nalc

Report
**Local council
elections 2019**

**National Association
of Local Councils**

www.nalc.gov.uk

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INTRODUCTION

Following the local (parish and town) council elections in May 2019, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) undertook research based on the experiences of councillors, councils and county associations. County associations, clerks and councillors answered and distributed tailored surveys. The qualitative data gathered, gave councils and councillors a chance to describe their personal experiences; while the quantitative data collected gave a statistics-based overview of the local elections.

NALC aimed to gather data from a variety of locations as well as council sizes to showcase the range of experiences across the local council sector. While the council and county association survey collected experiences of the elections, the councillor survey also accumulates information around the motivations for running as a councillor. This includes their use of election materials; how they promoted the election and, their use of social media. While the participants in the survey were self-selecting, there is evidence that respondents were generally representatives of the cross-section of councillors and councils albeit with the very smallest councils being under-represented.

Within this research project, NALC has placed the results of the surveys in conjunction with national research around the May 2019 local council elections. This information was gathered from district and borough council websites; revealing; the total number of local councils; the total number of seats; the number of seats won through co-option; the number of seats won through a contested election and the total number of vacant positions.

By placing first-hand experiences in a context of quantitative analysis, for the first time, a full overview of the May 2019 local elections will be seen. This research project is the only national research of its type. NALC believes that the democratic process is crucial to the first tier of local government. These results will inform the elections strategy of NALC and our partners and, suggest ways that councils can encourage more members of the public to stand for election.

NALC would like to thank all 43 county associations for their constant cooperation during this research task. With special thanks to: Cheshire Association of Local Councils; Devon Association of Local Councils; Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils; Kent Association of Local Councils; Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils ; Worcestershire Association of Local Councils and, Yorkshire Local Councils Association.

Local council, councillor and county association surveys overview:

- Start date — 31 July 2019
- Closing date — 20 December 2019
- Total responses — 3,743

CONTEXT

In 2015, NALC took a review of the recent election amongst councillors, county associations and committee employees. The vast majority of local councils held elections. Several general issues emerged as a result including;

- Fewer people coming forward to stand in some areas
- Big local issues brought people out
- The low number of contested elections, as uncontested elections are more cost-effective
- However, there was no national research to support this hypothesis.

The variation of the cost of elections was the central area of concern. Local councils and county associations have tried many initiatives to encourage contested elections. This issue highlights the need to raise the profile of the sector nationally. A local democracy programme backed up by a national democracy fund is needed to support this. Elections should be a normalised part of local council culture to ensure that the cost is seen as part of the process rather than as an extra expense.

In 2015, there was limited data regarding parish election voting patterns, which is needed to inform the steps that should be put in place to improve participation. The local council sector is becoming more significant, more extensive and more influential across England. It is only right that there is a good evidence base on which to develop public policy.

Issues for national consideration/discussion with Electoral Commission and/or Government

Costs

Costs were the number one concern flagged up by councillors, especially though who have a small income. There needs to be greater transparency and clarity about the value of elections charged by principal councils. High costs put off local councils from encouraging people to stand for election. There seem to be no consistent rules regarding the election costs across the tiers, which may affect budgeting. The fees should be proportionate to the size of the council to limit councils from becoming discouraged.

The lack of clarity around election cost has led to principal authorities charging various amounts for elections: some district councils charge full fees, and others charge in part. This is a particular cause for concern when local council elections take place at the same time as other elections.

<u>Management and administration of elections</u>

There are many different factors to how district and borough elections are run compared to town and parish council elections. NALC believes that there should be no difference. For example, local candidates cannot appoint election agents, and there are differences around access to the electoral-role. The differences are also likely to confuse twin or triple hatted councillors, already having to understand the many complexities around elections.

Anecdotal evidence from 2015 suggests a loss of electoral expertise in principal councils (presumably because of savings) which have made it more difficult for parishes to access information. County associations have had to ensure that they bridge this gap in knowledge. Issues raised include polling stations (location and number); some evidence of people being sent to the wrong place and, insufficient advertising. NALC would like to see the early introduction of electronic submission of nomination papers, which is supported by the Electoral Commission, as some councillors and clerks found the documentation uploaded by the Electoral Commission on their website confusing.

Some anomalies/issues:

- Under and over-representation in individual wards;
- the varied number of councillors-per-elector;
- there is no consistency for parish elections with nominations by ward;
- election agents cannot legally be elected in parish elections;
- many local elections were uncontested because of district councils not assisting in the provision of information to prospective candidates;
- some concerns were too many barriers to standing, such as lots of bureaucracy;
- The capacity of local councils, especially small ones, might be an issue. (One council's clerk had not notified councillors of the election as she did not have the time to do so, being employed for 5 hours per week).

General issues that need to be addressed by society, the sector, national bodies and others

There was general support for a concerted campaign to raise the profile of local councils, their role and influence and the importance of elections. If councils are to become an increasingly important part of local governance, there needs to be a better understanding of their role and work, their importance to community resilience and as a building block of democracy through:

- More positive examples of what councillors do in publications;
- TV promotion and use of social media;
- reaching out to under-represented groups and encourage their national bodies to promote parishes' work and standing for elections;

- recruiting support from other sectors.

What worked well in generating interest in standing for election?

Examples include:

- Leaflet through the door, although this is costly;
- Newsletters/articles in the national media;
- Open sessions for candidates and at the council;
- County associations got funding to run promo events;
- Blandford Forum's short video trying to promote both registering to vote and standing for election — the video has over 1,000 views (see video: http://youtu.be/L2kppyz0Bxs);
- Newsletters and articles had worked well to encourage participation;
- Other events – such as public meetings - had not always been cost-effective.

NALC's Diversity Commission census survey in 2018

In 2017 as part of our work to help local councils improve, NALC launched a Diversity Commission to support the growth of diversity and representation in local councils. The commission included representatives from the Fawcett Society, the Local Government Association (LGA), universities, county associations and local councils.

Local councils work for and are shaped by their communities. With this in mind, the commission began work to look at ways local councils could:

- Encourage more people from diverse backgrounds to stand for election;
- be representative of the community they serve;
- devote more time to engaging those who feel isolated from their community.

The Diversity Commission created a work stream which consisted of creating a toolkit for local councils to follow, to increase the diversity of their councils; diversity pledges from councillors and council organisations; a talk at the NALC Annual Conference 2018 and, a call for evidence from councils in promoting a diverse council. The commission assessed the diversity of people who are local councillors in relation to their age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and socio-economic background.

This report gives an insight into the research they have carried out through the local councillor census survey and call for evidence. Over 2,100 councillors (2.1% of councillors) participated in this research which took place from November 2017 to June 2018.

As you can see from the infographic above, the majority of councillors are male (60%), aged between 46-75 (81%), and would recommend becoming a councillor (79%). 3% of councillors are LGBTQ+; this is almost double the national average in 2015 (1.7%).

This report has highlighted the issue of diversity in the local government sector. NALC has vowed to ensure that its members, employees and sponsors are as inclusive as possible.

To build upon previous surveys, NALC decided to use the same template of questions from the Diversity Commission survey, but also send surveys to councils and county associations. This research will give NALC, and our members, an excellent understanding of the state of play of local democracy and an understanding of areas for improvement. This project will outline the results of these surveys and conclude on a plan for development.

(Source: Office for National Statistics)

NALC Councillor Census Survey

Visit www.nalc.gov.uk/diversitycommission to find out more about the National Association of Local Councils diversity work

60% of councillors are male

39% of councillors are female

7% of councillors have disabilities or are disabled

How old are councillors?

Under 45
11%

46 – 75
81%

Over 75
8%

How did councillors get involved with their local council?

50%	31%	20%	6%	3%
Community	Issue of interest	Family and friends	Organisation	Event

79% of councillors would recommend becoming a councillor

3% of councillors are part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community

Councillors on average spend 12 hours on council business per month

80% of councillors have received some level of training

How long has a councillor served in their local council?

| 54%	21%	25%
Five or less years	6 – 10 years	Over 10 years

COUNCILLOR SURVEY

Total responses: 2,821

It must be noted that in 2019 elections did not take place in every principal authority, thus reducing the pool of people that can answer the survey. For example, in Oxfordshire, three out of five district councils held elections for one third of the parishes in their area to run concurrently with the County Council elections in every three out of a four year cycle. Therefore, local councils and their approach to elections must be a constant effort, rather than a push for improvement once every four years.

Who are local councillors?

The profile of the average councillor according to the councillor survey is male (59%), heterosexual (86%), between the ages of 55-64 (29%), White British (90%) and Christian (59%).

The majority of councillors in the May 2019 election were new (25%) the next group has been a councillor for 5/10 years (20%) out of 2,816 responses.

The majority of councillors were co-opted in the election (38%) while 32% were elected in an uncontested election and (29%) in a contested election.

The 2019 election

Q2) How long have you been a councillor for?
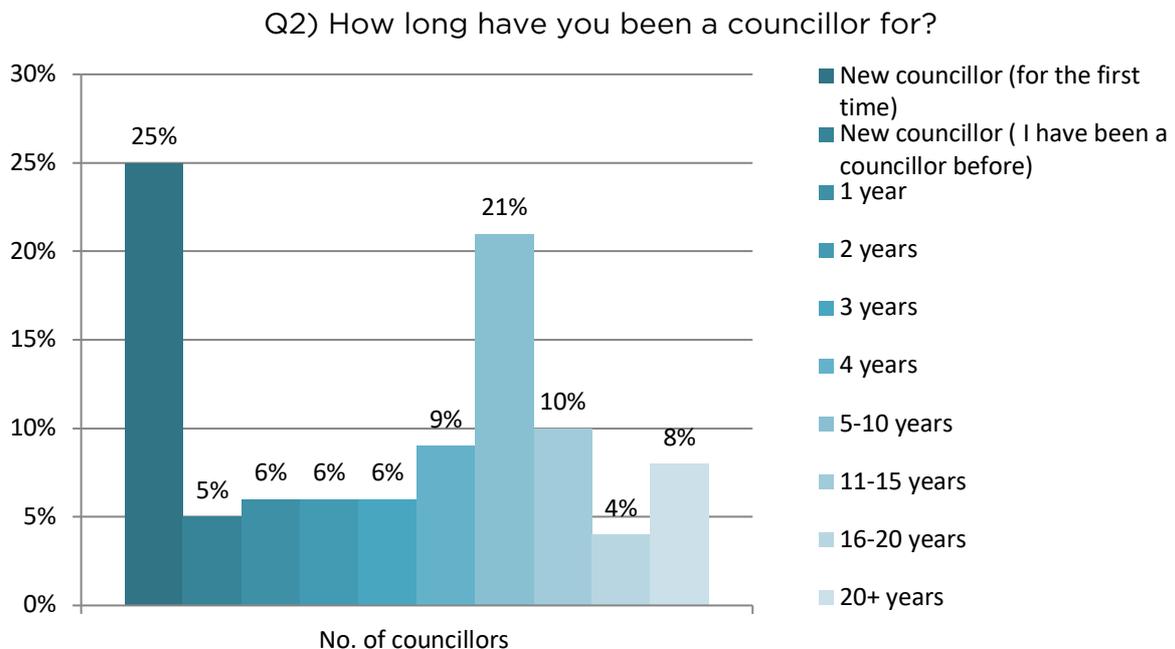
25% of councillors in the May 2019 were newly elected for the first time.

Q3) How did you become a councillor?

- 29% — I was elected in a contested election
- 33% — I was elected in an uncontested election
- 38% — I was co-opted
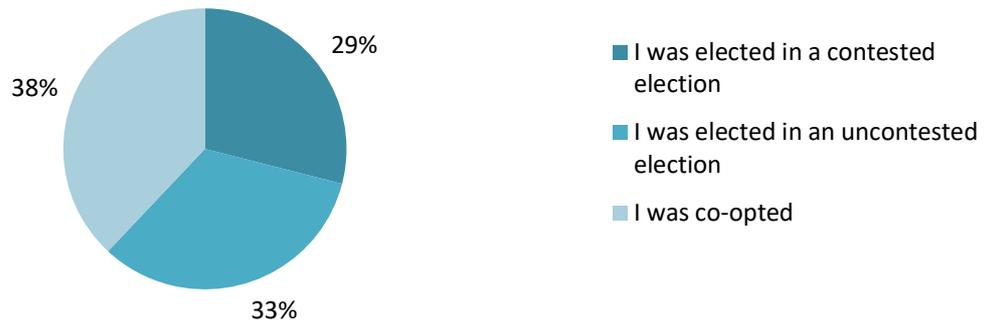
62% of candidates put themselves forward for an election.

Q4) How readily available was information regarding the 2019 May election?

|	From the parish or town council	From the County Association	From the Principal Authority	From the Electoral Commission
Readily available (easy and clear on the website)	54%	19%	32%	20%
Available (Had to search on the website but not difficult to find)	20%	19%	23%	18%
Hard to find	5%	6%	7%	8%
	3%	2%		1%
Didn't exist	18%	54%	37%	53%
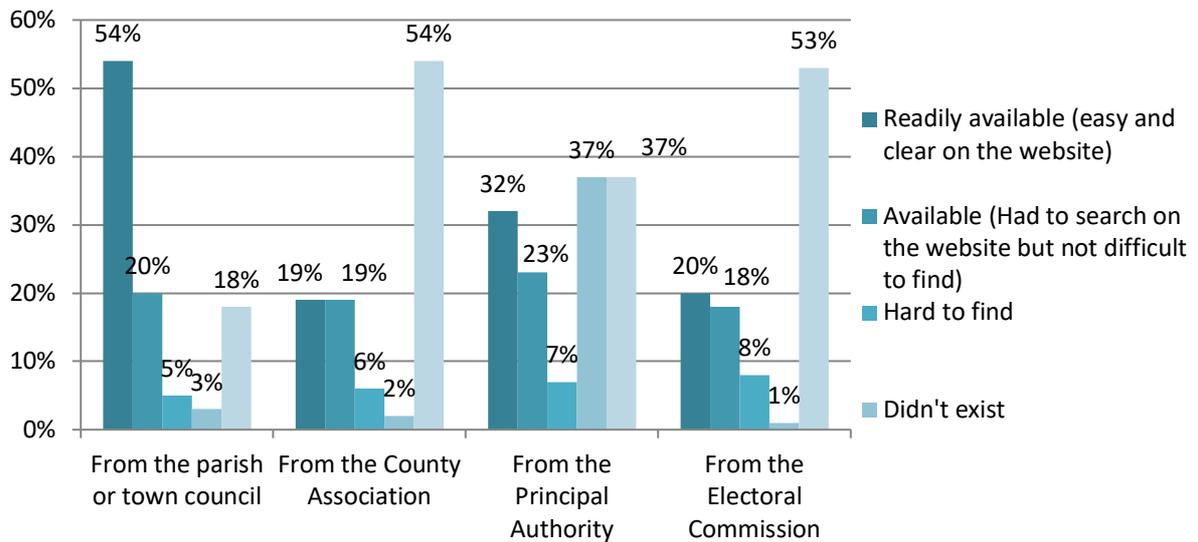
The majority of people looked at their council website (54%) and the principal authority website (32%). Over (50%) of those who responded did not look on the Electoral Commission website (53%) or the county association website (54%).

Q5) Would you recommend becoming a councillor?

92% of respondents said that they would recommend becoming a councillor.

Q6) Why did you stand for election as a town or parish councillor? (Select all that apply)
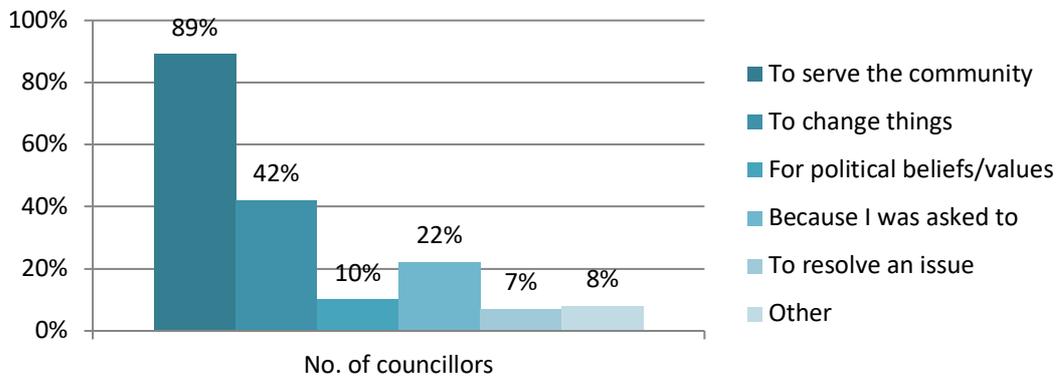
89% of councillors stood for election to serve their community.

Q7) How did you get involved in standing for election to your council?
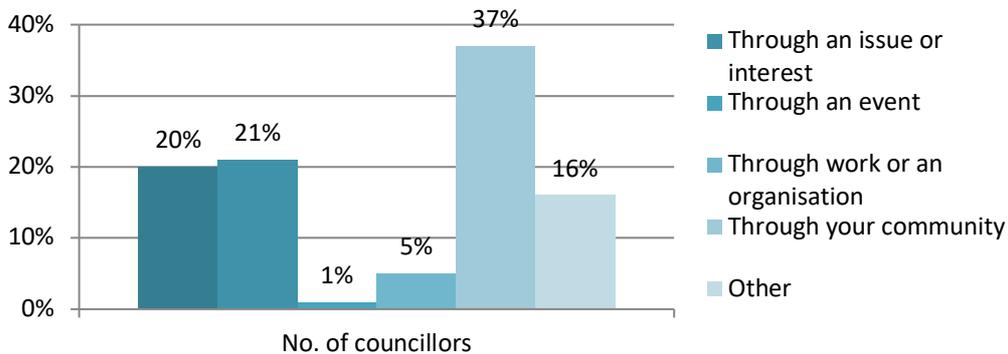
37% of respondents became in the council through their community. Other responses included councillors came to the house regarding a planning application and were persuade, started attending meetings, political party, and wanted to be involved in local issues

Q8) Does your council have a neighbourhood plan?

- Yes
- In the process of creating one
- No

37%
26%
36%
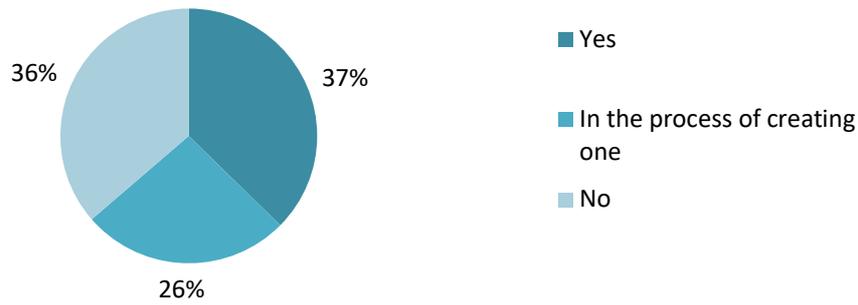
63% of councils have a neighbourhood plan or are in the process of making one.

Q9) Did you and/or your council use social media to promote the election?

- Just me
- Just my council
- Both
- Neither
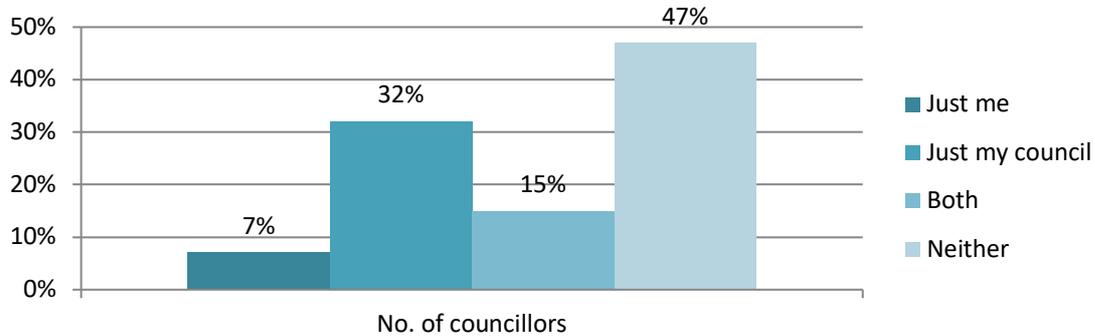
No. of councillors

In 47% of cases, neither councillors nor councils used social media to promote the election.

Q10) Did you approach people to stand on your council (where necessary) such as, those who have been vocal on parish issues?

- Yes
- No
- Not necessary

20%
47%
33%

47% of councillors approached individuals to stand for election.

Q11) What should be changed to make the process of standing for election easier? (Please select all that apply and tell us more detail to support your choices)

Legend
■ More information
■ More support
■ Open days
■ Nomination forms
■ Expenses process
■ Appointing an agent
■ Access to a grant
■ Other

Chart values: 58%, 36%, 33%, 19%, 10%, 4%, 6%, 32%
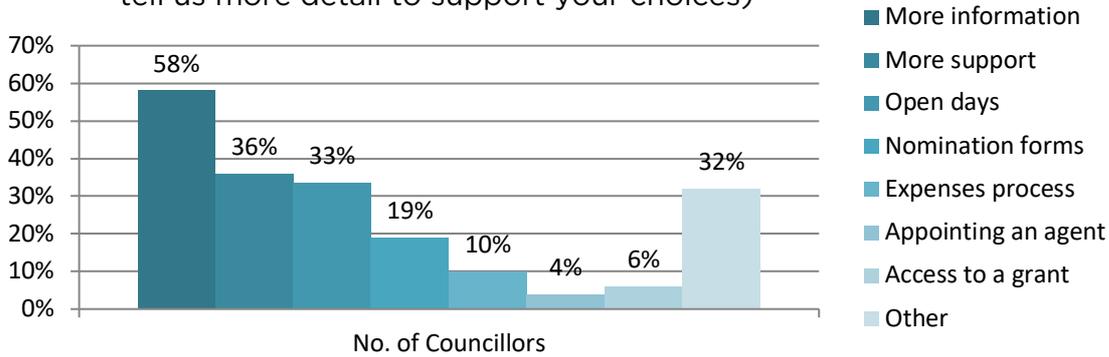
No. of Councillors

58% of councillors surveyed stated that more information about how to become a councillor would make standing for election easier. 36% stated that more support would also make the process easier. Other response included:

- "Look at other ways of running a PC. Many people are interested in certain areas but not in all the activities of a PC. Some different levels of councillors would only deal with certain areas i.e. Planning; Leisure Amenities etc., in a subcommittee role but others would be full councillors across all areas of council work. Because the role of the chair of the main council can be very controversial in many PC's, a lot of people who could stand for the council do not because they believe the chair has too much influence in decisions taken. This stems from many, who find it difficult not to voice their opinions because they do not want to go against what the chair's view is and they feel isolated. Another way to help would be the restrict any councillor for being the council chair for more than 3 years, and not elected to the same position for three years after their previous term of office. Some councils have the same chair for over 20 years and this is not a healthy state for any council."

- "Not enough publicity is done to promote the work of town and parish councils and their roles are misunderstood by many residents. There is an ingrained mistrust of parish councils by many who think they are paid roles that control services like NHS and police.

- "Unless you are in the 'know' and are adept at extracting information from a variety of sources, and have the time to do so, it is quite difficult to know what a parish councillor does; what time is necessary to devote to the office and what a councillor's responsibilities are. There is a need to give a lot more support to anyone who shows an interest in becoming a councillor. I nominated a local man who had shown an interest two elections back and he has now been a tower of strength to the council but it takes time and energy. An open day is a really good idea and may well come up with the right candidate.

- "I'm a parish councillor. Publication of what could be called information/training materials by Borough Council before I stood for nomination (i.e. correct forms to complete etc.) was sent to me by people who knew the process. This should be more transparent - perhaps once a person has merely "expressed an interest" they (or their representative) can attend a meeting outlining various forms to be completed etc. Also, I think a general pack could be produced outlining rules responsibilities for England & Wales could be produced by either Gov't or Electoral Commission".
- "The current process seems pretty straightforward to me".

Q12) About yourself: Please indicate the gender you identify with:

0.21%   0.04%   2%

38%

59%

- ■ Female
- ■ Male
- ■ Transgender
- ■ Prefer to self subscribe
- ■ Prefer not to say
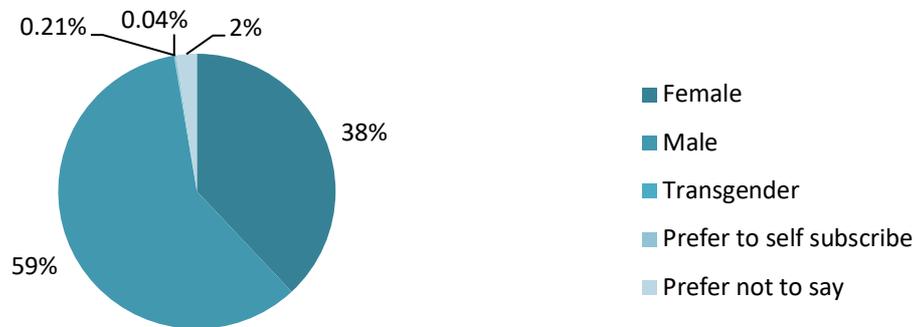
59% of councillors are male. 38% are female.

Q13) What is your sexual orientation?

86%

0.50%   1%   0.60%   0.30%   9%   3%

No. of councillors

- ■ Heterosexual
- ■ Gay woman
- ■ Gay man
- ■ Bisexual
- ■ Prefer to self-subscribe
- ■ Prefer not to say
- ■ Other
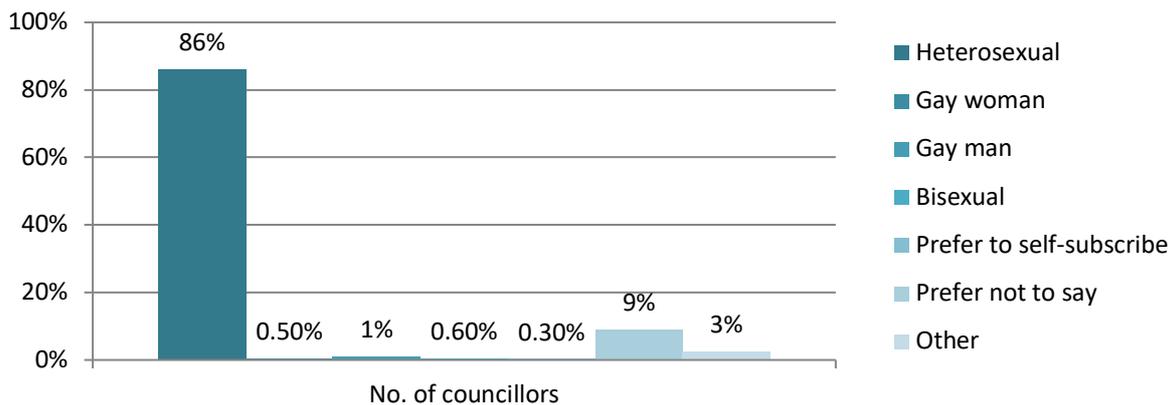
86% of councillors are heterosexual.

Q14) Please tick your age range:

Legend:
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-70
- 71-75
- 76+

Data labels: 0.60%, 3%, 5%, 13%, 29%, 22%, 19%, 9%
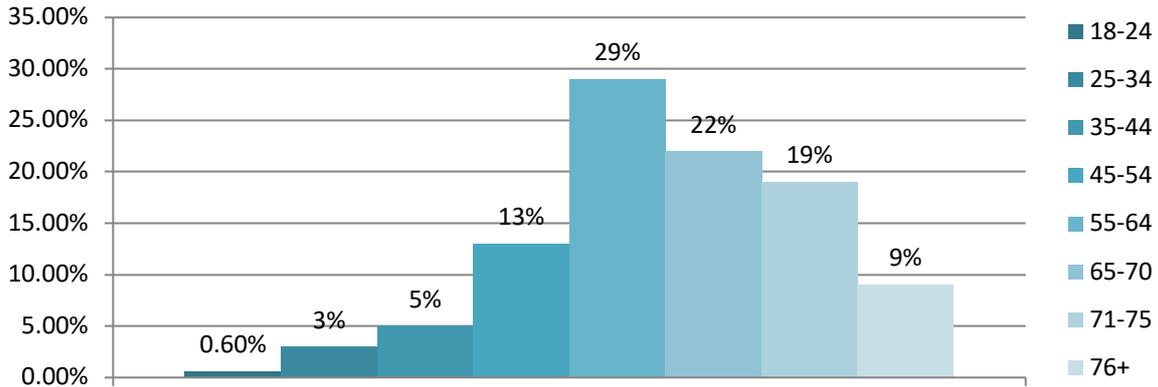
50% of respondents are under the age of 64.

Q15) Which of the following ethnic groups would you describe yourself as belonging to: (Choose ONE section)(Commission for Racial Equality categories)


Legend:
- White British
- White Irish
- White- Other White
- Mixed -White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed - White and Black African
- Mixed- White and Asian
- Mixed - Other
- Asian or Asian British - Indian
- Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
- Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi
- Asian or Asian British - Other
- Black or Black Britain - Caribbean
- Black or Black British - African
- Black or Black British - Other
- Chinese or Chinese British
- Prefer not to say
- Other

Data labels: 2,523, 26, 35, 3, 3, 6, 7, 8, 1, 1, 4, 5, 0, 1, 2, 119, 73

Nationality Affiliation

90% of councillors are White British.

Q16) What is your religious affiliation?

Christian: 1,655
Muslim: 3
Hindu: 7
Sikh: 2
Jewish: 15
Buddhist: 11
No religion: 792
Prefer not to say: 210
Other: 91

X-axis: Religious Afifiliation
Y-axis: 0 to 2,000
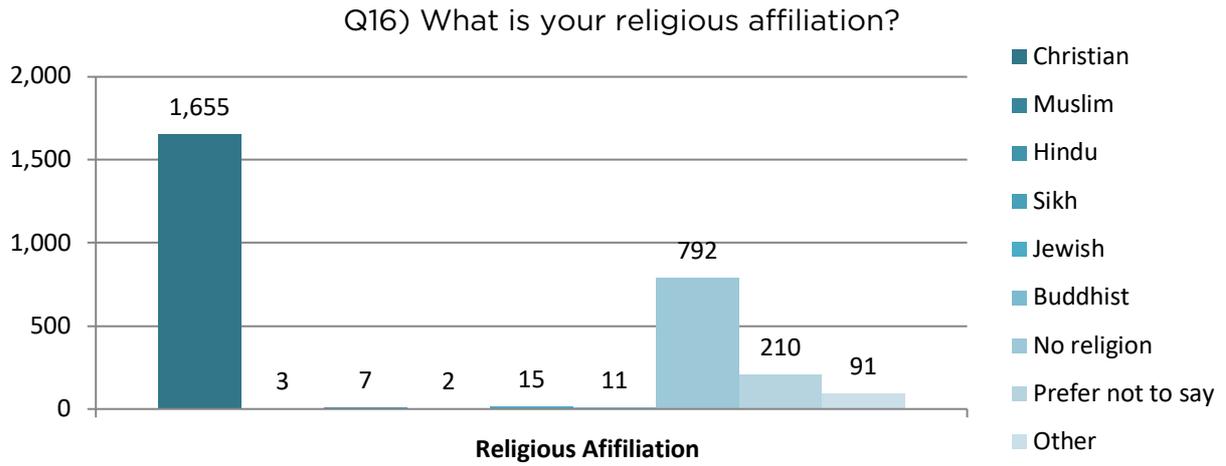
59% of councillors are Christian.

Q17) Do you identify yourself as a disabled person?

0.36% 3.75% 7%

Yes
No
Don't know
Prefer not to say

89%
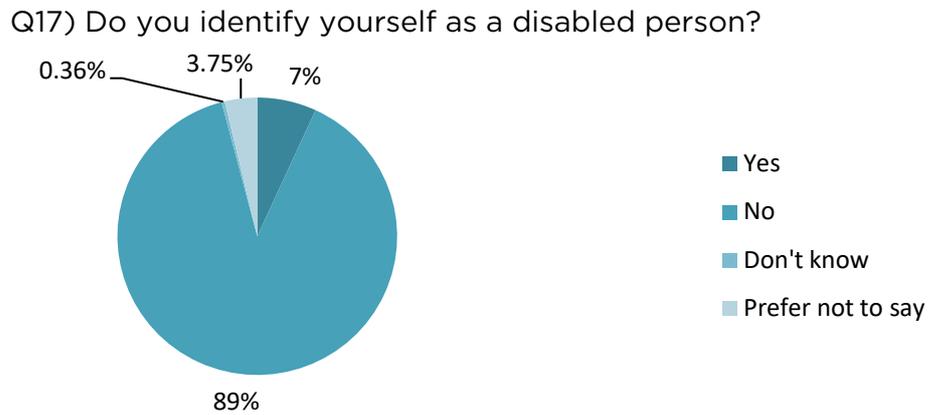
7% of councillors are disabled.

Q18) Do you have caring responsibilities?

5% 17%

Yes
No
Prefer not to say

79%
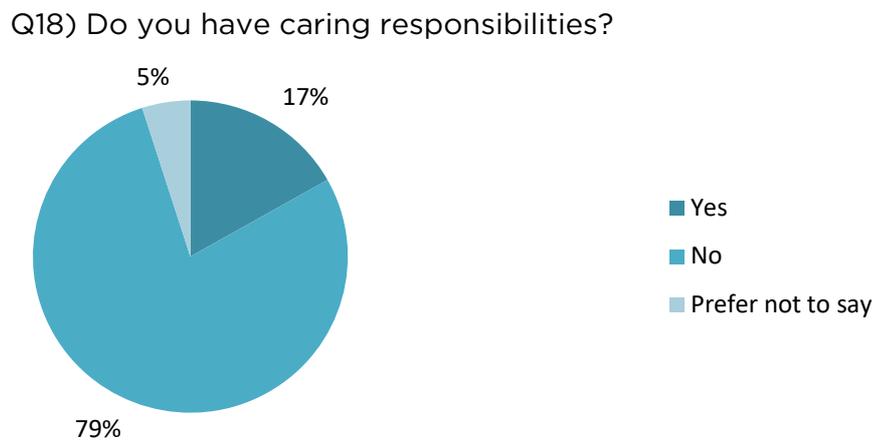
17% of councillors have caring responsibilities.

Compared to the census survey in 2018

The census survey had 2,100 responses. There has been an increase in respondents to the survey by 721 people — an increase of 25%.

In 2018, 64% of respondents stated that they were elected (either in an election or by co-option). The study, therefore, added the figure of contested and uncontested election together for 2019. In conclusion, although since 2019 the number of respondents increased by 29%, the actual number of elected candidates reduced by two percentage points. 78% said they would recommend becoming a councillor. In 2019, 95% of respondents recommended becoming a councillor. There has been a 16% point increase in the number of councillors recommending becoming a councillor. Since 2018, there has been a slight reduction in the number of female councillors (-1%). The 2019 General Election saw the most significant amount of female MPs ever elected (34%). The local council sector is, therefore, more representative of the national picture at (38%). The local council sector is therefore 4% ahead of the national average.

LOCAL COUNCIL SURVEY

Total responses: 900

The aims of this survey were to gather information on our members and to determine how to election process could be improved. The majority of councils suggested that a change in the process would make it easier for them, while 49% suggested trialling an online process. It was further interesting to see the range of councils that filled in the survey: ranging from those who do not raise a precept, to those who have a precept of over £1m.

Who are our local councils?

Q3) What is the councils precept for 2019/20?

Q3) What is the councils precept for 2019/20?

|	No. of councils
£0-25,000	400
£25,001-50,000	140
£50,001-100,000	117
£100,001-250,000	113
£250,001-500,000	60
£500,001-…	28
£1,000,000+	11
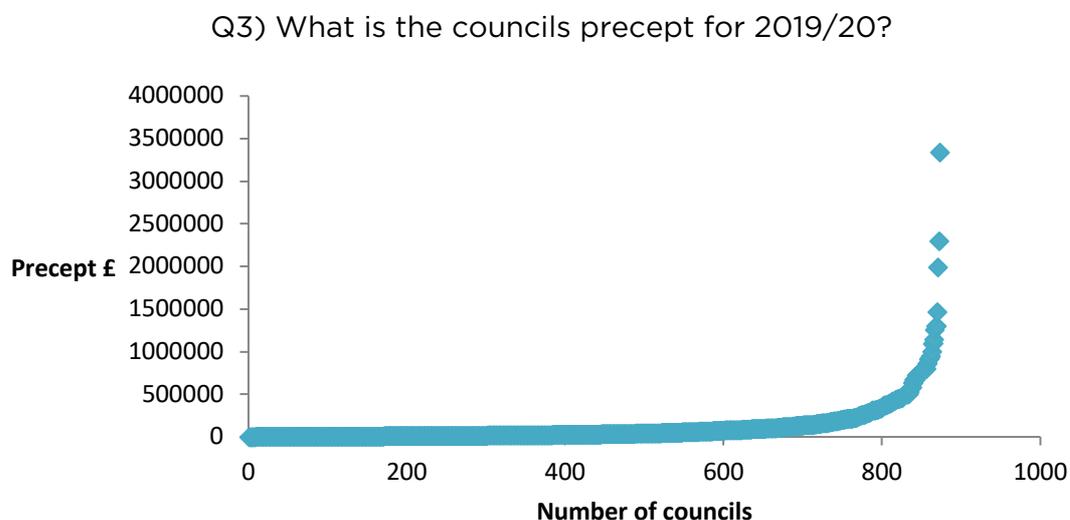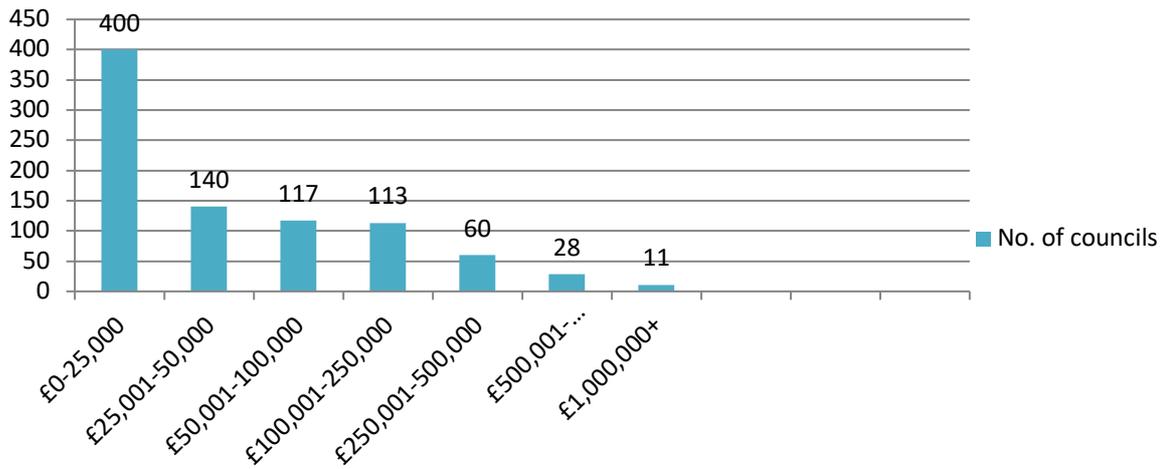
46% of councils have a precept of 0-£25,000. 88% of precept is under £250,000. 12% of precept is over £250,000

Q4) How many electors are there in the civil parish?


	%
0-250	10%
251-500	18%
501-1,000	17%
1,001-2,500	20%
2,501-5,000	16%
5,001-7,500	6%
7,501-10,000	5%
10,001-20,000	6%
20,001-50,000	2%
50,001-70,000	0%
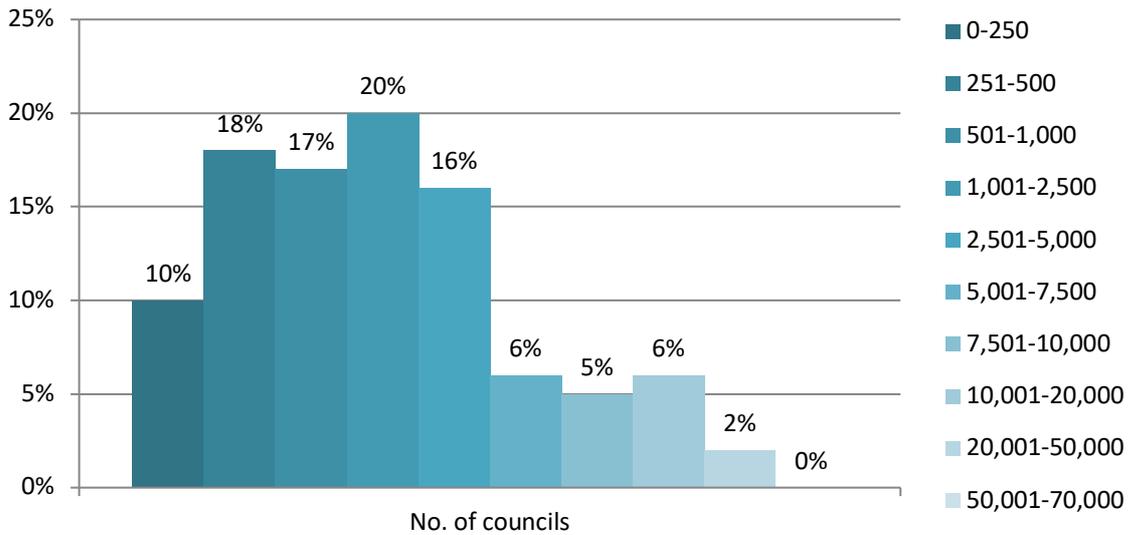
No. of councils

81% of councils have an electorate of below 5,000.

Q5) How many staff does the council employ?

No. of councils

No. of staff that councils employ

Legend:
- 0-10
- 11--20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-85

Values: 937, 51, 13, 3, 5
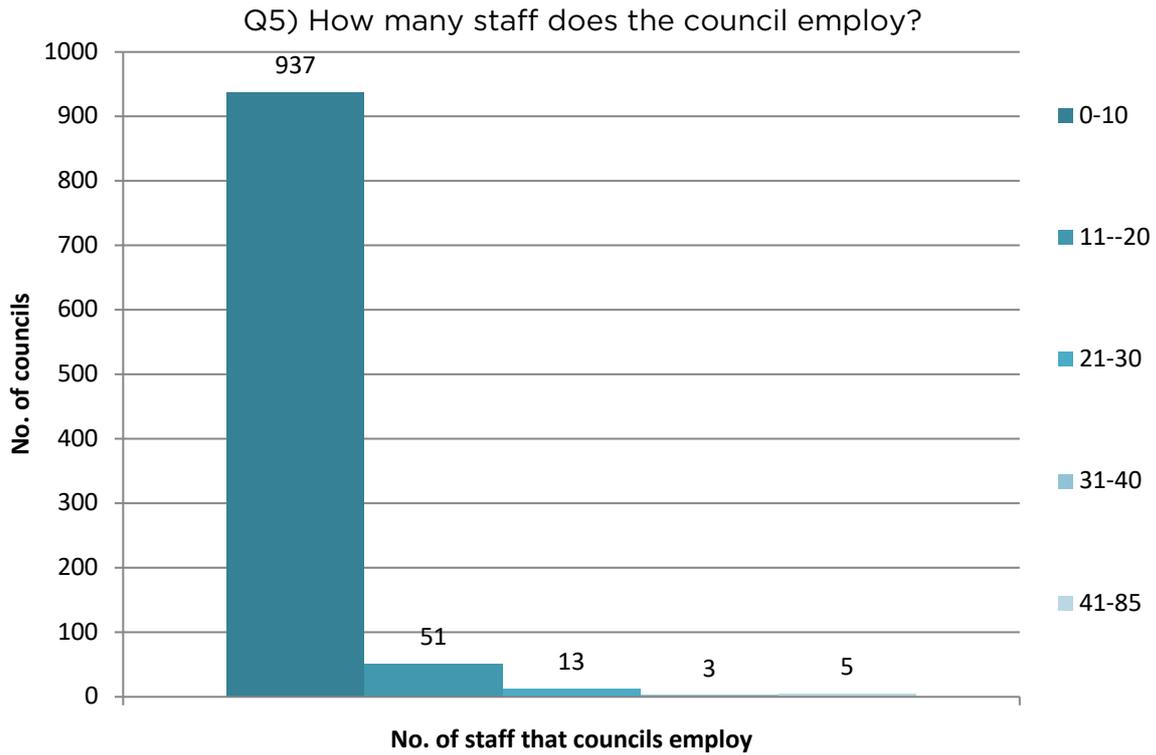
93% of councils employ 0-10 members of staff.

q.7 Please indicate the average number of hours per week that the council collectively spends on committee business: (attending events, preparing for meetings, attending committee meetings etc.)

Number of hours

Legend:
- Less than one hour
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-15 hours
- 26-30 hours
- 31-35 hours
- 36-40 hours
- 41-50 hours
- 51-55 hours
- 56-60 hours
- 61-65 hours

Values: 15%, 38%, 17%, 8%, 7%, 4%, 3%, 2%, 1%, 2%, 1%, 0.50%, 0%

38% of councils spend 1-5 hours per week on committee business. 75% of councils spend between 1-20 hours of committee business per week.

20

Q8) How many seats does the council have?

No. of seats on councils
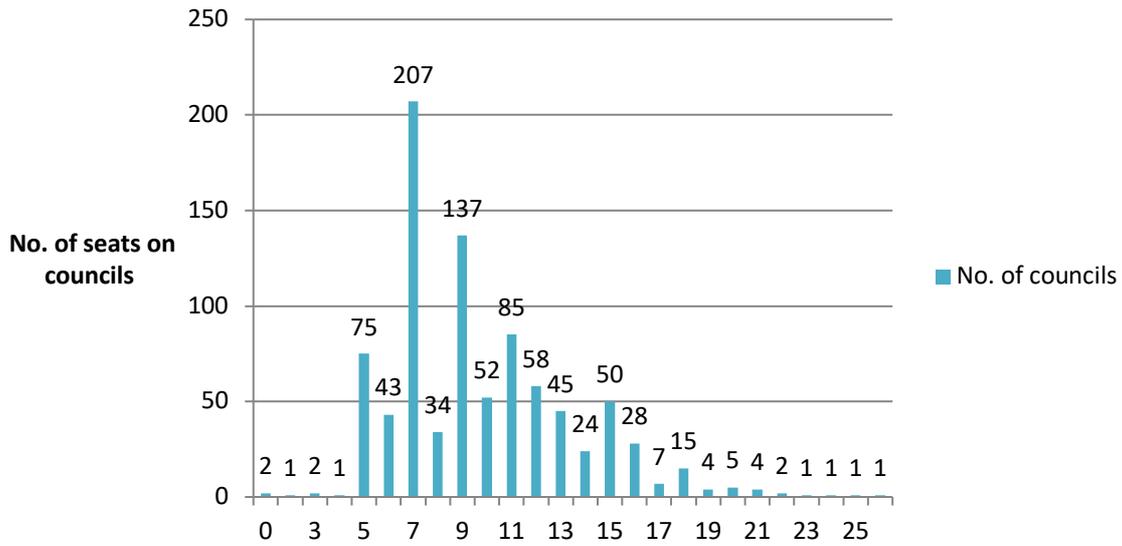
No. of councils

23% of councils have 7 seats. 13% of councils have 15 seats or more. 87% of councils have less than 15 seats.

The 2019 elections

Q9) May 2019 elections: How many candidates for election were there?

- 0-10
- 11--20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41+

633

182

39

17

1
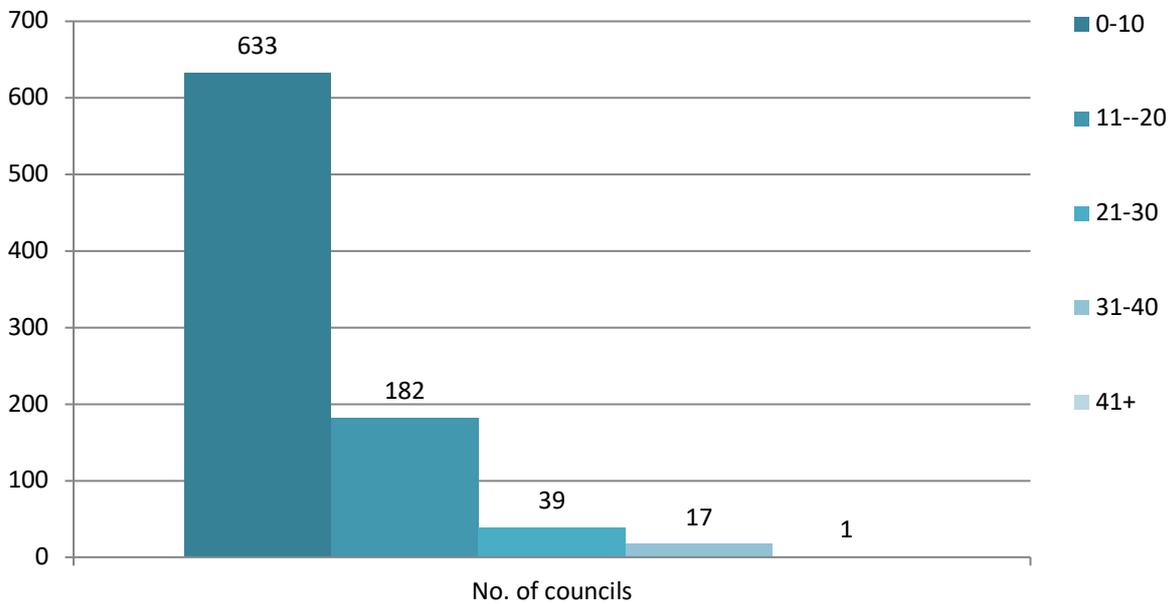
No. of councils

72% of councils had 10 candidates or less.

Q10) How many seats were filled by uncontested elections i.e. where there were fewer candidates than seats available?

Legend: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22

Values: 175, 13, 12, 28, 69, 92, 99, 102, 64, 59, 35, 30, 28, 13, 11, 3, 4, 1, 2, 1, 1

X-axis: No.of councils
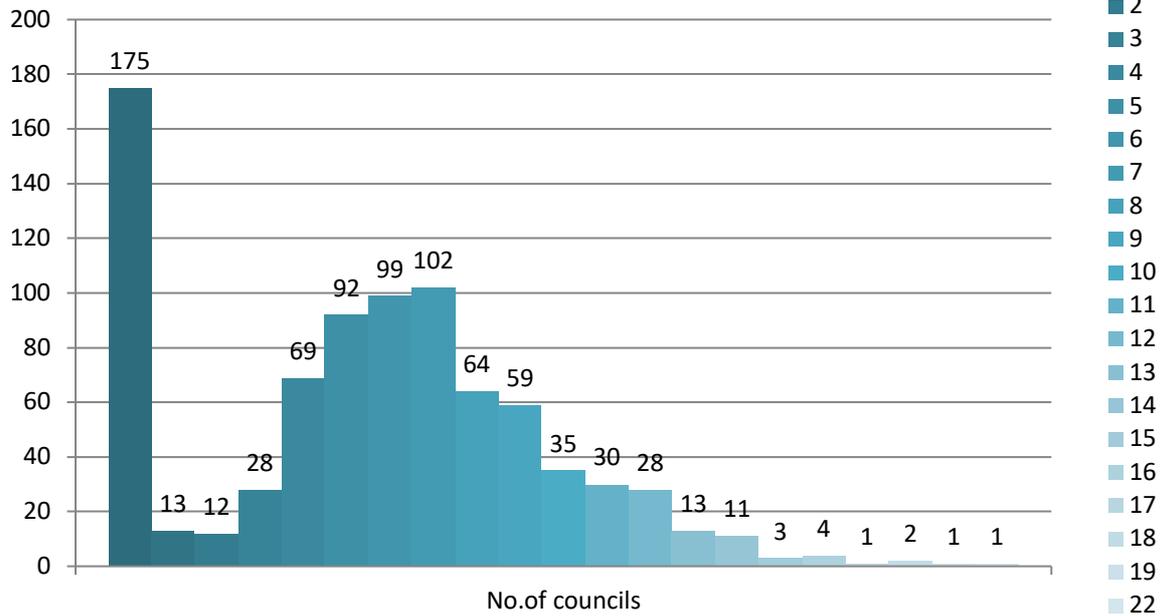
79% of council seats were filled by an uncontested election (842 councils respondents).

Q11) How many seats were filled by co-option after the election?

Legend: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10

Values: 420, 224, 121, 44, 23, 10, 3, 1, 1, 1

X-axis: No. of councils
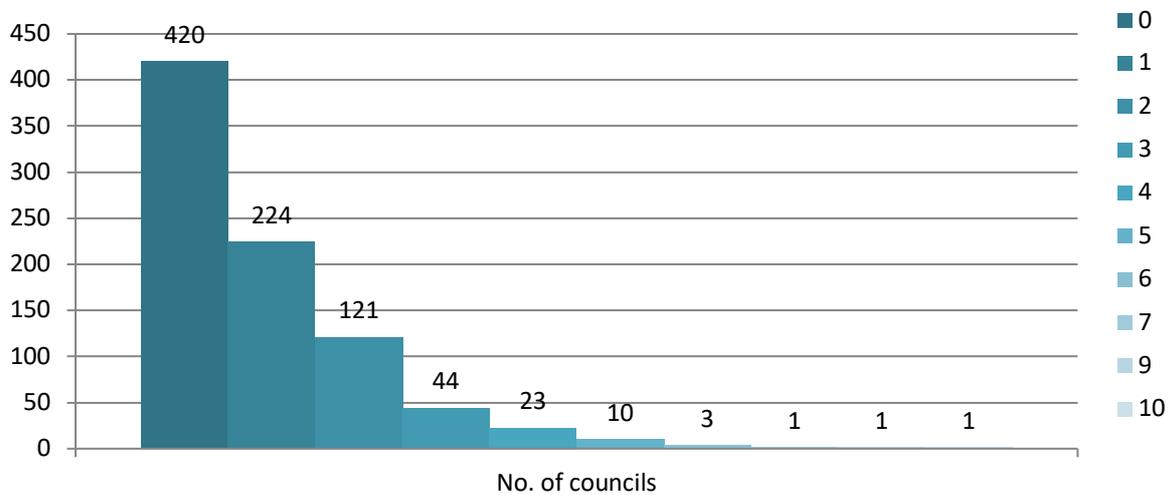
50.5% of councils had to co-opt after the election.

Q12) What process did councils use to co-opt councillors? (Select all that apply)

- Through advertisement
- Through targeting people directly
- Through a selection process
- Through looking for a specific skill set
- Through increasing the diversity of the council
- Other
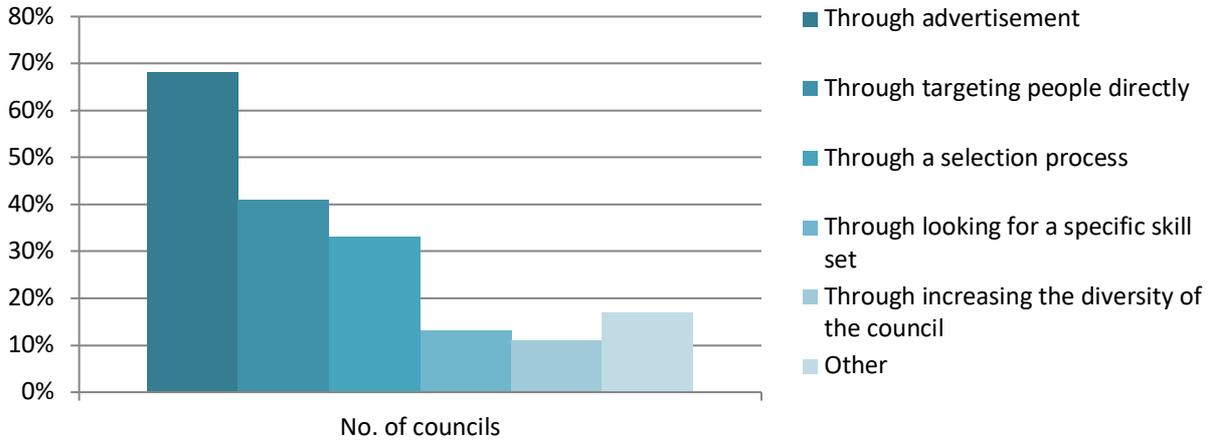
68% of councils co-opted through advertisement.

Q13) On the date that you are completing this survey; do you have any vacant seats?

66%

- Yes
- No
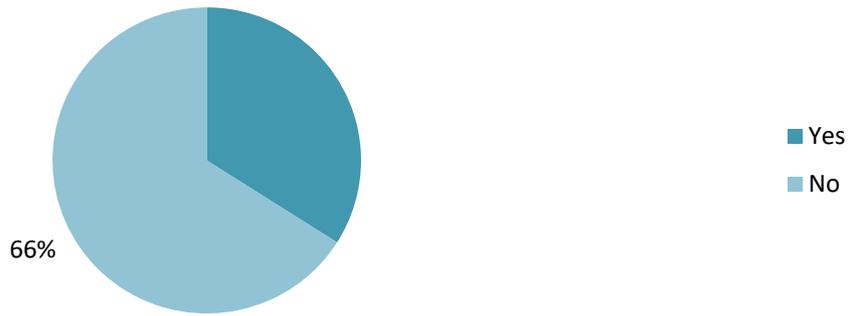
66% of councils did not have vacant seats.

Practicalities

Q16) Was the council's election held on the same day as the principal authorities?

4% 2%

94%

■ Yes
■ No
■ Don't know
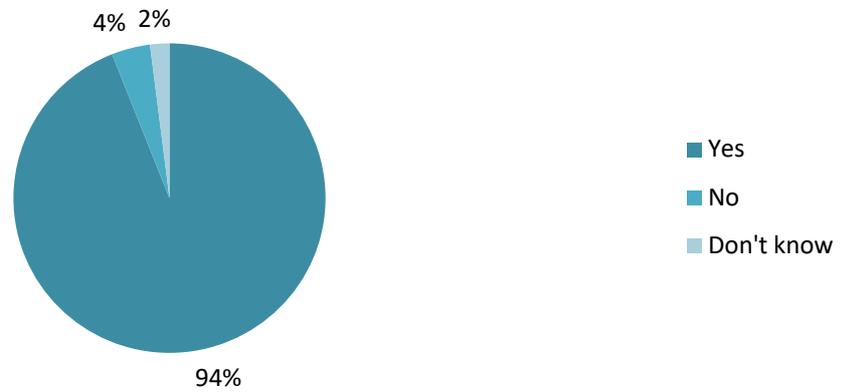
94% of councils had their election on the same day as their principal authority.

Q17) What is the percentage your budget is taken up by the cost of the election?

3% 1%

95%

■ 0-10%
■ 11-20%
■ 21-30%
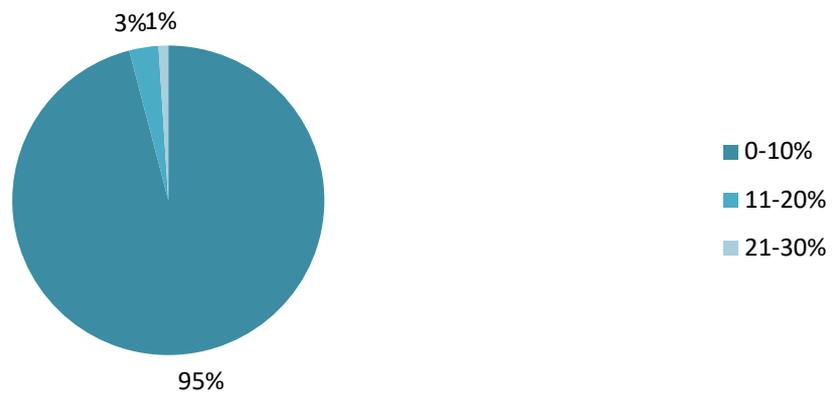
95% of councils stated that less the election took up 10% or less of their budget.

Q18) How much time do you estimate that the clerk and/or other staff spent on the elections? E.g. promoting the election, holding events, etc.

Legend:
- None
- 1-3 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 5-7 hours
- 7-10 hours
- 10-12 hours
- 12-15 hours
- 15-17 hours
- 17-20 hours
- 20-23 hours
- 23-25 hours
- 25-27 hours
- 27-30 hours
- 30+ hours

Bar values (left to right): 8%, 32%, 19%, 12%, 9%, 4%, 5%, 1%, 3%, 2%, 1%, 0.45%, 1%, 4%

X-axis: No. of councils
Y-axis: 0% to 35%
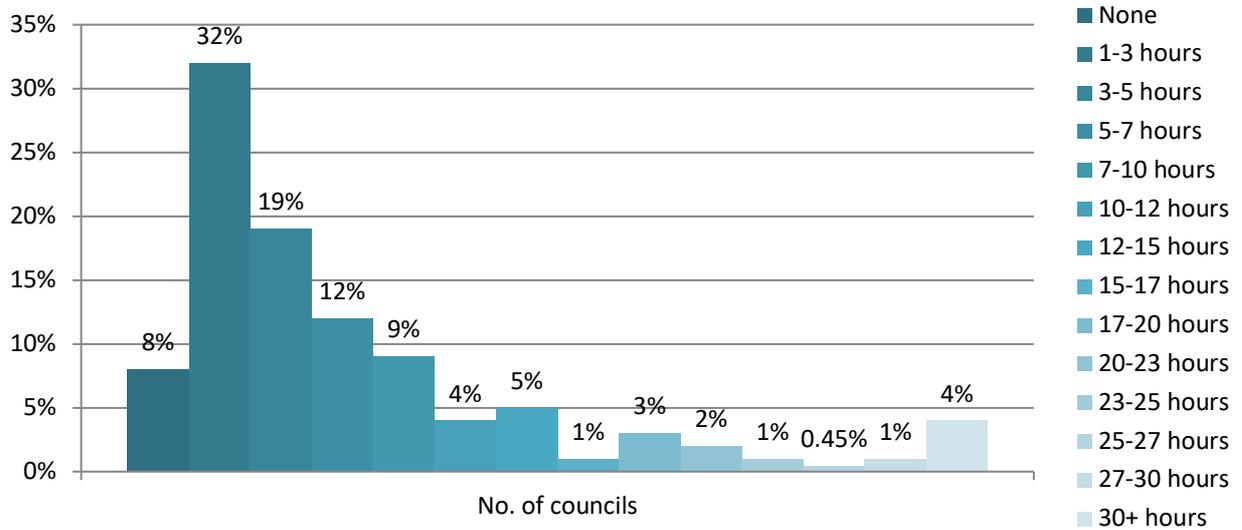
80% of councils spent 10 hours or less promoting the election.

Q19) Did your council, experience any particular challenges or hurdles (for example issues with staff time, putting on election events or difficulty getting councillors to stand)?

- "Lack of interested parties at the time of election; more people came forward after the event."
- "One councillor did not inform the clerk he was not going to stand again, one councillor submitted paperwork after closing day so now the council is unable to vote on the general power of competence option as it does not fulfil the required percentage of elected councillors' criteria."
- "No new candidates came forward."
- "In spite of more publicity than ever before, it is still very difficult to persuade people to stand for election. Lack of staff time results in no possibility to put on an election event - we are just too small. A letter to all residents post-election resulted in 10 possible co-opted so the answer may be a letter to all households BEFORE the election next time!"
- "No."

Support

Q20) Does the principal authority subsidise the cost of your local election?

- Yes
- No

37%

63%
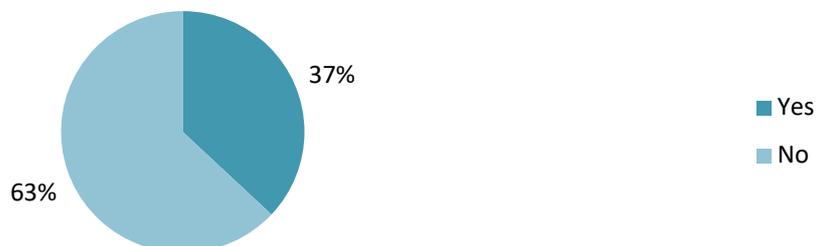
63% of principal authorities do not subsidise the cost of local elections (517 council respondents).

Q21) If yes, does the principal authority pay for all of the election or only in part?


- All
- In part

35%

65%
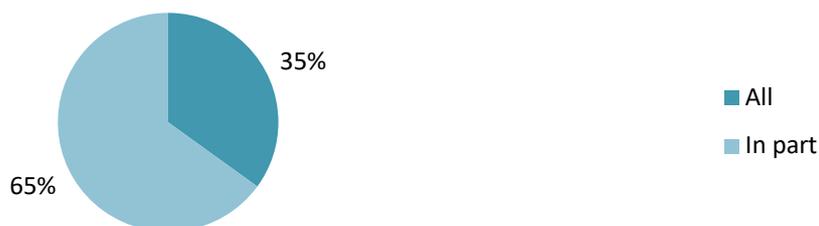
65% of subsidised elections are part for in part (210 council respondents).

### Q22) Does the principal authority offer any other election support?

- Training
- Briefing documents
- Joint briefing documents
- Officer support
- Other

38% 71% 22% 51% 10%
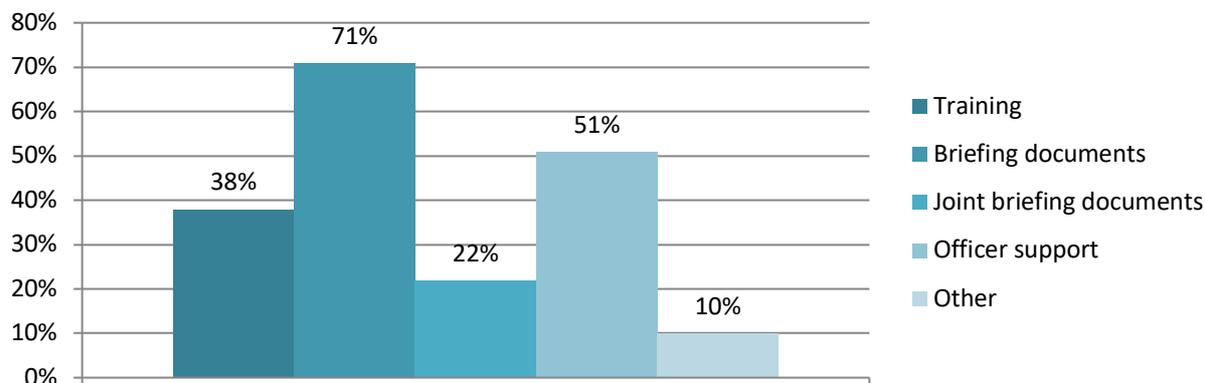
71% of principal authorities offer election support.

Q23) Was information about the elections easily available on the principal authority website?

12%

6%

8%

74%

- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- Did not look
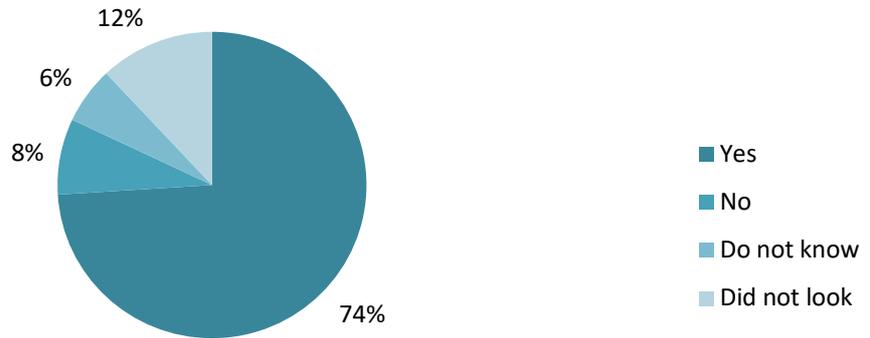
74% of councils said that information was available on principal authority websites.

Q24) Did you find the Electoral Commission nomination process and election pack/information clear, helpful, and written in plain English?

34%

66%

- Yes
- No
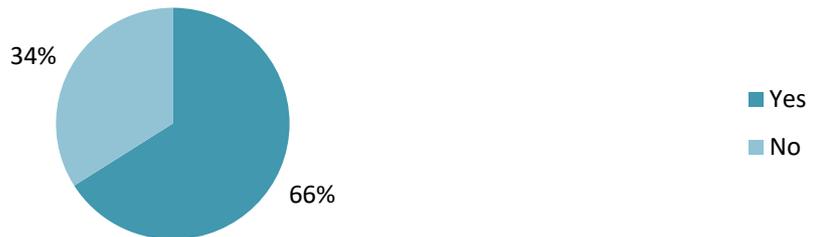
66% of councils think that the Electoral Commission nomination process and election pack was helpful.

Q25) If not, what do you think needs to be changed? (Select all that apply)

69%

28%

7%

8%

12%

10%

40%

- Design of forms
- Accessibility of the forms
- Design of the posters
- Accessibility of poster and other election materials
- Design of the guides
- Accessibility of the timetables
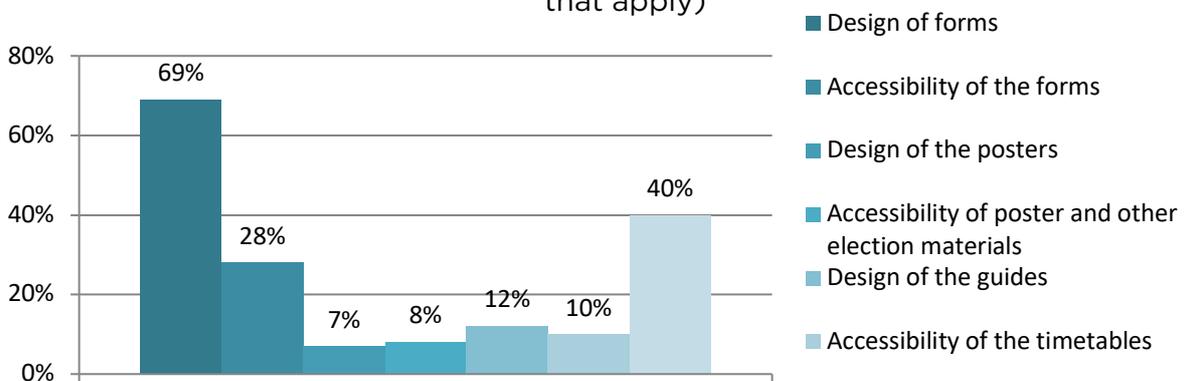
69% of councils said that the design of the forms should change.

Q26) Are you aware of NALC's 'Make a Change' campaign?

49% 51%

■ Yes
■ No
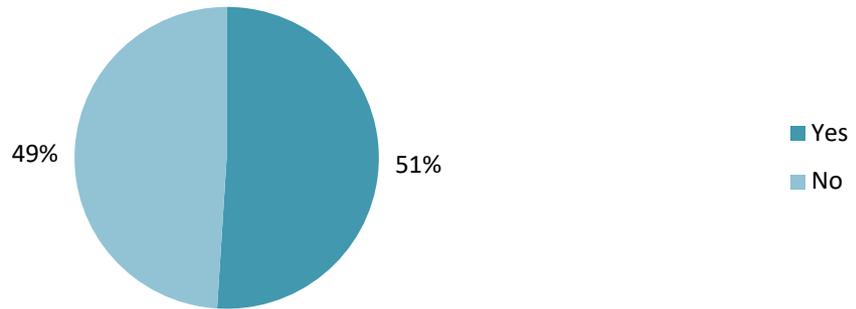
51% of councils are aware of NALC's *Make a Change* campaign.

Q27) If yes, did you use any resources?

35%

65%

■ Yes
■ No
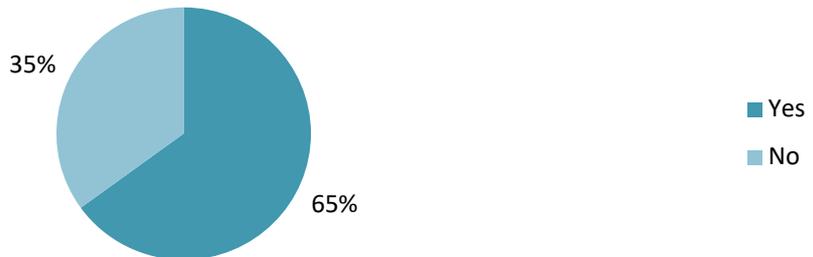
65% used resources (336 council respondents).

Q28) If yes, which ones: (Select all that apply)

■ Editable posters	
■ Editable elections press release	
■ Election promotion video	
■ Councillor YouTube videos	
■ All about Local Councils (Guide)	
■ The Good Councillor Guide	
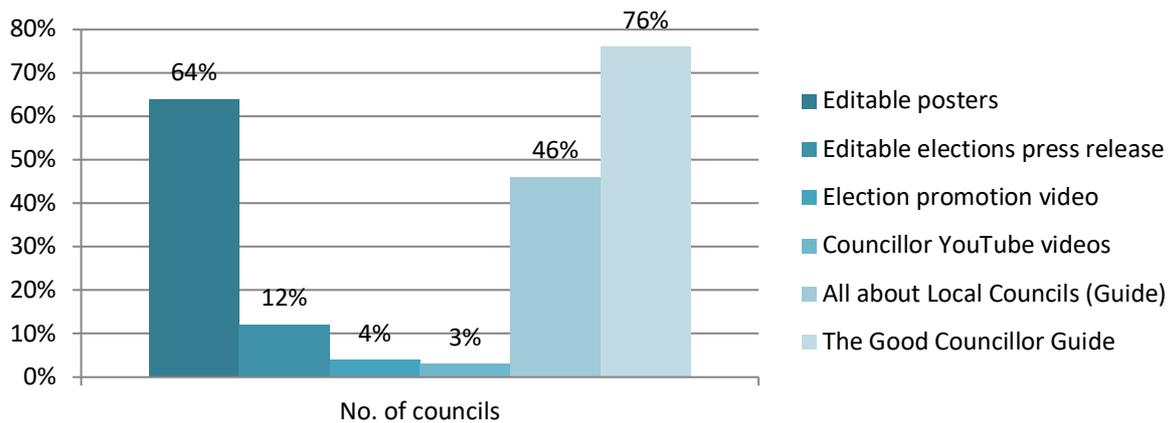
No. of councils

76% of councils used The Good Councillor's Guide.

Q29) Are there any resources that haven't been provided that you would have found helpful?

- "No."
- "More simple, punchy advertising text encouraging people to stand."
- "How to submit election expenses returns – even when it is a nil return. Councillors were very confused by this."
- "A specific simple guide written for clerks including time-lines and how to run an election year. We were told the day after our May meeting of actions which should have happened at the meetings. Clerks are often part time and may only be confronted with an election year once or twice in their employment. I was told there was nothing to worry about. I was not able to attend the training supplied by Copeland BC and then after the election I was informed of actions/time-line for actions which should have taken place."

Q30) Did your County Association run an election campaign?

Yes
No
Don't know

26%
17%
58%
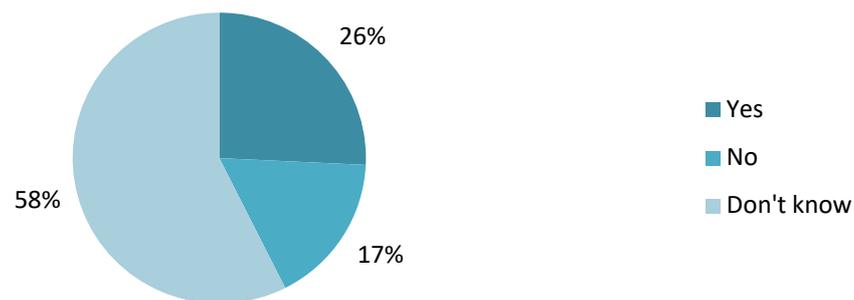
58% of councils do not know if their County Association ran an election campaign.

Q31) If yes, did the council use any County Association materials?

Yes
No
Don't know

29%
32%
39%
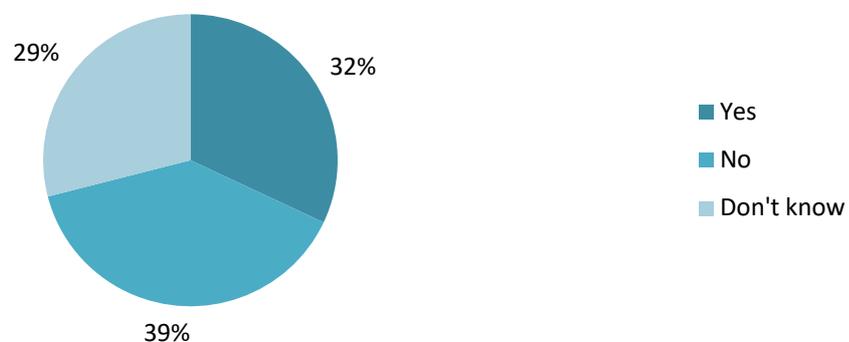
32% of councils used county association materials.

Q32) If not, then why? What did the council use?

- "We used the materials direct from the NALC website. Our District Council did not provide any materials other than the statutory forms, etc."
- "Used own resources."
- "We do videos, press releases, newsletters, etc. and have done for many elections now."
- "The District Council provided posters and all advertising paperwork for the election."

Q33) What more can be done to encourage candidacy at local council elections?

- "Ensure that they are aware it isn't about politics but about the local area."
- "Needs more national promotion via social media and advertising."
- "This is very difficult as to be an effective councillor you ideally need to attend training sessions on all aspects covered by parish councils and councils. This takes time and is very dependent upon people being willing to give up their own time to do this. Also it appears parish councils are easy prey for consultations; there has been an increase in the amount being received. For councillors to be able to make a positive contribution to the consultation they need to read and understand the consultation document. A lot is expected from parish councillors, with very little in return for the commitment they give to the community."

Representation

Q34) Do you feel that the council is more representative of its community after the 2019 elections?

44% Yes
56% No
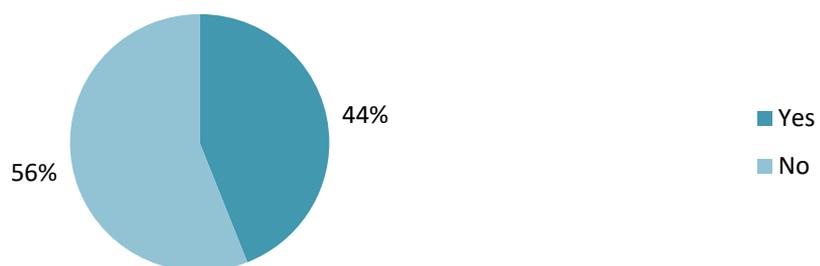
56% of councils feel that they are not more representative of their communities after 2019.

Q35) If yes, is there something that you or your council did to specifically encourage this?

- "Encouraged a young female person to stand for election as council is currently comprised of mostly retirement aged persons."
- "Ran a campaign to encourage different groups in the community. Spoke to residents raising queries before election to consider running."
- "Article in village magazine on past female parish councillors, in order to dispel the misapprehension that it's a male thing!"
- "Held 'Meet the Council' events during the year (not specifically targeted at the election) to stimulate interest in council projects and how to become involved."

Q36) If no (to question 34) how will the council look to engage more diverse representation amongst its members at the next ordinary elections or as casual vacancies arise in the meantime?

- "They continue to encourage people including new residents and younger people."
- "Holding more council events to promote the work and encourage participation."
- "Speaking at a variety of local events and putting councillor stories on the website."
- "The new council are already planning a Community Engagement Strategy and events to raise its profile."

Q37) How many of those elected in May were already councillors before the election?
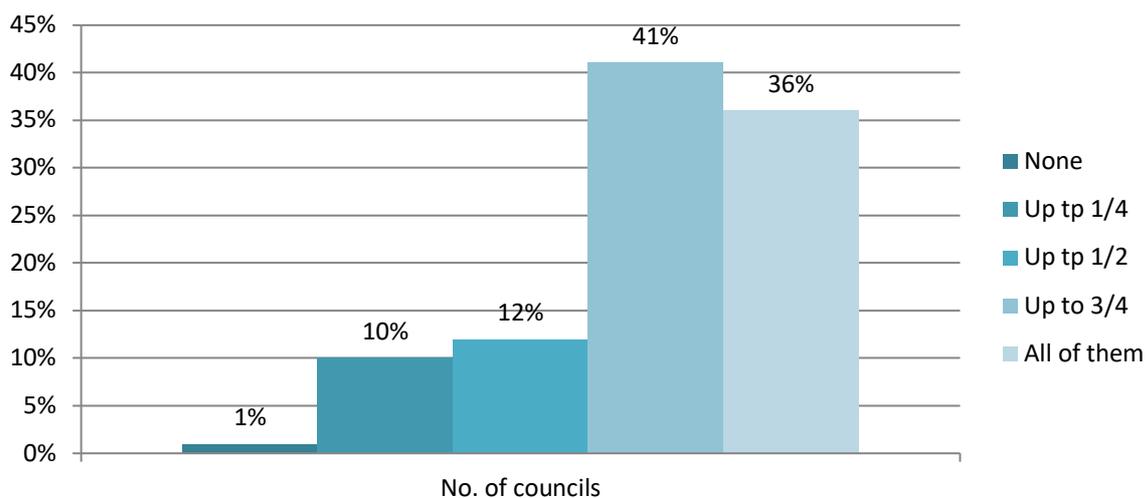

77% of councils had ¾ or more of their councillors re-elected in May 2019.

**Q38) Compared to the last main election (e.g. 2015) are there now:**
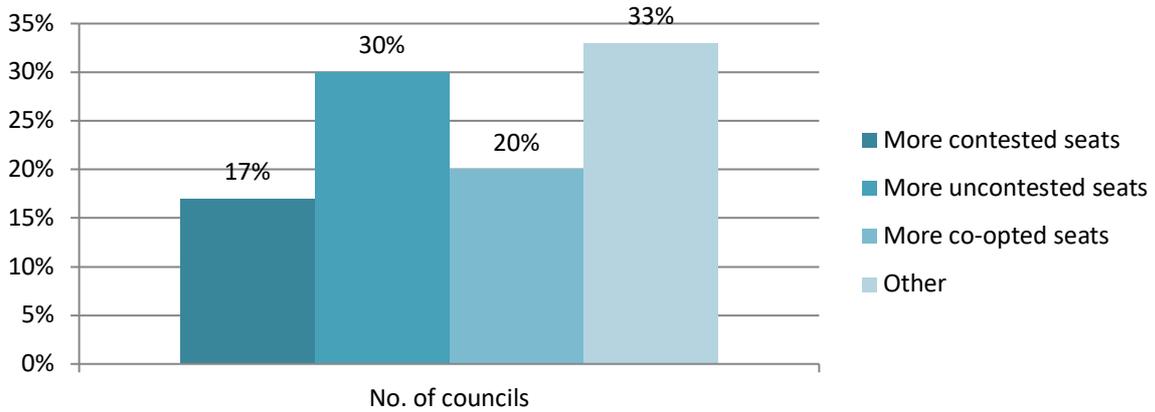
47% had more elected councillors (in contested and uncontested elections). Other responses included:

- "About the same, many of our co-opted members put themselves forward for election."
- "2015 was an uncontested election with 5 Cllrs for 5 seats- no change from 2015 to 2019."

Q39) The General Power of Competence: Eligibility for the general power of competence requires the council to meet two tests, which are, a qualified clerk (Cilca) and 2/3 of elected councillors: Did the council have the General Power of Competence before
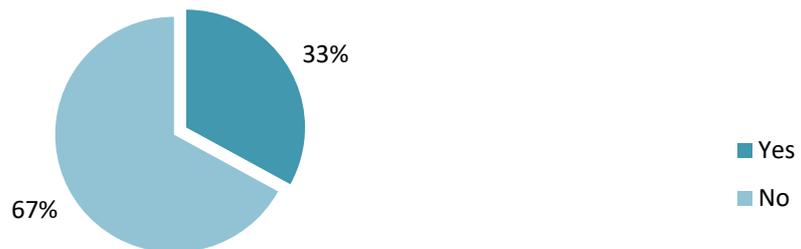
67% of councils do not have the General Power of Competence (GPC).

Q40) If yes, did the council lose its General Power of Competence following the election?

9%

91%

- Yes
- No
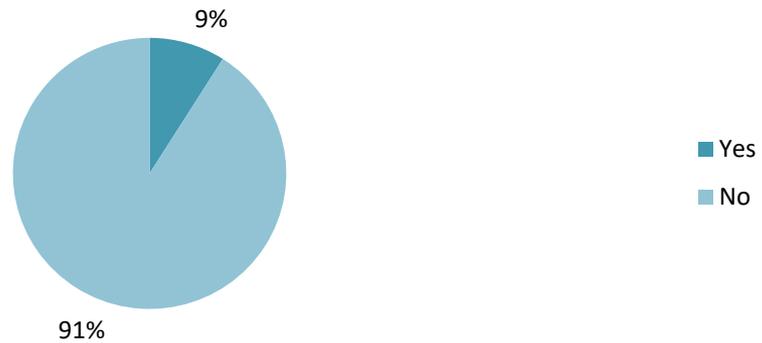
91% of councils did not lose the GPC following the election (340 councils).

Q41) If you did lose the General Power of Competence, are you looking to become eligible now?

38%

62%

- Yes
- No
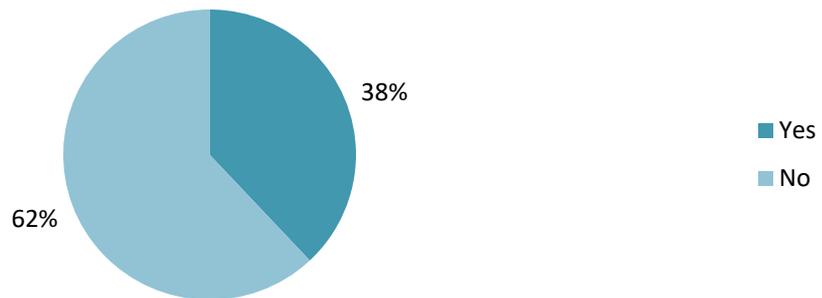
62% of councils are not looking to become eligible (103 councils).

Q42) If you are not, why not?

- "They don't seem to value it."
- "The parish council does not feel it will benefit from having the General Power of Competence."
- "It's a very small council with limited clerk hours and too few councillors most of whom work full time. We do not have the resources."

Reforming local elections

Q43) Do you think there should be a pilot for online voting in local elections?

29%

71%

Yes
No
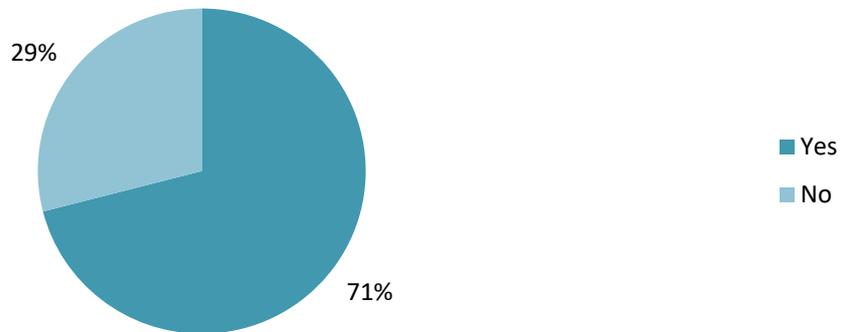
71% of councils think there should be a pilot for online voting in local elections.

Q44) Please tell us here if there any specific changes to electoral or nominations processes you would like to see: (Select all that apply)

Cost of elections

Guidance and support from Principal Authorities

Simplified forms

Expense forms process

Nomination forms

Nomination process

Online process

A clearer understanding of the election process

Other

32%

21%

62%

30%

25%

23%

49%

35%

12%
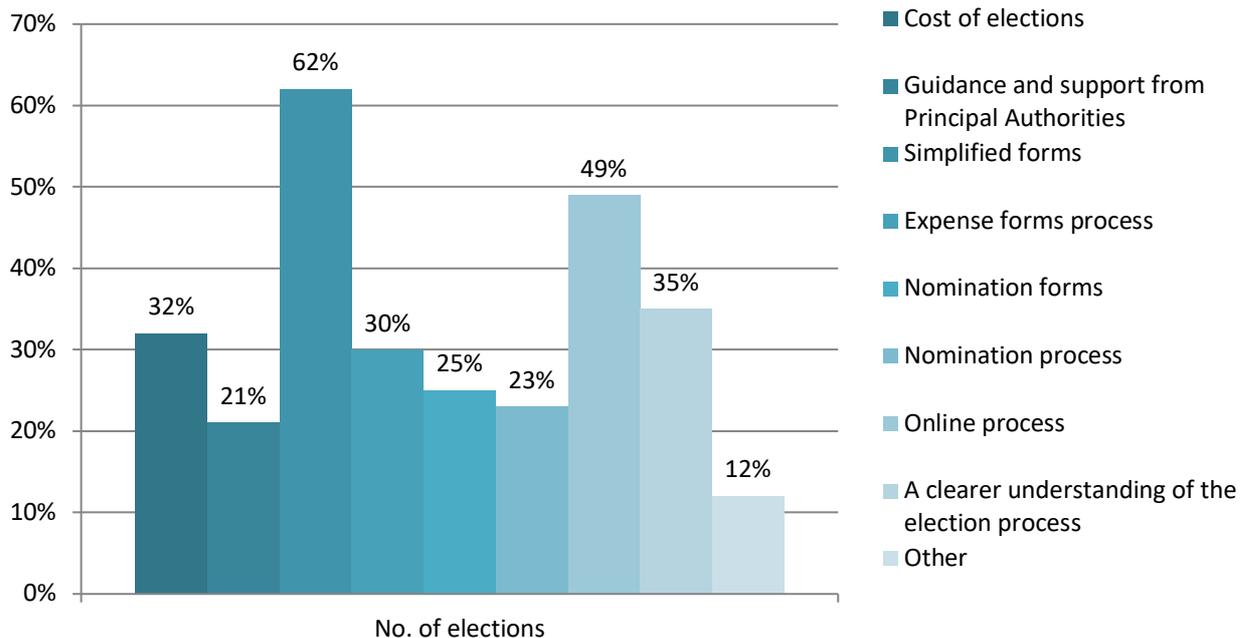
No. of elections

62% of councils suggest that elections need to be simplified. 49% of councils suggested that there should be an online process. Other responses included:

- "The electoral process is not the problem."
- "Needs to be more done nationally to encourage people to stand. I did not get involved in the nomination process as this is a particularly political council."

- "Online voting would be good as electors feel intimidated by walking past candidates outside the election room."
- "If the election is uncontested why do we need to go through the same whole process as a contested election, and why does it cost us £80 for a process we do not need or see as necessary. The forms were very difficult to understand and the clerks need a clear guidance note with a time-line for actions."

Compared to the Diversity Commission census survey

When questioning that amount of committee business that is being undertaken by councils, the 2018 census survey collected data on hours per month while the 2019 survey collated data on hours per week. To compare this data, NALC has estimated that the hours of work in a week can be multiplied by four to result in the number of hours per month.

The census survey dictates that the number of hours per month that the committee undertakes committee work is between 5-6 hours. While the 2019 study states that the majority of councils spend between 1-5 hours of committee work per week, this means that the average committee undertakes between 4-20 hours of work per month. This data indicates that councils are taking on more work streams per month than they were in 2018.

As this is the first survey of its kind, there is limited information in which to compare the results. However, this can be tracked over time as the report suggests this survey is re-issued every four years.

**Government data comparison**

Government data from the report, on Council tax data for local precepting authorities: 2018-2019 and 2019-20 data, states that there are 10,224 parish and town councils. 72% of which (7,336 of 10,224 councils) raises a precept of £25,000 or less.

The councillor survey demonstrates that 46% of councils that responded raised a precept of below £25,000. Therefore, the majority of respondents to the survey were from larger councils.

COUNTY ASSOCIATION SURVEY

Total responses: 25

County associations who did not have elections in May 2019: Buckinghamshire, Cornwall, County Durham, Isle of Wight, Northamptonshire, Northumberland, One Voice Wales, Shropshire and Wiltshire. The other ten County Associations did not respond to the survey. NALC hopes that this report may be of use to all county associations to identify areas of excellence and areas for improvement.

Q2) How many County Association were aware of NALC's 'Make a Change' campaign?

5%

95%

- Yes
- No
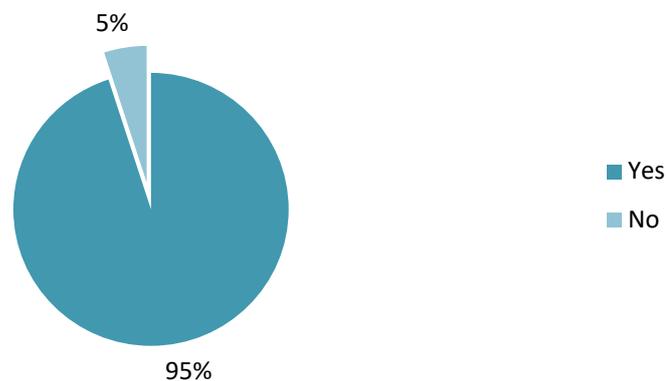
95% of County Associations were aware of NALC's *Make a Change* campaign. Of this, 76% of county associations used NALC resources.

**Q3) If yes, did you use any NALC resources?**

24%

76%

- Yes
- No
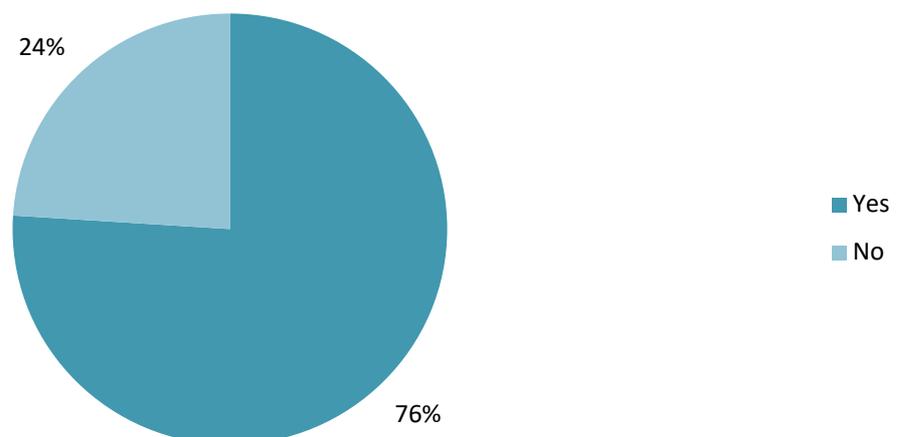
76% of county associations used NALC resources.

Q4) Did County Associations raise awareness of the May 2019 elections?

5%

Raised awarness
Did not raise awarness

95%
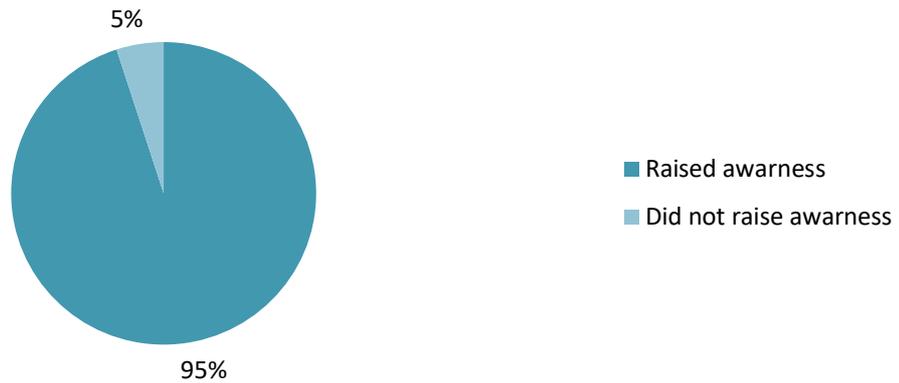
95% of county associations raised awareness of the May 2019 election and encouraged candidates to stand.

Q5) If yes, what did you do?

- "Dedicated page on the LRALC website."
- "Training shared posters and information."
- "Publicised the elections via web and social media accounts, circulated all relevant information to member councils."
- "Press releases, local radio interviews."
- "Encouraged member councils to get out to the community and encourage candidates for election. Arranged and delivered elections training to ensure councils followed the correct procedures and undertook community engagement in the build up to elections."

Q6) Did County Association's use their own election materials?

32%

Yes
No

68%
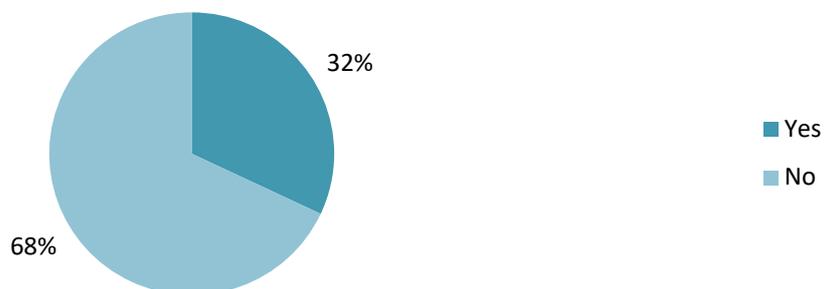
32% of county associations produced election materials.

Q7) What do you think needs to change about the local elections process (for example, cost; polling cards; the timetable, etc.)?

- "Junk the stupid idea of ID cards! Greater clarity and materials on the ability of local council candidates to produce election materials. Very few do."
- "Fundamental understanding of our democratic system – to be taught in schools and publicised nationally."
- "The timetable requires more give away as there is little from the election results and the required first meeting of a new council. New councillors struggle with this due to lack of understanding of the role they are committing to and the quick turnaround doesn't allow much time for councillors to 'settle in'. Publications that promote the role of councillor that doesn't perceive the role to be time consuming as this appears to be the main reason for putting people off standing. Or that it is predominantly for 'older' people. Clearer, more advance costings to allow town and parish councils to pre-empt more accurate costs when budget setting the November before elections."
- "Cost for town and parish councils as we heard a lot of councils discussing not wanting elections due to the potential costs involved. More work to be done nationwide to redevelop faith in the democratic process and engage a wider scope of candidates, particularly work within higher education more youth engagement".

Warding

In November 2018, Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils submitted a policy motion to NALC's Policy Committee. The policy motion outlined the complexity of wards as each parish ward must lie within a single district ward and county division.

This requirement can result in parish wards that:

- Are not coterminous with those of the district;
- Comprise electorates that are disproportionate compared with the average electoral ratio for the parish as a whole;
- Embrace boundaries that bear no relationship to community identity;
- Lead to arrangements that will confuse voters at combined district and parish elections; and
- Result in increased election costs for the town and parish council.

Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils, therefore, urged NALC to lobby Government to implement changes to Schedule 2 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act, 2009 to facilitate the introduction of coterminous electoral arrangements in electoral areas with combined district and parish elections.

The current legislation applying to periodic electoral reviews prevents coterminous boundaries between parish and district/borough wards in any instance where the parish ward lies within more than one county division. The result of this is that parish wards of unequal size and the electorate with different boundaries to those of the district ward, which confuses the voters and inhibits candidates standing for election.

In the case of Royal Leamington Spa, this has resulted in the establishment of 8 new electoral areas compared to five district Wards, which resulted in the smallest ward of 413 electors and the largest ward of 748 electors. The arrangement prevails against the effective representation of electors at the parish level and means that councillors have to assume an uneven workload.

NALC recommendations on warding

In July 2019, NALC met with the Local Government Association and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to talk to them about this issue on behalf of our members. NALC will continue to lobby Government regarding this issue and escalate it where necessary.

NATIONAL ELECTIONS

NALC has conducted the first national research of any local council election, by collecting data from borough and district council websites from the May 2019 elections. The results are firstly displayed as a comparison between each county association and then subsequently alphabetised for each county.

The categories are split between the total number of councils at the election, the total number of seats at the election, the total number of uncontested seats, the total number of contested seats and finally the total number of vacant seats.

There are thought to be 10,000 parish and town councils in England and roughly 100,000 councillors. The findings of this research outline that there is a problem in getting councillors to stand for election. In conjunction with the surveys around the experience of local councils, councillors and county associations, these numbers are based on the exact figures found on the websites and are more than likely a lot lower than exact figures. Yet, this study still has some value as it demonstrates the type of information that principal authorities are making available to the public.

The results of this study are more than likely to be less than accurate, as the information was not fully complete on each website. To overcome this, the study gathered further data and information by researching the websites of parish and town councils. As a result of this method of data collection, the number of seats will not be exact and will exclude some vacant seats from the dataset.

One outcome of this research would be to lobby for principal authorities to follow a standard for presenting data, which would increase the accuracy of the data collected and make it easier to complete this research after every four years.

The results of the research are outlined below:

- Total number of local that had elections was 6,033.
- Total number of seats were 42,272.
- Total number of uncontested seats was 30,230 (71% of all seats).
- Total number of contested seats was 9,259 (22% of all seats).
- Total number of vacant seats was 2,783 (7% of all seats).

Therefore approximately 59% of local councils had an election in May 2019.

The number of local councils who had elections in May 2019
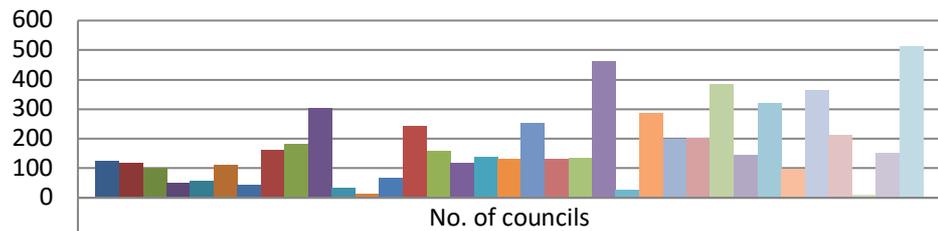
	No. of councils
■ Avon	122
■ Bedfordshire	116
■ Berkshire	101
■ Buckinghamshire	48
■ Cambridgeshire	58
■ Cheshire	112
■ Cleveland	44
■ Cumbria	162
■ Derbyshire	182
■ Devon	305
■ Dorset	33
■ Durham	12
■ East Riding	66
■ Essex	242
■ Gloucestershire	159
■ Hampshire	117
■ Herefordshire	137
■ Hertfordshire	130
■ Kent	253
■ Lancashire	132
■ Leicestershire	134
■ Lincolnshire	461
■ Merseyside	26
■ Norfolk	284
■ Nottinghamshire	199
■ Oxfordshire	200
■ Somerset	384
■ Staffordshire	145
■ Suffolk	322
■ Surrey	99
■ Sussex	363
■ Warwickshire and WM	214
■ Wiltshire	7
■ Worcestershire	150
■ Yorkshire	514

The total number of seats at the May 2019 election
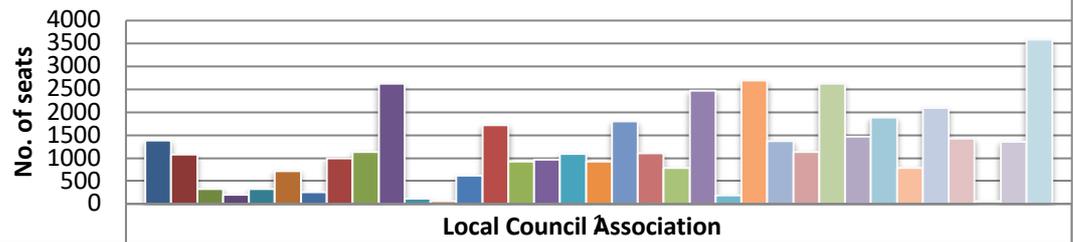
Local Council Association	No. of seats
■ Avon	1377
■ Bedfordshire	1,074
■ Berkshire	325
■ Buckinghamshire	202
■ Cambridgshire	322
■ Cheshire	709
■ Cleveland	255
■ Cumbria	996
■ Derbyshire	1,132
■ Devon	2,625
■ Dorset	122
■ Durham	61
■ East Riding	618
■ Essex	1,719
■ Gloucestershire	918
■ Hampshire	959
■ Herefordshire	1089
■ Hertfordshire	922
■ Kent	1801
■ Lancashire	1103
■ Leicestershire	790
■ Lincolnshire	2468
■ Merseyside	190
■ Norfolk	2699
■ Nottinghamshire	1371
■ Oxfordhisre	1133
■ Somerset	2625
■ Staffordshire	1471
■ Suffolk	1884
■ Surrey	785
■ Sussex	2099
■ Warwickshire and WM	1422
■ Wiltshire	58
■ Worcestershire	1359
■ Yorkshire	3589

Number of uncontested seats in the May 2019 election

Legend: —— No. of uncontested seats

Data points by county:
- Avon: 531
- Bedfordshire: 841
- Berkshire: 76
- Buckinghamshire: 135
- Cambridgshire: 234
- Cheshire: 569
- Cleveland: 197
- Cumbria: 855
- Derbyshire: 748
- Devon: 1716
- Dorset: 24
- Durham: 61
- East Riding of Yorkshire: 371
- Essex: 1390
- Gloucestershire: 613
- Hampshire: 759
- Herefordshire: 967
- Hertfordshire: 640
- Kent: 1217
- Lancashire: 771
- Leicestershire: 604
- Lincolnshire: 1924
- Merseyside: 35
- Norfolk: 2035
- Nottinghamshire: 1,045
- Oxfordshire: 859
- Somerset: 1900
- Staffordshire: 1015
- Suffolk: 1634
- Surrey: 534
- Sussex: 1372
- Warwickshire: 931
- Wiltshire: 37
- Worcestershire: 887
- Yorkshire: 2703

43

Number of contested seats in May 2019 election

Number of Contested seats

County	Number of Contested seats
Avon	405
Bedfordshire	148
Berkshire	239
Bucks	40
Cambs	88
Cheshire	140
Cleveland	44
Cumbria	137
Derbyshire	370
Devon	598
Dorset	98
Durham	0
East Riding	145
Essex	275
Gloucestershire	210
Hampshire	189
Herefordshire	118
Hertfordshire	264
Kent	575
Lancashire	317
Leicestershire	125
Lincolnshire	206
Merseyside	154
Norfolk	526
Nottinghamshire	243
Oxfordshire	257
Somerset	464
Staffordshire	379
Suffolk	250
Surrey	230
Sussex	668
Warwickshire	344
Wiltshire	21
Worcestershire	218
Yorkshire	774

Number of vacant seats after the May 2019 election

Number of Vacant seats after the May 2019 election
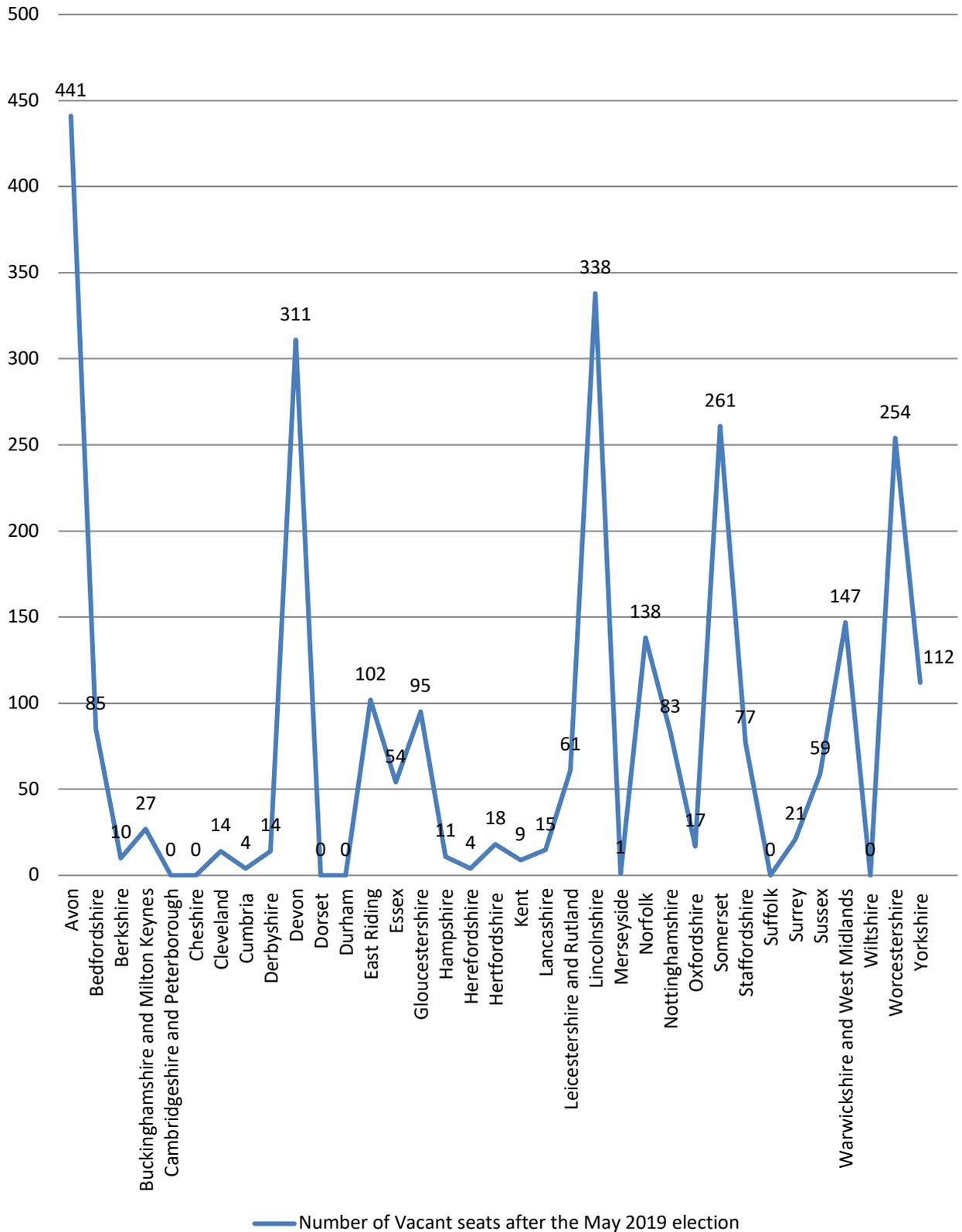
Avon Parish and Town Elections

441

531

405
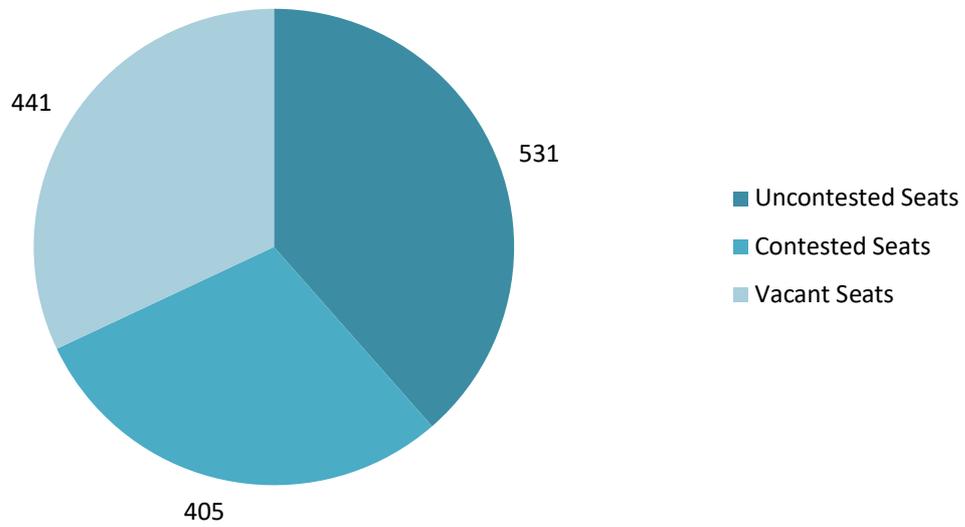
The total number of council was 122. The total number of seats 1,377.

Bedfordshire Parish and Town Elections

85

148

841
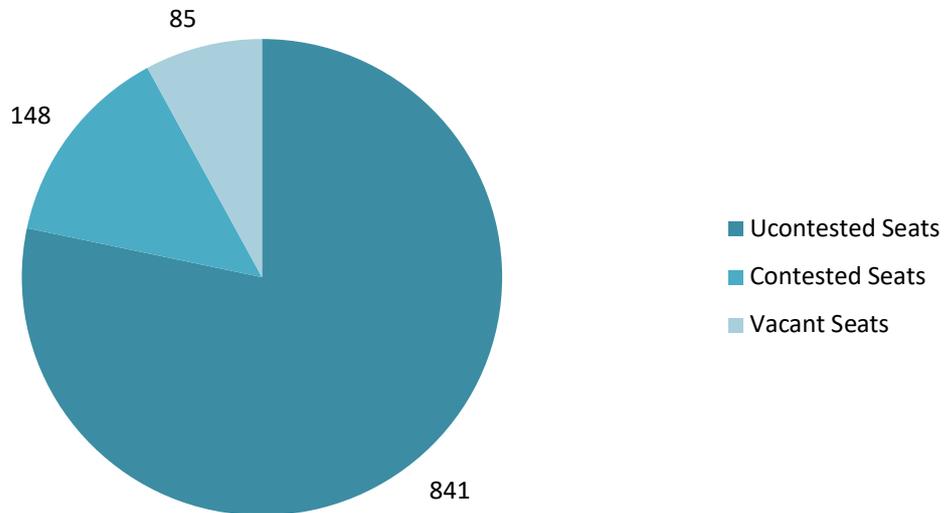
The total number of councils was 116. The total number of seats was 1,074.

Berkshire Town and Parish Elections

76 — Uncontested Seats
239 — Contested Seats
10 — Vacant Seats
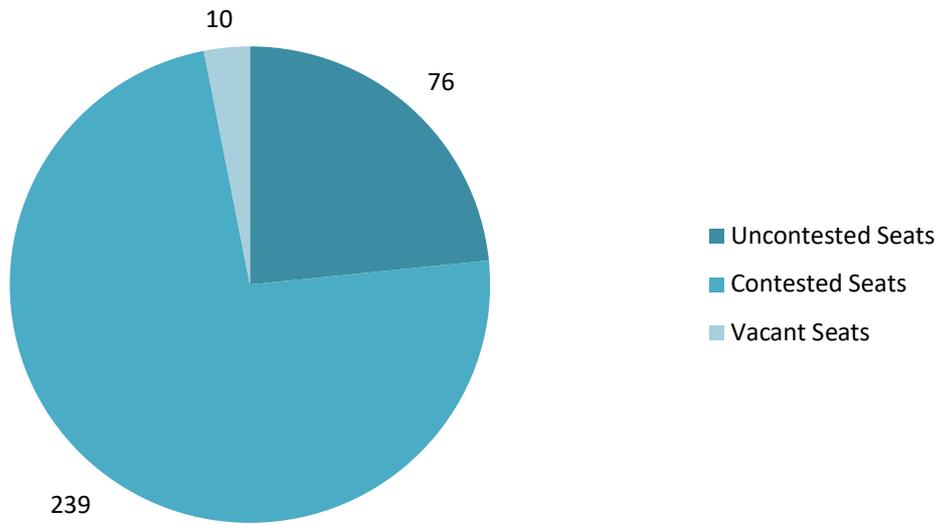
The total number of councils was 101. The total number of seats was 325.

Buckinghamshire Parish and Town Elections

135 — Uncontested Seats
40 — Contested Seats
27 — Vacant Seats
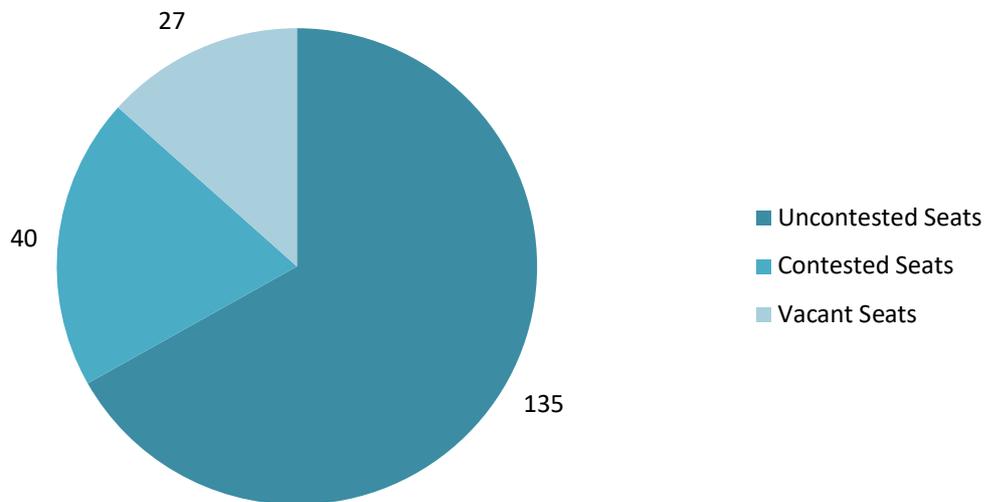
The total number of councils was 48. The total number of seats was 202.

## Cambridgshire Parish and Town Elections
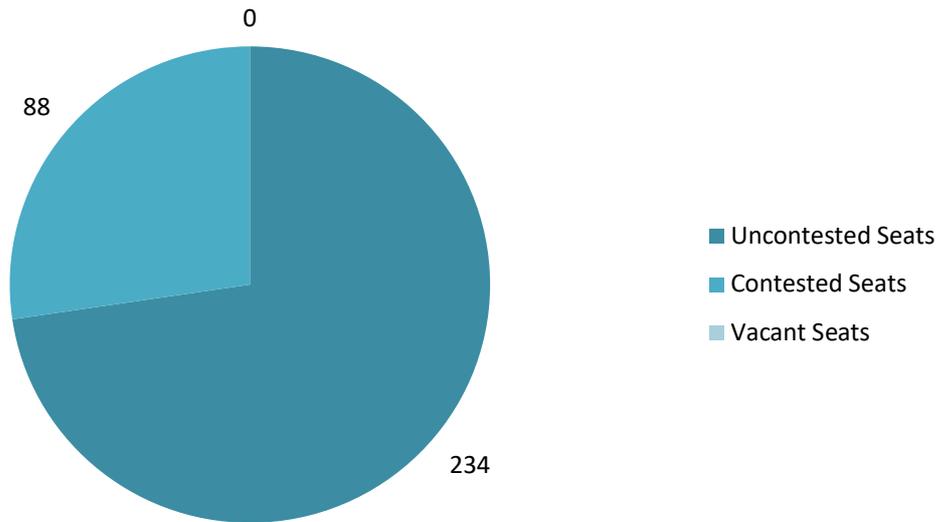
The total number of councils was 58. The total number of seats was 322.

Cheshire Parish and Town Elections
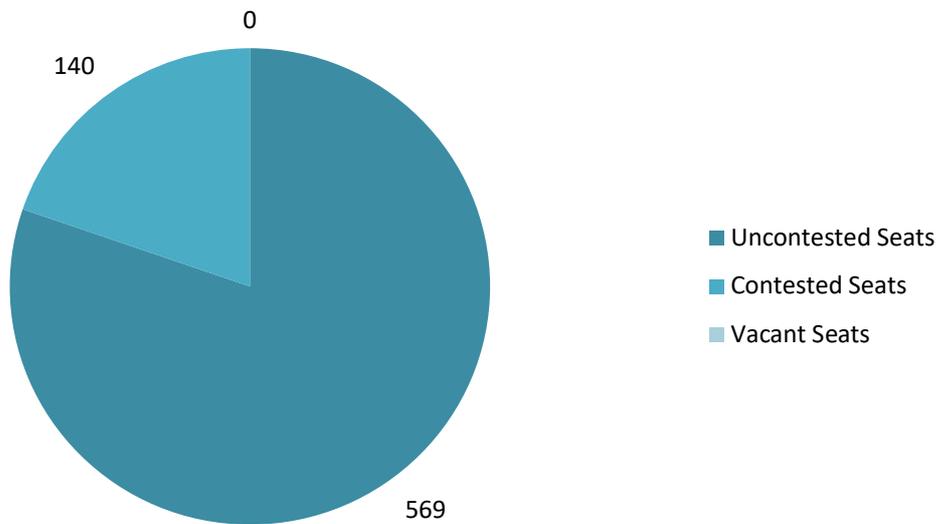
The total number of councils was 112. The total number of seats was 709. 4 local councils received no nominations.

Cleveland Parish and Town Elections

14

44

197

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
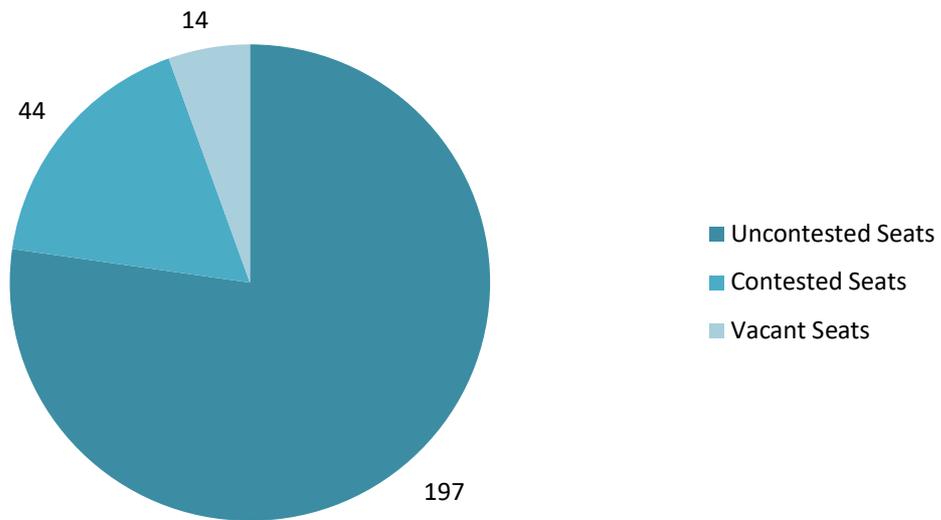
The total number of councils was 44. The total number of seats was 255.

Cumbria Parish and Town Elections

4

137

855

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
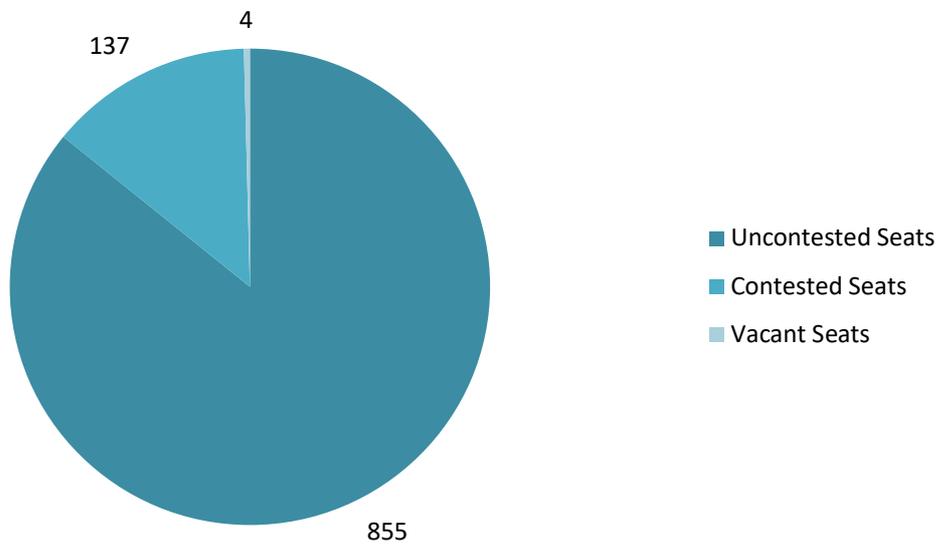
The total number of councils was 162. The total number of seats was 996.

Derbyshire Parish and Town Elections

14

370

748

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
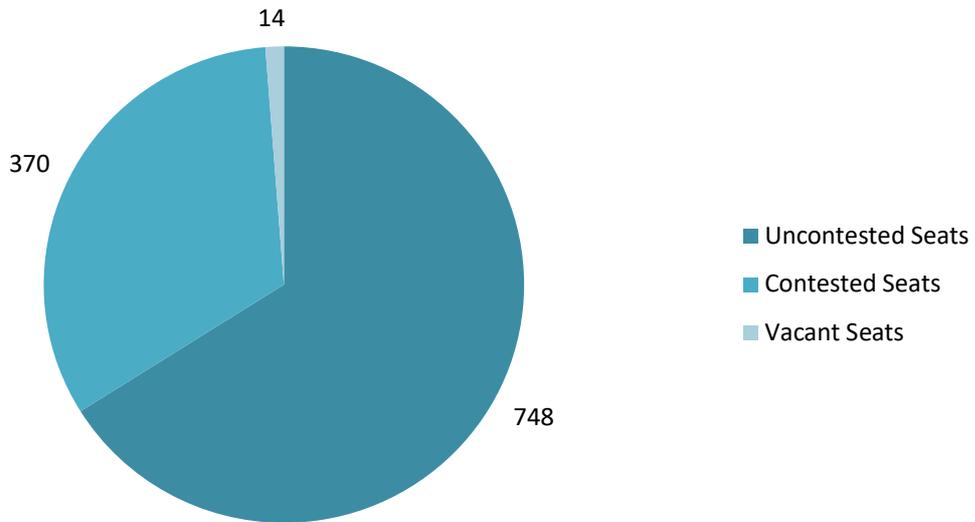
The total number of councils was 182. The total number of seats was 1,132.

Devon Parish and Town Elections

311

598

1,716

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
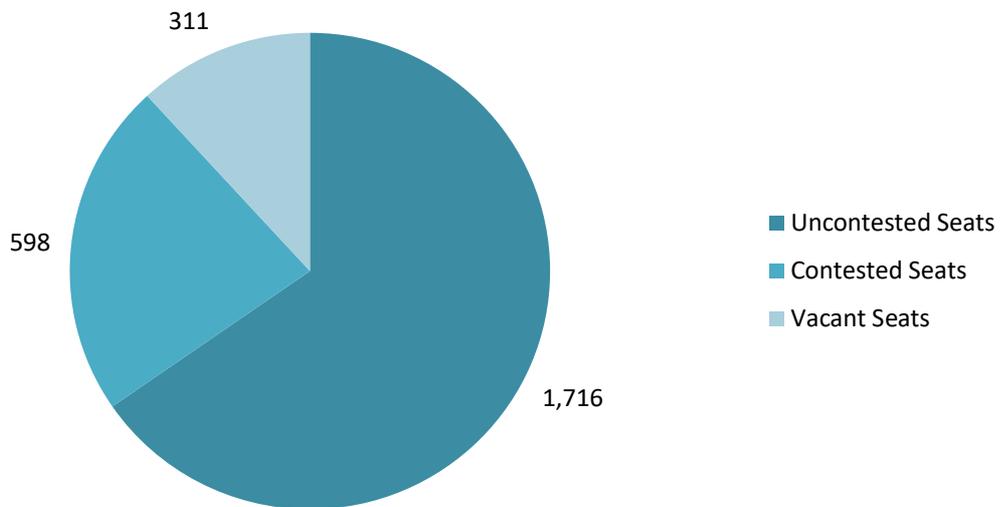
The total number of councils was 2,625. The total number of seats was 305. 6 local councils received no nominations.

Dorset Parish and Town Elections

■	Uncontested Seats
■	Contested Seats
■	Vacant Seats
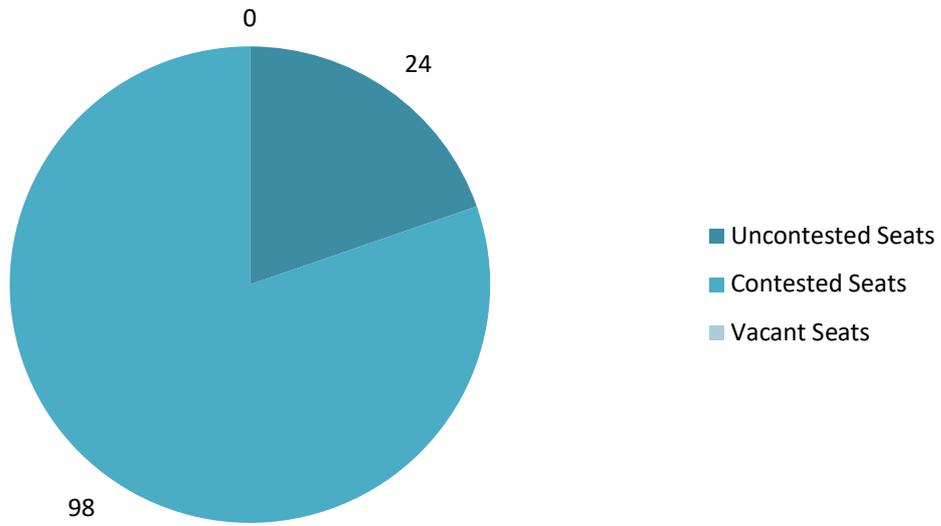
The total number of councils was 33. The total number of seats was 122.

Durham Parish and Town Elections

■	Uncontested Seats
■	Contested Seats
■	Vacant Seats
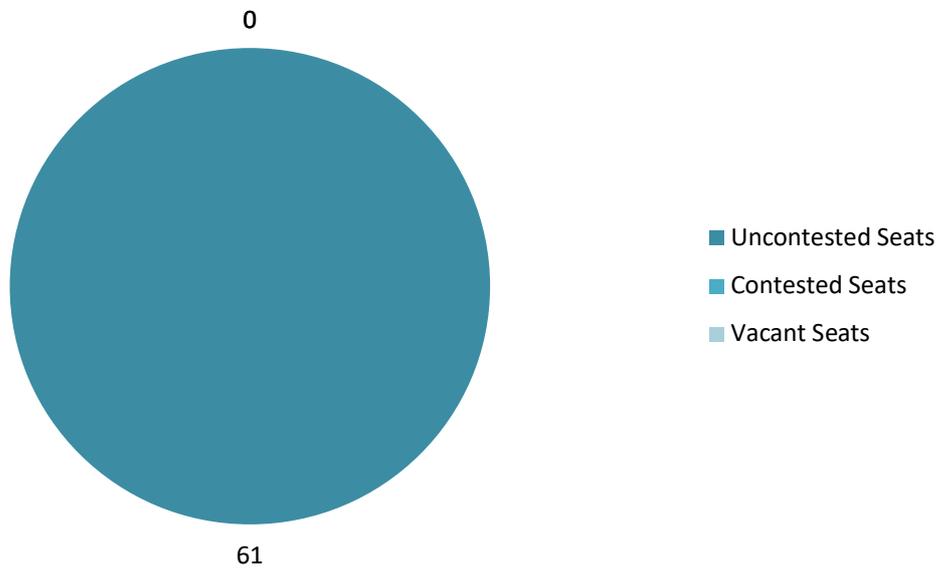
The total number of councils was unknown. The total number of seats was 61.

East Riding of Yorkshire Parish and Town Elections

29

135

469

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
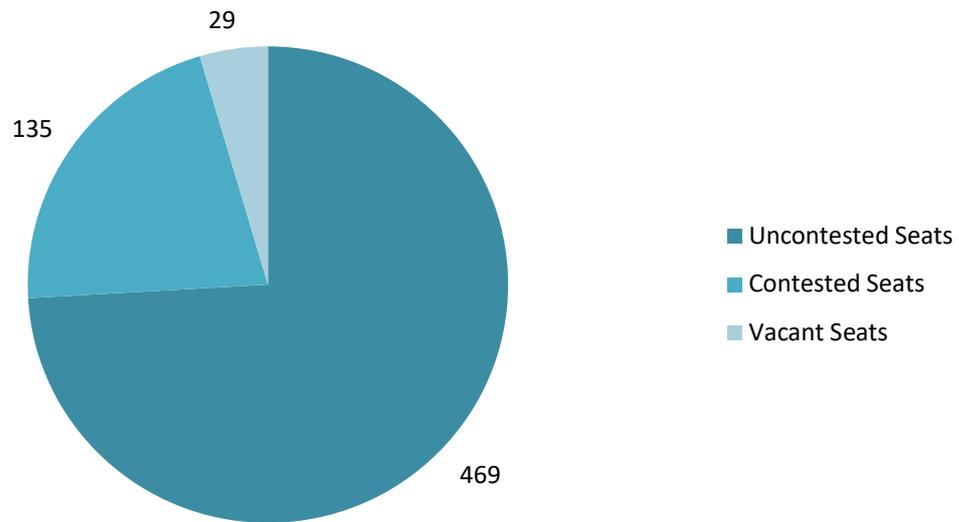
The total number of councils was 69. The total number of seats was 633.

Essex Parish and Town Elections

54

275

1,390

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
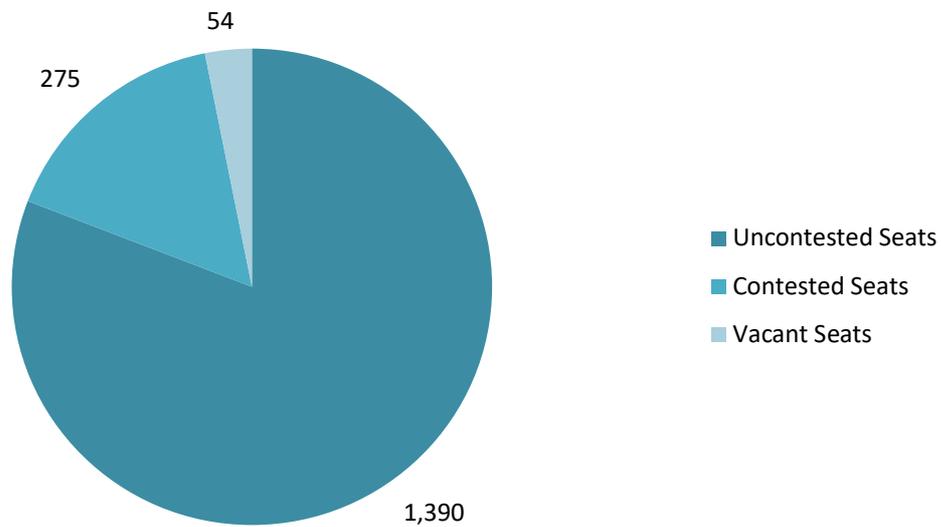
The total number of councils was 242. The total number of seats was 1,719.

Gloucestershire Parish and Town Elections

95

210

613

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
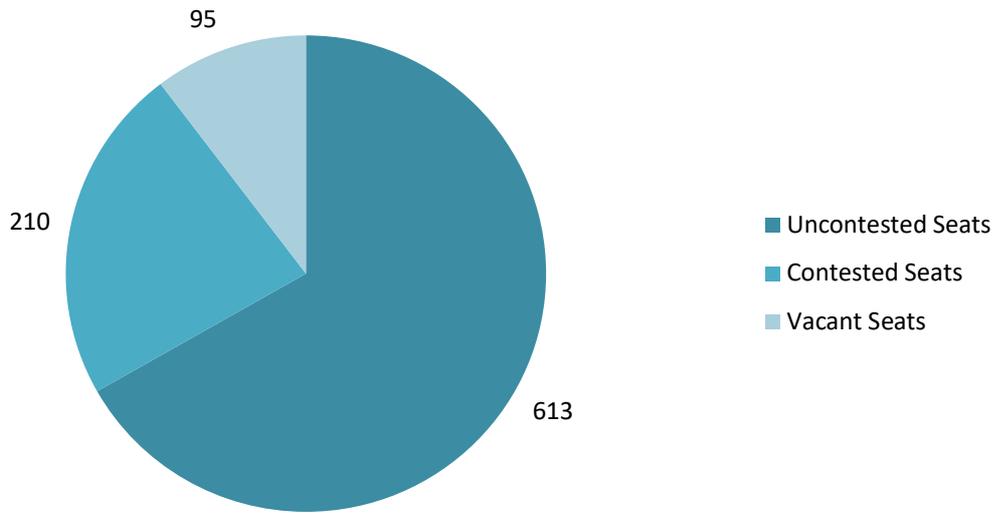
The total number of councils was 159. The total number of seats was 918.

Hampshire Parish and Town Elections

11

189

759

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
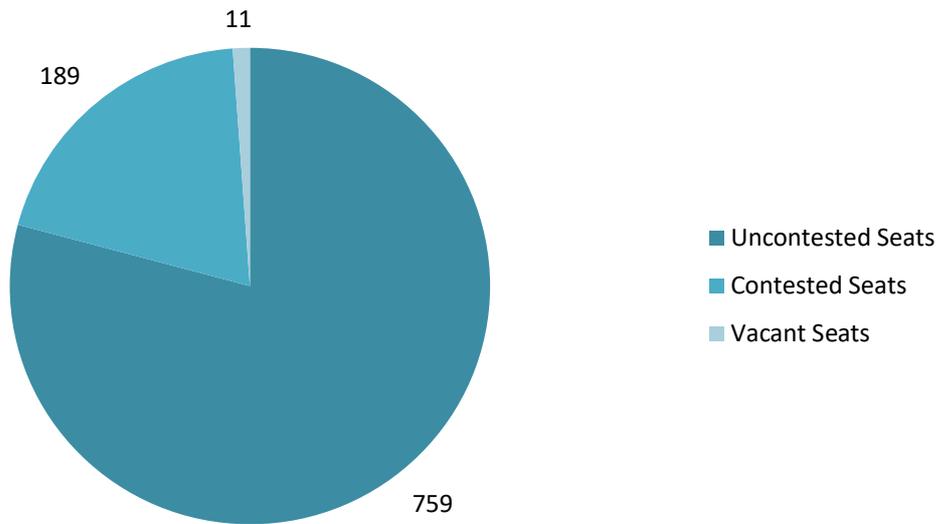
The total number of councils was 117. The total number of seats was 959.

Herefordshire Parish and Town Elections

118   4

967

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
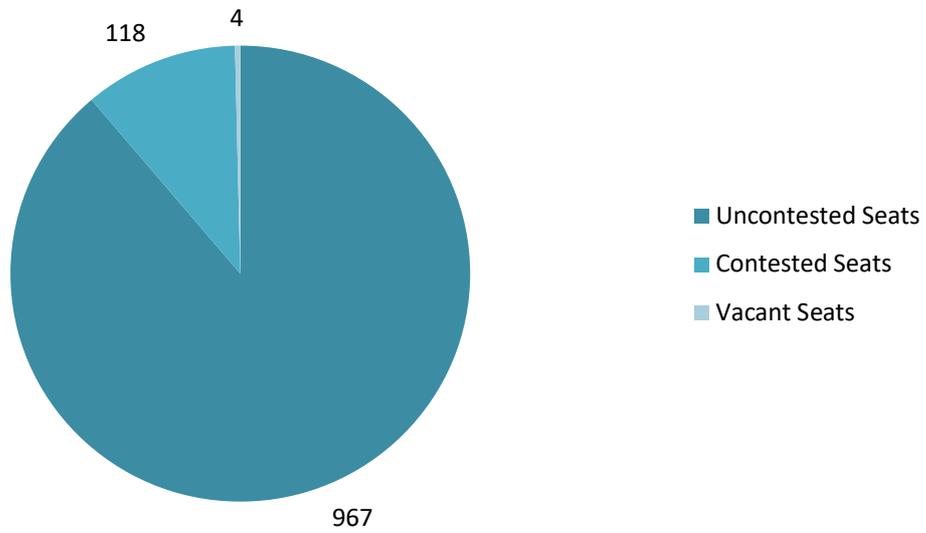
The total number of councils was 137. The total number of seats was 1,089.

Hertfordshire Parish and Town Elections

18

264

640

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
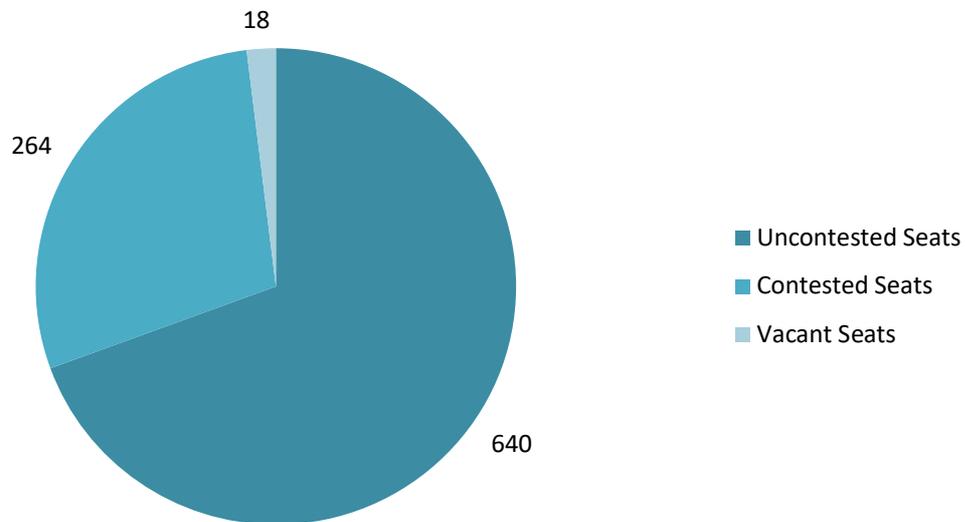
The total number of councils was 130. The total number of seats was 922. 1 local councils received no nominations.

Kent Parish and Town Elections
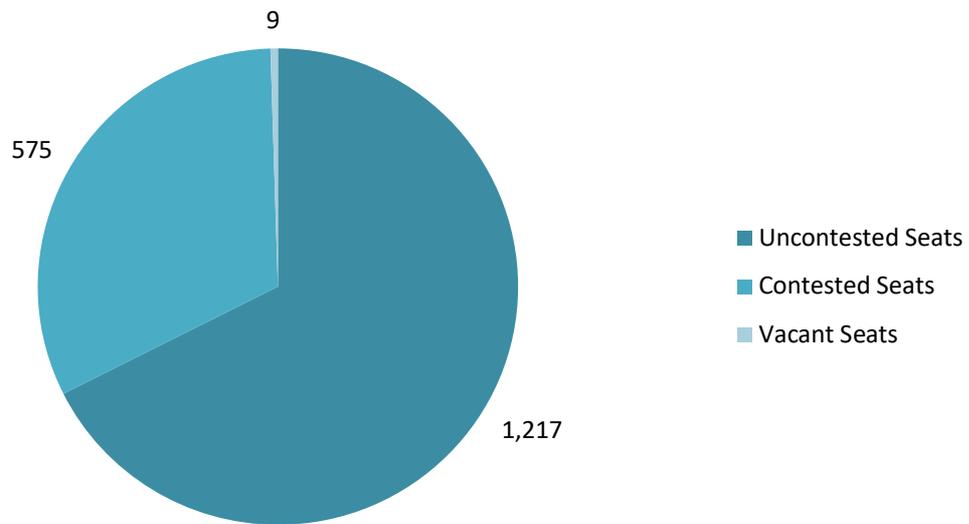
The total number of councils was 253. The total number of seats was 1,801. 7 local councils received no nominations.

Lancashire Parish and Town Elections
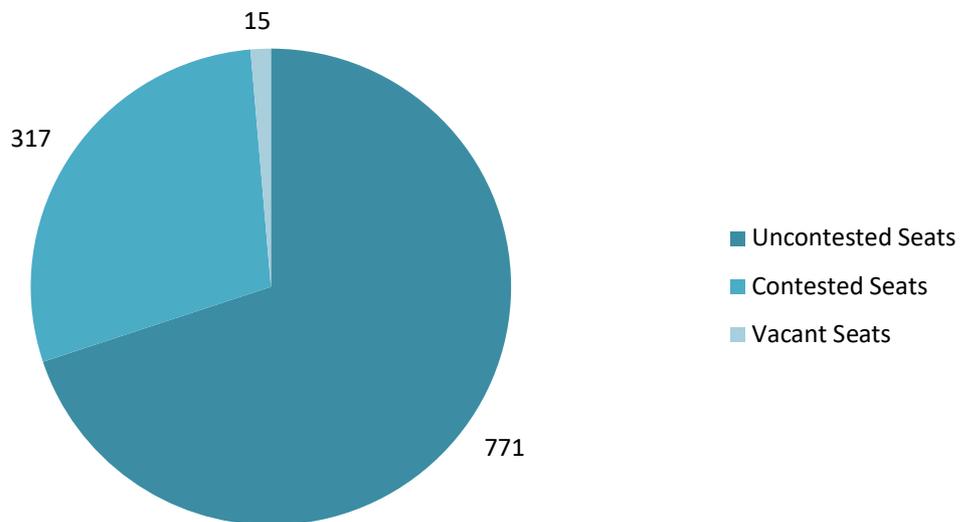
The total number of councils was 132. The total number of seats was 1,103.

Leicestershire Parish and Town Elections
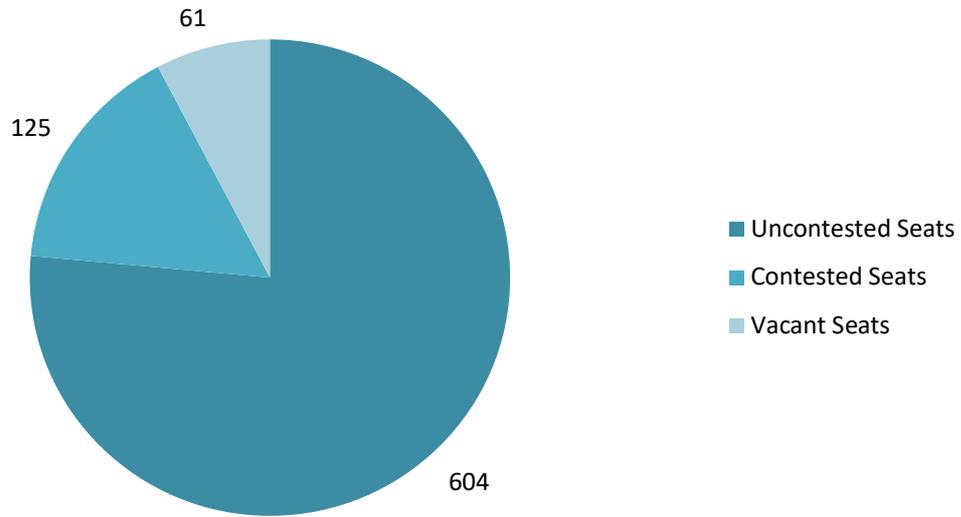
The total number of councils was 134. The total number of seats was 790.

Lincolnshire Parish and Town Elections
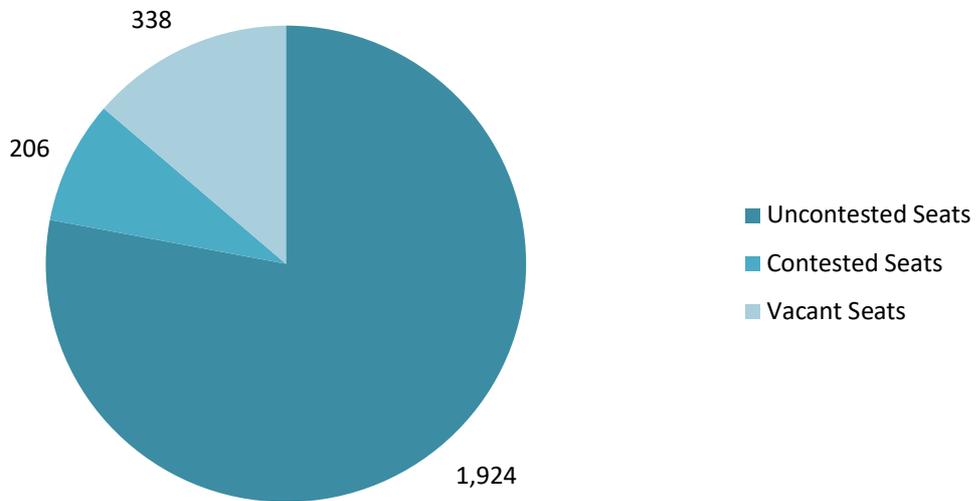
The total number of councils was 461. The total number of seats was 2,468. 11 local councils received no nominations

## Merseyside Parish and Town Elections
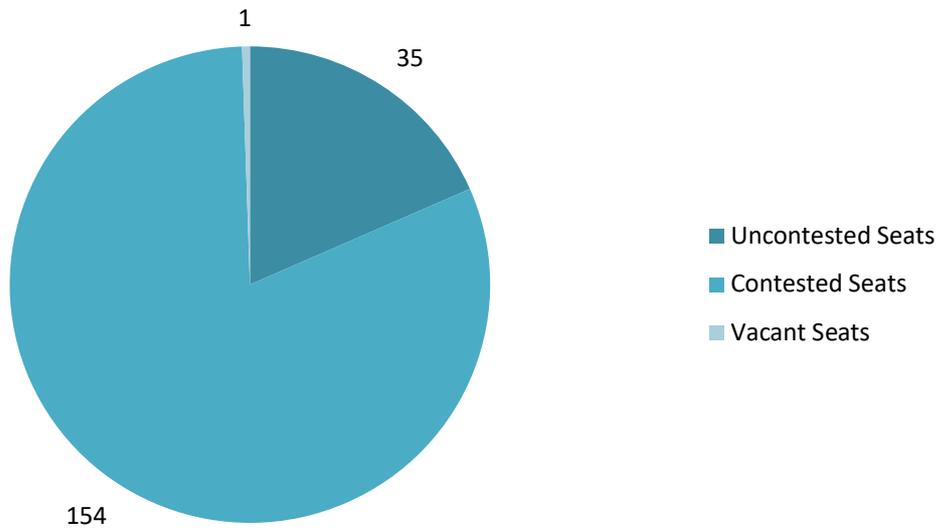
The total number of councils was 26. The total number of seats was 190.

Norfolk Parish and Town Elections
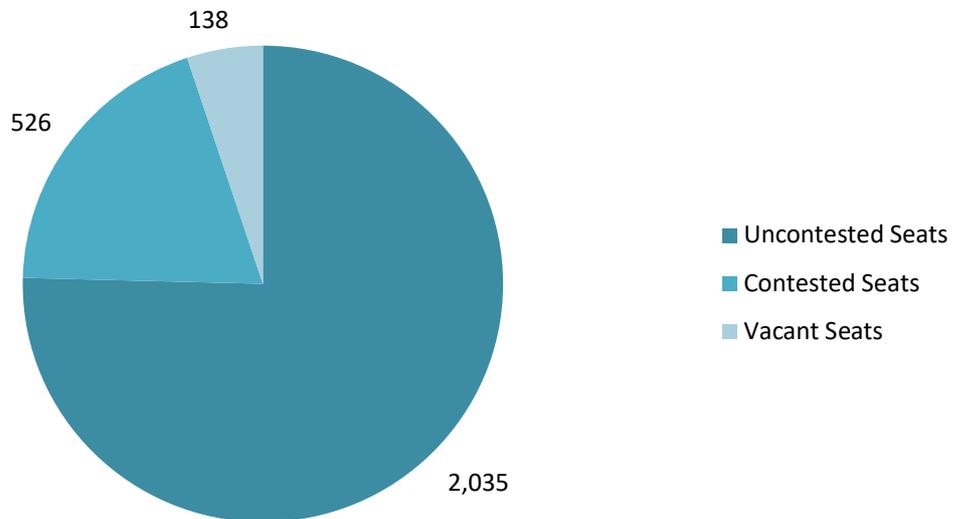
The total number of councils was 284. The total number of seats was 2,699. 1 local councils received no nominations.

Nottinghamshire Parish and Town Election

83

243

1,045

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
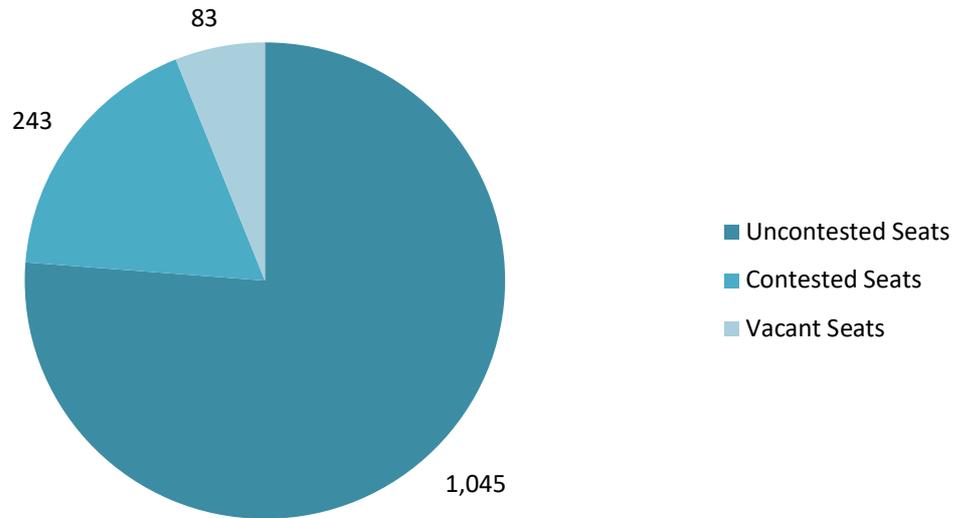
The total number of councils was 199. The total number of seats was 1,371. 2 local councils received no nominations

Oxfordshire Parish and Town Elections

17

257

859

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
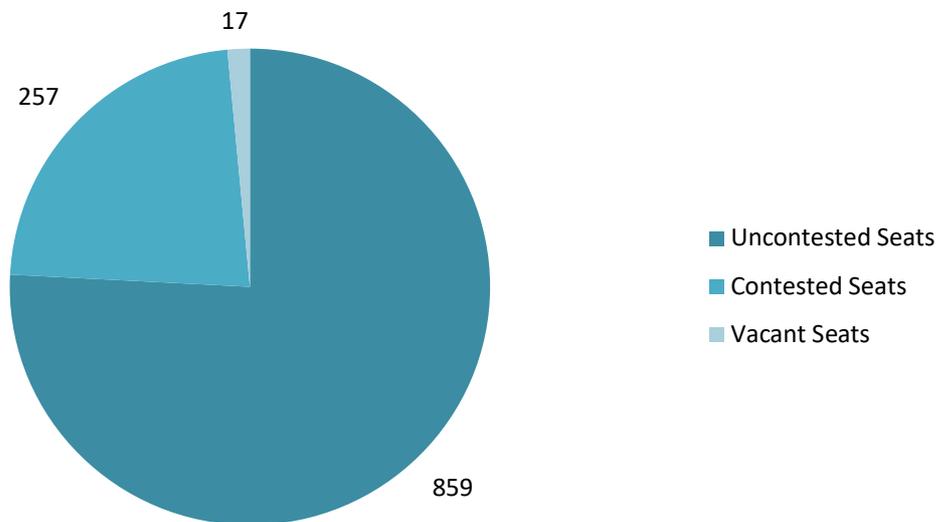
The total number of councils was 200. The total number of seats was 1,133. 34 local councils received no nominations.

Somerset Parish and Town Elections
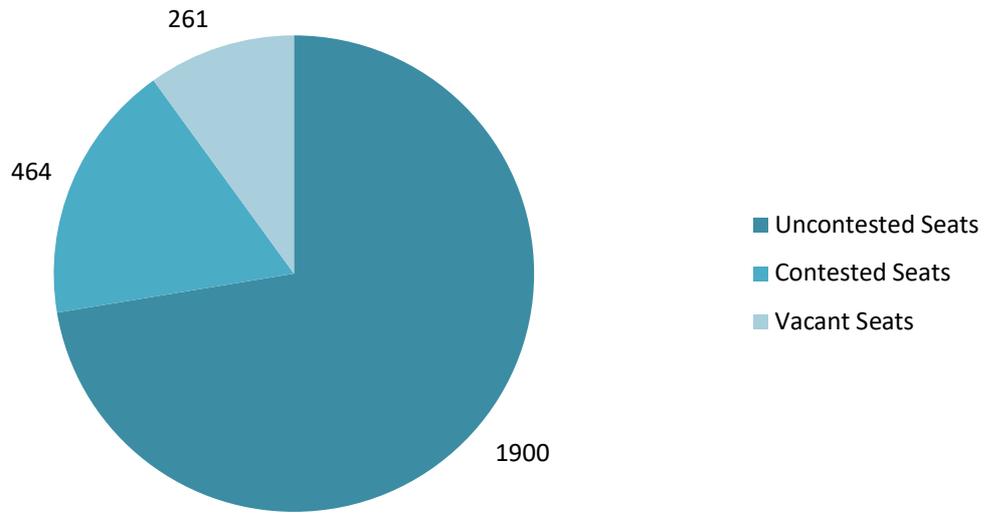
The total number of councils was 384. The total number of seats was 2,625. 6 local councils received no nominations.

Staffordshire Parish and Town Elections
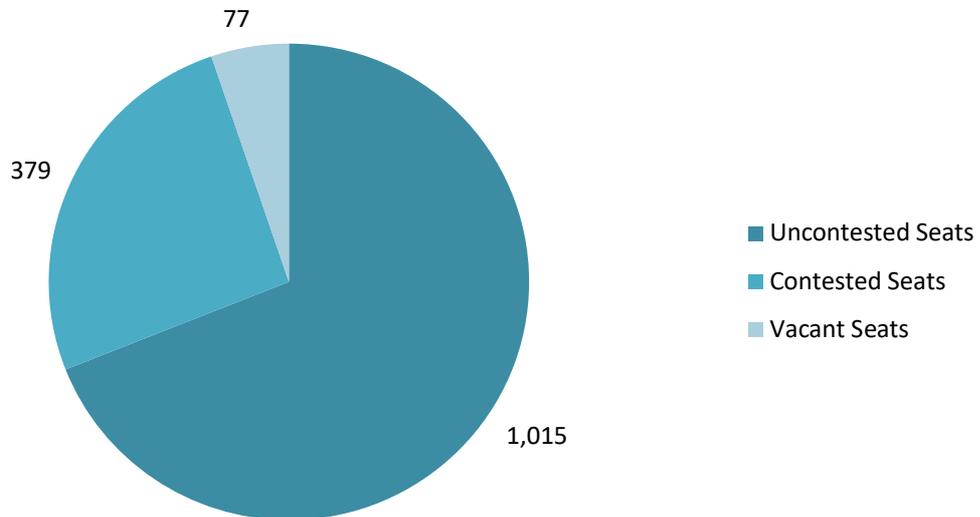
The total number of councils was 145. The total number of seats was 1,471.

Suffolk Parish and Town Elections

250

0

1,634

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
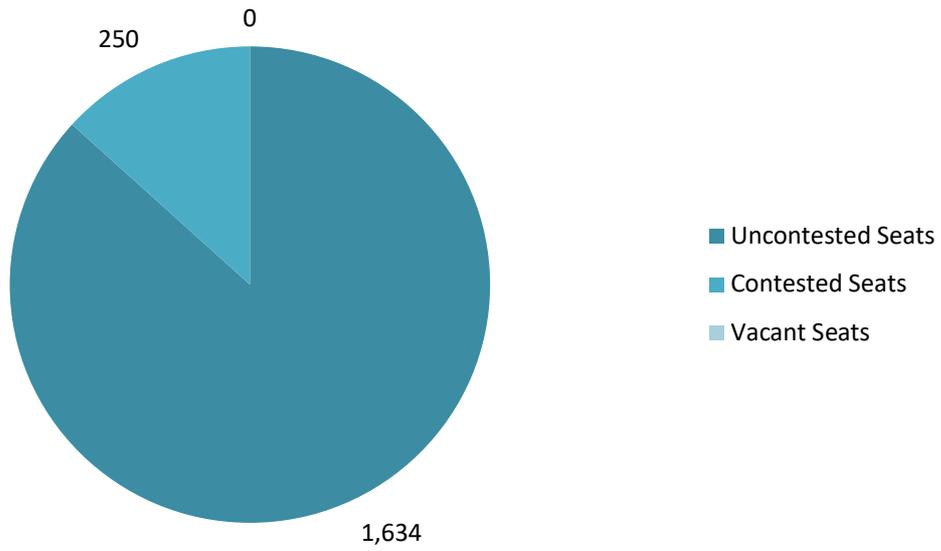
The total number of councils was 322. The total number of seats was 1,884. The amount of vacant seats is unknown. 3 local councils received no nomination

Surrey Parish and Town Elections

21

230

534

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats
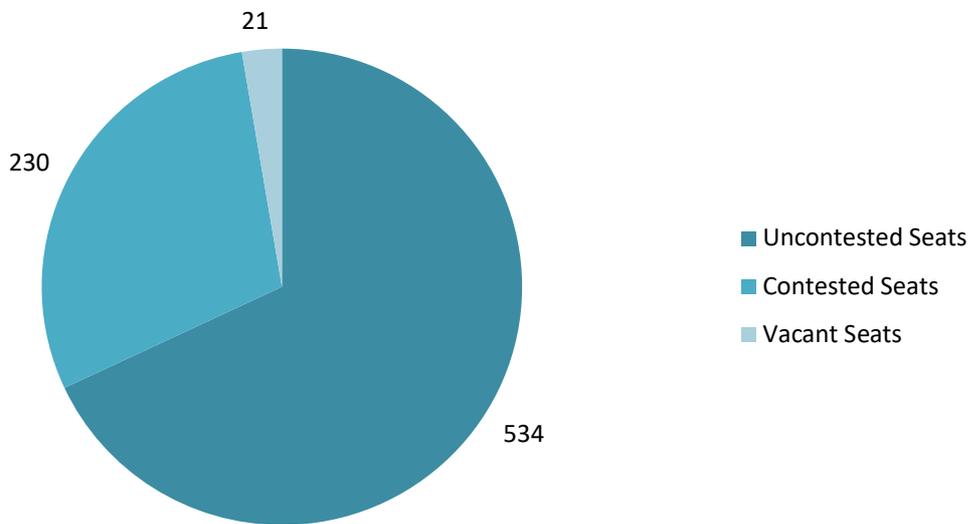
The total number of councils was 99. The total number of seats was 785.

(East and West) Sussex Parish and Town Elections

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats

59
668
1,372
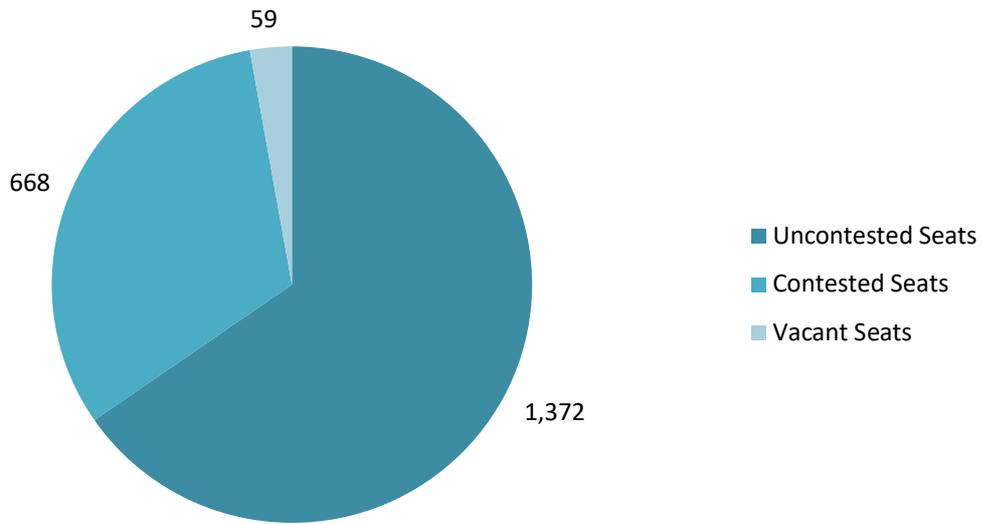
The total number of councils was 363. The total number of seats was 2,099.

Warwickshire and West Midlands Parish and Town Elections

- Uncontested Seats
- Contested Seats
- Vacant Seats

147
344
931
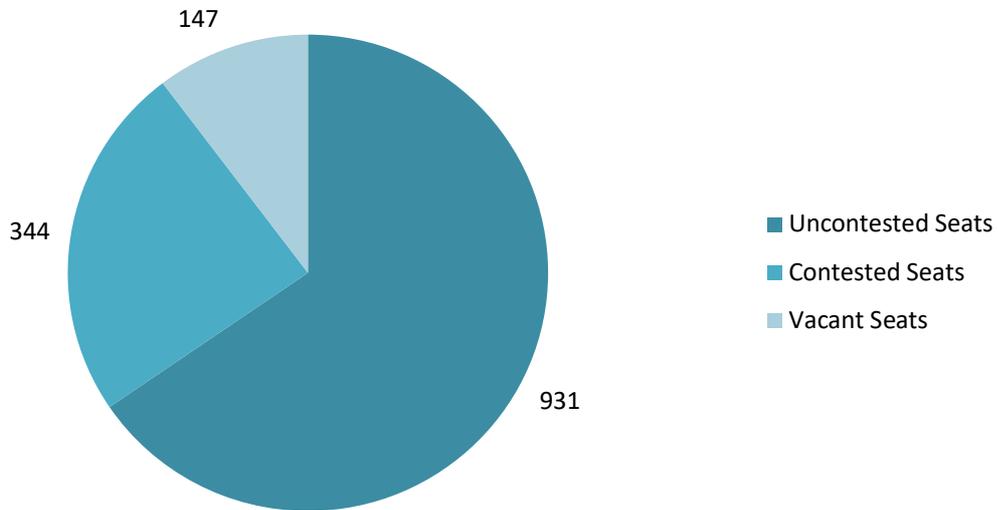
The total number of councils was 214. The total number of seats was 1,422.

## Wiltshire Parish and Town Elections
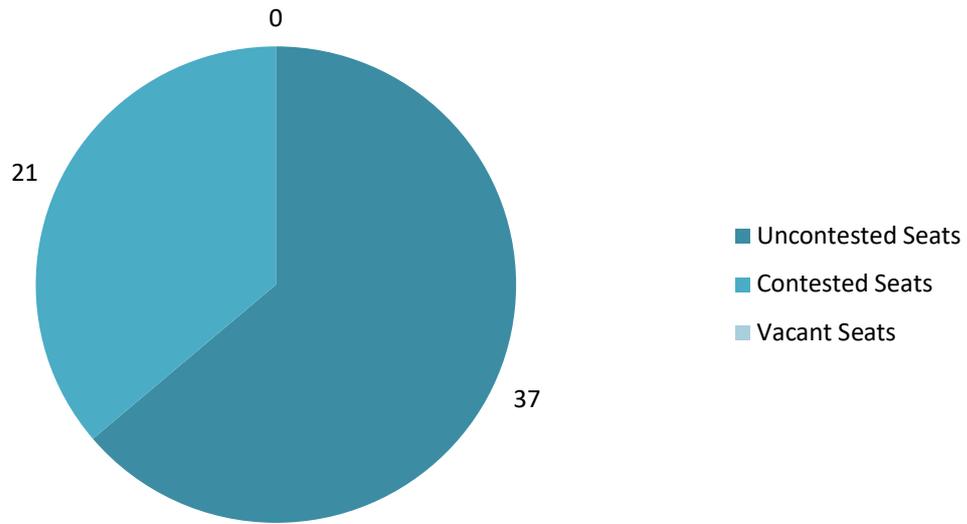
The total number of councils was 7. The total number of seats was 58. The amount of Vacant Seats is unknown.

Worcestershire Parish and Town Elections
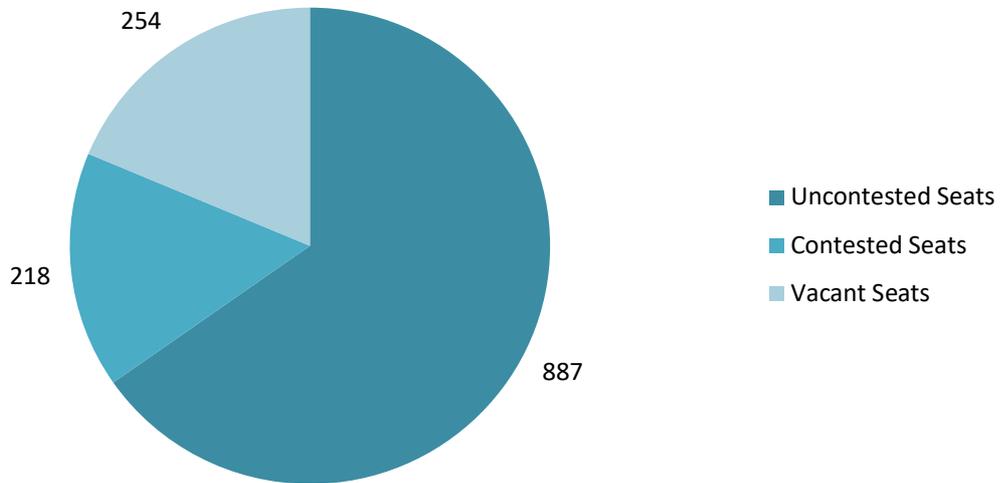
The total number of councils was 150. The total number of seats was 1,359. 3 local councils received no nominations.

Yorkshire Parish and Town Elections
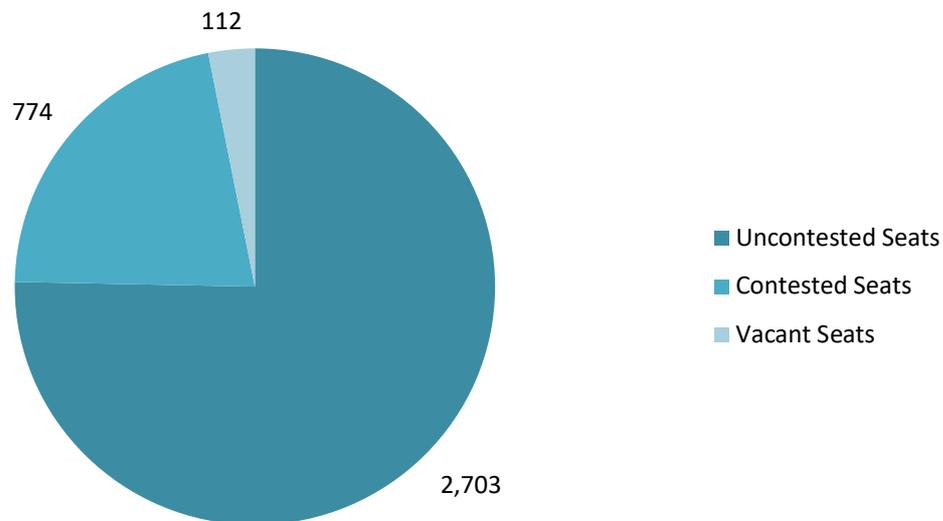
The total number of councils was 214. The total number of seats was 3,589.

NALC NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

A section of this report was presented at the National Assembly committee meeting in March 2020. The assembly endorsed the research and prompted a discussion around local elections. This discussion included: how to increase the number of candidates and, the meaning of representation and diversity. The assembly came to a consensus that it is vital that the local council be representative of its community.

The government research on ethnicity in England:

- As at the 2011 Census, the most ethnically diverse region in England and Wales was London, where 40.2% of residents identified with either the Asian, Black, Mixed or Other ethnic groups;
- Out of all regions, London had the smallest percentage of White British people, at 44.9%, and the North East had the highest percentage, at 93.6%;
- People from the White ethnic group were more likely to live in the South East than any other region, with 16.2% doing so; people from the Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnic groups were more likely to live in London than any other region, with 58.4%, 35.9%, 33.1% and 49.9% doing so respectively;
- 81.5% of the general population lived in an urban location, and 18.5% lived in a rural area – the ethnic groups most likely to live in an urban neighbourhood were Pakistani (99.1%), Bangladeshi (98.7%), and Black African (98.2%).

As evident in the research above, the most ethnically diverse region in England is London. At the same time, people who identify as White are most likely to live in the South East than any other area. As those who identify as Pakistani, Bangladeshi and African are more likely to live in urban areas, it is assumed that those who identify as White live in rural areas.

Therefore, if a rural council is comprised of mostly White residents, this would make the council representative of its rural community.

(Source: GOV.UK)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, to obtain data from local council elections held in 2019 was somewhat tricky, as each council displays data on their website differently. While appreciating that this will be a significant challenge, this research project should be repeated for every election cycle, with a similar format, to ensure that the health of local democracy is supported and cohesive.

The majority of the elections that took place in 2019 were uncontested. The lack of contested elections is hampering the sector, as it undermines the democratic process and mandate of local councils. If councils are to be trusted with public funds, they must be held to account within the election process.

NALC's suggested next steps are:

Councillors

- Help the council promote local elections and encourage more candidates to stand for election.
- Use social media to promote the local council sector and the difference you make to the community.

Local councils

- Continue to use the elections information produced by county associations, principal authorities and NALC.
- Use events and open days to promote becoming a councillor.
- Contact your local media sources to highlight the elections.
- Consider achieving an award under the Local Council Award Scheme Highlight and becoming eligible to use the General Power of Competence.
- Explore the use of neighbourhood planning and links with other community groups as ways of getting more candidates for local elections.

<u>County associations</u>

- Make election material readily available to councils and councillors;
- Publicise NALC's "Make and change campaign" and publicise local elections;
- Support councils by highlighting the local elections to county media sources;
- Work alongside NALC and local councils to encourage Black and Minority Ethnic candidates and more candidates below the age of 40.
- Engage early and often with principal authorities on plans to promote the local elections.

<u>NALC</u>

- Tailor the elections campaign based on results from the surveys.
- Ensure that election materials and guidelines are promoted as widely as possible, including in publications.
- Work closely with county associations to support councils and publicise local elections (i.e. social media and blog posts.)
- In collaboration with county associations, increase engagement with local media outlets to raise the profile of candidates, the role of local councillors and the elections process.
- Lobby the government to establish a national democracy fund to encourage more people to become councillors, making it easier for people to stand and serve, to gather elections data and promoting contested elections.
- Follow up with county associations on the materials that they produced and share learning and good practise.
- Work with The Boundary Commission to review the laws on boundaries, in light of local experiences as seen by Royal Leamington Spa Town Council.
- Work with The Electoral Commission to create a simple elections process including reviewing the information pack, expenses process, and, simpler election forms.
- Work with The Electoral Commission and others to ensure that local councils display their elections data in a simplified and accessible way.
- Gather data on local elections for every election cycle.