



CPA BIMR

Election Observation Mission to Isle of Man

SEPTEMBER 2026



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT



"I want to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to the efficient running of the elections. We saw for ourselves how hard everyone worked to make this election a success. It was a significant shared civic effort, and those involved should rightfully be proud. We witnessed a well organised process, with a real commitment to make it transparent and inclusive. We hope our recommendations will be a positive contribution to the Isle of Man."

Deputy Chris Blin, Head of Mission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the invitation of Jonathan King, the Clerk of Tynwald, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association British Islands and Mediterranean Region (CPA BIMR) conducted an independent Election Observation Mission to the 2026 House of Keys General Election in the Isle of Man. The Mission assessed the electoral process against international standards and domestic law, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders and observing all stages of the election process.

The Isle of Man is a self-governing Crown Dependency with a long-established parliamentary tradition. Electoral landscape remains predominantly candidate-centred, with the vast majority of candidates contesting the election as independents.

The electoral legal framework provides a solid foundation for the conduct of democratic elections and reflects fundamental democratic principles. Amendments adopted ahead of the election introduced declarations of candidates' relevant interests, changes to the handling of postal votes, and provisions for official pre-election meetings. However, aspects of the legal framework would benefit from a review to ensure that it remains aligned with developments in electoral administration and campaigning.

Members of the House of Keys are elected in 12 constituencies, each returning two members under a bloc vote electoral system.

Election administration was delivered through cooperation between the Crown and Elections team, Deputy Returning Officers (DROs), Captains of the Parishes and polling staff. The Mission noted the election was delivered professionally, transparently and within legal deadlines, despite resource limitations. The commitment and cooperation of election stakeholders contributed significantly to the effective conduct of the process.

Postal and proxy voting continued to provide important alternatives to voting on polling day. The administration of postal voting was centralised for these elections.

Amendments permitting the processing of postal ballots before the close of polls supported the timely conduct of the count.



The right to vote is broadly granted. Voting rights are extended to residents aged 16 and over, without citizenship-based restrictions, and voter registration remains active and compulsory. A total of 66,146 electors were registered for the election, an increase compared with the previous general election. During the campaign period, some stakeholders raised concerns regarding the accuracy of certain entries on the electoral register and challenges associated with the voter registration process.

Candidate eligibility requirements are clearly defined in law, and the nomination process was completed without any candidate rejections or formal complaints. Eighty-two candidates registered for the election, representing an increase from the previous electoral cycle and providing voters with a broad choice of candidates. Fifteen candidates represented registered political parties, while the majority stood as independents.

Campaigning was active and competitive. Candidates had a broad range of opportunities to engage with voters through hustings, community events, media appearances and direct voter contact. Around 30 hustings were organised across the Island. Campaign discussions focused primarily on housing, healthcare, clean energy and issues affecting younger people.

Campaign finance regulations provide for the disclosure of donations and campaign expenditure and impose spending limits on candidates. Amendments introduced ahead of the election also required candidates to declare relevant interests, providing voters with additional information regarding potential financial, professional and organisational interests.

Women's participation as candidates increased compared with the previous election, with 26 women standing as candidates, however only eight were elected in comparison to ten in the previous election. Women were also strongly represented among polling station staff, although their representation among Deputy Returning Officers remained limited.

The Isle of Man continued to expand the use of electoral technology through the introduction of an electronic voter lists in polling stations island-wide. The system enabled voters to cast their ballot at any polling station within their constituency and operated effectively, with only one technical issue reported and subsequently resolved.

Election day was orderly and professionally managed. CPA BIMR observers visited polling stations across all constituencies, including observing opening procedures and the count in selected constituencies. Voting procedures were generally followed, polling staff performed their duties professionally, and accessibility measures showed improvement compared with previous elections. Further efforts may assist in addressing accessibility challenges at some polling locations.



The counting process was conducted transparently and efficiently. New counting tools were introduced in four constituencies. Results were produced without any recounts island-wide. While some procedural inconsistencies were noted between locations, these did not affect the overall integrity of the process and may benefit from further training and guidance in future elections.

The legal framework provides mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes through election petitions heard by the High Court. The Mission was not made aware of any recent election challenges brought through this process.

Overall, the 2026 House of Keys General Election was administered professionally and transparently. The election benefited from constructive cooperation among election stakeholders, broad opportunities for participation, and a competitive field of candidates. At the same time, a number of stakeholders identified areas that may benefit from further support, including elements of the legal framework, voter registration arrangements, training around electoral procedures and reinforced accessibility measures, with a view to supporting the continued development of democratic processes in the Isle of Man.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The Isle of Man is a self-governing Crown Dependency located in the Irish Sea between Great Britain and Ireland. His Majesty the King, as Lord of Mann, is Head of State and is represented on the Island by the Lieutenant Governor. The Crown retains ultimate responsibility for the good government of the Island and acts on the advice of Ministers of the United Kingdom Government.

The Isle of Man's parliament, Tynwald, comprises three chambers. The House of Keys is directly elected and consists of 24 Members, while the Legislative Council comprises 11 members, including three ex officio members (President, the Bishop of Sodor and Man, and the Attorney General) and eight members elected by the House of Keys. Together, the House of Keys and the Legislative Council constitute Tynwald Court, the third chamber. The President of Tynwald presides over sittings of both Tynwald Court and the Legislative Council.

The Chief Minister is nominated by the House of Keys and appointed by the Lieutenant Governor. The Chief Minister and the ministers selected form the Council of Ministers, the Manx Cabinet, which constitutes the Government of the Isle of Man. Following the 2021 general election, a high number of changes were made to ministerial portfolios and government composition. The cabinet formed after the September 2021 general elections has seen numerous reshuffles – with 29 changes according to some media reports – which contributed to perceptions reported to the Mission of the government lacking coherence and consistency in policymaking.



Political parties continue to play a limited role in the Isle of Man's political landscape, which remains predominantly candidate-centred and non-partisan. Only three seats in the outgoing House of Keys were held by members of political parties – two by the Manx Labour Party and one by the Liberal Vannin Party. Two new parties registered before the 2026 general election – Change Movement Limited (or “Change”) and Transform Isle of Man. Together with the Isle of Man Green Party, which also contested the previous election, this brought the total number of registered political parties to five. As in the past, the vast majority of candidates in the 2026 general election were independents.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The anchor of electoral law is the Elections (Keys and Local Authorities) Act 2020, amended in April 2026. Adopted ahead of the previous electoral cycle, the Elections Act covers the registration and conduct of political parties, the administration of elections, campaign financing, corrupt and illegal practices, election petitions, and elements of MHK status as well as their recall. New provisions introduced ahead of these elections included requiring declarations of relevant interests to be made by candidates, allowing the processing of postal votes to begin before the polls close, and providing for one official pre-election meeting per constituency.

Candidate nomination and polling procedures are detailed in the Elections (Keys) Regulations 2021. Other relevant legislation includes the Registration of Electors Act 2020, which governs the process of voter registration, and the Equality Act 2017, which contains guarantees of non-discrimination in the provision of public services and the exercise of public functions. The Human Rights Act 2001 incorporated the European Convention of Human Rights into the Isle of Man legal order.

The electoral legal framework provides a solid foundation and supports the holding of democratic elections. However, it would benefit from a review to ensure that it remains in step with the evolution of the electoral environment and practices. For example, the Elections Act and the Regulations offer little guidance on election campaigns, including in traditional and social media; regulation of election administration does not appear to contemplate its open recruitment. In the Mission's interviews, several stakeholders questioned the extent to which the current electoral legal framework is fit for purpose.

ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND BOUNDARY DELIMITATION

Members of the House of Keys are elected from 12 constituencies, each returning two members. The Isle of Man uses a bloc vote system, whereby electors may cast as many votes as there are seats to be filled in their constituency. There is no ranking of candidates, the candidates receiving the highest number of votes are elected.



An Electoral Commission appointed by the Governor in Council in September 2022, in keeping with provisions of the Elections Act 2020, was mandated to review the number and boundaries of constituencies for the House of Keys. The Commission recommended to retain the same number of constituencies but suggested boundary changes, in order to preserve the principle of equal suffrage, and proposed for numerical targets of constituency size variance to be included in the law. Specifically, the Commission proposed that the variance does not exceed 15 per cent, as recommended by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission. The Electoral Commission's report does note that other considerations are important for the quality of democratic representation, including community identity and geographic ties, which are pertinent for future decision-making in this sphere.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Elections are administered by the Crown and Elections team within the Cabinet Office. The team is overseen by the CEO of the Isle of Man Government, who for the purposes of the election acts as the Returning Officer. At constituency level, Deputy Returning Officers (DROs) are responsible for key aspects of election administration, including nominations, polling and counting.

The role of DRO is temporary and carries significant operational responsibilities. Recruiting individuals to undertake the role has reportedly been a longstanding challenge. For the 2026 election, responsibility for postal voting administration was transferred from DROs to the Cabinet Office in order to reduce administrative burdens.

The Crown and Elections team consists of six staff members. Throughout the electoral period, the team provided operational support and guidance to DROs and Captains of the Parishes, including through training activities, manuals and procedural guidance.

The election was administered within legal deadlines and according to established procedures. The Mission noted a high level of cooperation among election stakeholders, including the Crown and Elections team, Deputy Returning Officers, Captains of the Parishes, candidates and polling staff.

SPECIAL VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

Postal and proxy voting provided important alternatives to casting ballots in a polling station. Proxy voting is available by law to any eligible elector who is unable to vote in person or by post. Applications were made to the Crown and Elections officers, who had to verify that this requirement was met and the voter could not vote otherwise. In total, 186 proxies were issued and 179 proxy votes cast.

A postal ballot is available "on demand" to any eligible voter who wishes to vote by post, and its use is increasing. The Crown and Elections office handled applications and sent



out postal voting packs, while the votes were mailed back to the deputy returning officer for each constituency. Over 2,400 postal ballots were dispatched to voters.

Postal votes could also be returned by hand to any polling station within the constituency during polling hours. Amendments adopted ahead of these elections allowed district returning officers to begin processing postal votes before the polls closed, which helped avoid delays of the vote count.

Starting from late afternoon on polling day, counting officers in each constituency opened return envelopes and compared the personal identifiers contained in the voter's declaration (signature and date of birth) to the ones in the postal vote application. Postal votes admitted to the vote count were anonymised (separated from the declarations of identity) and cast into a sealed ballot box, which was opened together with other ballot boxes during the vote count.

THE RIGHT TO VOTE AND VOTER REGISTRATION

The right to vote is granted broadly in the Isle of Man. Anyone who has, during the whole of the preceding 12 months, had his or her usual place of residence in the Island and is not subject to any legal incapacity to vote, is entitled to enrol on the voter register. The right to vote is granted from 16 years of age. There are no citizenship-based restrictions on suffrage and no restrictions for prisoners, unless specifically imposed as part of their sentence.

Voter registration is active and compulsory. A total of 66,146 electors were registered for the 2026 election, compared with 64,744 in 2021. Registration was available online and through paper-based applications.

Some voters reportedly found the online registration system difficult to navigate. During the campaign, a number of candidates raised concerns regarding the accuracy of entries on the electoral register, particularly in relation to addresses and subsequent amendments to voter records.

THE RIGHT TO STAND FOR ELECTION AND CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

A person may stand as a candidate for the House of Keys if he or she has attained the age of 18; is either a British citizen or has the right to remain on the Isle of Man, within the meaning of immigration law; has been ordinarily resident on the Island for at least five years, continuously or cumulatively; is a registered voter; and is not subject to any legal disqualifications. The latter include being an office-holder under any government outside the Island or an undischarged bankrupt, serving a custodial sentence, and having been convicted of an offence involving a custodial sentence of at least three months within the preceding five years.



A total of 82 candidates registered for the election, including 15 representing registered political parties. The remaining candidates stood as independents.

The nomination process was conducted between 19 and 26 August. The process was completed without any candidate rejections or formal complaints. Candidates and election officials generally reported that sufficient time was available to complete nomination procedures and verification requirements.

Candidates met by the Mission highlighted the guidance and assistance provided by Deputy Returning Officers during the registration process.

THE CAMPAIGN

The campaign provided candidates with numerous opportunities to engage with voters. Around 30 hustings were organised through cooperation between the Crown and Elections team and the Captains of the Parishes. Many events were recorded and made available online.

Candidates also participated in meetings organised by schools, professional organisations and media outlets. A range of media organisations facilitated debates, interviews and candidate presentations.

Interlocutors reported that direct engagement between candidates and voters remains a central feature of campaigning in the Isle of Man, with door-to-door canvassing continuing to play an important role. Social media was also reported to be of growing importance within campaign strategies.

Campaign discussions focused primarily on housing, healthcare, clean energy and issues affecting younger people. Stakeholders also referred to broader concerns regarding public services and economic pressures.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance regulations provide for transparency of donations and spending. The law requires candidates to disclose any donations they received above the minimum threshold (GBP 50) by publishing a declaration no later than five days before polling day. This includes in-kind donations through the use of goods and services. Anonymous donations are prohibited. Candidates must also declare any donations they make to any person resident in their constituency. There are no donation limits, but campaign spending is capped. Candidates interviewed by the Mission opined that campaign donations are rare in practice and most MHK contenders fund their campaigns themselves.

Campaign spending limits take into account constituency size and consist of the base amount (GBP 2,150) plus 54 pence for each registered voter. All candidates are required



to submit to the elections office two declarations of expenses – one no earlier than ten days before election day and a subsequent one within 35 days after the election. The period covered by the declaration of expenses commences one year before the election date. These declarations must be made available for public inspection. If a complaint is made substantiating that the candidate's campaign expenses exceeded the permissible amount, the candidate may be required to produce invoices, receipts and other proof of election expenses.

Amendments adopted ahead of these elections introduced a requirement for prospective candidates to also declare their "relevant interest", defined as any interest which may affect, or reasonably be perceived as affecting, a candidate's judgment on the way in which the candidate may carry out his or her duties if elected. The definition specifically includes various business and financial holdings, sponsorships, directorships, and trade union and professional memberships.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Twenty-six women stood as candidates, compared with sixteen in the previous election. Eight women were elected, compared with ten in 2021.

Women were also well represented among polling station staff observed by the Mission. However, only two women served as Deputy Returning Officers.

ELECTION DAY OBSERVATION

Election day was orderly and professionally managed. The CPA BIMR Mission observed 37 polling stations across all constituencies, including opening procedures and counting activities in selected constituencies.

Observers assessed polling station operations positively. Election officials generally followed procedures, and candidates or their representatives were present outside polling stations observed by the Mission.

Accessibility arrangements showed improvement compared with previous elections. However, some locations may benefit from further measures to improve accessibility outside polling premises.

TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

The electronic electoral register, first piloted in 2021 in a constituency in Douglas, was expanded to all constituencies for the 2026 election. The system enabled voters to cast their ballot at any polling station within their constituency.

Polling station staff used both electronic and paper versions of the register. Only one brief technical issue associated with the system was reported to the Mission.



The expanded system of the electronic voter lists at polling stations provides greater flexibility for voters and has the potential to improve accessibility by allowing electors to choose the polling station within their constituency that best meets their needs.

COUNTING AND RESULTS

For the first time, Deputy Returning Officers were given the option of using a new counting board known as the "Kangaroo board". Four constituencies opted to use the system.

The count commenced on time and was conducted transparently. No recounts took place. The Mission noted that vote reconciliation procedures were generally undertaken in accordance with recommendations made following the 2021 election.

Observers reported some inconsistencies in the implementation of procedures across polling and counting locations. While these did not affect the integrity of the process, they indicate the importance of continued training and guidance for election officials.

ELECTORAL DISPUTES

An election may be challenged solely by way of a petition brought by an eligible voter or an unsuccessful candidate. The petition may be brought against a deputy returning officer or an elected candidate and complain against the lack of an election return, an undue return, or an undue election.

An election petition is a private suit and all its costs are borne by the parties. The petitioner is required to deposit a security payment in the amount directed by the court.

Election petitions fall under the jurisdiction of the High Court, whose president has the title of the First Deemster and the Clerk of Rolls. The Attorney General, whose mandate includes investigation and prosecution of electoral offences, must attend the trial of every election petition. None of the Mission's interlocutors could recall any challenges to elections by way of an election petition in recent history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The CPA BIMR Election Observation Mission wishes to express its gratitude to all on the Isle of Man who supported the work of the Mission, including election officials, candidates and civil society organisations. We are also grateful to our team of observers and analysts for taking part.

CPA BIMR ELECTION OBSERVATION SERVICES:

The first objective of the BIMR Strategy is to strengthen parliaments and the skills of their members. As part of this work, CPA BIMR facilitates election observations when invited to do so.

For more information about these services, please contact the CPA BIMR Secretariat at:
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