

UK Regional Working Metrics

Participation Sensitive Mandate Framework

May 2026 election evidence

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Reader guide: the regional sections distinguish verified trigger cases from incomplete returns and identify whether a later election could cover the same electorate. The final sections then test the administration, cost, legal and boundary questions that would need to be settled before PSMF could operate.

Purpose and current conclusion

This working document applies the proposed Participation Sensitive Mandate Framework (PSMF) to published May 2026 election information. PSMF is a proposal, not an existing legal mechanism. The analysis therefore asks what would have happened hypothetically if the framework had been in force.

The core design is continuity first: an election remains valid, the successful candidate takes office with full authority, and exceptionally low turnout records a provisional PSMF trigger. A later confirmation question may then be attached to an existing election covering the same electorate. Only an active majority against continuation changes the position.

Summary of findings

The regional evidence supports a bounded conclusion rather than a claim of national proof. In the current extract, 14 recorded areas fall below the illustrative 25% trigger among 2,254 records with turnout: 0.62% by area count. The 14 are distributed across London (2), the South East (1), the East of England (2), the West Midlands (3) and the North West (6). This is a working minimum, not a final national total: two cases have published electorate figures, while other records still require returning-authority confirmation and several authorities or devolved-nation datasets remain incomplete.

The two-year confirmation window is most straightforward where a later scheduled election covers the same electorate. London is the clearest example: a 2026 borough ward could potentially carry its confirmation question into the 2028 London-wide poll. Several English local authorities and combined-authority areas offer similar 2028 opportunities. The fit is weaker where the original election is a county division, where boundaries do not match, or where a 2026 devolved election is followed by no guaranteed 2028 event.

The evidence therefore supports PSMF as an acknowledgement mechanism that can often be added to an existing electoral timetable, while retaining a fallback for areas without a suitable event. It does not establish that PSMF would increase turnout, deter abstention or produce a particular confirmation result.

Evidence question	Current conclusion
What does the 25% test show?	A small, identifiable set of exceptionally low-turnout cases; the 0.62% area-count rate is a minimum based on currently usable records.
Where does the two-year window fit naturally?	London and many English local or combined-authority cycles where the later poll covers the affected electorate.
What about areas without a scheduled event?	They require a legislated fallback: a standalone confirmation poll or another legally coordinated event for the affected electorate.
What counts as rejection?	Only valid votes against continuation exceeding valid votes in favour. Abstention, low participation, a tie or an inconclusive result preserves the mandate.

How areas without a scheduled event are handled

The absence of a suitable election in the two-year window is an administrative limitation, not a reason to treat the original low-turnout result as invalid. The elected representative would already be in office with full authority. The legislation would need to provide a defined fallback: normally a standalone confirmation poll in the affected ward, division or constituency, administered by the relevant Returning Officer and counted as a separate confidential question.

That fallback has a clear purpose. It gives the affected electorate one visible opportunity to affirm or actively reject continuation without creating a turnout quorum, leaving a seat vacant or requiring a second election merely because participation remains low. If nobody turns out, if the result is tied, or if valid votes against do not exceed valid votes in favour, the mandate continues for the ordinary term. Only an active majority against continuation would create the further by-election event.

The proposal is therefore making a limited claim for the non-scheduled areas: not that every confirmation poll will be cheap or frequent, and not that it guarantees a different representative, but that exceptionally low participation should have a defined procedural consequence even where the calendar offers no convenient polling day. The cost section later in this document identifies the information a Returning Officer would need to price that fallback and the savings available when confirmation is combined with a scheduled poll.

Illustrative trigger and data rules

The working threshold used here is turnout below 25%. It is illustrative only and should not be presented as a settled statutory threshold. Turnout is measured against the registered electorate reported by the returning authority or election-results source.

Where the central data extract is incomplete or conflicts with an official returning-authority result, the record is marked as incomplete or corrected. Missing wards are not silently treated as above threshold.

London

London has 32 boroughs. All borough councils held whole-council elections in 2026. The Mayor of London and London Assembly elections are scheduled for 2028, covering Greater London.

Metric	Result
London boroughs	32
2026 borough elections	32 of 32
2028 London-wide election	Mayor and London Assembly
GLA contests	3: Mayor, 14 constituency Assembly members, 11 London-wide members
Two-year geographic coverage	All 32 boroughs
Legal status of PSMF	Hypothetical; enabling legislation required

A 2026 ward with exceptionally low turnout would therefore remain valid, while a confirmation question could potentially be administered to the affected electorate during the 2028 London-wide polling event. The 2028 GLA election would not replace the borough election.

Borough	Ward	Turnout	Illustrative outcome
Brent	Wembley Park	22.89%	Trigger verified
Enfield	Brimsdown	24.96%	Trigger verified
Brent	Stonebridge	25.46%	No trigger
Waltham Forest	Leytonstone	42.19%	No trigger; corrected official figure

London data status: two wards are independently verified below 25%. This is a confirmed minimum, not a complete London-wide total. The available central extract contains 607 unique ward records, 416 with turnout and 191 without; four boroughs are absent from that extract.

City of London special case

The City of London should be treated separately from the 32 London boroughs. It is governed by the City of London Corporation through historic City wards, and its local franchise includes residents together with qualifying business-appointed electors. Its electorate is therefore not directly comparable with an ordinary residential borough ward.

Metric	Result
Local authority	City of London Corporation
Electoral geography	Historic City wards; not a London borough
Local governing election	Common Council ward elections, normally on a four-year cycle
Electorate	Resident electors plus qualifying business electors
PSMF treatment	Separate case study; not added to the ordinary London-borough denominator
Data status	No comparable City turnout series has been added to the 2,254-record regional count

PSMF could in principle be applied to a contested Common Council ward election if the statutory framework covered that election. The trigger would have to use the registered City electorate for the ward, including both resident and qualifying business electors, with the categories reported separately where the data permit. The Lord Mayor, sheriffs and livery elections are separate civic processes and should not be treated as ordinary PSMF confirmation events.

A two-year confirmation window could potentially use another election covering the same City ward, subject to legislation and boundary matching. A parliamentary election is not automatically City-only because the City forms part of the City of London and Westminster constituency. The City should therefore be included as a distinct stress-test case, but its figures must not be merged with ordinary borough turnout percentages.

South East England

The South East combines county councils, district councils, unitary authorities and parish or town councils. The relevant question is whether an existing election approximately two years after a low-turnout election covers the affected electors.

Metric	Result
2026 county or unitary elections identified	5: East Sussex, Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and Isle of Wight
District councils with elections in 2028	23
2028 combined-authority mayoral elections in the South East	0
Direct two-year fit for a district ward	Generally available in the 23 listed districts
Direct two-year fit for a county division	Not automatic; boundaries differ
Verified sub-25% case	Portsmouth, Charles Dickens: 23.20%

The 23 district councils with 2028 elections are: Basingstoke and Deane, Cherwell, Eastleigh, Elmbridge, Hart, Havant, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, Runnymede, Rushmoor, St Albans, Tandridge, Tunbridge Wells, West Oxfordshire, Winchester, Woking and Worthing (by thirds); Adur, Fareham, Gosport, Hastings and Oxford (by halves); and Maidstone (whole council).

South East turnout-data status: the available 2026 extract contains 646 unique ward or electoral-area records, 593 with turnout (91.8%) and 53 without. One recorded ward is below 25%: Charles Dickens in Portsmouth at 23.20%. The missing records are concentrated in Hastings, Gosport, Hart, East Sussex County Council, Tunbridge Wells, Reading and Winchester.

East of England

The East of England includes county councils, districts and unitary authorities. The principal 2026 election areas identified in the turnout extract include Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk county councils, together with other local authorities whose cycles were affected by the 2026 election programme.

Metric	Result
2026 records in the available extract	559 unique ward or electoral-area records
Records with turnout	470 (84.1%)
Records without turnout	89
Verified areas below 25%	2
2028 local authorities with scheduled elections	17 identified: 14 district councils, 2 whole-council districts and Southend-on-Sea
2028 combined-authority mayoral elections	0 identified in the East of England
Verified sub-25% cases	King's Lynn North & Central: 24.78%; Harbour, Suffolk: 24.85%

The 2028 district authorities identified are Basildon, Brentwood, Broxbourne, Cambridge, Colchester, Epping Forest, Harlow, Ipswich, Rochford, St Albans, Stevenage, Three Rivers, Watford and Welwyn Hatfield (by thirds), together with Castle Point and North Hertfordshire (whole-council elections). Southend-on-Sea is listed among the unitary authorities electing by thirds.

For a low-turnout district ward, these 2028 elections provide a relatively direct two-year opportunity. For a 2026 county-division trigger in Essex, Norfolk or Suffolk, the later district elections do not automatically cover the same electorate. A county-level confirmation question would require legislation and coordinated administration across the relevant district or unitary polls. The 89 missing turnout records are concentrated in Thurrock, Southend-on-Sea, Cambridge, Norwich, Rochford, Broxbourne, Essex County Council and Brentwood.

South West England

The South West has a mixture of county councils, districts and unitary authorities. Unlike the South East and East of England, the available May 2026 extract does not provide a complete round of ordinary South West local elections; it contains only a small set of electoral-area records associated with six authorities.

Metric	Result
2026 records in the available extract	79 electoral-area records
Records with turnout	0 in the extract
Records without turnout	79
Verified areas below 25%	None verified; turnout data unavailable
2028 local authorities with scheduled elections	7 identified: Cheltenham, Exeter, Gloucester, Stroud, Bristol, Plymouth and Swindon
2028 combined-authority mayoral elections	0 identified in the South West

The 2028 district elections are Cheltenham and Exeter (by thirds), and Gloucester and Stroud (whole-council elections). Bristol is scheduled for a whole-council election in 2028, while Plymouth and Swindon elect by thirds. The West of England mayoral election is scheduled on a 2025/2029 cycle, so it is not a 2028 opportunity.

Because the available South West 2026 records contain no turnout percentages, no sub-25% PSMF trigger can responsibly be identified from this extract. The next data step is to obtain the relevant returning-authority declarations for the six named authorities and to distinguish ordinary elections from by-elections.

East Midlands

The East Midlands requires a careful distinction between ordinary local-election coverage and isolated by-elections. The available May 2026 extract contains only a small number of electoral-area records rather than a complete regional local-election round.

Metric	Result
Records in the available 2026 extract	13 electoral-area records across Chesterfield, Lincoln and West Northamptonshire
Turnout in the central extract	Not reported for those 13 records
Official Lincoln declarations reviewed	11 wards; turnout ranged from 28.76% to 43.36%
Verified areas below 25%	None in the 11 Lincoln wards reviewed
2028 regional election opportunity	East Midlands combined-county-authority mayoral election
Direct two-year fit	Potentially relevant only where the affected area lies within the mayoral authority

The East Midlands mayoral election is scheduled for 2028. It covers the combined-county-authority area, not every part of the wider geographic East Midlands. A low-turnout 2026 mandate in an included Derbyshire or Nottinghamshire area could potentially use that 2028 event, subject to legislation. A Lincolnshire, Leicestershire or Northamptonshire mandate would not automatically be covered by the East Midlands mayoral ballot.

The official Lincoln declarations reviewed show no ward below the illustrative 25% threshold. The remaining extract records require returning-authority verification before they can be classified; in particular, Chesterfield Staveley North appears to be an isolated by-election record rather than evidence of a full ordinary local-election round.

West Midlands

The West Midlands combines metropolitan districts, district councils and the West Midlands combined-authority mayor. The 2026 turnout extract provides a substantially usable, although not complete, ward-level sample.

Metric	Result
2026 records in the available extract	279 unique ward or electoral-area records
Records with turnout	243 (87.1%)
Records without turnout	36, concentrated in Coventry and Solihull
Verified areas below 25%	3
2028 local authorities with scheduled elections	10 identified across metropolitan and district councils
2028 mayoral opportunity	West Midlands combined-authority mayoral election
Verified sub-25% cases	Tamworth Wilnecote: 19.62%; Birmingham Ladywood: 22.82%; Wolverhampton Bushbury South & Low Hill: 24.34%

The 2028 local-election opportunities include Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Coventry at metropolitan-district level; Cannock Chase, Rugby and Tamworth by thirds; and Nuneaton and Bedworth by halves. The 2028 West Midlands mayoral election provides a wider-area opportunity, including Birmingham.

The three verified sub-25% cases would have remained valid elections, with the representatives taking office normally. Tamworth, Wolverhampton and the relevant metropolitan wards have a direct or near-direct 2028 opportunity; Birmingham has no Birmingham council election in 2028, but the West Midlands mayoral election covers the city. Coventry and Solihull require completion of the missing ward returns before their trigger totals can be assessed.

North West England

The North West combines metropolitan districts, unitary authorities, districts and two major combined-authority mayoral areas. The 2026 extract provides substantial ward-level evidence, although several authorities still require official-return verification.

Metric	Result
2026 records in the available extract	388 unique ward or electoral-area records
Records with turnout	307 (79.1%)
Records without turnout	81, concentrated in Sefton, Bolton, Halton, Preston, Bury, St Helens and Chorley
Verified areas below 25%	6
2028 local authorities with scheduled elections	21 identified across metropolitan, district and unitary councils
2028 mayoral opportunities	Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region

Metric	Result
Verified sub-25% cases	St Helens Town Centre: 20.30%; Knowsley Page Moss: 21.10%; Manchester Harpurhey: 22.35%; Knowsley Stockbridge: 23.10%; Knowsley Northwood: 24.30%; Salford Broughton: 24.44%

The 2028 local-election opportunities include the relevant North West metropolitan districts using the by-thirds cycle, Blackburn with Darwen and Halton among the unitary authorities, Burnley, Chorley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Preston and West Lancashire among the district councils, and Rossendale as a whole-council district. The Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region mayoral elections provide wider-area opportunities in 2028.

The six verified sub-25% cases would have remained valid elections with the representatives taking office normally. Manchester Harpurhey and the affected metropolitan wards have a direct 2028 local-election opportunity; broader mayoral coverage may also provide a combined-poll route. The 81 missing records mean the six-case figure is a verified minimum rather than a final North West total.

Yorkshire and the Humber

Yorkshire and the Humber contains metropolitan districts, unitary authorities and several combined-authority mayoral areas. The 2026 extract covers nine authorities but has substantial missing turnout data, so the trigger count must be treated cautiously.

Metric	Result
2026 records in the available extract	209 unique ward or electoral-area records
Records with turnout	106 (50.7%)
Records without turnout	103, concentrated in Bradford, Wakefield, Hull, Calderdale and North East Lincolnshire
Verified areas below 25%	None in the records with published turnout
2028 local authorities with scheduled elections	8 identified: Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield, Rotherham, Hull and North East Lincolnshire
2028 mayoral opportunities	South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, and York and North Yorkshire
Verified sub-25% cases	None currently verified; 103 records remain incomplete

The 2028 local opportunities arise from metropolitan districts electing by thirds or reverting to that cycle, Rotherham's whole-council election, and the unitary authorities Hull and North East Lincolnshire electing by thirds. The three mayoral elections provide wider-area opportunities, but their boundaries do not all cover the same wards.

No sub-25% case can responsibly be declared from the available Yorkshire and Humber extract because almost half of the records lack turnout. The next data step is to obtain the missing returning-authority figures, especially for Bradford, Wakefield, Hull, Calderdale and North East Lincolnshire.

North East England

The North East includes metropolitan districts, the Hartlepool unitary authority and two combined-authority mayoral areas. The available 2026 extract covers six authorities and has turnout for approximately three quarters of the recorded wards.

Metric	Result
2026 records in the available extract	123 unique ward or electoral-area records
Records with turnout	91 (74.0%)
Records without turnout	32, concentrated in North Tyneside and Hartlepool
Verified areas below 25%	None in the records with published turnout
2028 local authorities with scheduled elections	6: Gateshead, Hartlepool, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland
2028 mayoral opportunities	North East and Tees Valley combined-authority elections
Verified sub-25% cases	None currently verified; 32 records remain incomplete

The six local authorities have 2028 opportunities through the metropolitan by-thirds cycle or Hartlepool's unitary by-thirds cycle. The North East and Tees Valley mayoral elections provide wider-area opportunities, but each covers a defined combined-authority area rather than the entire geographic North East.

No sub-25% case can responsibly be declared from the available North East extract because 32 ward records lack turnout. The priority for completion is the official returning-authority data for North Tyneside and Hartlepool.

Wales

Wales must be analysed separately because the May 2026 election is a Senedd election rather than a Welsh local-government election. The next Welsh local elections are scheduled for May 2027, while the next Senedd election follows the Senedd cycle.

Metric	Result
2026 records in the available extract	18 electoral-area records
Records with turnout	17 (94.4%)
Records without turnout	1, Powys County Council
Verified areas below 25%	None in the records with published turnout
2026 election type represented	Senedd Cymru constituencies, plus isolated local records
Next Welsh local elections	May 2027
Next Senedd election after 2026	Expected in 2030 under the current cycle
Two-year confirmation opportunity after a 2026 Senedd trigger	No guaranteed Welsh poll in 2028; a 2029 UK general election could provide an occasion if legislation allowed it

A low-turnout 2026 Senedd constituency would remain valid and the elected Member would take office normally. There is no ordinary Welsh-wide election scheduled exactly two years later in 2028. The principal potential 2029 opportunity would be a UK general election, but that date is not fixed in

advance and the legislation would need to permit a Senedd-constituency confirmation question to be administered alongside a Westminster poll.

A low-turnout Welsh local-election ward in 2027 would likewise look to 2029 for a two-year opportunity. Welsh community-council elections are locally administered and cannot be assumed to provide a national two-year timetable. No sub-25% Welsh case is currently verified from the available 2026 extract.

Scotland

Scotland must also be separated into its national and local election cycles. The 2026 evidence available in the extract relates to the Scottish Parliament election, while the next Scottish local-government elections are scheduled for May 2027.

Metric	Result
2026 records in the available extract	81 Scottish Parliament electoral-area records
Records with turnout	0 in the central extract
Records without turnout	81
Verified areas below 25%	None verified from this extract
Next Scottish local elections	May 2027
Next Scottish Parliament election after 2026	Expected in 2031 under the five-year cycle
Two-year opportunity after a 2026 Scottish Parliament trigger	No guaranteed Scottish poll in 2028; a 2029 UK general election could provide an occasion if legislation allowed it

A low-turnout 2026 Scottish Parliament constituency would remain valid and the elected MSP would take office normally. There is no ordinary Scottish Parliament or local-government poll scheduled in 2028. A 2029 UK general election is the principal possible intervening nationwide event, but a Scottish-constituency confirmation question would require enabling legislation and a defined administrative procedure.

A low-turnout Scottish council ward in 2027 would similarly look to 2029. Scottish community-council elections are locally administered and do not provide a single guaranteed national two-year schedule. No Scottish sub-25% case is currently verified from the available 2026 extract.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has a separate electoral structure, combining elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, local-government elections for 11 councils and Westminster elections. There was no ordinary Northern Ireland-wide local-government or Assembly election in the May 2026 round covered by this working document, so no 2026 Northern Ireland ward or constituency turnout series is included here.

Metric	Result
2026 records in the available extract	0 Northern Ireland ordinary-election records
Verified areas below 25%	None assessed; no 2026 Northern Ireland series in the extract
Next Northern Ireland local elections	Expected in 2027, following the 2023 local-election cycle
Next Northern Ireland Assembly election	Due by 2027 under the five-year Assembly cycle
Two-year opportunity after a 2027 trigger	No guaranteed single Northern Ireland-wide poll in 2029; a UK general election could provide an occasion if legislation allowed a confirmation question

A low-turnout 2027 local-government ward or Assembly constituency would remain a valid election under the hypothetical framework, with the elected representative taking office normally. The principal possible two-year occasion would be a UK general election in 2029, but its date is not fixed in advance and any confirmation question would require enabling legislation, defined boundaries and coordinated administration. Local elections in Northern Ireland are administered across 11 councils, so a confirmation mechanism would need to specify whether it follows the affected ward, the Assembly constituency or another legally defined electorate.

Northern Ireland therefore has no verified May 2026 PSMF cases in this dataset. The next data step is to obtain the official 2027 local and Assembly results once published and test whether any exceptionally low-turnout wards or constituencies could be paired with a later qualifying poll.

Registered-electorate impact

The area-count rate and the electorate-impact rate answer different questions. The current evidence identifies 14 recorded sub-25% areas among 2,254 turnout-bearing records (0.62% by area count). A population-level figure must instead use the registered electorate in each triggered area and the registered electorate across the comparable set of areas. It should not be inferred from turnout percentages alone.

Recorded area	Turnout	Registered electorate	Evidence status
Brent — Wembley Park	22.89%	7,629	Exact figure in Brent declaration/results page
Tamworth — Wilnecote	19.62%	6,793	Exact figure in Tamworth declaration of result
Other 12 recorded areas	Various	Not yet captured	Official electorate totals still to be added

Completion ledger for the 14 recorded trigger candidates:

Region	Area	Turnout	Electorate status
London	Brent — Wembley Park	22.89%	Verified: 7,629
London	Enfield — Brimsdown	24.96%	Pending official declaration
South East	Portsmouth — Charles Dickens	23.20%	Pending official declaration
East of England	Norfolk — King's Lynn North & Central	24.78%	Pending official declaration
East of England	Suffolk — Harbour	24.85%	Pending official declaration
West Midlands	Tamworth — Wilnecote	19.62%	Verified: 6,793
West Midlands	Birmingham — Ladywood	22.82%	Pending official declaration
West Midlands	Wolverhampton — Bushbury South & Low Hill	24.34%	Pending official declaration
North West	St Helens — Town Centre	20.30%	Pending official declaration
North West	Knowsley — Page Moss	21.10%	Pending official declaration
North West	Manchester — Harpurhey	22.35%	Pending official declaration
North West	Knowsley — Stockbridge	23.10%	Pending official declaration
North West	Knowsley — Northwood	24.30%	Pending official declaration
North West	Salford — Broughton	24.44%	Pending official declaration

The exact registered-electorate subtotal currently captured is 14,422 for two of the 14 recorded areas. This is not yet the national affected-electorate percentage: the numerator is incomplete, and the denominator must be assembled on the same geographic basis. Once the remaining declarations are captured, the calculation is: registered electors in all recorded trigger areas ÷ registered electors in all comparable areas × 100. Until then, the defensible headline is the recorded area-count rate (0.62% of turnout-bearing records), accompanied by the explicit statement that the electorate-share calculation remains incomplete.

This distinction matters for PSMF: a ward can be a very small share of the number of areas while representing a materially different share of electors, and conversely. The final metrics page should therefore report both measures, with the electorate measure based only on published registered-electorate totals and clearly identified boundaries.

External comparison: PollCheck

PollCheck’s “Build Your Own UK General Election” tool is relevant as a conceptual comparison, not as a source for the May 2026 local-election turnout figures. It models the first question— which party or candidate is assigned the seat—across Westminster constituencies, starting from the 2024 result or alternative user assignments. Its own description states that the map covers 632 Great Britain constituencies on 2024 boundaries and retains Northern Ireland’s 18 seats. It does not provide the registered-electorate totals or ward-level turnout data required for the electorate-impact calculation in this document.

The comparison nevertheless reinforces the modular structure of PSMF: the prevailing electoral system, whether FPTP, STV, list PR, AMS or another lawful method, determines who wins. PSMF begins only afterwards and only where participation falls below the defined exceptional trigger. It does not replace the winning mechanism, alter seat allocation or claim that a different voting system alone resolves disengagement.

Brent comparison: PollCheck’s downloadable Brent ward data identifies a 2022 baseline and contains baseline electorate and turnout values for 16 of 22 listed wards. Calculated across those available wards, the simple mean turnout is approximately 33.5% and the electorate-weighted mean approximately 32.8%. Those figures are useful contextual evidence of low local-election participation, but they are not a complete 2026 Brent turnout total. The official 2026 Wembley Park result—22.89% turnout and a registered electorate of 7,629—must therefore remain analytically separate from the PollCheck historical baseline.

Hypothetical PSMF sequence

1. Ordinary election: votes are counted and the winner is declared under the existing electoral system.
2. Office: the elected representative takes office with full authority.
3. Trigger: turnout below the illustrative threshold records a provisional PSMF trigger; the election is not cancelled.
4. Waiting period: the framework waits approximately two years for the next qualifying election covering the affected electorate.

5. Confirmation: one question asks whether the representative should continue for the remainder of the ordinary term.
6. Outcome: continuation, a tie, abstention or insufficient participation preserves the mandate; only a valid majority against continuation changes it.

What the evidence establishes

The evidence supports a bounded proof-of-concept: exceptionally low participation can be identified without invalidating the election, delaying the elected representative taking office or changing the underlying voting system. It also shows why a later confirmation opportunity would need to be tied to the affected electorate and to an existing or deliberately scheduled election event wherever possible.

The evidence does not yet establish a final national electorate-impact percentage, a statutory threshold, a complete cost estimate or legal wording for implementation. Those are separate design and legislative questions. The working metrics should therefore be presented as an empirical stress test of the concept, not as proof that PSMF is already legally available or administratively complete.

Stress-test crosswalk

The separate United Kingdom PSMF Stress Test Assessment (2026) already examines threshold scaling, baseline general-election conditions, a hung Parliament with multiple provisional seats, constitutional continuity, political behaviour and the principal safeguards. The regional metrics in this document complement that assessment by testing where a trigger might arise and whether a later election could cover the affected electorate.

Stress-test area	What the existing assessment establishes	Remaining test or qualification
Threshold scaling	It models illustrative safeguard, engagement and incentive tiers at approximately 25%, 30–35% and 40%+.	The regional dataset does not yet provide complete empirical counts at each alternative threshold. The 25% figure remains illustrative, not settled.
General-election continuity	Under assumed typical turnout, government formation and parliamentary operation continue normally.	This is a modelled baseline, not a forecast of future turnout or behaviour.
Hung Parliament	The 60 provisional-seat scenario shows how later confirmation could create political sensitivity without delaying formation of government.	The 60 seats and 35-confirmed/25-rejected split are illustrative assumptions, not observed UK data. Rejection must mean valid votes against continuation exceeding valid votes in favour.

Stress-test area	What the existing assessment establishes	Remaining test or qualification
Confirmation outcomes	The assessment includes confirmation polls within a two-year period and possible by-elections.	It should also test ties, abstention, low confirmation turnout and inconclusive results; each preserves the original mandate under the settled design.
Strategic behaviour	It identifies possible sensitivity, volatility and abstention incentives.	No behavioural effect is empirically demonstrated. The proposal should not claim that PSMF will increase turnout or deter abstention.
Administration	It favours using existing electoral infrastructure where possible.	The timetable, boundary matching, costs, accessibility and legal authority remain to be specified.
City of London	Not covered by the parliamentary stress scenario.	It is now included separately because its resident/business franchise is not comparable with ordinary borough wards.

Interpretive limit: the stress test supports conditional continuity under its illustrative scenarios. It does not prove that PSMF is legally available, that the modelled numbers will occur, or that the framework will change participation behaviour. The most precise conclusion is that the mechanism appears capable of preserving the original election and government formation while creating a defined route for later active rejection in exceptionally low-participation cases.

Proxy voting and electorate integrity

Proxy voting can be available for a confirmation question because it is an existing method of casting an elector's ballot. It does not, however, allow a voter from one ward to transfer a confirmation vote onto an election taking place in another ward. A proxy is appointed by the affected elector and votes on that elector's ballot at the polling arrangement assigned to the affected electorate; the proxy does not acquire a separate vote in the proxy-holder's own area.

Scenario	PSMF treatment
Affected elector and proxy are in the same ward	The proxy may use the ordinary proxy-voting process if properly appointed and eligible.
Affected electorate is an Essex county division and the proxy lives in a neighbouring Colchester district ward	The proxy would still cast the county-division elector's confirmation ballot, not a Colchester ward ballot. The proxy's residence does not change the relevant electorate.
A 2028 election occurs in the neighbouring Colchester ward but not across the Essex county division	The Colchester poll cannot host the county-division confirmation question merely because the areas are adjacent or the proxy can attend there. The county division would need its own confirmation arrangements or a legally coordinated poll covering the affected electorate.

Scenario	PSMF treatment
No suitable event covers the affected electorate	A standalone confirmation poll, or a deliberately coordinated poll covering that electorate, is required. Proxy voting does not remove this scheduling requirement.
Secrecy and ballot handling	The confirmation response should be a separate confidential ballot, counted independently and not linked to the elector's candidate choice. A proxy is a trusted person and may know how they marked the ballot; that is an inherent feature of proxy voting, not a basis for moving the vote to another jurisdiction.

This stress test therefore confirms that proxy voting is an access mechanism, not a substitute for an electorate-matched confirmation event. PSMF legislation would need to preserve the ordinary proxy application, eligibility, deadline and polling-station rules while ensuring that the confirmation question is available to the correct affected electorate.

Cost benchmarking and double event risk

There is no single published national cost-per-ward tariff for a confirmation poll. Election costs are calculated by the relevant Returning Officer and vary with the affected electorate, postal-vote volume, geography, number of polling stations, venues, staffing, poll-card and ballot production, postage, verification and the count. The most useful public benchmarks therefore show the cost structure and the difference between a combined poll and a standalone poll, rather than supplying a universal price.

North Yorkshire Council's official 2024 policy on recharging parish by-elections provides a transparent lower-scale benchmark. It states that parish by-elections can cost approximately £1,500–£10,000, depending on the electorate and geographical area. It identifies venue hire, equipment, poll cards, postal votes, ballot papers, postage, polling and count staff, administration and the Returning Officer fee as cost elements. It also states that, where polls are combined, polling accommodation and some staffing, postage and poll-card costs can be shared, while ballot papers and election-specific count work remain attributable to the separate poll. This is not a ward-equivalent estimate, but it is directly relevant to the PSMF question because it demonstrates how marginal cost can be distinguished from the cost of a complete additional event.

At the larger end of the scale, the 2026 Makerfield parliamentary by-election had a published administrative budget of £226,208: £3,738 for the Returning Officer and £222,470 for ballot papers, IT, staffing and other support. That figure is a constituency by-election benchmark, not a ward confirmation-poll estimate, and should not be used as a direct forecast for local government. It does, however, show why a rejection that leads to a further by-election is a material additional event rather than a costless administrative step.

PSMF arrangement	Cost implication	What must remain separate
Confirmation added to a scheduled poll covering the same electorate	Lowest expected marginal cost. Some venues, polling staff, poll-card/postage processes and central administration may be shared.	The confirmation ballot, voter information, reconciliation and result must remain separately identifiable.
Confirmation held on the same day as an event elsewhere	Some central or count infrastructure might be shared only under a legally coordinated arrangement. It is not enough that another ward is voting.	The affected electorate needs its own register or poll record, polling arrangements, ballot papers, chain of custody and declaration. A ballot box cannot simply be transferred into another ward's ordinary poll.
Standalone confirmation poll in the affected ward or constituency	A full additional electoral event, with venue, staffing, notices, ballot production, postal and proxy handling, transport, verification and count costs. No reliable national average is currently published.	The authority would need a Returning Officer cost model using its own electorate, polling-station and postal-vote data.
Active rejection at confirmation	A later by-election would be triggered under the settled PSMF design. This is an additional poll; its cost is not automatically exactly double because some information or procurement may be reusable, but it is a real second event.	The by-election remains subject to the ordinary statutory timetable and administration.

The relevant public-finance test is therefore an expected-cost comparison, not a claim that confirmation is free: expected cost equals the cost of the chosen confirmation arrangement plus the probability of active rejection multiplied by the cost of the resulting by-election, less any infrastructure genuinely shared with a scheduled poll. The present evidence does not justify assigning a probability of rejection. It does justify treating same-electorate combination as the preferred cost-control route, with a standalone poll as the fallback where no suitable event exists.

For a future implementation assessment, each Returning Officer could provide a short schedule covering: electorate and polling-station count; poll-card and postal-vote volumes; venue and equipment hire; polling, opening and count staffing; printing and postage; transport and secure storage; Returning Officer and project-management fees; and the incremental cost of adding one separate confirmation question to an already scheduled poll. Those figures would turn the present qualitative conclusion into an authority-specific cost range without inventing a national average.

Distinctive contribution of the proposal

PSMF addresses a specific explanatory and institutional gap: the existing system explains how an election remains valid and how continuity is preserved, but it does not provide a separate mechanism for acknowledging exceptionally weak participation. The proposal does not claim that

low turnout makes an election unlawful, that a quorum should be imposed, or that PSMF would solve disengagement. Its narrower contribution is to make the issue visible and procedurally intelligible: the original election stands, the representative takes office, and exceptionally low participation may lead to one defined confirmation opportunity rather than being treated as irrelevant.

That is the basis on which PSMF should be assessed. It is a modest proposal for recognition and structured follow-up, not a claim to have resolved every problem of representation, trust or participation.

Findings and feasibility assessment

The evidence supports PSMF as a modest, system-compatible proposal, but not yet as an implementation-ready scheme. Its strongest feature is the separation between the original election and the later participation response: the winner takes office normally, government continues, and only an active rejection at one confirmation poll can lead to a by-election.

Question	Current finding	What remains to be resolved
Does it work with different voting systems?	Yes in principle. FPTP, STV, PR and AMS can determine the winner before PSMF begins.	Primary legislation must define how “same electorate” is identified for each system.
How often might it trigger?	In the present evidence set, 14 recorded areas fall below the illustrative 25% trigger among 2,254 turnout-bearing records: 0.62% by area count.	The final electorate-share percentage requires registered-electorate totals for all cases and a matched denominator.
Can confirmation use existing elections?	Often, especially where a later local, mayoral or London-wide poll covers the affected electorate.	Boundary mismatches mean this cannot be assumed for county divisions, combined authorities or devolved elections.
What if no suitable election occurs?	A limited standalone poll provides a workable fallback.	Legislation must set the timetable, franchise, administration, funding and ballot wording.
Can low confirmation turnout destabilise the system?	Not under the settled design: abstention, low participation and a tie preserve the mandate.	The statute must state expressly that only valid votes against continuation exceeding valid votes in favour constitute rejection.
What would it cost?	Combining confirmation with a scheduled poll covering the same electorate should reduce marginal cost; public benchmarks show that standalone events vary materially by electorate and geography.	A Returning Officer cost schedule is still needed for any specific ward or constituency, and an active rejection could lead to a further by-election.

Question	Current finding	What remains to be resolved
Is it legally available now?	No. PSMF is a proposal requiring enabling legislation.	Parliament would need to set the threshold, define the trigger, authorise confirmation polls and provide the by-election consequence.

Overall conclusion: PSMF appears administratively plausible as a limited legislative refinement because it leaves the original result, office and continuity intact. Its principal unresolved issues are not the basic logic of the mechanism, but calibration and implementation: the threshold, electorate boundaries, timing, cost of standalone polls, and the statutory definition of active rejection. The present regional metrics are sufficient to demonstrate how the proposal would operate in practice, provided they continue to be labelled as a working evidence base rather than a complete national audit.

Implementation questions requiring legislation

The following questions do not undermine the mechanism. They identify the points that would need to be settled in primary legislation, regulations or electoral guidance before PSMF could operate in practice.

Issue	Question requiring a legal or administrative rule
Trigger definition	What electoral unit is assessed, and is the threshold calculated from the registered electorate, ballot papers issued or another defined measure?
Threshold calibration	Is the illustrative trigger strictly below 25%, and can Parliament revise it after reviewing participation data?
Confirmation timetable	What is the precise start date, minimum interval and maximum two-year deadline for the one-time confirmation poll?
Suitable election	Who determines whether a later local, mayoral, parliamentary or devolved election covers the same electorate sufficiently to host confirmation?
Boundary change	What happens where wards, divisions, constituencies or combined-authority boundaries change between the original election and confirmation?
Confirmation ballot	What exact question, voter information and counting rules apply, including treatment of rejected ballots and equality of votes?
Active rejection	The mandate is rejected only where valid votes against continuation exceed valid votes in favour. Abstention, low participation, a tie or an inconclusive result does not reject it.

Issue	Question requiring a legal or administrative rule
Standalone poll	Who administers and funds a standalone poll, and what minimum notice, staffing, accessibility and public-information requirements apply?
Equality and access	How are postal, proxy, assisted, language and disability-access arrangements applied to the confirmation question?
Proxy and electorate integrity	How is it ensured that a proxy casts the affected elector's confirmation ballot within the correct ward or constituency, rather than transferring the vote to the proxy's own area?
Evidence and review	What data must electoral authorities publish, and after how many election cycles should Parliament review the threshold and operation of the framework?

These questions are implementation requirements, not unresolved flaws in the core principle. They provide a practical legislative agenda for any future examination of PSMF by Parliament, electoral administrators, councils or researchers.

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