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Publications
**Diversity in local
councils in 2018**

**National Association
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FOREWORD

Town and parish (local) councils are the first tier of local government and are statutory bodies. They are independently elected and raise their own precept (a form of council tax) to fund local services.

There are 10,000 local councils in England which cover over 30% of the country. There are over 100,000 councillors serving on local councils.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is the sole national body representing the interests of local councils in England. NALC works in partnership with county associations to support, promote and improve local councils.

As part of NALC's work to help local councils improve, NALC has launched a Diversity Commission to support the growth of diversity and representation in local councils.

The Commission is made up of representatives from the Fawcett Society, the Local Government Association (LGA), De Montfort University, Wiltshire Association of Local Councils and local councils.

CHAIR OF NALC DIVERSITY COMMISSION'S INTRODUCTION

NALC's Diversity Commission thinks it is important that local councils are representative of the areas they serve. The issue of diversity needs to be brought to the forefront and addressed to ensure full representation of the electorate within our sector with councillors reflecting the communities and people they serve.

Increasing diversity in the public sector is paramount for a sector which strives to promote equality and is particularly pertinent to local councils given their role at the forefront of community representation, service delivery and partnership working.

Local councils work for their communities and are shaped by communities. With this in mind, the Commission has begun work to look at ways for local councils to encourage every member of their community to get involved with what happens locally. We are asking local councils to:

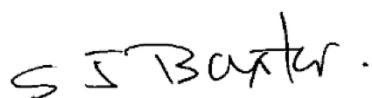
- Encourage more people from diverse backgrounds to stand for election
- Understand how representative of the community they are
- Devote more time to engaging those who feel isolated from their community

As part of the Commission's work, they have been undertaking an assessment of the diversity of people who are local councillors in relation to their age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and socio-economic background.

This report gives an insight into the research they have carried out through their local councillor census survey and call for evidence. Over 2100 councillors (2.1% of councillors) participated in this research which took place from October 30 2017 to May 30 2018.

Cllr Sue Baxter

Chair of NALC's Diversity Commission

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S I Baxter". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

SECTION 1: WORKING AS A LOCAL COUNCILLOR

In this section, the report will be looking at the work a local councillor carries out day to day, the skills of local councillors who are currently in post, and the time and effort they dedicate to their councillor duties.

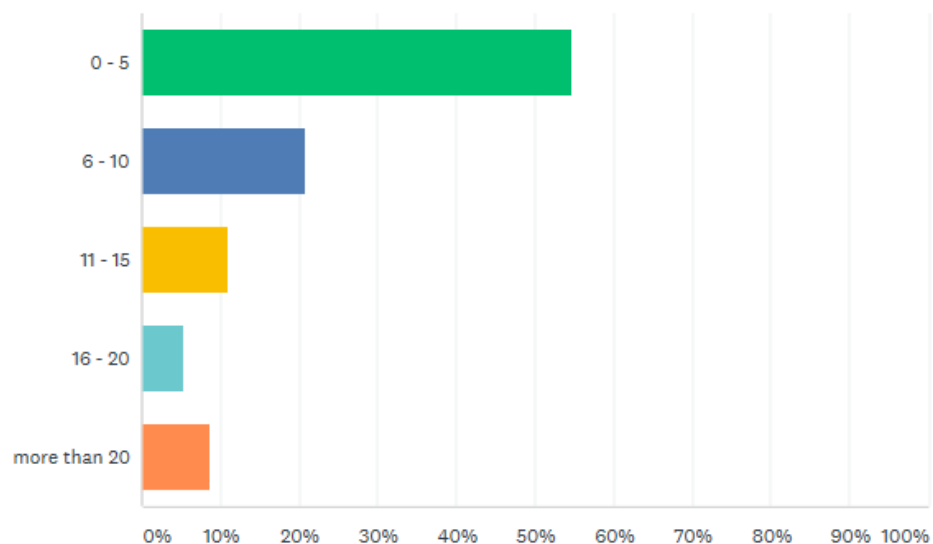
Length of service

The majority of local councillors who responded to the survey responded as newly elected councillors. 54% of councillors said they have only served on their council for 0-5 years highlighting that the turnover of local councillors is quite high in 2018. The current average length of service for a local councillor is 7.5 years.

Local councillors who fall under the 18-25 age bracket all responded as serving for only 0-5 years. This could show local councils have a problem retaining a younger generation and could pose the question what else can local councils do to retain younger councillors?

Table a

Table a shows how many years councillors have served on their council for.



Elected vs Co-opted

The census survey found that 63.5% of local councillors are elected compared with 36.5% of councillors who have been co-opted.

Although the majority of councillors are elected the high statistic of 36.5% of local councillors being co-opted could show local councils are facing a problem in recruiting candidates to stand for election. Lack of competition for places could lead to a lack of skilled councillors serving on local councils. Co-option is an effective tool for local councils to use if the right skills haven't been found during the election.

It could also point out that councils need to get better at engaging with their communities and raising awareness about what their council is doing.

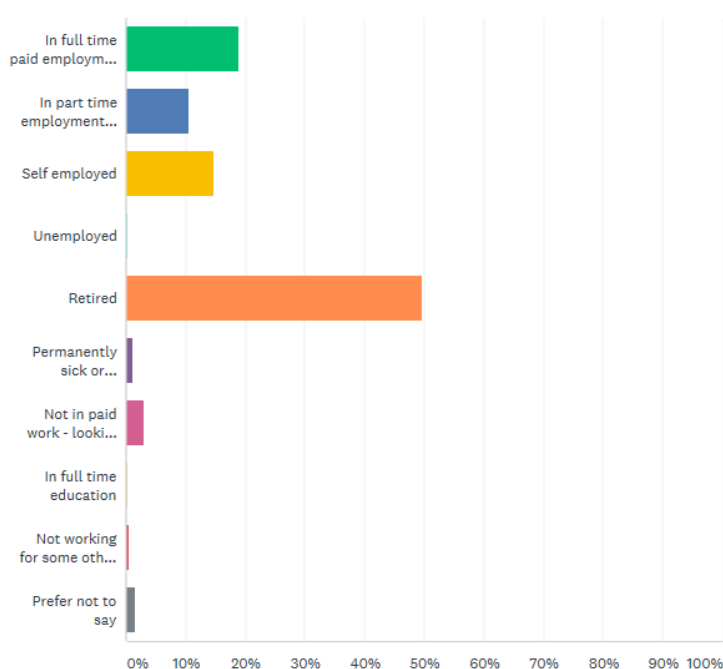
Time spent being a councillor

The average time spent per month as a councillor on council business is 12 hours. Per week that works out as an average of 3 hours and per year it works out as an average of 144 hours.

That means local councillors are volunteering up to 14,400,000 hours to their communities each year.

Looking at how local councillors spent their time, 67.7% of councillors said they only spent 1-2 hours per week engaging with their community, with 6% of local councillors spending more than 10 hours a week on meetings. This is something the Commission wants to change. The Commission wants more local councillors engaging with their communities to hear about the issues affecting them.

Relating to time commitments, we asked local councillors how many were a carer for a child under the age of 18 with only 13.8% replying that they were. This could show being a parent or guardian puts potential candidates off standing for election due to time restraints. This was highlighted in the Commission's more extensive research on diverse local councillors. One of the local councillors the Commission interviewed mentioned that the local council had put policies in place



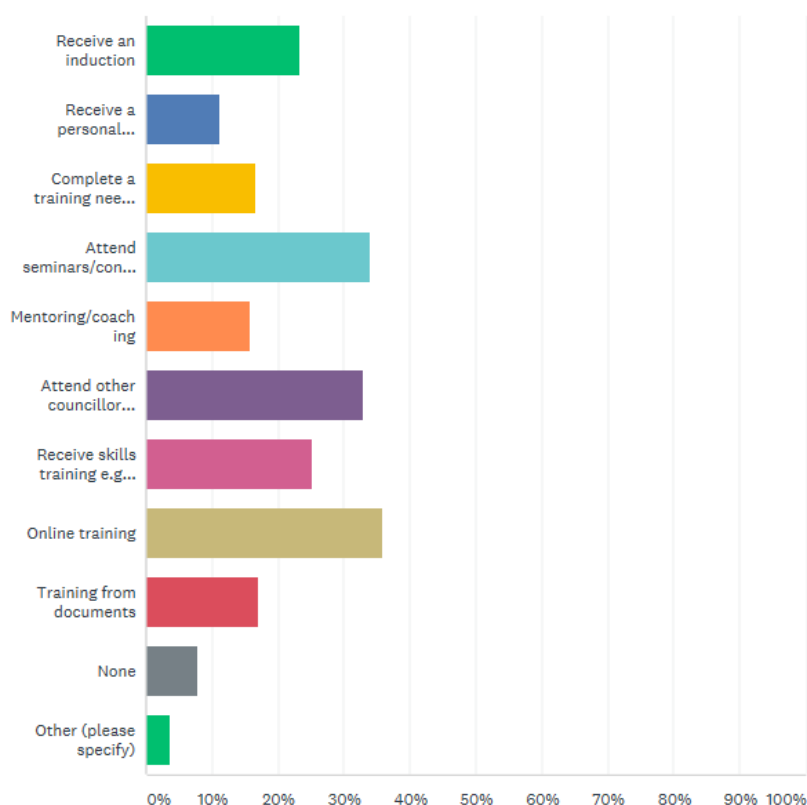
to be more flexible with their meetings, which encouraged parents wanting to be local councillors to stand for election. Through this the council gained a number of younger councillors. The Commission wants to encourage more local councils to do the same.

The census survey also asked about local councillors' main employment status. The survey found 49.6% of councillors are retired, 44.1% in some form of paid employment. Only 5% of councillors were unemployed, with 0.3% of councillors in full time education. The Commission would like to see the results be more proportionate but understands people with less time commitments are more likely to become a local councillor.

Training and development

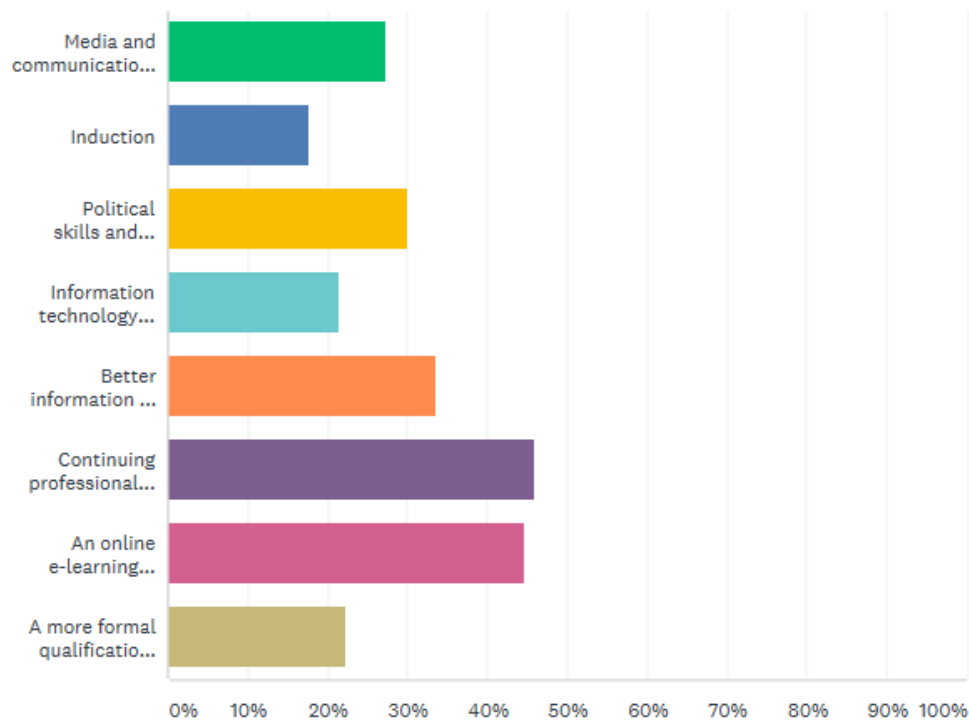
When asked what training local councillors have received in the last 4 years, 19.6% of local councillors responded saying they have not received any form of training. When asked which choice of training they would prefer 7.8% of councillors said none. This is a stark statistic which the Commission is eager to change. The Commission believes all local councillors always have scope to develop and wants to encourage local councillors to get as much training as possible in order to serve their communities to their best ability.

In contrast to this, over 80% of local councillors have received some form of training in the last 4 years with 46.7% of councillors attending seminars and conferences. However only 36.7% have received an induction from their council and the Commission will be looking at ways to encourage



more councils to carry them out. The majority (35.9%) of local councillors who responded said their preferred choice of training would be through an online training course.

The census survey also asked which resources and topics local councillors would like to learn more about. 45.7% of councillors voted for continuing professional development schemes for councillors with a further 44.6% voting in favour of an online e-learning package tailored to the role of a councillor. Coming out at the bottom of the list was induction at 17.5% posing the questions are inductions being carried out properly and do local councillors actually find any benefit from them?

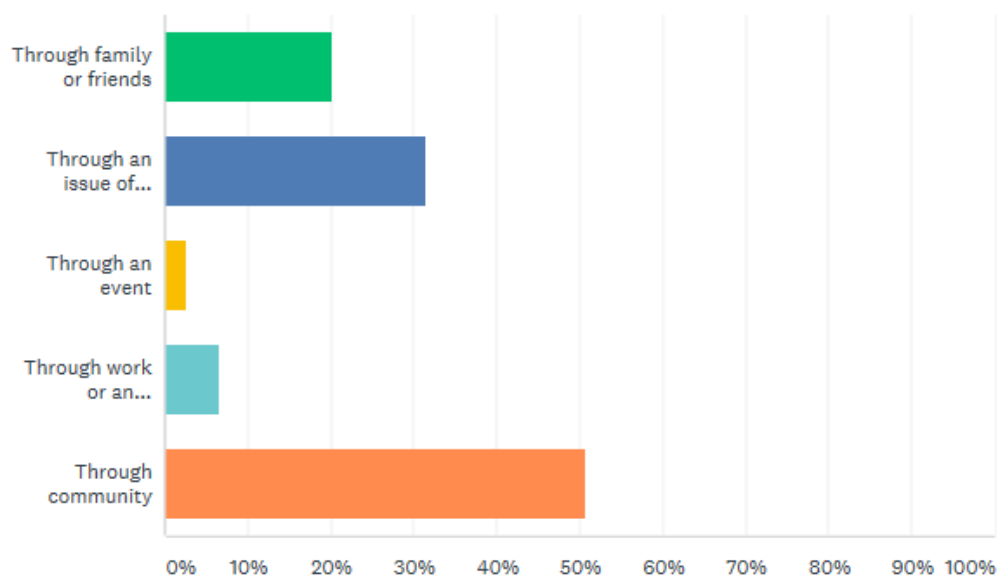


SECTION 2: PERCEPTIONS FROM THE LOCAL COUNCILLOR

In this section the report will look at a number of things including how local councillors first became involved with their local council, how much influence they feel they have on their community in their role as a local councillor and how they would analyse their experience as a local councillor so far.

When asked how the local councillor became involved with their local council, over 50% of councillors responded as getting involved through the community which could imply that local councils are effective in engaging with their communities and they are acting as the hubs of their communities.

31.5% of councillors said they got involved through an issue of interest which could show that those who want to solve local issues see local councils as the way to make a positive local change. 20.1% said they got involved through family or friends. These readings are quite reassuring to the Commission as they show local people are standing for election to their local council for the right reasons; community and issues affecting them.



The census survey also asked how much influence do councillors feel they have on their community with over 68% saying they had some to a lot of influence. This is positive reading for the Commission and highlights the increasing role local councillors are playing in their communities.

Only 3.1% of councillors felt they had no influence on their community what so ever. The Commission was pleased to see this result but would like even more local councillors to feel empowered and is calling for more powers to be devolved down to local councils so they can make a real positive impact on their communities.

When asked if local councillors would recommend becoming a councillor 78.3% said they would. This is a really positive reading for the Commission and shows the positive impact being a local councillor has on those who decide to stand.

In contrast only 8.3% saying they wouldn't. The census survey followed this question up by asking if local councillors intended to stand for re-election. 59.9% said they would, 24.9% said they didn't know and only 15.2% said no. The Commission was once again pleased to see these results and hopes it will encourage more people to stand for election in the run up to the May 2019 elections.

The census survey provided a comments section after this question to allow for reasoning as to why councillors would be standing down. The vast majority of the comments provided related to the reason being they were too old to carry on as a councillor or that the time commitments were too much to carry on.

SECTION 3: DIVERSITY OF LOCAL COUNCILS IN 2018

This section will look at the diversity of local councillors in 2018. It will look at the gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and social status of local councillors. It will explore where local councils are lacking in representation and try to address the issues.

It is important to make the point at this stage that local councils only cover 33% of England, with the majority of local councils covering rural areas, which may have an untypical demographic. This is something to bear in mind when looking at the following results.

The gender balance

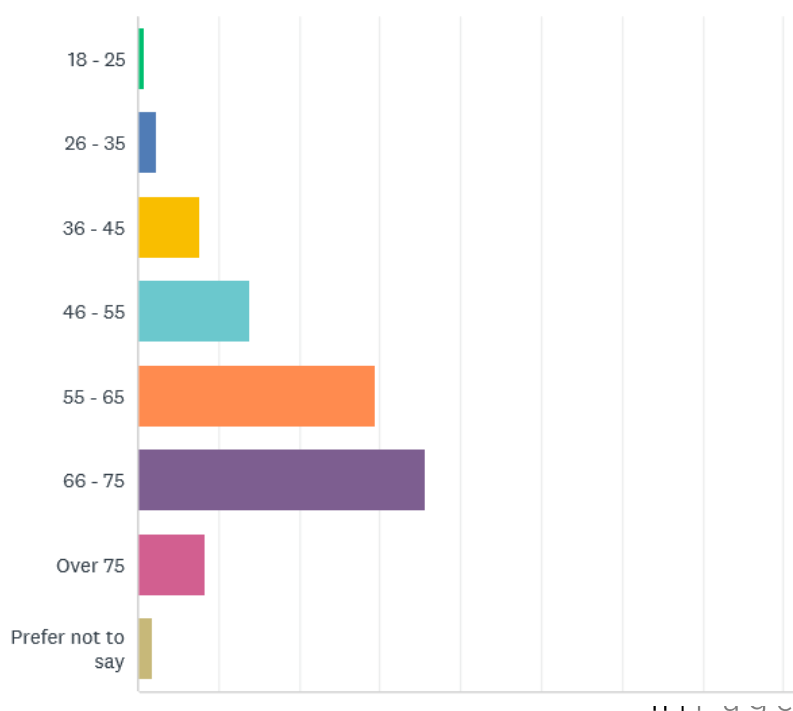
The census survey found that 59.2% of councillors are male, while only 39.2% of councillors are female. The national average works out that around 49% of the UK population are male, while 51% are female. The Commission recognises that local councils are lagging behind the national average on this statistic and will be carrying out campaigns to ensure more women stand for election in 2019. As part of these campaigns the Commission will be talking to more female councillors to see what issues they faced when they stood for election and how local councils can improve.

Embracing youth?

The answer is no... Only 0.7% of local councillors come under the 18-25 age bracket, with a further 2.3% coming under the 26-35 age bracket. Overall only 10.8% of councillors are under the age of 45, with 44% of councillors over the age of 66. This may relate to back to the point made in Section 1 regarding time commitments. It could be argued that the vast majority of councillors within the 66 and over age

bracket are retired meaning they have less time commitments than those who have full time jobs and parental commitments.

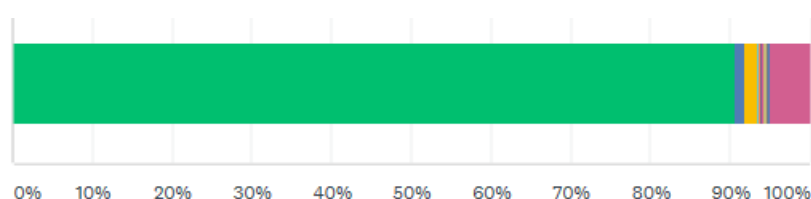
The census survey found that the average age of the local councillor in 2018 is 61, compared to the national average which is 40. As mentioned in the introduction text, this



could be down to the ‘rural effect’ with many local councils serving rural areas, which are stereotypically home to older communities.

Ethnicity and local councils

A staggering 90.5% of local councillors identified themselves as being White British. The national average for White British is 80.5%. 1.6% of councillors identified themselves as ‘Other White’ with a further 1.3% of councillors identifying themselves as ‘White Irish’. 0.5% of councillors identified as being Asian British (Indian) with other results more sporadic. No councillors surveyed identified as being from Chinese ethnic decent.

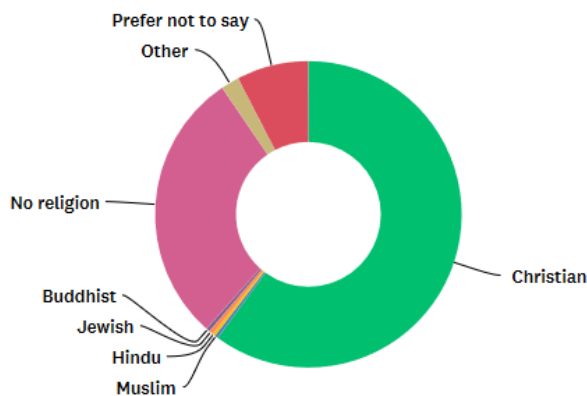


Comparing these results to the national average suggests that local councils are lacking in ethnic representation. The Commission recognises ethnic groups are being under represented on local councils and wants more local councils to do better at engaging with every member of their community.

However, as mentioned previously this could come back to the ‘rural effect’. It could be argued if we compared these statistics to the communities that are served by local councils they may well be representative. The Commission will be carrying out more research into this over the coming year.

Religious affiliation

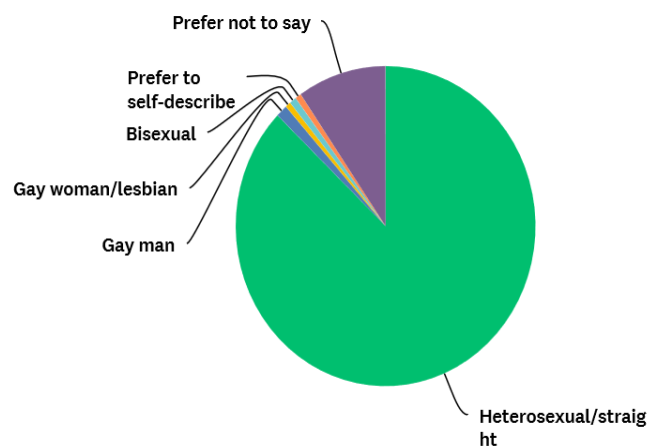
When asked about religious affiliation, 60.1% of local councillors identified as Christian, 0.4% responded as Muslim, 0.3% responded as Hindu, 0.5% responded as Jewish, 0.4% responded as Buddhist, and 1.9% responded as other. 28.9% of councillors responded as having no religion.



The British average for Christianity was 59%, for Muslim was 5%, for other was 4% and for no religion was 25%. Although local councils are lacking in representation for Muslims, the rest of the results were relatively representative. The Commission is however encouraging local councils to engage with every faith in their community to get optimum representation.

Sexual orientation

When asked about sexual orientation, 87.2% of local councillors identified as being heterosexual (straight), while 1.8% identified as being homosexual (gay/lesbian), 0.8% identified as being bisexual and 0.7% preferred to self-describe. Comparing this with the national average, local councils are actually exceeding in this field of representation. 93.4% of Britain identifies as being heterosexual, with 1.2% identifying themselves as homosexual and 0.8% identifying as bisexual. The Commission is encouraging local councils to continue their good work in this field and continue to engage with LGBTQ communities.



Professional background

As mentioned earlier in the report, the survey found 49.6% of councillors are retired with 44.1% in some form of paid employment. Only 5% of councillors were unemployed, with 0.3% of councillors in full time education. Of those employed, we asked a further question regarding the type of role they are currently employed in. Of the councillors who responded 30.1% said they worked in a managerial or executive role and 29.6% said they worked in a professional or technical role. This could show that local councils are attracting mostly highly qualified individuals.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

The Local Council Census Survey gathered information from 2100 respondents. This is estimated to be a 2% sample of local councillors in England. The survey took place over a six month period from 30 October 2017 – 30 May 2018.

The report shows us that local councils are lacking in diversity and need to improve. In particular local councils need to improve in engaging with females, younger audiences (under the age of 45), ethnic minorities, and those who identify as being disabled. This being said, local councils are more diverse than principal authorities (more information can be found in the Local Government Association's Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/national-census-local-aut-6af.pdf>).

It is important to mention that local councils are more diverse than the national average in a number of areas including councillors who identify as being LGBTQ. The statistic for this showed that 3% of local councillors identify as being LGBTQ (in 2015, 1.7% of the UK population identified themselves as being LGBTQ).

It is also important to mention that local councils are usually found within rural areas, which are a lot less diverse compared to their urban areas. More research is needed to find out exactly how representative local councils are of the communities they serve.

The Commission still believes that there is work to be done by local councils to be truly representative but has found through the Local Councillor Census Survey and their evidence gaining exercise that local councils are working hard to engage with their communities and reach out to hard to reach members of the community.

The Commission will be continuing its work to help local councils improve in this area by partnering with Company of Community Organisers to train local councillors with community organising skills and make them aware of the effective techniques to help them engage with their communities. The Commission will also be producing new publications and toolkits to help local councils promote what they do and, in turn, appeal to newer audiences.

The May 2019 elections will be the first big chance local councils have to engage with diverse audiences and become truly representative of the communities they serve.