

VERDICT 2017

Western
TELEGRAPH

Close call
for Crabb
as he holds
onto seat

FOLLOWING his narrow victory, Conservative Stephen Crabb spoke to reporter Joanna Sayers. He said: “The Conservative vote went up again in Pembrokeshire, it’s just the Labour vote went up also by a very large amount.” “Everybody expected Brexit to be to be the overarching issue, and it was the backdrop – the very reason why this election was called. But as a politician you don’t get to call the issues on which voters care about.

“What was coming across on the doorstep wasn’t just the questions about Brexit and how that might affect Pembrokeshire, it was questions about how people might pay for long-term social care, questions about jobs for young families, levels of wages.

“I think we had some strong policies and strong track record in some of those areas, but as a national campaign I really don’t think we built enough of that in.”

Mr Crabb, who briefly held the position of Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, was asked whether concerns about his party’s approach to disability benefits and work capability assessments had pushed people to vote for Labour.

“It wasn’t a big issue on the doorsteps, but clearly there are families who have been affected,” he said.

“We’ve helped a lot of individual families with their personal independent payments (PIP) through our constituency casework, and many people on the doorstep thanked us for the assistance that my office gave them.”

He said it was instead a “general mood” up and down the country that the Conservative’s national campaign was not speaking directly to young people.

“Jeremy Corbyn was speaking in a tone of voice that connected with them, it was more conversational, and also the promises that he was making around tuition fees, we still don’t know how they would ever be paid for, but clearly there were a lot of young people that liked that,” he said.

Pressed on whether he still had faith in Theresa May to lead the government over the next term, Mr Crabb said: “We’ll see what results come out from tonight.

“What I think we should avoid doing is making any knee-jerk changes.”

Win for Cons at

PEMBROKESHIRE went to the polls last week, with more than 84,000 people turning out to have their say on who runs the country.

Reporters Joanna Sayers and Anwen Baldwin were at the count at Withybush Showground overnight, keeping the county up-to-date with results and news from Pembrokeshire, and an insight into the national picture.

Tensions ran high this election campaign, with some candidates complaining of unprecedented levels of animosity as they canvassed for votes.

The turnout for Preseli-Pembrokeshire was 72.23 percent. In 2015, it was 70.8 per cent.

There was a 72.22 per cent turnout for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, compared to 2015’s total of 69.98 per cent.

In Preseli-Pembrokeshire 42,259 people cast their vote and in Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire there were 42,294 votes cast.

The Preseli-Pembs turnout figures were made up of 10,057 postal votes and 32,202 cast in person. Fifty-nine of these votes were spoilt, either by voting for too many candidates or voided for uncertainty. While in the south there were 10,770 postal votes and 31,524 went to the polls in person. Sixty-five were spoilt.

After the polls closed at 10pm the first box of votes to arrive at the count was from Meadow Park Day Centre polling station in Haverfordwest, closely followed at around 10.15pm by Carmarthen-shire West and Pembrokeshire’s South’s first box from the Rhos Community Hall.

Before the results were announced there was a ‘bundle flick’ of the Preseli-Pembrokeshire ballots was performed by count staff.

This is not a re-count, but instead will see the bundles of papers flicked through in front of candidates, to show that ballots are in the correct bundles.

Simon Hart held onto the seat, but his majority was halved from 6,054 in 2015 to just over 3,000.

Mr Hart used his victory speech to praise supporters, but said acts of vandalism and ‘threats’ on social media had overshadowed the campaign.

He said he never thought he would fight a campaign during which ‘swastikas were daubed on his election signs’.

“I have never been comfortable with negative campaigning, and I



At the election count, with returning officer Ian Westley. PICTURE: Western Telegraph

think social media descended into the most pernicious insults, and boards on private property were vandalised,” he said.

“That’s not the way we do things in west Wales. The potential leaders have a responsibility in making sure their enthusiastic, and often active supporters, observe some common decency.

“People will not stand for parliamentary positions if all they are going to have is a bucket full of nonsense.”

Mr Hart added that despite a ‘bitter and acrimonious campaign’ he would return to being a ‘positive, forward thinking’ person and continue to build on his work.

He added: “I’m obviously very pleased to have won, and to have increased my vote.

“But it has not been a particularly edifying campaign. The Conservative campaign overall did not excite and inspire.”

Labour’s runner-up for the seat, Marc Tierney, said: “I’m obviously disappointed, but in the space of two years Labour’s share of the vote has increased, and means there are a growing number of

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Pembrokeshire polls



Theresa May’s snap general election aimed to solidify support for Brexit, but tactical voting saw her party only just keep control in Pembrokeshire

good position for Plaid to build on moving forward.

“I was also pleased to be the only woman standing. We need to work to see more women, and particularly more young women, in politics.”

Stephen Crabb held on to Preseli-Pembrokeshire seat by just 314 votes, slashing his majority of nearly 5,000 in 2015.

Talking to the *Western Telegraph*, Stephen Crabb said he had been on the doorstep day-in-day out, rain or shine, throughout the short campaign duration.

He said he “genuinely did not expect the result to be that close” between himself and Philippa Thompson of Labour, but that it lined up with a similar pattern across the country.

“In the last 24 to 48 hours there’s been a shift in mood,” he said. “I think clearly younger people have been motivated to turn out at this election in the way that they didn’t at the Brexit referendum, and in a way they haven’t at previous general elections.

“They clearly like the way Jeremy Corbyn has spoken to them,

some of the messages he has been speaking about.”

Labour candidate Philippa Thompson paid tribute to her team and her fellow candidates for a ‘good clean fight’, and congratulated Mr Crabb on winning the seat.

She said: “It’s been an amazing experience, and I feel so privileged to have been selected, and to stand.

“I would like to thank everyone in Preseli-Pembrokeshire who put their faith in me.”

Liberal Democrat Bob Kilmister announced he was taking a break from the campaign trail following the election result.

He said: “I am going to go onto something with a day job.”

During the count he admitted he was not feeling confident about the night’s result.

He said: “It was evident throughout the campaign that this was a two-party race. There has been a lot of tactical voting here to try and defeat the Tories.

“There needed to be an issue on a second referendum for Brexit, but it seems that people don’t want it.”

Preseli-Pembrokeshire results:
Conservative HOLD
Susan Bale, UKIP: 850
Stephen Crabb, Conservative: 18,302
Bob Kilmister, Liberal Democrat: 1,106
Rodney Maile, New Society of Worth: 31
Chris Overton, Save Withybush Hospital: 1,209
Philippa Thompson, Labour: 17,988
Llyr Williams, Plaid Cymru: 2,711
Carmarthen West and Pembrokeshire South result:
Conservative HOLD
Alistair Cameron, Liberal Democrat: 956
Phil Edwards, UKIP: 905
Simon Hart, Conservative: 19,771
Abi Thomas, Plaid Cymru: 3,933
Marc Tierney, Labour: 16,661

‘Voting system needs to change’

AFTER Labour lost by just a few hundred votes in Preseli-Pembrokeshire, accusations of ‘vote-splitting’ were directed at other candidates.

Plaid Cymru’s Llyr Williams defended his decision to stand, as did independent Chris Overton, while Liberal Democrat Bob Kilmister highlighted his belief that the electoral system needs reform.

“It was odd seeing many Plaid supporters tactically voting Labour, turning up to someone’s house who usually has a Plaid poster and seeing a Labour one up and thinking...eh?”

“However, on seeing the result it was obvious that they helped turn things around in this constituency. I don’t think any of us ever expected it to be that close.

“Going forward, we need to have a single transferable vote system where people vote by preference. Critics will argue it removes the local element of a politician, but I’d argue that the local element has been removed now by the electorate.”

Bob Kilmister added: “I think Stephen Crabb won because the majority of postal votes were cast before the Tory manifesto was launched. It was clear at the count that Philippa won the votes cast on the day by between 1% and 2%.

“Secondly Labour needs to embrace proportional representation (PR). Officially they do not. Last night saw a lot of tactical voting across the whole UK. Often that was a vote against something, rather than a positive vote for something. I want people to be able to cast their vote in a positive manner. PR is the only way that can happen.”

Chris Overton said: “I am not a politician, just an interested person who cares about the NHS. I have commented that the only way a progressive alliance could win is if they start talking now and if some party rules are changed.”