

**Local elections 2021**

**The ones  
to watch**



**LGiU**

On 6 May, voters will go to the polls to choose over 8,000 councillors in 145 English local authorities, seven combined authority mayors, London and five single city mayors. On the same day voters will also elect Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales, Welsh Senedd seats and Members of the Scottish parliament. Parish councils elections and a number of neighbourhood plan referenda will also be held.

This year will include two sets of elections – those originally scheduled for 2021 and those postponed from 2020. The 2020 set of seats were first elected before the Brexit referenda and two general elections which have seen significant swings of fortune for political parties, so no doubt there will be some reading of the tea leaves over potential gains and losses and especially as many of the elections will be held in traditional labour areas. The 2021 set of elections are mostly county councils – these were last held in 2017, a year when Conservatives made gains.

## The Covid effect

These are also the first full set of elections in the UK since the beginning of the pandemic. While local elections are often viewed as some kind of opinion poll on the central government of the day, the higher profile and greater awareness of the role that councils play in people's lives may make a difference to how much people engage with the local elections. Conversely, with the difficulties of campaigning during pandemic restrictions and with still low (but increasing) numbers of adults fully vaccinated against Covid-19 with both jabs voters may feel less connected to candidates and less inclined to vote.

Government guidance on campaigning urges candidates to rely less on shoe leather and door knocking and more on online events and telephone canvassing. Campaign spending limits have been raised this year to reflect this. Independent candidates made striking gains in the 2019 elections, but this may be harder for like-minded campaigners who are working without party infrastructure.

Local elections are ultimately about local matters and choosing the people who will make decisions on things that affect everything from the state of the street where we live, to the parks and playgrounds we take our kids to, or the safety of our food. Even more importantly this year they are about electing the people who will lead us through local decisions about recovery from the pandemic. They are not a substitute for a general election.

However, there is one area where we should expect the national to influence the local and that is a national overarching policy on matters like adult social care, devolution or even how local government might be sustainably funded. Sadly, coherent approaches to local government policy have been largely absent as parties and politicians have first created a Brexit sized hole in the national discourse and then been dealing, understandably, with the pandemic.

While many will be watching changes in control and the share of the national vote, perhaps we should best judge the nation's mood with turnout. Do people have a renewed interest in local government after a year where local public servants have been so important to many people's lives or will lingering infection rates and a

difficult campaign season keep people away from the polls? Will a decline in local journalism and the perennial difficulty of finding information about local candidates mean turnout is lacklustre? And if voter turnout across the nation hits the bottom, what does that say about the state of our democracy?

## Overview

What's at stake:

Of the 145 local authority elections there are:

- 21 county councils
- 59 district councils
- 29 unitary councils
- 25 Metropolitan district councils
- the Greater London Authority
- the Isles of Scilly

In addition there will be eight combined authority mayoral elections, including London and five single authority mayors.

| Combined authority              | Original year |      | Incumbent            |
|---------------------------------|---------------|------|----------------------|
| Cambridgeshire and Peterborough | 2021          | Blue | James Palmer (Con)   |
| Greater Manchester              | 2020          | Red  | Andy Burnham (Lab)   |
| Liverpool City Region           | 2020          | Red  | Steve Rotheram (Lab) |
| Tees Valley                     | 2020          | Blue | Ben Houchen (Con)    |
| West Midlands                   | 2020          | Blue | Andy Street (Con)    |
| West of England                 | 2021          | Blue | Tim Bowles (Con)     |
| West Yorkshire                  | 2021          |      | Role established     |

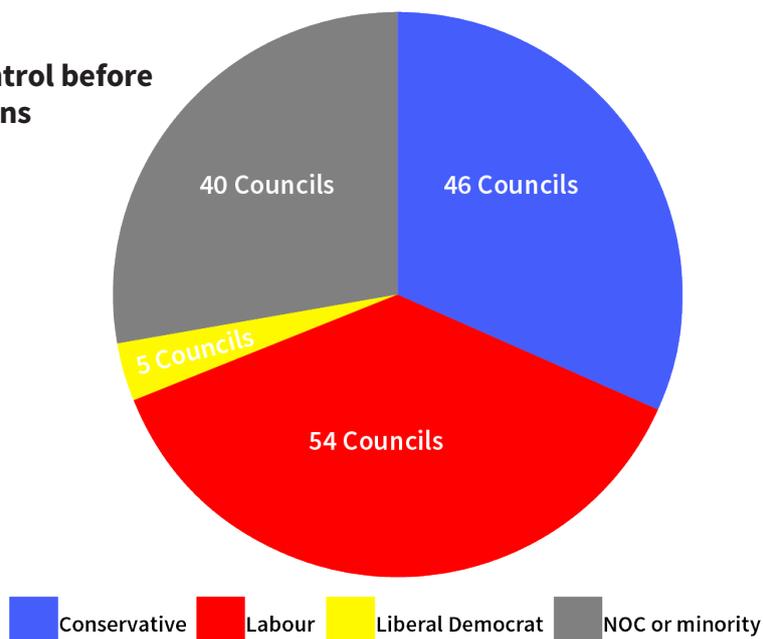
And the London mayor – currently held by Sadiq Khan, Labour.

| Local authority | Original year | Incumbent            |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Bristol         | 2020          | Marvin Rees (Lab)    |
| Doncaster       | 2021          | Ros Jones (Lab)      |
| Liverpool       | 2020          | Joe Anderson (Lab)   |
| North Tyneside  | 2021          | Norma Redfearn (Lab) |
| Salford         | 2020          | Paul Dennett (Lab)   |

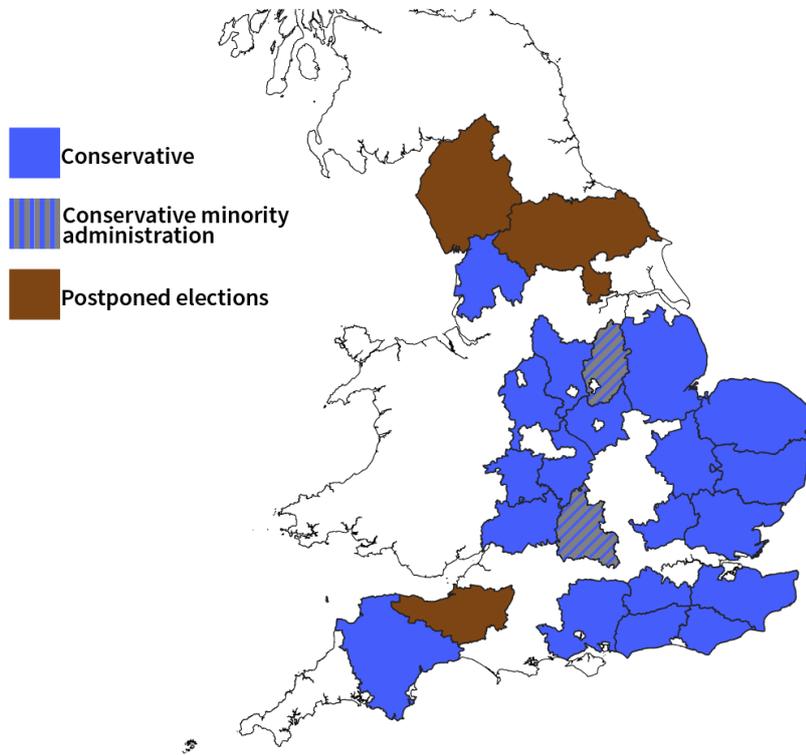
## Political control

The Conservatives and Labour at first glance have similar amounts at stake this year with 46 councils in Conservative control up for grabs and 54 Labour councils with elections. This hides the fact that only around a third of councils have much chance of changing control. Where councils only elect a third of their seats at each election – a good proportion of them have majorities so strong that it is mathematically impossible for them to change control. Even where councils are having all out elections, where the whole council is up for election, such as county councils, the historical strength of parties locally mean that not much is likely to change. Even so, the Conservatives and Labour have equally as much to lose and gain with about 20 Conservative or minority Conservative administrations and about 17 Labour or Labour minority administrations being put to the electoral test this year.

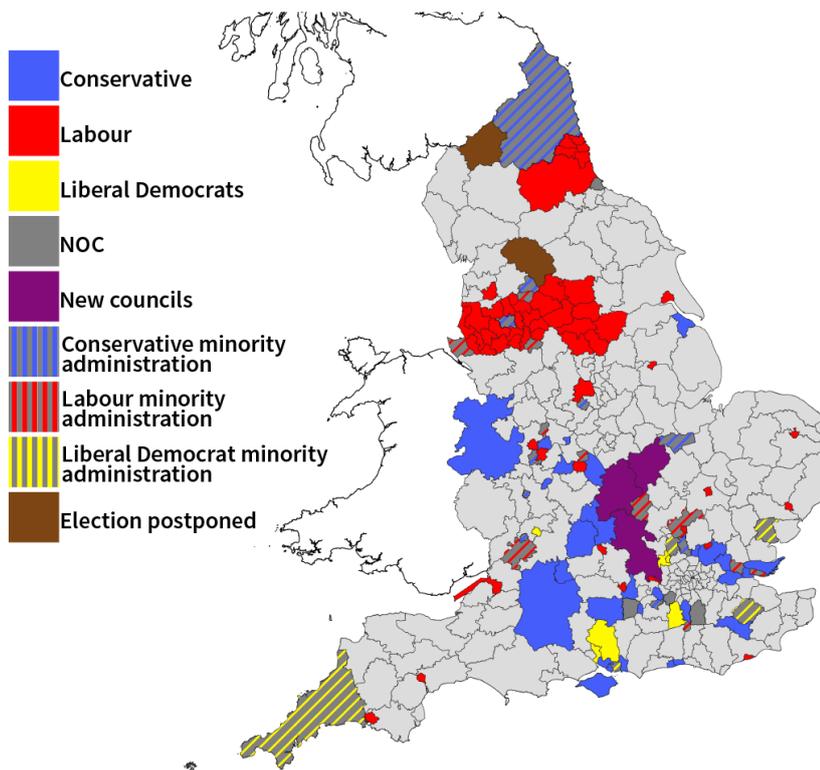
### Political control before 2021 elections



## County council elections



## Single tier and district elections



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# Elections by region

## Elections in the East Midlands

Three counties **Derbyshire**, **Lincolnshire** and **Nottinghamshire** turned blue at the last election and the latter two only by a thread. Former minister Edwina Currie is standing for the Conservatives in Whaley Bridge, so look out for how she fares on the night. **Derby City Council** has had some tumultuous local politics, long controlled by Labour it went No Overall Control in 2018 with a Conservative minority administration, but unsettled local politics, including the leader Chris Poulton surviving a vote of no confidence means that anything could happen.

Two new unitary councils, **North Northamptonshire** and **West Northamptonshire** will be holding elections for the first time after the abolition of Northamptonshire County Council and constituent districts. Most of the previous councils were historically Conservative run with the exception of Labour led Corby DC.

## East of England

East of England is holding a slew of elections this year, but many in districts that elect in thirds meaning change of overall political control is unlikely. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Mayor, first elected in 2017, is currently held by James Palmer, Conservative.

## County Councils

There are five all-out county elections Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex and Hertfordshire – all Conservative controlled. **Norfolk** was one of the few areas where Labour made gains at county level at the last set of elections and may hope to do so again. All other councils would likely take a considerable change of fortune for the Tories to have a change in control.

## District Councils

Although Conservatives are unlikely to lose control in **Castle Point**, it's worth watching how the Canvey Island Independents fare and if they do better than independents across the rest of the country. They campaign on the basis of restoring local authority sovereignty, such as it is, to the island – which was lost in the 1972 local government reorganisation.

In **North Hertfordshire** seats are split between Labour, Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. It's currently a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition, but Conservatives would only need to gain a handful of seats to retake control.

**Cambridge** is holding all-out elections this year because of boundary changes and will be hard fought between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

**St. Albans** is currently a Liberal Democrat minority administration, but finely balanced and has a history of switching between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

The Liberal Democrats and Labour are in coalition in **Colchester**, but Conservatives would only need a handful of seats to take control.

Conservatives lost overall control of Welwyn Hatfield in the 2019 elections, they won't need much to take it back, but can they?

**Basildon** is run by a Labour-led coalition. Both Labour and the Conservatives would have to win a possibly dauntingly high number of seats, but Labour would need to win more to govern alone. With the collapse of UKIP and perhaps a tough year for independent candidates, this is one to watch.

## Unitary councils

**Peterborough Council** currently has a Conservative minority administration but a small number of changes could see them take control. The council's leader, John Holdich, is stepping down this May. The longest serving councillor in Peterborough, his father, also served as a councillor there for many decades.

**Southend-on-Sea** has been run by a Labour led coalition, though Conservatives are still the biggest party.

## London

In London, Mayor Sadiq Khan faces no shortage of opponents, the following candidates will be attempting to take his spot: Shaun Bailey (Conservative), Siân Berry (Green), Luisa Porritt (Liberal Democrats), Kam Balayev (Renew Party), Valerie Brown (Burning Pink), Peter Gammons (UKIP), David Kurten (Heritage Party), Mandu Reid (Women's Equality Party) and Laurence Fox (Reclaim Party). Independent candidates include Brian Rose, Nims Obunge, Charlie Mullins, Winston McKenzie, Farah London, Max Fosh, Drillminister, Piers Corbyn and Count Binface

The **Greater London Assembly** is also holding elections, with 15 geographical constituencies selected as 'first past the post' and a further 11 seats elected from a list system.

The **City of London** was due to hold elections this year in March, but these have been postponed until March 2022 due to the pandemic.

## North East

**North Tyneside's** City Mayor Norma Redfearn is standing as Labour's candidate and for her third term. She is the only women incumbent standing this year. North Tyneside Council is also holding elections for a third of their seats, but mathematically Labour cannot lose control of the council.

**Tees Valley** is holding elections for city region mayor, currently held by Conservative Ben Houchen.

County Durham, the first county to ever be won by Labour, back in 1919, and Labour today, is unlikely to change hands. **Hartlepool**, which was historically Labour run, went to no overall control after a series of shifting alliances, allowing Conservatives

to lead a coalition. The much noted Hartlepool by-election will be held on the same day and that is likely to drive turnout and attention from mainstream political parties. **Northumberland** is technically NOC, but with Conservatives as the largest party and in control, they will seek to consolidate the gains made at the last elections from Labour.

## North West

**Cumbria County Council** (and **Carlisle**) was due to hold elections, but these have been postponed due to potential local government reorganisation. This leaves **Lancashire** as the only county election in this region, which the Conservatives won at the last election.

The North West region also has some high profile Mayoral elections including city Mayor elections for Liverpool and Salford as well as city region mayors for Liverpool and Greater Manchester.

### Metropolitan District Councils

**Bolton** is no overall control with a Conservative minority administration. Conservatives would only need a handful of seats to take control, but the seats they're seeking would be hard fought.

**Bury** is Labour held and will most likely remain that way, but it is possible for it to go NOC or even become a Conservative gain if it's a bad election for Labour.

**Stockport** is NOC and split between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

**Trafford** was a major Labour gain from the Conservatives in 2019, and with a healthy majority. It isn't likely for Conservatives to retake the council, but it could go NOC.

**Wirral** has been NOC since 2019, but Labour could retake control here.

### District Councils

**Pendle** is currently NOC with a Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition. Conservatives would not need to gain many seats in order to take control, but with an all-out election and boundary changes, anything could happen.

**Burnley** is NOC with Labour vying against a coalition of everyone else. Labour only needs one more seat to take control.

**West Lancashire** is Labour held but control is wafer thin. The Conservatives have no real chance of taking control, but it's not a two party shoot-out, with gains from Our West Lancashire, an independent localist party, at the previous two elections.

## South East

Plenty of counties in the South East with elections: Hampshire, Oxfordshire, East Sussex, Kent, Surrey and West Sussex. Most of these have been Conservative held for a long time, and conventional wisdom is that they are likely to remain so, with a couple of exceptions. **East Sussex**, which went from Conservative to NOC on gains from UKIP back in 2013 and returned to Conservative control in 2017. In **Oxfordshire** the Conservatives are a handful of seats short of full control and govern in coalition with some local independents.

### District councils

There are also a number of district councils with finely balanced political control. **Basingstoke and Deane** is all-out this year with boundary changes and is already NOC with a Conservative minority administration, but with more than double the number of seats of the next party. **Gosport Council**, which elects by halves, is Conservative controlled, but Liberal Democrats would only have to gain a few seats to take control. **Hart** is electing by thirds and is run by a coalition of Liberal Democrats and a local independent party – it won't be possible for the Conservatives to gain control, but they could make gains if independents struggle with pandemic campaigning.

**Adur** elects by halves and is Conservative control with a thinnish majority. **Tandridge** is NOC and is likely to remain that way. **Woking** is technically NOC with Conservatives holding nearly half the seats. **Crawley** was officially Labour controlled until a resignation in 2020 and elects by thirds. **Mole Valley** has been run by Liberal Democrats since 2019 with a slim majority, and like many Surrey districts, has a considerable independent presence.

**Elmbridge** is another Surrey council with a strong independent presence, the leader of the council Stuart Selleck is from the Molesey Residents' Association. **Maidstone** is NOC with a Liberal Democrat leader, but Conservatives would have to win fewer seats than their Liberal Democrat rivals to take control.

### Unitaries

**Milton Keynes** is NOC with Labour supported by the Liberal Democrats, they would need to win a sizable chunk of the third of seats which are up to take control.

**Portsmouth** is NOC with a Liberal Democrat minority administration. Lib Dems could retake control but they don't currently have many more seats than the Conservatives. **Isle of Wight** is Conservative controlled with a Cabinet including some non-aligned Members. In the past, the Island Independents have been a significant presence, but are down to eight seats now.

## South West

In **Somerset**, elections were postponed because of potential local government reorganisation. There are other county elections though, in Gloucestershire, Devon and Worcestershire, all are Conservative held and conventional wisdom says they are likely to remain so.

**Cornwall**, a unitary council, is run by a coalition of independents and Liberal Democrats. Conservatives, though, hold the largest number of seats and if this campaign year is hard for independents then both Liberal Democrats and Conservatives will hope to make gains at their expense. In **Wiltshire**, Conservatives currently have a solid majority, but Liberal Democrats and Labour will be hoping to make back seats lost in 2017.

**Bristol** is seeing a slew of elections, with delayed city Mayor elections currently held by Marvin Rees (Lab) and West of England city-region mayor scheduled for 2021. **West of England** incumbent Tim Bowles (Con) is stepping down at the end of his term. Bristol is holding all-out elections for the city council, delayed from last year. Though by far the largest party Labour's control of the council is razor thin and due to defections, expulsions and re-admissions Labour have won, lost, and regained control of the council since the 2016 elections, in which Bristol was previously NOC.

**Plymouth**, has a history of shifting control between Conservatives and Labour. Labour currently have control but would only need to lose a couple of seats to lose their majority. However, with elections in thirds Conservatives will not be able to form a majority administration.

District councils **Stroud** and **Gloucester** are both having all-out elections. Stroud is currently NOC with Labour in coalition with Greens and Liberal Democrats, though Conservatives are the largest party. Gloucester is currently NOC with a Conservative administration.

## West Midlands

The **West Midlands** city-region mayor, Andy Street, a Conservative, is running again.

There are three all out county elections in this region: Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. All are Conservative controlled, but **Warwickshire** has traditionally been NOC – though with Conservatives holding more than double the seats of Labour and Liberal Democrats together, the Tories would have to have a very bad night for either party to make inroads. Unitary Shropshire, also with all out elections has traditionally been solid Conservative and is likely to remain so.

Normally, Mets that elect by thirds are less likely to have a change of control, but there are definitely some ones to watch here.

- **Dudley** is finely balanced between Labour and Conservative and defections to and from the Tories make it even more so. Still, in an election by thirds, Labour is defending more seats.
- **Solihull** is Conservative controlled but they only need to lose one seat to lose control. The Greens are the main opposition party.
- **Walsall's** Conservatives have an only slightly more comfortable margin of control, but it could slip into NOC if it's a good night for Labour.

## Districts

**Nuneaton and Bedworth** elects by halves and that's how many seats the Labour party has on the council with the Conservatives holding only one fewer – could go Labour, Conservative or remain NOC. **Cannock Chase** is NOC and Labour controlled – the establishment of a localist independent party during this election could mean the Labour minority administration with the sole remaining Green member is disrupted. **Worcester** elects by thirds, and the leader Marc Bayliss is a Conservative and the deputy leader Adrian Gregson is Labour – it could go either way.

## Yorkshire and Humber

North Yorkshire County and Craven District council elections have been postponed due to possible local government reorganisation.

**Doncaster** is all-out and solidly Labour held. Mayoral elections are also being held. Ros Jones, a runner-up for the World Mayor prize, is the Labour incumbent.

**West Yorkshire** is holding its first combined authority mayoral election.

**Sheffield** is electing by thirds and if Labour lose three seats, the council tips into No Overall Control. In **Kirklees**, on the other hand, Labour need to win three to take control of the council.

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