

2010 Survey of Local Election Candidates

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Introduction

The IDeA has assisted with the annual local election candidates' survey since 2007. The survey offers an important means of identifying the kinds of people that stand for local office, their background, their motivation, their support network and importantly, their sense of achievement after the election is over – win or lose! Local government is often criticised because it is seen as the preserve of certain social groups at the exclusion of others and broadening participation continues to be discussed.

Because the candidates' survey has been conducted annually it is possible to observe patterns, to identify trends and to give a more considered assessment of the health of competition for seats. Election candidates are often vital members of their local parties, the activists without whom there would be little engagement with the electorate. Their views, therefore, are essential to inform our understanding of attitudes about the need to recruit younger people, more women and more people from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities. Some progress has been made in recent years, most notably in the London boroughs where some local party organisations successfully recruited minority ethnic candidates for winnable seats but more progress of this kind is needed and engaging with local party members in this way is essential for understanding the issues better. These surveys continue to show that local parties matter; for each candidate that stands for election after arriving at that decision independently two other candidates are actually recruited by fellow party members.

The survey evidence consistently show that the real source of under-recruitment among some social groups is the perception that the councillor's role is seen as too time-consuming, making it difficult to achieve a balance with other pressures, social and work-related. Candidates are generally agreed that affirmative action measures, for example, reserved seats for special groups, enforced early retirement for incumbents etc are not the preferred means for changing local government's social base. That leaves the recruitment process itself as the preferred option and here the national party organisations need to do more to promote best practice that is happening in various parts of the country.

This is the first survey of candidates that contested a local election on the same day that a general election was held. There is criticism that combining elections in this way devalues the local democratic process but while candidates recognised that the general election dominated the campaign they agreed generally that it helped generate more interest than is normal for a local election. Next year will see local elections fought on the same day as a national referendum so it will be fascinating to see how candidates respond.

The key findings

Among those seeking election in 2010 some 32% are women. After controlling for incumbents that stood for re-election the proportion of women falls to 28% but it appears that 37% of new candidates are women.

The youngest candidate to respond is aged just 18 years; the oldest is 90 years. The mean age for all candidates is 53 years. Women candidates are, on average, a year older than men. Younger candidates, those aged between 18-35 years, comprise 16% of the total. For first-time candidates the average age is 48 years, ten years younger on average than an incumbent facing re-election.

In London the evidence suggests that a greater proportion of older candidates stood in 2010 than did so in 2006. In other cities, where annual rather than four-yearly elections are held, the pattern is variable but there is more stability in the data from the shire and unitary authorities. Here, between 10-13% of candidates are in the youngest age category while the proportion in the oldest age category increased in 2010.

Overall, 88% of candidates in 2010 are of white ethnic origin. Respondents describing their ethnic origin as Asian British account for 1.3% of the total; overall 4.3% of candidates contesting in 2010 have their ethnic origin in the Indian sub-continent. . The recruitment of non-white candidates varies considerably across different types of local authority; London boroughs saw 14% non-white candidates but the remaining authorities saw just 3% of candidates belong to this category.

Only 7% have no formal educational qualifications while a further 13% have obtained a GCSE or its equivalent. One in five has an A-level or equivalent qualification. Overall one in three of candidates contesting in 2010 have a university degree with a further 26% completing additional studies towards a higher degree.

Retired people account for 28% of candidates. The full-time employed are the largest grouping (33%) with a further 11% in part-time paid employment. The self-employed comprise a significant fraction, almost a seventh, of the whole.

More than half, 53%, classify themselves as professional with a further 25% in some form of managerial or technical occupation. Around one in seven has some kind of skilled occupation but fewer than four in a hundred describe their occupation as unskilled.

It appears that a majority of candidates are recruited to contest wards that lie beyond their own neighbourhood. Some 52% of candidates live outside the ward that they contest, a figure that falls to just 44% amongst incumbents but rises to 49% amongst first time candidates.

Almost two-thirds of those standing hold or have held an office in their local party organisation. Among this group some 81% held office before contesting their first local election

More than four in ten, 43% of candidates, contested a local election for the first time in 2010. The remainder exhibit a broad range of campaigning experience. Over 70% of candidates produce a campaign leaflet and 61% of these deliver it to every address. Telephone canvassing is undertaken only by 28% of all candidates.

More than half, 51% overall, either agree (26%) or strongly agree (25%) that holding local and general elections simultaneously is a good idea. Only one in eight felt neutral about this issue but 36% are opposed with one in five overall strongly disagreeing with the principle of combined elections.

Candidates recognise that a combined election provides greater publicity but 54% agree/strongly agree with the statement that it made local campaigning more difficult and a similar proportion, 57%, felt that their efforts to state local party priorities were eclipsed by the parliamentary contest.

Candidates spent an average of 18 hours per week campaigning. Almost seven in ten campaigned for fellow party members in neighbouring wards. A large majority enjoy the experience and would stand again.

One in three candidates made their own initial decision to stand but 64% stood after being asked. Some 53% reported very strong encouragement from fellow party members and a further 38% state strong support. By contrast, less than 30% of candidates receive very strong support from their spouse or partner and only a quarter felt that other family members and friends had been very positive.

There is some competition for nomination; 24% faced a challenge to secure their ward nomination. Less than one in twelve sought a nomination for an additional seat. Three-quarters identify a good personal reputation as a factor in their selection while 70% believe that being a local resident is important. Four in ten mention previous service as a councillor and half their ability to win the election as selection factors.

However, 40% also believe that their selection was because they were the only volunteer while a greater proportion than this, 60%, felt selection followed after first agreeing to be a paper candidate only.

Seven in ten believe that people are discouraged from becoming a council election candidate because the role of councillor is seen as time consuming. By contrast, fewer than one in three strongly agree/agree that people are discouraged because councillors have too little power or are insufficiently paid.

A large majority desire a proactive role for local authorities in publicising the work of councillors. A clear majority believe that council websites offer an opportunity while more than half believe that information about becoming a candidate could be issued with council tax notifications. Three quarters agree that party organisations are best for recruiting new candidates.

Although around 60% support the idea of more women and more candidates from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups there is greater support, 74% for encouraging younger people to contest for local office.

The prevailing view is that insufficient women come forward for selection. Around four in ten maintain that parties don't do enough to recruit candidates from among minority ethnic groupings; a similar proportion believes that such people are

discouraged by the white councillor stereotype. More than half believe that too few minority ethnic people come forward for selection.

More than four in ten feel that younger people are under-represented because politics is not interesting but an equal number disagree with this viewpoint. Three in ten agree that younger people may lack confidence but over four in ten disagree. Six in ten feel that parties should become more proactive in recruiting younger people but most contend that the fault lies with younger people; more than three-quarters agree that they are under-represented because they don't want to be councillors.

The problem of councillors retiring after serving just a single four-year term is viewed by nine in ten of those surveyed as the result of council work becoming too time-consuming. The problem of balancing a councillor's role with work and social life is also given as a cause.

The 2010 Survey

A postal survey was issued on Thursday 6 May 2010 to 5,676 candidates randomly selected from a total of almost sixteen thousand candidates standing in a London or metropolitan borough, or a district or unitary authority election. For the London boroughs, where a larger sample was taken, one in every two candidates was selected for inclusion in the survey. For the remaining authorities a random sample of one in every four candidates was used. Candidate details, including the name, address and, where applicable, party description, were obtained from nominations published by each local authority. A total of 1,966 usable replies were received by the end of June, an overall response rate of 34.7%. The responses were compared to the range of candidates, in terms of sex and party description, and are considered to be a representative sample of all that contested in 2010. For this report the overall data are weighted to take account both of the larger sample drawn in London and also the variance in response rates across all 166 local authorities holding elections this year.

Within the report the 2010 findings are compared with those data obtained by earlier surveys. This is particularly the case when describing candidates' demographic characteristics because comparative analysis is important for gauging the success or otherwise of efforts to broaden the social base of council membership. On other occasions the report focuses on differences between those that stand but are unsuccessful, those incumbents that get re-elected and the all-important group of newly-elected councillors.

Who stood for election in 2010?

Almost a third, 32% of candidates contesting a local election seat in 2010, is a woman, continuing the broad trend of the past two decades (see Figures and Table A1). Women candidates account for 37% of Labour's total but a smaller proportion, only 32% and 28%, for the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives respectively. Among the Green party candidates women accounted for 37% of the nominations but only 16% for the British National Party. There are some minor differences when a candidate's electoral experience is taken into account. Women comprise 28% of incumbents but 37% of the first-time challengers, evidence of some growth in the proportion of women challenging for local office. .

The lowest age of a candidate is just 18 years whilst the oldest age is 90 years. The mean age for all candidates is 52.7 years. Women candidates are on average one year older than men. Only 16% of candidates are aged 35 years or younger and a further 15% fall into the second youngest age category (36-45 years). Unsurprisingly, the average age of candidates standing for the first time (48 years) is lower than that for incumbents (57 years) while the highest average age (58 years) is found among those candidates that had previously served on the council but were not currently incumbents.

Figures and also Tables A2-4 in the appendix show the age profile of candidates for three different types of local authority, London and metropolitan boroughs and those shire districts and unitary authorities that elect councils by thirds. These Tables compare exactly the same groups of local authorities over time, i.e. exclude any authorities abolished or created since 2006 or where the electoral cycle has been interrupted.

For London, where the 32 boroughs are common to both years, there appears to be an increase between 2006 and 2010 in the proportion of candidates in the two highest age categories, suggesting that attempts to recruit younger candidates generally has met with little success. The pattern is rather more irregular across the 36 metropolitan boroughs where there are additional surveys because of the electoral cycle. There is variation across years, for example, the proportion in the youngest age category ranges between 12-18% and in the oldest group from 14-21%. Interestingly, there is greater stability in those shire and unitary authority areas

that held elections during each of the years surveyed. Within the five age categories there is less of a range compared with the metropolitan boroughs (youngest age group ranges from 10-13%, for example) although the evidence from 2010 agrees with the finding from London that the proportion of candidates in the oldest age category increased.

A high proportion of all candidates (92.3%) that stood in 2010 describe their ethnic origin as white with 83.2% described as 'white British'. Irish (2.8%) and Other White comprise the remaining element in this grouping. Asian British (1.3% overall) are the largest among the non-white groupings and Asian candidates collectively comprise 4.3% of the total. The recruitment of non-white candidates varies considerably across different types of local authority; London boroughs saw 14% non-white candidates challenging but the remaining authorities had just 3% of candidates from this particular category.

Being definitive about trends in the recruitment of ethnic minorities is difficult because of the possibility of under-response from such candidates; unlike details about a candidate's sex or party label there is no reliable population estimate to compare with. Nevertheless, it can be confidently stated that recruitment of non-white candidates is much higher at London borough elections than elsewhere and also that there does not appear to be any significant increase in the numbers of such candidates being recruited generally. Compared with 2006 across London the proportion of minority ethnic candidates contesting this year is slightly down but the difference lies within the range of sampling error. In the metropolitan boroughs generally it is much lower than in the capital while it is lower still in the shire and unitary council areas. Of course, there are demographic differences between London and other areas that serve to explain some part of this variance but, after controlling for this, the under-recruitment of candidates generally from among ethnic minority communities continues.

Among the 2010 candidates only 7% overall possess no formal educational qualification and 13% succeeded in obtaining only GCSE level or its equivalent. One in five has an A-level or equivalent qualification. But in common with earlier surveys, overall one in three has a university degree with a further 26% obtaining a higher degree. Candidates in London are generally well-qualified with almost four in ten holding a first degree and a further three in ten with a higher degree. Rather more candidates in other cities has an A level as the highest educational qualification. The data from the shire districts and unitary councils confirm the differences, in terms of educational qualifications, between London and elsewhere.

The retired make up a large group in terms of occupational status, accounting for 28% of respondents. The full-time employed are the largest grouping (33%) with a further 11% in part-time paid employment. The self-employed comprise a significant fraction, almost a seventh, of the whole. Of course, these characteristics are consistent with the rise in the age profile of candidates generally in 2010. The retired make up more than a quarter of London borough candidates compared with a fifth in the 2006 study. There is quite a reduction in the full-time employed category. There is perhaps more consistency to the pattern in the metropolitan, shire district and unitary council authorities.

More than half the candidates, 53%, are in a professional occupation with a further 25% working in some form of managerial or technical role. Around one in seven has a skilled occupation but fewer than four in a hundred are unskilled. It is perhaps surprising to discover that London candidates are quite similar to their counterparts competing in other types of authorities. For example, around 25% across all types of authorities have a technical or managerial occupation. There is a small difference, however, in that while 56% of candidates in London and the shire districts are professional this falls to 50% in the metropolitan borough areas and only 40% in the unitary councils. Correspondingly, rather more candidates contesting in the shire and unitary areas have skilled/unskilled occupations.

A small majority of candidates, it appears, do not reside in the ward that they contest. Some 52% of candidates live outside the ward that they contest, a figure that falls to 44% amongst incumbents but rises to 49% amongst first time candidates. The difference between local authority types is rather small; between 53-54% are non-residents in the cities and 49-50% in the shire and unitary areas. There is a small increase across the London boroughs in the proportion of ward residents fighting as candidates in their own ward. A similar pattern is found in cities outside London but this is in contrast with less urbanised districts where more than half the seats being fought are by people within the immediate neighbourhood.

Candidate recruitment continues to be dominated by a relatively small number of social networks, dominated by local parties, community groups and charitable organisations. Almost two-thirds of those standing in 2010 hold or have held an office in their local party organisation. Among this group some 81% held this office before becoming a candidate. Similarly, almost six in ten have been involved formally with a charitable organisation, a similar proportion having a position of

responsibility with a local community group of some description. Slightly under half serve or have served on a public body of some kind, while one in three is involved with professional associations and/or trade unions. One in five has stood for parliamentary election but only 8% of this number did so before contesting a local election for the first time.

Campaigning and electoral experience

More than four in ten, 43% of candidates, contested a local election for the first time in 2010. The remaining 57% reflect a broad level of campaigning. Around one in seven has stood once before contesting again in 2010. This falls to one in twelve that have contested on three occasions while a slightly lower proportion than this has experience of four elections. Local campaigning, it appears, may become a regular activity for a sizeable minority.

Tables A1-3 also record trends in candidate recruitment over time. Roughly four in ten candidates are recruited for the first time into each London borough election cycle, rising to 47% in 2010. This contrasts with the much smaller proportion in the metropolitan borough areas although even here at the most recent election almost four in ten was contesting for the first time. That same pattern is also evident for other authorities – some 46% were first time candidates in 2010, almost twice the proportion that contested in 2007 for example. The most likely explanation for these increases outside London, where population turnover is probably a key factor, relates to the synchronous local and general elections. This event might have attracted a new cohort of candidates into the local electoral foray.

A large proportion, 27% of candidates, had been successful in winning an election at some time prior to 2010. One in sixteen had been successful on at least five occasions before 2010 while a similar fraction was elected only at the previous election.

Previous surveys reveal that candidates continue to stand, enjoy the experience of standing and would readily repeat the experience. Yet, candidates are also willing to acknowledge that their individual chances of winning the seat are negligible. Candidates are asked to consider how they felt, before the election, about their own

chance of winning; the range of options runs from zero (no chance at all) upwards to 10 (highly probable chance of success). Only one in fifteen selected the top point while a further one in twelve selected the next point down on the scale. It is a different story at the bottom end of the scale. Almost one in five, 18%, rated their own chances as zero with another 14% selecting the next category. Overall, before a single ballot was cast, almost half the candidates rated their own chance of winning at 3 or lower. While some candidates are motivated to stand by the prospect of winning for a clear majority the local electoral experience is more than just about the final vote count.

The 2010 campaign

Local election campaigns, it appears, are reluctant to embrace new technologies; the principal method for attracting votes continues to be hand-delivered leaflets. Over 70% of candidates prepare a campaign leaflet (Table 1) and 61% of these deliver it to every postal address in the ward. By contrast, telephone canvassing is undertaken by only 28%. Despite technological advances and widening patterns of computer ownership and Internet access only one in eight uses email or websites to publicise the campaign.

Table 1: Campaigning styles (%)

	Yes	No
Produce a campaign leaflet for distribution?	70.5	29.5
Deliver the campaign leaflets?	75.7	24.3
Leaflet delivered to all addresses in your ward?	60.8	39.2
Canvass by telephone?	28.1	71.9
Canvass by the internet /email?	12.5	87.5
Contact local media in order to publicise campaign?	27.8	72.2

The contents of campaign leaflets largely concentrate upon an individual's record of local community involvement but also emphasise, where appropriate, a party's local priorities. Less cited, although still mentioned by a majority of respondents, are personal qualities, such as a competency for public office, cited by 84% as either important or very important. Interestingly, fewer than this, 62% dwelt on previous political experience in their campaign literature, highlighting that for many this was their first foray into election campaigning. Unlike much general election campaign literature, local election pamphlets are not usually negative about rival parties and candidates; only 16% thought it was very important to cover rival parties.

This was the first opportunity for a local candidates' survey to access views about sharing polling day with a general election contest (Table 2). More than half, 51%, either agree (26%) or strongly agree (25%) that a combined election is a good idea. Only one in eight felt neutral about this issue but a significant fraction, 36%, took a contrary view with one in five strongly disagreeing with the practice of synchronous elections. Opinion was less sharply divided about the impact of a shared election on interest in the local election specifically. Some 35% strongly agreed with a further 40% agreeing that the public interest is heightened by a general election and that this excitement spilled over into the local campaign.

Table 2: Attitudes towards combined elections (%)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Combined elections good idea	25.2	25.8	12.5	16.2	20.2
Public interest spilled over into local elections	34.6	39.7	8.8	11.9	5.0
Campaigning locally was difficult	21.4	32.3	20.8	22.4	3.2
Local priorities eclipsed by national campaign	21.2	34.5	17.6	23.7	3.0
Difficult to recruit	3.4	5.8	20.7	49.8	20.2
Campaign had sufficient press coverage	2.0	21.4	20.9	35.9	19.8
Coverage was fair	1.8	24.4	32.6	25.3	15.9

There remains certain ambivalence in attitudes about this issue, however. While candidates acknowledge the greater public stimulus provided by the general election they also recognise that it becomes an uneven competition with their own campaign. Overall, 54% agree/strongly agree with the statement that it made local campaigning more difficult and a similar proportion, 57%, felt that their efforts to state local party priorities were eclipsed.

Did a combined election affect the supply of candidates? It did not. Overall, 80% disagree/disagree strongly with the statement that it became difficult to recruit candidates because of the general election. Interestingly, the proportions agreeing/strongly agreeing that the local campaign received sufficient coverage by the local press and that it was fair coverage, is in line with previous survey findings. The two election event does not appear to impact, adversely or otherwise, on local press coverage which most feel is neither sufficient nor impartial. More than a quarter of candidates make personal efforts to attract local media coverage for their own campaign.

During the campaign period itself candidates were active for 18 hours per week on average with Independent candidates the busiest of all. A high proportion, almost seven in ten, campaigned on behalf of fellow candidates in neighbouring wards. A large majority enjoyed their campaign experience with more than nine in ten prepared to stand again.

To stand or not to stand?

More than a third of candidates made their own initial decision to stand but 64% stood after being asked by someone else; for each candidate that is self-motivated to stand there are almost two others that contest because of being asked to do so. Six in ten from the first category do so because they feel strongly that they can make a difference. One in six of this group, however, were using a local election to launch a political career. The importance of local party networks is evident among those that decide to stand after initially being approached by a fellow party member; over 60% of these were responding to an invitation from another party member while almost three in ten were persuaded by a serving councillor.

The party connection remains vital in developing a strong support network for candidates. Some 53% reported very strong encouragement from fellow party members and a further 38% state strong support. By contrast, less than 30% receive very strong support from their spouse or partner and only a quarter feel that other family members and friends are very positive. But this does not infer that close personal contacts are negative about standing. Only one in twenty admits that a spouse/partner became negative about standing for election. Rather more, it appears, has a negative reaction from work; one in ten feels that employers are either negative or very negative.

The nomination process

A clear majority of candidates contest on behalf of a registered political party. Among these candidates almost 70% have been members for five or more years although a significant fraction, one in five, joined between one and five years before standing for election. A rather small number, 10%, joined the party within the 12 months prior to the election. There is some competition for nomination with 24% of our respondents facing competition for their ward nomination bid. Less than one in twelve sought a nomination for a seat additional to the one that they eventually contested.

Candidates are asked to identify the qualities that were instrumental in their selection. Three-quarters selected 'good reputation' while 70% believe that being a local resident is critical. About four in ten felt selection is influenced by previous service as a councillor and five in ten mention their ability to win the seat. One in three overall believe that being an incumbent councillor is important in securing the nomination. Of course, when only incumbents are considered the proportion within this group rises considerably with 86% identifying incumbency as a factor in the selection process.

It continues to be the case, however, that many candidates hold realistic views about selection. Overall, 40% of respondents claim it was because they were the only volunteer to step forward while a greater proportion, 60%, felt selection was conditional on agreement that theirs' was to be a paper campaign only. These candidates were more likely to live outside the ward, to have been the only

candidates competing for the nomination while a clear majority, two-thirds, campaigned in wards other than their own.

The wider recruitment problem

There is little doubt that negative images of the councillor's role create barriers to candidate recruitment. Seven in ten believe that people are discouraged from standing because the job is seen as time consuming (Table 3). By contrast, fewer than one in three strongly agree/agree that people are discouraged because councillors have too little power or are insufficiently paid. A majority maintain that intrusive media coverage of a person's private life may deter some from seeking office. Opinion is more or less evenly divided over whether party politics acts as a deterrent. One recommendation for broadening participation is that political parties should open up the selection process to candidates that are not party members. This is not supported generally by candidates with only 25% agreeing/strongly agreeing with this proposal.

Table 3: Recruitment Issues

	Strongly agree /agree %	Strongly disagree / disagree %
Being a councillor is too time consuming	69.7	13.6
Councillors are insufficiently paid	28.8	36.9
Political parties should recruit non-members to stand as candidates	25.2	53.7
More women councillors	61.0	7.5
More Black, Asian and other minority ethnic councillors	58.5	9.6
More younger councillors	73.5	7.0
Local authorities should provide more information about councillor's role	85.7	3.8
Responsibility of parties to recruit candidates	78.4	8.1
Local authorities should advertise for candidates	36.2	42.8
Enclose leaflet about becoming candidate with council tax notification	52.7	25.2
National advertising campaign for candidates	35.7	34.4

Some social groups, principally women, members of the Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities and younger people are currently under-represented in local councils. Although around 60% of 2010 candidates support the idea of more women and minority ethnic candidates there is greater support generally, 74%, for encouraging more younger people to contest. These findings correspond with previous surveys that found greatest support for the recruitment of younger people onto council benches. Two-thirds of candidates believe that a broader social base among councillors would improve local government's public image.

Almost nine in ten see a proactive role for local authorities in publicising the work of elected councillors as a means of widening participation. A clear majority believe that council websites offer such an opportunity while more than half believe that information about being a candidate could be inserted into council tax notifications. Three quarters agree that party organisations are best for recruiting new candidates although only 44% think that councillors themselves offer the best recruitment method.

There is ambivalence towards the idea of local authorities advertising for candidates; 36% support the idea but 43% disagrees. Similar uncertainty affects a measure for a national advertising campaign; 36% are in favour, 30% are neutral and 34% are against.

Generally, candidates believe groups are under-represented because people are reluctant to stand rather than because party selection processes are biased. Although, for example, 35% agree that local parties don't work hard enough to recruit more women, a larger proportion, 41%, take a contrary view. Prevailing opinion is that insufficient women want to be councillors – almost seven in ten concur with this explanation for the shortage of women. This reluctance does not originate from a lack of interest in politics (only 12% support this explanation) or lack of confidence (only 21% support). Women's personal circumstances are largely to blame it seems; 62% agree that women place families above political commitments. A majority agree that some women don't want to be councillors because of their dislike of the style of confrontational politics and because of the image of councils being governed largely by men.

Six in ten disagree that people from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups are under-represented because they lack interest in politics. Similarly, a general lack of confidence among ethnic minorities is not regarded as an obstacle to recruitment.

Around four in ten of our respondents maintain that parties don't do enough to recruit such candidates and a similar number believe that members of this group are discouraged because of the white councillor stereotype. However, a majority, 57% in 2010, continue to believe that simply too few people from the Black and Asian communities volunteer for selection.

A rather different set of factors are perceived to be working to deter younger people from standing; the views are sometimes polarised. More than four in ten respondents feel that younger people are under-represented because politics is not interesting to them but the same proportion takes the contrary view. Similarly, three in ten agree that a factor explaining few younger people is a lack of confidence but over four in ten disagree with this viewpoint. A majority, however, believe that whatever the cause of under-representation it is not because younger people put family before politics. Equally, the confrontational style of local politics is not regarded as an obstacle. Local government's image does appear to be important; a majority believe that younger people are reluctant to engage because of councillor stereotypes. There is also agreement from almost six in ten candidates that parties should become more proactive in recruiting this group. However, the most support is found for the suggestion that the fault lies with younger people; more than three-quarters feel that they are under-represented simply because they don't want to be councillors.

An important indicator of the health of local democracy is the unwillingness of many councillors to serve beyond a first term. This means that valuable experience is being lost when councillors decide to resign after a single four-year stint. The most popular explanation for this decision, chosen by 89% of respondents, is the belief that being a councillor in modern local government is too time-consuming. The problems of balancing a political career and family commitments and the need to request leave from work are selected by three-quarters of respondents.

By contrast, a smaller proportion, just under half, thought that the catalyst for the decision to resign is a lack of power, insufficient expenses and domination dislike of party politics. Only one in three believes that media coverage, a lack of support from local officers or the sense of job completion are the cause of early retirements. .

Conclusions

The problem of the under-representation of some social groups in our democracy continues – it is an issue that affects representative institutions at all levels, European, parliament, devolved assemblies, elected mayors as well as local councils. This report shows that the situation in 2010 continues the trend – not enough women, people of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds, and not enough younger people, are contesting and winning local elections. These research findings unfortunately show that there exist no simple solutions to this intractable problem that meet with broad support.

National leaders presenting a case for positive action measures risk alienating rank and file party activists. Affirmative action may become a quick fix that glosses over the underlying causes of under-representation. Correctly identifying those causes remains a difficult task however. Our respondents to the 2010 survey acknowledge that local parties could and should do more to recruit candidates from among some groups but the prevailing sentiment is that, for a variety of reasons, people either do not volunteer for selection or reject overtures to stand when asked by fellow party members. There are some well-publicised examples where targeted recruitment drives to attract more women, minority ethnic and younger people have been successful but institutional commitment is essential because the investment in time and resources is heavy. Overcoming stereotypes about life as a councillor and the pressures this places on people's private lives will not be achieved overnight. But, if recruitment drives by local parties aimed at diminishing the dominance of white middle-aged men are to succeed then more attention has to be given to removing the obstacles, real and perceived, that discourage certain people from standing. Some party organisation in the London boroughs are leading the way in this respect but more need to follow this example.

A start might be made by publicising the evidence that candidates overwhelmingly retain a positive feeling about their experience. The hours are long on the campaign trail and most, of course, do not succeed. If there is disappointment in falling short the candidates do not show it; indeed, a large majority are pleased to have stood and would do so again. These are not empty expressions of fake enthusiasm. Many candidates stand more than once, even though by the second and third time they are aware of the effort required. For so many to repeat the experience suggests that the benefits of standing outweigh the associated costs. A majority of candidates are asked to stand and do so for reasons that include a wish to give something back to their local community, to assist their party in a time of need or to lend their voice to

some issue or another. These positive stories of political engagement are those that should be widely circulated if the pool of candidates is to be expanded and the face of future local government altered.

Appendices

Table A1: Candidate characteristics 2010

	Count	%
Sex male	1297	68.0
female	609	32.0
<i>Total</i>	1907	100.0
Age		
<35	296	15.9
35-45	277	14.9
45-55	367	19.8
55-65	539	29.0
65+	378	20.3
<i>Total</i>	1857	100.0
Ethnicity		
White British	1558	83.4
Other white	166	8.9
Black, Asian and other minority groups	144	7.7
<i>Total</i>	1869	100.0
Education		
Higher degree	492	25.9
First degree	640	33.8
A Levels or equivalent	369	19.5
GCSEs or equivalent	254	13.4
No qualification	141	7.4
<i>Total</i>	1897	100.0
Employment		
full-time employment	634	32.9
part-time employment	212	11.0
Self employed	298	15.5
Retired	546	28.3
Other	238	12.3
<i>Total</i>	1927	100.0
Occupation		
Professional	995	53.1
Managerial/technical	467	24.9
Skilled, non manual	156	8.3
Skilled, manual	119	6.4
Partly skilled	76	4.0
Unskilled	62	3.3
<i>Total</i>	1874	100.0
Party		
Conservative	503	25.6
Labour	540	27.5
Lib Dem	486	24.7
Green	229	11.6
Other/Ind	207	10.6
<i>Total</i>	1966	100.0

Table A2: Comparing candidates contesting London Borough elections

	2006	2010
	%	%
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	64.2	65.6
Female	35.8	34.4
<i>Age</i>		
<35	20.7	18.9
35-45	16.8	16.7
45-55	23.0	18.7
55-65	25.8	27.1
65+	13.7	18.7
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
White British	82.8	75.9
Other white	n/a	10.4
BME	17.2	13.7
<i>Education</i>		
No qualification	3.8	4.5
GCSEs or equivalent	10.9	9.5
A Levels or equivalent	17.6	15.4
First degree	38.4	36.8
Higher degree	29.4	33.8

Table A2: Comparing candidates contesting London Borough elections (contd.)

	2006	2010
	%	%
<i>Employment</i>		
full-time employment	43.7	33.3
part-time employment	10.0	9.9
Self employed	16.4	17.8
Retired	21.3	26.2
Other	8.6	12.8
<i>Occupation</i>		
Professional	56.7	56.1
Manag/tech	26.7	24.7
Skilled, non manual	10.1	9.5
Skilled, manual	2.6	4.3
Partly skilled	2.3	2.6
Unskilled	1.6	2.7
<i>Residence</i>		
Inside ward	43.0	46.8
Outside ward	57.0	53.2
<i>Candidate Experience</i>		
First time	41.8	43.6
Previous	58.2	56.4

Table A3: Comparing candidates contesting metropolitan borough elections

	2006	2007	2008	2010
<i>Sex</i>	%	%	%	%
Male	72.2	63.7	65.0	69.5
Female	27.8	36.3	35.0	30.5
<i>Age</i>				
<35	15.0	18.3	12.3	17.2
35-45	17.2	19.7	15.1	12.9
45-55	23.4	19.6	16.1	22.0
55-65	23.6	28.5	40.7	30.1
65+	20.9	13.9	15.8	17.8
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
White British	95.7	84.5	88.3	89.7
Other white	n/a	13.1	7.5	7.1
BME	4.3	2.4	4.2	3.2
<i>Education</i>				
No qualification	7.9	12.2	8.0	9.8
GCSEs or equivalent	13.9	15.2	16.1	16.9
A Levels or equivalent	23.0	24.5	23.5	23.2
First degree	34.6	33.3	29.2	25.7
Higher degree	20.5	14.8	23.2	24.4

Table A3: Comparing candidates contesting metropolitan borough elections (contd.)

	2006	2007	2008	2010
	%	%	%	%
<i>Employment</i>				
full-time employment	35.6	36.1	29.3	31.3
part-time employment	13.9	11.6	13.5	10.9
Self employed	9.2	13.4	15.2	11.2
Retired	32.5	26.2	28.4	31.0
Other	8.7	12.7	13.7	15.6
<i>Occupation</i>				
Professional	41.2	40.4	50.2	50.3
Manag/tech	33.0	27.3	27.2	25.5
Skilled, non manual	9.0	10.7	11.1	7.6
Skilled, manual	9.2	11.4	6.0	8.1
Partly skilled	4.5	7.4	3.7	5.3
Unskilled	3.0	2.8	1.8	3.2
<i>Residence</i>				
Inside ward	47.2	44.4	49.5	46.1
Outside ward	52.8	55.6	50.5	53.9
<i>Candidate Experience</i>				
First time	20.3	18.1	23.8	38.8
Previous	79.7	81.9	76.2	61.2

Table A4: Comparing candidates contesting district and unitary council elections

	2006	2007	2008	2010
<i>Sex</i>	%	%	%	%
Male	69.1	65.9	69.3	69.8
Female	30.9	34.1	30.7	30.2
<i>Age</i>				
<35	12.0	12.5	11.7	9.8
35-45	16.5	13.9	13.1	13.4
45-55	22.0	23.8	20.1	18.5
55-65	32.3	31.5	34.6	34.3
65+	17.2	18.3	20.4	23.9
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
White British	97.0	91.9	90.1	90.1
Other white		5.8	7.8	6.7
BME	3.0	2.3	2.1	3.2
<i>Education</i>				
No qualification	7.1	8.0	8.9	7.6
GCSEs or equivalent	21.2	21.6	15.7	17.5
A Levels or equivalent	22.2	21.2	22.7	23.8
First degree	30.7	30.9	32.3	35.8
Higher degree	18.8	18.3	20.3	15.3

Table A4: Comparing candidates contesting district and unitary council elections (contd.)

	2006	2007	2008	2010
	%	%	%	%
<i>Employment</i>				
full-time employment	34.6	36.3	31.9	32.2
part-time employment	9.8	12.3	8.0	12.2
Self employed	18.5	12.3	14.3	17.6
Retired	26.9	28.7	33.5	29.3
Other	10.2	10.3	12.3	8.7
<i>Occupation</i>				
Professional	48.0	49.1	50.8	53.1
Manag/tech	27.7	27.8	25.1	24.1
Skilled, non manual	9.2	8.1	7.7	8.7
Skilled, manual	7.3	9.9	9.0	7.4
Partly skilled	5.6	2.9	4.7	4.2
Unskilled	2.2	2.3	2.7	2.5
<i>Residence</i>				
Inside ward	51.1	53.9	54.8	52.8
Outside ward	48.9	46.1	45.2	47.2
<i>Candidate Experience</i>				
First time	27.4	25.0	27.2	46.4
Previous	72.6	75.0	72.8	53.6