

Backlash at delay in election counts

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WEST Yorkshire councils were today facing a mounting political backlash after it was revealed they are considering delaying their General Election counts until the day after the polls close.

One Leeds MP said Parliament should consider rushing through a law which would force local authorities to count votes on election night.

Leeds, Wakefield and Kirklees are all considering tearing up more than a century of tradition and delaying their counts until the following day.

This would mean results in crucial marginal constituencies would not be known until the Friday afternoon or evening following the Thursday polling day.

It could also result in a new Prime Minister entering Downing Street before the voters of some West Yorkshire seats know who their MP was going to be.

Labour MP Fabian Hamilton – whose Leeds North East seat will be a key battleground – today said: “It would completely destroy the atmosphere of the election if the count is done the following day.

“I do feel sorry for the staff who have to work long hours but it’s not beyond the wit



PRESSURE: Councils could put counting of votes back a day

of local authorities to ensure that those staff who do the counting during the night are not the same people who are the tellers at the polling stations.

“There is no excuse – if they do not do it then Parliament needs to step in.”

Rachel Reeves, Labour’s candidate for Leeds West, said: “We want to engage with people in politics and one of the things that does engage people is sitting up on election night and watching the results.

Right

“If they have to wait until the next day when people are at work they will not be able to participate in that and it will be a shame for democracy and the democratic process. People have a right to have an MP by the Friday morning.”

Wakefield MP Mary Creagh said: “If people think that forming a government is

important, then it is important that we have a government from day one, not day two.”

And Leeds East MP George Mudie said: “I am a traditionalist in terms of thinking that the election night is part of the process. It is something that brings people in to view politics when they would not normally do so.”

Council officials have blamed the increased numbers of postal votes – which have to be checked to prevent fraud – and the cost of paying thousands of pounds in overtime for considering delaying counts.

Leeds council has counted votes the day after polling day for council and European elections since 2004 and is now considering doing the same for the General Election.

Paul Rogerson, returning officer for the Leeds constituencies, said: “A decision about whether votes at the next general election will be counted on the election night itself or the following day has yet to be made. All issues will be carefully considered before a final decision is taken.”

A spokesman for Kirklees Council said: “Given that in Kirklees we have 50,000 postal voters and that there will be a higher percentage poll at a General Election this will be a significant issue and will mean that counting, if it were to take place on Thursday evening, would actually be delayed well into the early hours of Friday.”

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