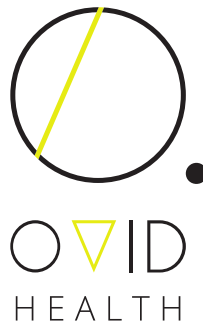


OVID Health: General Election Insights 2019

Health and political insights from our most marginal constituencies

Reinventing Healthcare Communications



At OVID Health we like to do things a little differently. So instead of regurgitating all the analysis you can get on Twitter, we've travelled to three 'bellwether' seats to take the population's temperature ahead of the General Election 2019.

Although we're a policy communications and public affairs agency based in London, our team and OVID associates come from all over the UK.

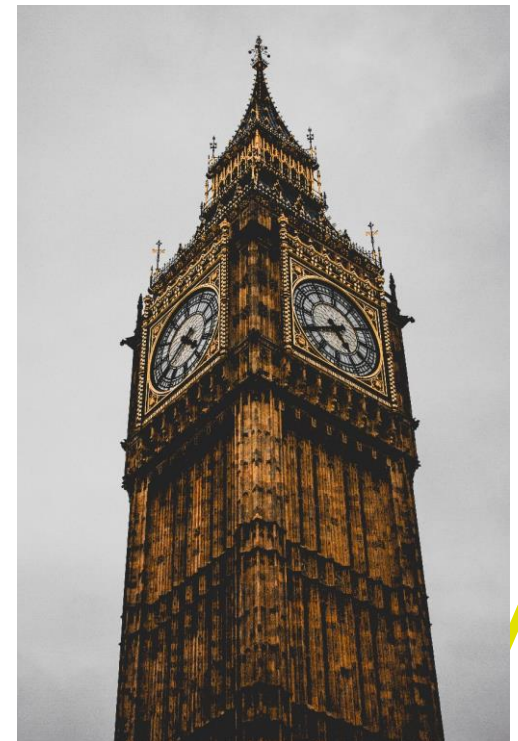
This means we draw on a vast amount of deep insight when we advise our public affairs clients on all things health, pharma and politics.

OUR PREDICTION

Come Friday December 13th, we're looking at an election result which will enable Boris Johnson and his team at Number 10 to breathe a huge sigh of relief.

And yet, polling leads have increasingly narrowed over the past seven days – and there is debate over whether we're looking at a handsome Conservative majority, or a hung Parliament.

But we think *Get Brexit Done* is hitting target voters in the sweet spot. Corbyn is doing badly on the doorsteps; yet Boris is not universally loved. A pragmatic public may well return a surprise at the ballot box.



Where did we explore?

- Norwich North – Labour target seat
- Oxford West and Abingdon – Conservative target seat
- Telford – Labour target seat

OVID Health is proud to be named as a Finalist in this year's PRCA Public Affairs Awards for *Best In-House Consultancy Collaboration Campaign* for our social care public affairs campaign, Health for Care, with our client The NHS Confederation. To find out how we could collaborate with you to create some award-winning work call us on 0330 111 0255, email hello@ovidhealth.co.uk or visit: ovidhealth.co.uk



Norwich North: General Election 2019

Exploring health and politics in an East of England battleground

Reinventing Healthcare Communications.

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General Election Candidates – Norwich North

Conservative Party: Chloe Smith; Labour Party: Karen Davis; Green Party: Adrian Homes; UK Independence Party: David Moreland; Liberal Democrats: Dave Thomas.

Introduction

Last week Boris Johnson made a flying visit to Norwich's International Aviation Academy. It was no coincidence he continued the campaign trail in this former WWII aircraft hangar.

Previously a safe Labour seat, Norwich North (after numerous boundary changes) is held by the Conservatives' Chloe Smith by a mere 507 votes. Labour are understandably keen to achieve the 0.6% swing required to take the seat – but could Brexit be standing in their way?

Character

Coming into Norwich by train you see a large Labour party placard in the foreground and the looming yellow and green of Norwich City Stadium in the distance.

A tiny Green Party poster in a high-rise flat was conspicuous by being the solitary external sign an election was taking place when OVID was in the area.

Norwich overall is split, with beautiful leafy suburbs in stark contrast to the boarded-up factories on the outskirts. Norwich South is a safe Labour seat – so Norwich North is litmus test of the Tories' strategy.

The Brexit Party candidate here has stood aside to avoid splintering the Leave vote – and Chloe Smith backs a Deal being made.

Campaign Issues

Norwich is one of the worst places for social mobility in the UK – according to a [2016 Social Mobility Commission report](#).

In no particular order, the other election issues on the street were:

- Mental health services
- Affordable housing and rental prices
- Immigration

But it is Brexit that's driving the day with voters. One man (manual labour worker) in his early 60s called Johnson a 'wild card, but Corbyn's worse. I've lived through the Seventies and you couldn't warm your house up. That's what Labour will do if they get in power'.

His wife added: 'I've never voted in my life, but I will this time to get Brexit done and to keep Corbyn out – we don't want all those tax cuts.'

Key Statistics

- Population of circa 87,000
- Average house price of £150,000 (ONS)
- 57% of Norwich North voted Leave
- One of only 44 constituencies where UKIP is standing
- Average age of 44 (ONS)

Healthcare

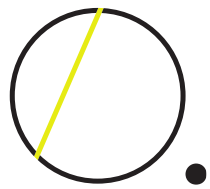
As he entered the aircraft hangar last week, Johnson was [heckled by Marilyn Heath](#), mum to an adult daughter with severe learning disabilities. She told the local paper that she wanted to raise the issue of care charges.

And Ms Heath's concerns about perceived inequities in the healthcare system were never far from voters' minds in Norwich North.

One woman in her 40s reminded OVID that the local mental health trust is one of the worst performing in the country (thrice rated 'inadequate' by the CQC) and this is showing in the services available to young people.

The Labour candidate Karen Davis has [blasted](#) the local NHS under the Conservatives, saying: *"The number of people waiting longer for urgent cancer treatment has tripled under the Tories – and the terrible impact of cuts on waiting lists is visible here in Norwich too."*

Another voter (a former pharmacist) said she couldn't envisage that Labour plans to 'nationalise' pharmaceuticals and medicines industry would have any benefit for patients, saying *"I just don't see how it could be done, and why we'd want that to happen."*



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Leave voter

Beth, a support worker in her early 30s, said:

"My Nan told me to vote Liberal Democrat as she doesn't like Boris Johnson and to be honest I don't like him either but I voted Leave and I think he means it when he says he'll get it done."

"I was also really happy to see Boris giving money to the police, so that ticks a box for me."

"But I don't normally vote so I will be doing lots of research this time. At the end of the day a Lib Dem vote is a wasted vote and I do think mental health services round here need sorting out."

'Undecided' voter

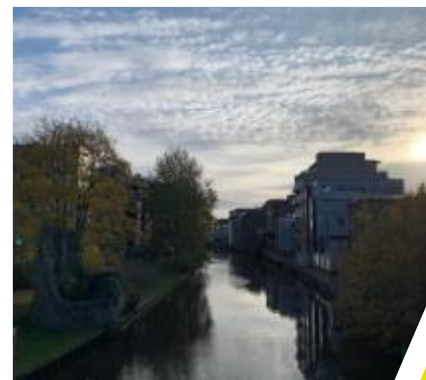
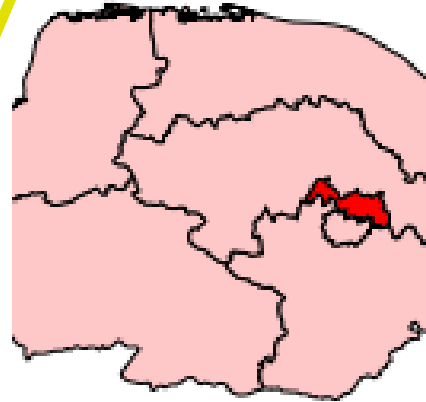
Charlotte, a nurse in her 20s, said:

"At the moment I'm getting lots of Green Party leaflets so they're obviously very active. On the NHS I think you can chuck as much money as you like at it, but if you don't solve the issues underneath like workforce then you can't fix it."

The problem with the NHS is that we offer everything and actually we should offer services up to a cap and after that you have to get private healthcare."

To be honest I'm disillusioned with the whole system. If pushed, I'd vote for the Tories just to leave (Brexit). Theresa May was in a catch 22 but I think Boris can do it."

Images courtesy of Chris McAndrew, Dudley Miles, Margot Thornley, Jos and OVID Health.



OVID HEALTH'S PREDICTION

Overall

Our findings align with those detailed in the recent YouGov MRP poll – that the Conservatives are on course to retain Norwich North on December 12th.

There was only one voter who said they'd be voting Labour, and when probed they seemed most likely to be a floating voter.

What was striking was how the genius (whichever way you vote) of Dominic Cummings was felt at every turn – with almost all constituents (unprompted) echoing the 'Get Brexit Done' slogan in their own responses to questions.

Much of voters' anger was directed not at the Labour party, but at Jeremy Corbyn individually – who they feel can't be trusted to deliver Brexit and to look after the economy.

There was also a significant portion of white working-class male voters who said they were life-long Labour voters who were planning on voting Conservative for the first time because they voted Leave and see them as the only party who can deliver.

They also tended to link their concerns around the local levels of immigration with the need to leave the EU.

On this basis we wouldn't be surprised if Chloe Smith extends her slim lead in a few weeks' time.

CONSERVATIVE HOLD

Oxford West and Abingdon: General Election 2019

Exploring health and politics in a Liberal Democrat marginal

Reinventing Healthcare Communications.



General Election Candidates – Oxford West and Abingdon

Conservative Party: James Frederickson; Labour Party: Rosie Sourbut; Liberal Democrats: Layla Moran; Brexit Party: Allison Wild.

Introduction

Since 1997 it's been a two-party contest for the Oxford West and Abingdon seat, between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

Most recently, Layla Moran claimed a Lib Dem victory in the 2017 election, by a majority of just 817 votes. Prior to this the Tories held the seat, winning it back from the Lib Dems in 2010 by a tiny majority of 176 votes, then holding it in 2015 with a stronger 9,582 majority.

Throughout, Labour has come third and the Green Party lost their deposit.

Character

This is a beautiful rural area with river walks and cosy pubs. It's steeped in history from university colleges to the market town, Abingdon-on-Thames, famous for its Bun-Throwing tradition of over 250 years to celebrate major royal occasions.

Its constituents are well-educated, socially conscious, and have a strong sense of community.

The Tory Council refused to fly a rainbow flag from the Town Hall for a Pride event (2016) due to "policies" on what flags could fly from the hall. Angry and deeming this homophobia, over 1,000 people signed a petition opposing the decision. Upon gaining control of the Council, the Lib Dems reversed the decision not to fly the rainbow flag and announced the first ever Abingdon Pride.

Campaign Issues

Significant pressure to deliver new homes and proposals by Conservative councillors to build piecemeal on the Green Belt have evoked deep concern over implications for infrastructure with *"more people being squeezed into the area"*.

Traffic congestion is a local concern and frustrations were expressed at the prolonged delay to creating an additional junction northbound onto the A34.

Parents also care greatly about education provision and funding for childcare.

Constituents unanimously agree *"it's very easy"* to get a GP appointment. One added *"I really care about this, I appreciate it's precious and many don't have it"* and many echoed similar gratitude.

Key Statistics

- Electorate of 78,400
- 87.1% white ethnicity
- 22.8% are aged 18-35 and 16.5% aged 65+.
- 2.4% unemployment, 3.2% of poor health.
- 63.5% house owners.

Healthcare

Constituents lack confidence in any parties' plans for the NHS, though the few Tory voters we spoke to see them holding the best hope.

Awareness that Labour has pledged more money and the Tories more nurses comes with scepticism. *"I don't believe any of them"* and *"where's the money coming from?"* are widely held concerns, with some fearful at recent allegations that Boris would privatise the NHS.

The constituency lacks trust in pharmaceuticals. Almost everyone was sceptical about *"these money-making machines"*, including one individual whose parents work in health: *"I've read too much about big pharma incentives"*.

The struggle the NHS faces to afford drugs was raised multiple times. A small number of people acknowledged *"they're producing drugs which save lives"* and *"need to make profit or they wouldn't do it"*.

A few drew comparison with the US stating *"they're much better here than in the US"*.

The general consensus is the local population's health is *"pretty good"*, but there was a call for more children's centres and community centres where people could *"learn practical skills"* and to *"combat loneliness in the elderly"*.

Obesity was cited as needing to be addressed with suggested approaches including *"prescribing park runs"* and *"grants for electric bikes"*.

Looking after children and young people's mental health was also considered a priority, with social media being a commonly referenced factor behind this need.

Tactical Voter

One young woman (24) explained:

"I vote tactically. Liberal Democrats, to keep the Tories out."

"Out of all MPs we've had locally since I turned 18, having met them all the Tories didn't come across as sincere as caring about the people whereas at least the Lib Dems have tried".



OVID HEALTH'S PREDICTION

Overall

From gauging the temperature of Oxford West and Abingdon constituents right now, it seems Layla Moran should feel confident of winning a second term as MP for the area.

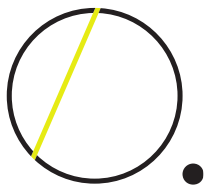
Given 70% of constituents backed Remain during the EU referendum, it's unsurprising most plan to vote Lib Dem, and the word on the street around voting inclination reflects the findings of YouGov's MRP poll which predicts the Lib Dems keeping their seat in this constituency in the upcoming election.

However, the unanimous motivation of those who will vote Lib Dem is to *"stop the Tories getting in"* as they *"don't like Boris Johnson"*, most adding they also *"don't trust Jeremy Corbyn"*.

One constituent echoed a widely shared sentiment among those who will vote Lib Dem saying: *"It's not the policies but the people that are the problem"*.

"I want them all to start telling the truth and set realistic, attainable goals", another said. Voting inclination is towards what's seen as the lesser of several evils. The few who will vote Tory shared the reasoning: *"I want Brexit done"*.

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT HOLD



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Images courtesy of Phillip Allfrey, Motacilla, Des Blenkinsopp and OVID Health.

Telford: General Election 2019

Exploring health and politics in a 'stoical' bellwether seat

Reinventing Healthcare Communications



Introduction

The focus on Telford may have as much to do with symbolism as with its highly marginal status – only 720 votes saw the Conservatives through to victory in 2017. Telford is a new town, founded in 1968 and bringing together several pre-existing smaller towns.

It is a place of contrasts, blending urban and rural areas as well as affluence and deprivation. Manufacturing is the largest sector for employment, and the area continues to grow economically and in terms of population.

Character

The current MP Lucy Allan recently described Telford as "[a stoical place](#)".

This character is partially due to Telford's geographical situation as the 'hole in the doughnut' of Shropshire, with a separate local council and an identity that's as much informed by the Black Country as it is by its leafy county neighbours.

With a lower proportion of car-owners (though a comically high number of roundabouts, as many residents will tell you) and relatively poor transport connections, Telford is perceived as somewhat remote and consequently looks to itself rather than engaging with the region.

Campaign Issues

Nationally, we have so far seen the Conservatives set the focus of their campaign on their commitment to 'get Brexit done'. Labour on the other hand has sought to move debate towards other issues, with health policy and the NHS taking a prominence.

Like many areas in the West Midlands, Telford voted strongly for Brexit in the EU referendum, with around two-thirds voting Leave.

Amongst the residents we spoke with most had pro-Leave sympathies. For those whom Brexit is the key election issue, the Conservatives are the straightforward choice. The candidate for the Brexit Party in Telford [stood down](#) to avoid splitting the Leave vote. It seems to be paying off, with all those who identified as strongly backing Brexit intending to vote for Johnson.

Key Statistics

- The population is circa 97,000
- The average house price is £162,750 (ONS)
- The number of people claiming unemployment benefit is 5.2%
- The population is 93.5% White British

General Election Candidates – Telford

Conservative Party: Lucy Allan; Labour Party: Katrina Gilman; Liberal Democrats: Shana Roberts

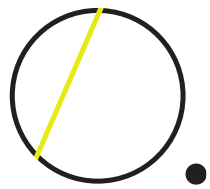
Healthcare

Discussing health policy in Telford either begins with or inevitably leads to the battle to save the 24-hour A&E and women's and children's unit at the Princess Royal Hospital (PRH as it's known locally).

Residents universally oppose the move, and Corbyn's recent promise to keep the Telford A&E open and unchanged was central to why the Labour supporters we talked to feel the party can be trusted with the NHS above their rivals. This was only compounded by the confusion prompted by Boris Johnson declaring the A&E would be "[kept open](#)" only for Health Secretary Matt Hancock to contradict this claim mere minutes after, saying there had been no changes to the current plans.

Returning as candidate for the Conservatives, Lucy Allan is currently crowdfunding a legal challenge to the government's decision. This has helped to limit, although not completely eliminate, the damage that this has had on the Conservative's chances in Telford.

Echoing her party leader, Katrina Gilman, the Labour candidate for Telford, has promised to ensure no services are lost at PRH.



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HEALTH

Though Telford has seen improvements in most major measures of quality of life, it continues to struggle with health inequalities, which have only widened as the population has grown.

Compared to the national average, Telford has a lower life expectancy, higher rates of long-term illness and disabilities, high obesity rates and high rates of admissions to hospital for a variety of conditions.

The NHS is also one of the largest employers in the area, so the issue is prominent in the minds of everyone in the community.

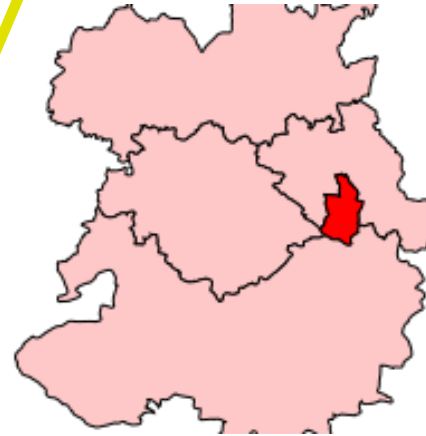
The original plans to close the A&E were met with fierce resistance locally, leading to the decision that it would instead be downgraded to an "A&E local" urgent care facility. For residents, this was of little comfort.

For a constituency that hasn't received much coverage in the media this campaign, Telford has proved an attractive area for leaders to visit in the run up to the election.

In the second week of campaigning, Jeremy Corbyn [paid a visit](#) to his "home county", (he went to school at Adam's Grammar School in Newport) where he announced he would be "*a very different kind of prime minister*".

Not to be outdone, Boris Johnson went and [launched the Conservative manifesto](#) here at the International Centre on Sunday 24th November.

Images courtesy of Scott Powell, King Otto, Mike White, Richard Law and OVID Health.



OVID HEALTH'S PREDICTION

Corbyn's policy of remaining neutral on a second referendum has done him no favours in the constituency. However, that is by no means to say that the result in Telford is cut and dried.

According to the latest [YouGov poll](#), utilising the MRP methodology that correctly predicted the 2017 election outcome, Telford is expected to be a comfortable win for the Conservatives.

From speaking to people, the feeling on the ground is this is a closer race than the data is suggesting.

Based on our interviews, Labour came out on top. Corbyn's announcement he would keep the A&E open has made an impression with voters, and despite Lucy Allan's personal opposition to the plans the Conservatives have been damaged by the issue.

However, Brexit support in Telford cannot be underestimated.

Katrina Gilman has taken the party line of neutrality on a second referendum, and this has caused many of those who voted Leave to see the Conservatives as the only party promising Brexit without any equivocation.

The result hangs on a knife-edge.

MARGINAL LABOUR GAIN