

# Standards Advisory Committee



Thursday, 22 September 2022 at 6.30 p.m.

Committee Room 1, 1st Floor, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5  
Clove Crescent, London E14 2BG

## Supplementary Agenda

**Chair: John Pulford MBE**

### Members

Vice-Chair:

John Pulford MBE, Fiona Browne, Mike Houston, Rachael Tiffen, Amanda Orchard, Councillor Shafi Ahmed, Councillor Sabina Akhtar, Councillor Amin Rahman, Councillor Sirajul Islam, Councillor Abu Chowdhury and Justina Bridgeman

### Observers (Independent Persons):

### Substitutes:

Councillor Asma Begum and Councillor Amina Ali

[The quorum for Standards Advisory Committee is 3 Members including one Councillor and one Co-optee]

### Further Information

Reports for consideration, meeting contact details, public participation and more information is available on the following pages.



## Public Information

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### Meeting Webcast

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<http://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

### Contact for further enquiries:

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Web:<http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/committee>

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## Standards Advisory Committee

Thursday, 22 September 2022

6.30 p.m.

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**Next Meeting of the Committee:**

Thursday, 8 December 2022 at 6.30 p.m. to be held in the Committee Room 1, 1st Floor, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, London E14 2BG

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<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p><b>Standards Advisory Committee</b></p> <p>Thursday, 22 September 2022</p>	
<p><b>Report of:</b> Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer</p>	<p><b>Classification:</b> Open (Unrestricted)</p>
<p><b>Register of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality Quarterly Update</b></p>	

<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services Patricia Attawia, Democratic Services Team Leader (Civic and Members)
<b>Wards affected</b>	

### Executive Summary

This report updates the Committee on the Members’ Register of Interests and declarations of gifts and hospitality submitted by Members since the previous report to the committee on 23 June 2022.

Standards Advisory Committee is receiving this report as it monitors compliance with the requirement in the Council Code of Conduct for Members to register and disclose their interests, and to declare any offer of a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £25.

### Recommendations:

The Standards Advisory Committee is recommended to:

1. Review, comment and note the report.

### 1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Council is required by statute to adopt a Code of Conduct for Members. For the purpose of the Code a Member includes the Mayor, elected Councillors and Co-opted Members of the Authority.
- 1.2 A Member is required under the Council’s Code of Conduct (paragraph 50) to register and disclose their interests. This must be done within 28 days of becoming a member or being re-elected to office.

- 1.3 Members must ensure their register of interests is kept up to date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
- 1.4 A Member is also required under the Council's Code of Conduct (paragraph 59) to register the offer of any gift or hospitality, whether accepted or not, with an estimated value of at least £25. They must include the person from whom it is received.
- 1.5 Repeated smaller gifts and hospitality which, when combined, would likely exceed £25 within any three-month period should also be declared.

## **2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 This is a noting report.

## **3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

### **Register of Interests**

- 3.1 Following the elections in May, all newly elected and returning Members were required to complete a declaration of interests.
- 3.2 From the total of 46 elected Members, 45 were returned within the 28 day deadline. The remaining declaration was received after the deadline. A reminder about updates was sent in August and will be sent again in November. The outcome will be reported to the December meeting of the committee.
- 3.3 A number of Co-opted members were recently recruited and will be taken through the requirements of the Code of Conduct during their induction. Any outstanding Register of Interest forms will be completed at that time.
- 3.4 All other Co-opted members were reminded about updating their Register of Interests with any changes within 28 days.
- 3.5 A number of members' declarations were published online sometime after they were received. In these cases, either councillors or the Monitoring Officer had some queries or there was a need for further information. Some of these included requests to withhold home addresses from the website.
- 3.6 A separate report is listed which looks at the issue of members' safety and publishing home addresses, following the LGA's call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors in October 2021, and their subsequent report titled 'Debate Not Hate: The impact of abuse on local democracy'.

## Gifts and Hospitality

3.7 During the period 1 June – 31 August 2022, 1 declaration was received. The details are set out in the table below.

Name	Date offered	Type	Accepted/ Declined	Date declared	On time	Provided by	Estimated value	Description
Cllr Maium Talukdar	24/06/2022	Hospitality	Accepted	20/07/22	Yes	Odgers Interim & Odgers Connect	£280	Municipal Journal Awards Dinner

3.8 The declaration was received within the 28 day deadline.

3.9 Members were reminded of the need to declare any offers of gifts and hospitality, via an article in the Members' Bulletin on 26 August 2022 which included a link to the online form for ease of reference.

3.10 An email was also sent to all Members asking them to confirm that either all declarations were up to date, or that they had nothing to declare. At the time of the report responses had been received from 6 Members. We will continue to chase for responses and update the Committee at the meeting.

## 4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None specific to this report.

## 5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

## 6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

6.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

## **7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES**

- 7.1 Section 29 of the Localism Act 2011 Act provides that the Council's Monitoring Officer must establish and maintain a register of interests of Members of the Authority.
- 7.2 Section 30 of the 2011 Act requires Members to register disclosable pecuniary interests within 28 days. Otherwise it is for the Council to determine what is entered in the register of interests and as indicated in this report that includes gifts and hospitality with an estimated value of at least £25.
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### **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

#### **Linked Report**

- NONE

#### **Appendices**

NONE

#### **Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)**

#### **List of "Background Papers" used in the preparation of this report**

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- NONE

#### **Officer contact details for documents:**

N/A

Non-Executive Report of the:  <b>Standards Advisory Committee</b>  Thursday, 22 September 2022	 <b>TOWER HAMLETS</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer	<b>Classification:</b> Open (Unrestricted)
<b>Local Government Association reports: Abuse and Intimidation of Members and a national census of local councillors</b>	

<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services
<b>Wards affected</b>	(All Wards);

### Executive Summary

On 30 June 2022, the Local Government Association published a report on issues of abuse and intimidation experienced by local councillors across the country. The report followed on from a survey they had undertaken on the issue.

This report is presented to the Standards Advisory Committee for consideration so that it is aware of the issues that are set out.

The report also notes a number of actions the Council takes to support Members.

### Recommendations:

The Standards Advisory Committee is recommended to:

1. Review and note the report.

#### 1. **REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 This noting report is presented to the Committee as it is relevant to its duty to manage standard in relation to the role of Members.

#### 2. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 Not applicable to this noting report.

#### 3. **DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

- 3.1 A part of the Standards Advisory Committee workplan is to monitor actions/issues of interest in the wider local government sector to bring to the Committee's attention when relevant to its work. A part of this involves reporting on the work of the Local Government Association (LGA). Two reports are presented here which are of potential interest to the Committee.

## **Abuse and Intimidation of Councillors**

- 3.2 In October 2021, the LGA launched a survey seeking evidence of abuse and intimidation received by local councillors. On 28 June 2022 they subsequently published a report setting out the findings of that survey along with a number of recommendations.
- 3.3 The full report is attached to this cover at Appendix 1.
- 3.4 A summary of the key themes which emerged from the survey were:
- There was significant variability on the levels of support offered by different local authorities and police forces.
  - Councillors with protected characteristics were likely to experience higher levels of personalised abuse.
  - Abuse significantly impacted councillors' health and wellbeing and had a negative impact on their willingness to stand for re-election.
  - Councillors were potentially more at risk compared to MPs as they were more visible locally.
  - A growing concern that abuse, particularly online, was being normalised.
- 3.5 The LGA therefore proposed a number of recommendations for action with Recommendation 1 in particular targeted at local authorities:

**Recommendation 1:** Councils and other relevant partners should take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors and take a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against councillors. This should include addressing the impacts of abuse on councillors' mental health and wellbeing and working in partnership with other agencies and councils to ensure that threats and risks to councillors' safety, and that of their families, are taken seriously.

**Recommendation 2:** The LGA should continue to gather and disseminate good practice from across the sector, consider what more can be done to prevent abuse and intimidation of councillors through the Civility in public life programme, and support councils and councillors when these incidents occur.

**Recommendation 3:** Police forces should work to improve the consistency of responses to abuse of and threats made against councillors and take a risk-based approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, such as MPs. This should include identifying best practice in relation to councillor support and safety and sharing it across the country.

**Recommendation 4:** The Government should prioritise legislation to put it beyond doubt that councillors can withhold their home address from the public register of pecuniary interests.

**Recommendation 5:** The LGA should work with political parties, election and democratic officers, and organisations responsible for guidance to raise awareness of the options currently available and promote the practice of keeping home addresses private during the election process and once elected.

**Recommendation 6:** Social media companies and internet service providers should acknowledge the democratic significance of local politicians and provide better and faster routes for councillors reporting abuse and misinformation online.

**Recommendation 7:** The relevant [Government department should convene a working group](#), in partnership with the LGA, to bring together relevant agencies to develop and implement an action plan to address the issue of abuse of local politicians and their safety.

#### Support provided by the Council

- 3.6 There are limits to the ability of the Council to protect Councillors as most Councillor activity takes place outside of the authority's control (such as political and community events) and as Councillors are not employees there are also legal restrictions in some areas.
- 3.7 However, the Council recognises that abuse and intimidation of Councillors is a significant, and increasing, issue. Officers have therefore been working to improve the support and advice available and this continues to develop.
- 3.8 Key features of the current support include:
- Including discussion of these issues in the Member Induction programme.
  - Providing guidance on the Members Hub.
  - Use the Members Email Bulletin to highlight the above as well as linking to LGA information and training available to support Members.
  - Ensuring that a risk assessment is completed before any new surgery venue is agreed.
  - Encouraging Members to report abuse to the police and to contact the Monitoring Officer if they need any specific advice.
  - Personal attack alarms have just been procured and are being offered out to Members who wish to have them.

#### Home Addresses

- 3.9 One issue the LGA report particularly highlights is that councillors may be required to publicise home addresses as part of declaring their pecuniary interests on the public register of interests and the potential for this to be used by those seeking to intimidate Councillors. The report expresses concern that members could be required to give their homes addresses when declaring their pecuniary interests, noting that this requirement was removed from similar pre-election publication documents.

- 3.10 The LGA report calls on the government to introduce legislation to remove this requirement.
- 3.11 In the meantime, the requirement is that for an address to be withheld from the public register then the relevant Councillor must present evidence to the Monitoring Officer as to why the address should be considered as 'sensitive'. In other words, that there is a real and likely threat of intimidation and/or violence.
- 3.12 The Monitoring Officer has reviewed the legislation and is satisfied that it is explicit that an address cannot be withheld without a specific threat in each case. She does therefore require evidence to be provided. However, the Monitoring Officer does take the precautionary principle and so does not require a large amount of evidence before agreeing to such a request.
- 3.13 Democratic Services have highlighted to Members the opportunity to request removal of home addresses on a number of occasions including when receiving new Register of Interest forms since the election. The Monitoring Officer has reviewed 14 such requests since the election as set out below:

<b>Requests where permission was given</b>
Threats of physical violence and intimidate to self and family
Racist and Islamophobic threats
Anonymous calls and previous assault
Intimidation and threats
Abuse from campaigners and random callers at address
Threatening calls and texts from a withheld number
Threatening letter from a resident who saw them at a community event with their children.
Concerned for family members following incidents during campaigning.
Threatening letter from a resident.
Health concerns within the family
Abuse and harassment towards member and family

<b>Requests where permission was not given</b>
General feeling of vulnerability being a public figure with home address being accessible on the website no specific threats or incidents
General caution for them and family no specific threats or incidents
General concerns raised by those in the household about address being in the public domain but no specific threats or incidents

- 3.14 As can be seen from the above, requests are very likely to be accepted by the Monitoring Officer in any cases where there is a specific issue either in relation to the Member or their family/household.

## **National Member Census**

- 3.15 On 17 June 2022, the LGA published its Census of Local Authority Councillors in England. This also includes data on local Mayors.
- 3.16 The data presented in the report was collected in January and February 2022 and so will not include any changes as a result of the May 2022 local elections.
- 3.17 A total of 5,055 responses were received which is a response rate of roughly 30% of the roughly 17,000 councillors in England.
- 3.18 In the report the results have been extrapolated from the survey to provide national estimates. The document reports that these estimates are generally considered to be robust but that care should be taken when splitting out smaller samples such as for regions.
- 3.19 The report provides summary themes on the subjects of Councillors' work, views on the role and personal characteristics (such as age, gender).
- 3.20 For example, 79% of councillors would recommend the role to others, councillors spent on average 22 hours a week on the role and that around 60% of councillors were male.

## **4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 It is important to understand how issues such as abuse and intimidation impact on councillors and to look at how these challenges may affect members with different personal characteristics.

## **5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
  - Consultations,
  - Environmental (including air quality),
  - Risk Management,
  - Crime Reduction,
  - Safeguarding.
  - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.
- 5.2 None.

## **6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this noting report.

## **7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES**

7.1 As referred to in paragraph 3.12 of the report, Section 32 of the Localism Act 2011 provides that if a member has an interest (whether or not a disclosable pecuniary interest), and the member and the monitoring officer, consider that disclosure of the details of the interest could lead to the member (or a person connected with the member) being subject to violence or intimidation, copies of the register of interests that are made available for inspection and any published version of the register, must not include details of the interest (but may state that the member has an interest the details of which are withheld under section 32)].

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## **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

### **Linked Report**

- None.

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – LGA Report on abuse and intimidation of Members
- Appendix 2 – LGA Report on Councillor Census data

### **Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)**

#### **List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report**

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- None

#### **Officer contact details for documents:**

N/A

## **Debate Not Hate: The impact of abuse on local democracy**

Our call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors was launched in October 2021. This report sets out the findings and recommendations for the future of local democracy.

28 Jun 2022

- Executive summary and background
- Introduction
- Key facts and figures
- Detailed examination of the responses to the call to evidence
- Summary and recommendations

### **Executive summary and background**

Councillors are at the centre of local democracy. Elected from amongst their local community and forming a vital link between councils and residents, it is a privilege and responsibility to be elected to public office. However, increasing levels of abuse and intimidation in political and public discourse are negatively impacting politicians and democracy at local and national levels.

Rights to object and constructive challenge are both key components of democracy, but abuse and intimidation cross the line into unacceptable behaviour and serve to silence democratic voices and deter people from engaging with politics.

There is a considerable volume of evidence of the impact of abuse, intimidation, and aggression at a national level, including extreme incidents such as the murder of Jo Cox MP and Sir David Amess MP.

To understand the impacts on local government and councillors, the LGA launched a call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors in October 2021. This report summarises the findings from the first six months of the call for evidence. It sets out what more could be done to improve support and responses to abuse and intimidation of councillors and reverse national trends around abuse and intimidation that are harmful to democracy.

## Key findings

Respondents to the call for evidence were asked to share their personal experiences of abuse and intimidation as councillors or candidates or abuse of councillors they had witnessed. This included **quantitative questions** looking at frequency, location and circumstances of abuse. In addition, respondents were asking for details about triggers of abuse, impacts of abuse personally and more widely, and reflections on support and responses from relevant agencies.

The following themes were identified in the responses to the call for evidence:

- **Variability of support** – The support offered by councils, political parties, and the police varied across the country. In particular, respondents identified a lack of proactive support from some councils and responses from some police forces to threats made against councillors and their families.
- **Targeted abuse** – Evidence from the qualitative responses indicated that councillors and candidates with protected characteristics were more likely to receive personalised abuse. Misogyny, racism and homophobia were particularly highlighted in the responses.
- **Personal and democratic impacts** – Abuse and intimidation can significantly impact councillors and their families, and the wider community. Several respondents described the negative impacts of ongoing abuse on their mental health and wellbeing. In addition, respondents supported the idea that abuse can impact councillors' willingness to stand for re-election or deter others from considering standing for public office.
- **Vulnerability of councillors** – Many respondents highlighted the visibility and accessibility of councillors in their local community, particularly when councillors' home addresses are available online. Councillors are therefore vulnerable to physical abuse, particularly compared to national politicians who may have greater protections and access to specialist police support.
- **Normalisation** – There is a growing feeling that abuse and intimidation, particularly online, are becoming normalised. Attitudes around councillors expecting abuse and being expected to manage abuse with little support were prevalent in the responses.

## Recommendations

In considering these findings, it is possible to set out some initial recommendations to improve the environment for current and prospective councillors. These recommendations range from relatively simple legislative changes to protect councillors' privacy to creating a longer-term culture change which seeks to de-normalisation of abuse of politicians and other high-profile individuals.

**Recommendation 1:** Councils and other relevant partners should take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors and take a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against councillors. This should include addressing the impacts of abuse on councillors' mental health and wellbeing and working in partnership with other agencies and councils to ensure that threats and risks to councillors' safety, and that of their families, are taken seriously.

**Recommendation 2:** The LGA should continue to gather and disseminate good practice from across the sector, consider what more can be done to prevent abuse and intimidation of councillors through the Civility in public life programme, and support councils and councillors when these incidents occur.

**Recommendation 3:** Police forces should work to improve the consistency of responses to abuse of and threats made against councillors and take a risk-based approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, such as MPs. This should include identifying best practice in relation to councillor support and safety and sharing it across the country.

**Recommendation 4:** The Government should prioritise legislation to put it beyond doubt that councillors can withhold their home address from the public register of pecuniary interests.

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**Recommendation 6:** Social media companies and internet service providers should acknowledge the democratic significance of local politicians and provide better and faster routes for councillors reporting abuse and misinformation online.

**Recommendation 7:** The relevant [Government department should convene a working group](#), in partnership with the LGA, to bring together relevant agencies to develop and implement an action plan to address the issue of abuse of local politicians and their safety.

## Introduction

Councillors are at the centre of local democracy. Elected by residents in their neighbourhood and tasked with making decisions that affect the whole community, they are as much a part of the community as those they represent and form a vital and direct link between the council and residents.

It is a key democratic principle which all councillors champion, that local government should be open and transparent and that decisions made by elected councillors should be open to scrutiny and challenge. Residents who are unhappy with decisions made by the council or services that the council provides have every right to object and have their voices heard. This is a civil liberty that must be maintained and protected.

However, the growing levels of abuse, intimidation and harassment against elected politicians are a real threat to representative democracy. Comments and actions that cross the line from honest and respectful debate to abuse and intimidation are designed to silence democratic expression, constructive challenge, and free speech.

There is evidence that increasing levels of toxicity of debate and abuse against public figures are having an impact on our country's democratic processes at a

national and local level. In 2017, the Committee for Standards in Public Life published a report on [Intimidation in public life](#) in which the Committee suggested that “the scale and intensity of intimidation is now shaping public life”. Since then, research into abuse toward parliamentary candidates has supported anecdotal concerns that levels of abuse are increasing and that women, ethnic minority and LGBTQIA+ politicians receive more discriminatory abuse related to their personal characteristics [\[1\]](#). During the general election in 2019, concerns were raised over a number of female MPs who retired from politics and cited abuse they faced as a key factor in their decision-making [\[2\]](#).

Beyond abuse that may dissuade prospective politicians from standing for election, there are significant concerns about the risks to politicians’ personal safety. Although rare, serious incidents do occur as shown by the murder of Jo Cox MP in 2016 and Sir David Amess MP in 2021.

The ability to debate and disagree well, as set out in the Committee for Standards in Public Life 2017 report, is all the more important when there is significant division in viewpoints and politicians grapple with difficult decisions about how to manage complex local issues.

Councillors represent and serve their local communities and the majority do so without being negatively impacted by abuse and intimidation. Recent councillor census data shows that a large majority of councillors (79 per cent) would recommend being a councillor to others and 65 per cent intended to stand for re-election; almost a third said they had never experienced abuse or intimidation linked to their councillor role and 72 per cent said they had never felt at risk in their role.

Nevertheless, some councillors do experience significant abuse and intimidation and the intensification of these harmful behaviours are unacceptable and represent a real risk to democracy at all levels.

### **Work of the LGA Civility in public life programme**

Following the publication of the Committee for Standards in Public Life reports into Intimidation in public life and Local government ethical standards, the LGA established the Civility in public life programme. The purpose of the programme is to address intimidation, standards of public and political discourse and behaviour in public office and provide support and advice to councils and councillors.

Since 2019, the LGA has developed a Model Councillors Code of Conduct and supportive guidance such as Digital citizenship guidance, Guidance for handling intimidation and abuse for councillors and case-studies on council support for councillors dealing with abuse and personal safety issues and run a series of evidence on councillor safety (grant-funded by the UK Government). The LGA launched this Call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors to formally record the experiences of councillors impacted by abuse and intimidation and develop a greater understanding of what could be done to improve civility in public life.

### **Work of the UK Government**

In response to the Committee for Standards in Public Life's reports and national events, the Government established the Defending Democracy programme, a cross-Whitehall initiative focusing on four priorities including strengthening the integrity of UK elections, protecting democratic processes and institutions, empowering British citizens and respecting open debate, and tackling disinformation. Under this programme, the Government has passed legislation to address intimidation of electoral candidates and campaigners and introduced legislation to create new offences related to threatening and harmful online communication and false information online.

We welcome progress in these areas, however, evidence gathered by the LGA indicates that greater attention needs to be paid to prevention to stop abuse and intimidation of elected politicians happening in the first place and reverse the impacts of an increasingly toxic political environment on current and prospective politicians.

### **About this report**

In October 2021, the LGA launched an open call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors by the public. The aim of the survey was to capture elected and prospective councillors' experiences and concerns about public abuse and intimidation and what the impacts of abuse are on them, those around them and democracy more generally. The survey was open to councillors, candidates and individuals who support candidates and councillors and might have witnessed relevant abuse. The Call for evidence remains open for submissions to capture experience of newly elected councillors.

In the first six months of the Call for evidence, 419 responses were received in relation to principal councils [\[3\]](#) and these responses formed the basis of this analysis and recommendations. This report uses the lived experience of councillors to fill a data gap around the abuse that councillors receive while fulfilling their elected role, the impacts of abuse on people in public life and local government, and what more needs to be done to improve the state of public discourse.

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[\[1\]](#) Gorrell et al., [Online abuse toward candidates during General Election 2019: Working Paper](#), Jan 2020

[\[2\]](#) Gorrell et al., [Which politicians receive abuse? Four factors illuminated in the UK general election 2019](#), July 2020

[\[3\]](#) A principal council is a local government authority as defined under the Local Government Act, section 270. Here it is used to mean any council across the UK which is not a parish and town council or combined authority, i.e. district, county, unitary, London borough, metropolitan etc.

## Key facts and figures

The [call for evidence of abuse and intimidation](#) was an open survey targeted at candidates, councillors and officers who have witnessed abuse of councillors. Four hundred and nineteen respondents from principal councils responded to the Call for evidence in the first six months. A summary of the key statistics from the survey is set out below:

- 88 per cent of respondents said they had experienced abuse and/or intimidation, directed at them personally in relation to their role as a councillor or because they were a political candidate
- 98 per cent of respondents who said they had experienced abuse and/or intimidation said they had experienced such incidents on multiple occasions
- Most abuse was received via social media, with 73 per cent of respondents with multiple experiences said they received abuse by social media
- 64 per cent of respondents had been abused and/or intimidated in person
- 50 per cent of respondents said the abuse was ongoing
- 72 per cent of respondents said they had taken actions themselves to avoid intimidation and/or abuse, or to protect themselves
- 60 per cent of respondents said they were aware of others being unwilling to stand or re-stand for election, or take on leadership roles, due to anticipated abuse.
- 42 per cent of respondents said they would be standing for re-election at the next election.
- 27 per cent of respondents said they would not stand for the next election and 31 per cent were undecided, of those respondents 68 per cent said abuse and intimidation had influenced their position on whether to stand again.

The [2022 LGA Councillor census](#) was a time-limited survey directed at all councillors in England which took place between January and February 2022. The survey covered a range of areas including representation, councillor views and councillors' work. 5055 respondents responded to the survey which is response rate of 30 per cent. A summary of the key statistics relating to the experiences and impacts of abuse and intimidation of councillors from the survey is set out below:

- 70 per cent of respondents thought that the council had effective arrangements for dealing with inappropriate behaviour by council officers, 57 per cent by councillors and 55 per cent by members of the public
- 28 per cent of respondents had either frequently or occasionally felt at risk personally in their role as a councillor, 45 per cent felt at risk rarely and only 26 per cent never felt at risk
- 65 per cent of respondents thought that council arrangements for protecting councillors personally were either very or fairly effective
- 7 in 10 respondents experienced abuse or intimidation in last twelve months; 10 per cent experienced it frequently, 29 per cent occasionally, 33 per cent rarely. Only 27 per cent had never had any such experiences
- 63 per cent of respondents felt that the arrangements in place for protecting councillors personally were effective
- 79 per cent of respondents would recommend the role of councillor to others
- 65 per cent of respondents intended to stand for re-election

### **Detailed examination of the responses to the call to evidence**

According to the recent LGA Councillor census [\[1\]](#), which gathers key demographic data and perceptions from serving councillors 10 per cent of councillors have experienced abuse and intimidation frequently, with a further 29 per cent experiencing it occasionally. Only 27 per cent said they have never had any such experiences. To get a clearer understanding of how abuse against councillors usually presents, what kinds of abuse councillors experience and why people abuse councillors, councillors and those around them were asked to share their experiences of abuse and intimidation of councillors by the public.

### **Experiences of abuse**

Respondents were from across the political spectrum, from different council types, and geographical areas, including submissions from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. 88 per cent of respondents had experienced abuse and/or intimidation directed against them personally due to their role, with the majority receiving both; 76 per cent had witnessed abuse and/or intimidation of this nature. Respondents to the survey were from a range of demographic groups in terms of age, sex and other protected characteristics; although it was not possible to do further statistical analysis to look for particularly at prevalent groups in the data due to the sample size. Together this could suggest that all councillors may be at risk of experiencing abuse and intimidation during their political career and that some councillors both experience and witness abuse. However, there is evidence from the

qualitative responses to the survey that councillors with protected characteristics are more likely to experience personal attacks and abuse. Later in the report we will consider in more depth whether some councillors are targeted with different kinds of abuse.

The abuse described by respondents was multi-faceted and took place in both the online and in-person spaces. Death threats, abusive and discriminatory language, character assassination and intimidatory behaviour, such as encroaching on personal spaces, were common forms of abuse. Destruction of property, physical assault and serious ongoing harassment like stalking or sexual harassment were reported, but these forms of abuse were rarer and more likely to result in some form of police involvement.

Overall, when the reports of abuse were grouped as either offline abuse (in-person or via telephone or post) or online abuse (social media, virtual meetings, or other online communication) they were equal, showing that online abuse happens just as much as offline abuse. However, 73 per cent of respondents said that multiple incidents of abuse they experienced took place on social media, making it the most common place for abuse to occur. Respondents were much more likely to report that abuse had occurred on multiple occasions and involved multiple perpetrators, than multiple incidents by one person or a single incident. This was particularly the case with online communication and on social media, referred to as “the Wild West” by one respondent.

Respondents felt that the increased use of unregulated social media platforms had increased the likelihood of abuse and hurtful comments. Respondents mentioned ‘pile-on’ abuse which is when a number of different individuals sending harassing communication to one victim in a public (social media platform) or semi-public space (messaging service like WhatsApp). Significant amounts of abuse can accumulate very quickly in this way through individual posts, which can be difficult to remove from the platform but nevertheless have a cumulative harmful effect. The immediacy and 24-hour nature of social media and the reach into personal spaces was also cited as an area of concern, with councillors feeling targeted within their own homes and unable to disengage from abuse being directed at them online. Respondents also suggested that the anonymity of social media emboldened perpetrators to be more extreme on social media and allowed them to set up multiple accounts for the purpose of abusing or ‘Trolling’ others with impunity.

Whilst the Government’s Online Safety Bill may help to address some forms of serious harmful online communication by introducing new communication offences and by introducing a duty to protect adults from harmful content, most online abuse would probably not meet the threshold for criminal prosecution or might fall below the scope of what content should be removed under this duty. We therefore have concerns that these provisions will not have the intended impact and more is needed to address non-criminal but nonetheless harmful online abuse and misinformation.

Councillors have many in-person interactions with residents. Respondents report that single incidents were more likely to happen in person than online and even single incidents had a significant impact on victims. Respondents repeatedly highlighted how visible and locally accessible councillors are to the public,

particularly compared to national politicians. In their formal role, councillors attend clearly advertised council events like council meetings and make decisions about highly emotive local issues like planning, licensing and service provision that affect a lot of residents. Council meetings are rightly open to the public, but there is generally little or no security or police presence to handle incidents when they occur. This is often down to the level of resource available, and some respondents indicated that even when the police accepted there were heightened risks at certain council meetings, they often could not guarantee police support due to resourcing issues. As a consequence, some reported council meetings being adjourned or postponed due to safety concerns.

By comparison members of parliament conduct their official parliamentary role in the highly secure Houses of Parliament and often have formal offices and staff to support their local role and surgeries in their constituency. Members of parliament have a high local and national profile, representing thousands of constituents and are at significant risk of abuse and serious threats. It is therefore right that they have the appropriate facilities and protection to keep them safe as they fulfil their elected role. However, councillors, particularly those with special responsibilities, make decisions affecting hundreds of thousands of people and may experience similar levels of abuse and threats as MPs. Councillors should therefore receive support appropriate to the level of risk associated with their role and their particular situation, just as MPs do.

Councillors also engage less formally with their local community by holding ward surgeries, door-knocking and visiting residents in their homes. Advice from political parties and the LGA is that these activities are not carried out alone, but responses from the survey indicated that many had done so before an incident occurred, and many rely on volunteers to support these activities. Respondents highlighted that in-person abuse takes place in both formal and informal settings and includes verbal abuse such as threats and discriminatory language and other physical abuse amounting to criminal incidents. Spitting was a common and upsetting form of physical abuse, but respondents also reported more serious physical assaults.

Threats were a consistent theme throughout the responses and ranged from threats to smear a councillor's reputation to threats to the physical person, family or property of the councillor. These threats were seen to be more serious due to the public availability of councillors' personal information, such as home addresses on council websites, making councillors more vulnerable to serious incidents and high-profile incidents over the past few years.

**“I have been abused on the street and threatened by being told, I know where you live...and I've been told to watch my back.” *Anonymous respondent***

In addition, some felt this accessibility of information increased the risks of threats being made online translating into real violence. One respondent gave an example of a death threat being made online where multiple individuals suggested councillors should be shot, one social media user posted that they would be willing to 'pull the trigger, just tell me where they live', while another signposted to councillors' home addresses on the council website. In another case, threats were implied by leaving a live bullet on the doorstep of a councillor's house. This is a rare example, however,

many respondents had less extreme examples of online communications leading to real world threats, such as multiple 'poison pen' letters being delivered to councillors homes and orchestrated demonstrations outside a councillors home.

## **Normalisation**

Respondents who said they had experienced multiple incidents were asked to describe how often they received abuse from more than once a day through to less than once a month. The responses indicated that a high frequency of abuse was common. For example, one in ten respondents said they experienced abuse due to their role once a day or more than once a day and 36 per cent of those who experienced multiple incidents of abuse, said they experienced abuse once a week or more frequently. Almost half the respondents who experienced multiple incidents said the abuse was ongoing and many described it as constant. A third said the abuse was not ongoing and some said described abuse not as regular but as directly linked to specific engagement activities, such as posting online. Nevertheless, there was a clear theme that a certain level of abuse and intimidation is a feature of political life which is both expected and accepted by councillors and those around them.

Normalisation of abusive behaviour towards councillors was also evident in the qualitative responses councillors gave to the call for evidence. Some respondents said that although they were initially shocked by the prevalence and level of abuse when they were elected, the accepting attitude of their councillor colleagues, council staff and political officers quickly led to a shift in their expectations and norms. Consequently, respondents expressed a perception that councillors ought to be able to manage the majority of abuse themselves and that when they struggled to cope, they were concerned people would judge them or say they were not cut out for politics. This might partly explain why 37 per cent of respondent did not seek support in relation to their experiences. A few challenged this perception, recognising that councillors should not have to suffer personal attacks to represent their communities.

**All organisations could take it more seriously; being robust enough to handle personal attacks should not be a pre-requisite for public office.** *Anonymous respondent*

In relation to council staff or political officers, responses showed this normalisation playing out in two distinct and opposing ways. One approach accepted that abuse of councillors by the public is expected and normalised such that very little individual support was offered; abuse is so every day and constant that trying to address it would be a huge and never-ending effort without much benefit. The second approach to increased abuse by the public was for councils to put in place varying levels of support for councillors including specific training, guidance, support, and policies to deal with abuse from the public and bespoke risk assessments of councillors' personal safety. There is a similar divergence of experience in relation to police response to abuse and intimidation of councillors. In some cases, normalisation of abuse of elected members has led to some poor practices where genuinely criminal or threatening behaviour has not been investigated or addressed because of the victim's role as a councillor.

**“I think there is an element of not being believed, that you are exaggerating, that you have to put up with it, and that if you do not like it, you can change your role and give to someone else.” *Anonymous respondent***

Normalisation of abuse by councillors themselves may also have led to some councillors not reporting serious abuse or threats when they occurred. Some respondents were clearly self-categorising abuse as tolerable or serious enough to report to the police, with little in between. In addition, some councillors said that their more experienced councillor colleagues seemed more resilient to abuse and described being told they would get used to abuse after a while. In some cases, this high tolerance had led to councillors not reporting serious incidents, which the police later advised were criminal, should have been reported, and may have put the councillor at risk of harm.

The idea that councillors and other people in high profile public roles should expect and grow used to abuse, that they learn to cope with threats and intimidation, and that there is little to be done to curb abuse is a pervasive narrative at local and national levels. In the aftermath of the murder of Sir David Amess MP, the Government rightly reviewed arrangements for MP's security to assess the provision available and bring consistency across different areas of the country. The LGA welcomed this prioritisation of elected members security, however, the Government chose not to widen the scope of the review to include councillors and other local politicians, despite repeated calls from them to do so. In addition, all police forces were instructed to make direct contact with MPs in their area to discuss their safety and provide advice and support. By comparison councils coordinated support for councillors locally; police input relied on existing relationships rather than a national directive and therefore varied across different areas.

Finally, councillors are leaders of their local community and often act as role models for future leaders; most are striving in good faith to exemplify high levels of discourse and respect debate. However, some respondents commented that rising level of general abuse and disrespectful debate at the national level was coarsening debate in the council chamber. Others said they felt abuse from fellow councillors and political party members was on the rise, despite there being common and well understood standards of behaviour and conduct based on the Nolan principles and principles of respect.

Large scale reviews of standards in local government, such as the Committee for Standards in Public Life 2019 report, have found little evidence of a widespread standards problem. However, there was evidence of misconduct by some councillors related to bullying and harassment. The LGA is committed to maintaining high standards of conduct and creating a consistency of approach by councils when dealing with councillor standards and behaviour. In 2020, the LGA developed a Model Councillor Code of Conduct in consultation with the sector to set out a common standard of behaviour and support councillors to role model positive behaviours, and respectful conduct.

The normalisation of abuse and intimidation of people in public life has had a negative impact for many, including councillors. If this normalisation of abuse is symptomatic of a wider toxification of society and public discourse, further

consideration will need to be given to solutions that will address this within the sphere of local government and in wider society.

### **Targeted abuse towards councillors with protected characteristics**

Targeted abuse towards councillors with protected characteristics was a recurring theme in the responses to the call for evidence, whether through first-hand experience or as a witness. The qualitative evidence from the survey indicated that councillors with protected characteristics may experience more personal attacks, compared to others who experience more general abuse.

Some respondents suggested that councillors with protected characteristics were more likely to experience more extreme and a higher volume of abuse; due to the number of responses and style of the survey it has not been possible to confirm this claim through statistical analysis of these results. However, this would follow trends seen at national levels. For example, in a 2020 study looking at 'Which politicians receive abuse?' in the run up to the 2019 UK general election, Gorrell et al. found that women received more sexist abuse, whereas men received more general and political abuse.

Misogyny, racism and homophobia were all mentioned by respondents, although misogyny and reference to women's personal characteristics or making threats designed to specifically impact women were particularly common.

**“Initially when I became a councillor, I was told by a colleague that I should never hold a surgery alone as I was at risk... I was told that with me being disabled, I would be the target of negative treatment by people.”** *Anonymous female respondent*

Many councils, political parties and organisations, like the LGA, are working hard to increase the diversity of representation in local government and this requires a greater variety of candidates to stand at local election. So, it's important to note here that many respondents directly linked abuse associated with personal characteristics with reluctance to stand for election or re-election; some described women choosing to take on back-office roles in the local party rather than run for office because of concerns about what abuse they would face.

Some argue that this kind of targeted abuse is symptomatic of wider inequality and discrimination in society and the solution in the long run is to tackle the root cause. Personal and discriminatory abuse of candidates and councillors with protected characteristics undoubtedly hampers efforts to improve local representation and if it continues may negative impact the limited diversity we currently have in local government. So, in the meantime, actions to address those symptoms and reduce the excessive amount and severity of abuse women and other people with protected characteristics receive could help reverse the trend of underrepresentation of these groups in local and national politics.

## Triggers of abuse

To better understand the reasons why perpetrators direct abuse at councillors, respondents were asked to comment on whether they felt there were triggers that acted as catalysts of abuse and what those triggers might be. This covered specific to non-specific events and processes and picked up where abuse was not triggered but appeared to be generalised.

59 per cent of respondents believed the abuse was triggered by specific events. Others were not sure or felt there was not specific trigger event except being in public life. These triggers can broadly be categorised into abuse related to decisions of the council, abuse linked to political party or individual political stances, abuse aggravated by other factors, like perceived poor performance of the council or a misunderstanding of the role of councils and councillors, and abuse linked to the councillor's role in public life. Abuse, triggered by a specific event or otherwise, could also be aggravated by certain myths and perceptions about councillors.

The most common and easy to identify trigger was contentious council decisions; respondents highlighted abuse related to unsuccessful planning and licensing applications and objections to general planning and parking decisions as common triggers. Planning and licensing are an integral part of council business and can be very emotive issues as these decisions can have an impact on individuals and the whole community. Councillors appointed to committees dealing with these issues will generally receive training on the technicalities of planning and licensing and making these decisions before they take up the role. However, there is no strengthened level of support for councillors sitting on these committees, or training for planning staff who support councillors, to help them deal with abuse linked to the types of decisions they make.

Another trigger for abuse was wider council policy on topical issues and in some cases, these were associated with certain types of councils, for example [Low Traffic Neighbourhood issues](#) were clearly associated with urban rather than rural councils. However, there were many triggers, like Covid-19 vaccinations and climate change, that traversed geography across all types of councils.

Here it is useful to examine the different kinds of behaviours respondents said residents displayed and clarify the distinction between appropriate objections to council decisions and policy or complaint about council services. Respondents reported a range of behaviours from continuous and repeated complaints and objections to personalised verbal abuse and intimidatory comments and physical aggression intended to inappropriately influence individual councillors and local decision-making. Residents have a right to object to policies they are unhappy with; these civil liberties are a vital democratic principle and must be maintained. Further to this, the LGA actively encourages residents to engage with their local council and the decisions that affect their communities. However, actions that amount to harassment and devolve into personal attacks or are intended to intimidate a councillor into changing their position or actions are not acceptable and this is happening far too often.

Campaigning and canvassing in the community were also highlighted as high-risk activities by respondents. One respondent labelled door-knocking as “particularly harrowing”, with some councillors saying they had concerns about their own safety and wellbeing, as well as their volunteers while campaigning. Many respondents stated that this abuse was connected to the policy positions of their political party or their own views on particularly divisive issues, such as leaving the European Union. Respondents described how disagreement and opposing views were then reflected in the form of aggression, threats, and personal abuse. Some commented that this has become steadily worse in recent years and that personalised abuse between national and local politicians had set a precedent that has filtered down into conversations with members of the public.

Responses to the questionnaire indicate that it is sometimes possible to anticipate what events or activities might trigger abuse and aggression towards councillors. Consequently, it may be possible to put in place measures to prevent abuse from taking place or mitigate the impacts of abuse. Council officers often work with their councillors ahead of contentious or high-profile decisions to ensure that they are handled sensitively and that councillors know how to respond to online abuse. For example, councils can remove the option for comments on social media posts for a set period of time and advise councillors to do the same. Allowing time before opening up for comments can reduce ‘knee-jerk’ reactions and allow time for consideration, while still allowing people to have their say at a later point.

### **Aggravating factors**

There was a clear theme running through the qualitative responses about factors that served to aggravate and intensify abuse. These were chiefly based on preconceptions about the role and powers of the councillors, levels of council performance and the public’s right to abuse people in public office.

Respondents commented that it was common for abuse to be rooted in a misunderstanding of the role of the council and councillors, particularly where councils are required to implement government policy. Confusion about responsibility and functions of different levels of government was compounded by residents’ incorrect assumption that councillors have the power to immediately influence national policy and change local policy independently of the rest of the council. Respondents also commented that councillors are more accessible and available to residents than members of parliament and therefore were often the first port of call for disgruntled residents.

**“Council is always seen as the bearer of bad news whilst MP’s who are often responsible for setting the policy are deemed as a hero.”** *Anonymous respondent*

Change, reduction or closing of local discretionary services was a common theme in responses, this was linked to these services being vulnerable to reduction in central funding from Government and often being highly visible physical infrastructure in the community, such as library services. Respondents commented that it was sometimes difficult to control the narratives around service changes and even

positive changes, such as transferring library services to local community groups, was sometimes seen as an abdication of responsibility.

21 per cent of respondents felt that the abuse they experienced was not triggered by a specific event. Many of those felt that abuse was related solely to being a figure in public life and that abusing politicians was seen as fair game.

**The problem is that abuse often starts as low level... This creates a sense that local councillors are easy game for abuse. *Anonymous respondent***

They particularly highlighted running for election, being elected and taking on additional responsibilities as points where abuse started or intensified. This is supported by the fact that 72 per cent of respondents said they had additional responsibilities as a councillor. A further 19 per cent of respondents were not sure whether abuse was related to specific events or not and some said it was a combination of ongoing abuse and events that exacerbated abuse, such as engaging with resident online or at ward surgeries.

Councils and political parties have a role in supporting candidates and councillors representing them. The evidence suggests abuse is becoming more common, consistent and normalised in the eyes of the public, councillors and public organisations; one in five respondents to the survey said the abuse or intimidation was ongoing. To ensure this trend does not continue, organisations that support councillors should be proactive in handling serious abuse and referring incidents to the police where necessary, as well as actively supporting councillors to handle abuse that falls below the criminal level.

### **Personal impacts of abuse and intimidation of councillors**

A critical part of the call for evidence asked respondents to share what the impacts of abuse and intimidation had been on them and other councillors. Evidence from these responses shows that abuse and intimidation of councillors has a significant impact on individual councillors and those around them.

Three broad categories of impacts emerged; impacts on the individual, impacts on the individual's family and friends, and impacts on local democracy and the community. These categories were influenced by how public the abuse was, who the councillor shared their experiences with and how the abuse influenced the councillors' choices.

Many respondents described how their experiences of abuse had negatively impacted their mental health and their ability to function in their councillor or other professional and personal roles. Depression and anxiety were commonly reported and some even reported being suicidal due to the levels of abuse. Some had to seek medical advice to deal with the physiological impacts of stress, and in extreme cases respondents described being so scared of verbal and physical abuse that they stopped going out or would only leave the house if accompanied by someone else.

Due to the public or threatening nature of the abuse, many respondents were concerned for their loved ones. These concerns ranged from family members being

distressed by the amount of public abuse directed towards the councillor to fears for their safety or the safety of the family home.

**“[Threats have] made me more aware of both mine and others safety and [the] importance of protecting myself and my family home...we all have to be careful.”** *Anonymous respondent*

Respondents commented that in small communities it is very easy to identify a councillor's family members and friends and sometimes they encounter abuse because of this association. These included grandchildren being bullied by other children at school, family members being ostracised from community spaces, and family businesses losing custom. Family members also worried about the councillor's safety and asked them not to stand for election again.

**My stress affects my family and I fear that they will be tainted too by the accusations levelled at me.** *Anonymous respondent*

### **Democratic impacts of abuse and intimidation of councillors**

To understand the full implications of abuse and intimidation of councillors, it is important consider impacts beyond the immediate and personal to the knock-on impacts on democracy and local representation.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they would stand for election again and 42 per cent said they would stand again and 27 per cent were not decided. 43 per cent of respondents went on to answer a question about whether the possibility of abuse and intimidation had influenced their position on whether to stand again and over two-thirds said it had.

Many respondents added their comments saying that the impact of abuse and intimidation on them personally and their family had directly influenced their decision on whether to stand at the next local election. Some described the lack of structural support for councillors or way to challenge poor behaviour as a contributing factor.

**“I could not run in another election ...I would not want to put my family through the stress and anxiety...”**

Unfortunately in politics it is perceived by some that councillor are ‘fair game’ and should have a thick skin. **Even a thick skin can be penetrated.** *Anonymous respondent*

Further to this, respondents said that some councillors were resigning before their term had finished and potential candidates were being discouraged from running for election by the levels of abuse. 60 per cent of respondents said they knew others who were unwilling to run for election or take on leadership roles due to anticipated abuse. Elections are naturally highly stressful, but some respondents said that the line between political competition and personal attacks had been crossed.

On the other hand, a few respondents said they found that abuse had spurred them on to “fight harder”, particularly when the abuse related to personal characteristics rather than objections to their policies or decisions. In general, these cases should

be taken as the exception not the rule and certainly not an expectation of the majority of councillors. It is therefore still vital that abuse against councillors is treated seriously, and that councils and police challenge the normalisation of this kind of abuse.

### **Support from relevant agencies and self-protection**

As part of the call for evidence respondents described whether and how they sought support for abuse and how relevant agencies, such as the police, council officers and political parties, responded when they ask for help or reported an incident. This helped clarify the range of opinions, approaches and responses that councillors experience when they seek support to handle abuse and intimidation and in particular brought out the variety of provision at different councils.

63 per cent of respondents sought support in relation to the abuse they experienced, and many received support from multiple sources. However, out of those who sought support almost a third sought informal support from councillor peers, friends and family and by employing a barrister or solicitor to give legal advice. Respondents were most likely to seek support from their peers but many went to multiple agencies, such as their own political party, council officers or the police over the abuse they experienced. Some looked for support from other sources, including national organisations like the LGA, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, the Local Government Ombudsman, and social media companies. Some also described handling these issues alone and managing their own personal safety.

When asked how helpful different types of support were, respondents said that support from friends and family was by far the most helpful, followed by peer support. This is particularly challenging finding as friends and family are likely to be the least well equipped to provide effective solutions to public abuse, apart from compassion and empathy. The police and the council were similarly ranked but respondents said they were not as helpful as family and peers. Support from political parties was ranked lowest out of all the options.

There were significant inconsistencies in the level and efficacy of responses to abuse of councillors from relevant agencies. Councillors themselves take a mixture of different approaches to dealing with these issues and responses from relevant agencies were equally mixed. In some cases, respondents reported an excellent experience, with prompt and effective action for those involved.

**“Officer and member colleagues were very helpful and supportive. The police were fantastic – took a statement, gave me advice and helped me enhance security at my home, put me on an emergency call list.”** *Anonymous respondent*

However, this was not universally the case and a common theme from respondents was a lack of coordination and partnership working between the council and political parties. Some councillors felt they were falling through the gaps between different agencies, with no one taking responsibility for councillor safety and wellbeing.

**“Both officers listened and offered me moral support. However, neither have been able to stop the residents’ abuse. The council would not take legal action**

**on my behalf against the worst abuser and advised me against taking a personal case against the individual. The police have seemed powerless to help me. My party haven't really been of any help... Some members of my family have given me lots of moral support.”** *Anonymous respondent*

In general, councillors sought support from their council in relation to misinformation online, abusive communications and physical safety or to request that their personal information, such as home addresses, be removed from the public domain. The response from councils was variable with no one set way of doing things. Some councils focused on equipping councillors to handle abuse and intimidation themselves with training and guidance, while others took a more involved approach, treating councillors similarly to employees and offering lone worker equipment and 24/7 support. Some councils had developed a successful collaborative approach working with political parties and the police to offer support and triage risk to councillors and offering bespoke risk assessments for ward surgery venues and private homes.

**“This [incident] happened over a weekend, the chief executive rang me, in fact my phone never stopped ringing, messages of support from the police and senior officers... I felt truly supported by county staff and councillor colleagues.”** *Anonymous respondent*

Support for councillors needs to be flexible to the specific situation and context, therefore it is expected that this offer will look different in different places. However, respondents also shared examples where they received little or no support at all and in particular, highlighted the lack of pastoral care available to councillors. It is becoming more common for political parties to actively record and deal with abuse against their members and some councils now allow their councillor to access staff wellbeing and counselling offers. However, many respondents said that council officers told them to ignore abuse and were apathetic towards addressing these incidents, particularly when they took place online.

There was a similar theme around the police classifying abuse against councillors as political or free speech and refusing to get involved as they would with other citizens. Threats against councillors' safety was generally, although not consistently, treated seriously by the police with some form of action being taken. However, this did not always result in a cessation of the threats and abuse or a warning or prosecution and so perpetrators continue with impunity.

A consistent theme from respondent's experiences was that the police often do not consider online abuse as their responsibility and believe that councillors who willingly stand for office should “expect to receive more abuse than a member of the public”. Due to this perception, respondents described not being taken seriously by the police, struggling to get their complaint investigated and consequently no action being taken against the perpetrators. Councillors do expect more abuse than members of the general public and often have very high tolerances for abuse, however, this does not mean abuse should be treated as acceptable or that councillors should not expect police to investigate crimes committed against them. In time, new offences in the Online Safety Bill may improve the police and prosecution response. The bar for criminal sanction has rightly been set very high to ensure

legitimate free speech is protected, nevertheless the new offences may act as a deterrent to perpetrators and encourage police to investigate reports of online harm or misinformation more thoroughly.

37 per cent of respondents did not seek support for the abuse they experienced. Some respondents said this was due to the abuse being a “one-off” event or the abuse being at a tolerable level, such that seeking formal support felt disproportionate. This description adds to the argument that abuse against politicians has become normalised; while abuse may be tolerated, it is still not acceptable.

However, there were some more extreme examples of abuse, intimidation and threats where respondents still did not seek formal support. This was mainly due to a perception that the onus was on them as the victim to protect themselves from abuse and poor behaviour and that there are few or no structural mechanisms in place to protect them from abuse. This feeling was summarised well by a response who said that councillors are “very much left to provide their own security.”

Further to this, some said they had little faith that the council could help them deal with the abuse affecting them. This is borne out to an extent by the 2022 councillor census data, where 45 per cent of councillors did not feel that their council had effective arrangements in place to deal with inappropriate behaviour by the public or didn't know what those arrangements were and 37 per cent did not feel that the arrangements their council had in place to protect them personally were effective.

Finally, some councillors commented that some perpetrators were known to have mental health problems and were known to council services and the police. Respondents mentioned that social care teams could be helpful in risk assessing and facilitating interactions between councillors and residents with additional needs to ensure those residents are able to access their elected representative. However, respondents also expressed frustrations that action was often not taken against some perpetrators because of their mental health problems. While a person's mental state may influence their behaviour, this does not lessen the impact abuse has on the victim or threats made by people with mental health problems should be taken as seriously as any other threat.

### **Councillor safety**

Abuse and intimidation form part of a spectrum of abuse which can include very serious assaults and evidence suggests abuse is to be shifting towards the more extreme end of this spectrum. In the recent councillor census less than a third of respondents said that they had never felt at personal risk when fulfilling their role as councillor. Respondents to the call for evidence commented that it felt like abuse was getting worse and risks of running for office were increasing.

### **Local politics is a far more dangerous place now that it ever was in the past. *Anonymous respondent***

72 per cent of respondents to the survey had taken some action to avoid intimidation and abuse. These actions were usually around moderating or managing planned and unplanned engagement with the public, specifically using the options on social media

to block abusive accounts, holding ward surgeries in public buildings, never working alone, and installing home security equipment. Some respondents commented that their approach had been to disengage from social media entirely and move to holding appointment only surgeries or “walking surgeries” held outside.

Over the last few years, high profile incidents like the murder of Jo Cox MP and Sir David Amess MP outside their respective ward surgeries have highlighted the vulnerability of elected politicians to serious assaults. This has rightly reignited concerns about the safety of councillors, mayors and police and crime commissioner and some historic practices that could put them at additional risk, such as the publication of politicians’ home addresses.

As mentioned earlier, there was a centrally coordinated programme of support for MPs following the death of Sir David Amess MP. This was a high-risk period for MPs and there were real concerns for their safety; a direct police response was a reasonable expectation from MPs. However, there was no expectation from central government that police would contact councillors in the same way. Instead, councils worked with their local police forces to reinforce their approaches to councillor safety. This was light touch in some cases, updating and reissuing councillor safety guidance or rerunning training designed to help councillors keep themselves safe. However, others recognised that councillors cannot control everything around them and that other agencies have a clear role in enhancing personal safety councillors are as safe as possible while going about their day-to-day council business.

Leeds City Council, for example, took the step of risk assessing all venues that councillors use as ward surgeries whether or not they were council-owned and worked with the councillors and venue providers to mitigate any risks identified. Many councils now provide personal alarms or systems for councillors to use when they are out in the community, in a person’s home and at their ward surgeries. These alarms vary in functionality, but usually they can provide a way to alert council officers to an incident taking place. Officers can then respond appropriately, starting with a welfare check and escalating to calling the police to attend the councillor’s location if necessary. Some alarm systems can also audio-record what is going on for evidence or have a mechanism to allow the councillor to silently alert the police that they need help.

In the past councils have routinely displayed councillor home addresses on their websites and until March 2019 councillors were required to publicly declare their home address on the ballot paper when they ran for election. Election practice has changed in line with recommendations made by the Committee for Standards in Public life 2017 and 2019 reports into [Intimidation in public life](#) and [Local government ethical standards](#) that making councillors’ home addresses public was unnecessary and put them at risk of incidents in their home. Evidence from respondents suggests that just the idea of having to publish a home address can also put people off standing for election and this is out of step with the way we treat personal data in every other sphere of life.

The practice of putting councillor addresses on council websites has reduced as councillors’ attitudes have changed. However, councillors may still be required to publicise their home addresses as part of declaring their pecuniary interests on the

public register of interests. Councillors may apply for a dispensation from their monitoring officer if they feel disclosing their address would put them or a member of their household at risk of violence. However, the monitoring officer has the discretion to decide whether this test has been met and this has led to inconsistent approaches in different councils. Some monitoring officers have taken the proactive view that all councillors are at risk of violence due to their public role and allow all councillors a dispensation, while others require a specific reason or incident to occur before they will remove an address. Effectively this means that someone could run for election without declaring their address and within 21 days of being elected be required to put it on a public document. Clarity that dispensation may be applied without a specific incident taking place would help create consistency of approach across different councils and reassure prospective councillors that they will have this protection if they are elected. In the view of the LGA, legislative change is required to put this beyond doubt.

Changes to allow councillors to withhold their home addresses from the public register of interests would be in line with changes rules on publishing home addresses for candidates running in elections. Prior to 2018, candidates in local elections were required to declare their home address on the ballot paper; now candidates may choose to opt out of sharing their address. Some councillors still choose to declare their home address. However, feedback from members and safety experts is increasingly moving towards the idea that candidates and councillors' personal information should be protected and that they should have to opt-in to sharing information like homes addresses as is the case with private citizens.

In recognition of the concerns in the sector and the real risk to councillors, the LGA ran three 'Personal safety for councillors' events for over 500 attendees between December 2021 and March 2022, updated the Councillor guide to handling intimidation, and produced case studies outlining how councils can support councillors with their safety and wellbeing.

Beyond the role of councils, political parties and individual councillors to manage councillor safety, there is a wider issue about how violence and threats against councillors are dealt with by the police. Earlier we mentioned some examples of councillors having excellent experiences where the council and the police worked together to mitigate risks to councillor safety. However, the overwhelming feedback was that concerns raised by councillors were not taken seriously enough or were outright dismissed by police as part and parcel of political life.

Councillors have the same legal rights and protections as any other member of the public and some would argue councillors have an enhanced risk profile when it comes to physical abuse which should be considered when they report abuse, threat and intimidation. Despite this, some believe that the bar for police to investigate and act when a crime is reported appears to have been set higher for councillors.

This should be considered in relation to other elected politicians, such as members of parliament. Members of parliament have a dedicated team based in the Metropolitan Police called the Parliamentary Liaison and Investigations Team to handle crime on the parliamentary estate in Westminster and liaise with Single Points of Contact (SPoC) in local constabularies to deal with crime and security of

members of parliament in their home constituencies. This can include doing specialist risk assessments of MPs homes and offices and handling improved security measures like the installation of better locks and lighting and digital doorbells or CCTV.

By comparison there is no single team or functionality in police forces that are equipped with the specialist knowledge required to triage and handle crimes committed against local politicians because of their role as an elected official. In addition, although informal relationships may exist between councils and police in relation to councillor safety this does not always translate into a coordinated approach to addressing crimes against councillors. For example, some police forces will not accept a report of a crime from the council on the councillor's behalf but insist on a report from the councillor as a citizen. This risks taking the complaint out of context and can lead to an incorrect assessment of the associated risks to the complainant. On the other hand, some councils have proactively established partnerships and collaborative forums to ensure there are strong links between local emergency services in case of incidents or emergencies. One council, for example, holds regular collaborative meetings with the Neighbourhood Safety Team, local police, local fire and rescue service and Police Community Support Team where they share latest intelligence and resources and complete a joint risk assessment for an individual councillor's activities. This can help prevent incidents taking place, but can also support councillors if an incident does occur.

Councils and police services have a duty to work together to formulate and implement strategies to tackle local crime and disorder under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This is usually facilitated through a Community Safety Partnership. So, relationships should already exist that could help to manage crime against councillors. However, this does not always seem to be working. One respondent shared that the only reason their complaint was dealt with was because they mentioned it in passing to the police and crime commissioner and chief constable of the local police force.

Actions to abuse or intimidate councillors stifle democracy and the voice of elected leaders and threats to councillors' personal safety is a crime. We recognise that there is significant pressure on the police and the Crown Prosecution Service and that it is not always appropriate to pursue prosecution for all crime. However, as with MPs, councillors should expect to have their complaints are taken seriously, and for police to use all available and appropriate tools at their disposal against perpetrators.

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[\[1\] LGA 2022 Councillor census data](#)

## Summary and recommendations

The call for evidence has revealed an ongoing issue with abuse and intimidation of councillors and concerns about the safety of local politicians that are having an impact on councillors and local democracy more widely. It is important that we address these issues to ensure that they do not have a detrimental impact on councillors, councils and local democracy in the future.

There are clear gaps and inconsistencies in the support and response mechanisms available to councillors to deal with these issues, including council support, support from political parties and preventative support from local police. There is also evidence of a normalisation and acceptance of abuse of councillors that should be challenged. However, there is some evidence of good practice around risk assessing ward surgery venues and home locations for councillors, building partnerships with local police, wellbeing support and having clear policies for dealing with communications from abusive residents.

**Recommendation 1: Councils and other relevant partners should take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors and take a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against councillors. This should include addressing the impacts of abuse on councillors' mental health and wellbeing and working in partnership with other agencies and councils to ensure that threats and risks to councillors' safety, and that of their families, are taken seriously.**

**Recommendation 2: The LGA should continue to gather and disseminate good practice from across the sector, consider what more can be done to prevent abuse and intimidation of councillors through the Civility in public life programme, and support councils and councillors when these incidents occur.**

There is evidence of inconsistency in the response of the police to incidents of abuse, intimidation and aggression towards councillors and a normalisation of unacceptable conduct against politicians. There is also a perception that in some cases the threshold for intervention has been set higher for councillors than other members of the public. However, there were examples of good practices by police who took a proactive and coordinated approach to councillor harassment and safety. This worked best when police took a risk-based approach, took the public nature of the councillor role into account, and used all the powers at their disposal to disrupt abusive behaviour before it became more serious.

Police could consider replicating successful approaches taken with MPs or candidates during elections and providing a specialist Single Point of Contact for councillors in the local police force. Another approach would be having a Safety Liaison Officer as is provided for journalists across many forces in England; SLOs oversee cases related to crime against journalists and intervene only when necessary.

**Recommendation 3: Police forces should work to improve the consistency of responses to abuse of and threats made against councillors and take a risk-based approach that factors in the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, such as MPs. This should include identifying best practice in relation to councillor support and safety and sharing it across the country.**

The availability of councillors' personal information can make them vulnerable in their own homes and the current legislation lacks clarity in relation to when home addresses can be withheld from the public register of interests. There is also an ongoing presumption that councillors should share their home address, and this can put people off from standing for election. Instead, it may be better for the sector to move towards a presumption that councillors do not share their home addresses publicly and councillors should have to actively 'opt-in' to having this information shared as with private individuals and their personal information.

**Recommendation 4: The Government should prioritise legislation to put it beyond doubt that councillors can withhold their home address from the public register of pecuniary interests.**

**Recommendation 5: The LGA should work with political parties, election and democratic officers, and organisations responsible for guidance to raise awareness of the options currently available and promote the practice of keeping home addresses private during the election process and once elected.**

It is clear in the responses from the call for evidence that councillors experience a lot of abuse online and that social media can be a fertile ground for abuse and intimidation. There were significant concerns about the availability of personal information online and how easily online abuse can translate into physical harm. Common concerns were about the cumulative impact of 'pile-on' abuse and how online abuse can transcend traditional boundaries into personal spaces 24 hours a day. The Online Safety Bill currently going through Parliament will aim to better regulate online spaces through protecting users from illegal and harmful content. The LGA welcome the Bill and will work to ensure it can protect users from harmful abuse and misinformation that might otherwise fall below the criminal level as currently written.

**Recommendation 6: Social media companies and internet service providers should acknowledge the democratic significance of local politicians and provide better and faster routes for councillors reporting abuse and misinformation online.**

There is currently no clear offer of support or leadership from the Government in relation to the safety of local councillors, despite serious incidents taking place in the last year and concerns about the vulnerability of councillors and the impact of abuse on local democracy. This is in contrast to the centrally coordinated support provided to MPs in relation to abuse, harassment and personal safety.

**Recommendation 7: The relevant Government department should convene a working group, in partnership with the LGA, to bring together relevant agencies to develop and implement an action plan to address the issue of abuse of local politicians and their safety.**

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# National census of local authority councillors 2022



# REPORT OF THE COUNCILLORS' CENSUS 2022

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Local Government Association (LGA) has carried out the ninth Census of Local Authority Councillors in England. This census provides the most comprehensive, timely overview of local government representation and, with previous years' data, how that has changed over time. The results will help to inform central and local government and political groups in the development of strategies and policies for local government. The 2022 Census was conducted in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its effect on local communities, and recent prominent issues of personal safety.

The 2022 Census collected data between January and February 2022 and updates previous censuses conducted over 1997-2018.

The 2022 Census was the second to be conducted entirely online. All 16,930<sup>1</sup> councillors in England were emailed a unique link to the questionnaire. A total of 5,055 councillors responded, a response rate of 30 per cent. This is markedly higher than in 2018 (15 per cent), but lower than those in 2013 (38 per cent) and earlier.

In this report, the data have been grossed to show estimates for all councillors in England. Please see [Annex A](#) for details. [Annex C](#) compares the profile of councillors with those of the adult population as a whole.

## **Response**

The 2022 response rate of 30 per cent compares with 15 per cent in 2018, 38 per cent in 2013, and 33 per cent in 2010. A variety of measures taken to improve upon the dip in response in 2018 are described in [Annex A](#).

The actual number of respondents, 5,055, is sufficient to enable robust national estimates to be produced for all councillors assuming that there is no systematic bias among respondents. As far as can be gauged, there was no large-scale systematic bias – see [Annex B](#) for further details. The lower response does, however, mean that sub-national estimates should be treated with caution. In some cases, comparisons with previous Censuses should be treated with caution where questions have been changed (this is noted on relevant [tables](#)).

The response by type of authority and region is detailed in [Annex A](#).

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<sup>1</sup> This is slightly less than the total number of council seats at the time (17,001) as at any given time there are likely to be a small number of vacant seats.

## Scope

Questions in the 2022 Census, which were largely the same as in 2018, fell into three broad areas, shown below together with the relevant table. A [full series of tables](#) covering each question is shown towards the end of the report.

- Councillors' views on a range of areas:
  - reasons for becoming a councillor (Table 1)
  - important things that councillors do (Table 2)
  - influence of councillors (Table 3)
  - effectiveness of councillors (Table 4)
  - whether councillors would recommend their role to others (Table 5)
  - intention to stand for re-election (Table 6)
  - arrangements for dealing with inappropriate behaviour (Table 7)
  - how often councillors feel at risk personally (Table 8)
  - arrangements for protecting councillors personally (Table 9)
  - frequency of abuse or intimidation (Table 10).
  
- Councillors' work:
  - length of service (Table 11)
  - positions of responsibility (Table 12)
  - time spent on council/party business (Tables 13-16)
  - party/group (Table 17)
  - membership of other councils (Table 18).
  
- Councillors' personal characteristics:
  - employment status (Tables 19-22)
  - voluntary/unpaid positions (Table 23)
  - highest qualification (Table 24)
  - sex (Table 25)
  - gender identity (Table 26)
  - age (Table 27)
  - ethnic group (Table 28)
  - sexual orientation (Table 29)
  - health conditions or illnesses (Table 30)
  - caring responsibilities (Table 31).

## **SUMMARY**

The main findings of the 2022 Census were as follows:

### **Councillors' views**

- 85 per cent of councillors became councillors in order to serve their community;
- 63 per cent thought that listening to the views of local people was among the most important role of councillors, 60 per cent thought the same of representing local residents, and 58 per cent supporting local communities;
- 32 per cent of councillors thought they were very effective in their role, and 60 per cent fairly effective;
- 79 per cent would recommend the role of councillor to others;
- 65 per cent intended to stand for re-election;
- 70 per cent thought that the council had effective arrangements for dealing with inappropriate behaviour by council officers, 57 per cent by councillors and 55 per cent by members of the public;
- 28 per cent had either frequently or occasionally felt at risk personally in their role as a councillor, while 72 per cent had rarely or never felt at risk;
- 65 per cent thought that council arrangements for protecting councillors personally were either very or fairly effective;
- 10 per cent of councillors had experienced abuse or intimidation frequently over the last twelve months. 29 per cent occasionally, 33 per cent rarely, and 27 per cent had never had any such experiences.

### **Councillors' work**

- On average, councillors had served for 9.1 years in their current authority; 48 per cent had served for up to 5 years while 12 per cent had done so for more than 20 years;
- 54 per cent of councillors held a position of responsibility, most commonly as chair or vice-chair of a committee;
- Councillors spent, on average, 22 hours per week on council business, the largest chunk of which was on council meetings (8 hours);

### **Councillors' personal characteristics**

- 40 per cent of councillors were retired, and 32 per cent were in full- or part-time employment;
- 61 per cent of councillors held other voluntary or unpaid positions, such as school governorships;
- 64 per cent of councillors held a degree or equivalent or higher qualification; only 4 per cent did not hold any qualification;
- 59 per cent of councillors were male, and 41 per cent female (but see [page 13](#));
- The average age of councillors in 2022 was 60 years; 16 per cent were aged under-45 and 42 per cent were aged 65 or over.
- 92 per cent described their ethnic background as white;
- 84 per cent described their sexual orientation as heterosexual or straight;

- 16 per cent had a long-term physical or mental health problem which reduced their daily activities;
- 46 per cent of councillors had a responsibility as a carer, most commonly looking after a child.

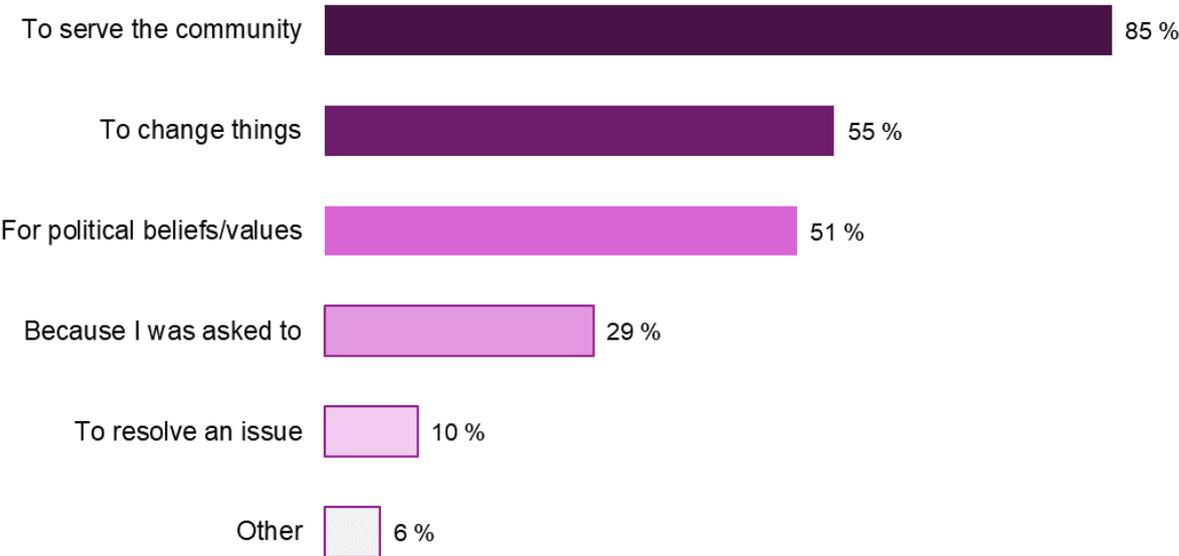
**MAIN FINDINGS**

This section covers a selection of survey findings together with the relevant [table](#).

**Reasons for becoming a councillor (Table 1)**

More than four of five (84.8 per cent) became councillors in order to serve the community, and more than a half did so in order to change things (54.8 per cent) or for their political beliefs/values (50.5 per cent). The reasons for becoming a councillor have changed little since 2006.

**Chart 1: Reasons for becoming a councillor (2022)**



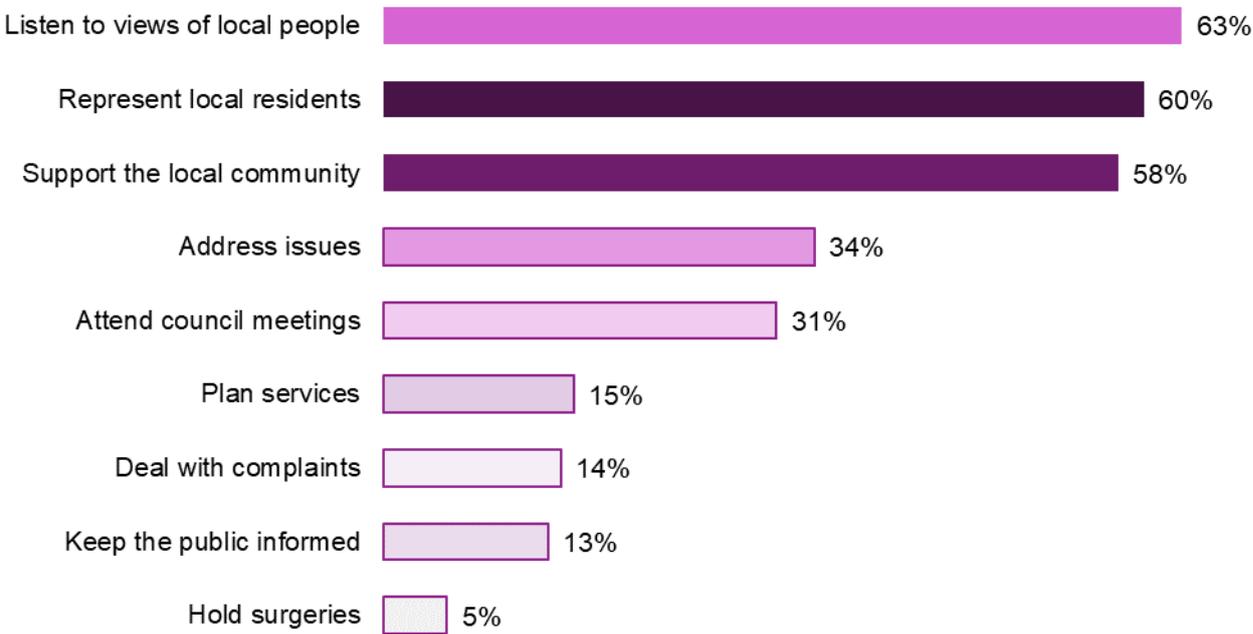
**Most important things that councillors do (Table 2)<sup>2</sup>**

Three-fifths of councillors (62.7 per cent) thought that listening to the view of local people was among the most important councillor roles. Representing local residents (59.7 per cent) and supporting local communities (57.7 per cent) were cited by similar proportions.

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<sup>2</sup> Respondents were allowed to indicate up to three items; the proportion reporting most of them fell between 2013 and 2018, but this may be an effect of moving from a paper-based to an online questionnaire. It was impossible for respondents to tick more than three items with the online system, whereas this could not be enforced on a paper questionnaire.)

**Chart 2: Most important things that councillors do (2022)**



**Influence of councillors (Table 3)**

In 2022, 33.9 per cent of councillors thought that they had about as much influence to change things in their area as they expected before they were elected, while 33.3 per cent felt that they had more influence than expected and 32.8 per cent felt that they had less influence. These proportions have fluctuated slightly since 2008 – the proportion feeling they had less influence fell steadily from 25.4 per cent in 2008, but increased in 2022.

**Effectiveness of councillors (Table 4)**

A little under a third of councillors (31.9 per cent) thought that they were very effective in their role in the council and 59.6 per cent rated themselves as fairly effective. Only 5.7 per cent regarded themselves as not very or not at all effective.

Since 2006, the proportion answering ‘very effective’ has increased (from 23.5 per cent) while the proportion answering ‘fairly effective’ has fallen (from 68.6 per cent).

**Recommending the role of councillor (Table 5)**

In 2022, 79.0 per cent of councillors would recommend the role to others (slightly lower than in previous years), 8.6 per cent would not, and 12.4 per cent did not answer or could not say.

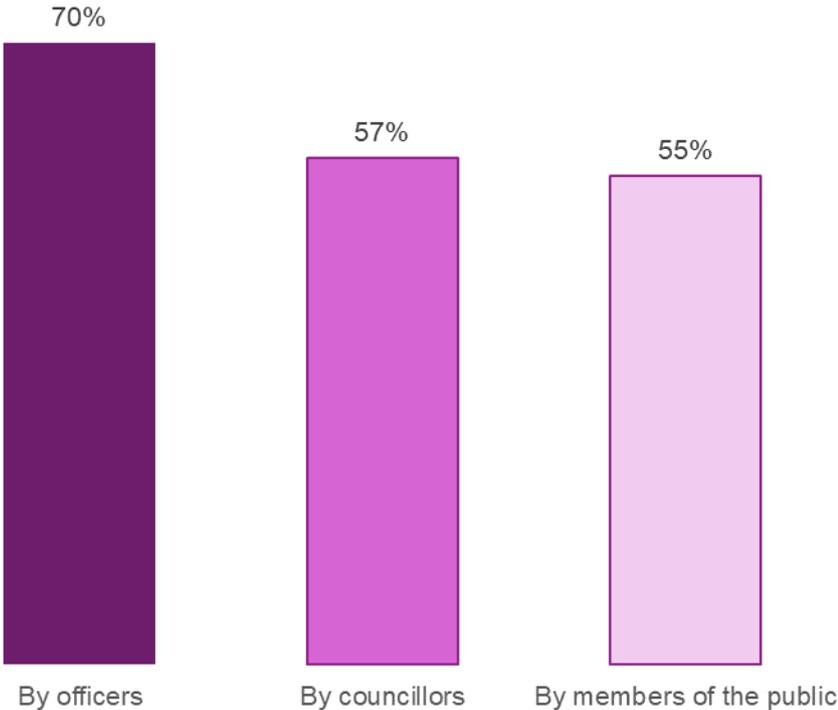
**Intention to stand for re-election (Table 6)**

Just under two-thirds of councillors (64.6 per cent) intended to stand at the next elections (17.6 per cent did not answer or didn’t know). The proportion not intending to stand (17.8 per cent) was slightly higher than in previous years.

**Arrangements for dealing with inappropriate behaviour (Table 7)**

In 2022, most councillors thought that their council had appropriate arrangements in place to deal with inappropriate behaviour towards them in their role as councillors. The proportion varied between 69.6 per cent in respect of such behaviour by council officers, 56.8 per cent in respect of councillors (50.3 per cent of female councillors compared with 61.3 per cent of male councillors), and 54.8 per cent in respect of members of the public.

**Chart 3: Arrangements in place to deal with inappropriate behaviour (2022)**



**Feeling at risk as a councillor (Table 8)**

Just under a half of councillors (45.1 per cent) reported that they rarely felt at risk personally when fulfilling their role as a councillor, while 26.8 per cent never felt at risk, 24.1 per cent occasionally felt at risk, and 4.0 per cent frequently felt at risk. Female councillors were less likely to report never feeling at risk (19.0 per cent) than male councillors (32.2 per cent), and more likely to report occasionally feeling at risk (31.1 per cent compared with 19.2 per cent of men).

**Arrangements for personal protection (Table 9)**

Around a half of respondents (48.7 per cent) thought that their council's arrangements for protecting councillors in their role were fairly effective, while 14.6 per cent thought them very effective. A quarter (25.0 per cent) regarded them as not very effective and 11.7 per cent as not at all effective.

### **Experiences of abuse or intimidation<sup>3</sup> (Table 10)**

Around one in ten councillors (10.3 per cent) had frequently experienced abuse or intimidation in their capacity as a councillor over the last twelve months, 29.4 per cent had experienced abuse or intimidation occasionally, 33.4 per cent had rarely experienced them, and 26.9 per cent had never experienced abuse or intimidation over the last twelve months.

#### **General comments on safety or civility in public life**

Councillors were also invited to add any comments they had about their safety or civility in public life more generally. A total of 2,088 did so.

Most comments concerned the types of abuse experienced, the main broad themes being listed below:

- online abuse from councillors and members of the public (including references to the lack of regulation or recourse for councillors to defend themselves) – 625 respondents;
- abuse specifically from other councillors (online and in-person, including lack of action to deal with aggressive behaviour) – 337 respondents;
- lack of or very little experience of abuse – 158 respondents;
- abuse or fear of being targeted at home (including concerns about home addresses being published) – 139 respondents;
- abuse specifically at surgeries – 121 respondents.

Other comments concerned a perceived lack of support and possible reasons for abusive behaviour:

- lack of support from police and councils (including mental health and safety training, more protection as MPs receive) – 334 respondents;
- perceived general decline in civility and respect for those in public life (councillors target of public anger about other issues including central government, lack of trust) – 261 respondents;
- councillors should be more respectful to the public (and the public will then respect councillors) and less sensitive (there is a limit to how protected councillors can be) – 112 respondents.

#### **Length of service (Table 11)**

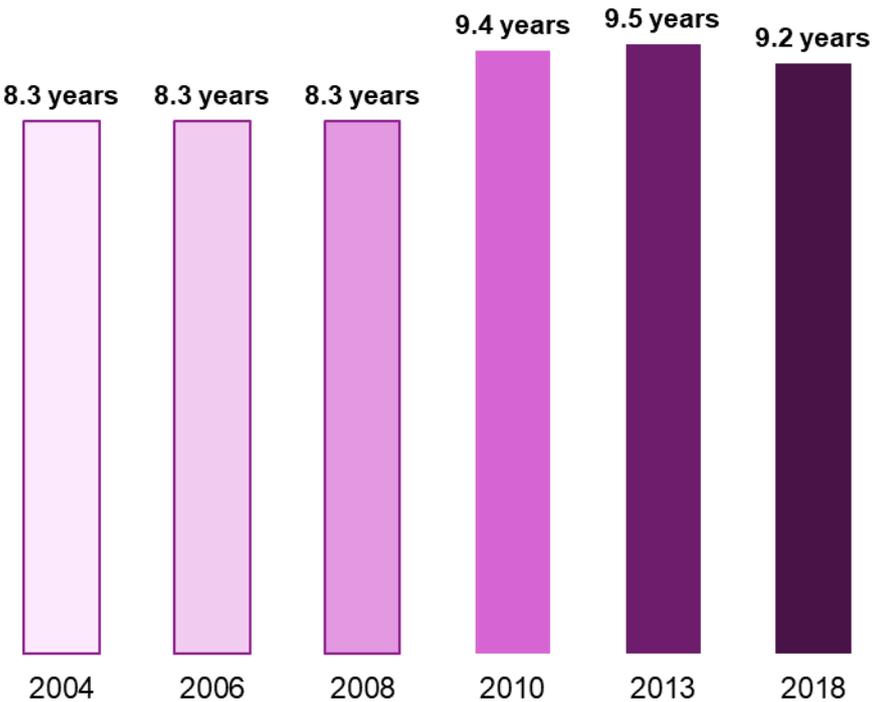
The average length of service in 2022 was 9.1 years, and has not varied greatly since 2006, remaining between 8.3 and 9.5 years. In 2022, the average for female councillors (7.8 years) was lower than that for male councillors (10.0 years).

In 2022, 20.6 per cent of councillors had been a member of their current council for 1-2 years, and 27.5 per cent for 3-5 years. More than one in ten (11.5 per cent) had served for more than 20 years.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Abuse': words and/or behaviour that constitute abuse or mistreatment can include, but is not limited to, physical abuse, bullying, emotional abuse, unsolicited abusive communication, and harassment. It may be one-off or repeated. 'Intimidation': words and/or behaviour intended or likely to block, influence, or deter participation in public debate or causing alarm or distress, which could lead to an individual wanting to withdraw from public life. It may be one-off or repeated behaviour.

**Chart 5: Average length of service of councillors (2006-2022)**



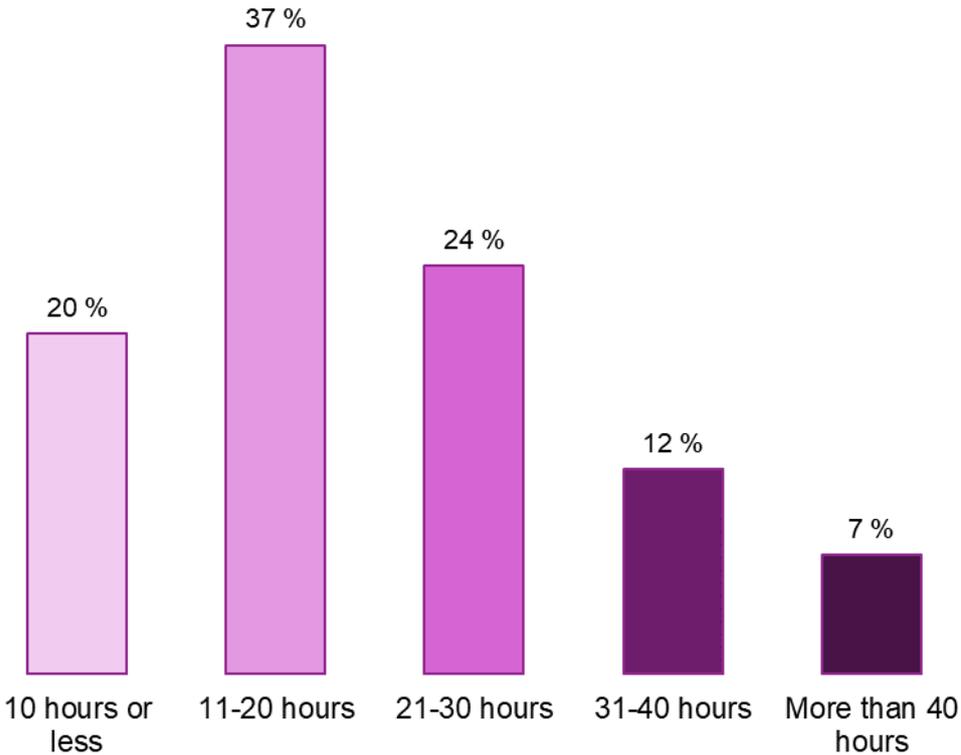
**Positions of responsibility (Table 12)**

In 2022, just over a half (53.5 per cent) of councillors held at least one position of responsibility, most commonly chair or vice-chair of a committee (32.5 per cent) or membership of the cabinet/executive (18.4 per cent). The proportion holding any position has not changed markedly since 2006.

**Time spent on council business (Tables 13-14)**

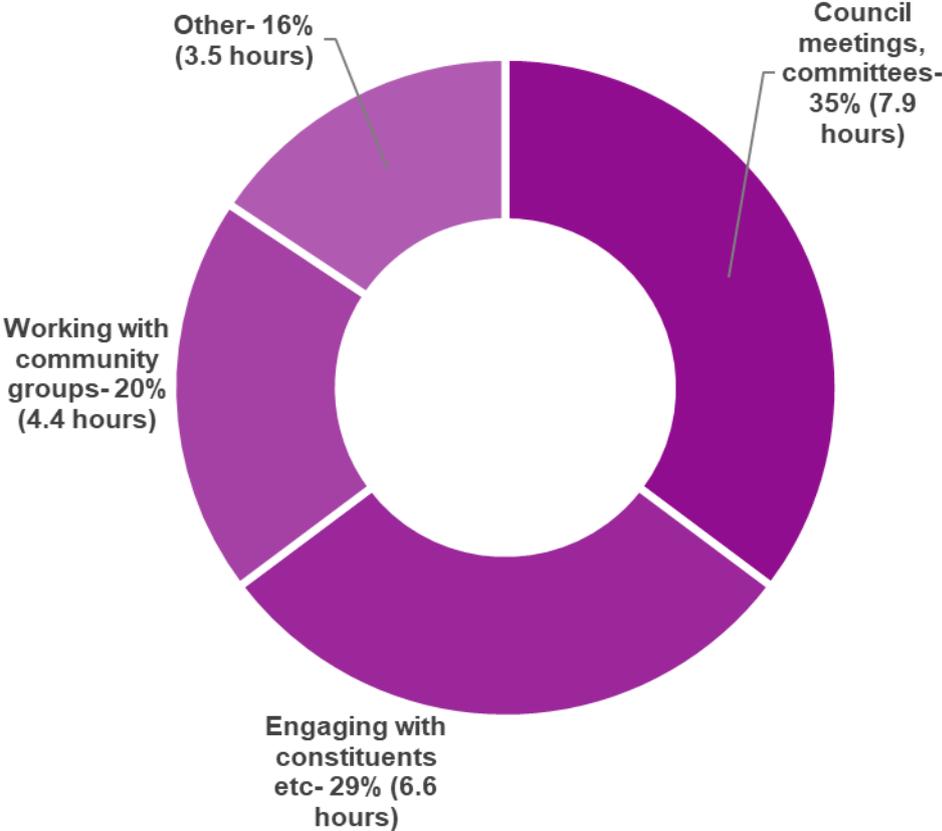
On average, councillors spent 22.4 hours per week on council business in 2022 (23.6 hours for female councillors, 21.6 hours for male councillors), compared with 22.0 hours in 2018 and 20.8 hours in 2013. In 2022, 20.3 per cent spent 10 hours or fewer and 13.5 per cent spent more than 35 hours per week. (Note: in 2022 time spent on virtual, hybrid and face-to-face activities was included.)

**Chart 6: Distribution of weekly hours spent on council business (2022)**



In 2022, the largest chunk of time was spent attending council meetings (7.9 hours on average), followed by engaging with constituents, surgeries, enquiries (6.6 hours), working with community groups (4.4 hours), and other items (3.5 hours).

**Chart 7: Breakdown of time spent on council business (2022)**



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**Time spent on group/party business (Table 15)**

Councillors spent, on average, 5.1 hours per week on group/party business in 2022, higher than 4.3 in 2018 and 2013. Almost three-quarters (73.7 per cent) spent 5 hours or less per week, and most of the remainder (18.5 per cent) spent 6-10 hours per week.

**Political party or group (Table 17)**

Two out of five councillors (41.9 per cent) were members of the Conservative Party, 30.3 per cent were members of the Labour Party, 13.9 per cent were members of the Liberal Democrats, 13.9 per cent were Independent (including the Green Party and Residents' Association).

**Membership of other public bodies (Table 18)**

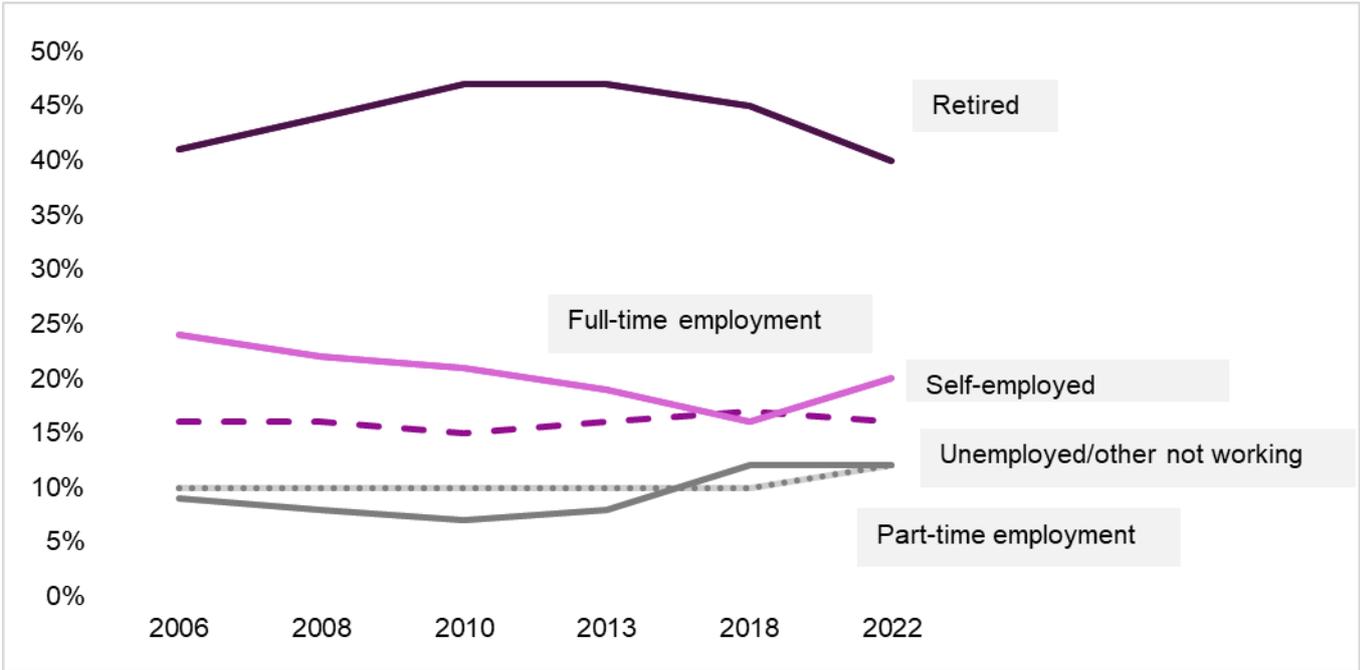
Aside from other local authorities, most commonly councillors were parish councils (13.7 per cent) or town councils (13.4 per cent).

**Employment status (Table 19)**

In 2022, 40.0 per cent of councillors were retired. The proportion in full-time employment had fallen gradually from 24.7 per cent in 2004 to 16.2 per cent in 2018, but increased in 2022 to 20.3 per cent.

In the population as a whole (aged 18+), 22 per cent of people were retired and 41 per cent were in full-time employment (see [Annex C](#)).

**Chart 8: Employment status (2006-2022)**



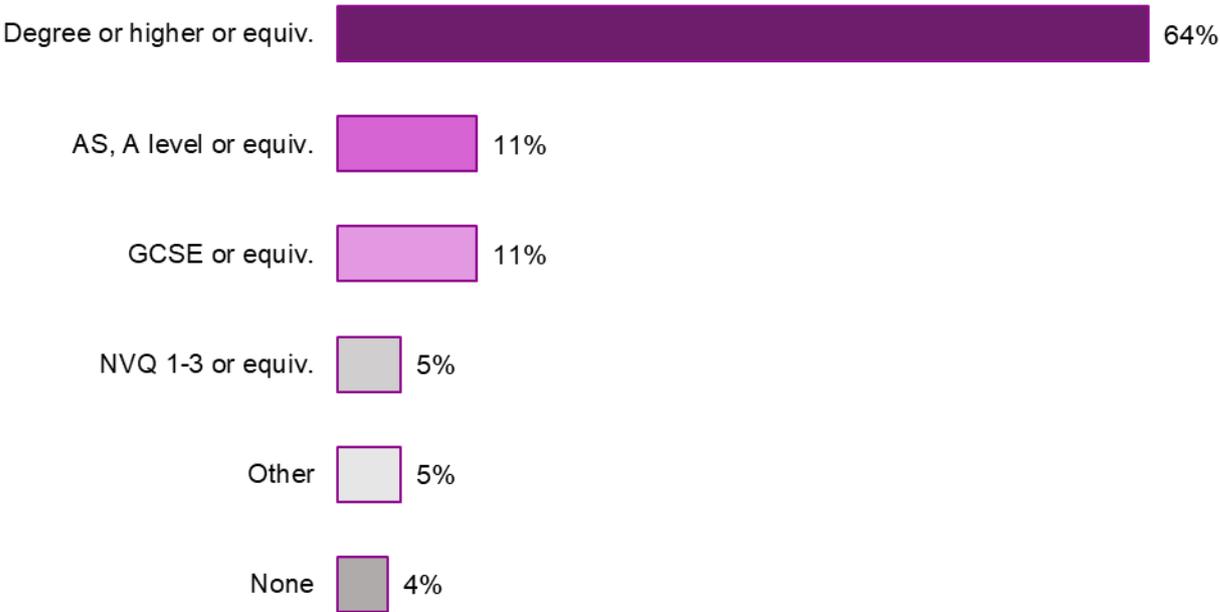
**Voluntary activities (Table 23)**

Three out of five councillors (61.4 per cent) held additional voluntary or unpaid positions. A fifth (20.3 per cent) were school governors.

**Highest qualification (Table 24)**

Just under two-thirds of councillors (64.0 per cent) had a degree or higher degree or equivalent in 2022, lower than in 2018 but higher than in earlier years (51.9 per cent to 60.4 per cent). In 2022, only 3.8 per cent did not hold any qualifications.

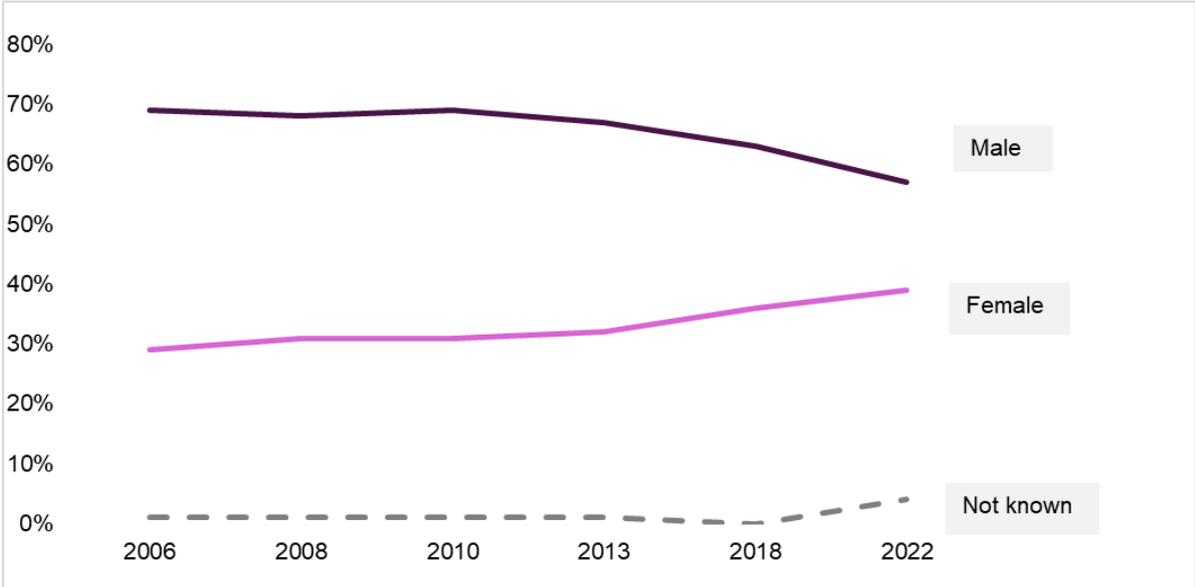
**Chart 9: Highest qualification held (2022)**



**Sex (Table 25)**

In 2022, 56.5 per cent of councillors were male and 39.1 per cent were female. If the proportions are recalculated to exclude a small number of respondents who did not answer, they equate to 59.1 per cent male and 40.9 per cent female. There has been a gradual fall in the former and concomitant rise in the latter over 2006-2022. It should be noted that figures collated by Oscar Research show proportions of 64.4 per cent male and 35.6 per cent female (more in line with previous censuses)<sup>4</sup>. The difference could be due to data collection method, timing, and the census response sample being slightly biased towards women.

**Chart 10: Sex of councillors (2006-2022)**



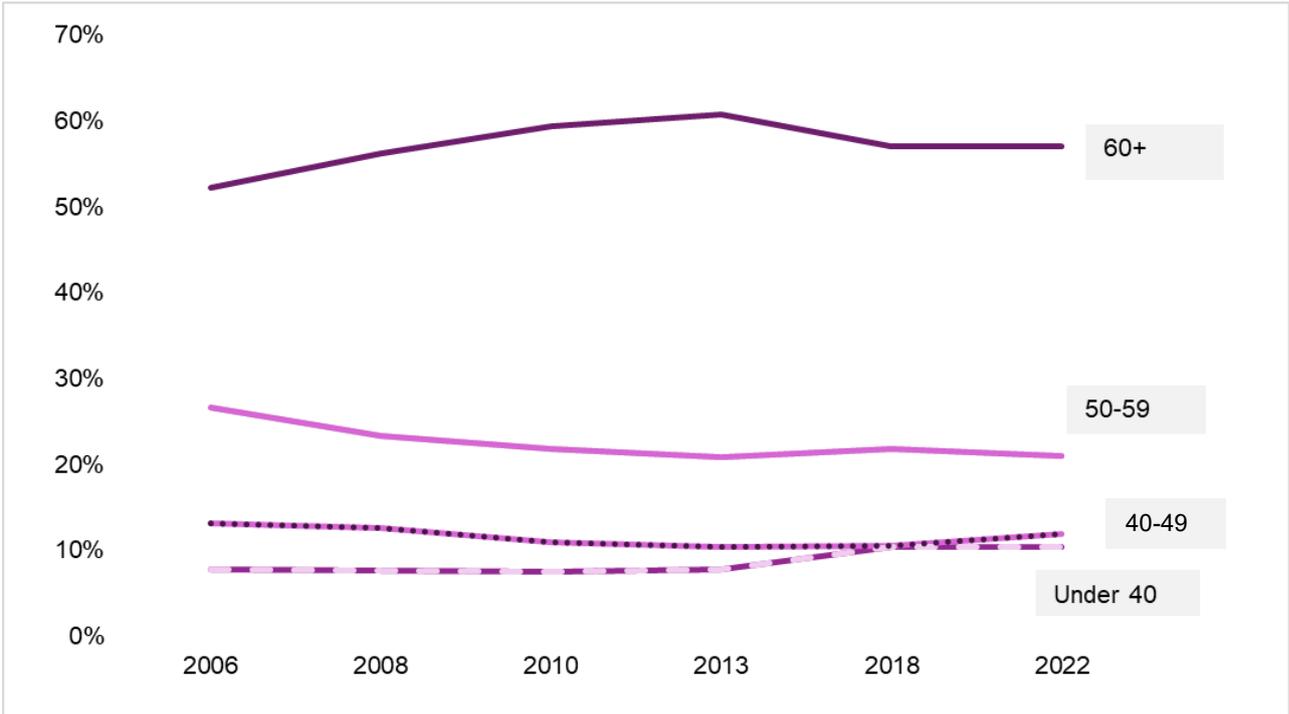
<sup>4</sup> [Live Elected Representative Gender Analysis \(oscar-research.co.uk\)](https://oscar-research.co.uk)

**Age (Table 27)**

The average age of councillors in 2022 was 59.5 years old, similar to that over the 2006-2018 period. The proportion aged under 45 was 15.7 per cent in 2022, while 42.2 per cent were aged 65 or over. Both the proportions aged over 60 and under 40 have tended to increase slightly since 2006.

In the population as a whole (aged 18+), 43 per cent of people were aged under 45 and 17 per cent were aged 65 or over (see [Annex C](#)).

**Chart 11: Age distribution of councillors (2006-2022)**



**Ethnic group (Table 28)**

The proportion of councillors describing themselves as white was 91.7 per cent in 2022, lower than the proportion reported between 2006 and 2018 (95.9 - 96.6 per cent). In 2022, 4.0 per cent were Asian or Asian British, 1.9 per cent were mixed or multiple, 1.5 per cent were black, black British, Caribbean or African, and 0.8 per cent were of another ethnic group.

**Sexual orientation (Table 29)**

In 2022, 84.1 per cent of councillors described themselves as heterosexual or straight, 4.2 per cent as gay or lesbian, 2.2 per cent as bisexual, 1.6 per cent as other, and 7.9 per cent preferred not to say.

**Health conditions or illnesses (Table 30)**

Around one in six councillors, 15.5 per cent, reported having a physical or mental health condition or illness which had lasted or was expected to last for twelve months or more and which reduced their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. The proportion was slightly higher among female councillors (19.9 per cent) than male councillors (13.5 per cent).

### **Caring responsibilities (Table 31)**

In 2022, more than two-fifths of councillors (45.9 per cent) had responsibility as a carer, higher for women (50.6 per cent) than men (38.9 per cent). Most commonly councillors cared for a child or children (19.7 per cent, 25.5 per cent of women and 17.1 per cent of men). Most of the rest cared for a relative (11.1 per cent) or partner (9.8 per cent). The overall proportion with a caring responsibility had previously ranged between 24.2 per cent and 27.9 per cent between 2004 and 2013, before increasing in 2018 and 2022.

## TABLES

**Table 1: Reasons for becoming a councillor (2006 - 2022)**

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%										
Serve community	16,654	86.9	17,228	88.4	15,905	88.2	16,115	90.0	15,033	84.6	14,350	84.8
To change things	10,020	52.3	10,471	53.7	9,428	52.3	10,520	58.7	9,667	54.4	9,274	54.8
Political beliefs	9,866	51.5	10,032	51.5	9,064	50.2	9,752	54.4	9,400	52.9	8,552	50.5
Because I was asked to	5,631	29.4	5,909	30.3	5,079	28.2	4,902	27.4	4,887	27.5	4,841	28.6
Resolve an issue	2,183	11.4	2,436	12.5	2,317	12.8	2,621	14.6	1,759	9.9	1,661	9.8
Other	635	3.3	522	2.7	338	1.9	328	1.8	853	4.8	1,074	6.3
Base (respondents)	19,153		19,496		18,041		17,915		17,770		16,930	

Note: more than one response could be given so percentages do not necessarily sum to 100.

**Table 2: Which are most important things that councillors do (2013-2022)**

	2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Listen to views of local people	12,028	69.8	8,654	48.7	10,616	62.7
Represent local residents	11,162	64.8	10,733	60.4	10,115	59.7
Support local community	10,610	61.6	9,116	51.3	9,763	57.7
Address issues	6,954	40.4	6,948	39.1	5,705	33.7
Attend council meetings	5,438	31.6	4,958	27.9	5,264	31.1
Plan services	3,457	20.1	3,696	20.8	2,534	15.0
Deal with complaints	4,367	25.4	3,056	17.2	2,341	13.8
Keep the public informed	3,638	21.1	3,110	17.5	2,202	13.0
Hold surgeries	2,188	12.7	1,617	9.1	915	5.4
Base (respondents)	17,227		17,770		16,930	

Note: more than one response could be given so percentages do not necessarily sum to 100.

**Table 3: Views on influence as a councillor (2008–2022)**

	2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%								
More influence to change things than expected	7,806	40.5	7,213	40.3	7,373	41.4	6,699	37.7	5,637	33.3
Less influence to change things than expected	4,908	25.4	4,465	25.0	4,081	22.9	4,229	23.8	5,555	32.8
As much influence as expected	6,575	34.1	6,206	34.7	6,362	35.7	6,841	38.5	5,738	33.9
Base (respondents)	19,289	100.0	17,885	100.0	17,816	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

**Table 4: How effective councillors are in their role (2006–2022)**

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%										
Very effective	4,290	23.5	4,723	24.3	5,077	28.2	4,937	27.6	6,113	34.4	5,399	31.9
Fairly effective+	12,513	68.6	12,366	63.7	11,303	62.9	11,163	62.4	10,200	57.4	10,098	59.6
Not very effective	798	4.4	539	2.8	442	2.5	120	0.7	711	4.0	872	5.1
Not at all effective+	635	3.5	414	2.1	349	1.9	1,134	6.3	124	0.7	100	0.6
Don't know/too early to say*	n/a	n/a	1,364	7.0	804	4.5	538	3.0	622	3.5	461	2.7
Base (respondents)	18,236	100.0	19,405	100.0	17,975	100.0	17,892	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

\*Don't know response option added in 2008 this should be taken into account when making comparisons with earlier years.

+Wording of scale changed in 2018.

**Table 5: Would councillors recommend the role to others (2008–2022)**

	2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%								
Yes	16,050	81.8	15,118	83.4	14,928	82.4	15,051	84.7	13,378	79.0
No	1,447	7.4	1,167	6.4	1,283	7.1	995	5.6	1,457	8.6
Don't know/no answer	2,120	10.8	1,844	10.1	1,900	10.5	1,724	9.7	2,095	12.4
Base (population)	19,617	100.0	18,129	100.0	18,111	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

**Table 6: Do councillors intend to stand for re-election (2006–2022)**

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	12,076	61.3	10,694	54.5	12,203	67.3	11,819	65.3	12,048	67.8	10,937	64.6
No	2,250	11.4	3,108	15.8	2,455	13.5	2,716	15.0	2,328	13.1	3,006	17.8
Don't know/no answer	5,363	27.2	5,816	29.6	3,471	19.1	3,577	19.8	3,376	19.0	2,986	17.6
Base (population)	19,689	99.9	19,617	99.9	18,129	99.9	18,111	100.1	17,770	99.9	16,930	100.0

**Table 7: Are effective arrangements in place to deal with inappropriate behaviour (2018-2022)**

	2018						2022					
	By members of the public		By council officers		By councillors		By members of the public		By council officers		By councillors	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	11,266	63.4	14,323	80.6	11,462	64.5	9,273	54.8	11,787	69.6	9,614	56.8
No	6,504	36.6	3,447	19.4	6,308	35.5	4,847	28.6	2,815	16.6	5,964	35.2
Don't know	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,810	16.6	2,328	13.7	1,352	8.0
Base (population)	17,770	100.0	17,770	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0	16,930	100.0	16,930	100.0

Note: 'don't know' response option was added in 2022 and this should be taken into account when making comparisons with earlier years.

**Table 8: How often councillors feel at risk personally when fulfilling their role as a councillor (2022)**

	No.	%
Frequently	683	4.0
Occasionally	4,078	24.1
Rarely	7,630	45.1
Never	4,539	26.8
Base (population)	16,930	100.0

**Table 9: Effectiveness of arrangements for protecting councillors personally as they fulfill their role as a councillor (2022)**

	No.	%
Very effective	2,472	14.6
Fairly effective	8,247	48.7
Not very effective	4,230	25.0
Not at all effective	1,981	11.7
Base (population)	16,930	100.0

**Table 10: How often over the last twelve months councillors have experienced abuse or intimidation in their role as a councillor (2022)**

	No.	%
Frequently	1,742	10.3
Occasionally	4,977	29.4
Rarely	5,651	33.4
Never	4,559	26.9
Base (population)	16,930	100.0

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%										
1–2 years	4,857	24.7	6,292	32.1	3,337	18.9	4,311	24.4	4,194	23.6	3,496	20.6
3–5 years	4,757	24.2	3,495	17.8	4,104	23.2	3,001	17.0	4,087	23.0	4,656	27.5
6–9 years	3,772	19.2	3,469	17.7	3,550	20.1	3,253	18.4	3,074	17.3	2,644	15.6
10–15 years	3,133	15.9	3,157	16.1	3,399	19.3	3,684	20.9	2,790	15.7	2,777	16.4
16–20 years	1,494	7.6	1,351	6.9	1,409	8.0	1,355	7.7	1,688	9.5	1,411	8.3
21–25 years	776	3.9	854	4.4	852	4.8	885	5.0	764	4.3	909	5.4
More than 25 years	901	4.6	1,000	5.1	1,001	5.7	1,157	6.6	1,173	6.6	1,037	6.1
Average years	8.3		8.3		9.4		9.5		9.2		9.1	
Base (respondents)	19,689	100.0	19,617	100.0	17,652	100.0	17,647	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%										
Directly elected mayor	6	0.0	5	0.0	86	0.5	89	0.5	16	0.1	15	0.1
Deputy mayor	314	1.6	338	1.7	261	1.4	292	1.6	341	1.9	458	2.7
Leader of the council	885	4.5	1,020	5.2	924	5.1	516	2.9	337	1.9	333	2.0
Deputy leader of the council	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	557	3.1	455	2.6	593	3.5
Chair/vice-chair of council/civic mayor	876	4.5	963	4.9	805	4.4	825	4.6	596	3.4	908	5.4
Cabinet/executive member	2,969	15.1	3,214	16.4	2,900	16.0	2,815	15.5	3,480	19.6	3,114	18.4
Chair/vice-chair of committee	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5,515	31.0	5,507	32.5
Chair/vice-chair of local strategic partnership main group	261	1.3	370	1.9	355	2.0	292	1.6	186	1.0	484	2.9
Chair/vice-chair of local strategic partnership sub-group	261	1.3	375	1.9	369	2.0	187	1.0	131	0.7	434	2.6
Party/group leader	1,414	7.2	1,448	7.4	1,180	6.5	1,372	7.6	1,460	8.2	1,592	9.4
Party/group deputy leader	1,109	5.6	1,160	5.9	1,076	5.9	1,084	6.0	878	4.9	1,053	6.2
Other party/group official	2,646	13.4	2,719	13.9	2,374	13.1	2,582	14.3	2,540	14.3	3,856	22.8
One or more positions	10,573	53.7	11,059	56.4	10,404	57.4	9,594	53.0	9,505	53.5	9,053	53.5
No positions	9,116	46.3	8,558	43.6	7,725	42.6	8,517	47.0	8,265	46.5	7,877	46.5
Base (population)	19,689	100.0	19,617	100.0	18,129	100.0	18,111	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

Notes: (1) more than one response (or no response) could be given so percentages do not necessarily sum to 100; (2) in 2006-2013, the process of grossing overstated the totals of directly elected mayors and council leaders and this was not corrected; since 2018, both numbers have been constrained to known national totals; (3) the classification changed in 2022 so only limited comparisons with earlier years are possible.

	2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
5 hours or less	916	5.2	755	4.3	643	3.8
6–10 hours	3,542	20.1	3,155	17.8	2,792	16.5
11–15 hours	2,823	16.0	3,072	17.3	2,813	16.6
16–20 hours	3,795	21.5	3,543	19.9	3,475	20.5
21–25 hours	1,886	10.7	1,875	10.6	1,903	11.2
26–30 hours	1,974	11.2	2,032	11.4	2,174	12.8
31–35 hours	600	3.4	820	4.6	840	5.0
36–40 hours	975	5.5	1,185	6.7	1,117	6.6
41–45 hours	247	1.4	412	2.3	281	1.7
46–50 hours	413	2.3	386	2.2	394	2.3
More than 50 hours	442	2.5	535	3.0	498	2.9
Average no. of hours	20.8		22.0		22.4	
Base (respondents)	17,613	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

	2006	2008	2010	2013	2018	2022
Attendance at council meetings, committees	10.0	10.0	10.2	8.0	8.1	7.9
Engaging with constituents, surgeries, enquires	7.0	8.0	7.9	6.0	6.2	6.6
Working with community groups*	n/a	n/a	n/a	4.5	4.1	4.4
Other, external meetings, seminars, training	6.0	6.0	5.5	4.1	3.6	3.5
Overall average number of hours	22.0	22.0	22.8	21.3	22.0	22.4
Base (respondents)	16,837	18,143	17,040	17,679	17,770	16,930

Note: \*an additional item was added to this question in 2013 so 'other' categories are not directly comparable. Caution must be exercised when making comparisons.

	2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
5 hours or less	13,552	80.2	14,066	79.2	12,472	73.7
6–10 hours	2,394	14.2	2,815	15.8	3,137	18.5
11–15 hours	435	2.6	415	2.3	549	3.2
16–20 hours	256	1.5	324	1.8	323	1.9
21–25 hours	77	0.5	58	0.3	288	1.7
26–30 hours	55	0.3	45	0.3	107	0.6
31–35 hours	15	0.1	19	0.1	15	0.1
36–40 hours	44	0.3	0	0.0	28	0.2
41–45 hours	13	0.1	0	0.0	7	0.0
46–50 hours	28	0.2	0	0.0	4	0.0
More than 50 hours	20	0.1	28	0.2	12,472	73.7
Average no. of hours	4.3		4.3		5.1	
Base (respondents)	16,889	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

	2004	2006	2008	2010	2013	2018	2022
Average number of hours	22.0	22.0	22.0	22.7	25.1	26.3	27.5
Base (respondents)	18,678	18,596	18,850	17,579	17,613	17,770	16,930

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Conservative Party	7,719	42.3	9,436	48.5	9,031	50.1	8,247	46.1	8,601	48.4	7,097	41.9
Green Party	97	0.5	144	0.7	141	0.8	176	1.0	249	1.4	448	2.6
Independent/RA	1,178	6.5	1,143	5.9	964	5.4	869	4.9	533	3.0	1,905	11.3
Labour Party	4,585	25.1	4,201	21.6	3,748	20.8	5,697	31.8	5,615	31.6	5,127	30.3
Liberal Democrats	4,427	24.3	4,315	22.2	3,958	22.0	2,624	14.7	2,346	13.2	2,352	13.9
Base (respondents)	18,252	92.7	19,445	99.1	18,008	99.3	17,905	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%										
Local authority	1,888	9.6	2,265	11.5	2,090	11.5	2,388	13.2	3,181	17.9	n/a	n/a
Parish/community council	3,102	15.8	3,081	15.7	2,815	15.5	2,556	14.1	2,324	14.1	2,322	13.7
Town council	2,161	11.0	2,422	12.3	2,305	12.7	2,426	13.4	2,105	12.8	2,271	13.4
Fire authority	717	3.6	798	4.1	704	3.9	661	3.7	554	3.4	307	1.8
Police authority	558	2.8	525	2.7	432	2.4	237	1.3	232	1.4	532	3.1
National Parks authority	200	1.0	187	1.0	238	1.3	207	1.1	147	0.9	193	1.1
Combined authority	n/a	n/a	596	3.5								
Any of the above	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7,135	39.4	6,914	38.9	n/a	n/a
Base (population)	19,689	100.0	19,617	100.0	18,129	100.0	18,111	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

Notes: (1) more than one response could be given so percentages do not necessarily sum to 100; (2) Combined authority was added in 2022 so caution must be exercised when making comparisons with earlier years.

**Table 19: Current circumstances (2008–2022)**

	2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%								
In full-time paid employment	4,133	22.0	3,586	21.0	3,361	19.2	2,879	16.2	3,430	20.3
In part-time paid employment	1,862	9.9	1,620	9.5	1,657	9.5	1,813	10.2	1,973	11.7
Self-employed or freelance	3,047	16.2	2,493	14.6	2,798	16.0	3,039	17.1	2,681	15.8
Unemployed	242	1.3	297	1.7	345	2.0	284	1.6	199	1.2
Retired	8,193	43.5	8,082	47.2	8,165	46.6	8,014	45.1	6,771	40.0
Not in paid work - looking after home/family	645	3.4	472	2.8	529	3.0	693	3.9	719	4.2
Not in paid work - in full-time education	69	0.4	59	0.3	57	0.3	107	0.6	121	0.7
Not in paid work - other reason	623	3.3	498	2.9	612	3.5	942	5.3	1,036	6.1
Base (respondents)	18,813	100.0	17,107	100.0	17,523	100.1	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

Note: the classification used has changed so caution must be exercised when making comparisons for this question, particularly for the 'other' category.

**Table 20: Current occupation (2006–2022)**

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%								
Managerial or executive	3,329	40.0	3,070	36.9	2,977	36.9	2,840	39.2	3,077	39.8	2,888	37.3
Professional or technical	2,523	30.4	2,713	32.6	2,633	32.6	2,351	32.5	2,590	33.5	2,527	32.6
Lecturer, teacher or researcher	734	8.8	744	8.9	708	8.8	546	7.5	673	8.7	696	9.0
Admin/clerical/secretarial/ sales	898	10.8	1,010	12.1	1,004	12.4	914	12.6	827	10.7	936	12.1
Manual or craft	827	9.9	781	9.4	744	9.2	587	8.1	572	7.4	703	9.1
Base (respondents)	8,310	99.9	8,319	99.9	8,066	99.9	7,238	99.9	7,730	100.1	7,750	100.0

Note: only councillors in employment.

**Table 21: Employment sector (2006–2022)**

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Public sector	2,640	29.7	2,274	25.8	2,038	24.5	1,971	26.9	2,242	29.0	2,227	28.7
Private sector	5,750	64.7	6,110	69.3	5,706	68.5	4,783	65.4	4,785	61.9	4,268	55.1
Charity/community/voluntary sector	493	5.5	437	5.0	586	7.0	559	7.6	703	9.1	1,187	15.3
Base (respondents)	8,883	99.9	8,821	100.1	8,330	100.0	7,313	99.9	7,730	100.0	7,750	100.0

Note: only councillors in employment.

**Table 22: Does employer support work as a councillor (2013-2022)**

	2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
To a great extent	1,762	37.2	1,956	41.7	2,231	43.1
To some extent	1,870	39.5	1,923	41.0	1,941	37.5
Not at all	861	18.2	704	15.0	827	16.0
Employer is unaware I am a councillor	147	3.1	108	2.3	180	3.5
Base (respondents)	4,734	100.0	4,691	100.0	5,180	100.0

Note: only councillors employed.

**Table 23: Additional voluntary activities (2013-2022)**

	2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
School governorship	6,730	37.2	4,443	25.0	3,436	20.3
Magistrate	473	2.6	391	2.2	215	1.3
Other	7,921	43.7	8,174	46.0	6,939	41.0
No other such positions	6,048	33.4	6,326	35.6	6,533	38.6
Base (population)	18,111	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

Note: more than one response could be given so percentages do not necessarily sum to 100.

**Table 24: Highest qualification held (2008–2022)**

	2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Degree or equivalent or higher (foundation degree, HND or HNC, NVQ 4 or above, teaching or nursing)	10,018	51.1	10,129	55.9	10,934	60.4	11,995	67.5	10,844	64.0
AS, A level or equivalent	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,827	10.8
GCSE or equivalent (GCSEs, O levels, CSEs or Basic Skills course)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,919	11.3
NVQ 1-3 or equivalent (BTEC National, OND or ONC, City & Guilds Craft/Advanced, BTEC General)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	886	5.2
Other qualification	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	807	4.8
No qualifications	3,538	18.0	1,636	9.0	967	5.3	551	3.1	648	3.8
Base (population)	19,617	100.1	18,129	100.0	18,111	100.0	17,770	99.8	16,930	100.0

Note: the classification used changed in 2022 so only limited comparisons with earlier years are possible.

**Table 25: Sex (2006–2022)**

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	13,645	69.3	13,417	68.4	12,411	68.5	12,192	67.3	11,248	63.3	9,573	56.5
Female	5,774	29.3	6,038	30.8	5,545	30.6	5,748	31.7	6,344	35.7	6,622	39.1
Prefer to self-describe	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	18	0.1	n/a	n/a
Prefer not to say	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	160	0.9	n/a	n/a
Not stated	271	1.4	162	0.8	173	1.0	171	0.9	n/a	n/a	735	4.3
Base (population)	19,689	100.0	19,617	100.0	18,129	100.1	18,111	99.9	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

Note: the classification was changed in 2018 and in 2022 so comparisons with other years must be treated with caution.

**Table 26: Gender identity (2022)**

	2022	
	No.	%
Gender identity is the same as sex registered at birth	15,886	93.8
Gender identity is NOT the same as sex registered at birth	135	0.8
Not stated	909	5.4
Base (population)	16,930	100.0

**Table 27: Age (2006–2022)**

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Under 25	58	0.3	110	0.6	124	0.8	106	0.6	107	0.6	202	1.2
25–29	273	1.5	308	1.6	221	1.4	298	1.7	444	2.5	340	2.0
30–34	430	2.4	403	2.1	378	2.4	471	2.7	657	3.7	502	3.0
35–39	656	3.6	643	3.4	454	2.9	493	2.8	657	3.7	726	4.3
40–44	1,036	5.7	1,022	5.4	662	4.2	738	4.2	764	4.3	883	5.2
45–49	1,368	7.5	1,378	7.3	1,068	6.8	1,094	6.3	1,120	6.3	1,093	6.5
50–54	1,877	10.3	1,746	9.3	1,494	9.5	1,515	8.7	1,635	9.2	1,495	8.8
55–59	2,992	16.4	2,638	14.0	1,944	12.4	2,131	12.2	2,257	12.7	2,021	11.9
60–64	3,730	20.5	4,119	21.9	3,086	19.7	2,970	17.0	2,523	14.2	2,527	14.9
65–69	3,009	16.5	3,275	17.4	3,232	20.6	3,779	21.6	3,021	17.0	2,602	15.4
70+	2,778	15.3	3,175	16.9	2,997	19.1	3,875	22.2	4,602	25.9	4,540	26.8
Base (respondents)	18,207	100.0	18,819	99.9	15,660	99.8	17,471	100.0	17,770	100.1	16,930	100.0
Average age in years	58.3		58.8		59.7		60.2		59.4		59.5	
Proportion under 45	2,453	13.5	2,486	13.1	1,839	11.7	2,106	12.0	2,630	14.8	2,652	15.7

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>White</b>	17,855	95.9	18,716	96.6	16,823	96.3	16,892	96.0	17,024	95.8	15,532	91.7
English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish or British	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14,745	87.1
Irish	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	284	1.7
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	0.0
Roma	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0.0
Any other white background	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	500	3.0
<b>Mixed or multiple</b>	127	0.7	82	0.4	106	0.6	69	0.4	160	0.9	329	1.9
White and Black Caribbean	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7	0.0
White and Black African	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	30	0.2
White and Asian	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	185	1.1
Any other mixed or multiple background	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	106	0.6
<b>Asian or Asian British</b>	519	2.8	423	2.2	407	2.3	499	2.8	373	2.1	679	4.0
Indian	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	243	1.4
Pakistani	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	216	1.3
Bangladeshi	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	76	0.4
Chinese	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	24	0.1
Any other Asian background	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	121	0.7
<b>Black, Black British, Caribbean or African</b>	93	0.5	97	0.5	118	0.7	102	0.6	160	0.9	257	1.5
Caribbean	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	102	0.6
African	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	124	0.7
Any other black background	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	31	0.2
<b>Other</b>	25	0.1	31	0.2	9	0.0	0	0.0	53	0.3	132	0.8
Arab	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14	0.1
Any other ethnic group	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	118	0.7
Base (respondents)	18,618	100.0	18,808	99.9	17,463	99.9	17,596	99.8	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

Notes: (1) Chinese was included within 'Asian' backgrounds in 2013; in previous years it was a separate category; (2) the classification changed in 2022 so comparisons with earlier years are limited and should be treated with caution.

	2010		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Heterosexual or straight	16,291	89.9	15,691	88.3	14,233	84.1
Gay or lesbian	464	2.6	746	4.2	716	4.2
Bisexual	174	1.0	302	1.7	374	2.2
Other	58	0.3	36	0.2	276	1.6
Prefer not to say/not stated	1,142	6.3	995	5.6	1,330	7.9
Base (respondents)	18,129	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100.0

Notes: (1) the 2010 figures have been recalculated to exclude a small proportion of 'not knows'; (2) this question was not asked in 2013.

	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%										
Long-term health condition or disability	2,138	10.9	2,602	13.3	2,563	14.1	2,383	13.2	2,861	16.1	2,627	15.5%
Base (population)	19,689		19,617		18,129		18,111		17,770		16,930	

Note: the wording of this question changed in 2022 so comparisons with earlier years must be treated with caution.

Table 31: Caring responsibilities (2006–2022)												
	2006		2008		2010		2013		2018		2022	
	No.	%	No.	%								
Child/children	2,737	13.9	2,641	13.5	2,251	12.4	2,625	14.5	2,968	16.7	3,333	19.7
Relative	994	5.0	1,374	7.0	1,163	6.4	1,368	7.6	1,777	10.0	1,886	11.1
Partner	1,521	7.7	1,825	9.3	1,432	7.9	1,430	7.9	1,422	8.0	1,664	9.8
Other	207	1.1	322	1.6	238	1.3	362	2.0	391	2.2	437	2.6
One or more caring responsibility	4,757	24.2	5,099	26.0	4,396	24.2	5,044	27.9	6,415	36.1	7,773	45.9
No caring responsibilities	14,932	75.8	14,518	74.0	13,733	75.8	13,067	72.1	11,355	63.9	9,157	54.1
Base (population)	19,689	100.0	19,617	100.0	18,129	100.0	18,111	100.0	17,770	100.0	16,930	100

## ANNEX A: CENSUS RESPONSE

Response to the 2022 Census by type of authority and region is shown below.

There was no great variation, but in terms of type of authority, response varied between 25 per cent in London boroughs and 33 per cent in both counties and unitaries; by region, it varied between 25 per cent in Greater London and 35 per cent in South West.

A response was received from at least one councillor in all but one of the 333 English local authorities.

	Number of respondents	Response rate
Type of authority	Number	Per cent
Counties	528	33
London boroughs	488	25
Metropolitan districts	692	29
Shire districts	2,226	29
Unitaries	1,121	33
Total	5,055	30
Region		Per cent
East of England	752	32
East Midlands	483	27
Greater London	488	25
North East	249	32
North West	634	28
South East	1,039	32
South West	596	35
West Midlands	474	30
Yorkshire and the Humber	340	29
Total	5,055	30

Various measures were taken in order to try to increase response:

- Non-respondent councillors were emailed directly twice;
- The LGA's four political group offices each sent reminders to their respective councillors, as did the County Council Network and District Councils' Network;
- Member services officers in each council were asked to circulate general reminders to councillors and to generally encourage them to respond;
- LGA's regional offices were asked to publicise the Census and, where possible, encourage councillors to respond;
- General reminders were circulated in 'first' magazine.

### Grossing note

Respondents' data was grossed to the equivalent of a 100 per cent response rate by weighting respondents according to type of authority and region (the same method as in previous Censuses). Each respondent was assigned a weight according to these two criteria.

To illustrate this, an example is given below of a scenario in which there are two types of authority and two regions.

<b>Total number of councillors</b>	<b>Type 1</b>	<b>Type 2</b>
Region 1	50	100
Region 2	25	75
<b>Number of Census respondents</b>		
Region 1	25	40
Region 2	5	25
<b>Calculated weights</b>		
Region 1	$50/25 = 2.0$	$100/40 = 2.5$
Region 2	$25/5 = 5.0$	$75/25 = 3.0$

Every response from councillors in authorities of type 1 and region 1 is given a weight of 2.0, and so on. By aggregating the weighted responses for each type and region, grossed national estimates for councillors are produced.

## ANNEX B: PROFILE OF COUNCILLORS' CENSUS RESPONDENTS

The profile of respondents was compared with that of all councillors in order to assess whether there might be any bias among Census respondents. This is summarised in the table below.

Overall data for councillors by type of authority, region, and party is based on the position after May 2021 elections; role is based on a single leader in each council; sex is based on the latest Fawcett Society research; ethnicity is based on the previous Census.

In summary, as far as can be gauged given the available data, respondents to the Census are not markedly out of line with councillors as a whole. However, a few variations were found:

- London boroughs are slightly under-represented among Census respondents, and unitary authorities are slightly over-represented;
- South East and South West regions are slightly over-represented among Census respondents;
- Conservative Party are under-represented, while Liberal Democrats and Independents are slightly over-represented;
- Leaders are slightly over-represented;
- Female councillors are slightly over-represented.

Type of authority	Councillors' Census respondents		% of all councillors
	Number of responses	% of responses	
Counties	528	10	10
London boroughs	488	10	12
Metropolitan districts	692	14	14
Shire districts	2,226	44	45
Unitaries	1,121	22	20
All	5,055	100	100
<b>Region</b>			
East of England	752	15	14
East Midlands	483	10	10
Greater London	488	10	12
North East	249	5	5
North West	634	13	13
South East	1,039	21	19
South West	596	12	10
West Midlands	474	9	10
Yorkshire and the Humber	340	7	7
All	5,055	100	100
<b>Party</b>			
Conservative Party	1,880	37	42
Labour Party	1,501	30	30
Liberal Democrat Party	868	17	14
Independent/other	806	16	14
All	5,055	100	100
<b>Role</b>			
Leaders	193	4	2
<b>Sex</b>			
Female	1,972	39	35*

\*Fawcett Society (2019).

## ANNEX C: COMPARISON OF COUNCILLORS AND GENERAL POPULATION (LABOUR FORCE SURVEY)

Percentages of people	England	
	Population	Councillors
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	49	59
Female	51	41
<b>Age</b>		
18–24	10	1
25–29	8	2
30–34	9	3
35–39	8	4
40–44	8	5
45–49	8	7
50–54	9	9
55–59	9	12
60–64	7	15
65–69	6	15
70+	17	27
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	86	92
Mixed	1	2
Asian	7	4
Black	3	2
Other	2	1
<b>Employment status</b>		
Full-time	41	20
Part-time	13	12
Self-employed	8	16
Unemployed	3	1
Retired	22	40
Looking after family, home	3	4
In full-time education	3	1
Not working other reason	7	6
<b>Employment sector</b>		
Public sector	25	13
Private sector	73	25
Charity/voluntary sector	3	7

Note: table shows proportions of total population aged 18+ and councillors in each area. Labour Force Survey (ONS, January – March 2021).



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