

# Hereditary peers: By-elections briefing

22 January 2019

The result of the most recent hereditary peer by-election will be announced on Wednesday 23 January.

This by-election was called following the death of Lord Skelmersdale on 31 October 2018. As one of the 15 hereditary peers elected by the whole house in 1999, his replacement will be elected by the whole house.

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](#). Out of 198 on the list, there is only one woman.

[There were 16 candidates in this by-election](#) and 785 peers were eligible to vote. To date, turnout at the seven by-elections where the whole house was eligible to vote has only averaged around 48%.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/house-of-lords-publications/records-of-activities-and-membership/register-of-all-hereditary-peers/>

<https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-information-office/2018/Arrangements-by-election-17-12-18.pdf>

## 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 – since the House of Lords Reform Act 2014 and House of Lords (Expulsion and Suspension) Act 2015 – retirement, resignation or exclusion are filled through a by-election.

By-elections take place within party groups – except for 15 hereditary peers, such as Lord Skelmersdale, 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 47 Conservative hereditary peers, four Labour, four Liberal Democrat and 31 Crossbench hereditary peers (one UKIP, one non-affiliated). [See full breakdown here](#).

<https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/lords/composition-of-the-lords/>

## 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 most recent register of eligible candidates of June 2017. No female hereditary peer has been admitted to the House of Lords through a by-election.

## Previous hereditary by-elections

Elections to the House of Lords use [the Alternative Vote](#). The first hereditary by-election was held in 2003 following the death of Viscount Oxfuird.

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

## Hereditary by-elections: the figures

- The 35 hereditary by-elections to date have had an average turnout of just 28 voters, excluding elections by the whole house (the average is 94 including whole house elections).  
This compares to an average of 28,823 votes cast over the last 35 Commons by-elections – a larger democratic mandate by a factor of 1,000.
- Excluding whole house elections, the average electorate for ‘normal’ by-elections is just 32 (this is 175 if we include whole house elections).
- 3,288 votes have been cast in total for the 35 peers elected in hereditary by-elections since 2003.  
By contrast, over a million - 1,008,808 - votes have been cast in the last 35 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. This includes the only by-election within the Labour group of hereditary peers for which there were 11 candidates and only three voters (30th October 2003).
- The average turnout for by-elections is 84%. Three by-elections have had 100% turnout, all of which have had an electorate of four or fewer.

## Hereditary Peer 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	44%	Lord Borwick
Lord Moran	Died	Crossbench	09/04/2014	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 Saltoun of Abernethy	Retired	Crossbench	03/02/2015	18	28	26	93%	Earl of Kinnoull
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 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	27/03/2017	27	803	346	43%	Lord Colgrain
Lord Walpole	Retired	Crossbench	19/07/2017	10	31	27	87%	Lord Vaux of Harrowden
Earl Baldwin of Bewdley	Retired	Crossbench	04/07/2018	19	31	26	84%	Earl of Devon
Lord Glentoran	Retired	Conservative	18/07/2018	11	47	43	91%	Lord Bethell
Lord Northbourne	Retired	Crossbench	28/11/2018	11	31	29	94%	Lord Carrington