

## MP calls for change in electoral law

Mark has called for a change in the law following the problems at May's general election count.

His Milton Keynes North constituency was affected by large queues, late counting and mixed-up ballot boxes, spoke in a debate in Westminster Hall yesterday (Wednesday).

It was one of the 11 constituencies which formed the focus of an investigation by the Electoral Commission.

During the debate, Mr Lancaster drew attention to the Newport Pagnell polling station which saw ballots for two separate wards in the council election mixed up.

He went on to outline the delay in counting votes, which began at 4.18am " when Electoral Commission guidelines stipulate a 2am start.

This was due not to increased turnout but to the local election taking place on the same evening, according to Mr Lancaster.

In fact, turnout was actually 62.8 per cent " down on the 64 per cent in 2005 and far less than the 81 per cent of 1992.

"Given the relatively small geographical area covered by Milton Keynes unitary authority, which is coterminous with the two parliamentary seats, the general view was that that was an unnecessarily long period to wait," he said.

The most significant problem, which ought to prompt a change in the law, was the large queues that formed at polling stations on the evening of May 6.

Acting returning officer John Moffoot, whose actions Mr Lancaster supported, was forced to defy Electoral Commission rules and suspend the 10pm voting cut off point in Wyvern School, Wolverton, where more than 150 people were still queuing.

He said: "Given the complications experienced in Milton Keynes, I should be grateful to know whether the Minister believes there is reason for concern and the potential for the same problems to occur again next May, when some polling stations may have to deal with three separate elections on the same day."

Specifically he asked for a review of the 10pm cut-off so people will not be turned away in future, adding: "I fear similar occurrences in future elections if the problem is not addressed."

Mr Lancaster was joined by MP for Milton Keynes South, Iain Stewart, who outlined the issues with individual voters' registration.