

## Women in the Mayoral Elections 2009

Including London, there are currently a total of 12 elected mayors<sup>1</sup> in England, a proportion of whom come up for re-election each year. A thirteenth authority, Stoke-on-Trent, voted to scrap the mayoral system in October 2008.

Prior to this year's local elections, only one elected mayor - Dorothy Thornhill in Watford - was female.

Mayoral elections took place in 2009 in three local authorities in England - Doncaster, Hartlepool and North Tyneside.

A total of 27 candidates stood for election to these three mayoralities, 8 (30%) of whom were women. The breakdown of candidates by political party (and none) is shown in Table 1 below.

Party	Doncaster	Hartlepool	North Tyneside
Conservative	m	m	f
Labour	f	m	m
Liberal Democrat	-	f	m
Green	-	-	m
UKIP	-	m	-
BNP	m	f	m
English Democrats	m	-	-
Community Group	m	-	-
National Front	-	-	m
Independents (male)	2	4	-
Independents (female)	-	4	-

The percentages of women candidates in mayoral elections between 2004 and 2009 were:

Year	Authorities	Total % Women Candidates
2004	London	30%
2005	Doncaster, Hartlepool, North Tyneside, Stoke-on-Trent	16%
2006	Hackney, Lewisham, Newham, Watford	23%
2007	Bedford, Mansfield, Middlesbrough	29%
2008	London	20%
2009	Doncaster, Hartlepool, North Tyneside	30%

If the 2004 and 2008 London mayoral elections are discounted, it can be seen that the percentage of women candidates has steadily risen over the period, and has now reached a

<sup>1</sup> These are in Bedford, Doncaster, Hartlepool, Hackney, Lewisham, Newham, Mansfield, Middlesbrough, North Tyneside, Torbay, Watford and London.

par with the average percentage of women candidates for other forms of local elections. However, only 16% of elected mayors are female - well below the percentage for women councillors (30%) but closer to that for MPs (20%).

In 2009 the successful mayoral candidates were:

Doncaster	Peter Davies	English Democrat
Hartlepool	Stuart Drummond	Independent
North Tyneside	Linda Arkley	Conservative

As a result, the number of women elected mayors has now doubled from one to two.

In previous mayoral elections, the number of independent candidates has tended to be fairly low, and the unusually large number of independents in Hartlepool in 2009 had the side-effect of dramatically increasing the number of women candidates overall. Of the 8 women who stood, 4 were independents in Hartlepool.

Independent candidates are, of course, self-selecting (although they may have a team of supporters around them), but those for political parties will usually have gone through some form of selection process not unlike that for parliamentary candidates. This presents parties with a number of problems in terms of ensuring some gender balance, most notably that mayoral elections occur in a piecemeal fashion with no relation to one another, and that sitting mayors are always likely to be re-selected to stand again.

Any increase in the number of women mayors is therefore likely to be difficult to achieve and very slow, unless political parties take a positive decision to field more women candidates in places they can reasonably expect to win, or unless more women stand as independent candidates where independents stand a real chance of winning.

It should also be noted that mayoral elections are more prone to result in the election of independent or other candidates - of the 12 current mayors 4 (Bedford, Hartlepool, Mansfield and Middlesbrough) are independents and 1 (Doncaster, where the new mayor is an English Democrat) is from a smaller party.

The number of elected mayoralties is currently so low that it is difficult to draw any hard and fast conclusions from the foregoing, other than to note that overall women do not seem to do as well as they do in other forms of elections. This may change if more elected mayors come into being, or may be intensified, and developments will therefore continue to be monitored.

**Centre for Women & Democracy**

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