



Local Candidates Survey: 2009

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August 2009

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Introduction

Since 2006 the Elections Centre, University of Plymouth has conducted annual surveys of candidates standing at the local elections. In 2009 the Electoral Commission requested that included on this survey should be a series of questions relating generally to candidates' experiences in seeking information about the process of standing, the availability of advice and guidance and finally, each candidate's direct experience of the election process. Other survey questions sought to identify each candidate's electoral experience (for example, was this the first time that the person had contested a local election or were they an incumbent councillor seeking re-election), party allegiance if any (distinguishing between candidates that stood on behalf of one of the major parties or as an independent) together with the standard questions relating to sex, age, occupational status and ethnic origin.

Methodology

The findings derive from a postal survey that was issued on Friday, 5 June to 3,534 randomly selected candidates from a total of 8,962 candidates standing for election to either a county or unitary authority at the 2009 local elections. From prior experience it was estimated that to obtain sufficient responses we would need to issue over three thousand questionnaires. Random selection consisted of alternately selecting one candidate in two followed by selecting one candidate in three from nomination lists published by each local authority; in effect, given a complete list of all nominated candidates this procedure selects the second, fifth, seventh, tenth etc. listed candidates. Candidate details, including name, address and, where applicable, party description, were also obtained from these nomination forms. A total of 1,105 replies were received by the end of July, a response rate of 31.3%. Compared with the range of candidates contesting the elections the responses are representative in terms of sex (sample has 28.8% women, actual election 28%), party affiliation and for the different types of councils (county, unitary) conducting elections. Successfully elected candidates comprise 26% of the total that contested in 2009 and 27.8% of survey respondents. Accordingly, given the representativeness of the sample the data are unweighted. There is a 95% likelihood that responses to these questions from among the true population proportion (i.e. amongst all candidates) are within two to three per cent (in either direction) of the proportions reported here.

The report is divided into five main sections. The first section considers the process of standing for election to a local council and the information sources that candidates use to navigate their way. In the second section the report assesses the extent to which candidates found useful the briefing sessions provided by local authority staff and the various guidance notes published by the Electoral Commission itself. Section three considers some of the practical aspects of standing for election, including the availability of nomination papers, the accuracy of electoral registers etc. The issue of electoral fraud continues to attract attention and in section four the report considers the extent to which candidates themselves felt this to be relevant to both the election as a whole and within their own ward in particular. The fifth and final section contains some observations about the nature and level of candidates' personal campaigning activities.

Section 1: The process of standing

There are various challenges facing anyone who decides to stand as a candidate for local election. Since a large proportion of those people that stand do so for one of a range of political parties it is unsurprising that a large majority of candidates rely upon the party or their own election agent to inform them about the process of becoming a candidate (Table 1). Two-thirds of respondents obtained information about how to stand as a candidate from their own party while almost a third asked their election agent. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive categories since candidates will seek information from both fellow party members and election agents. One in five also makes inquiries about the process of standing from their local authority. The Electoral Commission's resources about the process, published documents, telephone helpline and website are now used first hand by just over one in twenty candidates overall. This reflects a general trend whereby the Electoral Commission was used as a source of information significantly less than political parties, election agents and local authorities. The survey did not examine the possibility that, for example, it is the election agents that first access information resources and then pass them on to candidates.

Table 1: Accessing information about the election process (All responses)*

	<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Election Agent</i>	<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>Electoral Commission</i> <i>e.g. documents, telephone, website</i>	<i>Other</i>
How to stand as a candidate	66.8	30.1	19.6	5.5	8.7
How to obtain nomination papers	46.8	42.7	24.1	1.6	5.9
How to complete nomination papers	41.2	45.0	22.2	3.5	7.5
When and where to return nomination papers	35.0	44.9	37.6	2.4	4.0
Rules about election expenses	30.7	40.0	36.9	9.6	4.1
How to obtain a copy of the register of local electors & postal voters	34.6	32.9	41.4	3.4	4.3
Rules about postal voting	27.9	27.2	43.3	6.2	3.8
The electoral timetable	28.0	31.2	55.3	4.6	2.4
How to obtain a list of local polling stations	19.3	22.4	50.4	2.7	3.3
Procedures at the election count	23.5	26.8	53.8	4.3	3.9
How to challenge the election result	20.8	24.8	26.9	5.1	3.8

*All Tables contain percentages unless otherwise specified.

Advice regarding obtaining nomination papers and completing them is mainly sought from parties and agents, although around a quarter use the local authority resource. Local authorities are relied upon more in terms of when and where to return completed nomination papers.

The most frequent use of Electoral Commission supplied information relates to the rules governing election expenditure. Almost one in ten candidates used this resource, while the rules governing postal voting were consulted by 6% of candidates. It appears that for a large majority the information provided by the parties assists most in terms of the process of standing for election.

The key dates in the electoral countdown to polling day are widely circulated for candidates but a majority rely upon the local authorities for this information while almost a third obtain such information from the election agent. Only around one in twenty use the EC for this purpose.

Local authorities are equally important, it seems, in providing candidates with lists of local polling stations and the various procedures that apply to the election count itself. Overall, few candidates had sought information about the process of challenging the election result. Among those that did, one in 20 used the EC, while four or five times that number relied upon parties, agents or local authorities.

Of course, the overall figures take no account of each candidate's prior electoral experience. For a significant proportion of candidates, 21%, the 2009 election was the very first time that they had contested. For a second category of candidate, some 31%, this was not the first time that they had stood but at no point had they been successfully elected to their local council. The largest category of respondent in terms of electoral experience, some 33%, were incumbent councillors seeking re-election. The fourth and final category of respondent is those candidates, 14% of the total, who were not incumbents but who had previously served as a local councillor. It is clear that candidates bring with them a broad range of experience and this may or may not affect the process of standing for election and the sources of information used.

Table 2 controls for the range of experience in assessing specifically how and when EC resources were used. While only 5.5% of respondents overall accessed the Electoral Commission resources for information about standing, when electoral experience is taken into account some differences emerge. The group most likely to seek information from the EC are precisely those that have not stood before; one in ten of first time candidates used the Commission's resource. By contrast, those candidates that had stood previously and returning incumbents were half as likely to

rely upon the EC for such information while former councillors perceived themselves least in need of this resource.

Table 2: Electoral experience and accessing Electoral Commission resources

	First time candidate	Previous candidate	Former councillor	Incumbent
how to stand as a candidate	10.2	4.7	1.3	4.9
how to obtain nomination papers	3.8	1.8	.0	.8
how to complete nomination papers	5.5	3.5	.7	3.2
when and where to return nomination papers	4.7	2.6	.7	1.6
rules about election expenses	15.3	10.5	2.6	8.1
how to obtain a copy of the register of voters	7.2	2.3	.7	3.0
rules about postal voting	11.1	7.9	2.0	3.2
electoral timetable	9.4	5.3	1.3	2.4
list of local polling stations	7.7	1.2	.0	1.6
procedures at the count	7.2	5.0	2.0	2.7
how to challenge election result	8.9	4.7	2.6	4.1

This pattern is more or less repeated across the board, with novice candidates more likely than other types of candidate to consult the EC although the numbers are, of course, generally very low. Most notable is the search for information about the rules governing election expenses; 15% of all first time candidates consulted EC resources while around 10% of incumbents did so.

It appears from these data that how candidates engage with the electoral process is to an extent determined by their prior experience. Those with no previous experience are more likely to consult an outside source, such as the EC, for important information that will assist them in navigating a course through the electoral process.

The vital role played by local political parties in assisting candidates, most of who contest on behalf of one of those parties, is clear from the overall data. We might hypothesise that the more efficient and effective party organisations are, the less reliance there is on alternative sources of information. Conversely, where party

organisations are less established, for example, among the smaller or minor parties, or when a party is inapplicable in the case of candidates standing as independents, then we should expect that non-party sources of information become more essential.

The evidence from Table 3 generally supports these hypotheses. While fewer than one in twenty candidates that contested on behalf of one or other of the two main parties accessed EC resources about becoming a candidate, twice as many from the less well resourced Liberal Democrats did so. Almost one in twelve candidates that stood for one of the minor parties obtained information about how to stand for election from the EC. When candidates do not have any outside assistance from an organised political party then the EC is accessed more often – almost one in five candidates contesting as an independent used the resource in 2009.

Table 3: Party affiliation and Accessing Electoral Commission Resources

	Con	Lab	LD	minor	IND
how to stand as a candidate	3.1	2.8	6.1	7.6	18.6
how to obtain nomination papers	.0	1.2	2.3	2.1	6.8
how to complete nomination papers	2.0	1.2	2.3	5.9	16.9
when and where to return nomination papers	1.7	.4	1.9	2.9	15.3
rules about election expenses	6.1	4.0	8.4	16.0	30.5
how to obtain a copy of the register of voters	2.4	.8	3.0	4.2	18.6
rules about postal voting	2.0	5.6	6.8	7.6	20.3
electoral timetable	3.4	2.4	4.2	6.7	13.6
list of local polling stations	2.4	1.2	1.5	2.5	16.9
procedures at the count	3.1	2.0	2.3	7.1	16.9
how to challenge election result	3.1	2.0	3.8	7.1	25.4

This pattern is repeated throughout, with independent candidates and those challenging for the minor parties more likely than their counterparts among the three main parties to access EC-provided information about the process of standing for local council election. In respect of the crucial questions that arise about election expenditure, the EC is consulted by almost a third of independent candidates and one in six of those standing for the minor parties.

Section 2: Satisfaction with advice and guidance

Local authorities provide a briefing session for all candidates standing for local election. A relatively large number of candidates probably do not avail themselves of this service. When respondents were asked to comment upon the usefulness of this briefing some 15% did not offer any answer while 45% of those that did answer preferred to offer a “don’t know” response (Table 4). Nevertheless, only a small fraction of those providing an answer, barely one in ten, had not found the briefing useful. Almost three-quarters of candidates reported favourably upon the availability of local authority staff during the campaign.

Table 4: Advice and Guidance (All respondents)

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Tend to Agree</i>	<i>Tend to Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
The introductory briefing session by the Returning officer / electoral staff was useful	27.2	17.4	4.7	6.2	44.6
The Returning Officer / electoral staff were available for advice during the campaign	49.3	24.0	4.9	4.6	17.3
The Electoral Commission's written <i>Guidance for candidates and agents</i> was clear and easy to use	33.4	34.7	6.1	3.7	22.1
The information in <i>Guidance for candidates and agents</i> which covered election spending and donations was clear and easy to use	30.6	33.5	8.8	4.9	22.2
I am aware that the Electoral Commission offers advice by email and telephone on spending and donations	24.6	14.5	8.3	24.8	27.8

More than nine in ten respondents provided answers to the questions about EC documentation. Among these respondents a clear two-thirds majority was satisfied that the information had been clear and easy to use. There is clearly some

uncertainty regarding the EC's email and telephone service on matters to do with spending and donations. While a quarter of responses suggested that people were aware of this service an equal proportion took the opposite view while a further 28% preferred the "don't know" option to this question.

Would attitudes towards such things as the availability of electoral staff and the quality of guidance written by the Electoral Commission be mediated by the candidate's own experience in contesting elections? Table A1 suggests that the level of a candidate's campaign experience is not a major factor that is affecting levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the quality of the advice and guidance on offer. For example, around seven in ten across all categories agree/tend to agree that the EC written guidance for candidates and agents is clear and easy to use. Similar levels of agreement are also found in respect of the guidance about election spending and donations. Some rather minor differences are evident. For example, those respondents with prior experience serving as a local councillor (former councillors and incumbents) are slightly more inclined to agree that local authority electoral staff were available for advice than those without that experience (i.e. first time candidates and previous candidates).

It is clear from Table A2 that there are notable and statistically significant differences between candidates that stand as independents and those representing political parties. Independents are the most positive about the clarity and ease of use of EC guidance, and also about the availability of local authority electoral staff during the campaign.

Section 3: Experiencing electoral administration processes during the 2009 election

A set of questions on the questionnaire addressed specifically each candidate's personal experience of the 2009 election. These questions extend from the availability of nomination papers to general assessments of how the election was administered in the candidate's own area.

A clear majority (Table 5) agree/tend to agree that nomination papers were available when required and also agree that these were easy to complete. Opinion is more divided over the matter of the electoral register. Less than a majority fully agreed that it contained the names of all eligible electors, although over a further fifth "tended to agree". A large minority of the candidates had not experienced or were personally unaware of the opposite problem it seems – 43% answered "don't know" when asked if the register had contained names of electors who were *not* entitled to be on it, with only 16% agreeing/tending to agree that the register did include some people that were ineligible to vote in the local election.

Table 5: Experiencing Electoral Administration in 2009 (All respondents)

In my opinion...	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Tend to Agree</i>	<i>Tend to Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
Nomination papers were available in good time	77.3	11.6	4.9	3.4	2.7
Nomination papers were difficult to complete	7.1	10.7	20.1	61.0	1.1
The register of local electors included all those people who were entitled to be on it	45.5	22.4	5.8	5.8	20.5
The register of local electors included some people who were not entitled to be on it	7.5	8.9	13.6	27.3	42.7
The rules concerning election expenses were confusing	8.6	17.8	25.7	33.3	14.5
Elections staff made it clear what was happening during the postal	27.0	16.9	7.1	11.8	37.2

vote verification process					
Elections staff made it clear what was happening at all stages of the count.	38.3	22.2	12.1	13.3	14.1
Decision-making processes at the count were satisfactory	51.3	23.8	3.9	5.4	15.6
The electoral timetable allows sufficient opportunity for people to stand for election if they want to.	57.7	25.2	8.4	5.3	3.4
Overall the administration of the local elections in my area was satisfactory	59.1	27.0	5.8	5.6	2.6

Although 26% agree/tend to agree that the rules concerning election expenses were confusing, more than twice that number took a contrary view.

Generally speaking there was strong support for the work undertaken by local electoral administration staff, although a large proportion of candidates, more than one in three, expressed no opinion about the process of verifying postal votes. Opinion is clear that election staff conducted the counting of votes in an efficient manner with 87% agreeing/tending to agree that the administration of their own election had been satisfactory. Despite this, there are it seems some candidates that take a different viewpoint with a quarter tending to disagree/disagreeing that elections staff made it clear what was happening at all stages of the count. There are no obvious defining characteristics of candidates that held this view in terms of sex and age for example but it does appear that Liberal Democrats are more likely than members of other parties to fall into this category.

The views of first-time candidates are perhaps worth noting because this is their first impression at first hand of how the electoral process works (Table A3). Some measure of their relative inexperience, perhaps, is that these types are more likely than incumbents to prefer the option of “don’t know” to a number of questions. But their responses generally are similar to those of candidates that have stood previously but not been successful. Asked about the accuracy of the electoral register, for example, over half of first-time and previous candidates don’t know whether the register included people who were not entitled to be listed but only a quarter of incumbents did so. This probably reflects overall engagement with the campaign in respect of canvassing and campaigning (see section 5 below)

One point worth noting perhaps is that first-time candidates are rather more inclined than other candidates to disagree that election staff had made the process of postal vote verification transparent. By contrast, incumbents, with rather more electoral experience of course, were more likely to express a clear opinion about the overall quality of electoral administration and available electoral guidance. Generally speaking, few candidates expressed negative views about the overall administration of the election.

There are certainly some interesting differences in the attitudes of candidates after controlling for partisanship (Table A4). Conservative candidates generally hold a clear opinion about electoral administration and the accuracy of the electoral register and the quality of electoral administration whereas their counterparts representing Labour and Liberal Democrats are less certain. For example, while only a quarter of Conservatives selected “don’t know” for the question about over-sized electoral registers between four and five in ten Liberal Democrats and Labour candidates did so. This may be related to the fact that a majority of the seats in 2009 were being defended by the Conservatives, reflecting the party’s strengths across the English shires, and incumbents might be expected to be more familiar with campaigning and the need for accurate electoral registers during canvassing.

Of greater interest, perhaps, are the distinct views offered by independent candidates who do not benefit from party organisations and the support that these can contribute. In the crucial area of information about electoral expenses, for example, it is possibly significant that independents are almost twice as likely as others to feel that the rules governing election expenses are confusing. Moreover, none of the independents surveyed that responded to this question utilised the “don’t know” option whereas one in ten of main party candidates and fully one quarter of minor party candidates did so. Although this cannot be verified from this survey, the explanation for this may lie with the assistance that some candidates receive in completing their election expenses from party agents or more experienced party members.

Section 4: Attitudes towards electoral fraud

All candidates were asked two questions relating to the issue of electoral fraud. The first sought their attitudes about electoral fraud generally in Great Britain (Table 6) whilst the second specified their own election contest and any concerns about fraud there (Table 7).

Although one in twenty candidates are greatly concerned about the level of electoral fraud in Britain and a further one in seven believe it to be a big problem, a clear majority either do not feel that fraud is a very big problem (68.5%) or a problem at all (11.9%). Controlling for electoral experience, “insiders” (incumbents and previous councillors) are less likely than other candidates to view fraud as a very big problem but the differences are not statistically significant.

It is notable, however, that candidates standing for one of the minor parties are much more likely to be worried about electoral fraud than are those standing for the three main parties. Independents are also more likely to believe that fraud is a very big problem. In each case, however, those concerned with electoral fraud generally in Britain are considerably outnumbered by those that take a contrary view.

Table 6: Concerns about electoral fraud generally in Britain (row %)

	A very big problem	A big problem	Not a very big problem	Not a problem at all
All respondents	4.5	15.1	68.5	11.9
Con	2.8	18.9	63.5	14.7
Lab	2.0	7.3	76.3	14.3
LD	1.2	15.1	74.2	9.5
minor party	12.4	18.6	60.6	8.4
Independent	7.3	16.4	65.5	10.9
First time candidate	5.9	14.9	68.3	10.9
Previous candidate	5.8	16.1	67.6	10.6
Former councillor	2.7	18.1	69.1	10.1
Incumbent	3.4	13.1	69.3	14.2

Since a clear majority of candidates are not greatly concerned about the issue of electoral fraud it is unsurprising that they are even less concerned about it in terms of first-hand experience. Although the proportion expressing some kind of concern about fraud in the local context is similar to the national situation (19.6% are concerned about fraud generally in Britain; 16.5% concerned about their local election) there is a much larger group, 44.8%, that are not at all concerned about this issue in their own local council election while only 11.9% see no problem at all about fraud at the national level.

Table 7: Concerns about electoral fraud in local council election (row %)

	Very concerned	Fairly concerned	Not very concerned	Not at all concerned
All respondents	4.7	11.8	38.7	44.8
Con	4.2	9.4	36.8	49.7
Lab	3.6	8.9	35.2	52.2
LD	1.6	13.3	41.4	43.8
minor party	8.6	15.5	42.2	33.6
Independent	10.7	14.3	37.5	37.5
First time candidate	6.2	10.3	41.5	42.0
Previous candidate	5.0	12.4	43.8	38.8
Former councillor	4.7	12.1	34.9	48.3
Incumbent	3.6	11.3	34.2	51.0

While there are relatively more first time candidates that are very concerned about electoral fraud in terms of their own particular contest the difference with other types of candidate are not statistically significant. At the opposite end of the scale, four in ten first time candidates are not at all concerned, lower than the half of incumbents who felt the same way.

Each of the main parties has been directly affected by accusations of electoral fraud at local council elections so it is interesting, therefore, to note that their candidates hold broadly similar views. A slightly larger group of Conservative and Labour candidates than Liberal Democrats are “very concerned” about fraud in their own elections, but Liberal Democrats are more likely to fall into the “fairly concerned” bracket. Approximately half of candidates from the two main parties are “not at all concerned” but there are slightly fewer among Liberal Democrats taking this view.

Once again, however, concerns about fraud are more frequent among minor party and independent candidates. About one in ten of these are “very concerned” about the issue in their own local council election while just one in three do not see it as a problem at all. Nevertheless, even among these candidates for every individual concerned about fraud there are three that take the opposite view.

Section 5: Campaigning activity

Candidates were asked a series of questions about the nature and level of campaigning activity during the 2009 election campaign. Table 8 shows that roughly three-quarters of all candidates produced a personalised leaflet and also assisted in delivering these to addresses within their ward/division. When asked whether the leaflet was delivered to all addresses a majority, 57%, replied that they had, leaving 43% who had been selective about which households were canvassed in this way. Modern campaigning techniques employing telephone canvassing and also use of the Internet and email to contact would-be voters are growing at the local level. The geographic dispersion of many county electorates perhaps coupled with a scarcity of party activists gives this form of canvassing particular appeal. The survey found that one in five candidates had used telephone canvassing while one in ten had used electronic contacts of some kind. A third of candidates had contacted the local media to bring publicity for their campaign.

Table 8: Canvassing during the 2009 campaign (% Yes)

	Leaflet	Deliver	All addresses	Telephone	Internet /email	Contact media
All respondents	73.7	77.1	56.7	19.3	8.9	33.6
Con	97.9	97.6	88.9	27.3	7.3	20.1
Lab	60.4	61.2	43.3	27.0	7.1	43.6
LD	70.0	73.7	53.0	21.4	8.4	30.8
minor party	56.6	67.9	30.1	2.2	8.4	42.5
Independent	93.1	89.7	67.2	5.2	27.6	36.2
First time candidate	64.9	72.8	41.3	11.1	13.8	35.1
Previous candidate	56.2	60.5	34.0	10.3	7.7	36.4
Former councillor	75.2	75.8	51.4	24.8	6.9	38.8

Incumbent	94.8	95.3	88.4	30.7	7.8	28.1
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Leaflet:	Did you produce a campaign leaflet for distribution?
Deliver:	Did you deliver the campaign leaflets?
All addresses:	Was your leaflet delivered to all addresses in your ward?
Telephone:	Did you canvass by telephone?
Internet /email:	Did you canvass by the internet /email?
Contact media:	Did you contact any of the local media in order to publicise your campaign?

There are some significant differences in the level and style of campaigning after controlling for a candidate's partisan allegiance. Conservative candidates were almost unanimous in producing a leaflet and their coverage was much more extensive than that of their two principal rivals. Labour made as much use of telephone campaigning as did the Conservatives and its candidates were more proactive in trying to raise media interest in their campaign. In respect of canvassing there are marked differences between the experience of candidates standing for one of the smaller parties and those standing as independents. Virtually all of the independents produced a leaflet and helped to deliver it to two-thirds of households. These candidates were also most likely to be users of electronic canvassing while over a third contacted local media outlets. Minor party candidates were less active by comparison, producing fewer leaflets on average and distributing to only a third of households. Their preferred strategy for raising campaign awareness appears to have been via the local media.

Incumbents, many of whom on this occasion are Conservatives, reflecting the party's strength at this particular point in the local electoral cycle, were more likely than other types of candidate to produce and deliver a leaflet to most of their residents. Incumbents also made more use of the telephone to contact voters but were less inclined to contact local media to raise campaign awareness. First-time candidates made the greatest use of the Internet and email for their campaigning.

Respondents were asked about the amount of time that they personally had invested during each week of the campaign (Table 9). There is an extensive range in the data with a relatively large number, about 6%, investing no time at all, whilst one candidate claimed 180 hours per week on average. The mean weekly time spent on canvassing is 18.4 hours. Conservatives and incumbents claimed the highest average with 26 hours spent. Candidates contesting for the first time spent about 15 hours each week doing so.

To some extent these mean values are affected by extreme cases at both ends of the spectrum. There are clearly some candidates that campaign a great deal indeed and others, largely those that stood on condition that they could be a 'paper candidate' only, that do not campaign at all. After removing those that admitted to being a paper candidate and also the most active candidates, the perhaps more realistic extent of campaigning activities are shown in Table 8. Incumbents spent on average five hours per week more campaigning than did first-time candidates. The least time was spent by candidates who had stood at a previous local election. Liberal Democrats campaigned almost as much as did Conservative candidates and four hours more each week than both Labour and smaller party candidates. Independents campaigned for an average of 20 hours per week but the standard deviation suggests most lie within a range of between 10-30 hours.

Table 9: Average campaigning hours per week

	Valid N	Minimum hours	Maximum hours	Mean hours	Standard Deviation
All*	639	0	48	19.3	11.1
First time candidate	124	0	48	17.2	10.8
Previous candidate	138	0	42	15.9	11.2
Former councillor	89	0	45	18.8	10.7
Incumbent	286	0	48	22.1	10.7
Con	239	0	48	21.1	10.4
Lab	116	0	45	16.6	11.8
LD	134	0	45	20.3	10.7
minor party	103	0	42	16.9	11.6
Independent	47	0	48	19.7	11.1

- Paper candidates and 5% of those with highest hours excluded

Given that most candidates invest a great deal of time and energy into a campaign that they are not destined to win it is always surprising to discover that overwhelmingly they emerge with positive attitudes about their experience (Table 10). Candidates were asked two related questions: had they enjoyed campaigning during the 2009 election and would they be prepared to stand again as a candidate. Some 85% of all candidates had enjoyed the experience, regardless it seems of whether it was their first time or not. Labour and independents reported the lowest levels of enjoyment, but even in these cases eight in ten gave positive feedback. A clear majority would be prepared to repeat their experience.

Table 10: Enjoying the local election experience (% Yes)

	Overall, did you enjoy campaigning?	Prepared to stand as a candidate for local election again?
All respondents	85.0	90.4
First time candidate	84.4	89.8
Previous candidate	86.0	92.5
Former councillor	86.9	85.3
Incumbent	83.7	90.7
Con	89.6	93.1
Lab	80.4	87.1
LD	85.7	89.5
minor party	84.6	91.9
Independent	79.3	88.1

Conclusions

Local elections are dominated by political parties and it is unsurprising that these organisations are seen to be assisting those candidates that they have recruited. Most candidates, therefore, appear to be well served by their own party organisations in respect of following the rules and procedures surrounding the process of standing for local election. That is not to say that alternative sources of information are unnecessary or redundant. Local authorities, particularly their electoral registration and administration staff, clearly fulfil a key role in the electoral process.

The Electoral Commission's own resources, published documents, website and other direct information outlets, are currently being utilised by a rather small pool of the candidate population. Candidates that use the Electoral Commission for assistance regarding the rules governing election expenses are more likely to be standing for a minor party or especially as an independent.

Previous local candidate surveys have encountered mostly positive views about the campaigning experience and this year's survey is no exception. While some concerns remain about the accuracy of electoral registers and there is continuing uncertainty it seems about the rules governing election expenses, there is widespread enthusiasm for electioneering. Despite devoting a great deal of their time to canvassing for votes and despite the fact that most candidates lose, they are virtually unanimous in their willingness to stand again.

Table A1: Candidate electoral experience and attitudes towards advice and guidance

		Briefing session	Staff advice	Written Guidance	Election spend	Email and telephone
First time candidate	Agree	27.0	41.5	35.6	29.6	23.7
	Tend to Agree	14.7	24.9	32.9	34.3	11.4
	Tend to Disagree	6.4	3.7	6.4	6.9	7.3
	Disagree	6.4	6.0	4.1	5.1	24.7
	Don't know	45.6	24.0	21.0	24.1	32.9
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Previous candidate	Agree	21.6	44.0	32.5	29.5	26.1
	Tend to Agree	17.2	22.3	30.1	28.3	14.0
	Tend to Disagree	2.7	5.0	7.5	10.0	9.1
	Disagree	4.4	3.4	4.5	6.1	25.2
	Don't know	54.1	25.4	25.3	26.1	25.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Former councillor	Agree	28.7	52.4	32.6	30.0	25.5
	Tend to Agree	13.2	24.1	37.6	38.6	17.9
	Tend to Disagree	5.4	7.6	4.3	5.0	6.9
	Disagree	7.0	4.8	3.5	3.6	21.4
	Don't know	45.7	11.0	22.0	22.9	28.3
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Incumbent	Agree	31.8	57.2	32.8	32.0	22.8
	Tend to Agree	21.2	25.2	39.2	35.8	15.6
	Tend to Disagree	5.1	4.5	5.2	10.5	8.9
	Disagree	7.7	4.8	2.6	4.4	25.9
	Don't know	34.1	8.2	20.1	17.4	26.8
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Briefing session: The introductory briefing session by the Returning officer/ electoral staff was useful

Staff advice: The Returning Officer / electoral staff were available for advice during the campaign

Written Guidance: The Electoral Commission's written Guidance for candidates and agents was clear and easy to use

Election spend: The information in Guidance for candidates and agents which covered election spending and donations was clear and easy to use

Table A2: Party affiliation and attitudes towards advice and guidance

		Briefing session	Staff advice	Written Guidance	Election spend	Email and telephone
Con	Agree	31.2	53.4	37.4	34.4	24.5
	Tend to Agree	25.8	25.8	34.8	34.8	14.1
	Tend to Disagree	3.9	6.1	5.5	8.4	10.8
	Disagree	6.6	3.9	3.7	5.1	22.0
	Don't know	32.4	10.8	18.7	17.2	28.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Lab	Agree	27.5	50.2	32.0	30.7	27.3
	Tend to Agree	15.5	22.3	34.6	33.8	17.3
	Tend to Disagree	4.8	4.4	6.1	7.9	5.2
	Disagree	5.8	5.2	3.0	4.4	25.5
	Don't know	46.4	17.9	24.2	23.2	24.7
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
LD	Agree	20.3	40.2	25.0	22.6	17.6
	Tend to Agree	13.2	28.0	38.9	36.5	13.7
	Tend to Disagree	5.7	5.1	5.6	10.3	11.3
	Disagree	8.4	5.5	3.2	4.4	29.3
	Don't know	52.4	21.3	27.4	26.2	28.1
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
minor	Agree	26.2	50.4	37.8	32.0	26.1
	Tend to Agree	14.4	19.9	30.0	27.6	12.4
	Tend to Disagree	4.0	2.7	6.1	8.0	6.2
	Disagree	4.5	4.0	4.8	5.3	24.8
	Don't know	51.0	23.0	21.3	27.1	30.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
IND	Agree	39.6	61.8	40.0	41.1	40.0
	Tend to Agree	13.2	20.0	34.5	35.7	18.2
	Tend to Disagree	5.7	9.1	10.9	10.7	3.6
	Disagree	3.8	3.6	5.5	7.1	14.5
	Don't know	37.7	5.5	9.1	5.4	23.6
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Briefing session: The introductory briefing session by the Returning officer/ electoral staff was useful

Staff advice: The Returning Officer / electoral staff were available for advice during the campaign

Written Guidance: The Electoral Commission's written Guidance for candidates and agents was clear and easy to use

Election spend: The information in Guidance for candidates and agents which covered election spending and donations was clear and easy to use

Email and telephone: I am aware that the Electoral Commission offers advice by email and telephone on spending and donations

Table A3: Experiencing Electoral Administration in 2009 by Candidate Electoral Experience

		Nomination	Complete papers	Include register	Over-sized register	Expenses rules	Postal vote verify	Stages of the count	Decision processes	Timetable	Overall admin
<i>First time candidate</i>	Agree	73.2	9.2	36.7	7.1	11.2	17.4	29.1	44.3	54.2	54.9
	Tend to Agree	13.4	12.2	21.2	7.6	17.0	14.7	20.0	24.0	27.1	28.1
	Tend to Disagree	4.8	21.8	7.5	9.8	25.0	9.2	11.4	4.5	8.0	5.8
	Disagree	3.5	55.5	4.9	21.4	27.2	17.9	20.5	5.0	5.3	7.6
	Don't know	5.2	1.3	29.6	54.0	19.6	40.8	19.1	22.2	5.3	3.6
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Previous candidate</i>	Agree	70.7	7.7	41.5	4.3	8.0	23.3	31.7	43.9	49.5	55.8
	Tend to Agree	13.8	12.8	24.5	6.8	18.8	15.1	22.7	24.5	28.5	33.4
	Tend to Disagree	7.0	20.5	3.6	15.1	25.8	5.7	13.7	3.4	10.8	3.9
	Disagree	5.0	57.9	2.4	20.6	28.6	10.4	8.7	2.8	6.6	2.4
	Don't know	3.5	1.2	28.1	53.2	18.8	45.6	23.3	25.4	4.5	4.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Former councillor</i>	Agree	79.3	7.9	48.0	5.3	7.7	28.8	36.8	49.0	58.7	53.6
	Tend to Agree	12.0	9.3	20.4	12.7	14.7	18.7	25.0	29.3	19.3	31.8
	Tend to Disagree	1.3	15.9	7.9	10.7	25.2	7.2	12.5	4.1	11.3	7.3
	Disagree	6.0	65.6	4.6	31.3	40.6	9.4	15.3	6.1	8.7	5.3
	Don't know	1.3	1.3	19.1	40.0	11.9	36.0	10.4	11.6	2.0	2.0

	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Incumbent	Agree	85.4	4.7	53.4	11.4	7.9	35.5	50.1	63.0	66.9	66.8
	Tend to Agree	8.2	8.5	22.3	10.3	18.8	19.2	22.2	20.9	23.7	18.3
	Tend to Disagree	4.7	20.4	5.6	16.0	26.4	7.2	11.1	3.9	5.0	6.9
	Disagree	.8	65.8	10.1	35.4	38.2	10.3	12.5	7.8	2.8	7.5
	Don't know	.8	.6	8.7	26.9	8.7	27.8	4.2	4.5	1.7	.6
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Nomination: Nomination papers were available in good time

Complete papers: Nomination papers were difficult to complete

Include register: The register of local electors included all those people who were entitled to be on it

Over-sized register: The register of local electors included some people who were not entitled to be on it

Expenses rules: The rules concerning election expenses were confusing

Postal vote verify: Elections staff made it clear what was happening during the postal vote verification process

Stages of the count: Elections staff made it clear what was happening at all stages of the count

Decision processes: Decision-making processes at the count were satisfactory

Timetable: The electoral timetable allows sufficient opportunity for people to stand for election if they want to

Overall admin: Overall the administration of the local elections in my area was satisfactory

Table A4: Experiencing Electoral Administration in 2009 by Party

		Nomination	Complete papers	Include register	Over-sized register	Expenses rules	Postal vote verify	Stages of the count	Decision processes	Timetable	Overall admin
Con	Agree	86.6	3.5	51.4	11.4	9.2	35.3	51.4	69.7	74.4	72.9
	Tend to Agree	7.2	8.3	24.8	13.2	15.9	22.3	23.1	18.1	19.4	17.0
	Tend to Disagree	3.4	17.7	8.0	14.3	26.5	7.9	11.9	3.5	3.5	5.6
	Disagree	2.1	69.8	6.3	36.1	37.5	11.5	9.8	5.2	1.0	3.8
	Don't know	.7	.7	9.4	25.0	11.0	23.0	3.8	3.5	1.7	.7
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Lab	Agree	71.8	8.9	45.9	5.8	6.8	30.1	37.9	44.3	53.1	55.3
	Tend to Agree	15.3	14.2	23.0	7.1	20.3	13.1	18.3	27.0	26.7	29.5
	Tend to Disagree	6.9	19.5	4.1	14.1	25.7	5.9	12.3	4.8	9.1	6.6
	Disagree	3.6	57.3	4.1	25.7	35.0	7.6	11.5	6.5	7.4	5.3
	Don't know	2.4	.0	23.0	47.3	12.2	43.2	20.0	17.4	3.7	3.3
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
LD	Agree	79.2	8.8	41.1	5.5	5.6	18.3	31.9	46.4	52.9	52.7
	Tend to Agree	10.8	8.1	24.0	8.7	16.8	15.8	23.4	28.8	29.4	32.0

	Tend to Disagree	3.1	21.5	6.2	15.8	31.2	7.5	11.3	4.0	11.0	6.6
	Disagree	3.5	60.4	7.4	28.5	31.6	14.5	21.8	6.8	3.5	6.6
	Don't know	3.5	1.2	21.3	41.5	14.8	44.0	11.7	14.0	3.1	2.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
minor	Agree	71.1	7.3	39.6	3.6	11.0	20.7	29.0	42.2	47.8	54.3
	Tend to Agree	13.6	13.7	18.3	7.6	17.2	18.0	25.9	23.1	28.3	29.6
	Tend to Disagree	5.5	22.7	5.2	10.7	19.4	5.1	12.5	2.7	10.9	4.8
	Disagree	4.7	53.2	4.3	16.4	27.8	11.1	9.4	2.7	7.8	5.7
	Don't know	5.1	3.0	32.6	61.8	24.7	45.2	23.2	29.3	5.2	5.7
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
IND	Agree	70.7	8.6	58.6	20.0	17.9	35.1	39.0	44.1	54.2	53.4
	Tend to Agree	13.8	6.9	17.2	1.8	23.2	7.0	15.3	20.3	16.9	32.8
	Tend to Disagree	10.3	17.2	1.7	9.1	23.2	14.0	13.6	6.8	8.5	3.4
	Disagree	3.4	67.2	8.6	29.1	35.7	21.1	16.9	6.8	15.3	10.3
	Don't know	1.7	.0	13.8	40.0	.0	22.8	15.3	22.0	5.1	.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Nomination: Nomination papers were available in good time

Complete papers: Nomination papers were difficult to complete

Include register: The register of local electors included all those people who were entitled to be on it

Over-sized register: The register of local electors included some people who were not entitled to be on it

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Timetable: The electoral timetable allows sufficient opportunity for people to stand for election if they want to

Overall admin: Overall the administration of the local elections in my area was satisfactory