

SUBSCRIPTION CONTENT EXAMPLE

Next Week in UK Politics – w/c 29th April

Summary of Contents

It's all about the locals this week in UK Politics!

This week's edition features:

- The London Mayoral Election
- Local councillors, other mayors, and PCCs
- The Blackpool South by-election
- What's on in Parliament?

At a glance:

Thursday 2nd May is arguably the second most important political day of the year, after the general election, with voters across the country heading to polling stations to elect councillors, mayors, and police and crime commissioners. The eagerly anticipated Blackpool South by-election takes place on the same day, with Labour hoping to regain another former Red Wall seat from the Tories. Back in Westminster, Parliament will see a debate on assisted-dying, and the final Prime Minister's Questions before voters head to the polls on Thursday.

Read on to find out more!

London Mayoral Election

Sadiq Khan is hoping to win a record third term as the capital's mayor and faces Conservative candidate Susan Hall in his bid for City Hall. This election will use the first-past-the-post voting system, the same used in general elections, for the first time, replacing the Supplementary vote system used previously. There are no longer 1st and 2nd preference choices, meaning Londoners must vote for one candidate only. Voters will also elect the 25 members of the London Assembly.



[Image: PA – Independent]

A recent TV debate on BBC News saw the candidates clash over crime, housing and ULEZ expansion. Hall attacked Khan over his pledge in the previous election not to expand ULEZ, which he did anyway, and argued that he might do the same with a pay-per-mile scheme. Khan said this scheme would not be necessary because London's CO2 emissions have reduced 'thanks to ULEZ'. The London Mayor has characterised Hall as the most 'extreme candidate' he's ever faced, saying in an X post that 'where she attempts to denigrate and divide, I will always seek to celebrate & unite'.

Polls in March had Khan leading Hall by 24 points, but his lead has since narrowed to just 13%. The latest Savanta poll has Khan on 46% and Hall on 33%, with Rob Blackie for the Lib Dems on 9%, Zoe Garbett for the Greens on 7%, and Howard Cox for Reform UK on 2%. Next week's election decides who controls a yearly budget of around £18 billion and determines policy direction in the nation's capital. While Khan was seemingly walking into a third term in office, the recent narrowing of the polls could give Hall cause for optimism.

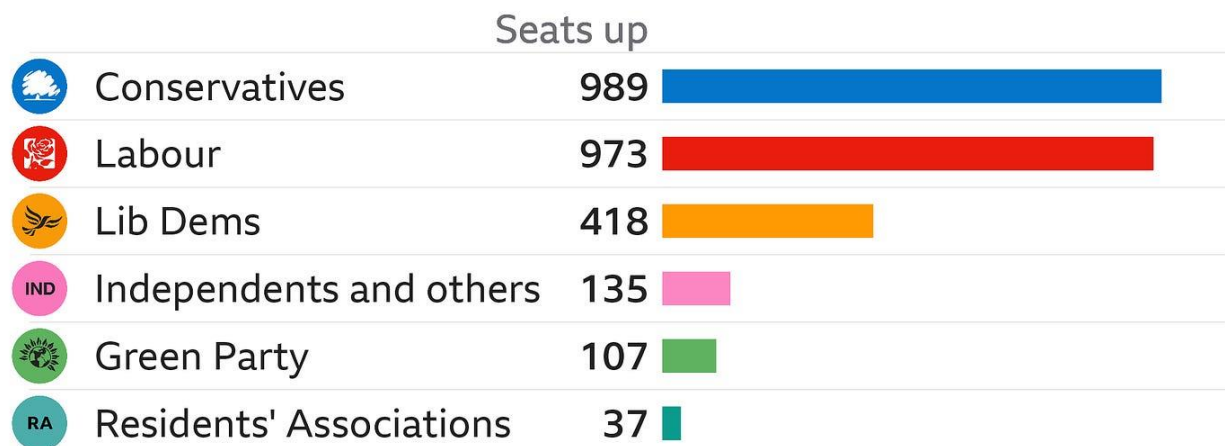
Local councillors, other mayors, and PCCs

A flurry of local elections will take place on May 2nd, with more than 2600 seats in 107 councils, 9 more regional mayors, and 37 police and crime commissioners all up for election.

Both Labour and the Tories are defending just under 1000 council seats each, with the Lib Dems on 418 and the Greens on 107.

Seats being defended in the English local elections

Based on the winners last time the seats were contested



Updated 29 Mar 2024



[Image: BBC]

Labour currently controls 45 councils to the Tories 18, with the Lib Dems controlling 10, and Reform UK and the Greens not having a majority on any. These seats were previously elected in 2021, at the height of Boris Johnson's popularity after the successful COVID vaccine rollout. Current predictions suggest that the Tories could lose up to 500 of their 989 seats, with Labour gaining around 350.

While the London Mayoral election will get most of the attention, 9 other regions are electing mayors, including the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, and Tees Valley. In total, the 10 regional mayors represent nearly half of England's population, have significant powers over local housing and transport, and often introduce plans to boost their region's economic productivity.

The most interesting elections will be in the West Midlands and Tees Valley, where there are two Conservative incumbents in Andy Street and Ben Houchen. Street won 48.7% of the vote in 2021 versus 39.7% for Labour candidate Liam Byrne. Recent polling has him 6 points behind Labour's Richard Parker, putting this election on a knife edge. Ben Houchen won 72.8% of the vote last time in Tees Valley, an enormous victory by modern standards. But recent polling has him level with Labour's Chris McEwan on 47%. Losing both these mayoral posts is perhaps the worst-case scenario for the Conservatives, representing a huge swing to Labour and putting Rishi Sunak's leadership under threat.

Blackpool South by-election

Following the resignation of Scott Benton, a by-election will be held this Thursday in Blackpool-South. Benton was previously suspended from Parliament after being caught being paid to leak private documents and lobby on behalf of gambling companies. He was thus suspended from the Tory party, and after his 35-day suspension from Parliament was approved, he resigned 2 weeks later, triggering a by-election.

This seat was part of the former Red Wall that flipped Tory in 2019 and is one the most deprived areas in England. It is the 17th most deprived constituency in England by income and voted 67.5% to Leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum. Blackpool has the worst life-expectancy in England, with a baby boy born there in 2018 expected to live to just 74 years old. It is thus not surprising that the campaign has centred around reducing unemployment and crime, with Labour candidate Chris Webb promising to increase neighbourhood policing, and hold a 'local jobs fair' with high street businesses



[Image: Labourlist.org]

POLITICS UK

In 2019, Benton won 49.6% of the vote, compared to 38.3% for Labour's Gordon Marsden. Recent polling suggests a huge swing towards Labour, with Chris Webb predicted to get around 48% of the vote, with David Jones for the Tories on just 30%, and Reform UK candidate Mark Butcher on 15.6%, up from 6% in 2019. The Tories have lost 10 seats this parliament at by-elections, the most of any government since the 1960s.

What's on in Parliament?

While most of the focus will be on the local elections, Parliament still sees some important events taking place. Here's a quick rundown of the most significant things timetabled this week:

Monday

Day over.

Tuesday:

The amendments made by peers to the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill will be considered by MPs this Tuesday. The bill will formally establish a new body called the Digital Markets Unit (DMA), which will work alongside the current Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). The bodies will be responsible for promoting and regulating digital market competition.

The Victims and Prisoners Bill will face the report stage in the Lords, and thus only has to pass its third reading, and receive Royal Assent, to officially become law. The bill allows the Secretary of State to refer prison release decisions of top-tier offenders to higher courts and prohibits those with life-long sentences from marrying or forming a civil partnership

Wednesday:

As always, Prime Minister's Questions takes place at 12 o'clock on Wednesday, and this week's proceedings will likely be dominated by the local elections.

This represents Keir Starmer's last big chance to publicly ridicule Sunak and the Tories before voters head to polling stations on Thursday. Expect scathing attacks from both the PM and Labour leader, trying to convince the public that the other party is not be trusted.

Thursday:

Notable events on Thursday include a Backbench Business Debate on Pension Schemes, and Business Questions to Penny Mordaunt, Leader of the House.

These debates allow backbench MPs to debate a topic of their choice, and do not involve a vote. They are often used to raise awareness of a particular issue, or seek to influence government policy.

Penny Mordaunt is the government's chief representative in the House of Commons, and these oral questions sessions allow her to announce the upcoming business events in Parliament, and lets MPs ask the government to allow a debate on a specific issue.

Friday:

POLITICS UK

Parliament starts a brief Recess on Friday, ending on Tuesday 7th of May after the Monday bank holiday. This will also give time for party leaders to digest the local election results and begin assessing an appropriate response.

Conclusions

For Rishi Sunak, a set of disastrous results could doom his premiership, potentially igniting further tensions within the Tory party, and attempts to replace him as leader. For Keir Starmer, a resounding victory would prove to his doubters that there is indeed public enthusiasm for Labour's policy platform. For the other parties, the Lib Dems will be hoping to make gains in Tory heartlands, and Reform UK will seek to establish a foothold in local councils, also mopping up disaffected Conservative voters.

Expect fireworks in PMQs on Wednesday, with both Starmer and Sunak eagerly trying to paint the opposition party as unworthy of the public's vote in both mayoral and councillor elections. Thursday is the biggest test for Rishi Sunak so far and will demonstrate whether Labour's enormous polling advantage can translate into a nationwide set of results. So, while we can expect Labour gains and Tory loses, it will be the scale of those loses that will be the most important, providing a great indication of what to expect at the general election.