

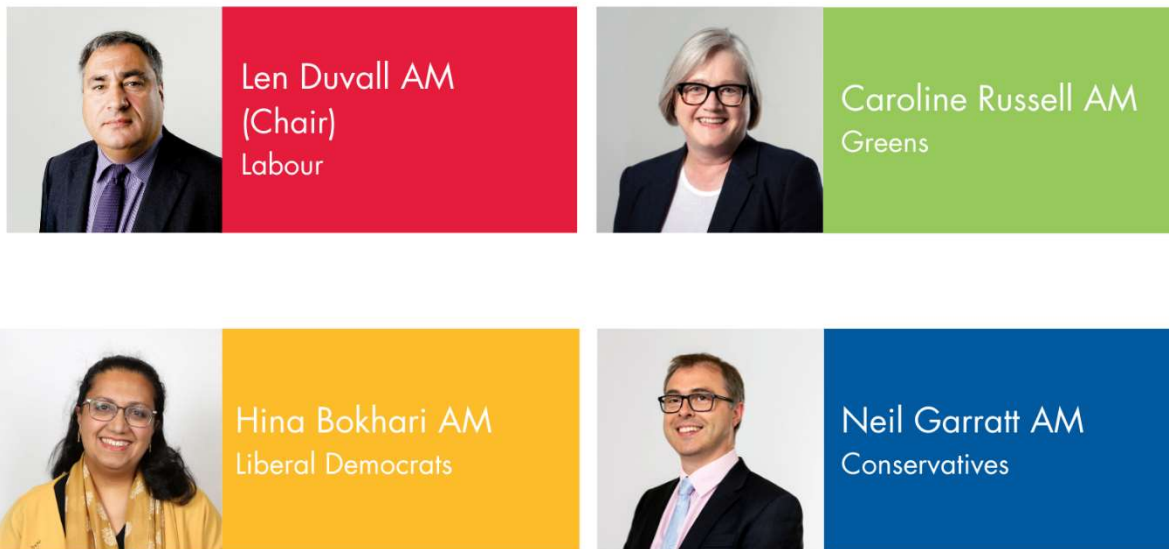


# London's elections in 2024

Elections Review Working Group

**LONDONASSEMBLY**

## Elections Review Working Group



The Elections Review Working Group was set up in May 2024 to review the Elections of the Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections.

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## Executive Summary

The Elections Review Working Group was created to review the delivery of, and issues arising from, the GLA Elections on 2 May 2024. It aimed to hear from a range of stakeholders, and make recommendations for the next elections in 2028. The Working Group was also keen to review the impact of key legislative changes brought in by the Elections Act 2022, and how they affected London's democracy.

The Working Group held three formal meetings in City Hall on 25 July, 3 October and 16 October 2024 to inform this report. We are grateful to have heard from London Elects, the GLA, borough representatives, political parties, the Electoral Commission, government stakeholders, think tanks and academics. We also heard from London Elects and boroughs, which have a role in organising the GLA Elections; and a separate GLA team that promotes democratic participation.

The Working Group also published a call for evidence to collect the views of key organisations and stakeholders; and a survey to gather Londoners' experiences of the GLA Elections. We appreciate all who contributed evidence in this way, and have drawn on these throughout this report.

The Working Group reached several key findings as part of its investigation:

- The 2024 GLA Elections were the first across London in which voters were required to show a form of **photo ID** to vote. Significant work was undertaken to inform the electorate about this change, and the requirement did not cause widespread issues at polling stations. The number of people who were turned away and did not return was low. However, anyone eligible and unable to vote due to voter ID is worrying for democratic participation. Moreover, the data likely underestimates the impact as we cannot know how many people did not attend polling stations in the first place as they did not hold a suitable form of ID. The policy also appears to have had an unequal impact on different groups, including younger and ethnic minority voters; and knowledge and use of free Voter Authority Certificates was lower than expected. The Government has committed to reviewing the list of eligible ID and the Mayor should consider asking Government to expand the list of IDs to include Transport for London (TfL) Travel Cards. Voter Authority Certificates also need to be promoted so voters know they can access this form of ID.
- As part of the Elections Act 2022, changes were introduced that aimed to provide greater flexibility and choice in how **disabled voters** are supported to vote at polling stations. The Working Group heard about good practice at the GLA Elections and welcomes steps taken by the GLA around accessibility, including implementing work with Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) that the 2021 Elections Review Working Group recommended.
- The Working Group heard a range of views about the **change in the Mayoral voting system** to 'First Past the Post' at the 2024 GLA Elections. The Mayor of London has indicated that the Government will reverse this change. This issue should be considered in the context of devolution – it has a significant impact on the running of the GLA Elections, including the count system. Any change should also take into account the

views of Londoners; be evidence-based; and last for a generation. A situation where voting systems change every time there is a change in Government would be damaging for public trust in democratic systems. Details of this were not included in the Government's Devolution White Paper, as had been suggested in media reports. The Government should urgently set out its position to provide the GLA with clarity for its elections.

- Turnout for the GLA Elections in 2024 was lower than the previous two elections, as it was across other Mayoralties in England. Turnout was 40.5 per cent at the GLA Elections in 2024; for comparison, London turnout was 58.4 per cent at the 2024 General Election, and 35.5 per cent at London borough elections in 2022. While there are a variety of reasons for this, the Working Group was struck by evidence it heard about political literacy as a barrier to participation. As the Government considers greater devolution in England, the Working Group is calling for a renewed focus from the GLA in **informing the electorate about the roles of the Mayor and the Assembly**.
- Alongside this, we heard about the challenge of **explaining voting systems** in easy-to-understand language. We conclude that, while the longer-form written materials produced by London Elects for describing the Assembly elections were accurate, its short-form social media explanations of the London-wide Assembly ballot paper were misleading; this should be reviewed ahead of future elections.
- **Abuse and intimidation** of people involved in elections – candidates, electoral staff or volunteers – poses a threat to democracy. It impacts people's lives and risks fewer people standing for public office. We heard evidence of abuse and intimidation at these elections that had an impact on candidates attending hustings. Significant work is being undertaken on this issue at a national and local level and the GLA should seek to understand its impact for London. This should be seriously considered by the GLA ahead of the 2028 GLA Elections to safeguard individuals and our electoral system.
- The 2024 GLA Elections were unique in many ways. They were the first to be **counted manually**; elections since 2000 have used electronic counts. In addition, they took place against uncertainty over the timing of a UK General Election and the potential impact on this for the GLA Elections. The Working Group is grateful for the work of the GLRO, London Elects and boroughs in conducting a successful manual count for the GLA Elections.
- Unlike previous years, **borough and ward level data** was not provided for the 2024 elections. There is now a gap in the information available to academics and political parties about the detail of democratic participation and choices. We have made recommendations to address this in the event of a manual count for 2028.
- In the event of a manual count for 2028, our review found a number of improvements that should be considered by the GLA, including reviewing the process and improving the experiences of boroughs waiting for results to be signed off by the GLA.
- The decision on a manual or electronic count for 2028 will need to be made in June 2025. Among boroughs and political parties, there was not a consensus from those we spoke to about the most effective counting method. The possibility of a General Election, the potential for a Mayoral voting system change and the cost and resource should all be considered as part of this decision.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

The Working Group welcomes the Government's commitment to conduct a review of the list of eligible forms of photo ID ahead of the next elections. This should include consideration of groups particularly impacted – including young people, ethnic minority groups, people from lower social grades, disabled people and people who are unemployed – and how this policy will interact with government manifesto commitments, such as lowering the voting age to 16.

### Recommendation 2

Transport for London should write to the GLA and GLA Oversight Committee with details of:

- How many people hold each of its types of photo ID cards – including the currently acceptable forms of photo ID (60+ card) and those that are not, including Student 18+ Oyster, 16+ Zip Oyster photocard, 18-25 Care Leaver Oyster Card, Apprentice Oyster photocard – and any estimates of these figures as a proportion of Londoners within these demographics.
- How secure it considers the application processes for these cards to be, including any reported instances of fraud or impersonation.

The GLA should use this information to contribute to the Government's review of eligible lists of photo ID to support London voters, with a view to expanding the forms of photo ID that younger voters.

### Recommendation 3

Given the low awareness and take-up, London Elects should include information about Voter Authority Certificates more prominently in its communication to voters if the policy remains for the 2028 GLA Elections.

### Recommendation 4

The GLA should work with London boroughs to share any best practice about how Voter Authority Certificates were promoted locally and seek to understand why there has been low-take up in London.

### Recommendation 5

To further build on its accessibility work, the GLA should:

- request and compile data from boroughs on the number and types of accessibility requests made in 2024

- **discuss with the Electoral Commission any accessibility measures taken forward in other parts of the country at the 2024 elections and review with London boroughs whether these would be useful to disabled voters in London at the 2028 Elections, including developing approaches to include neurodiverse Londoners.**

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### **Recommendation 6**

**Alterations to the Mayoral voter system is a matter for central government. However, any future government that has plans to change the Mayoral voting system should hear from Londoners before taking this decision.**

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### **Recommendation 7**

**The GLA should develop a public awareness campaign focused on informing Londoners about the roles within London's regional government.**

**It should engage with the Assembly on the information materials produced about the Assembly, and secure members' participation in this work, where appropriate.**

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### **Recommendation 8**

**The GLA should create videos explaining the voting systems of the GLA Elections, learning from the examples of New Zealand and Scotland. These should form part of the GLA's wider work in explaining the roles of the Mayor and the Assembly ahead of the next GLA Elections and be visible on the GLA website, the GLA Democracy Hub and the London Elects website.**

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### **Recommendation 9**

**The GLA and Metropolitan Police should conduct a review of abuse and intimidation of candidates and at the GLA Elections, setting out how these issues were dealt with and what further lessons it can learn from national and local government. It should write to the GLA Oversight Committee with its findings.**

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### **Recommendation 10**

**The Metropolitan Police must also ensure its procedures for supporting candidates and staff reporting election-related concerns are as sensitive, responsive and quick for those taking part in elections at regional and local elections as they are for national elections.**

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### Recommendation 11

As part of its review of the 2024 Elections, the Government should review any intimidation and abuse experienced by electoral administrators, and whether legislation needs to provide greater penalties to those found guilty of abuse towards electoral administrators.

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### Recommendation 12

In response to this report, the GLA should provide the GLA Oversight Committee with a short analysis of how long boroughs were waiting for London Elects to sign off verification and count totals in 2024, and an estimation of the cost of delays.

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### Recommendation 13

In the event of a manual count for 2028, the GLRO should discuss with the Electoral Commission its guidance on 'principles of an effective verification, count and results collation process', including a reasonable process for how to address small variances that ensures timely results.

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### Recommendation 14

In the event of a manual count in 2028, the GLRO should write to the GLA Oversight Committee setting out how she plans to reduce sign-off delays and improve communication with boroughs. This should include details of:

- how many people will sign-off results at the centre
  - what mechanisms will be put in place to inform boroughs of delays and the reasons for them and how this will be staffed.
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### Recommendation 15

In the event of a manual count for 2028, the GLRO should work with boroughs to collect and publish ward and borough verification data.

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### Recommendation 16

The Government should remove the 'mixing requirement' for a manual count in GLA Elections legislation to allow for more granular data to be published.

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### **Recommendation 17**

**In response to this report, the GLRO should share with the GLA Oversight Committee a summary of any conversations it has had with Government about removing the 'mixing rule'. Given the importance of the breakdown of votes for each candidate or political party by ward and borough, the GLRO should also estimate the cost and time needed to provide borough and ward-level data before making a decision on count arrangements for 2028.**

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### **Recommendation 18**

**Before deciding whether to conduct a manual count or e-count of ballots in the 2028 elections, the GLA should calculate the final cost of the manual count in 2024. It should then compare this to previous e-counts (adjusting for inflation), and share these workings with the GLA Oversight Committee.**

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### **Recommendation 19**

**The Government should clarify its position on the Mayoral voting system as part of its elections review and evaluation before May 2025 to give the GLA information to plan for 2028.**

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### **Recommendation 20**

**The GLA should make clear to Government the significant impact that the possibility of a General Election had on its planning of its own elections. MHCLG should meet with electoral teams from the GLA and Combined Authorities to discuss this.**

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## Background

The **seventh** GLA Elections took place on the 2 May 2024 with...

...an electorate of **6,162,428**

... turnout of **40.5%**  
almost **2.5 million people**

Each voter has three votes,

there were... **7,482,905** ballots counted



**2,495,559**

Mayoral ballots counted



**2,493,433**

Constituency ballots counted



**2,493,913**

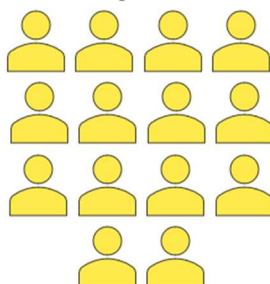
London-wide ballots counted

To elect...

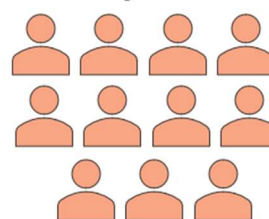
The Mayor of London



**14** Constituency Assembly Members



**11** London-wide Assembly Members



A number of different organisations are involved in making these elections happen, including the following:

- Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO), who has overall responsibility for organising the GLA Elections, with a particular role in collating and announcing the Mayoral and London-wide Assembly results.
- London Elects, a team from across the GLA that supports the GLRO in organising the elections.
- Constituencies and boroughs: London's boroughs and the City of London lead on voter registration and management of polling stations; and provide most of the staff who count ballots. Each GLA Constituency (made up of two or three boroughs) has a Constituency Returning Officer (CRO), responsible for announcing the Constituency Assembly Member result in their area.
- Electoral Commission, an independent body that oversees elections and political finance in the UK, its role including providing guidance to Returning Officers and publishing reports on how well elections were run.
- Government is responsible for setting policies and creating new laws related to elections, for example on photo ID, electoral systems or the voting age.

Additionally, the GLA has a democratic participation team that has a role in informing Londoners about their civic and democratic rights. This work is separate from the organisation of the elections by the GLRO and London Elects.

## The impact of the Elections Act 2022

### Photo ID

The photo ID requirement was brought in as part of the Elections Act 2022. In the second reading of the Elections Bill in the House of Commons, the Government cited electoral fraud as a reason for the change, including the Tower Hamlets election court judgement from 2015.<sup>1</sup>

### Photo ID implementation

The new requirement for photo ID was a major focus of the election messaging beforehand, and of commentary about these elections.

Electoral administrators told the Working Group that the Elections Act 2022 made a substantial number of changes. In London, these changes took place over one election cycle compared to two in other parts of the country, which held local elections in May 2023 as well.

That said, while more staff and resource were needed, boroughs did not report major issues in implementing the photo ID policy.<sup>2</sup> They highlighted that this part of the Act had been widely publicised before election day:<sup>3</sup>

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*“Most of the challenge was not necessarily introduced by voter ID, because that was the big ticket in town. It almost sold itself. The media were very interested in that, which was very helpful ... However, it was the level of change arriving significantly together that caused the biggest challenge for administrators.”*

**Peter Stanyon, Chief Executive, Association of Electoral Administrators**

*“On the day, I think we were expecting scenes, we did not have that in polling stations at all.”*

**Zoe Wilkins, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

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Before the GLA Elections, significant work was undertaken by the Electoral Commission, the GLA, and London boroughs to inform voters about the requirement to bring photo ID to vote. The Greater London Returning Officer's report to the Working Group noted that voter ID

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<sup>1</sup> [Elections Bill, Second Reading](#), House of Commons, 7 September 2021

<sup>2</sup> The constituencies of Enfield & Haringey, and Brent & Harrow, similarly told the Working Group that there were not issues with implementing the photo ID policy

<sup>3</sup> Elections Review Working Group, [Item 5 – 2024 Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections - panel 1](#), 3 October 2024, p.21

messaging was a key part of London Elects' marketing campaign and included on polling cards and statutory booklets sent to registered voters.<sup>4</sup> Separately, between August 2023 and February 2024, the GLA Democratic Participation team ran the second phase of its voter ID public awareness campaign and administering grants to community organisations. Representatives from London boroughs at the Working Group's second meeting spoke highly of the work of the GLA Democratic Participation team:

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*"I would just like to put in a kind of a cheer though for Dr [Elisabeth] Pop [Lead Officer on Democratic Participation, GLA]. She and her team did an amazing job getting lots and lots of engagement and publicity out and really, really helpful because the more we could inform our electorate the better."*

**Zoe Wilkins, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

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This action worked. The Electoral Commission told the Working Group that 82 per cent of Londoners were aware of the need to show photo ID, based on polling immediately after the GLA Elections.<sup>5</sup> Similar polling highlighted by the Mile End Institute at Queen Mary University of London found awareness among Londoners just before the GLA Elections at 78 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

We also note that research from February 2024 suggests 63 per cent of London adults supported the implementation of voter ID, compared to 24 per cent who were opposed.<sup>7</sup>

### **Photo ID impact: voters turned away**

There was significant concern before the elections that the new photo ID requirements would result in voters being turned away from polling booths.

On the day, 5,621 voters were recorded by polling station staff in London as being initially turned away due to lack of photo ID. Of these, 4,103 returned to vote and 1,518 did not.<sup>8</sup> Data collection was not a statutory requirement at the GLA Elections as it was for the UK Parliamentary Elections; figures represent data from 24 London boroughs. While we are aware that the GLRO discouraged polling staff asking for photo ID before people had reached the issuing desk, it is possible that some voters were reminded outside the polling station. It is also possible that some voters did not turn up to polling stations because of lack of photo ID, and therefore the exact number of people impacted is hard to determine and is likely an underestimate, as the Electoral Commission's data acknowledges. The GLA's own polling of Londoners in May 2024 found that 1.27 per cent of Londoners said they were turned away due

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<sup>4</sup> [GLRO Report to the Elections Review Working Group](#), 25 July 2024, p.7

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Michela Palese to Len Duvall OBE

<sup>6</sup> Centre for London/Savanta, [London Polling Tracker](#), 1 May 2024

<sup>7</sup> Electoral Commission, [Public Attitudes 2024](#)

<sup>8</sup> The impact of ballots being incorrectly cast and therefore not counted is discussed later in this section in relation to the change to the Mayoral voting system

to voter ID, and later returned; and 0.6 per cent of Londoners reported that they did not return to cast their vote.<sup>9</sup>

These statistics support the GLA's assessment that the photo ID requirement did not create a "London-wide problem" at the GLA Elections. However, these statistics likely underestimate the impact of the photo ID policy, both in relation to the available data at the May elections and that they do not account for people who did not try to vote because they did not have photo ID.<sup>10</sup> We want voters to be able to engage in London's democracy, and are disappointed by any eligible voter being turned away from voting due to the photo ID requirement.

### **An unequal impact?**

Although the numbers reported are comparatively small, several of our guests indicated concerns with the policy or that reforms are needed. The Electoral Commission told us that the Voter ID policy does appear to have had an "unequal impact" on different groups.<sup>11</sup> Phil Thompson, Head of Research at the Electoral Commission, said young people, people from ethnic minority communities, and people from lower social grades in particular were less aware of the voter ID requirement. He also told us that people with a disability and people who are unemployed were less likely to have a form of ID.<sup>12</sup>

The Electoral Reform Society said that the organisation did not consider the policy to be proportionate to the levels of electoral fraud. Its research on the 2024 Parliamentary election suggested that constituencies with a higher proportion of voters turned away due to voter ID tended to be constituencies with higher proportions of ethnic minority populations.<sup>13</sup> The Electoral Reform Society and the Runnymede Trust, a British race equality and civil rights think tank, also both called on the policy to be scrapped.<sup>14</sup>

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*"We are concerned Voter ID requirements will serve to exacerbate already present disparities in registration rates for people of colour. According to figures from the Electoral Commission 87 per cent of white people were registered to vote in 2022, compared to 80 per cent of Asian communities and 72 per cent of Black people."*

**Runnymede Trust**

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<sup>9</sup> GLA/YouGov, [GLA Poll Results 2024](#), May 2024

<sup>10</sup> Data was not a statutory requirement for the May 2024 Elections as it was for the UK Parliamentary Elections in July. Data on those turned away is based on data from 24 London boroughs. The Electoral Commission's research for the July Elections across the UK found that 4 per cent of non-voters said they did not vote due to ID, which rose to 10 per cent when prompted. This figure was lower in London at 1 per cent.

<sup>11</sup> Elections Review Working Group, [Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Panel 1 - 2024 Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections](#), 16 October 2024, p.3

<sup>12</sup> Elections Review Working Group, [Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Panel 1 - 2024 Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections](#), 16 October 2024, p.3

<sup>13</sup> Call for evidence response, Electoral Reform Society

<sup>14</sup> Call for evidence, Electoral Reform Society and Runnymede Trust

The Mile End Institute noted that awareness of the photo ID policy was lower among younger people aged 16-24 compared to Londoners overall (66 per cent and 78 per cent, respectively).<sup>15</sup>

Respondents to our survey did not report being unable to vote as a result of the photo ID requirement.<sup>16</sup> A small number of responses indicated support for the photo ID requirement, but others reported that it took longer to vote, and that it was an extra thing to think about on polling day; others felt it was a barrier to participation. Some respondents said that, as a result, they decided to cast a postal vote instead of voting in person. There were also concerns about the policy and its impact on different groups, including on younger people, those on lower incomes, and transgender people. The below survey responses provide an illustration of these views:

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*“I was shocked that the ID rules excluded my adult son, who has none of the required documents to prove his identity but has lived in London his whole life... It annoys me that old people like me had loads of choices re: ID whereas young ones had few – passports and driving licences are less likely to be held by poorer people, especially young poor people.”*

*“I couldn't vote this time but I anticipate this could cause me problems next time. I oppose photo ID in general but I particularly have concerns as many of the options seem geared for older people, with fewer options for younger people.”*

*“Personally it felt humiliating: I'm a trans woman who was unaware at the time of how to change my photo ID legally to reflect how I live. So showing a photo of myself before I started transitioning felt humiliating. I also thought it was unfair that older people had more choice for ID in principle than I did.”*

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### Reviewing eligible photo ID

As part of our review, we heard that the Government will review the list of eligible photo ID; and the policy will be considered in view of equalities concerns.

Ruth Law from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) confirmed to the Working Group that its evaluation of the policy was under way and would conclude in spring 2025. She also noted that in October 2024, a draft statutory instrument was

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<sup>15</sup> Call for evidence response, Mile End Institute

<sup>16</sup> For example, 14 responses mentioned 'no impact' and a further 57 noted 'none' in terms of personal impact.

laid to include Veterans' Cards as an accepted form of ID as one of the gaps already identified in the current list.<sup>17</sup>

Michela Palese, Head of Policy at the Electoral Commission, told the Working Group:

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*"It is very much ensuring that the policy is as accessible as possible to all voters. As part of the review that it seems the Government is going to be conducting on this, really focusing on looking at forms of ID that will most help those who we know are less likely to have an existing accepted form of ID. Therefore, really looking at what the evidence is showing in terms of additional options to add to the list of IDs."*

**Michela Palese, Head of Policy, Electoral Commission**

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However, Peter Stanyon, Chief Executive of the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), also said that while he agreed that further forms of ID should be added, there is a balance to be struck and the list must not be too long or complex for staff to implement:

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*"As part of that review, it is very important that we look at the whole round bearing in mind that we are dealing with volunteers in polling stations who will be the ones delivering that going forward, therefore it is a review from both ends of the spectrum, I think."* **Peter Stanyon, Chief Executive, Association of Electoral Administrators**

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Working Group Members hold different views on the new photo ID requirement, but agree that if it remains, a review of the eligible forms of ID and ways people can confirm their identity (for example 'vouching') is necessary to address the equality concerns we heard.<sup>18</sup> We welcome the work being done to look into this.

London has a large and diverse population and while the current list of acceptable ID (see Appendix 1) includes the 60+ London Oyster Photocard,<sup>19</sup> we heard that some Londoners perceive the list to be exclusionary for certain demographic groups. This perception has the potential to be damaging to people's engagement in democracy. The rationale for inclusion or exclusion of certain forms of ID is currently unclear to voters.

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<sup>17</sup> Elections Review Working Group, [Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Panel 1 - 2024 Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections](#), 16 October 2024, p.3; and the [Draft Statutory Instrument](#)

<sup>18</sup> The Electoral Reform Society also supported these measures in its response to the Working Group's call for evidence.

<sup>19</sup> In other parts of the country, this was not the case, for example Mersey Travel Card.



In addition, in view of the Government's manifesto commitment to lower the voting age to 16, and lower awareness among younger people aged 18-24 about the photo ID requirement, the Working Group believes that Government should consider what forms of photo ID will be available for 16-17-year-olds as part of its legislation.

We believe that in London, the GLA and Transport for London have a role in this.

### Recommendation 1

**The Working Group welcomes the Government's commitment to conduct a review of the list of eligible forms of photo ID ahead of the next elections. This should include consideration of groups particularly impacted – including young people, ethnic minority groups, people from lower social grades, disabled people and people who are unemployed – and how this policy will interact with government manifesto commitments, such as lowering the voting age to 16.**

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### Recommendation 2

**Transport for London should write to the GLA and GLA Oversight Committee with details of:**

- **How many people hold each of its types of photo ID cards – including the currently acceptable forms of photo ID (60+ card) and those that are not, including Student 18+ Oyster, 16+ Zip Oyster photocard, 18-25 Care Leaver Oyster Card, Apprentice Oyster photocard – and any estimates of these figures as a proportion of Londoners within these demographics.**
- **How secure it considers the application processes for these cards to be, including any reported instances of fraud or impersonation.**

**The GLA should use this information to contribute to the Government's review of eligible lists of photo ID to support London voters, with a view to expanding the forms of photo ID that younger voters can use.**

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### Voter Authority Certificates

Voter Authority Certificates (VACs) were introduced in order to provide a free form of eligible photo ID for voters. They can be applied for online or via post. Voters must apply before 5pm on the sixth working day before polling day. For the GLA Elections, this was 5pm on 24 April 2024. These were intended to ensure people without an eligible form of ID or who were not recognisable in the ID they held could still vote.<sup>20</sup>

However, London's 2024 elections showed that take-up remains low. The Electoral Commission's 2024 report on voter ID highlighted the low awareness and uptake of Voter

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<sup>20</sup> Elections Act 2022, [Impact assessment](#)

Authority Certificates nationally.<sup>21</sup> Data from London boroughs that provided statistics to the Electoral Commission shows that 2,360 voters used a VAC as their ID to vote in the GLA Elections.<sup>22</sup> The GLA's own survey from July 2024 suggests a third of Londoners (32 per cent) were aware of Voter Authority Certificates; but also found that take up remained low, with just two per cent holding this form of ID.<sup>23</sup>

Responses to our own survey similarly indicated that not all voters were aware that a free form of ID was available to them. Some respondents told the Working Group that the photo ID requirement meant they paid to have a form of ID so that they could vote:

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*"It meant I felt I had to purchase voter ID to use which was a pain."*

*"I had to renew my passport to do this which annoyed me and is an unnecessary expense as I doubt I will travel abroad again."*

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We considered how the GLA had promoted awareness of these Voter Authority Certificates before the London elections in 2024. The GLA had two separate mechanisms through which it informed voters about VACs:

- **London Elects:** in the period directly before the GLA Elections, London Elects ran a marketing campaign with information about the 2 May elections.
- **GLA Democratic Participation:** more broadly, from August 2023 to February 2024, outside the period in which London Elects operates, the GLA Democratic Participation team ran campaigns about the photo ID requirement and VACs.

The GLA's democratic participation evaluation report set out its work to promote VACs, including marketing materials and grants to community groups that supported 125 people without other forms of ID to fill out forms.<sup>24</sup> Its report suggests that, as a result of the low awareness, VACs will continue to be part of its work going forward. In view of the evidence we have heard, we support this emphasis.

Directly before the GLA Elections, London Elects provided information to voters about VACs through its website and the statutory booklet.<sup>25</sup> Its paid-for social media campaign told voters they needed to bring photo ID to vote. However, information about VACs does not appear to have featured in social media advertising.<sup>26</sup> By comparison, similar promotion materials from the

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<sup>21</sup> Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#)

<sup>22</sup> Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#)

<sup>23</sup> GLA Evaluation Report: [London Voter Registration Week 2023 and GLA Voter ID public awareness campaign – phase two \(June 2023 – February 2024\)](#), September 2024

<sup>24</sup> GLA Evaluation Report: [London Voter Registration Week 2023 and GLA Voter ID public awareness campaign – phase two \(June 2023 – February 2024\)](#), September 2024

<sup>25</sup> London Elects, [Voter Information Booklet 2024](#), April 2024

<sup>26</sup> Meta Ad Library, [London Elects](#)

Electoral Commission's messaging included information on what voters could do if they did not have ID.<sup>27</sup> London Elects' paid-for social media ads focused on the voter ID requirement were scheduled from 25 April, after the VACs deadline had passed.<sup>28</sup> This messaging was undoubtedly important and necessary in the last few days before the election, and we know that London Elects had a number of messages to communicate to voters during that time. That said, the evidence suggests that more work is needed to inform voters specifically about VACs, and we believe that London Elects should consider what more it can do if the photo ID requirement remains in 2028.

### **Recommendation 3**

**Given the low awareness and take-up, London Elects should include information about Voter Authority Certificates more prominently in its communication to voters if the policy remains for the 2028 GLA Elections.**

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### **Recommendation 4**

**The GLA should work with London boroughs to share any best practice about how Voter Authority Certificates were promoted locally and seek to understand why there has been low take-up in London.**

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## **Accessibility**

### **Support for disabled voters**

Taking part in democracy should be equitable across different demographic groups, and the right to vote independently and in secret is a democratic right. The Elections Act 2022 brought in changes that aimed to provide greater flexibility and choice in how disabled voters are supported to vote at polling stations. This was in recognition that some disabled people face additional barriers to voting. In particular it meant:

- disabled voters could choose anyone over 18 to accompany them in the polling station to help them vote
- Returning Officers were required to take all reasonable steps to provide support for disabled voters – for example, equipment in polling stations.

As part of our review, we wanted to understand what progress the GLA had made as a result of this legislation to improve the accessibility of the GLA Elections for disabled voters. Deputy GLRO Alex Conway told the Working Group that London Elects had implemented work on ensuring accessibility for the 2024 elections. This work was carried out in collaboration with Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), as recommended by our predecessor, the 2021 Elections Review Working Group.

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<sup>27</sup> Meta Ad Library, [Electoral Commission](#)

<sup>28</sup> Meta Ad Library, [London Elects](#)

Reforms included the provision of audio ballot papers that could be scanned via a QR code and read out ballot papers to voters. These audio ballot papers were scanned 342 times on polling day.<sup>29</sup> There were also tactile voting devices, used in previous elections.<sup>30</sup> Both aimed to give blind and partially sighted voters more privacy and independence when voting. Additionally, London Elects produced videos about the assistance available to disabled voters in polling stations; and British Sign Language interpreters were at City Hall to communicate the results.

Deputy GLRO Lea Goddard told the Working Group about the accessibility steps taken in collaboration with London boroughs:

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*“I think the big step forward was the provision of audio ballot papers, I think that was a really good advance ... in conjunction with our electoral registration colleagues across London, we did all we could to support those initiatives to ensure that anybody who is going to the polling station was able to vote as easily as possible.”* **Lea Goddard, Deputy Greater London Returning Officer/Senior Elections Manager**

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Michela Palese, Head of Policy at the Electoral Commission, also praised this work from the GLA and other local authorities:

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*“Based on some of the observations, a few of us were out in London at the election in May [2024] and just seeing, for example, the QR ballot codes and some of the innovations that were trialled in London and across other parts of England and Wales at the May polls was just a really good example of how these changes, in terms of the flexibility that they offer to returning officers, can have a positive impact. Speaking to other local authorities and really sharing that practice is another key element of that.”* **Michela Palese, Head of Policy, Electoral Commission**

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Representatives from London boroughs told the Working Group that while many accessibility measures were in place at previous elections, the Elections Act 2022 put accessibility “at the top of that agenda” locally.<sup>31</sup> Boroughs reviewed the suitability venues for polling stations and

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<sup>29</sup> [GLRO Report to the Elections Review Working Group](#), 25 July 2024, p.19

<sup>30</sup> Another form of device that allows blind and partially sighted voters to listen to the candidate list and can help identify where to mark the paper to vote for each candidate.

<sup>31</sup> Elections Review Working Group, [Item 5 – 2024 Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections - panel 1](#), 3 October 2024, p.26

sought as much as possible to move away from temporary venues, which often do not have step-free access.

Many respondents to the Working Group's survey were positive about the accessibility measures within polling stations for people with accessibility needs. They also highlighted the option to vote via post as helpful in making elections accessible for them:

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*"My eyesight isn't great, but the print was clear and if there is good light, I can read documents fine with reading glasses."*

*"I have hearing loss – I found the staff very helpful"*

*"There were ramps and cubicle at various levels for people in wheelchairs. I can't speak for other kinds of accessibility needs as I didn't require or witness them."*

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However, we also heard evidence that there is more work across the GLA and London boroughs can do to understand the needs of disabled voters. Zoe Wilkins from the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham told the Working Group that there was not a high level of take-up from voters to request accessibility measures and suggested that this work could be built on:

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*"They [disabled voters] do not know what kind of help we can provide and I think that is the key thing that we have to work on in future is letting people know (1) what is there as standard and (2) actually if you need something else, let us know because we are here to help and we will do so if we know what the needs are."*

**Zoe Wilkins, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

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This view was corroborated by findings from the May 2023 local elections (not held in London), the first in which new legislation around accessibility was implemented. MHCLG's evaluation from those elections found that a minority of disabled adults of voting age in England knew a great deal or fair amount about the new accessibility measures.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the Electoral Commission's report on the UK General Election found that more should be done to inform voters about accessibility requests they can make at elections.

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Additionally, Ian Buckle from the London Borough of Waltham Forest told the Working Group that measures for neurodiverse Londoners could be an area of improvement for boroughs and the GLA in considering accessibility:

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*“I think the neurodiverse issue is one that we are increasingly aware of in Waltham Forest ... It is something where we can obviously improve.”*

**Ian Buckle, Head of Governance and Electoral Services, London Borough of Waltham Forest**

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We want to thank the GLA and London boroughs for their work in this area. There were positive developments in these elections, of which those involved in organising and running the elections can be proud. In view of this new legislation, and reports from some boroughs that there was not a large take-up of voters making accessibility requests, we believe that this should be something the GLA seeks to understand on a London level. We also heard from MHCLG and the Electoral Commission about wider work across the sector about accessibility of the elections, and the GLA should review whether there are lessons from this work for the GLA and share its best practice with others. This should include work around accessibility for neurodiverse Londoners.

### Recommendation 5

**To further build on its accessibility work, the GLA should:**

- **request and compile data from boroughs on the number and types of accessibility requests made in 2024**
  - **discuss with the Electoral Commission any accessibility measures taken forward in other parts of the country at the 2024 elections and review with London boroughs whether these would be useful to disabled voters in London at the 2028 Elections, including developing approaches to include neurodiverse Londoners.**
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### Change to the Mayoral voting system

The Elections Act 2022 changed the voting system for electing the Mayor of London.

In previous elections, the Mayor was elected via the Supplementary Vote (SV) system, in which voters were able to choose a first and second choice. Under the SV system, if no single candidate gains more than 50 per cent of the vote, the two candidates with the most first choice votes have the second preference votes they received added to the number of first choice votes. The candidate with the highest number of first and second preference votes combined wins.

The SV system had been in place since the first GLA Elections in 2000 and was included in the Government's proposals for the creation of the GLA. These proposals were voted on as part of a London referendum in 1998; turnout for this referendum was 34 per cent and 1.2m people voted in favour of the plans compared to 478,000 against (72 per cent versus 28 per cent).

In 2022, the Government changed the voting system for all 'Metro mayors' to a First Past the Post voting system, where voters have one preference and the candidate with the highest number of votes wins. The Government said this was in line with its 2019 manifesto in support of First Past the Post and "designed to make the voting process easier to understand for electors and strengthen democratic accountability".<sup>33</sup> " and cited the number of spoilt ballot papers in 2021 as one of the reasons for the change.<sup>34</sup> Our predecessor, the [2021 Elections Review Working Group](#), noted the design of the ballot paper as a contributing factor to the high number of rejected ballots in 2021. It did not conclude the voting system itself necessarily leads to a high number of spoilt ballots.

The Government's impact assessment referenced the 2011 nationwide referendum on changing the UK Parliamentary voting system, where there was not support for a change in the voting system, as a reason for this change but did not refer to London's GLA referendum. This legislation amended the GLA Act 1999. The change was not supported by the incumbent Mayor.

## Implementation

The GLA and boroughs told the Working Group that the change in the Mayoral voting system did not create practical implementation issues. The GLRO report to the Working Group said that this change was a key part of its messaging for the elections; and that, as a result, London Elects' campaign communicated a 'one vote per ballot paper' message. GLA polling from May 2024 suggests that the majority of Londoners were aware that the voting system had changed. Two in three (64 per cent) correctly identified the system of voting for one preference; however, 11 per cent thought that there were still two choices, and one in five (21 per cent) said they didn't know.<sup>35</sup>

Boroughs told us that the change to the Mayoral voting system did not create significant issues at polling stations – for example, enquiries from members of the public or a lack of understanding about how to complete ballots. However, Ian Buckle from the London Borough of Waltham Forest also said that this is not the full picture:

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<sup>33</sup> Impact Assessment, [Addendum to the Elections Bill Impact Assessment: First Past the Post \(FPTP\)](#), October 2022

<sup>34</sup> Impact Assessment: [Addendum to the Elections Bill Impact Assessment: First Past the Post \(FPTP\)](#), October 2022

<sup>35</sup> GLA/YouGov, [GLA Poll Results 2024](#), May 2024

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*“What is probably not as clear to us is whether voters are satisfied with the change in policy, but that is also probably not a question for us as administrators anyway.”*

**Ian Buckle, Head of Governance and Electoral Services, London Borough of Waltham Forest**

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At its meeting with political organisers, the Working Group heard more mixed views on the impact of the change to the Mayoral voting system with regards to communication with voters and whether this made the system easier or more difficult to understand for voters.

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*“From our perspective, it made it much easier to communicate to people. From a political education perspective, it was much easier to convey how to vote.”*

**Aline Delawa, Regional Director (London), Labour Party**

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*“I think the fact that it was communicating a change made it more confusing to communicate with voters because it meant that political party time and London Elects time had to go on to communicating this change.”*

**Ash Haynes, London Campaign Manager, Green Party**

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### Implementation: spoilt ballots

The GLA, the Electoral Commission and boroughs all pointed to the number of spoilt ballot papers as a potential signifier of implementation problems. The GLRO said there were concerns that more Mayoral ballot papers would be spoilt by those not realising that the second preference vote had been removed. However, the number of rejected ballots show that this did not happen; there were in fact substantially fewer spoilt ballots this year.<sup>36</sup>

- In 2024, there were **11,127** spoilt ballot papers (2,806 for voting for more than one candidate).
- In 2021, there were **114,201** spoilt ballot papers (87,214 voting for more than one candidate).
- in 2016, there were **49,871** spoilt ballot papers (32,217 voting for more than one candidate).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> [GLRO Report to the Elections Review Working Group](#), 25 July 2024, p.7

<sup>37</sup> The [2021 Elections Review Working Group](#) noted the design of the ballot paper as a contributing factor to the high number of rejected ballots in 2021.



We note in this context that some government communications announcing the new voting system from the time cited the 2021 London elections spoilt ballots directly as part of its rationale:

“In this May’s London Mayoral elections, the Supplementary Vote system saw hundreds of thousands void, wasted or blank votes cast, reflecting voter confusion and the complex system.”<sup>38</sup>

There can be multiple reasons for a change in the number of spoilt ballots from one election to the next. For example, the London-wide ballot saw fewer spoilt ballots in 2024 compared to 2021 despite no change in the voting system.<sup>39</sup>

The GLA and boroughs successfully implemented this policy; however, this is not the only factor to consider.

### Impact on outcome

Voting systems can influence and even change the outcomes of elections and some commentators have suggested that changes to the electoral system may have been brought in to provide an electoral advantage. The Government explicitly stated in communications around its change of mayoral voting systems to First Past the Post that “Supplementary Vote also means that a ‘loser’ candidate can win on second preferences”, and that First Past the Post would ensure this did not happen.<sup>40</sup>

Professor Tony Travers told the Working Group that, while there are examples in other parts of the country where the second choice votes have changed the outcome of the election, this has not happened in London and that political parties adapt their campaign messaging depending on the voting system:

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*“The thing about the London Mayoral election results since it started is ... no candidate who came top on first preference has ever lost the election if the second preference is counted.”*

**Professor Tony Travers, School of Public Policy and Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science**

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This suggests that the outcome of the 2024 Mayoral election would not have been substantially different under the previous system.

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<sup>38</sup> Cabinet Office, [First Past the Post to be introduced for all local mayoral and police and crime commissioner elections](#), 15 September 2021

<sup>39</sup> In 2024, there were 17,226 rejected ballots compared to 54,931 in 2021. [London Elects](#)

<sup>40</sup> Cabinet Office, [First Past the Post to be introduced for all local mayoral and police and crime commissioner elections](#), 15 September 2021

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## Impact on citizens

Voting systems can also influence how citizens feel about participating in the democratic system. Phil Thompson told the Working Group that within the Electoral Commission's public opinion polling, some voters say they would be more satisfied under a preferential system. In February 2024, this polling indicated that 35 per cent of Londoners said their satisfaction with the process of voting at elections would increase if the system were proportional.<sup>41</sup>

Thea-Ridley Castle from the Electoral Reform Society told the Working Group that analysis suggests some evidence of tactical voting under First Past the Post when comparing the Mayoral vote to the votes under the London-wide Assembly Member ballot. The Electoral Reform Society sees tactical voting as a symptom of people's voices not being heard in elections:

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*"Tactical voting means that people cannot express their true preference, it means that they do not get the person that they want. We believe that it should be moved back to SV, even better, alternative vote (AV)."*

**Thea Ridley-Castle, Research and Policy Officer, Electoral Reform Society**

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Our survey asked Londoners about their views on this change. It was open to anyone who wanted to respond, and therefore was not seeking to be representative of the views of Londoners. However, it did reveal some evidence of tactical voting or people feeling their vote was "wasted" under First Past the Post:

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*"I was unable to express my preference for a first choice and felt I had to vote tactically to be sure of supporting a winner."*

*"The new voting system was worse. It prevented me voting for my first choice, because I had to vote tactically."*

*"I seriously considered voting for a candidate that was not my preferred choice, but in the end, in the light of opinion polling, decided to vote for the person I wished to become Mayor. I felt seriously let down by having to face this dilemma."*

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<sup>41</sup> Electoral Commission, [Public Attitudes 2024](#)

Not all respondents to our survey were unhappy with the change. Those that preferred First Past the Post generally reported that they found it straightforward or easier to understand, and others said that it did not impact their experience:

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*“Better system. More easily understood.”*

*“I’m happy just to have one preference.”*

*“Much preferred the new way. Easy to understand, and I same as the General Election.”*

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The Government should take citizens’ views into account when making changes to the voting system. The 2021 Elections Review Working Group recommended that any change to the voting system should be subject to a city-wide referendum.<sup>42</sup> Professor Tony Travers said that Government normally does take note of referendums; and while the legislation noted the 2011 nationwide referendum, it did not refer to the 1998 GLA referendum:

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*“in the original referendum on the creation of the Greater London Authority, the voting system was in the referendum, and although in Britain we do not have a constitution that embeds these things when votes of that place take place, given that that was embedded, as was the Assembly’s voting system, probably Government should have regard to that kind of referendum-based vote. Generally, where we have referendums, Governments do take notice of what they say.”*

**Professor Tony Travers, School of Public Policy and Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science**

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A majority of the Working Group believe that Londoners should have been consulted on the change to the voting system to the mayoral election.

### **The future of the Mayoral voting system?**

As Government considers the future of devolution in England, the findings of our review suggest that consultation with regional government and citizens is needed.

The Elections Act 2022 states that that a statutory review of the policy should take place.<sup>43</sup> Ruth Law from MHCLG told the Working Group that she was not aware of any in-house analysis

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<sup>42</sup> With a dissenting note from AM Keith Prince. The original legislation of the 1998 referendum can be found [here](#) and the Government’s proposals can be found [here](#).

<sup>43</sup> Elections Act 2022, [Review of operation of the Act](#)

being carried out in relation to the change in the voting system; but added that Government would be looking at analysis from the Electoral Commission and others.

The Mayor of London Sadiq Khan has said that the Labour Government will reverse this part of the Elections Act.<sup>44</sup> Recent media reports had suggested that the Government's plans for the Mayoral voting system would be announced as part of the White Paper on devolution,<sup>45</sup> but this did not form part of the paper published on 16 December 2024.<sup>46</sup>

However, any changes cannot be perceived by the public to benefit any one party or individual. We were struck by evidence from Professor Tony Travers that the electoral system for the Mayor cannot be changed every time there is a change of government. From our review, this would not only be bad for trust in democracy but also for communicating to voters and for those organising the elections. Therefore, any future changes should be lasting and involve Londoners. This aspect of the Mayoral voting system is described in Chapter 4 and should be a serious consideration for any government announcement on the issue.

## **Recommendation 6**

**Alterations to the Mayoral voter system is a matter for central government. However, any future government that has plans to change the Mayoral voting system should hear from Londoners before taking this decision.**

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<sup>44</sup> The Rest Is Politics, [Sadiq Khan: Realities of Mayoral Power, Blurred Lines Between Dominic Cummings & Boris Johnson](#) (video), 23 April 2024, at 39 minutes

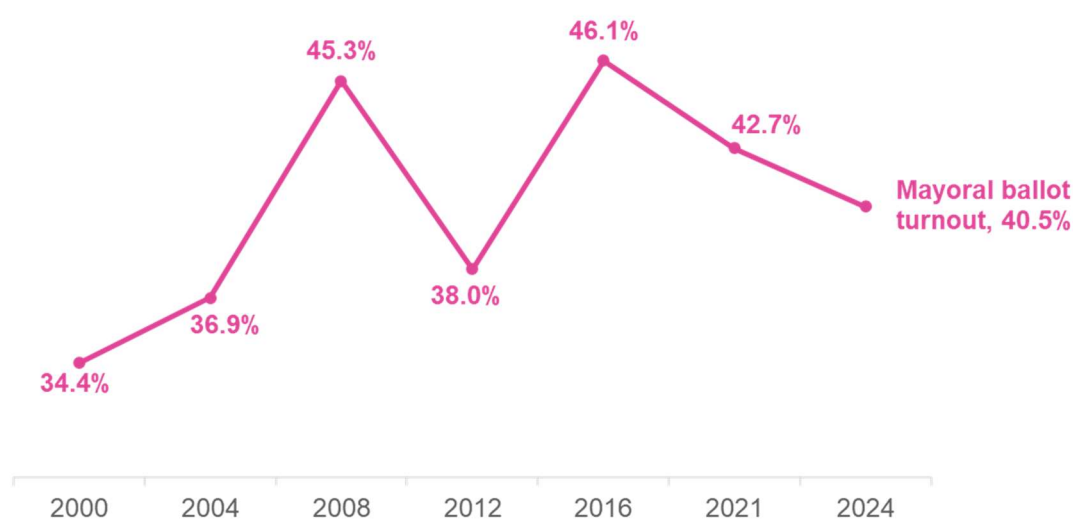
<sup>45</sup> See, for example: Byline Times, [Government Could Reverse Conservative Attempts to 'Gerrymander' Mayoral Voting Systems](#), 25 October 2024

<sup>46</sup> Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, [English Devolution White Paper](#), 16 December 2024

## Public engagement in London's democracy

Public engagement in elections is important for a healthy democracy. However, 2024 has seen a downward trend in turnout at national and local elections. At the GLA Elections, turnout was 40.5 per cent, down on the previous two elections in 2021 and 2016.

### Mayoral ballot turnout



Turnout is only part of the picture – this figure is based on the number of registered voters, which is lower in London than in other parts of England. Turnout figures alone also do not capture how confident and informed voters feel about voting systems and political institutions. At the Working Group's 25 July meeting, the GLA's Head of Community Engagement Farah Elahi highlighted political literacy as a barrier across many types of elections:

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*"I think we recognise that political literacy generally, not just in relation to the GLA and Assembly Member elections, but more generally can be a barrier for people's participation."* **Farah Elahi, Head of Community Engagement, Greater London Authority**

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Our review sought to understand how the GLA has informed voters about the institutions of the Mayor and the Assembly; and explained their respective voting systems.

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## The role of the Mayor and the Assembly

In its campaign run up to the GLA Elections, London Elects' Alex Chafey told the Working Group about the trade-offs and multitude of messages it needed to communicate in a short space of time to voters. Part of that activity included short animations to inform voters about the roles of the Mayor and the Assembly:

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*"We did run advertising design to tell people, explain the role of the Mayor and Assembly to people. Obviously, we have got a lot of messages to communicate, and that is not something which can fit easily on a poster or on the side of a bus. That is something we did in animated form on social media. As I said, our first objective is to tell people the election is happening and then try to introduce them to those other messages. That information was on the website and in the booklets."*

**Alex Chafey, Senior Marketing Manager, London Elects**

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Separately, we took written evidence from Dr Elisabeth Pop – the GLA's Principal Policy and Programme Officer for Active Citizenship and Democratic Participation – that its work has revealed that there is not always good knowledge around the make-up of the Greater London Authority, including the remit of the Mayor and the London Assembly, and their respective voting systems. She said that to date the Democratic Participation team has not carried out representative surveys or specific research on this.<sup>47</sup> London Elects said that its market testing in the run-up to the elections focused on knowledge of the voting systems, and in particular on communicating the change to the Mayoral voting system.

When asked at the Working Group meeting on 25 July about whether there is more work to do to inform voters about the work of GLA beyond the election cycle, GLRO Mary Harpley said:

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*"We probably do need to think about what more can we do around reminding people what they are voting for every four years, more month-in/month-out, and then the London Elects work comes in on top of that in the statutory run-up to the elections."*

**Mary Harpley, Greater London Returning Officer**

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The GLA Democracy Hub, run by the Democratic Participation team, does provide some political literacy resources that can be used by civil society organisations, schools and Londoners more generally. So far, the role of the Mayor and the London Assembly does not appear to have been a significant focus of this work, compared to work around voter registration and photo ID. PowerPoint presentations and lesson plans provided for use in educational settings from September 2024 and November 2022 did provide a brief overview of the role of the Mayor and the Assembly alongside other types of election in London and other issues.

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<sup>47</sup> Elections Review Working Group, [Agenda](#), 3 October 2024, p.42

We recognise that there was need to prioritise communications on the new photo ID requirement for this year's elections in London. However, across the GLA there is an opportunity and an obligation to inform all Londoners about the roles of the Mayor and the London Assembly. This is not currently enough of a priority outside of the short window before the elections. As the GLA reaches its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we believe this should be a significant focus of this four-year term.

We note, in this context, that the UK Parliament and other devolved parliaments (such as the Scottish Parliament) provide extensive resources for the public about their institutions.<sup>48</sup> The London Assembly has taken steps this year to advance its own communications, including newly publishing Assembly Research Unit information papers on the role and powers of the Mayor, the GLA, the London Assembly, and functional bodies. In our position as democratic representatives, Assembly Members have a role to play in efforts to better inform Londoners of the Mayoral and Assembly institutions and would welcome GLA engagement on this topic ahead of elections in 2028.

## Recommendation 7

**The GLA should develop a public awareness campaign focused on informing Londoners about the roles within London's regional government.**

**It should engage with the Assembly on the information materials produced about the Assembly, and secure members' participation in this work, where appropriate.**

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## The voting system for the London Assembly

The voting system used to elect the London Assembly was designed to be proportional. This system, the Additional Member System, sees Londoners use two ballot papers used to elect 25 Assembly Members:

- a ballot paper to vote for one of 14 constituency Assembly Members, using First Past the Post
- a ballot paper where Londoners vote for a political party or independent candidate, which determines the remaining 11 London-wide Assembly Members.

The allocation of the 11 London-wide Assembly seats is determined using a proportional formula that takes into account the number of constituency seats won; and the number of votes on the London-wide ballot.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> [UK Parliament Week](#) and Scottish Parliament [educational resources](#)

<sup>49</sup> This is called the d'Hondt formula and seats are determined by the number of London-wide votes for a party or independent candidate divided by the number of constituency seats won +1. This continues for each of the rounds until the seats are allocated and the additional seat allocated it taken into consideration by the formula each time.

We heard from numerous guests that describing this system succinctly is not an easy task. The description of the voting system was accurate in the statutory booklet sent to households about the elections by the GLRO, which, alongside information about each of the three ballots, set out:

“London-wide Assembly Members are elected according to how well the respective parties or independent candidates have done by adding up the votes from across London. Any party or independent candidate with 5 per cent or less of the votes is eliminated. The 11 seats are then allocated to the remaining parties or independent candidates. This is worked out using a formula that takes into account the number of Constituency London Assembly Member seats the party has won; so that the overall make-up of the Assembly proportionally reflects how Londoners have voted.”

However, the paid-for social media content produced by London Elects was not clear, describing the third ballot as for the ‘London-wide Assembly Member’, and did not reflect the options on the ballot paper (voting for a party or independent candidate). The GLRO’s report to the Assembly stated that this messaging was viewed by 4.4m people.<sup>50</sup> The GLRO’s comment piece in the Evening Standard was similarly confusing, saying that the third ballot was for “your London-wide Assembly Member (which is a vote for the party of your choice)”,<sup>51</sup> without explanation of how the two votes interact or the proportional nature of the Assembly.

Some responses to the Working Group’s survey also told us that they found the explanation of how the Assembly ballots worked confusing or that lack of knowledge was an accessibility barrier:

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*“Lack of voter education regarding how the London Assembly vote worked.”*

*“Information on the way the Assembly vote worked was not very clear”*

*“It wasn’t totally clear what the three different votes were for. I know one [was] for Mayor, one was for London Assembly, I couldn’t tell you what the third one was for.”*

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As part of our discussion with the GLRO about this issue, we were pleased that our concerns around this messaging were listened to:

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<sup>50</sup> [GLRO Report to the Elections Review Working Group](#), 25 July 2024

<sup>51</sup> Evening Standard, [This is how the London mayoral election is changing: you will need ID to vote and you only have one preference](#), 23 January 2024



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*“What we can commit to, we clearly did not get it right in this headline message on the orange ballot paper, we can see that ... We can commit now to doing some more active testing on the Assembly London-wide messaging because, it is not an excuse, it is complicated and one of the hardest things is to get really, really complicated things across straightforwardly.”*

**Mary Harpley, Greater London Returning Officer**

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The Working Group is concerned that the GLA messaging around the London-wide ballot paper for these elections was not as clear as it should have been. But we also heard that there are examples that the GLA can learn from: Thea Ridley-Castle from the Electoral Reform Society pointed to New Zealand's visual presentation of its voting system, and the Scottish Parliament has similarly created explanatory videos and interactive resources.<sup>52</sup> The GLA should create and promote better resources for Londoners to understand the GLA voting systems.

### **Recommendation 8**

**The GLA should create videos explaining the voting systems of the GLA Elections, learning from the examples of New Zealand and Scotland. These should form part of the GLA's wider work in explaining the roles of the Mayor and the Assembly ahead of the next GLA Elections and be visible on the GLA website, the GLA Democracy Hub and the London Elects website.**

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<sup>52</sup> Resources from [the New Zealand Electoral Commission](#) and the [Scottish Parliament](#)

## Abuse and intimidation in London's elections

Abuse and intimidation of people involved in elections – candidates, electoral staff or volunteers – poses a threat to democracy. It can have an impact on people's lives and risks fewer people standing for public office.

### Abuse and intimidation in UK elections

The Electoral Commission's research following the May 2024 elections in England revealed "unacceptable abuse and intimidation", with 43 per cent of candidates surveyed in England experiencing some form of abuse or intimidation.<sup>53</sup> In its report on the UK General Election in July, the Electoral Commission's survey found that over half of candidates responding to its survey said they avoided some form of campaigning because of fear of abuse.<sup>54</sup> Michela Palese told the Working Group at its 16 October meeting that the Electoral Commission flagged abuse and intimidation as a serious concern at the May 2022 and 2023 elections.<sup>55</sup> This is a consistent issue across different types of elections that, if left unaddressed, poses a threat to democracy.

Responses to the Working Group's Call for Evidence agreed that abuse and harassment of candidates is a serious issue in politics, and one that is worsening on a national level. The Mile End Institute's response outlined that its 2019 survey of candidates found one in every two (49 per cent) General Election candidates in the UK had suffered of some form of harassment, abuse or intimidation while campaigning, an increase of 11 percentage points compared with 2017.<sup>56</sup>

Both the Mile End Institute and Elects Her told us that there are "gendered aspects in the prevalence" of abuse, harassment and intimidation and this is affecting the willingness of women to stand for election.<sup>57</sup> At our 16 October meeting, Sofia Collignon, Director of the Mile End Institute, told the Working Group that this was impacting women and ethnic minority candidates and politicians:

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<sup>54</sup> Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#)

<sup>55</sup> Elections Review Working Group, [Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Panel 1 - 2024 Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections](#), 16 October 2024, p.12

<sup>56</sup> Mile End Institute call for evidence response

<sup>57</sup> Mile End Institute and Elects Her call for evidence responses

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*“We also see that women councillors and people of ethnic minority origin are more concerned about the issue of harassment and intimidation. [...] We have not observed direct effects on the decision to stand again, yet, but we are seeing currently that the way that the issue has been escalating and the fact that it has been getting worse – and also there is more awareness about it, are reaching higher levels of concern and people are considering this when they decide to stand for office or not.”*

**Dr Sofia Collignon, Senior Lecturer in Comparative Politics and Director, Mile End Institute, Queen Mary University of London**

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## Candidates' experiences of the GLA Elections

The Working Group heard that there is a gap in the research around abuse and intimidation experienced by candidates at the GLA Elections. Phil Thompson, Head of Research at the Electoral Commission, told the Working Group that its research did not have enough responses from candidates in London to be able to report on London separately, but did not find significant differences between London and the rest of England.<sup>58</sup> The Mile End Institute's Call for Evidence response also noted a lack of survey data on the experiences of candidates standing in London. However, it has found concerning public attitudes around harassment of politicians, with 18 per cent of Londoners reporting it is acceptable to follow political figures on the street.<sup>59</sup>

At the Working Group's 3 October meeting, guests from political parties noted abuse and intimidation as an issue, both in London and nationally. Aline Delawa, Regional Director (London) for the Labour Party, outlined concerns from political parties about abuse of candidates, including in relation to the Mayor of London and in relation to Assembly candidates:

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<sup>58</sup> Elections Review Working Group, [Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Panel 1 - 2024 Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections](#), 16 October 2024, p.11

<sup>59</sup> Mile End Institute call for evidence response

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*“Our concern as well is that we have seen an increase in the amount of abuse of candidates. In Brent and Harrow, the candidate there had a targeted letter sent to Hindu voters about him which had to be addressed, and we had to take action to address that. The mechanisms by which one can deal with that and address this are really difficult. Following the mayoral election – we captured all of that – the general election was called very, very quickly afterwards. The level of harassment towards candidates there increased, and we think they will continue increasing for the locals and then the next set of mayorals and London Assembly.”*

**Aline Delawa, Regional Director (London), Labour Party**

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The Working Group received evidence in relation to this incident as part of its Call for Evidence. While it was looked into by the police and found to be an electoral offence due to a lack of identifying imprint (some campaign materials must state who is responsible for publishing and promoting it), the police were not able to identify the person responsible and therefore no further action was taken.<sup>60</sup>

There was consensus across political parties about the issue of abuse and intimidation, including online abuse on social media. The Working Group heard that at recent elections, concerns about security meant that parties told candidates not to attend hustings in certain areas out of fears for their safety; and that candidates were given an email address, rather than a phone number, to raise issues.

## **National and London-level actions addressing abuse and intimidation**

Reflecting the national concern about this issue, ahead of the elections in 2024, the Electoral Commission, National Police Chiefs' Council, the Crown Prosecution Service and the College of Policing issued joint guidance for candidates about harassment and intimidation.<sup>61</sup> The Elections Act 2022 introduced a new penalty for anyone found guilty of intimidating candidates, campaigners or elected representatives. Anyone found guilty of this behaviour could be banned from standing for elected office for five years. This was in addition to legislation already in place, including intimidation offences, such as common assault, harassment, and the use of threatening language.<sup>62</sup>

The role of the police was highlighted by both the Electoral Commission and Sofia Collignon from the Mile End Institute at the Working Group's 16 October meeting:

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<sup>60</sup> Krupesh Hirani AM call for evidence response

<sup>61</sup> Electoral Commission, National Police Chiefs' Council, CPS and College of Policing, [Joint Guidance for Candidates in Elections](#), 2024

<sup>62</sup> Electoral Commission, [Preventing candidate intimidation](#)

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*“Practically, I would also like to highlight the role of the police force and how important it is to establish best practices with the police force. One key example are the actions that the police. In Scotland, for example, there is a dedicated police officer during the campaign looking after councillors.*

*“Councillors in Scotland can express their concerns directly to this point of contact, who has received training about what could potentially constitute breaches of security and are best trained and best placed to help. Something that we are observing as well is that because of the centralisation of police forces, some candidates and elected officials will tell us that the response they are getting from the police is variable and what is it that the police consider to be actionable threats and what is not.*

*“Another suggestion is to engage much more with the College of Policing and offer training that is mandatory for all police officers on the issue of abuse, harassment and intimidation in public life, which is particular and specific.”*

**Dr Sofia Collignon, Senior Lecturer in Comparative Politics and Director, Mile End Institute, Queen Mary University of London**

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Following the General Election in June 2024, the Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, held a meeting to look into the issue of candidate harassment during the UK Parliamentary Elections.<sup>63</sup> Organisations also highlighted resources that the Local Government Association has created for councillors.<sup>64</sup>

Given the work being done in this area by national and local government, our review wanted to understand what more the GLA could do to tackle this issue. Michela Palese, Head of Policy at the Electoral Commission said:

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<sup>63</sup> The Guardian, [Yvette Cooper to chair meeting of taskforce considering ‘alarming rise’ in candidates intimidation](#), 15 July 2024

<sup>64</sup> Local Government Association, [Councillors' guide to handling harassment, abuse and intimidation](#). Noted in call for evidence responses from Elects Her and Mile End Institute

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*“In terms of what the GLA can do, it is continuing to work with a range of partners across the sector ... We do not think that any single actor, whether that is the Commission or the police or somebody else within the space, can tackle this by themselves ... There is also a role in terms of improving responses and protection, signposting, for example, to candidates and campaigners how they can report instances of abuse and intimidation, where they might be able to find additional resources and information. That being said, the onus cannot just fall on the candidates and campaigners themselves who, in some cases, may be victims of abuse and intimidation.”*

**Michela Palese, Head of Policy, Electoral Commission**

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At the London level, we did find evidence of some advice and support for candidates who might experience harassment. London Elects' final briefing for candidates and agents was attended by representatives from the Metropolitan Police and included a briefing on candidate safety and security.<sup>65</sup> The GLRO's report to the Working Group's 25 July meeting did not include reports of abuse or harassment experience by candidates during the election campaign but noted a "heightened risk of disruption" for the declaration of the Mayor based on precedent and social media, and that one candidate causing disruption left the venue.<sup>66</sup>

However, representatives from political parties told us that the support available to GLA candidates was uneven, both in terms of differences between Mayoral and constituency candidates and different levels of support between local and national politics:

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<sup>65</sup> London Elects, [Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections: final briefing for candidates and agents](#), 8 April 2024

<sup>66</sup> [GLRO Report to the Elections Review Working Group](#), 25 July 2024, p.12

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*“I appreciate that it is huge and logistically it is going to be challenging to have intervention, but if we just deal with the level of support, I do not think it is the same for councillors, activists and probably GLA members, if we are being honest, just because we have had those tragedies at parliamentary level where there has been intervention. It would be very helpful if channels could be explored where there could be helplines for candidates and parties which would result in at least a direct line to the police.”*

**Brian Jarvis, Head of Field (London), Conservative Campaign Headquarters**

*“[M]y constituency candidates were not as aware of how to contact the police, if they felt they needed it, as the information that was given to us centrally about Mayoral candidates. I wonder if there is a little bit of a gap there in making sure all levels of candidate get equal induction into that support that is available for them.”*

**Ash Haynes, London Campaign Manager, Green Party**

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Political parties and candidates in London are worried about abuse and intimidation. The Working Group's evidence suggests that the GLA should do more to understand how this impacted the GLA Elections in May 2024. At national and local levels, action is being taken to address abuse and intimidation at elections; and the GLA should have a role in this. With the Metropolitan Police, the GLA should conduct a review on the role and impact of abuse and intimidation at London's elections. This should set out what support and escalation mechanisms were available to candidates; and review what further work is needed ahead of the 2028 GLA Elections. It is vitally important that a diverse range of people feel they are able to stand for public office in London; and that issues of abuse and intimidation in London are adequately dealt with.

## **Recommendation 9**

**The GLA and Metropolitan Police should conduct a review of abuse and intimidation of candidates and at the GLA Elections, setting out how these issues were dealt with and what further lessons it can learn from national and local government. It should write to the GLA Oversight Committee with its findings.**

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## **Recommendation 10**

**The Metropolitan Police must also ensure its procedures for supporting candidates and staff reporting election-related concerns are as sensitive, responsive and quick for those taking part in elections at regional and local elections as they are for national elections.**

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## Harassment of electoral administrators

The Working Group also heard from Peter Stanyon, from the AEA, that electoral administrators should have the same protections in the Elections Act 2022 as candidates and campaigners:

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*“We were disappointed, we did make representations before the Elections Act was passed saying we feel electoral officials, Returning Officers, Electoral Registration staff should be covered by the same banner, solely because it is evident there is greater abuse being given, because of dissatisfaction with the process, not because it is not being delivered correctly, but it does not suit the modern way of living in some respects.”*

**Peter Stanyon, Chief Executive, Association of Electoral Administrators**

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Boroughs in London did not report this to us as an issue for them. However, given the increasing pressure on electoral administrators, and their vital role in delivering free and fair elections, more protection from harassment and intimidation is needed.

## Recommendation 11

**As part of its review of the 2024 Elections, the Government should review any intimidation and abuse experienced by electoral administrators, and whether legislation needs to provide greater penalties to those found guilty of abuse towards electoral administrators.**

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## The administration of the GLA Elections

The 2024 GLA Elections had several unique elements. They were the first to be counted manually; elections since 2000 have used electronic counts. In addition, they took place in the context of uncertainty over the timing of a UK General Election – which could have happened on the same day. This uncertainty impacted on decisions about how the elections were run.

### Manual count

The change from an electronic to a manual count was a major change for the administration and organisation of the 2024 GLA Elections.

As Greater London Returning Officer, Mary Harpley made the final decision in August 2022 to move to a manual count of the ballots from the GLA Elections 2024.<sup>67</sup> The GLRO decision cited three primary reasons for this: the change of voting system for the Mayor of London; the possibility of a UK General Election in May 2024; and cost (particularly in view of sunk costs for the postponement of the 2020 elections to 2021).

At the Working Group's 25 July meeting, the GLRO was positive about the manual count in 2024:

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*"We are all here recognising that the manual count worked very well and was delivered on the Saturday [4 May 2024] in the way that everybody had hoped; not everyone had thought [this was] possible."*

**Mary Harpley, Greater London Returning Officer**

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The move to a manual count did not delay the results of the elections and boroughs, and the GLA should be congratulated for its work to achieve this.

It is not yet clear whether manual counting will be a one-off or the new norm for GLA Elections. The GLRO's report to the Working Group stated: "On the face of it, counting manually in 2028 seems the right thing to plan." However, our review has revealed a number of considerations ahead of any decision being made about a manual or electronic count for 2028. There were also several areas for improvement and lessons to be learnt from this manual count.

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<sup>67</sup> GLRO Decision, [GLRO24-01](#), 19 August 2022

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## Borough and political perspectives

When we met with GLA representatives in July, it had not had a chance to discuss, with boroughs, their perspectives on the manual count for 2024.

From what boroughs told us, there are differing opinions and preference on manual versus electronic counting. Linzi Roberts-Egan, Chief Executive of Waltham Forest and Chair of the London Elections Management Board, wrote to the Working Group:

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*“In the meeting with CELC [Chief Executives of London Councils], the 13 boroughs who attended were asked whether they preferred manual or electronic counting going forward. Six boroughs preferred electronic voting, five boroughs preferred manual with two boroughs undecided.”*

**Written evidence from London Borough of Waltham Forest**

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Boroughs we spoke to as part of our review had a range of preferences on electronic versus manual counting. Aspects such as transparency, local flexibility and familiarity were cited as positives of the manual count, whereas electronic counting resulted in more efficiency and consistency:

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*“I, personally, and I will not speak for the boroughs within my constituency, enjoy the manual count. It is something that I think is very transparent for politicians. It is an enormous undertaking at this scale, but it is something that we know and deliver well.”*

**Ian Buckle, Head of Governance and Electoral Services, London Borough of Waltham Forest**

*“I like manual counts for the reasons I have said, but the e-counts are very reliable and consistent. Consistency, though, you do get a lack of flexibility perhaps. Sometimes you do need to be able to do something slightly different that suit your local area a bit better. On balance, I personally prefer doing it the electronic way. I have found that more efficient.”*

**Zoe Wilkins, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

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Representatives from political parties we spoke to echoed similar trade-offs between manual and electronic counting. Manual counting was seen as a benefit to some political parties due to the openness of being able to see the progress of the count, whereas others preferred the speed of electronic counting. Notably, neither system was criticised as an untrustworthy way to conduct the counting:

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*“Bizarrely, against all the trends in terms of 21st century voting, we do think manual is better in terms of a scrutiny function as well ... You can see that physically with paper, it is difficult when the output is electronic, so from that perspective, we do think that manual was better for us.”*

**Aline Delawa, Regional Director (London), Labour Party**

*“I would have a slight bias towards the electronic system, it appears to be quicker from a counting point of view, therefore a better allocation of resources.”*

**Ash Haynes, London Campaign Manager, Green Party**

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Our review found there is not a clear consensus among boroughs and political parties on manual versus electronic counting. This makes the GLRO's decision for the count method for 2028 less straightforward and suggests that either way a clear explanation will be required for whichever method is chosen.

## Lessons from the manual count

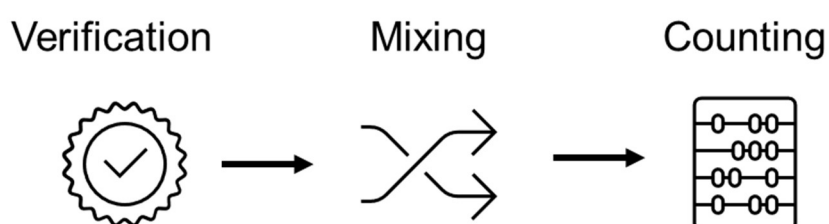
Representatives from boroughs and political parties at the Working Group's 3 October meeting described good working relationships with London Elects. Boroughs said that the GLA listened to challenge, in the context where boroughs may have a range of opinions. Lea Goddard, Senior Elections Programme Manager at the GLA, was particularly highlighted as having a collaborative approach with boroughs and understanding their perspectives. Similarly, the political party representatives we heard from said that London Elects was responsive and supportive.

That said, they also noted some areas of improvement for the next elections; many of these related specifically to aspects relating to a manual count.

### Delays in sign-off

One of the biggest concerns raised by boroughs and political parties as part of our review was reports of significant sign-off delays at the verification (counting the number of ballot papers) and count stage (counting the votes per candidate/party).

### Summary of stages



Previously, the e-count software collated the local totals for the Mayoral and Assembly London-wide elections. However, for a manual count, London Elects needed to confirm the verification totals and final figures submitted by boroughs.

Some boroughs described delays of an hour, others an hour and a half, which added significant cost to boroughs and impacted staff who were waiting on results and had been working hard at the count:

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*“We did not know for our London-wide result, we waited for an hour and a half in the North East constituency at the end of what had been a very long two days and we eventually dismissed the majority of our teams before we had our results signed off because by that point, with the confidence that we had in it, we would be arguing very robustly that we were not going to go back into it. It is expensive. We are talking, within our venue, 350 members of staff an hour can be as much as £15,000. It is not small money. We need to work on that process if we are going to do manual again”*

**Ian Buckle, Head of Governance and Electoral Services, London Borough of Waltham Forest**

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The GLRO's report to the Working Group acknowledged “frustration of delays of half an hour or more” and but that in some instances the process did find mistakes that needed to be corrected by CROs.<sup>68</sup>

Given the significant impact on boroughs, the GLA should review the extent of these delays and the potential cost implications that this had on the manual count.

## Recommendation 12

**In response to this report, the GLA should provide the GLA Oversight Committee with a short analysis of how long boroughs were waiting for London Elects to sign off verification and count totals in 2024, and an estimation of the cost of delays.**

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### Variance and tolerance

As part of the sign-off process for the election, the GLRO Directions set out:

- **“Tolerance for variance at the verification:** At the verification stage, CROs/BROs shall look to arrive at zero tolerance for variance between the verification total, and the aggregate total of all ballot paper accounts, for each borough.

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<sup>68</sup> [GLRO Report to the Elections Review Working Group](#), 25 July 2024, p.11

- **Tolerance for variance at the count:** At the count stage CROs/BROs shall look to apply zero tolerance for variance between the verification total, and the aggregate of all votes cast and rejected ballot papers.<sup>69</sup>

The GLRO's report to the Working Group said that this was in line with Electoral Commission guidance and agreed by boroughs. The guidance from the Electoral Commission to the GLRO stated that some of the principles of an effective verification, count and results collation process are that:

- “the verification produces an accurate result. This means that the number of ballot papers in each box either matches the number of ballot papers issued as stated on the ballot paper account or, if it does not:
  - the source of the variance has been identified and can be explained, and/or
  - the box has been recounted at least twice, until the same number of ballot papers is counted on two consecutive occasions.
- The count produces an accurate result, where:
  - the total number of votes cast for each candidate (or party), together with the rejected votes matches the total number of ballot papers given on each verification statement
  - the verification, count and result collation are timely.<sup>70</sup>

John Bailey from the London Borough of Barnet explained that this process often meant repeated counting:

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*“We were given a tolerance of zero, which meant that if the figures did not match what we were expecting, we counted them again, and in many cases, we counted them again and again. But then if you end up with a variance, that variance is factual, we have counted and that is the number we have now.”*

**John Bailey, Head of Electoral Services, London Borough of Barnet**

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At the Working Group's 25 July meeting, GLRO Mary Harpley said that there were some instances in which explained differences were accepted:

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<sup>69</sup> GLA, [GLRO24-10 GLRO Directions relating to the Mayor of London, the London-wide Assembly Members and Constituency Assembly Member elections on Thursday 2 May 2024](#), 29 January 2024

<sup>70</sup> Electoral Commission, [Guidance for the GLRO administering the GLA Elections](#)

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*“You will, I know, hear some frustration from some of them on my insistence that people returned back to the verification numbers in the count and how even at single digit variances, I would not accept them. There were some I eventually did accept but with the knowledge that that had been tested and tested and that there were explanations for them.”*

**Mary Harpley, Greater London Returning Officer**

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This issue was also discussed in written evidence from the London Borough of Waltham Forest, based on a meeting of London Chief Executives. It said that small variances across such large areas should be accepted and that there should be a London-wide policy on what on the checks needed for figures to be accepted.

### **Recommendation 13**

**In the event of a manual count for 2028, the GLRO should discuss with the Electoral Commission its guidance on ‘principles of an effective verification, count and results collation process’, including a reasonable process for how to address small variances that ensures timely results.**

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#### **Delegation of sign-off**

The GLRO has a statutory responsibility for the collation of votes from the Mayoral and London-wide Assembly, and declaration of the results. It is therefore it is right that these results are signed off centrally by London Elects and have the confidence of the GLRO. The GLRO's report to the Working Group noted the need to have “qualified people look at each result carefully”.

However, boroughs questioned whether there were enough staff able to sign off results to prevent these delays. Some evidence we received suggested that only the GLRO signed off results. Alongside this, there was a lack of communication. This impacted boroughs' relationships with agents and candidates at the count, as they did not have this clarity from the centre and could not tell people at the count the reasons for the delays:

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*“The issue with results themselves I think was particularly difficult. There must be more delegation. There must be a better route of escalation for the GLRO team. It is a challenge that I have had to overcome within my own borough where all decisions were being made through a very small funnel and it does slow the entirety down. With the right training, trust, and procedures in place, you can push some of those decisions further down the pipe, which would probably move things along much faster.”*

**Ian Buckle, Head of Governance and Electoral Services, London Borough of Waltham Forest**

*“There are some things there about just communicating back about what is the holdup and what messaging do you want to give to our staff, what message do you want us to give to the candidates and their agents, so that everybody knows what is going on and why are we waiting, is there a problem ... There was a delay, particularly for the mayoral result, the myth that came back perhaps was that the GLRO and team were checking the mayoral results, getting ready to do that announcement, which makes me think do we need a bigger team in the centre then with authority to sign off other results as they come.”*

**Zoe Wilkins, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

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Additionally, boroughs said that the reporting tool that boroughs inputted data did not facilitate an easy process for sign off for boroughs or London Elects and that any future manual count should provide an audit trail, more visibility for the GLRO and easier usability for boroughs.

These processes should be looked at in the event of a manual count for 2028. After significant work from borough teams to count ballots from these elections, efforts should be taken to reduce these waiting times and communicate effectively. Sufficient resource and delegation from London Elects is required to achieve this.

## **Recommendation 14**

**In the event of a manual count in 2028, the GLRO should write to the GLA Oversight Committee setting out how she plans to reduce sign-off delays and improve communication with boroughs. This should include details of:**

- **how many people will sign-off results at the centre**
  - **what mechanisms will be put in place to inform boroughs of delays and the reasons for them and how this will be staffed.**
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## Ward and borough-level data

One significant implication of the move from electronic to manual counting in 2024 was that data on the electorate and voting patterns was significantly reduced.

In previous GLA Elections, the electronic count meant that the turnout and results by party for each ward and borough was available on the London Elects website.<sup>71</sup> In 2024, this data was only made available by GLA constituencies (two or three boroughs combined). This is a significant change: the size of the electorate in 2021 ranged from around 3,000 to 19,000 for wards; and from around 99,000 to 278,000 for boroughs. For GLA boroughs, the information becomes much less detailed as the size of the electorate ranges from 359,208 in West Central to 628,856 in City & East.<sup>72</sup> The data provided for the 2024 GLA Elections was significantly less granular than that for the UK Parliamentary Election, where the size of each constituency's electorate is much smaller.<sup>73</sup> Consistent recording of ward-level data since the establishment of the GLA in 2000 has allowed academics and political parties to understand changes in the voting patterns of local areas over time. The loss of this data for 2024 means comparisons cannot be made in the same way.

Political party representatives and academics highlighted the importance of granular data in elections, and the role it plays in research and the democratic process:

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*“[W]ard-by-ward information or borough-by-borough information does allow us to see differences which have a meaning, turnouts are much lower in some places than others, why? They are higher in some places than others, why? There are some wards, or boroughs, even, that have particular characteristics, and if there are big differences, it would be good to know those in order that they can be researched.”*

**Professor Tony Travers, School of Public Policy and Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science**

*“The data we can get from that is invaluable for political parties, for voters, just for general trust in the democratic system.”*

**Ash Haynes, London Campaign Manager, Green Party**

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<sup>71</sup> See, for example: London Elects, [2021 results](#), borough and ward-level data

<sup>72</sup> London Elects, [2024 results](#)

<sup>73</sup> The 2023 boundary review specified that constituencies must now have an electorate within 5 per cent of the 'electoral quota' – now set at 73,393 registered voters – with just a few exceptions. [UK Parliament](#) and House of Commons Library, [General Election 2024 results](#), Detailed results by constituency, September 2024



## Turnout figures

Verification figures – the process to check that all ballots are accounted for and are in the correct ballot boxes – could have been provided for this election. This data could then have been used to provide turnout figures.<sup>74</sup> It was therefore possible in the 2024 elections for turnout figures to have been made available by ward/borough.

Access to ward-level verification data also allows counting agents to ensure that the count as been conducted correctly:

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*“The British system is that you appoint counting agents to make sure that no dodgy business is going on ... so those spreadsheets that get put together help when it comes to an end result to see if a mistake has been made because if it is wildly out, it means that the counting staff have probably got something wrong ... if you did not have those spreadsheets and knowing that was the case, you would not know. The spreadsheet is part of the process and is quite helpful to know. In order to do that, you do need those verification figures by polling district, or you cannot actually adjust for the actual real turnout.”*

**Brian Jarvis, Head of Field (London), Conservative Campaign Headquarters**

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At the Working Group's 25 July meeting, GLRO Mary Harpley acknowledged:

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*“Probably in hindsight, we should have thought a little bit more about verification because data could be shared from verification, and we did not have a London-wide position on it ready. In the end, individual CROs took their own decision and that did cause a little bit of unnecessary noise in the system.”*

**Mary Harpley, Greater London Returning Officer**

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Because the GLA did not set out an agreed position on this, CROs took different approaches, both in terms of collection of the data and what they were willing to share. This resulted in candidates and agents receiving different information depending on the constituency.

In the event of a manual count for 2028, we heard a clear message from boroughs that a consistent approach was needed to ensure that there is clarity, trust and transparency in approaches:

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<sup>74</sup> Verification figures provides the number of ballots in the election and can be compared to the number of electors to produce turnout.

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*“There is probably scope I would say for looking at manual counts and saying which of the elements we insist on having at every count so that there is this transparency for people who are coming along to them ... Therefore, maybe there is a chance to look at that now as part of this review and just say what were the things that the inconsistency caused doubt? That is where we want consistency, so that we have got a solid piece of work that everybody understands what is going on. That is why we need it.”*

**Zoe Wilkins, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

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The Working Group agrees with the GLRO's report to the Working Group that, although it was an area for Constituency Returning Officer (CROs) discretion, a London-wide view on this should have been taken.<sup>75</sup>

Given the importance of verification data at ward and borough levels, the Working Group believes that the GLRO should ensure this data is available in 2028 in the event of a manual count.

## **Recommendation 15**

**In the event of a manual count for 2028, the GLRO should work with boroughs to collect and publish ward and borough verification data.**

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### **The 'mixing rule'**

The GLA told us that the reason for the lack of borough- and ward-level data broken down by political party or candidate was because of a 'mixing rule' within the Greater London Authority Election Rules 2007. This mixing takes place after the ballots are verified, and therefore only applied to the count totals by candidate or party. The 2007 Rules include specific instructions for a manual count, including a requirement to mix together ballot papers after verification:

“The CRO must mix together all of the ballot papers used in the election in the Assembly constituency and must count the votes given on them.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> [GLRO Report to the Elections Review Working Group](#), 25 July 2024

<sup>76</sup> [Greater London Authority Elections Rules 2007](#)

This rule is not included in legislation relating to electronic counting of ballots, so it has not previously applied. The GLRO set out the implications of this rule:

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*“The advice we received after much discussion was very clear about the legal basis for the manual count, the requirement to mix ballot papers at constituency level. What that therefore meant for ward-level data, if you were meeting the law, you would not be able to provide the ward-level data.”*

**Mary Harpley, Greater London Returning Officer**

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Deputy GLRO Alex Conway told the Working Group at its 25 July meeting:

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*“I do not even know if it is a drafting error, there is no obvious reason for it to exist at all, but exist it does and, for the reasons Mary says, it has big implications for how we then manage the counts and everything else.”*

**Alex Conway, Deputy Greater London Returning Officer**

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The ‘mixing rule’ also had an impact on the counting venues this year. Constituencies required larger venues in order to mix the ballots and to count them together. This was a late change as some areas had initially planned to count by borough at smaller venues.<sup>77</sup>

In correspondence with the Working Group about the reason for the ‘mixing rule’, a representative from MHCLG said that:

*“it does look to be something of an anomaly given the more general wording for other polls is that the contents of a ballot box should be mixed with the contents of at least one other ballot box – rather than all the papers at the count for that poll or in that area (in this case a borough) for a given poll...”*

*I do not know if there was a particular policy reason for providing for this in the legislation for the GLA elections but I can see that it may make the administration of counting by hand (as opposed to by electronic counting machines) somewhat more difficult to structure. On that basis, I think we want to look at it a little further and cannot currently see any reason for it being different and having to remain so given that the standard procedure of mixing with one other box is in place for other combined area mayoral elections and for Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioner elections.”<sup>78</sup>*

Chief Executive of the AEA Peter Stanyon outlined a potential reason for the ‘mixing rule’:

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<sup>77</sup> [GLRO Report to the Elections Review Working Group](#), 25 July 2024, p.9

<sup>78</sup> Working Group correspondence with MHCLG

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*“My understanding is that when the law was originally drafted, it was drafted on the basis of e-counting. Therefore, the system was able to produce a lot more granular information than a hand count can do. The reading of the legislation mirrors what you would do at any other count, which is to mix ballot papers, which is to avoid the challenge of secrecy and someone being able to identify someone's vote from the polling station. Clearly on the scale we are talking about, the likelihood of someone being able to identify an individual ballot paper is minimal, but the same principle applies.”*

**Peter Stanyon, Chief Executive, Association of Electoral Administrators**

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It is striking how large an impact the 2007 ‘mixing rule’ had on this year’s elections, and the rationale of secrecy does not translate practically to an election of this scale or the way the ballots are counted. The GLA should call on Government to remove the mixing rule to provide greater flexibility in terms of count venues and the data that could be provided. In response, the Government should provide clear explanation and confirmation of its ‘mixing rule’, or alternatively seek to change the related legislation to remove it before the next election.

## **Recommendation 16**

**The Government should remove the ‘mixing requirement’ for a manual count in GLA Elections legislation to allow for more granular data to be published.**

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### **Ward and borough data without the mixing rule**

If the Government does remove the ‘mixing rule’ from the legislation relating to manual counts, it would then be technically possible to provide data showing the breakdown of votes for each candidate or political party by ward and borough. This information is easily and routinely made available when using e-counting, but as part of our review, we wanted to understand from boroughs what this would mean for a manual count and heard that this would have implications on time and cost:

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*“It is certainly possible, but I think we are making, not just the count slower, but the number of processes we would have to do, especially around postal voting up until we get to the count, would become more complex for each local authority.”*

**John Bailey, Head of Electoral Services, London Borough of Barnet**

*“You could technically do, as we did with the GLA before, where – if you change the law – you count the polling station ballots by ward, and then just have a figure for just your postal votes across the constituency. That would be reasonable to do, as long as you did not have that requirement to mix the postal votes in with the polling station ballots.”*

**Zoe Wilkins, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

*“Is it possible? Yes. Will it cost? Astronomically.”*

**Ian Buckle, Head of Governance and Electoral Services, London Borough of Waltham Forest**

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Even in a scenario in which the ‘mixing rule’ is removed from legislation, providing granular data therefore appears far more straightforward under an electronic count than under a manual count.

This data is important to many parties, and the GLA needs to give greater consideration of data when making any decision on a manual count or e-counting.

## **Recommendation 17**

**In response to this report, the GLRO should share with the GLA Oversight Committee a summary of any conversations it has had with Government about removing the ‘mixing rule’. Given the importance of the breakdown of votes for each candidate or political party by ward and borough, the GLRO should also estimate the cost and time needed to provide borough and ward-level data before making a decision on count arrangements for 2028.**

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## **A manual count for 2028?**

The GLRO has stated that a decision on counting for the GLA Elections in 2028 will need to be made in June 2025. As well as the considerations of data outlined above, our investigation highlighted a number of factors for the GLRO to consider in making this decision.

## Cost and resource

Cost and the resource required for boroughs was a significant consideration, both in the GLRO decision around the manual count and in the view of constituencies that responded to our Call for Evidence and boroughs that we spoke to.

The deadline for boroughs to submit the costs to London Elects was November 2024. Until that point the GLA is not able to calculate the cost of a manual versus electronic count. Deputy GLRO Alex Conway told the Working Group:

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*“What we will have for the first time by November is an accurate picture of how much it costs boroughs to conduct a manual count, and that is not something that we have had before. That will help us make some calculations for 2028.”*

**Alex Conway, Deputy Greater London Returning Officer**

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The GLRO decision from 2022 had anticipated that the manual count would save around £4m. In May 2023, the GLRO's update on election preparation to the GLA Oversight Committee was more conservative about the potential for cost savings from a manual count, owing to factors such as inflation:

*“While there may be savings from the procurement of a counting system, it is possible that increased staffing costs will arise to conduct the manual account, as well as cost increases for materials, storage, and transportation of ballot papers.”*

Responses to the Working Group's Call for Evidence from two constituencies – Brent & Harrow and Enfield & Haringey – stated that the manual count required more resources from boroughs and that more staff, time and cost was involved.<sup>79</sup> The London Borough of Waltham Forest's evidence to the working group noted staffing issues across London at the May elections, which would likely be exacerbated in a situation of a combined election.

The cost and resource of the manual count should be carefully considered before any decision is made about the counting arrangements for 2028.

## Recommendation 18

**Before deciding whether to conduct a manual count or e-count of ballots in the 2028 elections, the GLA should calculate the final cost of the manual count in 2024. It should then compare this to previous e-counts (adjusting for inflation), and share these workings with the GLA Oversight Committee.**

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<sup>79</sup> Call for evidence responses

## The Mayoral voting system and a manual count

The change in the Mayoral voting system to first past the post was a key influencing decision around the move to a manual count.

As outlined in Chapter 1, whether the voting system will revert to the Supplementary Vote system is not currently clear. However, the current Mayor of London has indicated his belief that the Government will change back the voting system. Similarly, media reports had suggested that this was being considered by Government as part of its White Paper on devolution. Details of this were not included in the White Paper published on 16 December 2024, and therefore the Government should clarify its position on this as soon as possible.

GLRO Mary Harpley indicated that this change would result in delays to results of the GLA Elections being announced, potentially with three to four days of counting:

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*“If we were thinking about staying manual with the second preference reinstated, should we find ourselves there, we would have to have a very realistic conversation about what that would mean for the eventual timing of the Mayoral result ... To be really clear, we are not discounting it. We are not saying that it is clearly not going to be reinstated because we do not know any more than anybody else at this stage. Our challenge will be timing and we have been here before.”*

**Mary Harpley, Greater London Returning Officer**

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Deputy GLRO Alex Conway said that this scenario could be an argument in favour of electronic counting. Therefore, it clearly would have a significant impact on any count decision made for 2028. In view of this, the Government must set out its position and a timeline for any changes to the Mayoral voting system before June 2025.

## Recommendation 19

**The Government should clarify its position on the Mayoral voting system as part of its elections review and evaluation before May 2025 to give the GLA information to plan for 2028.**

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## A General Election

The possibility of the GLA Elections on the same day as a UK Parliamentary Election was unpopular with organisers of elections and the biggest contributing factor in the 2024 elections being counted manually. The GLA has said that this possibility cannot be discounted for 2028. The latest date the next General Election can be held is 15 August 2029.

Boroughs and the GLA outlined numerous complications of two elections held on the same day, including:

- the announcement of a General Election can happen with little notice
- the differing constituency boundaries and moving ballot boxes around London
- the impact of a higher turnout on the speed of delivering results for the GLA Elections
- the need to verify all ballot papers before counting for the General Election followed by the GLA Elections, meaning that the decision between a manual versus electronic count is not straightforward.

As with the overall decision regardless of a General Election, boroughs highlighted numerous advantages and disadvantages of each approach. Some boroughs felt that the manual verification of ballots at the same time as the General Election and the installation time of an e-counting system required at venues would create issues:

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*“If it is a combined election in 2028 – it poses that possibility – then I think that does make e-counting quite challenging. We would have to verify all of the GLA ballot papers manually before then sending on to take part in an e-count. At that point the dual handling of ballot papers means that the e-count is going to be slower.”*

**John Bailey, Head of Electoral Services, London Borough of Barnet**

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However, boroughs said that the moving of ballot papers would likely mean that they were recounted anyway and some boroughs questioned whether an electronic count would be quicker and require fewer staff:

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*“if we get a general election, which is probably the biggest consideration – as it was rightly last time around – those ballot papers are going to be moving across London anyway. To then arrive at a manual count, are we going to take it on face value that they have been verified in another venue, are we going to assume that they are still OK when they get there or are we are going to recount them anyway? If we are going to recount them anyway, which is quicker, is it to have a manual team after we have been up ... and we are going to be tired and then we are running a manual count, or is it easier to have a smaller team of dedicated people to run an e-count the day after, two days after the general election.”*

**Zoe Wilkins, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

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There is no easy answer to this scenario, and the GLA has dealt with significant uncertainty over the last two elections, as Ian Buckle from the London Borough of Waltham Forest outlined:



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*“The GLA has suffered two elections on the hoof where circumstances outside of its control have had probably quite a detrimental impact on its ability to deliver its own elections. Westminster’s [the Government] taste for going to the polls is one of the things that ultimately the GLA will bear the cost for, not Westminster.”*

**Ian Buckle, Head of Governance and Electoral Services, London Borough of Waltham Forest**

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The GLRO was right to take into account the scenario of a General Election on the same day as the GLA Election for 2024. While the timing of a General Election is a decision for politicians, the GLA should make the case to Government that the possibility of a General Election poses significant challenges for London in organising its own elections.

### **Recommendation 20**

**The GLA should make clear to Government the significant impact that the possibility of a General Election had on its planning of its own elections. MHCLG should meet with electoral teams from the GLA and Combined Authorities to discuss this.**

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## Working Group Activity

### Formal meetings

The Working Group held its first meeting on [25 July 2024](#) with the following guests:

#### Panel 1

- Mary Harpley, Greater London Returning Officer
- Alex Conway, Deputy Greater London Returning Officer
- Lea Goddard, Deputy Greater London Returning Officer/Senior Elections Manager
- Ajay Patel, Deputy Greater London Returning Officer
- Alex Chafey, Senior Marketing Manager, London Elects

#### Panel 2

- Farah Elahi, Head of Community Engagement, Greater London Authority

The Working Group held its second meeting on [3 October 2024](#) with the following guests:

#### Panel 1

- John Bailey, Head of the Electoral Services, London Borough of Barnet
- Ian Buckle, Head of Governance and Electoral Services, London Borough of Waltham Forest
- Zoe Wilkins, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

#### Panel 2

- Aline Delawa, Regional Director (London) Labour Party
- Ash Haynes, London Campaign Manager, Green Party
- Brian Jarvis, Head of Field (London), Conservative Campaign Headquarters

The Working Group held its third meeting on [16 October 2024](#) with the following invited guests:

#### Panel 1

- Melanie Davidson, Head of Support and Improvement, Electoral Commission
- Michela Palese, Head of Policy, Electoral Commission
- Phil Thompson, Head of Research, Electoral Commission
- Ruth Law, Head of Communications and Engagement, Electoral Integrity Programme, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
- Peter Stanyon, Chief Executive, Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA)

#### Panel 2

- Dr Sofia Collignon, Senior Lecturer in Comparative Politics and Director, Mile End Institute, Queen Mary University of London
- Thea Ridley-Castle, Research and Policy Officer, Electoral Reform Society
- Professor Tony Travers, School of Public Policy and Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science

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**Call for evidence and survey**

In August 2024, the Working Group published a call for evidence and received 12 responses from:

- Brent & Harrow constituency
- Brunel University London
- Elect Her
- Electoral Reform Society
- Enfield & Haringey constituency
- Krupesh Hirani AM
- London Borough of Waltham Forest
- Professor Tony Travers, London School of Economics and Political Science
- Mile End Institute
- Runnymede Trust
- An individual member of the public

The Working Group also published a survey to hear from Londoners about their experiences of the GLA Elections. The survey was open to anyone who wanted to share their views and asked open text box questions, rather than aiming to replicate representative quantitative research conducted by other organisations like the Electoral Commission. It received 212 responses and responses are published alongside this report.

## Appendix: accepted photo ID

The Electoral Commission [website](#) outlines the following acceptable forms of photo ID to vote in elections, as of December 2024:

### International travel

- Passport issued by the UK, any of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, a British Overseas Territory, an EEA state or a Commonwealth country (including an Irish Passport Card)
- Driving and Parking
- Driving licence issued by the UK, any of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or an EEA state (this includes a provisional driving licence)
- A Blue Badge

### Local travel

- Older Person's Bus Pass funded by the UK Government
- Disabled Person's Bus Pass funded by the UK Government
- 60+ London Oyster Photocard funded by Transport for London
- Freedom Pass
- Scottish National Entitlement Card issued for the purpose of concessionary travel (including a 60+, disabled or under 22s bus pass)
- 60 and Over Welsh Concessionary Travel Card
- Disabled Person's Welsh Concessionary Travel Card
- Senior SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
- Registered Blind SmartPass or Blind Person's SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
- War Disablement SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
- 60+ SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
- Half Fare SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland

### Proof of age

- Identity card bearing the Proof of Age Standards Scheme hologram (a PASS card)

### Other government issued documents

- Biometric residence permit
- Ministry of Defence Form 90 (Defence Identity Card)
- National identity card issued by an EEA state
- Electoral Identity Card issued in Northern Ireland
- Voter Authority Certificate
- Anonymous Elector's Document

## Other formats and languages

If you, or someone you know needs this report in large print or braille, or a copy of the summary and main findings in another language, then please call us on: 020 7983 4100 or email [assembly.translations@london.gov.uk](mailto:assembly.translations@london.gov.uk)

### Chinese

如您需要这份文件的简介的翻译本，  
请电话联系或按上面所提供的邮寄地址或  
Email 与我们联系。

### Vietnamese

Nếu ông (bà) muốn nội dung văn bản này được dịch sang tiếng Việt, xin vui lòng liên hệ với chúng tôi bằng điện thoại, thư hoặc thư điện tử theo địa chỉ ở trên.

### Greek

*Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.*

### Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinize çevrilmiş bir özetini okumak isterseniz, lütfen yukarıdaki telefon numarasını arayın, veya posta ya da e-posta adresi aracılığıyla bizimle temasa geçin.

### Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਸੰਖੇਪ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਉਪਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਡਾਕ ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

### Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज़ का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

### Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে ফো করবেন অথবা উল্লেখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

### Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں درکار ہو تو، براہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں یا منکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

### Arabic

الحصول على ملخص لهذا المستند بلغتك،  
فارجاء الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو الاتصال على  
العنوان البريدي العادي أو عنوان البريدي  
الإلكتروني أعلاه.

### Gujarati

જો તમારે આ દસ્તાવેજનો સાર તમારી ભાષામાં જોઈતો હોય તો ઉપર આપેલ નંબર પર ફોન કરો અથવા ઉપર આપેલ ટપાલ અથવા ઈ-મેઇલ સરનામા પર અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

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