

## Ministers 'wrongly assumed simply holding police elections would be enough'

Ministers wrongly assumed that “simply holding” elections for police and crime commissioners would be enough to inspire the public to vote, a damning report has found, as only one in five people thought they knew enough about the candidates to make an informed choice.



Four out of five people did not have enough information to make an informed choice, the report found Photo: Getty Images

By Wesley Johnson, Home Affairs Correspondent

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One out of four people said they knew “nothing at all” about the elections last November, while one in two admitted they knew “not very much”, the Electoral Commission said.

The Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), who replaced police authorities in 41 force areas across England and Wales, earn up to £100,000 a year and have the power to set force budgets and priorities, as well as to hire and fire chief constables.

But the process was marred by a record-low turnout with around one in seven bothering to go to the ballot box, prompting a detailed inquiry by the commission.

It found more than a third of people who chose not to vote blamed a lack of awareness, five times

as many who said they were unaware of the local elections in May.

Four out of five people did not have enough information to make an informed choice, the report found, and the Home Office's failure to send out candidates' details to voters was a "mistake".

David Hanson, the shadow policing minister, said the report showed Theresa May, the Home Secretary, "presided over shambolic elections" which "left people without the information they needed".

Jenny Watson, who chairs the commission, said setting up a website with information was not good enough and it reached fewer than two million people, no more than one in 20 of those eligible to vote.

"We have to work in the world that we're in, not the world that we'd like to be in," she said.

"It is not enough to think that simply holding an election will inspire participation.

"For 2016, there needs to be a candidate information booklet sent to every household where there are elections."

The report also found the Home Office does not have experience in running elections and would need better support from other areas of government in future.

Ann Barnes, who won the election in Kent and has repeatedly raised concerns over the lack of information for voters, said future elections needed to be better organised.

"Voters weren't able to get information about the candidates," she said.

"How on earth were candidates expected to reach the vast numbers of voters in their areas? In my case, 1.2 million."

A Home Office spokesman said: "More than five million people turned out to vote for the first ever election of PCCs, giving them an infinitely bigger mandate than the unelected and invisible police authorities they replaced."

"As the Electoral Commission notes, turnout at the next PCC elections is likely to be higher. They will take place alongside other leading polls and people will be more aware of the impact PCCs are making to deliver on public priorities in tackling crime."