

Women Candidates in the 2012 Mayoral Elections

15 percent of candidates for the three mayoral posts being contested on 3 May are women. This is the lowest percentage ever in the history of directly elected mayoral elections in the UK.

It represents a significant decrease on 2011, when 21 percent of mayoral candidates were women, but continues the underlying pattern of mayoral elections attracting fewer women candidates than council elections, in which around 30 percent of candidates are usually female.

2012 Mayoral Elections

There are mayoral elections taking place in 3 local authorities in May - London, Liverpool and Salford. Liverpool and Salford are electing mayors for the first time.

Table 1: Gender of Candidates in 2012 Mayoral Elections in England

	Con	Lab	LibDem	Green	UKIP	Ind	Other
Liverpool	m	m	m	m	m	m (2)	m (5)
London	m	m	m	f	m	f	m
Salford	f	m	m	m	m	f	m

From this it will be seen that there are no women candidates at all in Liverpool, and that only one of the three major parties - the Conservatives in Salford - are fielding a female candidate in any of the elections.

Background

There are now 14 English local authorities (plus London) which have opted to be run by executive elected mayors. These are Bedford, Doncaster, Leicester, Liverpool, Hackney, Hartlepool, Lewisham, Mansfield, Middlesbrough, Newham, North Tyneside, Salford, Torbay, and Watford. Of these North Tyneside and Watford are the only ones to have women mayors in office at present.

Unlike council leaders, elected mayors are not councillors, but are directly elected by voters, and have wider decision-making powers within their local authority. They are still required to work with local councillors (elections for whom continue as normal) and must agree budgets and annual plans for key services with the council.

3 May 2012 will also see referendums held in a further 10 local authorities; Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Coventry, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield and Wakefield. These are the largest authorities in England without an elected mayor, and the referendums have been required by the Secretary of State. In addition, Doncaster will hold a referendum on whether or not to abolish the elected mayor and return to the council leader system.

Authorities which return a 'Yes' vote on 3 May will hold mayoral elections on 15 November 2012 (concurrently with the Police and Crime Commissioner elections to be held throughout England and Wales).

Stoke on Trent did have an elected mayor, but voted to abolish the post in 2008.

Overall, two thirds of mayoral referendums so far have resulted in 'No' votes.

Mayoral Elections 2004 - 2012

The percentage of women candidates in mayoral elections varies greatly year on year.

Table 2: Percentage of Women Candidates in Mayoral Elections 2004-2011

Year	Authorities	Percentage Women Candidates
2004	London	30%
2005	Doncaster, Hartlepool, North Tyneside, Stoke-on-Trent	16%
2005	Torbay (October)	21%
2006	Hackney, Lewisham, Newham, Watford	23%
2007	Bedford, Mansfield, Middlesbrough	29%
2008	London	20%
2009	Doncaster, Hartlepool, North Tyneside	30%
2009	Bedford By-election	17%
2010	Hackney, Lewisham, Newham, Watford	18%
2011	Bedford, Leicester, Mansfield, Middlesbrough, Torbay	21%
2012	Liverpool, London, Salford	15%

The very low number of mayoral elections in any one year means that events in one election can have a disproportionate effect on the overall picture. For instance, if Liverpool is excluded from the 2012 calculation, the level of women rises to 24 percent - still below the average for either council or parliamentary elections, but towards the higher end of the mayoral scale.

Because in all cases the main political parties (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat) are less likely to field women candidates, the percentage of women standing overall can also be significantly affected by the number of independent candidates in any one election; for instance, the unusually high level of women mayoral candidates in 2009 was caused entirely by 6 of the 13 candidates in Hartlepool having been women (1 Liberal Democrat, 1 BNP and 4 Independent) whilst in Doncaster and North Tyneside the customary low levels were maintained.

For Further Information

CFWD will be producing a full report on the Mayoral elections in May 2012; in the meantime, for further details please contact Nan Sloane at cfwd@cfwd.org.uk, or by phone on 0113 234 6500.