should not be included in the count if the signature and/or date of birth supplied by voters and returned with their postal vote cannot be matched with those previously provided by the voter and held on the Electoral Registration Officers' (EROs') records. This security measure is intended to prevent postal voting fraud, and there is currently a requirement for ROs to carry out this check on a minimum 20% sample of postal ballot packs at each opening session.

3.41 Checking the identifiers on 100% of returned postal ballot packs, or very close to that, has now become the standard practice of ROs across Great Britain. Identifiers on 100% of returned postal ballot packs must be checked by ROs if they are to meet our performance standards for well-run elections. All ROs met this standard, and confirmed that they had checked 100% of returned postal ballot packs.

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[21] 14% of the electorate were issued with a postal vote at the local elections in June 2009.

3.42 A total of 53,000 postal votes were reported by ROs as having been rejected as invalid or otherwise not forwarded to the count; 2.9% of all those returned in England and 3% in Anglesey. This compares to 2.1%, and 3.4% of postal votes returned at the mayoral elections in Doncaster and North Tyneside, respectively. This overall rejection rate compares to a rate of 4.7% for the November Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections, 4.6% of returned postal votes for the May 2012 local government elections, and 7.6% of returned postal votes at the May 2012 mayoral referendums.

3.43 At the May elections in 2013 approximately 21% of rejected postal ballot packs in England and Anglesey did not contain either or both of the elector's signature and date of birth. However it continues to be the case that the most common reasons why returned postal votes are not included in the count are because either, or both of the signature and date of birth provided by the voter do not match the records held by the ERO (54% in England and 61% in Anglesey). The proportion of postal votes that were rejected as a result of the ballot paper being missing was 9% in England and 16% in Anglesey. Missing postal vote statements accounted for 16% of those rejected in England and 1% in Anglesey.

3.44 Checking the personal identifiers on all returned postal ballot packs will be a legal requirement under new regulations which we expect to see in place for elections from 2014 onwards. We have been recommending this change since 2007 and pleased that the UK Government has now accepted and acted on our recommendation.

3.45 While it is clearly important that measures are in place to detect and prevent postal voting fraud, it is also important to ensure these measures do not inadvertently prevent who simply make mistakes on their postal voting statements from casting their vote. Allowing EROs to tell electors that their postal vote statement has been rejected and where appropriate request a refreshed specimen signature, would help address this problem.

3.46 We recommended this change in our July 2007 evaluation of the first year of operating the requirement to check postal vote identifiers, and we have welcomed provisions included in the ERA Act to implement this change. We have recommended that these provisions should be commenced in advance of the scheduled May 2014 elections, so that any electors who may need to provide a new specimen signature are able to do so in good time ahead of the scheduled 2015 UK Parliamentary General Election.

Voting by proxy

3.47 Electors with a valid reason for why they were unable to vote in person, such as illness, physical incapacity, work commitments, or being overseas, could appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf, either in a polling station or by post. The deadline for applying for a proxy vote was 5pm on Wednesday 24 April.

3.48 Approximately 19,000 people appointed a proxy at the local elections, which as a proportion of the electorate in England, was 0.1% and in Anglesey was 0.3%.

3.49 Of that total, around 70 were proxies appointed as a result of medical emergencies. After the deadline for applying for a proxy vote, anyone who was suddenly taken ill and so was unable to vote in person could appoint an emergency proxy, up to 5pm on polling day itself.

3.50 We have welcomed the Government's acceptance of our previous recommendation that the emergency proxy voting provisions should be extended to those unexpectedly called away on business or military service. However, we are disappointed that our previous recommendation that these should be further extended, to apply to those who have other reasons for not being able to attend the polling station at short notice, such as caring responsibilities or a recent bereavement, has not been implemented. We would therefore repeat our recommendation that the emergency proxy provisions be further extended so as to avoid disenfranchising those voters.

Rejected ballot papers

3.51 Overall, the number of ballot papers that were rejected at the count for both local government and mayoral elections represented a small proportion of the total number of ballot papers cast. For the local government elections in England 0.5% of ballot papers were rejected at the count; 0.2% were rejected in Anglesey. These rejection rates are broadly in line with previous similar elections.

4   Participation: Campaigning and standing for election

Number of candidates standing in the 2 May elections

4.1   More than 9,500 candidates campaigned to be elected for over 2,300 seats in 34 local authorities across England. Approximately 900 of these were candidates independent of a political party. In Anglesey, 107 candidates stood for 30 available seats.

4.2   Nine candidates stood in the South Shields by- election, 10 in the Doncaster mayoral election and 3 in the North Tyneside mayoral election.

Advice for candidates from the Commission

Revised code of conduct for campaigners

4.3   Campaigners are an essential element of a healthy democracy, and their right to put their arguments to voters should be supported and protected. It is equally important, however, to ensure that the activities of campaigners do not bring into question the integrity of the electoral process.

4.4   In March 2013 we issued a revised Code for campaigners, electoral administrators and police forces to what is, and is not, considered acceptable behaviour at polling stations and in the community during the lead-up to polling day.[22]

4.5   The revised Code was agreed by the political parties represented on the House of Commons Parliamentary Parties Panel and the panels for the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales, and is endorsed by the members of the Electoral Commission's UK Electoral Advisory Board of senior Returning and Electoral Registration Officers, and Electoral Integrity Roundtable. Copies of the Code were sent to all registered political parties in Great Britain, and Returning Officers were asked to draw it to the attention of all candidates and parties contesting elections.

4.6   We were aware of one specific instance where it was suggested that a campaigner may have breached the provisions of the code which discourage campaigners from collecting completed postal ballot packs from electors. We understand, however, that an allegation relating to possible electoral fraud offences under the Representation of the People Act is now under

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[22] The Electoral Commission (2013) *Code of conduct for campaigners: postal voting, proxy voting and polling stations:* http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/154176/Code-of-conduct-campaigners-2013.pdf

investigation by the police. We will report on any specific issues once investigations have concluded.

Standing for election

4.7   It should be easy for people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are, and what they have to do to comply with these rules. However, we continue to receive a significant number of queries from candidates on the qualifications for standing for election.

4.8   We provide practical advice and assistance for anyone who wants to stand as a candidate or be an agent at a local government election in England and Wales. It covers the whole election process, including the main steps towards standing as a candidate, the campaign and election periods, the declaration of the result, and election spending. Standing for election can be complicated, but our guidance aims to make it as straightforward as possible.

4.9   The Commission has begun a review of the procedures used for standing for election in the UK. Our review will consider any barriers which prevent people from putting themselves forward as candidates for election, and whether there are any unnecessary barriers which could be removed. The review will include qualifications, disqualifications and the requirements for becoming nominated as a candidate, as well as the benefits and support available to candidates once nominated.

4.10 We aim to publish our final conclusions and any recommendations for change by the end of March 2014.

Campaign spending and donations

4.11 There are rules that limit candidates' campaign spending at local elections and place restrictions on the donations they can accept to fund their campaigns. The rules on campaigning applied from 26 March 2013 until polling day.

4.12 We published guidance on the rules for candidates and agents in early February 2013. We also updated our candidates and agents guidance, produced a factsheet explaining the changes to the rules and updated our candidate spending forms in late March when the changes relating to the Fund came into effect. In the period from January 2013 to the end of March 2013 we responded to over 250 queries about the rules on party registration and campaigning at elections. We registered 37 new political parties and 188 changes to party details between January and March 2013.

4.13 In January 2013 the UK Government consulted the Commission on a draft Order to amend the rules on candidate spending, by excluding some spending funded by the Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund from counting against spending limits. In our consultation response we expressed concerns that the rule changes arising from the Order could create regulatory uncertainty for users of the Fund. After we raised our concerns

during the January consultation period, the Government and the Fund administrator began to further develop their policies to clarify the operation and scope of the Fund.

4.14 The Government put the Order before Parliament in March 2013. We briefed Parliamentarians on our concerns and highlighted the steps that we had recommended should be taken to mitigate the risks created by the Order. After the Order was passed, the Fund administrator confirmed its revised policies and also advised all grant applicants to contact us for advice on how their spending from the grant should be treated under the spending rules. We have provided this individual advice to those applicants that contacted us.

4.15 At the time of publication of this report we have not identified any breaches of the rules on candidates' spending and donations at these elections, and have received no allegations of breaches. Candidates had to provide their spending return to the relevant Returning Officer by 6 June if their result was announced on Thursday 2 May, and by 7 June if their result was announced on Friday 3 May. If we carry out any enforcement work in connection with potential breaches of the rules at these elections, we will publish information about these in due course in accordance with our disclosure policy.

Looking ahead

Candidates and agents

While the primary responsibility for ensuring individual candidates understand whether they are qualified or disqualified will continue to remain with them and their election agents, important lessons need to be learned by the Commission, political parties, Returning Offices and the UK Government about how best to ensure prospective candidates fully understand the rules surrounding their eligibility to stand.

The Commission has begun a review of the procedures used for standing for election in the UK. We aim to publish our final conclusions and any recommendations for change by the end of March 2014.

In June 2013, we published our review of the current rules on political finance[23]. The scope of the review was to identify how the rules could be made more effective, and how to reduce the burdens they create for those we regulate. The report makes 50 recommendations, including nine improvements to the rules covering candidates and agents. These changes

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[23] Electoral Commission, *A regulatory review of the UK's party and election finance laws: Recommendations for change* (June 2013) http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/155874/PEF-Regulatory-Review-2013.pdf

would have to be made through primary legislation. We have invited the relevant Governments in the UK to take them forward[24], and recommended that some of the proposals would require consultation.

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[24] The Scottish Government has legislative responsibility for the rules at Scottish Parliamentary and Scottish local government elections.

5   No undue influence

5.1   Voters need to be confident that there is no undue influence in the way our electoral and political finance systems work. We keep a constant focus on electoral integrity and we continue to work closely with all those involved in delivering elections to ensure that they understand and effectively carry out their responsibilities in preventing and detecting electoral fraud.

5.2   We work with the UK's Associations of Chief Police Officers (ACPO and ACPOS) and The National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC)) to produce guidance for police forces on how to detect and prevent electoral fraud.

5.3   We also set performance standards which require Returning Officers (ROs) to confirm that their election plans detail the processes they have in place to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity issues, and what steps are to be taken to deal with any problems that might arise.

Voters' views about electoral fraud

Understanding electoral fraud

5.4   Almost half (46%) of people surveyed in our public opinion research after the May 2013 elections felt that they understand 'a lot' (9%) or 'a little (37%) about electoral fraud, compared to 50% who claimed to know 'hardly anything at all (31%) or 'nothing at all' (19%). These results are consistent with our previous post-poll research, where between 45% and 50% of respondents felt they understood a lot or a little about electoral fraud.

5.5   People were asked to explain what they understood by the term 'electoral fraud'. 41% of people said they understood electoral fraud to involve 'someone voting using someone else's vote/name/false identity'. Others mention 'cheating/corruption/vote rigging' (22%) and tampering with ballot papers (8%).

5.6   Our public opinion research also asked people to what extent they thought different types of fraud are regarded as a problem. Respondents were more likely to identify benefit fraud and false insurance claims as a problem than electoral fraud (79% and 83% respectively compared to 15% in relation to electoral fraud). This figure is lower than the 30% of people who said that they thought fraud was a problem that we have consistently seen over the last few years.[25]

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[25] This may in part be explained by the slightly re-worded question for this year's survey where participants are asked if benefit and insurance fraud are also a problem, rather than just about electoral fraud. And also elections were not held in the areas which we have identified as being high risk where allegations of electoral fraud are more likely to be reported and investigated.
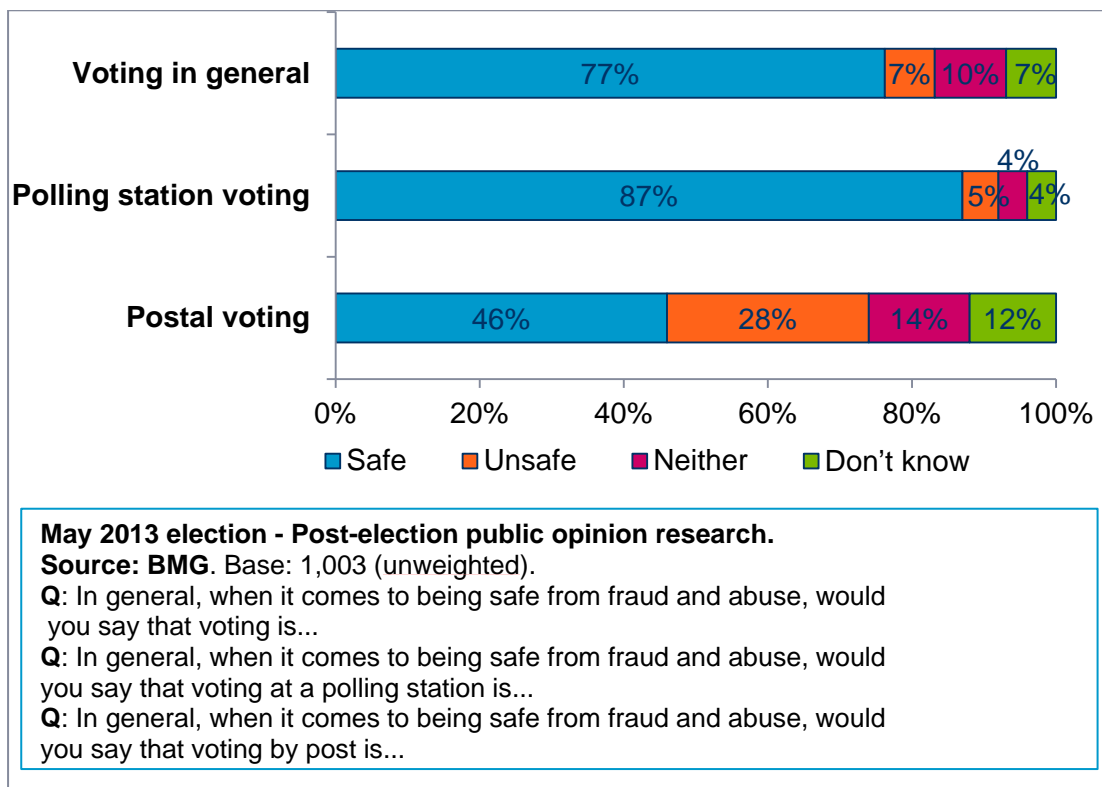
Perceptions of fraud

5.7   As shown in chart 3 below, three quarters (77%) of respondents to our 2013 public opinion survey felt that voting in general is safe from fraud and abuse. This is similar to the findings from the past three years, which were 79% in November 2012, 76% in May 2012, 77% in 2010 and 79% 2011.

5.8   Voting in person at the polling station continues to be perceived as safer than casting a vote by post (88% compared with 46%), despite security measures in place through the provision of absent vote identifiers to strengthen its security.

5.9   Those who vote by post are significantly more likely to think that postal voting is safe – 82% compared to 38% of polling station voters. Postal voters in England were less likely that those in Wales to think that postal voting was safe – 82% compared to 92%.

Chart 3: Is voting safe from fraud and abuse?

May 2013 election - Post-election public opinion research.
Source: BMG. Base: 1,003 (unweighted).
Q: In general, when it comes to being safe from fraud and abuse, would you say that voting is...
Q: In general, when it comes to being safe from fraud and abuse, would you say that voting at a polling station is...
Q: In general, when it comes to being safe from fraud and abuse, would you say that voting by post is...

Were people concerned that fraud took place at the May 2013 elections?

5.10 Almost half of respondents to our public opinion research (48%) thought that hardly any (33%) or no (15%) electoral fraud took place at the May 2013 elections. Only 1% thought that a lot of fraud had taken place and 21% thought that a little had. A further 31% said that they did not know.

5.11 The proportion of people who thought that fraud had taken place at the 2 May elections was fewer than those who said that they thought fraud had

taken place at either the November 2012 PCC elections (28%) and the May 2012 local elections (35%).[26]

5.12 Those respondents who said that they thought electoral fraud took place on 2 May were asked which out of a list of options best described why they thought this. Reasons given included: a general feeling that identity fraud is on the increase (48%); lack of identification being required to vote (48%); a general impression that fraud is a problem (47%); postal voting not being secure (43%); multiple registrations (37%); that politicians can't be trusted (34%) and seen stories in the media (18%).

Cases of alleged electoral fraud at the May 2013 elections

5.13 Through the ACPO National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC), we have collated data from all police forces in England and Wales relating to cases of alleged electoral fraud at the May 2013 polls. As at the end of June we are aware of approximately 140 potential cases of alleged electoral fraud which relate to the 2 May polls.

5.14 Our initial analysis of this data indicates that a large proportion of alleged cases relate to potential campaign or nomination offences, including alleged false nominations, false statements about the character or conduct of candidates, and allegations that some election materials failed to include the correct imprint.

5.15 At the time publishing this report the majority of these cases were still under investigation by the police, and we will publish by mid-March 2014 comprehensive data on all cases of alleged electoral fraud reported during 2013 and their outcomes.[27]

Challenging an election result

5.16 The results of elections can only be challenged through the issue of an election petition by the High Court. The process of challenging an election result requires a petition to be lodged with the courts within 21 days of the election result being declared.

5.17 At the time of publication, we are aware of two instances where the results of county council division elections have been challenged through a petition: Maryport South and Moss Bay & Moorclose divisions of Cumbria Country Council.

5.18 We will report on the outcome of these petitions once investigations have concluded.

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[26] For both the May 2012 and November 2012 elections, these figures are for the areas holding elections in England only.
[27] Our annual reports on allegations of electoral fraud can be found on our website http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voter-registration/electoral-fraud

Electoral fraud in the UK – our review

5.19 In 2012 we commenced a wide-ranging review to identify whether there are opportunities to improve confidence in the security of electoral processes in the UK[28] while at the same time achieving the appropriate balance between accessibility and security of the electoral system.

5.20 We published an evidence and issues paper, which sets out information about electoral fraud in the UK and about concerns which people have raised during our initial consultation[29]. We aim to publish our final conclusions and any recommendations for change by autumn 2013, in time for any legislation to be introduced before the end of the current Parliament.

Looking ahead

Recent high-profile cases of alleged electoral fraud have highlighted areas for improvements to current approaches to preventing and detecting electoral fraud, particularly to ensure well-managed and coordinated relationships between police forces, Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Returning Officers (ROs). These improvements will require action from EROs and ROs and police forces, particularly in areas of higher risk, but they will also need to be supported by commitments from political parties, candidates and campaigners.

Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Returning Officers (ROs): EROs and ROs need to begin detailed planning now to ensure their approach to preventing and detecting electoral fraud is as thorough and robust as possible. EROs and ROs also need to take specific steps to improve confidence in their approach for future elections, particularly among elected representatives, candidates and campaigners: they should make sure they do more to tell people in their local areas what they are doing to prevent and detect electoral fraud, and they should make information publicly available wherever possible, to support improved transparency about the integrity of electoral registration and election processes.

Police Forces: Police forces need to review their plans for policing elections in 2014 and 2015 in conjunction with EROs and ROs. They should ensure that plans developed by EROs and ROs reflect the specific role of police forces in relation to both operational policing on the ground during the pre-election period, and also in dealing with and investigating allegations of electoral fraud. Given the considerable public interest in allegations of electoral fraud, police forces should review their communication strategies for future elections to provide an appropriate level of assurance that they are

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[28] Issues relating to the financial regulation of political parties, organisations and individuals engaged in campaigning are out of the scope of the review. Nor does the review cover the rules for challenging the outcome of elections, which has been included in the Law Commission review of electoral law. Further information about the Law Commission's work on reforming electoral law can be found on our website:
http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/law-commission-review-of-electoral-law
[29] Further information about the Commission's review of electoral fraud can be found on our website: http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voter-registration/electoral-fraud

responding to concerns about electoral fraud and thoroughly investigating allegations.

The Commission

Our guidance
During the next 12 months, in the lead up to the May 2014 elections, we will review and comment on plans published by EROs and ROs, particularly in areas where allegations of electoral fraud are more likely to be reported and investigated, including actions agreed with relevant police forces, to ensure that what they propose will be an effective response to improve confidence in the integrity of future elections.

Electoral integrity
We will report on the outcomes of Tower Hamlets' action plan to implement our recommendations, this summer.

We will publish the final conclusions from our review of electoral fraud, along with any recommendations for change to the current voting system to improve confidence in the security of electoral processes in the UK, by autumn 2013. This will be in time for any legislation to be introduced before the end of the current Parliament.

In advance of the 2014 and 2015 elections we will continue to monitor the 15 high risk areas allegations of electoral fraud are more likely to be reported and investigated.

We will continue to collate and analyse NPoCC data on a monthly basis to identify any further areas of concern/ high risk areas

We will further engage with political parties and campaigners to reduce the opportunity for electoral fraud while increasing public confidence in the integrity of the electoral and political process. We will work with parties to build on the current code of conduct and analyse the effectiveness of the code since its implementation.

Appendix: Research methodology

Public opinion

BMG Research interviewed a representative sample of 1,003 of individuals – split almost equally between voters and non-voters – in England and Anglesey. Interviews were conducted between Friday 3 May 2013 and Sunday 19 May 2013.

Our survey did not cover mayoral elections or neighbourhood planning referendums that took place on 2 May 2013.

Interviews were conducted by telephone and were distributed as follows:

- 802 in England (spread proportionately in areas holding elections)
- 201 in Anglesey

The profile of the contacted sample was representative of the eligible electorate aged 18+ with quotas set by voting/non-voting and key demographics. Interviews have been geographically distributed in areas with elections, proportionately to the area's population.

The data has been weighted by age, gender and work status to adjust for minor deviations from the target sample.

A sample size of 1,003 carries a maximum confidence interval of +/-3.1% at the level of confidence of 95%. The confidence interval reduces to ±2.8% on observed values around 30%/70%, and to ±1.9% on observed values around 10%/90%.

In Anglesey, interviews were available in both English and Welsh.

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

A technical report is available upon request.

Electoral data

Professors Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher at the Elections Centre, Plymouth University, collected and collated data from Returning Officers on the Commission's behalf.

This included data relating to electoral registration, turnout, absent voting and rejected ballots. We received data from all those local authorities in England and Wales which held scheduled local elections or mayoral elections. However, in some cases an authority did not return all of the data requested, or did not return it for all wards.

Returning Officer feedback

The Commission issued an optional qualitative feedback form to Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in areas where the elections were held in England and Anglesey on 2 May.

We received 16 returns: six from the East and South East region, seven from the North West and one from each of the South West, West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber. Twelve of the forms were completed by District ROs (four of whom were also ERO for their area); three were completed by a County RO and another by an ERO.

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

Putting voters first