



September 2006.

Local Election Candidate Survey, 2006

Thank you very much for returning our questionnaire and we would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation of the time and effort taken by you in the completion of our questions and your supplementary comments.

We enclose the initial statistical summary of findings from the 1,183 questionnaires that were returned. This is a very pleasing response from the 2,800 questionnaires posted in May and means that we can report on the views of many of the candidates for the London and metropolitan boroughs, shire district and unitary authorities' elections in 2006. We hope you will find that it is interesting reading. The information contained in this summary is for your personal attention only and should not be used for other purposes.

We wish to protect the anonymity of all who assisted in this project and we ask that prior permission is sought from the Elections Centre before any of this information is passed on to a third party.

Thanks to the generous assistance from each and every one of you this survey has been valuable in collecting the views and opinions of many of this year's candidates. Thank you once again and we wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Shears.

LOCAL ELECTION CANDIDATE SURVEY, 2006
Summary of the questionnaire responses.

This summary presents the results of the initial analysis. The main aim of this survey was to ask the local candidates about their reasons for standing for local council elections and their personal opinions about the experience.

We sent a questionnaire to a sample of candidates nominated for these elections in England. We aimed to contact approximately one fifth of all candidates.

The response rate was good and most importantly we have received replies from 1,183 candidates who are closely representative of the gender and party profile of all candidates this year.

The proportion of men and women who responded was 67% men and 33% women and that closely reflected the proportion of men and women who stood in England this year. The respondents who were Independent candidates and those who represented the main parties were almost the same as the overall national proportion:

- Actual Conservative candidates in England, 28% - survey respondents, 29%.
- Actual Labour candidates in England, 27% - survey respondents 28%.
- Actual Liberal Democrat candidates in England, 24% - survey respondents, 24%.

We also had a good response from candidates who represented the smaller parties and those who were Independent.

- Green Party candidates in England, 9% - survey respondents, 8%
- UKIP candidates in England, 2% - survey respondents, 3%
- BNP candidates in England, 2% - survey respondents, 3%
- The Independent candidates in England, 14% - survey respondents, 14%

The first section of the questionnaire asked about the candidates' previous experience in political and community involvement. The responses showed that the majority of candidates had participated previously in local elections in addition to being involved otherwise in local political and community affairs.

- 68% had been candidates previously.
- 32% had been elected previously.
- 44% had held a position of responsibility in a local community group.
- 39% had held office in a charitable organisation.
- 51% had held a local party office.

We were particularly interested to find out what initially motivated people to stand for election. Question Two asked candidates to select up to three reasons and rank them in importance from this list.

- I wanted to support my party
- I was asked to stand
- Dissatisfaction with previous councillor(s)
- I wanted to do something to improve this area for the residents
- I knew people on the council who encouraged me to stand
- I felt very strongly about particular issues / or a single issue and wanted to do something

As expected many candidates (63%), cited belonging to a political party and wishing to support it was the principal motive for candidacy. Being asked to stand was very important and selected by 58% of respondents. A desire to improve their local area was also important for 55% of respondents.

Alongside an individual's decision to stand for election, the strong support from party members, family and friends was clearly important for candidates when they had decided to stand for the first time.

- 94% received positive encouragement from party members
- 83% received positive encouragement from party agents
- 76% received positive encouragement from personal friends
- 60% received positive encouragement from their spouse or partner
- 66% received positive encouragement from other family members

When asked about the initial decision to put themselves forward for selection, *less than one in five* candidates stated that the decision to stand was entirely their own. *Almost half* said the decision to seek selection was a consequence of being approached or encouraged by others. *A further third* said it was a combination of a personal decision assisted by supporters.

In an attempt to gauge the level of competition within the parties for selection, the candidates for registered political parties were asked if there had been more people in their party seeking selection than there were available seats.

- 25% of candidates said there had been more people seeking selection for their party in the ward than there were available seats.
- 75% had been the only candidate seeking selection for the seat.

At first glance, that appeared to be a surprisingly high percentage, with three quarters of candidates experiencing no opposition for a seat. A closer examination of the candidates' own explanation for being selected revealed the presence of many long-standing party candidates with good records who were not challenged at the re-selection stage.

Only 7% of respondents had applied for more than one seat this year.

The party candidates were asked if they knew why they had been selected:

In your opinion why were you were selected to contest this seat?

	1 st reason	2 nd reason
Incumbent		
Previously a councillor		
Local resident		
Likely to win this seat		
Good reputation		
The only volunteer		
Prepared to stand as paper candidate		

- 39% thought that the most likely explanation for selection was having a good reputation
- 33% were prepared to stand as "paper candidates"
- 31% said being a local resident was important
- 26% said I was the only volunteer
- 18% selected "likely to win seat"

Respondents also felt that previous community involvement, being known to members of the selection panel and previous political experience were all factors associated with their successful selection.

The candidates were asked how confident they had been of election success when standing this year:

On a scale of 1-10, what was your estimation of the probability of winning? (1 being "highly improbable" and 10 "highly probable").

Less than 10% of the respondents ranked their chances of winning this election as "highly probable" and a further 18% selected "8" or "9". Over a half believed success was improbable, rating their chances between 1 and 4. Confidence about winning was predictably associated with those who had been councillors previously, 70% of those who rated their chances of winning at "10" and 68% who selected "9" had been elected before.

Most of these candidates entered the campaign expecting election defeat but nevertheless, many were involved with the campaign. More than half visited households and nearly three quarters produced and delivered campaign leaflets.

A high proportion of those respondents, 83%, thought that their leaflets had been delivered to all addresses in their ward with assistance from party members or friends.

The traditional leaflets continue to be the most widespread method used by candidates to inform the residents about themselves and their parties.

A high percentage of candidates, 83% enjoyed campaigning, of those who stood as paper candidates many commented that they had actively helped in more winnable seats for their party. A very high percentage of candidates, 90% said they would be prepared to stand again.

The next sections of the questionnaire moved away from the experiences of the individual candidates standing for election and onto exploring their opinions about some wider issues concerning local government. Firstly, candidates were asked if they agreed or disagreed with possible reasons why relatively few people stand for local elections.

- 92% said there is a general lack of public knowledge about local government
- 76% said being a councillor is too time-consuming.
- 73% said most people are not interested in local government.

The candidates were asked if they thought there should be more effort to attract a greater diversity of people to serve as councillors. In principle many candidates supported the objective to increase diversity among elected members. More than half said that there should be more women among councillors; almost two thirds believed there should be more councillors from ethnic minority backgrounds. Over 70% would like to see more young people serving as councillors. Over 60% thought that a greater social diversity would improve the public image of councils.

However, there was little support for the positive action initiatives that have been tried to attract more women to stand. All women shortlists were approved by only 8% of candidates, 72% strongly disapproved or disapproved of all women shortlists. Party quotas for women were approved by 26% of candidates and 56% strongly disapproved or disapproved of quotas.

A high proportion of respondents (87%) thought that local authorities should provide more public information. However, only 28% said local authorities should advertise for candidates. Most respondents thought that the political parties should continue to have the main responsibility for candidate recruitment. Less than half (43%), believed that councillors should recruit candidates.

Those candidates who had previously been councillors were asked how many hours a week they spent on council business. On average, it seems councillors spent 25 hours per week. Over 10% said they spent over 30 hours.

Most councillors were contacted by residents more than once a week. Telephone calls were most popular followed closely by letters and e-mails. Many councillors attended community events and party meetings more than once a week.