



Election timetables

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This Research Paper sets out the model timetables for Parliamentary general elections and by-elections. The *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013* made provision for a 25 day timetable for general elections and a timetable of up to 27 days for a by-election. This means that Parliament will be dissolved on 30 March 2015, 25 working days before the general election on 7 May 2015.

A model local election timetable is also included in the Paper which updates and replaces Research Paper 13/27 *Election timetables*.

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Summary

This Paper sets out model election timetables for UK general and by-elections as laid down in the *Parliamentary Elections Rules* in Schedule 1 of the *Representation of the People Act 1983* as subsequently amended, most recently in 2013.

Since the general election in 2010 two pieces of legislation have made changes to the triggering of and timetable for a parliamentary election. First, the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* ended the prerogative power of dissolution. Dissolution now only occurs in accordance with that Act. Secondly, the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013* extended the length of the timetable for general elections from 17 to 25 days. This provision was brought into force on 6 April 2014 by the [Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 \(Commencement No 5 and Transitory Provisions\) Order 2014](#).

The by-election timetable also now varies between 21 and 27 days from the issuing of a writ.

The *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* fixes the date of the next general election as 7 May 2015, and provides for five year intervals between elections. The *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013* made provision for lengthening the Parliamentary election timetable and therefore Parliament will be dissolved 25 days before the general election on 7 May 2015.

A timetable for the 2015 general election is provided. Parliament will be dissolved on Monday 30 March 2015, Day 0 of the timetable, for polling day to be on Day 25, Thursday 7 May 2015.

For the purposes of the timetable, weekends and public holidays are disregarded. In the timetable for the 2015 general election Friday 3 April and Monday 6 April are Bank Holidays (Good Friday and Easter Monday) as is Monday 4 May; these days are therefore not counted for the purposes of the timetable.

1 Introduction

Statutory electoral timetables for both general and by-elections are laid down in the *Parliamentary Elections Rules* in Schedule 1 of the *Representation of the People Act 1983*. The timetables were last amended by the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013*. Section 14 of the 2013 Act amended Section 3 of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* to provide for a 25 working day election timetable, not including the day of issuing of writs and summoning of a new Parliament.

2 *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*

This Act sets a maximum term between elections, rather than the actual length of the Parliament. It fixes the date of the next general election as 7 May 2015 and on the first Thursday in May in every fifth year thereafter. There is scope for the Prime Minister to lay an Order before both Houses to extend this date for a maximum of two months to deal with unexpected developments, setting out the reasons for the delay. One precedent is the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001 which delayed the local and general elections by one month.

Early elections can be held only:

- if a motion for an early general election is agreed either by at least two-thirds of the whole House or without division or;
- if a motion of no confidence is passed and no alternative government is confirmed by the Commons within 14 days.

If a new Government cannot be formed within this time period, then dissolution is triggered. There is no provision for an extension of the 14 day period. Dissolution does not need to follow immediately on a triggering event, as section 2(7) of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* allows for the Prime Minister to recommend a suitable polling day to the Crown. A proclamation for a new Parliament can then be issued.

Where an early election has taken place, the next election will generally take place five years later. The only exception is where an early election is held before the first Thursday in May in the year in which an election is held; in these circumstances the next general election will be held on the first Thursday in May in the fourth year from the previous election. This means that Parliaments cannot extend beyond five years and that the normal cycle is restored to five years.

3 The Parliamentary election timetable

The Electoral Commission published proposals in 2003 to lengthen the general election timetable to bring it into line with the 25 day local election timetable.¹ The Commission's reasoning was based on the increasing practice of combining local and general elections. The proposals formed part of a package of reform for electoral administration set out in the Commission's report, *Voting for Change: an electoral law modernisation programme*, published in June 2003. The *Electoral Administration Act 2006* subsequently included many of these recommendations in its provisions, including the abolition of Maundy Thursday as a *dies non* (a day not counted for the purposes of the election timetable).² However, the Labour Government did not favour an increase in the length of the Parliamentary election

¹ *Electoral Timetables in the United Kingdom*, Electoral Commission, July 2003

² For further details of the *Electoral Administration Bill 2005-06* see [Library Research Paper 05/65](#)

timetable in its response to *Voting for Change* in December 2004 and no lengthening of the timetable took place in 2006.³

In July 2010 the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) published a report, *Beyond 2010: the future of electoral administration in the UK*.⁴ The AEA welcomed the Coalition Government's proposal for fixed-term Parliaments and suggested that this would provide an opportunity to lengthen the electoral timetable for Parliamentary elections. The AEA recommended a standard electoral timetable for all elections.

On 13 July 2011, Mark Harper, then Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform, announced the publication of draft legislation on three electoral administration provisions in a written statement.⁵ One of these provisions was to extend the timetable for UK Parliamentary elections from 17 to 25 working days. Mark Harper noted that the very limited time available for the postal vote process in the 17 day timetable "compromises effective participation in elections by certain types of voter, particularly overseas and service voters." Extending the timetable to 25 days would increase the time between the deadline for nominations and polling day, thus allowing administrators to begin printing ballot papers earlier.

The provisions to increase the length of the Parliamentary general election and by-election timetables were subsequently included in the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013* and were brought into force on 6 April 2014 by article 3 of the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (Commencement No 5 and Transitory Provisions) Order 2014*.

The new model timetable is as follows:

Model general election timetable

Day 0	Proclamation summoning new Parliament, and issue of writ
Day 1	Receipt of writ
Day 3 (4pm)	Last day for publication of notice of election
Day 6	Last day for delivery of nomination papers/withdrawals of candidature/appointment of election agents (4pm) Statement of persons nominated published at close of time for making objections to nomination papers (5pm on Day 6) or as soon afterwards as any objections are disposed of, but not later than 4pm on Day 7
Day 13	Last day to apply to register to vote *
Day 14 (5pm)	Last day for requests for a new postal vote or to change or cancel an existing postal vote
Day 19 (5pm)	Last day for applications to vote by proxy (except for medical emergencies)
Day 20	Last day for appointment of polling and counting agents
Day 25 (7am-10pm)	Polling day

* Note that the deadline for making an application for registration prior to an election is now 12 days before the election. The deadline had been altered by the *Electoral Administration Act 2006* to eleven days before the election but in January 2014 the Electoral Commission announced that it had

³ Cm 6426 Recs 54-56

⁴ *Beyond 2010: the future of electoral administration in the UK*, Association of Electoral Administrators, July 2010

⁵ [HC Deb 13 July 2011 c24WS](#)

identified an issue with the 11 day deadline. Amendments made to Regulation 29(4) of the *Representation of the People (England and Wales) [and (Scotland)] Regulations 2001* had added a day to the process; this had the effect of making the last day for making registration applications before an election twelve working days before the poll. The Commission has published a detailed explanation of the situation on its website: [Deadline for registration ahead of an election](#).

3.1 Day of election

The *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* sets the day of Parliamentary elections as Thursday. Until this legislation, which fixed the date of the next general election as Thursday 7 May 2015, there was no statutory requirement for Parliamentary elections to be held on Thursdays; they could be held on any weekday. However, using Thursdays had become an election convention. Since 1935 every general election has been held on a Thursday. The month for the election varies but 1918 was the last time that an election was held in December, and there have been no polling days in January since 1910. For a full list of months in which elections have been held see *British Electoral Facts 1832 – 2006*, Tables 5.02 and 5.03.⁶

3.2 Disregarded days

For the purposes of the election timetable, Saturday, Sunday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Good Friday, other bank holidays and any day appointed for public thanksgiving or mourning are disregarded. Maundy Thursday is no longer disregarded following the *Electoral Administration Act 2006*.⁷ A bank holiday which is in force only in one part of the UK is still a disregarded day for the purposes of a general election timetable. Therefore St Patrick's Day (17 March) would affect a general election timetable if the polling day was less than 25 days after that date.⁸

The *Representation of the People Act 1983* states that days of public thanksgiving or mourning are to be disregarded for the purpose of the election timetable but no definitions of such days are provided by the Act or elsewhere.

The Parliamentary election timetable could be affected by a period of "public mourning" following the death of a member of the Royal Family. Days of mourning are not statutorily defined but would seem to encompass the general days of mourning observed by the public on the death of the Sovereign, as opposed to the court mourning observed by the Royal Family and others. This period of general mourning lasts only a few days, until the funeral. It is assumed that this would be "public mourning" for the purposes of the *Representation of the People Act 1983*. There was no period of general mourning on the death of King George VI in 1952, but it is possible that a period of general mourning would be announced on the death of the present Sovereign.

In practice it could perhaps be assumed that any day of mourning or thanksgiving relevant to the election timetable would be set for a day or days (such as Saturdays or Sundays) which, if otherwise appropriate in the context of the event giving rise to them, would not substantively interfere with the election timetable.

3.3 Death of the Sovereign

Section 20 of the *Representation of the People Act 1985*, which makes provision for what is to happen if the Sovereign dies during a general election, was substituted by paragraph 16 of the

⁶ *British Electoral Facts 1832-2012*, edited by Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, Biteback Publishing, 2012

⁷ S 20 of the *Electoral Administration Act 2006*. Brought into force by the *Electoral Administration Act 2006 (Commencement No 2, Transitional and Savings Provisions) Order, 2006*. SI 2006/3412

⁸ Schedule 1, para 2(2) *Representation of the People Act 1983*

Schedule to the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act* 2011. The general principle is that a 14 day delay to the timetable and/or the meeting of Parliament is instituted, should the Sovereign die on or after the day of dissolution.

For section 20 substitute—

“20 Demise of the Crown and parliamentary elections etc

(1) Subject to what follows, the demise of the Crown does not affect any proclamation summoning a new Parliament issued before the demise (see section 3(4) of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act* 2011) (or any other matter relating to a parliamentary election or the summoning of a new Parliament).

(2) Subsections (3) to (6) apply if the demise occurs—

(a) on the day of the dissolution of a Parliament by section 3(1) of the 2011 Act, or

(b) after that day but before the polling day for the next parliamentary general election after the dissolution as determined under section 1 of the 2011 Act or appointed under section 2(7) of the 2011 Act (“the current election”);

and any relevant writ, notice or other document is to be issued or, if already issued, read accordingly.

(3) In relation to the current election, for the purposes of the timetable in rule 1 in Schedule 1 to the principal Act—

(a) the polling day shall be—

(i) the 14th day after the day which would otherwise have been the polling day, or

(ii) if the 14th day is not a working day, the next working day after the 14th day;

(b) any working day within the period of 13 days beginning with the day after the demise —

(i) shall be disregarded in computing any period of time, and

(ii) shall not be treated as a day for the purpose of any proceedings before the polling day.

(4) If the polling day for the current election was appointed under section 2(7) of the 2011 Act, the reference to the polling day in section 1(4) of the 2011 Act is to be read, in relation to the current election, as a reference to the new polling day under subsection (3)(a).

(5) Section 76 of the principal Act shall have effect in relation to any candidate at the current election as if the maximum amount specified in subsection (2)(a) of that section were increased by one half.

(6) If the proclamation summoning the new Parliament after the current election was issued before the demise, the meeting of the new Parliament shall (subject to any prorogation subsequent to the demise) take place —

(a) on the 14th day after the day appointed in the proclamation for the meeting, or

(b) if the 14th day is not a working day, the next working day after the 14th day.

(7) If the demise occurs within the period of seven days before the day of the dissolution of a Parliament by section 3(1) of the 2011 Act, subsections (2) to (6) have effect as if the demise occurred on that day.

(8) In this section “working day” means any day other than one to which rule 2 in Schedule 1 to the principal Act applies in relation to the current election (or would have applied had it fallen before the polling day).”

3.4 General Election Timetable for 2015

The new 25 day timetable represents a significant extension of the length between dissolution and polling on 7 May 2015, given that Easter falls between dissolution and the poll. Dissolution and the issue of writs will take place on 30 March 2015. Under the previous 17 day timetable dissolution would not have taken place until 13 April 2015.

The Electoral Commission has published full details of the [timetable](#) for 7 May 2015 on its website; below is an abbreviated version.

May 2015 election timetable

Day 0 – Dissolution and Issue of Writ	Monday 30 March
Day 1 – Receipt of Writ	Tuesday 31 March
Day 2	Wednesday 1 April
Day 3 – Last day for publication of notice of election	Thursday 2 April
	<i>Friday 3 April (Good Friday) is a Bank Holiday and Monday 6 April is a Bank Holiday in England, Wales and Northern Ireland but not in Scotland. These days are therefore not counted for the purposes of the timetable.</i>
Day 4	Tuesday 7 April
Day 5	Wednesday 8 April
Day 6 – Deadline for candidates to deliver nomination papers to (Acting) Returning Officer (4pm) and deadline for candidates to withdraw (4pm)	Thursday 9 April
Publication of statement of persons nominated, in most cases 5pm on 9 April.	
Day 7 - Publication of statement of persons nominated if objections to nominations have been made (4pm)	Friday 10 April
Day 8	Monday 13 April
Day 9	Tuesday 14 April
Day 10	Wednesday 15 April
Day 11	Thursday 16 April
Day 12	Friday 17 April
Day 13 – Deadline to register to vote	Monday 20 April
Day 14 – Deadline for applying for a postal vote (5pm)	Tuesday 21 April
Day 15	Wednesday 22 April
Day 16	Thursday 23 April
Day 17	Friday 24 April
Day 18	Monday 27 April
Day 19 – Deadline for applying for a proxy vote (except for emergency proxies) (5pm)	Tuesday 28 April
Day 20	Wednesday 29 April
Day 21	Thursday 30 April
Day 22	<i>Friday 1 May</i>
	Monday 4 May is Bank Holiday
Day 23	Tuesday 5 May
Day 24	Wednesday 6 May
Day 25 - POLLING DAY	Thursday 7 May 2015
Deadline for issuing replacement postal ballot papers (5pm) and deadline for applying for an emergency proxy (5pm)	

4 Dissolution Procedure

The *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* ended the prerogative power of the Crown to dissolve Parliaments, as noted by Neil Parpworth in *Constitutional & Administrative Law*:

Although the Act does not declare that 'The prerogative power to dissolve Parliament is hereby abolished', it does provide in s3(2) that 'Parliament cannot otherwise be dissolved'. If not expressly then at least by implication, the prerogative power of dissolution has been extinguished by the 2011 Act.⁹

The term of a Parliament now automatically expires, unless there is an early election, or an extension using the powers to adjust the date of the election (see below). A royal proclamation will then be made to summon a new Parliament, following a meeting of the Privy Council. Under section 1(5) of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*, the Prime Minister may adjust the date of the election by a statutory instrument for up to two months, but this has to be approved by both Houses before dissolution and be accompanied with a statement of reasons. The intention is to deal with unexpected events, such as the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001, which resulted in the *Elections Act 2001* postponing local elections for a month.

Where there is an early election, following either a vote of confidence, or decision of two thirds of the House of Commons, the proclamation to summon a new Parliament would include the date of the election, as provided for in section 2 of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*.

A royal proclamation is a formal notice issued to the people by the Sovereign. The role of proclamations in modern times has diminished, but the most important are those which announce the accession of a new Sovereign, and those which prorogue Parliament. The draft of the proclamation is submitted for approval and signature to the Queen in Council. At the same time an Order is approved, directing the Lord Chancellor to cause the 'Great Seal of the Realm' to be affixed to the proclamation. The proclamation takes effect the moment it is sealed.

Following the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*, the responsibility for issuing the writs for the election became a statutory responsibility of the Lord Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, although there is expected to be a continuing role for the Crown Office to despatch the writs.¹⁰

The previous dissolution procedure

Until the passage of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*, the United Kingdom did not have set timings for general elections or fixed-term Parliaments. The *Septennial Act 1715*, as amended by section 7 of the *Parliament Act 1911*, merely required that a Parliament be dissolved after a maximum of five years. In theory, once five years had passed, a Parliament expired, but in practice the Prime Minister normally requested a dissolution from the Monarch before that date. The five years ran from the first meeting of Parliament following the general election. The timetable for the next general election was then set in motion, unless dissolution had been requested earlier. The current Parliament was summoned to meet on

⁹ Neil Parpworth, *Constitutional and Administrative Law*, 7th edition, 2012, para 4.23

¹⁰ *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*, Section 3(4)

Tuesday 18 May 2010, so would have been expected to cease to exist at midnight on Sunday 17 May 2015.¹¹

Dissolution of Parliament was a prerogative act and could occur at any time; Parliament did not need to be sitting, or to be recalled, for the purpose of dissolution. In 1992, 1997, 2005 and 2010 dissolution was preceded by prorogation of Parliament. However in 2001, Parliament was dissolved without being prorogued beforehand. Instead Parliament was adjourned on 11 May 2001. The proclamation declaring the dissolution also established the day for the meeting of a new Parliament and, under the *Representation of the People Act 1983*, thereby set the timetable for the coming general election.

Although generally speaking the timing of a general election was in the gift of the Prime Minister, a dissolution and general election could have been precipitated if the Government lost a vote of confidence in the House of Commons and could no longer command a majority. The most recent example was on 28 March 1979 when an Opposition motion of no confidence in the Callaghan Government was carried with a majority of one; the result led to the dissolution of Parliament and the victory of the Conservative Party in the following general election.

4.1 Proclamation of Dissolution

In the past the City of London marked the Dissolution of Parliament with a Formal Proclamation on steps of the Royal Exchange. A Formal Proclamation was also made at Mercat Cross, Edinburgh.

Now that the Dissolution is a statutory process rather than a prerogative act, there is no longer any requirement for a Proclamation to Dissolve Parliament.

The *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* does not set the date for the meeting of a new Parliament following a normal general election. It provides that the Queen may issue a proclamation setting the date of the meeting of the new Parliament once the old Parliament has been dissolved. The proclamation will be published in the London Gazette and on the Privy Council website but there is no statutory requirement for a Formal Proclamation.

4.2 Prorogation and adjournment

Prorogation of Parliament is a prerogative act of the Crown, which suspends the business of both Houses, including the sitting of committees, until Parliament is summoned again.¹² Section 6(1) of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* specifically preserves this prerogative power which is exercised by a royal proclamation, following a Privy Council meeting after which an Order in Council is issued.

The ceremony of prorogation normally takes place when both Houses are sitting; a Commission in the House of Lords, usually made up of five peers, requests the attendance of the Commons and Royal Assent is signified to outstanding Acts followed by a nominal speech from the throne. Alternatively, Parliament can be prorogued by proclamation when either House is adjourned. Prorogation is the normal instrument for ending an individual session of Parliament, but it has been the custom for much of the twentieth century for a Parliament to be prorogued before its dissolution.

¹¹ Further information on the general election timetable before the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* is available in Library Research Paper 09/44 [Election Timetables](#)

¹² For further information see 2.12 – 2.16 of the [Companion to the Standing Orders and guide to the proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2013 edition and p 144 – 146 of *Erskine May's Treatise on the law, privileges and usage of Parliament*, 24th edition, 2011

From September 1974 until 1992 an alternative practice grew up of dissolving Parliament by proclamation following the adjournment of both Houses. An adjournment merely suspends a House's business within a session for a specified period of time, and the exercise of the power is by the Lords and Commons separately. All that is needed is a resolution of the House or for the Speaker to declare under Standing Order that the House is adjourned. It is not therefore a prerogative act. The practice appears to have been first used in 1922 following the sudden break-up of the coalition government. Since Parliament had already adjourned for the summer recess, Parliament was dissolved by royal proclamation on the same day as the announcement of a general election, and no prorogation took place. Parliament had been adjourned on August 4 until November 18 1922 and the election was announced on 23 October, with dissolution on 26 October 1922.

Thereafter prorogation was used until 1964 when Sir Alec Douglas Home called an election when Parliament was already adjourned for the summer recess; after consultation he decided against a recall of Parliament simply to prorogue. Harold Wilson was the next Prime Minister to abandon prorogation in September 1974, once again when both Houses were already adjourned for the summer recess.¹³ Thereafter adjournment became the norm, as Professor Robert Blackburn records in his 1990 study, *The Meeting of Parliament*.

According to Professor Blackburn, discussions took place between officials of both Houses and the Crown between 1974 and 1979 as to the necessity of the prorogation ceremony. The *Royal Assent Act 1967* meant that Commissioners in the Lords were no longer necessary, as Assent by Notification became the accepted practice. Therefore a prorogation ceremony was no longer strictly necessary and was seen as time consuming, coming as it did a few days into the election campaign.

However, before the 1987 dissolution, Speaker Weatherill expressed sadness that the prorogation ceremony was not taking place. Professor Blackburn notes this as an indication that it had been a Government, not a Commons decision to abandon prorogation. In 1992 prorogation was held before dissolution. Although it is not known what prompted the reversion, the Speaker's intervention was no doubt influential.

In 1997 the decision to continue with prorogation may well have been taken with the 1992 precedent in mind. However, the effect on select committees meant unfortunate publicity for the Government and may well have contributed to the reversal to adjournment before the 2001 election.¹⁴ The relatively long period between the announcement of the election on 17 March 1997 and dissolution on 8 April 1997 focused attention on the manner of the dissolution.¹⁵ Prorogation was on 21 March 1997, a week before Good Friday.

While prorogued Parliament can be summoned by proclamation for an earlier day than in the prorogation proclamation, pursuant to the *Meeting of Parliaments Act 1797 and 1870* and the *Parliament (Elections and Meetings) Act 1943*.¹⁶ In reality this power can only be exercised by the Prime Minister through advice to the Crown on the use of the prerogative.

¹³ Parliament was adjourned from 29 July 1974; the election was announced on 15 September 1974 and Parliament dissolved on 25 September 1974

¹⁴ There were press reports that the unusually early prorogation had been announced to ensure that the Select Committee on Standards and Privilege report on allegations against Neil Hamilton and others would not be published before the election. This was denied by the then Government.

¹⁵ At 22 calendar days, it was the longest since 1950.

¹⁶ Erskine May, 24th edition 2011, pp144-47. See ff18 on p147 for full explanation.

5 Date of meeting of the new Parliament

The *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* does not set the date for the meeting of a new Parliament following a normal general election. The date will be announced in a proclamation issued by the Queen on the advice of the Privy Council summoning the new Parliament. Where it is an early general election the royal proclamation will include the date of the poll.

The meeting of Parliament after an election may be deferred under the *Proclamation Act 1867* by a proclamation proroguing Parliament to a later day, not less than 14 days after the date of the proclamation. In 1950 this power was used to extend prorogation from 24 January to 14 February when Parliament was in recess. In the event, a dissolution proclamation was issued on 3 February and polling took place on February 23 1950. The election had been announced on 11 January 1950.

In 2010 the date of meeting of Parliament reflected the recommendations from the Modernisation Committee in its report, *Revitalising the Chamber: the role of the back bench Member*, which recommended that “there should be a longer gap than usually occurred in the past between the election and the day the House first meets to permit some of the practicalities that prevent Members from focusing on their new job to be addressed and to make time for an induction programme before the House starts its work”. It recommended that “the gap should be about twelve days”.¹⁷ The Government accepted the recommendation in principle.¹⁸

6 Dates of election announcement, prorogation, dissolution polling day and assembly of Parliament

Prior to the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*, it had been the custom for the Prime Minister to announce the date of the election some days in advance of dissolution, to allow for the rapid passage of bills in the “wash-up” period. Further details of this procedure in 2010 are given in a joint Commons and Lords Library Research Paper 11/18 [Wash-up 2010](#).

The following tables set out the length of time in days between the election announcement, prorogation and dissolution, polling day and assembly of the new Parliament from 1918 to 2010.

¹⁷ Modernisation Committee, *Revitalising the Chamber: the role of the back bench Member*, 20 June 2007, HC 337 2006-07, para 39

¹⁸ Office of the Leader of the House of Commons, *Revitalising the Chamber – The role of the back bench Member (The Government’s Response to the modernisation Committee’s First Report of session 2006-07: HC 337)*, October 2007, Cm 7231, para 6,

Election dates 1918-2010

Year	Election announced	Parliament prorogued	Parliament dissolved	Polling day	Parliament assembled
1918	14 November	21 November	25 November	14 December	4 February 1919
1922	23 October	-	26 October	15 November	20 November
1923	13 November	16 November	16 November	6 December	8 January 1924
1924	9 October	9 October	9 October	29 October	2 December
1929	24 April	10 May	10 May	30 May	25 June
1931	6 October	7 October	7 October	27 October	3 November
1935	23 October	25 October	25 October	14 November	26 November
1945	23 May	15 June	15 June	5 July[1]	1 August
1950	11 January	21 January	3 February	23 February	1 March
1951	19 September	4 October	5 October	25 October	31 October
1955	15 April	6 May	6 May	26 May	7 June
1959	8 September	18 September	18 September	8 October	20 October
1964	15 September	-	25 September	15 October	27 October
1966	28 February	10 March	10 March	31 March	18 April
1970	18 May	29 May	29 May	18 June	29 June
1974	7 February	-	8 February	28 February	6 March
1974	18 September	-	20 September	10 October	22 October
1979	29 March	-	7 April	3 May	9 May
1983	9 May	-	13 May	9 June	15 June
1987	11 May	-	18 May	11 June	17 June
1992	11 March	16 March	16 March	9 April	27 April
1997	17 March	21 March	8 April	1 May	7 May
2001	8 May	-	14 May	7 June	13 June
2005	5 April	7 April	11 April	5 May	11 May
2010	6 April	8 April	12 April	6 May	18 May

[1] July 12 in twenty two constituencies and July 19 in one, because of local holiday weeks

Election dates - intervals in days

Year	Announcement to dissolution	Dissolution to assembly	Polling day to assembly
1918	11	71	52
1922	3	25	5
1923	3	53	33
1924	0	54	34
1929	16	46	26
1931	1	27	7
1935	2	32	12
1945	23	47	27
1950	23	26	6
1951	16	26	6
1955	21	32	12
1959	10	32	12
1964	10	32	12
1966	10	39	18
1970	11	31	11
1974 (F)	1	26	6
1974 (O)	2	32	12
1979	9	32	6
1983	4	33	6
1987	7	30	6
1992	5	42	18
1997	22	29	6
2001	6	30	6
2005	6	30	6
2010	6	36	12

Source: FWS Craig, *British Electoral Facts 1832-1987*, Table 14.02, as amended

7 By – elections

7.1 By-election timetable

The writ for a by-election is usually issued on the same day as a motion in the House of Commons for the Speaker to make out the warrant for the issue of a writ. By Parliamentary convention the Chief Whip of the party to which the previous Member belonged will usually arrange for the motion to be moved. This convention causes difficulties when the seat is vacated by an Independent. The most recent incidence of this was the death of the Independent, Peter Law, on 25 April 2006. On this occasion the writ for the seat of Blaenau Gwent was moved by a Labour Whip on 6 June 2006. The seat was subsequently won by another Independent.

The writ is issued by the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery and sent to the Returning Officer or acting Returning Officer for the constituency. The by-election timetable is set in motion following the issue of the writ, but is more flexible than the general election timetable as the acting Returning Officer has some discretion in fixing the last day for the delivery of nomination papers and the subsequent polling day. In practice the motion is normally timed to ensure that the warrant is made with a particular polling day, a Thursday, in mind, but the actual decision is for the acting Returning Officer, and there is no procedure for an appeal against the day chosen.

Thursday has become a convention but there have been post war by-elections where polling day has been on another day.¹⁹

The *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013* has lengthened the by-election timetable from between 13 to 19 working days to between 21 and 27 working days. See the Library Standard Note 6609 [By-election timetables](#).

The previous wording of the Election Rules allowed for a minimum 13 day timetable, but until the South Shields writ of 15 April 2013, such a short timetable had not occurred in the last few decades. The possibility of such a short timetable arose only where the notice of election had been published on Day 1 of the timetable. The timetable for the by-election in South Shields on Thursday 2 May 2013 was the shortest possible under the old rules at 13 days; polling took place on the same day as local elections in England. The writ for the by-election had been moved on the same day that David Miliband took the office of Steward and Bailiff of the Manor of Northstead which he did on 15 April 2013. The 15 day timetable has been the one most commonly used in the post war period.

Model by-election timetable under the new provisions in the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013*:

Model by-election timetable

Issue of writ	Day 0
Receipt of writ	Day 1
Last day for publication of notice of election (4pm)	Day 3
Last day for delivery of nomination papers/withdrawals of candidature/appointment of election agents (4pm)	To be fixed by the (Acting) Returning Officer; not earlier than Day 4 (if the Notice of Election is published on Day 1) nor later than Day 8 (not later than the seventh day after the Writ is received)
Statement of persons nominated published at close of time for making objections to nomination papers if no objections are made (5pm) or as soon afterwards as any objections are disposed of	
Last day of receipt of absent voting applications	11 days before polling day
Last day for appointment of polling and counting agents	5th day before polling day
Polling Day	To be fixed by the (Acting) Returning Officer: not earlier than the 17th day after the close of nominations, nor later than the 19th day after the close of nominations. Polling day is therefore between Day 21 and Day 27.

¹⁹ The most recent example was the by-election at Hamilton on 31 May 1978 which was a Wednesday; apparently this was chosen because the acting Returning Officer wished to avoid a clash with a World Cup match on television. Earlier examples are given in Appendix 22 of *Chronology of British by-elections 1833-1987*, FWS Craig (1987)

7.2 Period between vacancy and moving the writ

There is a convention that the writ should be moved within three months of the seat becoming vacant, but this is not a statutory or Parliamentary requirement.

By-elections since May 2010

Constituency	Date of vacancy		Date of Writ	Date of by-election	Calendar Days to issue writ from date of vacancy
Oldham East and Saddleworth	Annulment of Phil Woolas' General Election Victory	05-Nov-10	16-Dec-10	13-Jan-11	41
Barnsley Central	Resignation of Eric Illsley	09-Feb-11	09-Feb-11	03-Mar-11	0
Leicester South	Resignation of Sir Peter Soulsby	01-Apr-11	05-Apr-11	05-May-11	4
Belfast West	Resignation of Gerry Adams	26-Jan-11	16-May-11	09-Jun-11	110
Inverclyde	Death of David Cairns	09-May-11	08-Jun-11	20-Jun-11	30
Feltham and Heston	Death of Alan Keen	10-Nov-11	24-Nov-11	15-Dec-11	14
Bradford West	Resignation of Marsha Singh	29-Feb-12	06-Mar-12	29-Mar-12	6
Cardiff South and Penarth	Resignation of Alun Michael	22-Oct-12	23-Oct-12	15-Nov-12	1
Corby	Resignation of Louise Mensch	29-Aug-12	23-Oct-12	15-Nov-12	55
Manchester Central	Resignation of Tony Lloyd	22-Oct-12	23-Oct-12	15-Nov-12	1
Croydon North	Death of Malcolm Wicks	29-Sep-12	08-Nov-12	29-Nov-12	40
Middlesbrough	Death of Sir Stuart Bell	13-Oct-12	08-Nov-12	29-Nov-12	26
Rotherham	Resignation of Denis MacShane	05-Nov-12	08-Nov-12	29-Nov-12	3
Mid Ulster	Resignation of Martin McGuinness	02-Jan-13	11-Feb-13	07-Mar-13	40
Eastleigh	Resignation of Chris Huhne	05-Feb-13	07-Feb-13	28-Feb-13	2
South Shields	Resignation of David Miliband	15-Apr-13	15-Apr-13	02-May-13	0
Wythenshawe and Sale East	Death of Paul Goggins	07-Jan-14	21-Jan-14	13-Feb-14	14
Newark	Resignation of Patrick Mercer	29-Apr-14	01-May-14	05-Jun-14	2
Clacton	Resignation of Douglas Carswell	28-Aug-14	09-Sep-14	09-Oct-14	12
Heywood and Middleton	Death of Jim Dobbin	06-Sep-14	10-Sep-14	09-Oct-13	4
Rochester and Strood	Resignation of Mark Reckless	29-Sep-14	14-Oct-14	20-Nov-14	15

For details of when the writ was moved for each by-election since 1974 see the previous edition of this Research Paper, 13/27.²⁰ A Parliamentary Information List gives a separate list of by-elections held more than 3 months after a vacancy occurred since 1974.²¹

In 1973 a Speaker's Conference on Electoral Law had recommended that the three month rule on the moving of a writ should be embodied in a resolution of the House.²²

²⁰ *Election timetables*, RP 13/27

²¹ Standard Note 6576 *By-elections held more than three months after vacancy*

²² Cmnd 5500 1973

1. The Conference, conscious that the intervals before the issue of by election writs have on occasion been unduly prolonged, put forward the following guidelines:

(a) The motion for a writ for a by-election should normally be moved within three months of a vacancy arising.

(b) It is inexpedient for by-elections to be held in August, or at the time of local elections in April/May, or in the period from mid-December to mid-February before (under present arrangements) a new Register is issued.

(c) Consequently, if this restriction should bring the date of the by-election into one of these periods, the by-election should if practicable be held earlier. If this is impractical the period should be lengthened by the shortest possible additional time. The total period (from vacancy to the moving of the writ) should not be more than four months.

(d) In the fifth year of a Parliament, some relaxation of these guidelines should be allowed, in order if possible to avoid by-elections being held immediately before a general election.

These recommendations have not been implemented.

The Speaker's Conference of 1973 also recommended a relaxation of the arrangements for the issuing of writs during a recess, to allow the Speaker some discretion to issue a warrant only when asked by representatives of the appropriate party (para. 2.3). The Speaker was, at that time, required to issue a warrant for election to certain categories of vacant seats upon the application of any two Members during the recess without any consideration of the duration of the vacancy. The *Recess Elections Act 1975* still requires the Speaker to issue a writ on application of any two Members during the recess if a Member has died, or acceded to the peerage, or accepted a disqualifying office (which does not include the Chiltern Hundreds or the Manor of Northstead) or has been made bankrupt, and the Speaker's Conference recommendation has not been acted upon.²³

The Speaker's Conference noted that a maximum time limit would increase the likelihood of a by-election being in progress when Parliament had been dissolved:

4. One consequence of putting a maximum on the period in which a by-election must be held is to increase the possibility that a by-election will be in train when Parliament is dissolved. If this happens, the writ for the General Election should manifestly cancel the earlier writ for the by-election; and similar provisions with regard to candidates' expenses should apply as now in the case when a poll is abandoned because of the death of a candidate.

Writs for by-elections have occasionally been issued, and then superseded due to an ensuing general election. A writ was issued for Warwick and Leamington on 5 November

²³ The Speaker is required to give six days' notice in the London Gazette before the writ can be issued and the recess must be long enough to allow the writ to be issued before the Commons meets again. See Standard Note 529, [Recess Elections Act 1975](#) for details of the procedure.

1923 with a polling day of 22 November, but Parliament was dissolved on 12 November and the by-election did not take place; the general election was held on 7 December 1923.²⁴

In 1983, a motion to issue a writ for the constituency of Cardiff North West was passed on 19 April 1983²⁵ but a motion was subsequently passed on 10 May 1983 discharging the Speaker's warrant.²⁶ The moving of the writ on 19 April 1983 is interesting in that it was moved by the Plaid Cymru MP, Dafydd Wigley, (although the Member who had died on February 10 was Michael Roberts, a Conservative) and a Government amendment was carried which required the warrant to be issued by the Speaker on 10 May 1983.²⁷ In the event the general election was announced on 9 May 1983, dissolution took place on 13 May and the election was on 9 June 1983.

There is no statutory provision providing for the cancellation of a by-election when a general election is in progress. It is presumed that an acting Returning Officer would consider the writ to have been superseded if the by-election were due to take place at a date when Parliament had been dissolved, since the Member could not be elected to a Parliament which no longer existed. If the conduct of the by-election were to be contested in an election court²⁸, the view may be taken that the acting Returning Officer had acted sensibly in cancelling the election, although there had been no strict statutory authority for such action. The position where the day fixed for the by-election falls between the Government's announcement of a general election and actual dissolution is much less clear-cut, since a Parliament would still exist. It is possible, for example, that an election court would uphold a decision by the acting Returning Officer to cancel the election.²⁹ On the other hand if Parliament were still in existence on polling day the acting Returning Officer might well consider he had no authority to cancel the election.

In 1979 the by-election for Liverpool Edge Hill took place on 29 March, and Parliament was dissolved on 7 April. On 28 March 1979 the Government had lost a confidence vote and the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, announced immediately after the vote that he would ask Her Majesty on the following day for a dissolution.³⁰ David Alton, the successful candidate, took his seat on 3 April 1979, and asked a number of Parliamentary Questions before dissolution.³¹

For information about by-elections in this Parliament see Library Standard Note SN/SG/05832, [By-elections since 2010](#).

8 Local election timetables in England and Wales³²

The current local election timetable of 25 days dates from the *Local Government Act 1972*. It is set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the *Local Elections (Principal Areas) Rules 1986*.³³ In

²⁴ The candidate was Anthony Eden on both occasions. See *Anthony Eden* [1986] by Robert Rhodes James pp.72-73. A writ was also apparently issued for a by-election in the University of London on September 15 1924, and Parliament was dissolved on October 9 (*Chronology of British Parliamentary Elections 1833-1983* [1983] F.W.S Craig pxi)

²⁵ HC Deb 19 April 1983 c164-171

²⁶ HC Deb 10 May 1983 c737

²⁷ See *Parliamentary Practice* (1989) p.277 fn2

²⁸ As provided for in Part III of the *Representation of the People Act 1983*

²⁹ The problem of election expenses remains as there is no statutory provision governing the calculation of candidates' expenses when a poll is countermanded, except where a candidate has died [s.76(3) *RPA* 1983]

³⁰ HC Deb 28 March 1979 c589

³¹ See Hansard index vol 965 for details

³² The administration of local government elections is devolved in Scotland

³³ SI 2214/1986

theory, the earliest day for publication of notice of election is 32 days before polling day, but the remaining deadlines are fixed days before polling day. The timetable is calculated backwards from polling day, in contrast to the parliamentary timetable which is counted forwards from issuing of the writ. This causes some problems when local elections are combined with other elections as certain key dates, such as closing time for nomination of candidates are not always aligned.

8.1 Model local government election timetable for England and Wales³⁴

Model local election timetable

Event	Working days before poll (deadline if not midnight)
Publication of notice of election	Not later than 25 days
Delivery of nomination papers	From the date stated on the notice of election up to 4pm on the 19 th working day before the election
Deadline for delivery of nomination papers	19 days (4pm)
Deadline for withdrawals of nomination	19 days (4pm)
Deadline for the notification of appointment of election agent	19 days (4pm)
Publication of first interim election notice of alteration	19 days
Publication of statement of persons nominated	Not later than 18 days (4pm)
Deadline for receiving applications for registration	12 days
Deadline for receiving new postal vote and proxy vote applications and for changes to existing postal or proxy votes	11 days (5pm)
Deadline for receiving new applications to vote by proxy (not postal proxy or emergency proxy)	6 days (5pm)
Publication of second interim election notice of alteration	Between 18 days and 6 days
Publication of notice of poll	Not later than 6 days
Publication of final notice of alteration to the register	5 days
Deadline for notification of appointment of polling and counting agents	5 days
First date that electors can apply for replacements for lost postal votes	4 days
Polling Day (7am to 10pm)	Day 0 (first Thursday in May)
Last time for re-issue of spoilt or lost postal votes (5pm)	
Deadline for emergency proxy applications (5pm)	
Last time to alter the register due to clerical error or court appeal (9pm)	

³⁴ [Local government elections in England and Wales: guidance for Returning Officers](#), Electoral Commission, Part B, p2

8.2 Combined general and local elections on 7 May 2015

The scheduled local government and mayoral elections on 7 May 2015 in England will be combined with the general election. A full list of all the scheduled elections is available on the Electoral Commission's website.³⁵ The Electoral Commission has published a timetable for the combined elections.³⁶

9 European Parliamentary elections

The timetable for the European Parliamentary elections is 25 days.³⁷

The 2014 European Parliamentary elections had been due to take place in June 2014, but were moved to late May. The Council of the European Union had proposed moving the date of the 2014 elections to avoid any reduction in voter turnout caused by the June Pentecost holidays and the European Parliament indicated in late 2012 that it would agree with this proposal. The UK Government subsequently brought forward provisions to move the local elections, usually held on the first Thursday in May, to 22 May 2014, so that they could be combined with the European Parliamentary elections. Library Standard Note 6707, [Moving the date of local elections in England in 2014](#) gives further details

The timetable for the combined European Parliamentary and local government elections in England on 22 May 2014 showed the complexities of combined elections; in this case there were further complications because of a bank holiday in Gibraltar on 28 April and on 1 May 2014 which meant that some electoral deadlines in the South West electoral region were different to the deadlines elsewhere in Great Britain.³⁸

³⁵ [List of all local government and mayoral elections taking place in England on 7 May 2015](#), Electoral Commission

³⁶ [Combined timetable for the UK Parliamentary general election and local government elections 2015](#), Electoral Commission

³⁷ *European Parliamentary Elections Regulations 2004* SI No 293, Schedule 1, Rule 1

³⁸ [Combined timetable for the European Parliamentary elections and local government elections in England 2014](#), Electoral Commission