

A photograph of a hand placing a white ballot paper into a ballot box, overlaid with a teal tint. The hand is on the left, and the ballot box is on the right. The background is a solid teal color.

nalc

Report
**Local council
elections 2022**

**National Association
of Local Councils**

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CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Context	5
Executive summary	6
Data of local council elections by the principal authority	8
Survey of local councillors	10
Survey of local councils	14
Survey of county associations	17
NALC Make A Change materials	20
Conclusion and recommendations	22

INTRODUCTION

England's local (parish and town) councils are the first tier of local government. Local councils are the smallest local authorities and play a crucial role in local governance as they cover an estimated 40% of the population across England. They raise over £600 million through council tax, referred to as a 'precept', and like principal local authorities, they have specific statutory functions and powers. Local councils employ staff, own premises and provide services to their local community.

Like any local authority, councillors are elected to represent their community, develop strategies for their area, and work with community groups, amongst other functions. There are around 100,000 local councillors in England - four times as many councillors than in principal authorities - all volunteering their time (over 14 million hours a year) by taking up civic office to make decisions about improving their area. Their decisions affect the quality of life and well-being of citizens in very different ways, given that local councils are responsible for a growing range of assets and services.

The most recent cohort of local council elections took place on 5 May 2022. Following this, NALC undertook a composite survey of councillors, local councils and county associations. Furthermore, this data was collated with election results data from district and borough council websites. This report is a continuation of the work conducted to produce the first report on the 2019 local elections to provide a sense check of the status of local democracy, which will inform the strategic direction of NALC's elections campaign and engagement with various stakeholders, including central government. A few questions were included in the survey regarding the use by different respondents - of the recruitment materials NALC generated on its website for its Make A Change campaign - for the local council elections on 5 May 2022.

The composite councillor, local council, and county association survey ran from May 2022 to July 2022, receiving 462 responses.

We must consider that whilst the sample size for these surveys is statistically significant, results are indicative of the respondents in areas that held elections. NALC estimates that about 11% of local councils held elections in May 2022. Therefore, some of the results displayed in this report may again be skewed away from nationally representative results.

CONTEXT

NALC report on the 2021 local elections

In January 2022, NALC published its report summarising outcomes from the local council elections on 6 May 2021. That report followed a minor cycle of local elections in May 2021, in which an estimated 15% of local councils held elections. The report collated data from separate surveys of local councillors, local councils and county associations. It concluded that NALC should lobby the Electoral Commission and UK Government to simplify and digitise local elections.

Several themes emerged from the 2021 local council elections report:

- The number of councillors elected through contested elections had significantly increased from 29% in 2019 to 38%.
- 10% of responding local councils reported that all local council seats were filled by councillors who had not served before, a significant increase from 1% in 2019.
- A reported 22% of county associations did not raise awareness of local council elections in their boundaries.

NALC's Make A Change campaign

In 2022, NALC continued the 'Make A Change' campaign to progress its longstanding work to promote local council elections and encourage undiscovered community heroes to run for election. As part of this campaign, NALC liaised with county associations to update the range of promotional materials for councillors, local councils and county associations to use for the election cycle on its dedicated webpage. These included:

- Communications pack — easy-to-adapt text for campaign use
- Timetable for local council elections — summary of critical elections campaign milestones
- Frequently Asked Questions — summary of answers to likely candidate questions
- Make a change, become a councillor online event — link to an online event NALC organised in the run-up to the May 2021 local council elections.

Slightly nearer to the local council elections of May 2022, The Unusual Suspects — a video campaign and interview with Jackie Weaver to get more people involved with local councils, was released and uploaded to the NALC website.

Along with this, NALC released two more promotional videos in collaboration with serving local councillors. These videos highlight why these individuals became councillors, what they do on their local council and how their work benefits their community. This series and more information on the Make A Change campaign can be found on the Elections page of the NALC website.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

England's local councils are the first tier of local government, represent around 40% of the population and have an increasingly important and growing role in local governance and the delivery of public services. Around 100,000 local councillors elected to represent their community and make decisions that will affect the quality of life and well-being of their constituents. The most recent cycle of local council elections occurred on 5 May 2022, in which 10% of local councils had scheduled elections. To gain insight into these elections, NALC undertook a composite survey of councillors, local councils and county associations between May and July 2022. This report has analysed survey data in conjunction with data collected from principal authority websites to paint a broader picture of the 2022 local elections cycle.

The number of councillors elected through contested elections has significantly decreased from 38% in 2021 to 22% in 2022. There are, therefore, still significant obstacles to overcome. 57% of local councils reported seat vacancies after the elections, only a slight decrease of 2% from 2021. Many local councils still require further support from county associations and principal authorities.

The demographic profile of our local councillors has changed little since 2021. The number of first-time councillors decreased from 24% in 2021 to 19% in 2022. The highest proportion of respondent councillors were those who had served for between five and ten years as a local councillor – at 21%.

Whilst the election cycle in 2022 was not hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic anywhere near as much as in 2021 – there was a greater emphasis in 2022 on council candidates using tried and tested methods of campaigning such as word of mouth and leaflets as methods of promotion – than were likely used in 2021. For instance, 32% of councillors used word of mouth, and 17% created a leaflet this year. Local councils used Facebook to the same extent as in 2021, with 53% of local councils reporting using Facebook for election promotion, 52% also used word of mouth locally to promote elections. Furthermore, as in 2021, local councils have called for the reduction in election costs and the simplification of the nominations process, which can potentially increase nomination interest and, by extension, the number of contested elections.

In summary, NALC makes several recommendations:

Councillors

- Strongly encourage anyone active in your communities to consider formalising that activism by standing for election to become a local councillor – say being a local councillor will provide a stronger position from which to get things done in their community.
- Look for opportunities to promote any upcoming local council elections in your areas and for your own local councils – to community-oriented

organisations that are likely to have members and activists who would make excellent local councillors.

Local councils

- Continue to raise awareness of elections to your local council by heavily promoting them on your websites and continue to use Facebook and other social media platforms to do so
- Re-channel monies, which would have once been used to print materials to promote elections to your local council – towards e-promotion of the elections on your website and via social media (as above).

County associations

- Continue to utilise NALC's Make A Change materials to encourage more people to stand for elections to their local council – to encourage as wide a range of candidates to stand for election as possible – this may help more local council elections in the future be contested.
- Promote future use by principal authorities in your areas of digital nominations processes and digital voting processes (subject to changes in electoral law).
- As a priority, ensure that you know about all local council election rounds in your county area – and promote increased participation in those elections in the local media.

NALC

- Continue to produce tailored local councils elections reports annually – subject to time and resource – and ensure that the Make A Change materials address and support the needs of county associations, local councils and local councillors.
- Lobby the Electoral Commission and UK government to simplify and digitalise local elections nomination processes and to introduce digital voting.

Local Government Association (LGA)

- Continue to ensure that LGA member councils provide relevant elections training, events, advice and guidance to local councils in their areas holding upcoming elections.
- Working with NALC and county associations, ensure that standard messaging between the NALC Make A Change and the LGA Be A Councillor programme is cross-fertilised and mutually promoted.

UK government

- Introduce digital nominations and voting systems for all local council elections in the future, perhaps after piloting.

- Ensure that data and materials produced by relevant government departments promoting democratic participation, serving the community and how to campaign are promoted visibly on relevant government websites.
- Ensure that government departments in the future collate, publish and disseminate all relevant data about local council elections.

DATA OF LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS BY THE PRINCIPAL AUTHORITY

Data from the May 2022 local council elections were collected through principal authority websites. Where there were difficulties in obtaining data or estimated results, these gaps were overcome by further desktop research on local council websites.

In May 2022, local (parish and town) councils held elections across 38 principal authorities and 15 county associations. The final election numbers for 2022 are as follows:

Total number of local councils holding elections: 1,013

Total number of seats: 8,068

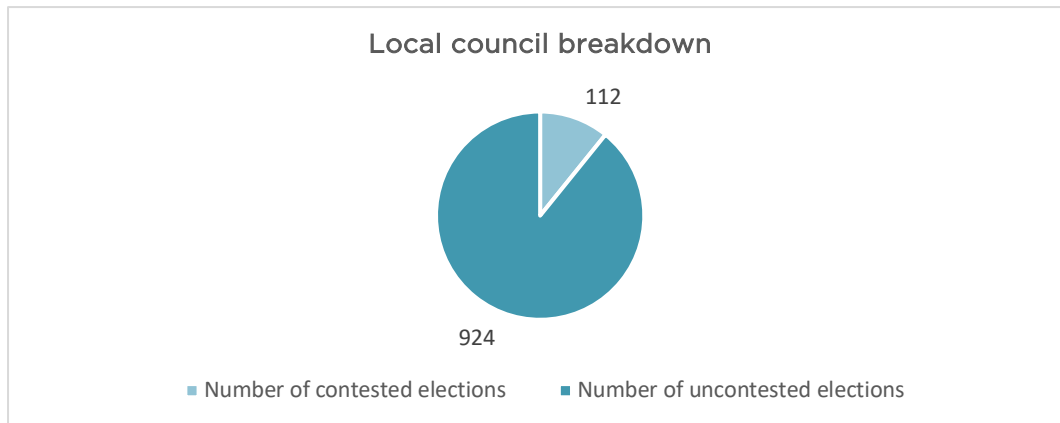
England's local councils are represented by around 100,000 councillors. Therefore, approximately 10% of local councils across England held their scheduled elections on 5 May 2022. This election proportion is around 5% lower than the same statistic for 2021.

County areas where local council elections were held elections in May 2022 include Berkshire, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Cleveland, Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and West Midlands, Wiltshire and North Yorkshire.

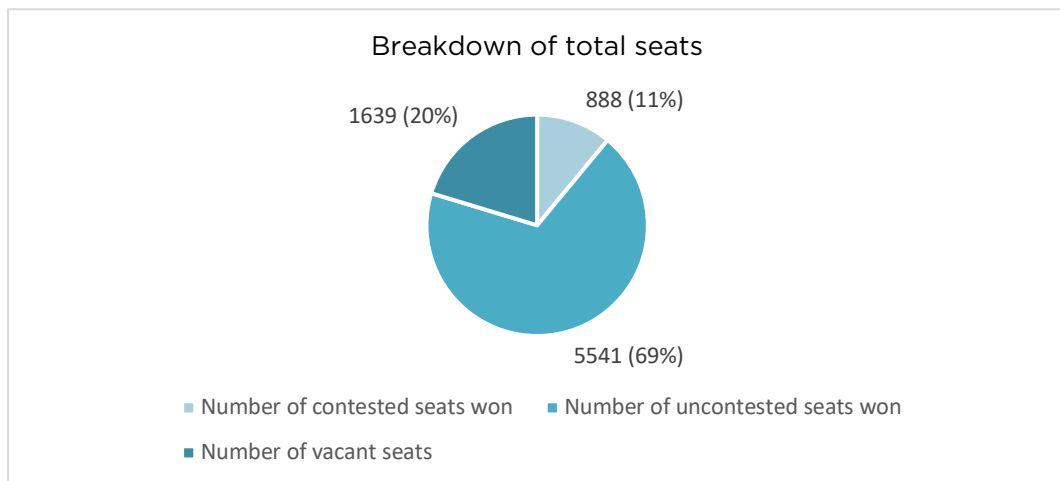
The estimated election numbers are as follows:

- Total number of contested seats won: 888
- Total number of uncontested seats won: 5,541
- Total number of vacant seats: 1,639
- Total number of elected councillors: 8,068

- Total number of county association areas where elections were held – 15



According to the estimated participation rate of councils, roughly 11% of our local councils held at least one contested election, compared to 91% who held at least one uncontested election.¹



- The total number of contested seats won – 888
- The total number of uncontested seats won – 5541
- The total number of vacant seats – 1639

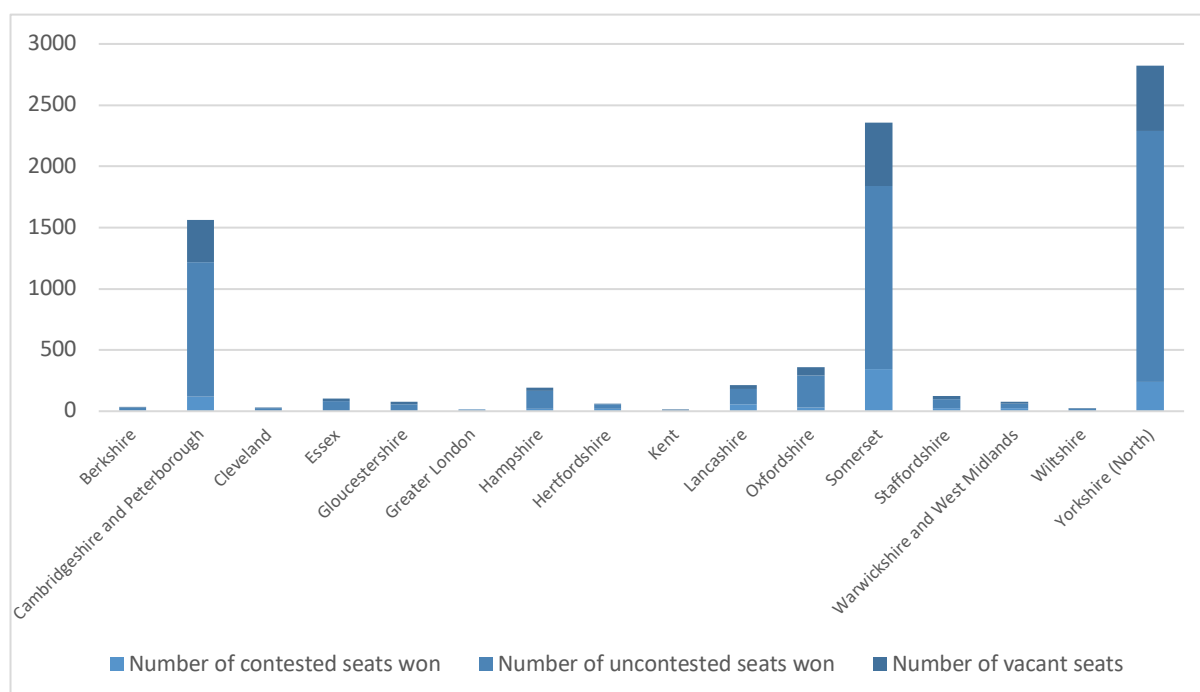
After 5 May 2022, 11% of seats were filled by a contested election, 69% were filled through an uncontested election, and 20% were left vacant. Therefore, 1,639 seats need to be filled through co-option.²

¹ These figures overlap because warded or grouped councils may hold both contested and uncontested elections.

² Following an ordinary election, if the parish council can constitute a quorum, the elected councillors may co-opt councillors to fill the remaining seats. Paragraph 12 of Part II of Schedule 12 to the Local Government Act provides that three or one third of the total number of local councillors, whichever is greater, is necessary for a meeting to constitute a quorum.

Seat breakdown by county associations

Despite elections being held across 15 county associations, 84% of available seats were up for election in 3 areas: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Somerset and North Yorkshire.



The government has received proposals from areas wishing to reorganise local government structures to make them more streamlined and efficient. Proposals to replace existing local authority districts in Cumbria, North Yorkshire, and Somerset have been approved, and new unitary authorities are due to vest in 2023. Two new unitary authorities, North Yorkshire and Somerset held all-out local elections on 5 May 2022, hence the high numbers across these county areas.

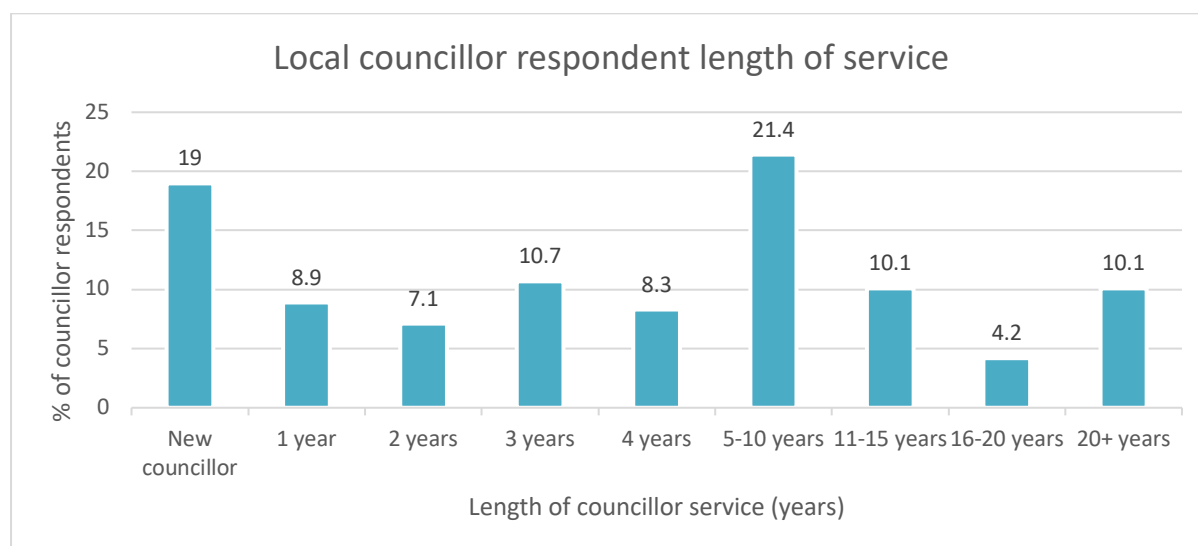
SURVEY OF LOCAL COUNCILLORS

Total responses: 269

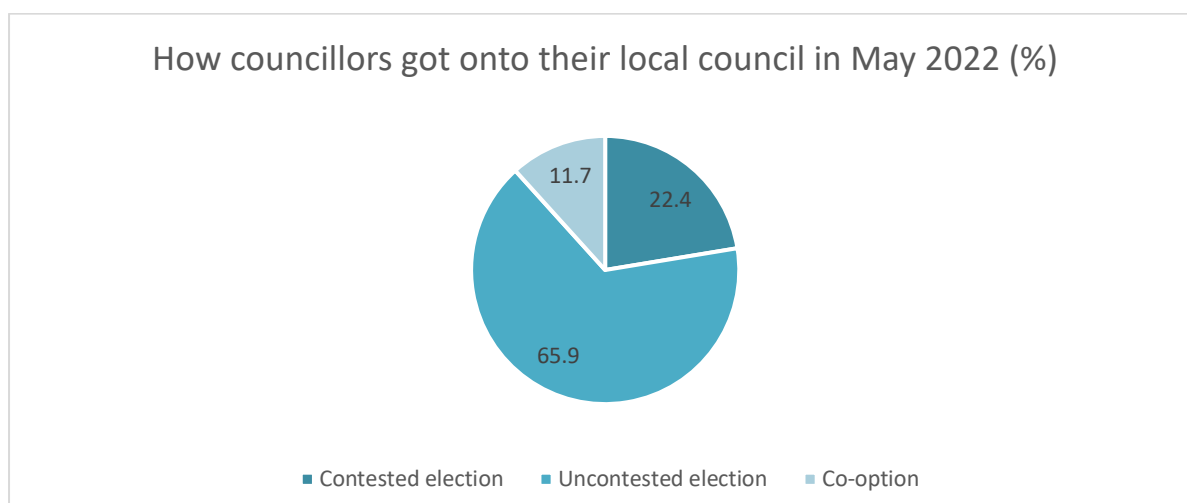
The purpose of these survey questions (2-9) was to explore the experience of the local councillor; for example, their reason for running for the local council. The highest proportion of respondents to the local councillor survey came from Yorkshire (28%). The highest banding for respondents to these survey questions was from councillors who had served for between 5 and 10 years (21%). As in 2021, most councillor respondents reported that they wanted to serve their community, a further 31% reported that they wanted to change things in their community, and again most local councillor respondents (41%) got involved in standing for election through their community.

Unlike the 2021 survey of local councillors, this survey did not garner evidence on the demographics of newly elected councillors.

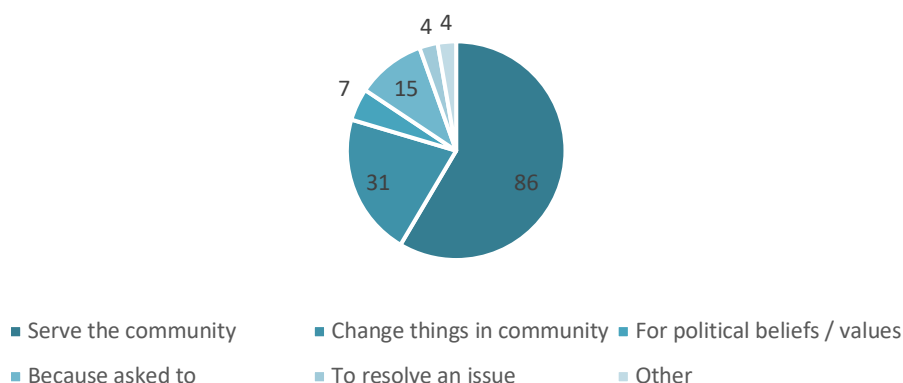
Finally, this survey gives an update on the status of participatory democracy – as of 2021. 46% of respondents have served for 5+ years (3% lower than in 2021), and 77% were elected in an uncontested election or co-opted (15% lower than the same statistic for 2021). Social media use was varied, but Facebook was the most common platform used by 13% of candidates to promote themselves during the election campaign (7% less than in 2021).



- 19% of those elected were new councillors (down 5% from 2021); however, 46% of elected councillors had served for 5+ years (down 3% from 2021), and 24% had served for more than a decade (down 1% from 2021).
- 22% of councillors were involved in a contested election (down 16% from 2021); 66% were elected in an uncontested election (up 39% from 2021) and 12% of councillors were co-opted (down 23% from 2021).
- This tells us that the proportion of local councillors co-opted fell considerably between 2021 and 2022 and that the number of councillors elected in an uncontested election rose markedly between 2021 and 2022.

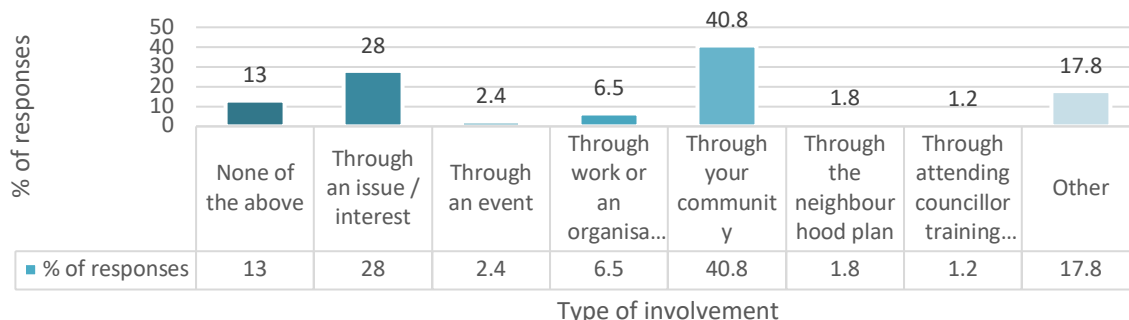


Why local councillors stood for election (%) (Respondents could choose multiple answers)

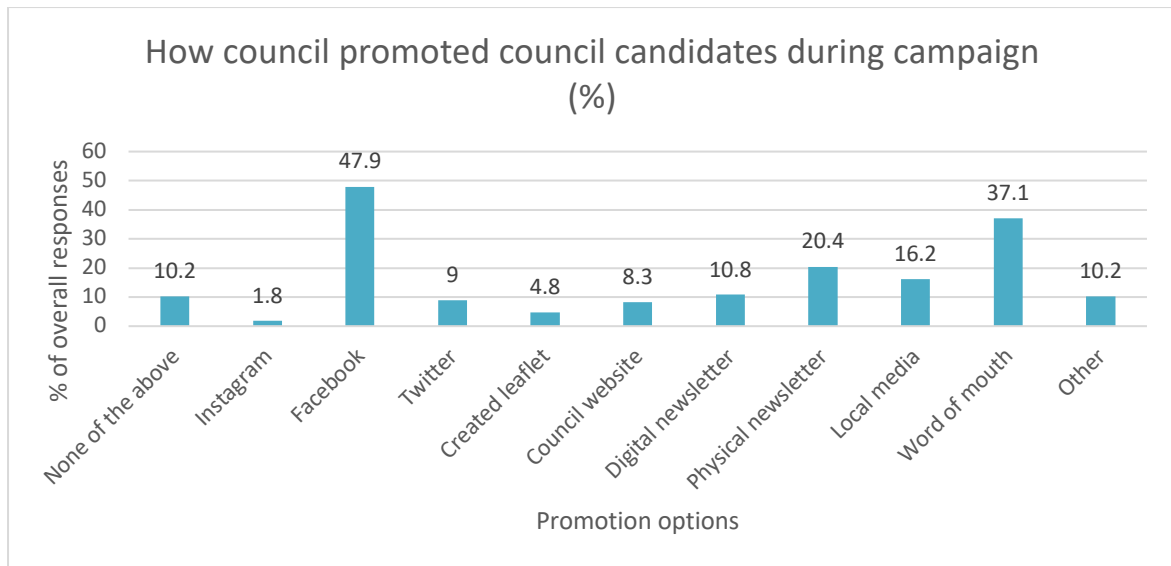


In May 2022, 86% of local councillor survey respondents stated that they stood for election to serve the community (exactly the same proportion as in May 2021). 31% of respondents said they wanted to change things in their community (a reduction of 25% from 2021). 7% stood for their political beliefs / values (down from 15% in May 2021). 15% stated they stood for election because they were asked to, down from 22% in May 2021. 4% stated they had stood to resolve an issue (down from 8% in 2021), and 4% said they had stood for other reasons (down from 7% in May 2021).

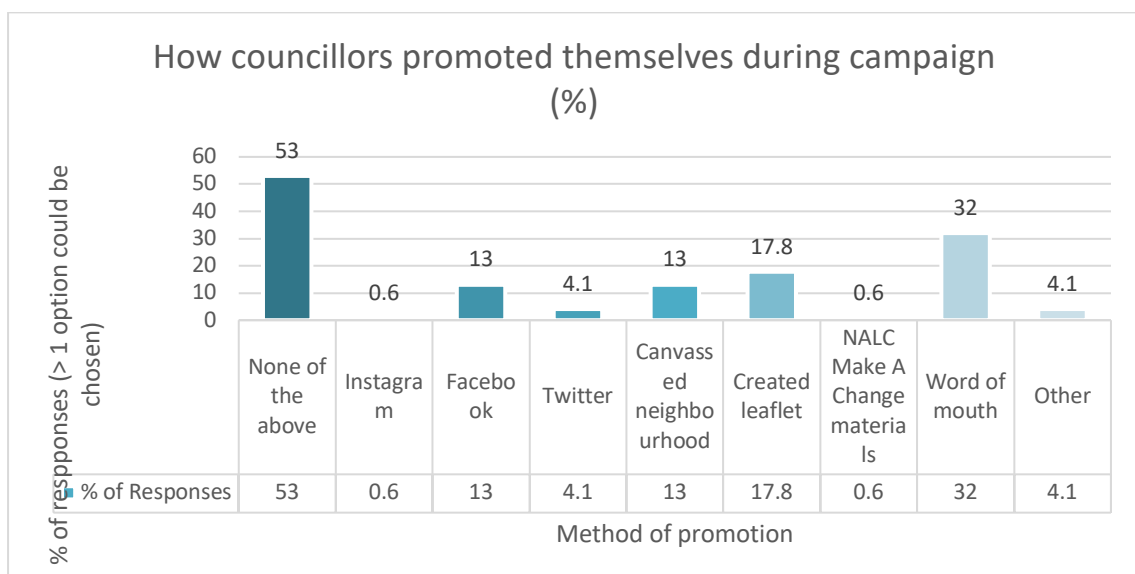
How councillors got involved in standing for election (by %)



41% of respondents got involved in standing for election through their community in May 2022 (up 2% from May 2021). 28% became involved in standing for election through an issue or interest (down 9% from May 2021). And 7% stood for election through work or an organisation they were connected with (down 3% from May 2021).



59% of respondents said that for the May 2022 local council elections, their local councils used social media to promote their elections – a combined figure of responses for Instagram, Facebook and Twitter (up 10% from May 2021). Facebook was again the most popular platform used by councils – with 48% of respondents stating that their councils used Facebook to promote the elections, up 11% in the last year. 10% of respondents stated that their local councils used another social media platform to promote the May 2022 local council elections – up 5% from May 2021.



32% of candidates promoted themselves through word of mouth (up 11% from May 2021). 18% created physical leaflets to promote themselves during the local election campaign - down 12% since May 2021.

Facebook was again the most popular social media platform, used by 13% of respondents, down 7% since May 2021. 53% of respondents did not use any

named electronic or physical method of self-promotion during the election campaign, a figure up 14% since May 2021.

Separately, 95% of respondents recommended becoming a local councillor, while 5% did not.

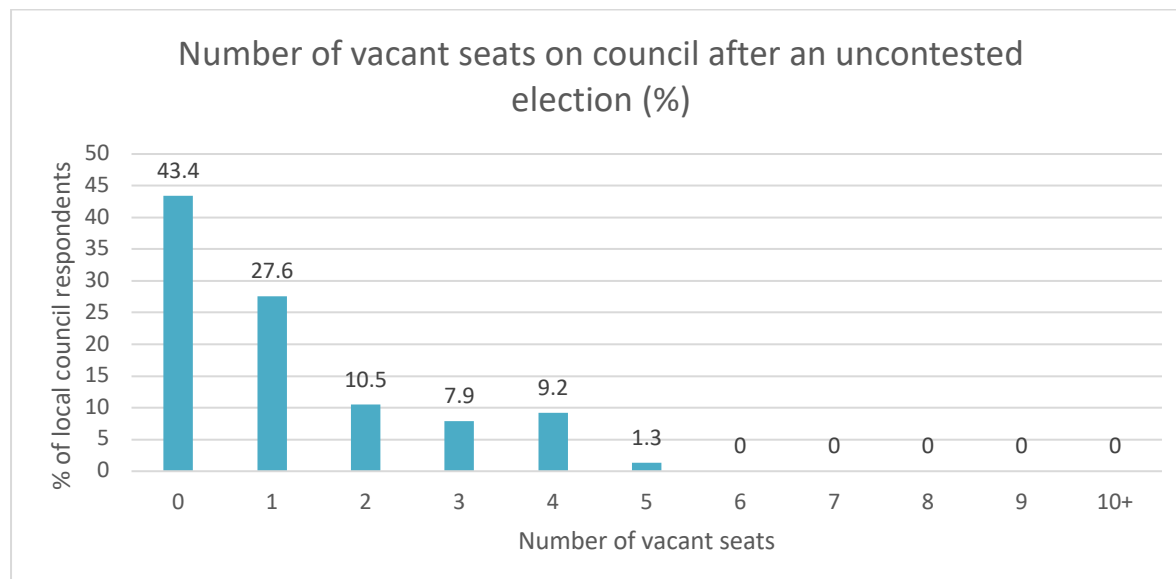
SURVEY OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Total responses: 179

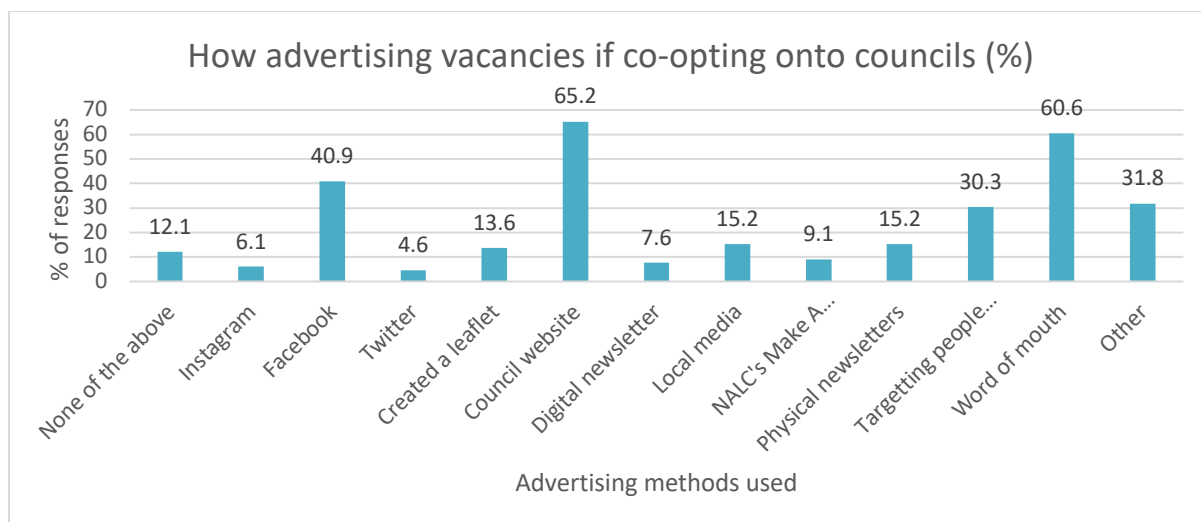
The purpose of these survey questions was to investigate how the election process could be improved, with a particular focus on democratic participation and campaign awareness.

The area from which the highest number of responses to these survey questions (11-20) came was Yorkshire (41%). NALC found that many of the local councils reported high levels of seat vacancies (57%, 2% down from May 2021), and a significant proportion (43%) had no vacancies on their local councils after the May 2022 elections.

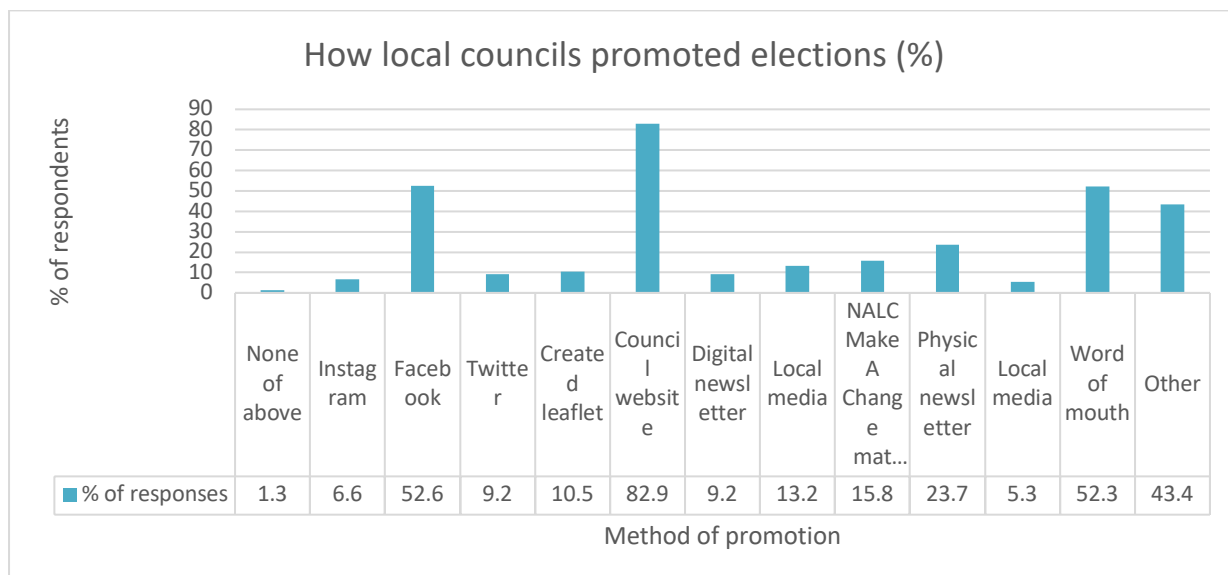
Furthermore, social media is becoming a more intrinsic part of the local election campaign process for many local councils (68%, up 18% since May 2021) however, there is little variety in the platforms they use, and 24% still use physical newsletters.



57% of local councils reported vacant seats after the May 2022 local council elections (down 2% from May 2021); 46% reported between 1-3 vacant seats (precisely the same percentage as in May 2021).

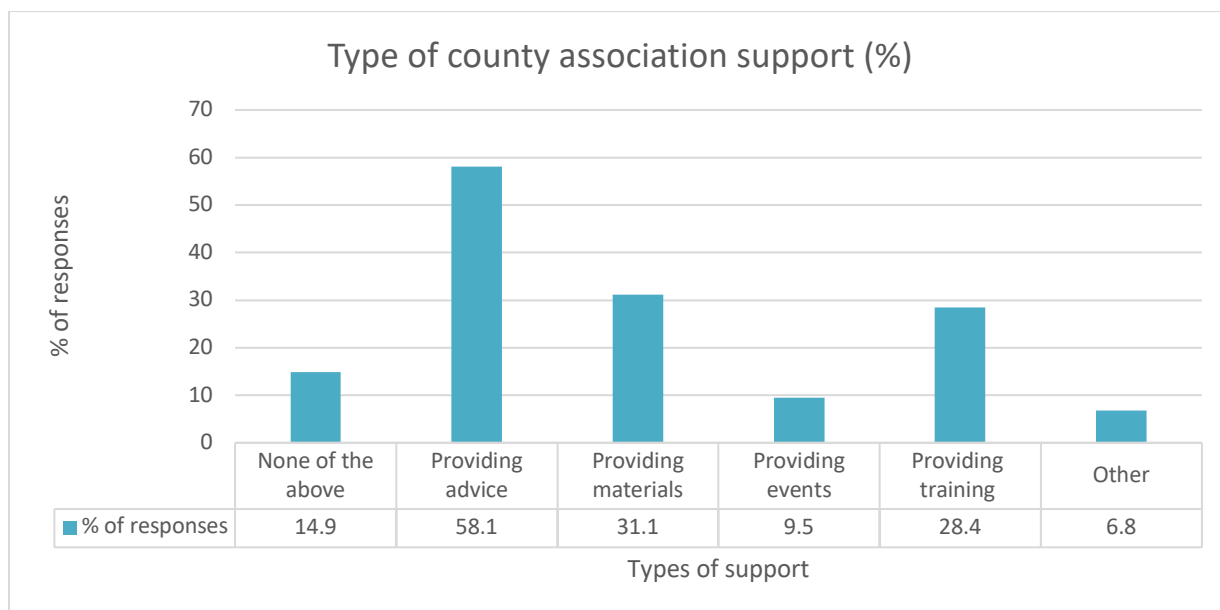


61% of local councils used word of mouth to co-opt (down 1% from 2021); 52% used social media (up 2% from May 2021); 30% targeted candidates directly (down 7% from 2021), and 14% used leaflets (also down 13% since May 2021).



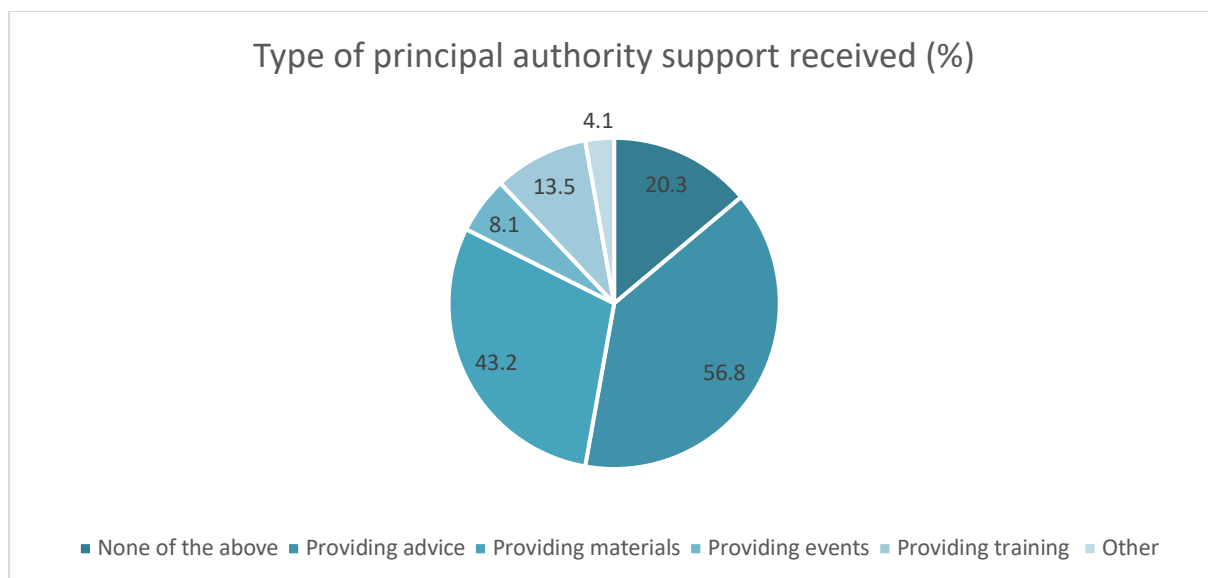
In May 2022, 24% of local council respondents said they had used a physical newsletter/notice to raise awareness of the local council elections, a considerable fall of 35% from May 2021. As of May 2021, 53% of local councils used Facebook to raise awareness of the local council elections in May 2022 – Facebook has been the most popular social media platform to do this over the last two years for local councils.

This tells us that in May 2022, local councils were using other types of promotion than physical materials to raise awareness of their elections than in May 2021. However, it also tells us that the pattern of how social media was used to do this has not changed that much over the last year.



58% of local councils reported that county associations provided them with advice for the May 2022 local council elections (up 23% from 2021); 28% received training (down 4% in the last year), and 31% received materials (up 1% from May 2021). Only 10% received events support, though this figure is 4% higher than last year.

This tells us that county associations in areas holding local council elections in May 2022 provided local councils with much more advice than their counterparts had in May 2021; and that such advice support was supplemented by a slightly higher provision of related elections events than in May 2021.



57% of local councils reported that they received advice from their principal authorities during the May 2022 local council elections (up 17% from May 2021); 43% received materials from their principal authority (up 12% from May 2021), and

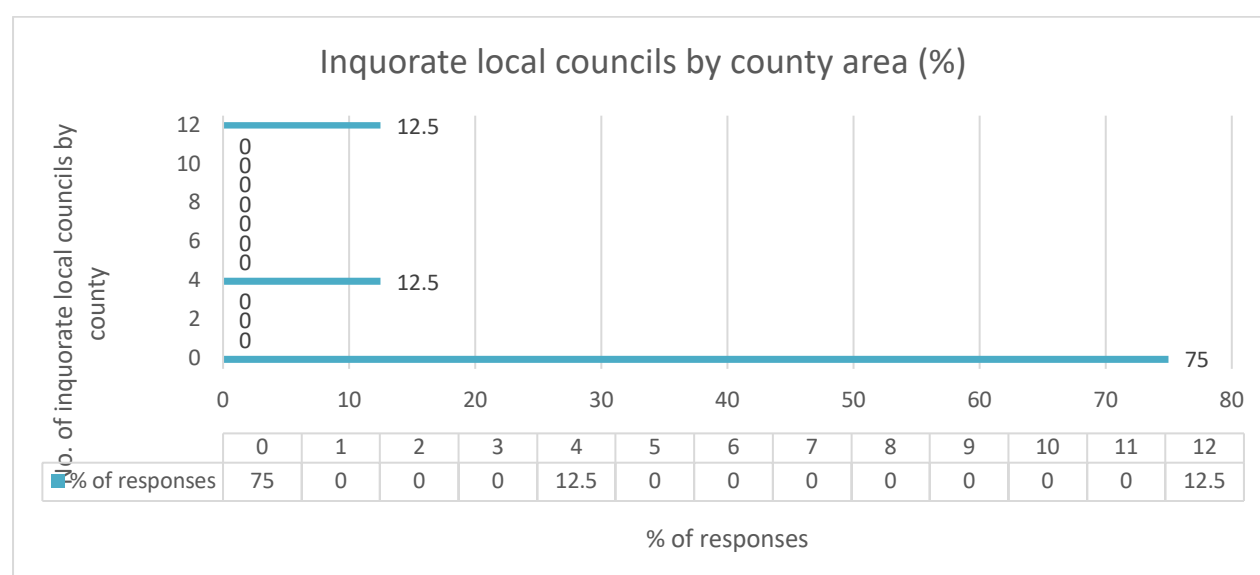
14% received elections training from their principal authority during the May 2022 elections period (up 1% from May 2021).

This tells us that significantly more local councils received advice and materials from their principal authorities during May 2022 for their local council elections than their counterparts had done in May 2021.

SURVEY OF COUNTY ASSOCIATIONS

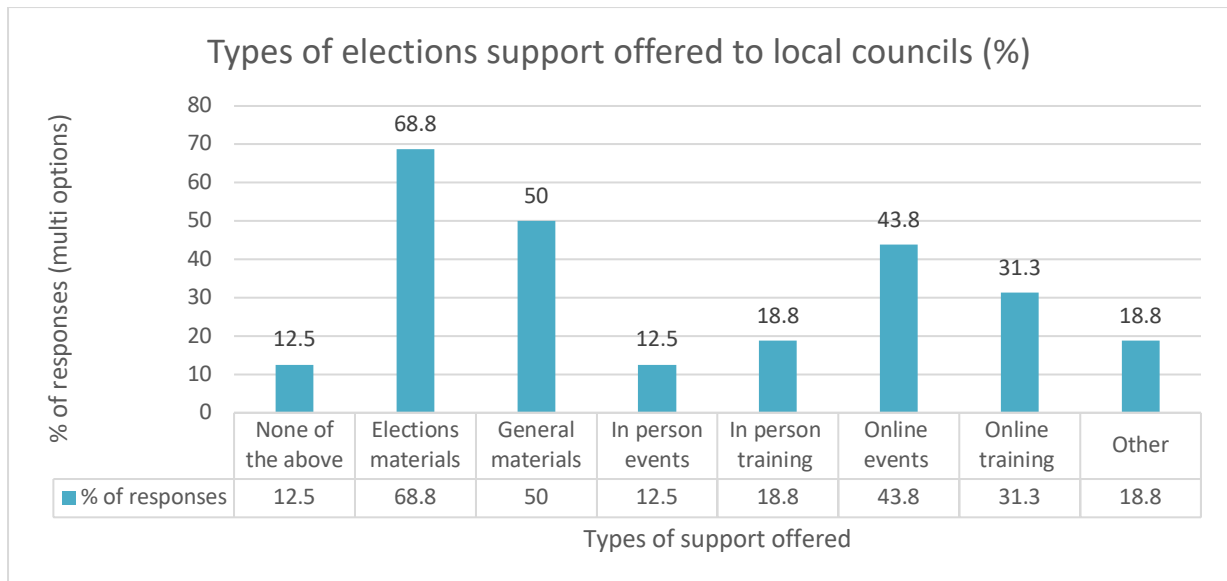
Total responses: 14/15

Responses from county associations that held elections include Berkshire, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Cleveland, Essex, Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and West Midlands, Wiltshire and Yorkshire (North), were received.



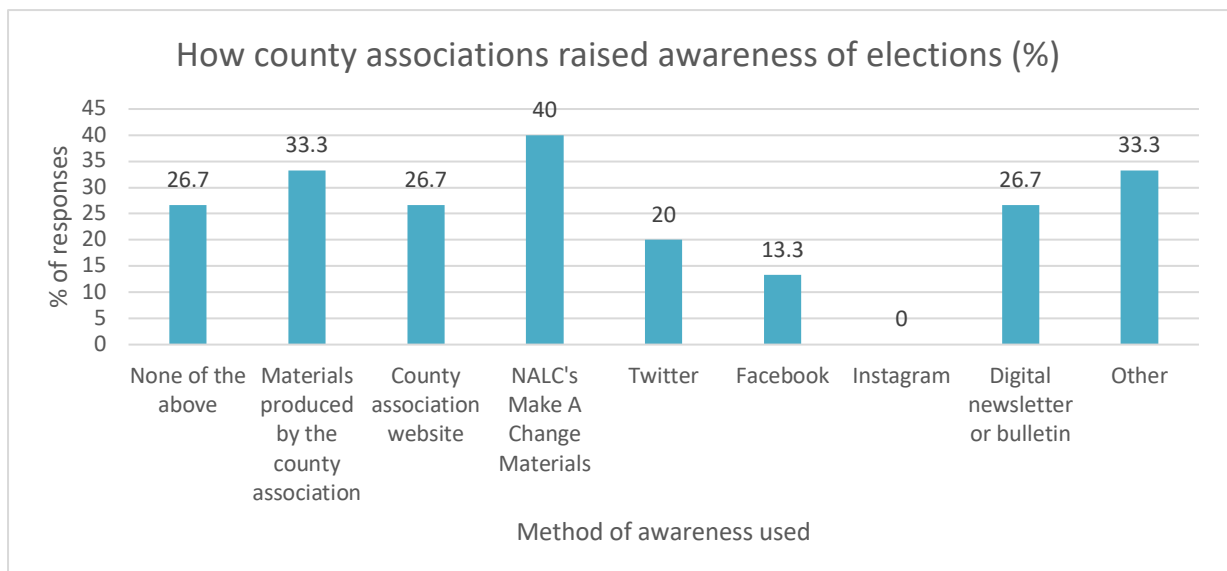
13% of reporting county associations reported that they had at least 1-9 inquorate local councils in their area after the May 2022 local council elections – down by 45% from May 2021. 75% of reporting county associations stated that they had no known inquorate local councils in their area after the local council elections in May 2022 (up 33% from May 2021).

Overall this suggests that the proportion of inquorate councils after the May 2022 elections was much lower than the percentage of inquorate councils after the May 2021 local council elections – in county areas where local council elections took place in respective years.

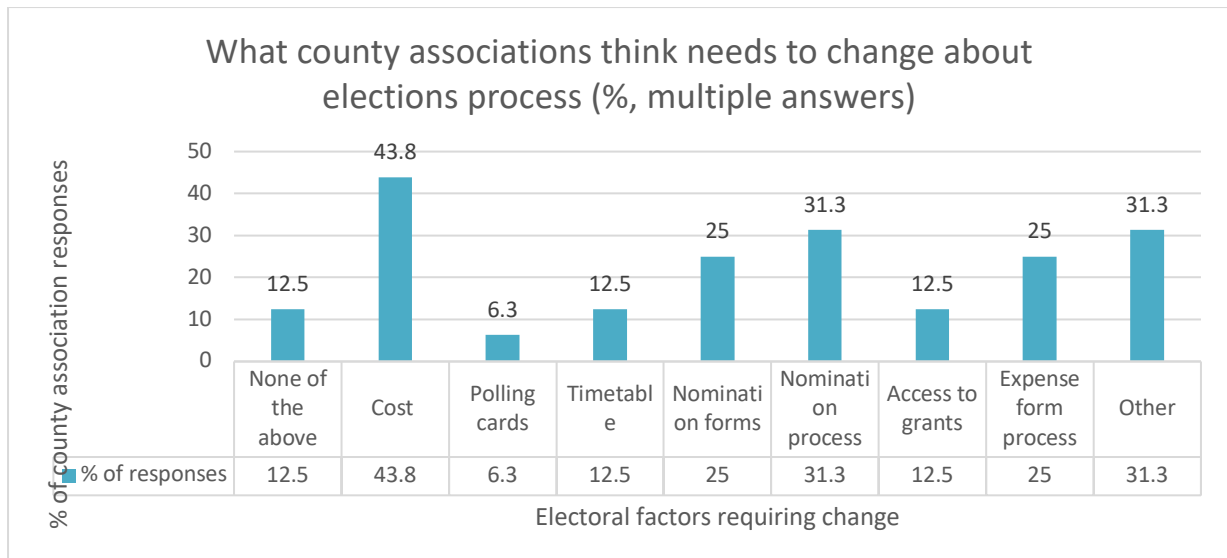


69% of reporting county associations provided election materials for local councils in their areas (down 2% from May 2021), 44% held online events (up 3% from May 2021), and 31% provided online training (up 24% from a year ago).

This tells us, overall, that most county associations in whose areas there were local council elections in both May 2021 and May 2022 – provided elections materials, but whilst the emphasis on online events was about the same, there was a more significant provision of online support in the form of training in May 2022.

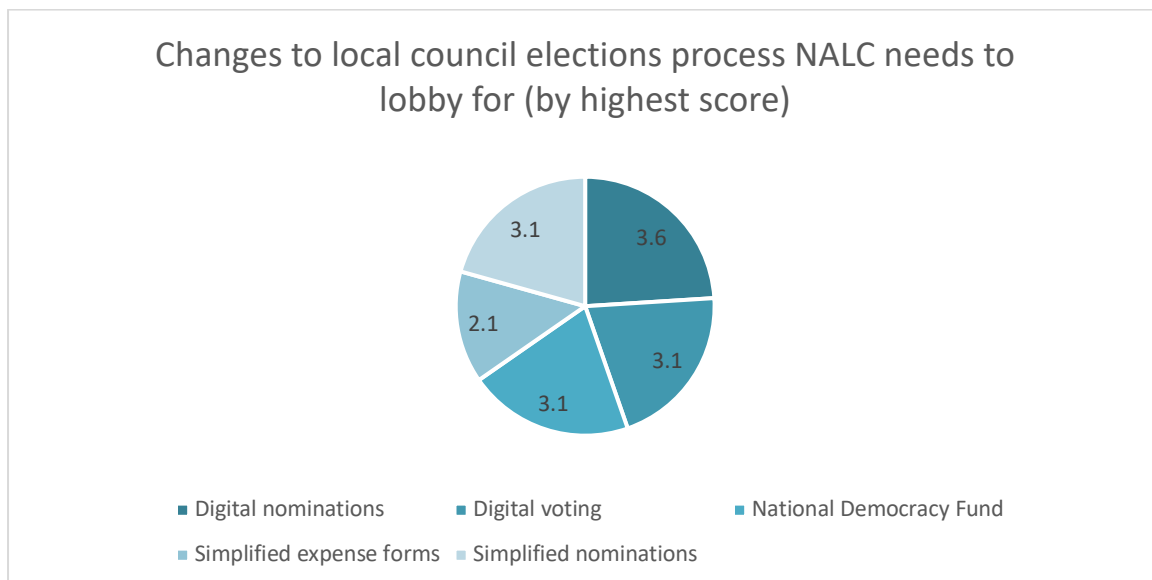


40% of reporting county associations used NALC's Make A Change materials to raise awareness of local elections (a reduction of 4% since May 2021); only 33% of reporting county associations used social media to promote awareness of the elections (an increase of 16% since May 2021); whilst 33% of responding county associations developed their own elections materials, an increase of 16% from May 2021.



31% of reporting county associations would like to see changes to the nomination process (down 25% from May 2021), just 25% would like to see changes to the nomination forms (half of the proportion from a year ago); and 44% considered election costs to still be a significant burden, down 7% from 2021.

This tells us that fewer county associations where local council elections were held in May 2022 than in May 2021 wanted to see changes to the nominations process or nominations forms. However, election costs are still considered prohibitive by many county associations.



When asked (by highest score) – what county associations thought NALC should prioritise most amongst aspects of the local council elections system which needed to change – easily the highest factor score was for digital nominations. There was then an even split between digital voting, simplified nominations and a National Democracy Fund. The lowest priority seems to have been given to simplified expense forms.

This tells us, in sum, that due to their experience in the May 2022 local council elections, county associations considered that the most urgent electoral aspects requiring change were the introduction of digital nominations, supported by digital voting. NALC has been tasked with still lobbying for a simplified nomination process and (ideally) a National Democracy Fund (if current central government finances permit) – but simplified expense forms were not considered a change priority by county associations.

NALC MAKE A CHANGE MATERIALS

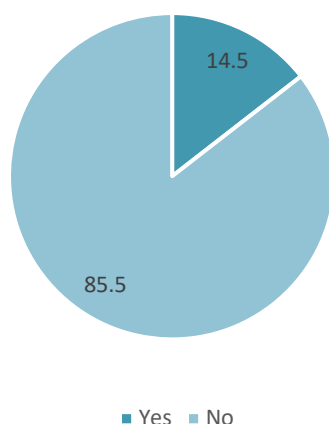
As part of the overall composite questions asked at the end of the primary survey, NALC asked all respondents (local councils, local councillors and county associations) to answer honestly as to what use they had made of the NALC Make A Change recruitment resources during the May 2022 local council elections.

To be clear – these materials reside on the NALC Make A Change webpage and, in May 2022, including the following:

- Communications pack NALC designed several resources for the pack that included an editable promotional poster and information flyer, press release, email text, social media posts and visual assets.
- Timetable for local elections – a resource to help understand the deadlines for the election process.
- FAQs – frequently asked questions about local elections.
- Make A Change, become a councillor event – leading up to the May 2021 local elections, NALC held a free online public event on everything you need to know about local councils and what they do, the role of a councillor and how to become one. The event featured viral sensation Jackie Weaver, a group of community heroes and Times Radio presenter Matt Chorley.

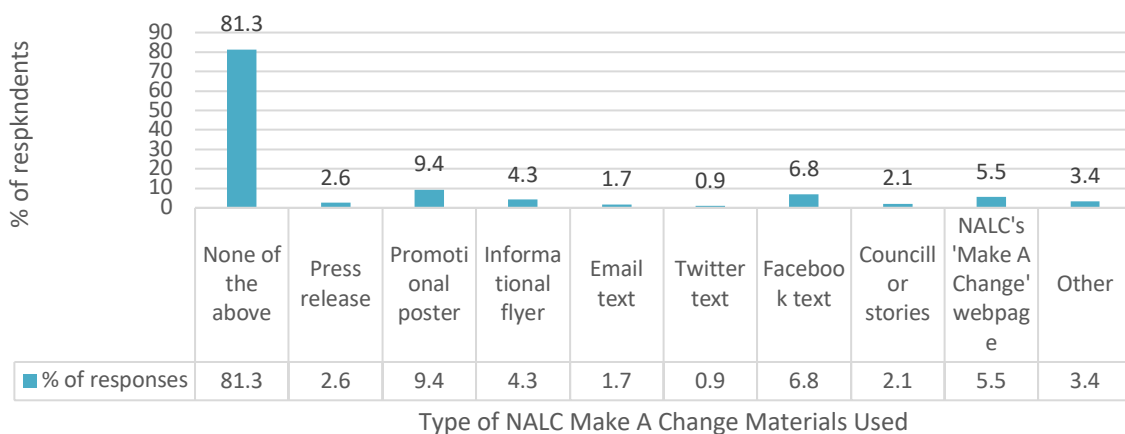
Slightly nearer to the local council elections of May 2022, The Unusual Suspects – a video campaign and interview with Jackie Weaver to get more people involved with local councils, was released and uploaded to the NALC website.

Overall proportions of respondents using NALC Make A Change recruitment resources (%)



This data was not measured in May 2021 so is not comparable with that for the May 2022 local council elections but in essence 15% of respondents from all three respondent subsets confirmed that they had used the materials provided, 85% had not. However, there is nothing very new in this data as it has always tended to be county associations who have primarily used these materials for previous rounds of local council elections.

Types of NALC Make A Change Resources Used (multi-response, %)



The most popular of the recruitment resources used by overall respondents to the survey was the promotional poster (9%), followed by the Facebook text (7%), NALC's Make A Change web page (6%) and the informational flyer (4%). There is no comparative data for May 2021 as this data was not captured at that point – in the three separate surveys issued to local councils, local councillors and county associations in July 2021.

Qualitative comments on the materials

NALC did capture some very helpful qualitative comments in the May 2022 composite survey regarding how helpful the Make A Change materials had been in areas holding local council elections in May 2022. Some essential thumbnails are included below:

Q32 What did you find useful about our recruitment resources?

- “Saved time creating own material”
- “Easy to edit and use”
- “Informative, made people aware of what was happening”
- “The poster was eye-catching, and the text included relevant information”.

Q33 What could be added or improved to benefit you?

- “Sending the resources out earlier/publicising them in a timely manner”
- “Making more local councils/councillors aware the resources exist”
- “More local advertising”
- “More national coverage including adverts that promote the interesting parts of being a local councillor and how people can make a difference”
- “More simple information on how a parish council works and what it can do”
- “Reduce the length of the suggested Facebook post”
- “Make them more inclusive – current materials very white orientated”.

CONCLUSION

This report has analysed survey data from councillors, local councils, and county associations to provide insight into the key themes of local (parish and town) council elections that took place in May 2022. Furthermore, desktop research was conducted to complement data on the overall status of the local democratic process. In analysing the output data for this report, three key themes emerge – the democratic deficit (via a fall in the number of contested elections and a marked increase in the number of uncontested elections), serving the community and campaign methodology.

The democratic deficit in local council elections was also highlighted in the report summarising outcomes from the May 2021 round. It was suggested in 2021 that the democratic process represented a mixed picture. The results from the local council elections surveys in May 2022 indicate a definite democratic deficit in the local council sector and a shift away from the mixed picture of 2021. This is evidenced by the fact that 22% of councillors were involved in a contested election (down 16% from 2021), and 66% were elected in an uncontested election (up 39% from 2021). The paradigm shift to far more uncontested elections points to an alarming increase in a democratic deficit in the May 2022 local council elections.

Serving the community has been a regular theme of previous election reports and emerges again as a central tenet of the May 2022 local council elections. In May 2022, 86% of local councillor survey respondents stated that they stood for election to serve the community (precisely the same proportion as in May 2021). This has, therefore, still been a constant theme for local council candidates in both the May 2021 and May 2022 local council elections. And 41% of local councillor survey respondents got involved in standing for election through their community in May 2022 (up 2% from May 2021). So, community interest and the wish of councillors and candidates to serve their communities have remained a firm factor over the last year, influencing why people have stood for election and what their programme of action might be if elected.

Campaign methodology was just as digital during the May 2022 local council elections as it was for the May 2021 local council elections in many respects. Whilst 53% of local councils made use of Facebook (the same proportion as in May 2021), in May 2022, just 24% of local council respondents said they had used a physical newsletter/notice to raise awareness of the local council elections, a considerable fall by 35% from May 2021. There has been a shift by local councils holding elections in May 2022 to use more digital tools (and fewer physical assets) than their counterparts did in May 2021 to promote their elections, therefore.

Finally, the leading national lobbying changes the sector was asking NALC to lobby for in May 2022 (as in May 2021) were digital nominations and voting (especially highlighted by county associations). One other priority for lobbying by NALC for future procedural changes was again for a simplified nomination process.

In conclusion, NALC makes the following recommendations:

Councillors

- Strongly encourage anyone active in your communities to consider formalising that activism by standing for election to become a local councillor – say being a local councillor will provide a stronger position from which to get things done in their community.
- Look for opportunities to promote any upcoming local council elections in your areas and for your own local councils – to community-oriented organisations that are likely to have members and activists who would make excellent local councillors.

Local councils

- Continue to raise awareness of elections to your local council by heavily promoting them on your websites and continue to use Facebook and other social media platforms to do so.

- Re-channel monies, which would have once been used to print materials to promote elections to your local council – towards e-promotion of the elections on your website and via social media (as above).

County associations

- Continue to utilise NALC's Make A Change materials to encourage more people to stand for elections to their local council – to encourage as wide a range of candidates to stand for election as possible – this may help more local council elections in the future be contested.
- Promote future use by principal authorities in your areas of digital nominations processes and digital voting processes (subject to changes in electoral law).
- As a priority, ensure that you know about all local council election rounds in your county area – and promote increased participation in those elections in the local media.

NALC

- Continue to produce tailored local councils elections reports annually – subject to time and resource – and ensure that the Make A Change materials address and support the needs of county associations, local councils and local councillors.
- Lobby the Electoral Commission and UK government to simplify and digitise local elections nomination processes and to introduce digital voting.

Local Government Association

- Continue to ensure that LGA member councils provide relevant elections training, events, advice and guidance to local councils in their areas holding upcoming elections.
- Working with NALC and county associations, ensure that standard messaging between the NALC Make A Change and the LGA Be A Councillor programme is cross-fertilised and mutually promoted.

UK government

- Introduce digital nominations and voting systems for all local council elections in the future, perhaps after piloting.
- Ensure that data and materials produced by relevant government departments promoting democratic participation, serving the community and how to campaign are promoted visibly on relevant government websites.
- Ensure that government departments in the future collate, publish and disseminate all relevant data pertaining to local council elections.