

Five wards to watch out for overnight

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*With the local elections underway and the result coming in overnight, **Lewis Baston** writes about five wards which we should be looking out for. They are: Waddon ward, Croydon, Silverwood ward, Rotherham; Langdon Hills ward, Basildon; Fratton ward, Portsmouth; and Carshalton Central ward, Sutton.*



At 10pm this evening the voting will stop and the ballot boxes will be sealed. It will take some time to make sense of the pattern of the thousands of ward results that will come in, but what can one tell from the straws that will be in the wind when the first councils start declaring their local election results?

Overnight counts in local elections have become more unusual in recent years for several reasons. Checking of postal votes is a more complicated procedure thanks to identity requirements introduced since 2006, and a combined election like today's European and local polls puts more strain on electoral administrators. Any stray ballots that ended up in the wrong box need to be separated out during verification anyway, among other considerations. The European results will not be counted and announced until Sunday anyway, so many councils have decided not to rush the local count. It is also, important given the massive cuts to many councils' funding, cheaper to count in the daylight hours. Nevertheless, a few keep up the tradition including Sunderland, which prides itself on the speed and efficiency of all its election counts and feels that being head of the pack is worth it. However, while Sunderland is excellent at counting, the actual results are sometimes a bit predictable. If more than a couple of UKIP gains come through at this stage, something big is happening.

If there is no such evident earthquake, keep an eye out for the following wards which are expected before dawn (information thanks to the [Press Association elections team](#)). This handful will hopefully tell several stories, including the traditional battle between Labour and Conservative, the potential of UKIP in northern Labour heartlands and southern New Towns, the resilience of the Lib Dems in their strongholds and what a well-established MP's personal vote might be worth.

Links are provided to where the council will publish the results, where possible. Many councils will also be using Twitter to provide ward results as they happen. So, with an eye on the television, at least one computer on, and a beverage of choice – heavily caffeinated in my case – in one's hand, which are the wards that matter?

Waddon ward, Croydon (overnight)

Croydon is a polarised and hard-fought London borough, first won by Labour in 1994 and then switching back to the Conservatives in 2006. Labour dominate the north of the borough around Thornton Heath, the Conservatives dominate the south around Purley, and there are a handful of competitive seats that will determine who rules this large local authority. It probably all comes down to Waddon, an area just west of Croydon town centre that tends to swing with the tide. One of the Labour candidates, intriguingly, is former Conservative and Independent MP Andrew Pelling, who represented Croydon Central from 2005 to 2010.

Silverwood ward, [Rotherham](#) (overnight)

The big question of the 2014 local elections, as mentioned in my [previous piece](#) is how far UKIP can make inroads into the Labour heartlands, and whether it can actually make many gains. They ran Labour fairly close in Silverwood, a straggling ward west of Rotherham town adjoining Rawmarsh. Rawmarsh is unusual in that it already has a councillor elected under UKIP colours in a by-election in May 2013, who comes up for election today. Silverwood – white working class territory in a borough where Labour has had its share of problems on the council and in the 2012 parliamentary by-election – is one of UKIP's easiest target seats and if they fail, they are doing worse than

expected.

Langdon Hills ward, [Basildon](#) (overnight)

Basildon is accustomed to getting attention because of its volatile voting behaviour, swinging back and forward between Conservative and Labour and sometimes flirting with other parties – the BNP in the late 2000s and UKIP more recently. Langdon Hills to the west of Basildon town centre, next to the confusingly-named district and rail station of Laindon. It is one of the more attractive areas of the town. The Conservatives held the seat in 2012 with a modest lead over Labour, but in 2013 UKIP won the county council division in the area; in 2014 it will give an interesting early insight into how the UKIP vote is faring in the New Towns and Eastern England.

Fratton ward, [Portsmouth](#) (overnight)

This is a weird one. The densely packed terraces of Fratton normally make up the safest Liberal Democrat ward in Portsmouth, a city where they have been notably strong in local elections in recent years and have a majority on the council. But the incumbent this year is Mike Hancock MP (architect of their long string of local victories in Fratton) who despite being an MP for 17 years has also remained a councillor. Hancock is suspended from the Lib Dem group in Portsmouth, and from the parliamentary party, over allegations about his personal conduct towards a constituent, and he is standing as an Independent. The Liberal Democrats are not opposing him, nor officially endorsing him, but he has personal support from Fratton activists. It is hard to see Hancock losing, despite the circumstances. Another Lib Dem MP, Gordon Birtwistle, is also standing for re-election to Burnley council in the bucolic-sounding Coal Clough & Deerplay ward.

Carshalton Central ward, [Sutton](#) (overnight)

This set of elections is widely expected to be a grim one for the Liberal Democrats, but there are several places where they have realistic hopes of maintaining their local strength, including the London Borough of Sutton which they have ruled since 1986. One of the more marginal wards is Carshalton Central, where the Liberal Democrats regained two seats in 2010 from the Conservatives who had seized them in 2006. If the Liberal Democrats are holding on to Carshalton Central, an attractive village area around a pond and a different proposition from the more built-up Sutton Central, they are on course to keep control in this flagship council.

Many of the most interesting councils, particularly in London where the count is complicated because nearly every ward will be electing three councillors from one ballot paper, will be announced on Friday during the day, including Hammersmith & Fulham, Islington, Trafford, Bradford and Barnet. But by that time the broad pattern should have started to emerge...

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the British Politics and Policy blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting. Image credit: [Charles Hutchins](#)

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