

Hereditary peers: By-elections briefing

Electoral Reform Society, June 2018



A by-election has been called following the retirement of the 4th Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, grandson of Stanley Baldwin.

As a Crossbench Peer, his replacement will be selected by hereditary peers of the Crossbench group - 31 in total.

Eligible candidates are drawn from the Register of Hereditary Peers held by the Clerk of Parliaments. This list contains any hereditary peer who has expressed an interest in standing in a by-election.

Peers can join or leave the list at any time and the list is published annually: [see here](#).

Out of 211 on the list, there is only one woman.

During the last Crossbencher by-election in 2017 there were **10 candidates (and 31 eligible voters)**.

On the basis of previous turnout for crossbench by-elections, around **26 Peers will shortly decide** which aristocrat remains in Parliament to vote on our laws, for the rest of their lives.

Background

The 1999 House of Lords Act removed all but 90 of the hereditary peers (plus holders of the offices of Earl Marshall and Lord Great Chamberlain) – 92 in total. 667 hereditary peers lost their right to sit in the Lords in these reforms.

Subsequently, vacancies that result from death (or retirement, resignation or exclusion since the House of Lords Reform Act 2014 and House of Lords (Expulsion and Suspension) Act 2015) are filled by by-election.

By-elections take place within party groups (except for 15 hereditary peers, originally elected to serve as office holders, whose successors are elected by the whole house). These party groups reflected the proportion of party affiliation at the time of the 1999 reforms. There are 49 Conservative hereditary peers, 4 Labour, 4 Liberal Democrat and 31 Crossbench hereditary peers (1 UKIP, 1 non-affiliated). See full breakdown [here](#).

Where are the women?

There is only one female hereditary peer currently sitting in the House of Lords (The Countess of Mar).

Three of the original five female hereditary peers that remained following the 1999 reforms have since died and one retired in 2014. All four were replaced by male peers and there is only one female hereditary peer listed on the register of future candidates (June 2017). No female hereditary peer has been admitted to the House of Lords by by-election.

Hereditary by-elections – the figures

Elections to the House of Lords use the Alternative Vote¹. The first hereditary by-election was held in 2003 following the death of Viscount Oxford. According to ERS analysis:

- Hereditary by-elections have an average of just 29 voters². This compares to an average of 29,116 votes cast over the last 32 Commons by-elections – a larger democratic mandate by a factor of 1,000.
- The average electorate for normal hereditary by-elections is just 32 (188 including whole-house elections). By contrast, the average turnout over the last 32 House of Commons by-elections is 29,116.

¹ <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/voting-systems/types-of-voting-system/alternative-vote/>

² This is for 'normal' by-elections - ones which do not involve the whole house. The figure is 100 when including the whole-house elections, which are for filling 15 official hereditary roles in the Lords, such as Deputy Speaker.

- 3,190 votes have been cast in total for the 32 peers elected in hereditary peer by-elections since 2003. By contrast, 931,725 votes have been cast in the last 32 House of Commons by-elections.
- At its highest, the electorate has been 803, at its lowest just three.
- Four by-elections have had more candidates than electors, including the only by-election within the Labour group of hereditary peers – for which there were 11 candidates and only 3 voters (30th October 2003).
- The average turnout for by-elections is 83%. Three by-elections have had 100% turnout (all of which have had an electorate of four or fewer).

By-Elections since 2013

Previous Peer	Reason	Electorate	Date of Results	No. of Candidates	Electorate	Turnout	Turnout %	Winning Candidate
Earl Ferrers	Died	Conservative	06/02/2013	27	48	46	96	Viscount Ridley
Lord Reay	Died	Whole House	17/07/2013	23	753	334	45	Lord Borwick
Lord Moran	Died	Crossbench	09/02/2014	13	29	27	93	Lord Cromwell
Lord Methuen	Died	Whole House	22/10/2014	15	776	283	36	Earl of Oxford and Asquith
Viscount Allenby of Megiddo	Died	Crossbench	10/12/2014	18	27	25	93	Lord Russell of Liverpool
Lord Cobbold	Retired	Crossbench	10/12/2014	18	27	25	93	Duke of Somerset
Lord Chorley	Retired	Crossbench	03/02/2015	18	28	26	93	Lord Thurlow
Lord Saftoun of Abernethy	Retired	Crossbench	03/02/2015	18	28	26	93	Earl of Kinnoul
Viscount Tenby	Retired	Crossbench	07/07/2015	19	28	25	89	Lord Mountevans
Lord Luke	Retired	Conservative	16/09/2015	16	48	41	85	Duke of Wellington
Viscount Montgomery of Alamein	Retired	Crossbench	20/10/2015	17	29	26	90	Lord Trevelthain and Oaksey
Lord Montagu of Beaulieu	Died	Conservative	24/11/2015	14	48	44	92	Lord Fairfax of Cameron
Lord Avebury	Died	Lib Dem	19/04/2016	7	3	3	100	Viscount Thurso
Lord Bridges	Non-Attendance	Crossbench	12/07/2016	17	31	27	87	Earl of Cork and Orrery
Lord Lyell	Died	Whole House	21/03/2017	27	803	346	43	Lord Colgrain
Lord Walpole	Retired	Crossbench	20/07/2017	10	31	27	87	Lord Vaux of Harrowden