

Makerfield by-election: Survation's initial estimate

15 May 2026

In brief

Ahead of any forthcoming Makerfield constituency polls, Survation has produced a pre-poll forecast of the by-election under two scenarios: Labour fielding a candidate other than Andy Burnham, and Labour fielding Burnham himself.

The forecast finds that Burnham's candidacy is decisive. Without him, Reform UK win Makerfield by a wide margin. With him, the race becomes competitive and Labour is the more likely winner.

Headline findings

With a Labour candidate other than Burnham, and based on current national level polling, Reform UK are likely to take the seat on 53 per cent to Labour's 27 per cent.

With Burnham as the Labour candidate, the race tightens to Labour 45 per cent and Reform 42 per cent. Labour holds the seat in roughly two thirds of simulated outcomes from our model.

Scenario summary

Scenario	Labour	Reform UK	Probability Lab wins
Labour candidate other than Burnham	27%	53%	0%
Burnham as Labour candidate	45%	42%	67%

Central estimates from 10,000 simulations per scenario. Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Green vote shares each hold in the 3 to 6 per cent range across both scenarios.

Where the Burnham vote comes from

In our [Gorton and Denton post-by-election poll](#) we asked respondents to confirm how they actually voted at February's by-election and how they would have voted had Andy Burnham had been the Labour candidate. The difference between the two answers, broken down by how they voted at the 2024 general election, shows clearly which voters Burnham wins back for Labour.

How they voted in GE 2024	Labour actual	Labour with Burnham	Boost
Voted Labour	47%	65%	+18 pp
Voted Reform	0%	19%	+19 pp
Voted Green	19%	38%	+19 pp

Voted another party	9%	45%	+36 pp
Did not vote in 2024	19%	40%	+21 pp

The Burnham boost comes from three sources in roughly equal measure: 2024 Labour voters who would have stayed loyal rather than switching elsewhere, 2024 Reform voters who would have switched back to Labour with Burnham on the ballot, and 2024 non-voters who would have turned out for him.

How the forecast was produced

The forecast combines three independent sources of information about Makerfield: the seat's 2024 general election result, the Wigan council elections held earlier this month (in which Reform UK won seven of the eight wards that make up Makerfield), and a demographic estimate built from Census 2021 data on the constituency.

To estimate what difference Burnham would make as the Labour candidate, we drew on Survation's post-by-election poll in Gorton and Denton from February 2026. In that poll respondents were asked how they had actually voted in the by-election, and then how they would have voted if Burnham had been on the ballot for Labour. Because Makerfield's electorate is older, more White British and more strongly Leave-voting than Gorton and Denton's, the Burnham effect was re-weighted to reflect the kinds of voters who actually live in Makerfield, rather than applied wholesale.

The forecast was then run 10,000 times under each scenario to produce both a central estimate and a range of plausible outcomes.

What this is and isn't

This is a pre-poll forecast, not a poll. It draws on official election results, Census data and survey data from a comparable by-election. An actual constituency poll is the only source that can produce headline polling numbers, and this forecast is the educated baseline against which they should be read. By-elections are volatile, and forecasts of this kind can move significantly when actual fieldwork data arrive. This is not a definitive prediction.

Sources

Election data sourced from the UK Parliament Election Results service and the House of Commons Library. Demographic data from the Office for National Statistics, Census 2021, aggregated to 2024 Westminster boundaries. Council election results from the LEAP archive (Andrew Teale) and Wigan Council. Gorton and Denton by-election data are from Survation's post-election poll, fieldwork 9 March 2026, sample 501 respondents.