

# Auckland Council Elections Candidate Experience Survey 2016

July 2017

Technical Report 2017/004







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Auckland Council  
Technical Report 2017/004  
ISSN 2230-4525 (Print)  
ISSN 2230-4533 (Online)

ISBN 978-0-9941451-0-9 (Print)  
ISBN 978-0-9941451-1-6 (PDF)

This report has been peer reviewed by the Peer Review Panel.
Review submitted on 20 February 2017 Review completed on 3 July 2017 Reviewed by two reviewers
Approved for Auckland Council publication by:  Name: Dr Lucy Baragwanath  Position: Manager, Research and Evaluation (RIMU)  Name: Eva McLaren  Position: Manager, Economic and Social Research and Evaluation (RIMU)
Date: 3 July 2017

### Recommended citation

Allpress, J. A and Meares, C (2017). Auckland Council elections candidate experience survey 2016. Auckland Council technical report, TR2017/004

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# Auckland Council elections candidate experience survey 2016

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## **Executive summary**

After the 2016 Auckland Council elections, a survey was conducted to understand candidates' awareness of the 'Love your Auckland – Stand for council' campaign, their experiences of the nomination process, their awareness and usage of the resources available to them, and to identify areas for future service improvement.

A total of 38 per cent of candidates (164 out of 427) responded to the survey.

### **'Love your Auckland - Stand for council' campaign**

Overall awareness of the 'Love your Auckland' campaign was high, but lower for candidates who were running for the first time and/or who came from non-Pākehā backgrounds.

Most candidates reported that the campaign had either a neutral or positive impact on their decision to stand for election. Comments on the campaign were split; some candidates liked the approach while others felt that it was unhelpful and/or a poor use of public money.

Candidates engaged with 'Love your Auckland' through a number of channels, notably the council website, Facebook, online and newspaper advertisements, and posters in libraries and council buildings.

### **Nomination process**

Nine in 10 candidates were able to access all the nomination information they needed. Most candidates also said it was easy to find this information, although one in 10 reported some difficulty. The majority (84%) of those who were able to find information said it was accurate.

Younger and non-Pākehā candidates were more likely to experience difficulty finding the information they needed. Younger candidates (aged 18-54) also rated the nomination information they did find as less accurate than did older candidates. Participants made a number of suggestions for improvement, many of which focused on providing an online nomination platform and making nomination process information clearer and easier to locate.

### **Quality of resources**

There was a high level of awareness and usage of the Auckland Council website by candidates, highlighting its role as a central information hub. Awareness of the candidate information handbook and candidate promotional booklet was also high, although usage for these two resources was lower.

Candidates who used each specific resource were asked to rate its usefulness. The candidate information handbook was rated most useful. The candidate audio booklet,

candidate promotional booklet, council website and the Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) booklet were considered helpful by the majority of candidates who used them.

## **‘Show your love’ website**

Auckland Council developed the ‘Show your love’ website as a way to engage voters. The primary aim of the website was to help voters find information on candidates in their area.

Most of the candidates who responded to the survey contributed information to the website. Those who did not were more likely to be older, and Māori, and less likely to be Chinese, Indian and Samoan.

Approximately half of all the candidates who reported contributing to the website were unsure whether it had had a positive impact on their campaign, with roughly even numbers of the remainder feeling that the website did and didn’t benefit their campaign, respectively.

Survey respondents provided a number of suggestions for how to improve the ‘Show your love’ website. Many of the comments related to the website’s functionality, difficulties filling in the forms, the general design, and the need for more real-time information.

## **Understanding elections**

Participant comments indicate a lack of understanding of local body election processes and the nature of Auckland Council’s mandate in a range of areas, including voter enrolment, online voting and candidate/voter awareness.

## **Areas for improvement**

The main areas for improvement, as outlined in Section 7.0 of this report, are :

- Make nomination processes clearer and easier
- Increase awareness of the ‘Stand for council’ message, particularly among non-Pākehā and first-time candidates
- Build on communication channel successes, targeting different candidate groups
- Ensure all candidates are aware of and have access to every resource available to them
- Improve the functionality and impact of the ‘Show your love’ website
- Ensure customer-facing staff are adequately informed
- Ensure all communications are clear
- Review the communication of the election responsibilities of Auckland Council and other parties
- Broaden the provision of assisted voting support.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Voter turnout for local elections has been declining in many areas of New Zealand since the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> In 2013, just 35.5 per cent of eligible Aucklanders voted, one of the lowest turnouts in New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> Auckland Council plays two key roles in the election process: to ensure that statutory requirements around the elections process are met; and to enable all Aucklanders to participate, as voters and/or as candidates. As one way to fulfil these obligations, Auckland Council's Electoral Officer provides support and resources to all candidates who stand for election in the Auckland Council area.

Local government elections are held under the Local Electoral Act 2001 (and its associated regulations, the Local Electoral Regulations 2001). Parliamentary elections are held under the Electoral Act 1993 (and associated regulations). The Electoral Act makes the Electoral Commission responsible for the electoral roll and for parliamentary elections. The Electoral Commission provides copies of the electoral roll to council electoral officers for local elections. The Local Electoral Act requires councils to appoint electoral officers, who are responsible for the conduct of the council elections. In practice, councils have either appointed a staff member as electoral officer or the principal of the contracted election provider (for Auckland Council this was Dale Ofoske, Managing Director of Independent Election Services Ltd). The appointment of an electoral officer means the responsibility for the elections is not directly with the incumbent council members. The Society of Local Government Managers (SOLGM) provides a comprehensive code of good practice for conducting elections. While the focus of SOLGM is on the management of elections, Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) provides resources for candidates and conducts research on election issues such as voter turnout, across all councils.

In 2016, Auckland Council provided a range of resources to encourage and support candidates, including a pre-election 'stand for council' campaign, a range of informational resources in multiple formats, and a website for candidates to upload additional information about themselves.

Following the 2016 elections, a survey of candidates was conducted to understand their awareness of the Love your Auckland – Stand for council' campaign; their experiences of the nomination process; their awareness and usage of the resources available to them, including the 'Show your love' website; and to identify areas for future service improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lgnz.co.nz/home/nzs-local-government/vote2016/campaign-and-research/>

<sup>2</sup> Buzz Channel (2016). Demographic patterns of behaviours in Auckland local government elections. Auckland Council.

This report summarises the survey findings, and is organised into six main sections focusing on:

- the 'Love your Auckland – Stand for council' campaign
- the nomination process and Electoral Officer support
- the quality of resources provided to candidates
- usage of 'Show your love' candidate website
- communication of election results
- understanding elections
- areas for improvement.

The survey was conducted and analysed by Auckland Council's Research and Evaluation Unit.

Overall, 38 per cent of all the candidates (164 out of the 427 unique candidates invited to participate<sup>3</sup>) completed at least some of the survey, with 150 of the 164 completing all the questions. The candidates who completed the survey were similar in demographic characteristics (age, gender and ethnicity) to the wider pool of candidates.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.1 Method

All Auckland Council candidates were invited to complete an electronic survey on their experience as a candidate.<sup>5</sup>

The initial invitation was sent to all candidates on 18 October 2016.<sup>6</sup> The survey was open for three weeks, with two email reminders sent to candidates during that time.

The survey analysis was conducted in SPSS analysis software, Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word.

---

<sup>3</sup> A total of 432 candidates stood for election, however 5 opted out of email communications so did not receive an email invite to complete this survey.

<sup>4</sup> A separate report on the demographic characteristics of candidates was prepared by Auckland Council's Research and Evaluation Unit: [The demographic characteristics of Auckland Council candidates and elected members](#). Auckland Council technical report, TR2017/017. Because the separate report contains information for a larger group of candidates, no demographic information is presented here.

<sup>5</sup> Only those running for Mayor or for membership of the Governing Body or local boards were invited to participate.

<sup>6</sup> Voting closed on 8 October 2016, with progress results announced 8 October and final results formally declared by public notice on Saturday 15 October 2016.

## 2.0 Love your Auckland – Stand for council

Aucklanders were encouraged to stand for election through the 'Love your Auckland – Stand for council' campaign.

### 2.1 Awareness and impact on decision to stand

Most candidates were aware of the 'Love your Auckland' campaign (83%), with a minority either not aware of the campaign (13%) or unsure (5%).

Most candidates were **aware** of the 'Love your Auckland - Stand for council' campaign

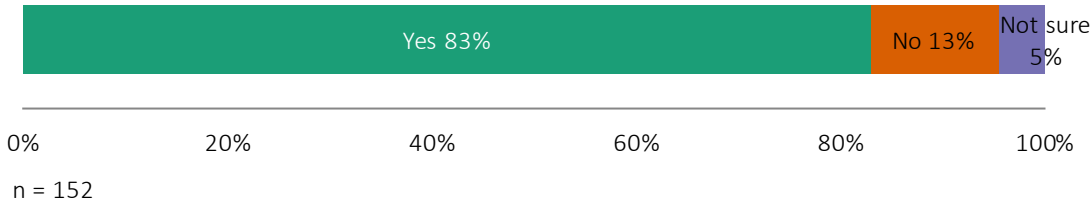


Figure 1. Awareness of the 'Love your Auckland - Stand for council' campaign

Those who reported being unaware or unsure were more likely to be first-time candidates (see Section 2.5 below) and less likely to be Pākehā (e.g., Samoan, Chinese, Māori, Cook Island Māori and 'Other').

Of those who were aware of the campaign, most (72%) were neutral about the impact it had on their decision to stand. A quarter of candidates (26%) stated that the campaign had a positive impact on their decision to stand. Almost no one reported a negative impact on their decision to stand.

Candidates were neutral or positive about the impact of the 'Love your Auckland' campaign on their decision to stand

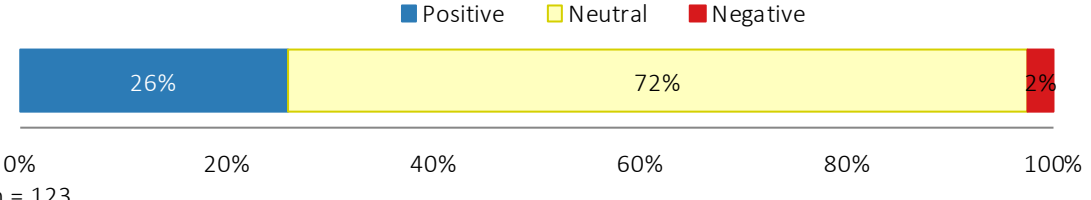


Figure 2. Impact of 'Love your Auckland – Stand for council' on candidates' decisions to stand<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Note, this and subsequent graphs have simplified the 5-point scales into 3 categories (e.g. 'somewhat positive' and 'very positive' have been combined into one response type).

## 2.2 Awareness channels

Most candidates who were aware of the 'Love your Auckland' campaign heard or saw information about it on the Auckland Council website. Of the different advertising media used, Facebook, online advertisements, newspaper advertisements, and posters in libraries and council buildings were most effective. Between 45 and 34 per cent of candidates heard about the campaign via these media.

Radio advertisements, promotional materials in community centres, and events were less impactful, with fewer than one in five candidates hearing about the campaign through these media.

### Many candidates heard about 'Love your Auckland' via Facebook, advertisements and posters

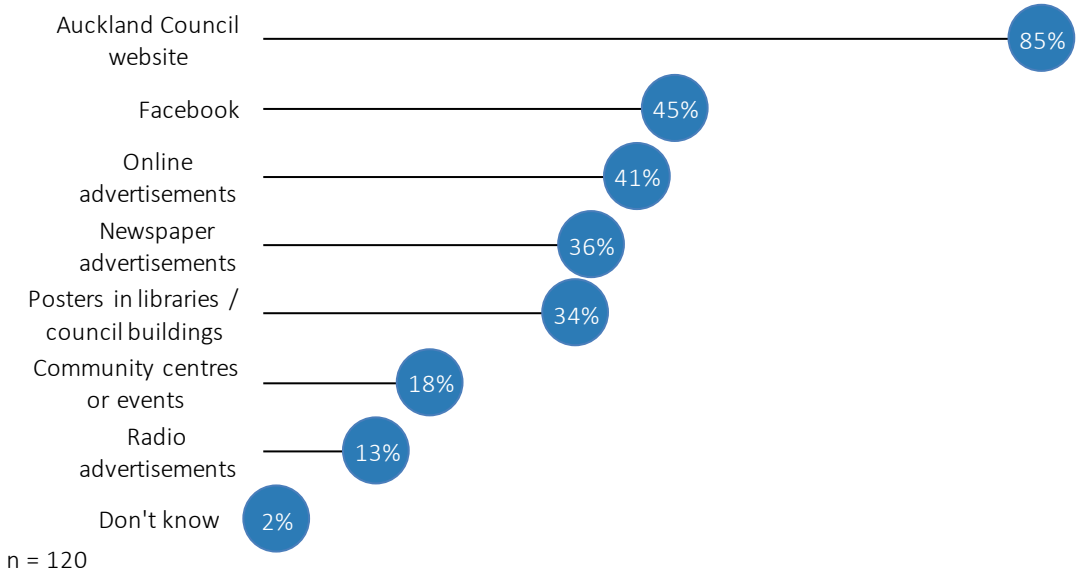


Figure 3. How candidates saw or heard about 'Love your Auckland'

## 2.3 Feedback from candidates

Many of the 37 candidates who provided comments about the 'Love your Auckland - Stand for council' campaign were positive about the campaign and its impacts.

*Great idea, definitely do it again. Felt like a positive campaign, giving people a reason to vote.<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>8</sup> All candidate quotes are presented in italics. Spelling and grammar have been corrected to aid the reader; when we have added or changed candidates' words to provide clarity, this is indicated by square brackets.

*The 'Love your Auckland' brand name was fantastic - it was inspirational and informative to encouraging voters. As a candidate the information was great!*

*I found out about it after I had already signed up to stand, but I wish I'd seen it earlier. I think it's integral to getting younger people to apply.*

*I really liked the approach. It didn't make me want to stand but it did reinforce my decision and made the process seem accessible.*

*I think it was great that the council did this, it certainly raised the profile and I think the voting turnout and engagement.*

*I think it was a great campaign to engage the otherwise un-engaged but personally I was driven by local issues. Great marketing campaign though and an on point theme to hopefully get people involved. Again, thank you.*

Amongst those who were not in favour of the campaign, the most frequently cited reason was the cost of the campaign and the return on this investment for rate payers.

*[It] cost a lot of money for little return in terms of voter turnout.*

*Large waste of ratepayers' money.*

*I don't think this campaign helps. The money would be better put into providing more detailed information about candidates.*

Other respondents commented on the content of the campaign, in particular the slogan and the artwork. These were perceived as irrelevant, misleading, patronising, confusing or cheesy.

*I thought the artwork was pretty but it looked like a hippy van and that is for people who grew up in the 60s and 70s, not young people. Also, I couldn't work out what the message was straight away. It was trying to be too clever. Just like last time's ghost campaign. Ad needs to speak to the lowest common denominator.*

*The billboards on buses and bus stops [were] weak and unclear. It could have been for an environment clean-up campaign rather than local body information.*

*I thought the heart branding was confusing and didn't relate to elections or standing for election.*

*I think there may be a better slogan out there somewhere - 'Love your Auckland' just doesn't sound quite right.*

*With council satisfaction so low, and people generally disengaged, this seemed a very odd creative choice. It seemed to be a relatively high profile campaign that completely missed the audience it was trying to target e.g. particularly under 35s. I don't think 'love' is the issue they have!*<sup>9</sup>

Candidates also felt that resources would have been better allocated to increasing enrolment or the development of an online voting system. These suggestions lie outside the remit of Auckland Council and are discussed in the section titled Understanding elections on page 41.

## **2.4 Differences by age**

Candidates were split into two approximately evenly sized groups of 'younger candidates' aged 18-54 years (n = 66) and 'older candidates' aged 55 and over (n = 79), and differences between the two groups were compared.<sup>10</sup>

Awareness of 'Love your Auckland' was similar for the two age groups, however younger candidates were more likely to hear about the campaign online (Facebook and online advertisements), as well as via posters in libraries and council buildings, and through community centres or events.

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<sup>9</sup> Research assessing the impacts of Auckland Council's 2016 voter awareness campaign showed that it was successful in engaging younger voters aged between 18 and 39 years of age. See Todd, J (2017) *Awareness of and attitudes towards voting in 2016 Auckland Council elections*, TR2017/013.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix A for a summary of demographic differences between younger and older candidates.



**Younger candidates** were more likely than **older candidates** to hear about 'Love your Auckland' online and in council buildings

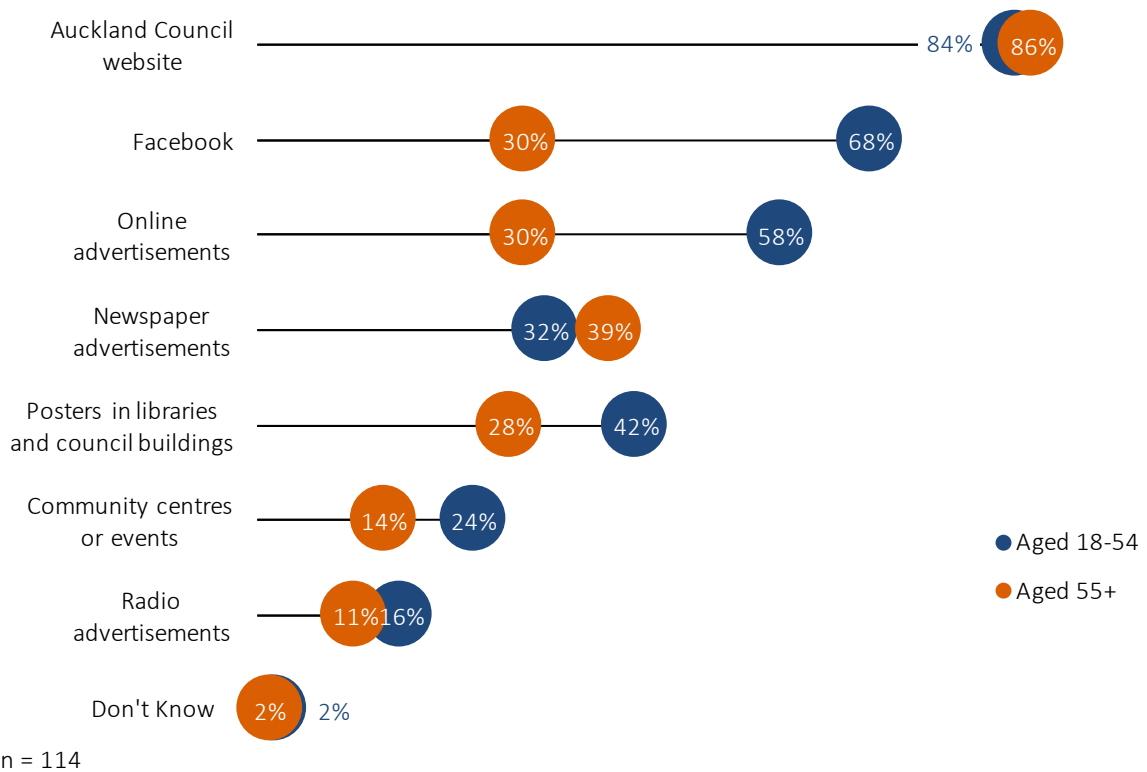


Figure 4. How candidates heard about 'Love your Auckland', by age

There was no difference between the two age groups in the reported impact of 'Love your Auckland' on candidates' decision to stand.

An analysis of the comments made by younger and older candidates suggests that the younger group was more positive about the campaign and less likely to believe that the costs outweighed the benefits. In contrast, older candidates were less positive and more inclined to feel that the campaign was too costly and the benefits of it minimal.

## 2.5 Differences by new and returning candidates

Candidates were split into 'first-time candidates' (n = 75), and 'returning candidates' (n = 75) and differences between the two groups were compared.<sup>11</sup>

Awareness of 'Love your Auckland' was notably higher amongst returning candidates with 91 per cent of candidates in this group aware of the campaign (compared to 75% of first-time candidates).

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix B for a summary of demographic differences between first-time and returning candidates.

**Awareness** of the 'Love your Auckland - Stand for council' campaign was higher for returning candidates than for first-time candidates

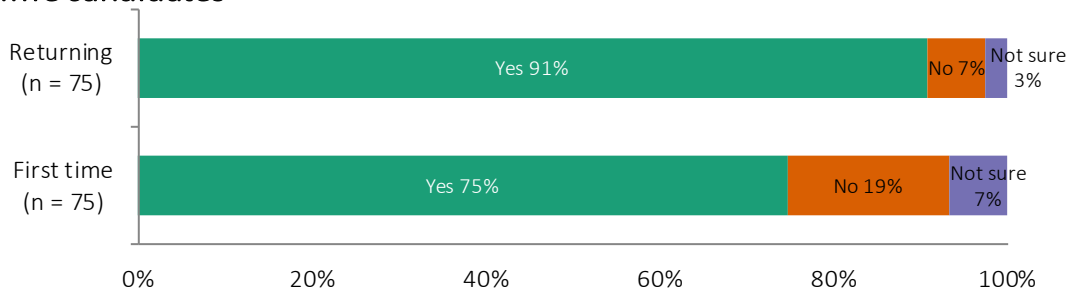


Figure 5. Awareness of the 'Love your Auckland - Stand for council' campaign, by term

The ways in which first-time and returning candidates heard about 'Love your Auckland' were broadly similar, with the exception that first-time candidates were more likely than returning candidates to hear about the campaign through newspaper advertisements and less likely to hear via online advertisements (see Figure 6 below). First-time and returning candidates rated the impact of the campaign on their decision to stand similarly.

**First-time candidates** were more likely than **returning candidates** to hear about 'Love your Auckland' via newspaper adverts

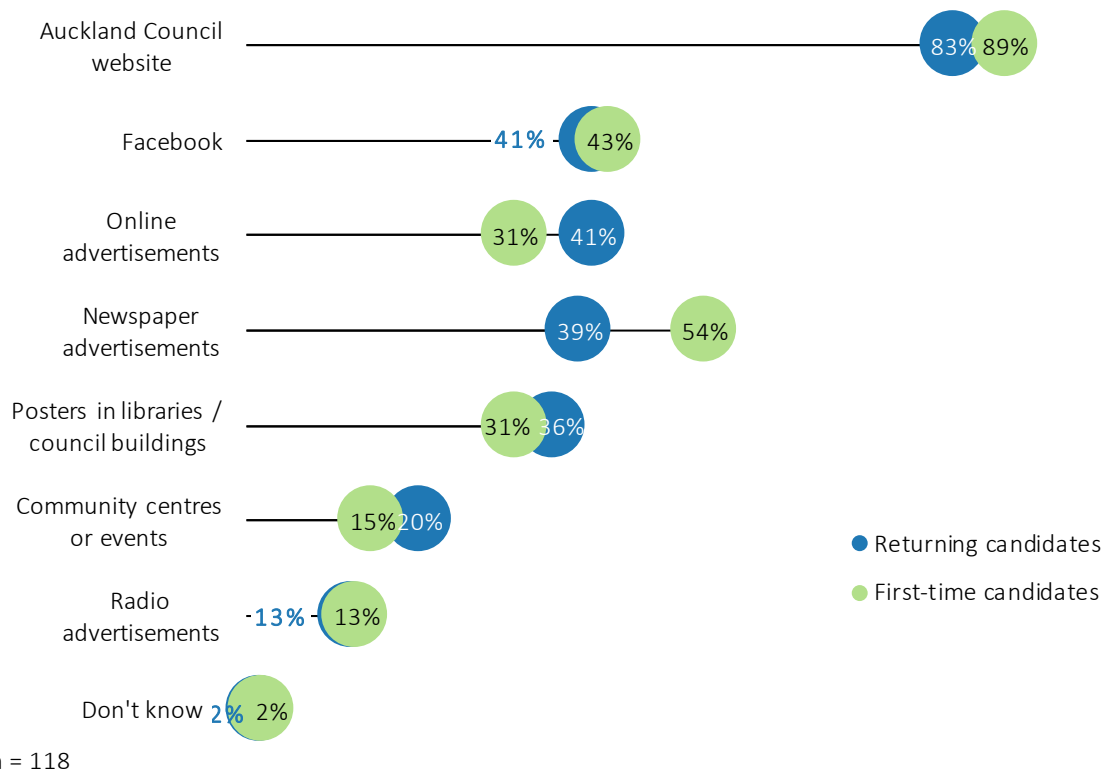


Figure 6. How candidates heard about 'Love your Auckland', by term

### 3.0 Nomination process

Candidates were asked about their experience of the nomination process, in terms of the accessibility and perceived accuracy of information, as well as the support provided by the Electoral Office.

#### 3.1 Ease, accuracy and accessibility of information

Overall, three out of four candidates reported that it was easy to find information on the nomination process (i.e. rated ease as '4' or '5' on a 5-point scale). One in 10 candidates had some difficulty finding information on the nomination process.

Those who found information more difficult to find tended to be younger (see Section 3.4 below) and were less likely to be Pākehā (notably Māori, Samoan and 'Other' ethnicities). These results suggest that changes designed to improve the accessibility of information need to cater specifically to these groups of candidates.

Finding information on the nomination process was **easy** for the majority of candidates

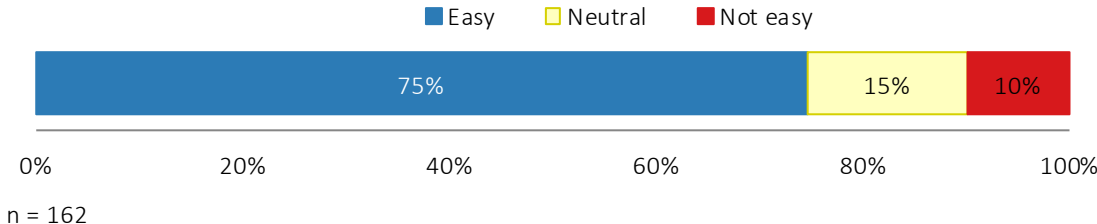


Figure 7. Ease of finding information about the nomination process

When candidates did find information on the nomination process, it was seen as accurate by 84 per cent of candidates.<sup>12</sup> Five per cent of candidates considered the information inaccurate to some degree.

<sup>12</sup> Note, numbers may differ slightly from the manual addition of percentages reported in figures, due to rounding to whole numbers in figures.

Nomination information was seen as **accurate** by most candidates

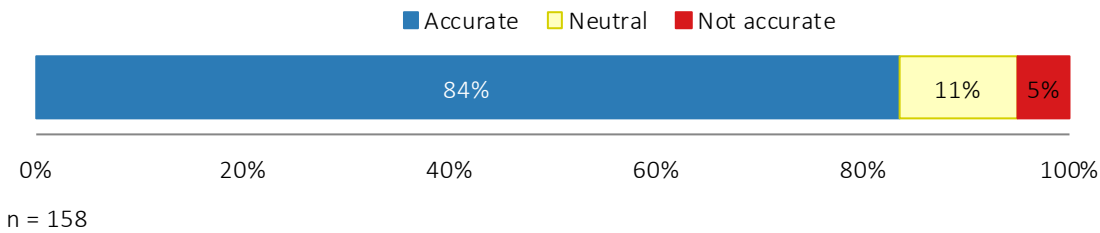


Figure 8. Perceived accuracy of nomination information

Nine in 10 candidates reported being able to access all the information they needed. A small number of candidates (8%) were not able to do so.

The majority of candidates were able to **access** all of the information they needed

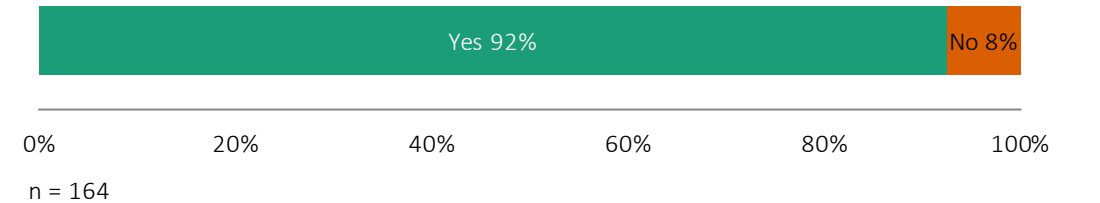


Figure 9. Accessibility of nomination information

### 3.2 Auckland Council Electoral Officer support

Approximately one in three candidates reported seeking assistance from the Auckland Council Electoral Officer.

A minority of candidates **sought support** from the Electoral Officer

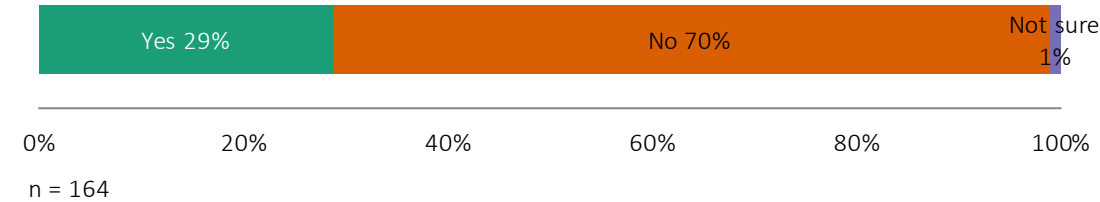


Figure 10. Electoral officer support

Of those who did seek support from the Electoral Officer, 81 per cent rated the support received as helpful. A small number of candidates (13% of those who sought assistance,

representing 6 survey respondents) found the support provided unhelpful (selecting either '1' or '2' on a 5-point scale).

### The Electoral Officer assistance received was helpful for most who sought support

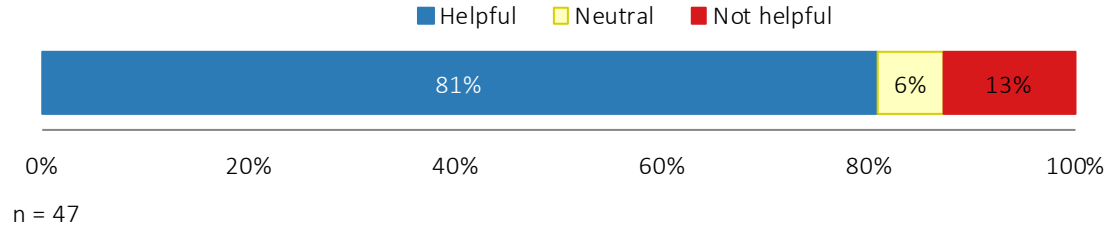


Figure 11. Helpfulness of electoral officer support

### 3.3 Feedback from candidates

Fifty-nine of the 150 survey respondents provided feedback on improving the nomination process for future candidates. Many suggestions focused on the information provided to candidates as printed material, via websites or through Auckland Council staff.

Some participants identified aspects of the process about which candidates required more or better information, including the criteria for nominees, locations for submitting applications or the time required to undertake the role of an elected member.

*[It] should be clear[er] who can nominate. I had a person that nominated me but was not yet registered. This came at a very late hour and put me under pressure to get another nominator.*

*In the rush to sign up I ended up having to be nominated a second time - as I had misread the requirement that you had to be nominated by someone in your exact area. Doh! Maybe this needs to be made a bit clearer - as I went in to the office with my forms there was a host of other folks in the same boat.*

*The instruction on where to submit my application within a council building was not clear and I had to visit the help desk to find it out. More visible directional instruction would help.*

*While a number of candidates stood, some didn't realise the time that is necessary.* Other respondents focused on their experiences locating information on the website.

*When going to the council website, I found it difficult initially to find election/candidate information.*

*Have a dedicated website not mixed in with council with lots of portals to move through. Keep it clear and simple.*

*[I'm] very experienced and yet found the multiple sites hard to follow. Election staff helped me find the election sign sites files on Auckland Transport – [it] needs all to be in one easy place and printable.*

*It is not good to design sites like Love Auckland ... and then the other one that I don't remember the name for ... as candidates and public don't know how to find any of this online information about candidates and process.*

The important role that staff play in communicating information was also mentioned.

*Staff in the office must be train[ed] to know what they are doing.*

*I sent many emails to [ ] and received no replies.*

*Nice staff at council offices had little training it seems as didn't know process for some election things and made them feel bad not to be able to help.*

In addition to a focus on information for candidates, participants also stressed the importance of communicating appropriately with potential candidates and voters.

*Disabled people are largely unaware, and not informed of possible participation in elections as candidates. Communicating the existence of these opportunities with diverse communities is a long deliberative process that the State is obliged to invest in. This can be helped by providing resources in a range of formats and methods. One audio booklet with nomination was produced - this is only one small step towards full equity of access and inclusion.*

*I strongly believe some training, as well as well-targeted information sessions will not only help educate the large Samoan (especially) and other Pacific Island groups within each ward and local boards, but also prepare them to register for voting in time and give them confidence in casting a vote on the forms provided.*

A number of respondents also supported the shift to online nominations.<sup>13</sup>

*Put it online.*

---

<sup>13</sup> This would require a change to the Local Electoral Act 2001.

*Creating a framework for submitting nomination forms online would be good.*

*Allow it to be done online with digital photos and documents.*

Respondents also made suggestions for improving the nomination process.

*Proper meet the candidate dates [should be set] before nominations close so candidates know and can prepare easily.*

*Financial assistance to candidates that cannot [afford] the fee but want to be a candidate for office, therefore making it accessible and an opportunity for everyone.<sup>14</sup>*

Lastly in this section, respondents also acknowledged the efforts of staff involved in the 2016 election and noted that the process had worked well.

*Found it excellent and straightforward! No changes necessary.*

*It was an easy process, the hardest part was pinning down referees to get them to sign the documents.*

*The Auckland Council and Electoral Office did a super job. I see no gaps. Thank you.*

### **3.4 Differences by age**

Overall, younger candidates rated their ability to access all the information they needed slightly lower than older candidates (89% of younger candidates vs. 95% of older candidates).

In line with this finding, older candidates reported that nomination information was both easier to find and more accurate when they found it.

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<sup>14</sup> The fee candidates are charged is a legal requirement and can be reimbursed after the election if the candidate gets one-quarter, or more, of the votes of the least successful candidate.

## Older candidates found information **easier** to find than younger candidates

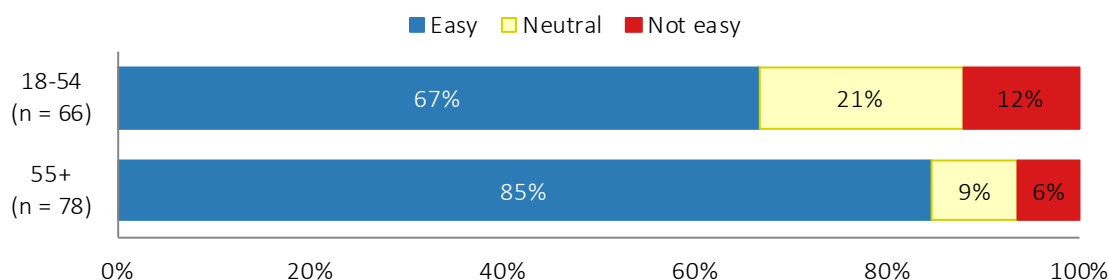


Figure 12. Ease of finding information about the nomination process, by age

## Older candidates felt the information they obtained was more **accurate** than younger candidates

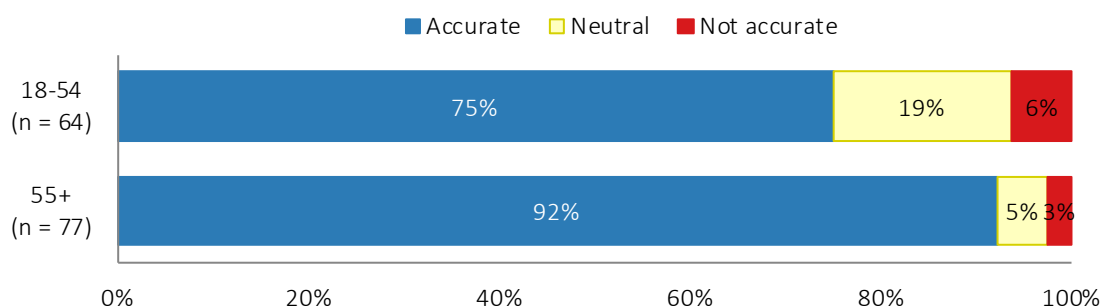


Figure 13. Perceived accuracy of nomination information, by age

An analysis of the comments made by older and younger candidates did not fully explain these age differences. Both groups identified instances where information was difficult to find. Similarly, both groups mentioned instances where the information they were provided, from a range of sources, was inaccurate. These were less frequent, however, than comments made by both younger and older candidates about dealing with information that was confusing or difficult to understand.

The notable difference between younger and older candidates was that those in the younger age group were much more likely to suggest making information and/or the nomination process available online, indicating that younger candidates may have responded less positively to questions about ease and accuracy because of different expectations regarding being able to navigate the nomination process electronically.

Older candidates were more likely to seek the support of the Electoral Office (32% of candidates aged 55+ sought support vs. 24% of those aged 18-54).

Although the numbers of respondents was low, older candidates were more likely to find the electoral officer support provided to be helpful (see Figure 14 below).



## Older candidates found the assistance they received from the Electoral Officer more helpful than younger candidates

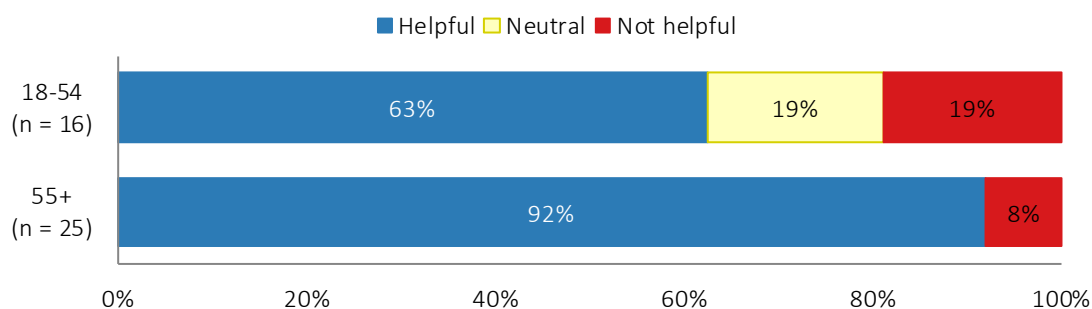


Figure 14. Helpfulness of electoral officer support, by age

### 3.5 Differences by new and returning candidates

Overall, returning candidates were less likely than first-time candidates to feel that they were able to access all the information they needed (87% of returning vs. 96% of first-time candidates).

However, both groups rated the ease of finding information and the accuracy of that information similarly, indicating that returning candidates may have desired more information.

Returning candidates were more likely to seek assistance from the Electoral Office about the nomination process (32% vs 24% of first-time candidates), but both groups rated the helpfulness of the support received similarly.

## **4.0 Quality of resources**

Candidates were asked about their awareness and usage of the different resources provided for them, as well as how useful they found those resources.

A range of resources was available for candidates. The Auckland Council website acted as a central repository of information and also provided links to other resources, such as candidate-related research.

Three candidate-related booklets were available, including a thin, 31-page promotional booklet providing an overview of Auckland Council and the election process; a 115-page information handbook providing a detailed explanation of the nomination and election processes (available also as an audio booklet); and a 20-page Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) booklet with an overview of local government elections.

Note, candidates were not provided with a printed 'pack' containing all resources, they were expected to find resources appropriate to them in physical locations (e.g. council service centres) or online.

### **4.1 Awareness and usage of resources**

There was a high level of both awareness and usage of the Auckland Council website by candidates, highlighting its role as a central hub of information. Awareness of the candidate information handbook and candidate promotional booklet was also high, although usage was lower with only 62 per cent and 57 per cent of candidates respectively using these resources.

Awareness and usage of press releases and information published by the media was reported by 52 per cent and 38 per cent of candidates, respectively.

Awareness and usage of the elections audio booklet, informational videos and the LGNZ booklet was generally low.

## Awareness and useage of candidate resources

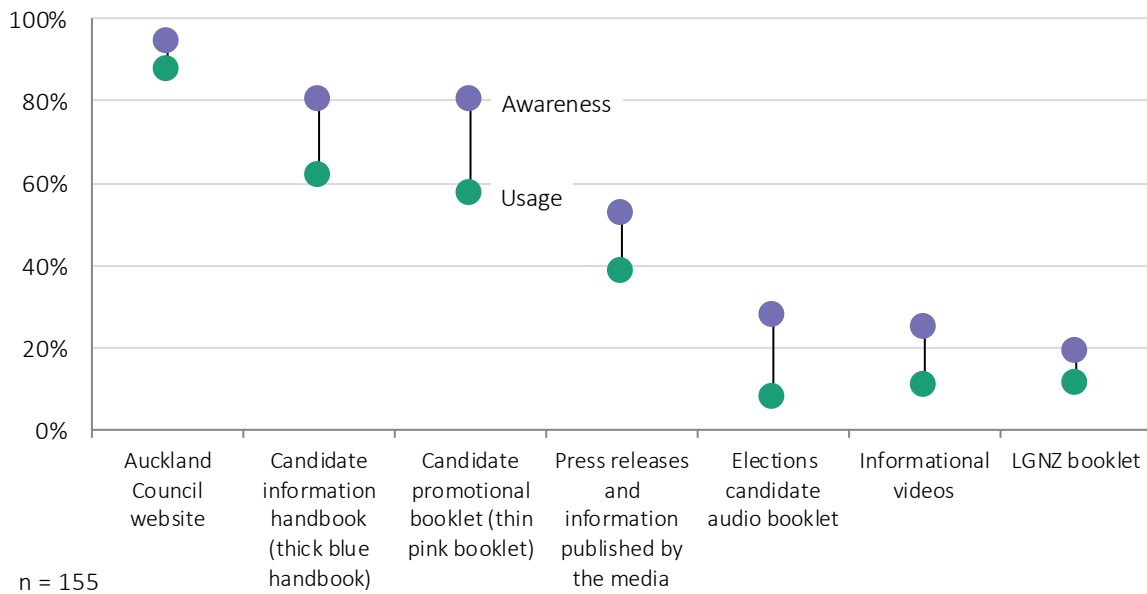


Figure 15. Awareness and usage of different candidate resources

## 4.2 Usefulness of resources

Candidates that reported using a resource were then asked how useful they found it. The candidate information handbook was rated as most useful, with 83 per cent of users finding it useful.

The candidate audiobook, promotional booklet, council website and LGNZ booklet were rated as helpful by between 78 and 71 per cent of the candidates who used them, as illustrated in Figure 16.

Informational videos as well as press releases and information in the media were seen as less helpful, with only one in two candidates who used these resources finding them useful.

## Information booklets and council website rated as more **useful** than informational videos and media information

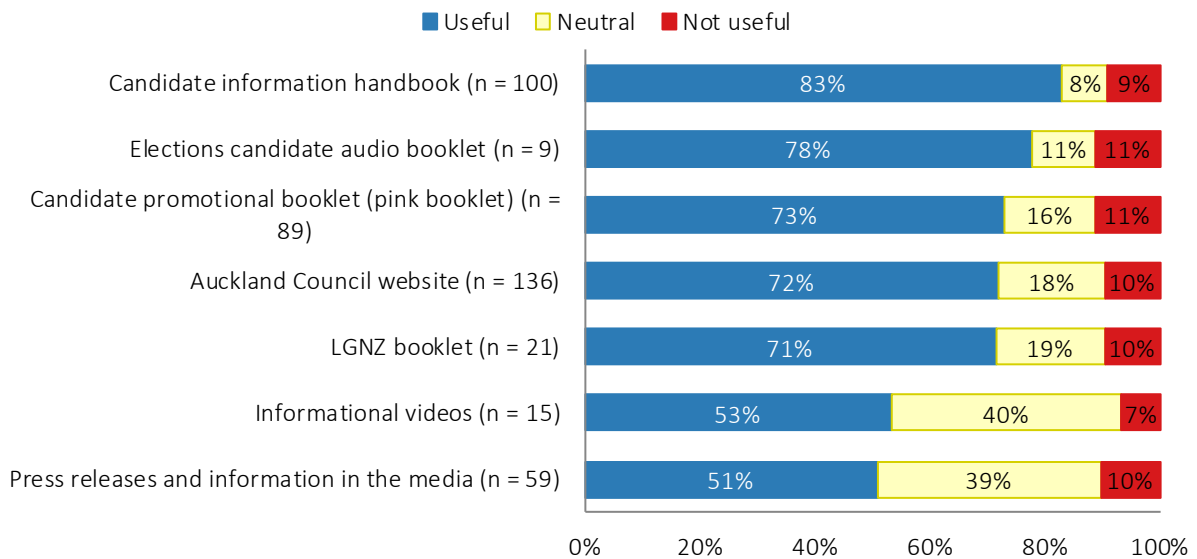


Figure 16. Reported usefulness of different candidate resources

Candidates were asked about the support they received from [elections@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:elections@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz); more than two-thirds found this communication helpful.

## Communications from [elections@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:elections@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz) were seen as **helpful** by over two-thirds of candidates

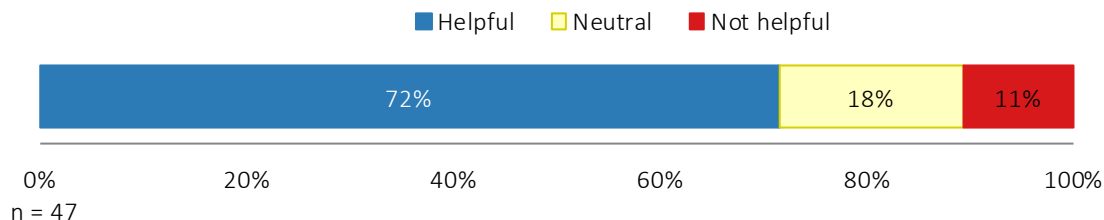


Figure 17. Helpfulness of Auckland Council and Electoral Office email communications

### 4.3 Suggestions for improvement

Candidates who responded to the question about improving resources for future candidates were generally positive about the resources provided to them during the 2016 election campaign.

*I liked the warning to candidates about checking signs after the storms. I had noticed a few (others) were down.*

*Keep up the good work.*

*The 'Show your love' website was much better than 2013, could use similar format for preliminary information too.*

*They were very helpful. Thank you.*

Many of the remaining comments focused on the accuracy and clarity of the information provided to candidates.

*[I received] emails with conflicting information. Emails [were] poorly drafted so [the] information presented [was] not concise or accurate enough.*

*Not many communications from Auckland Council [were] received and some of the details were incorrect (e.g. due time of candidate information submission on [the] 'Show your love' website). More thorough preparation would help prevent any confusion.*

Several candidates described a lack of awareness of what was available and said that finding information, on the website and through other media, was very difficult.

*I was only made aware of the candidate handbook when I took the nomination form in, by then I had already searched for information myself and made calls to Electoral Services. I never discovered any information videos and never saw any promotion for candidates. There were no information evenings either. Generally I thought it was far more difficult to find information for candidates than it was in 2013.*

*Finding them on the Auckland Council website was initially very time-consuming. I expected a local body election flash on the front page and once followed I expected to see another that said "Standing for Election" etc. It was a trial finding the DHB stuff too.*

*[I'd like to see] one site to find information and some decent search engine work so that it can be found online. I did like the hard copies Auckland produced though.*

*I didn't know about the handbooks - I bet those were great. A heads-up on the process, and what you might need to do as a campaigner [would be helpful]. Everything was new and we kept finding out things a week before they were due.*

A number of candidates made requests for specific information; about signage, candidate responsibilities and legislation, for example.

*Clearly define info about signage. Most incumbent candidates were waving signs at intersections throughout the election period and election signs with "thank you" across them after the election period, putting newer candidates at a disadvantage while blatantly flouting the rules. Incumbent candidates also had their signs on council property and reserves because they knew Auckland Transport did not have the manpower to drive around checking unless someone reported or complained. There should be immediate penalties for this kind of behaviour and it should be spelled out in the info booklets.<sup>15</sup>*

*More specific information about the Act/s governing the local body. More information about responsibilities of candidates.<sup>16</sup>*

Although most respondents addressed the informational resources provided to candidates in their responses to this question, the services provided to disabled voters were described as an area of concern by one candidate.

*Assisted Voting services were unnecessarily restricted to only blind people - neglecting a wider range of disabled voters who would benefit from cognitive and physical assistance to cast their vote. Promotion was very limited and delivery was arranged in a counter-productive way to the intended objectives. Media coverage of this service was misleading/confusing as it suggested availability to any disabled person.*

#### **4.4 Differences by age**

Overall, there were few differences between younger and older candidates in terms of awareness, usage and perceived usefulness of different information sources, with some exceptions described below.

Younger candidates had slightly higher awareness and usage of the Auckland Council website, but lower awareness and usage of the candidate promotional booklet, candidate information booklet, and press releases and information published by the media.

Generally, ratings of usefulness of different resources were similar, with the exception of the candidate promotional booklet and informational videos, which were rated as much less useful by younger candidates (61% vs 82% useful for the candidate promotional booklet, and 38% vs 71% useful for informational videos).

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<sup>15</sup> A summary of the Auckland Transport Election Signs Bylaw rules and penalties can be found in pp. 37-42 of the candidate handbook.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Both older and younger candidates made comments and suggestions focusing on the need for good access to, and clarity in, the various resources provided during the election. The groups differed only in the greater number of positive comments made by older candidates, several of whom expressed satisfaction with the resources provided and gratitude to those who had provided them.

**Percentage of younger (18-54) and older (55+) candidates rating different resources as useful**

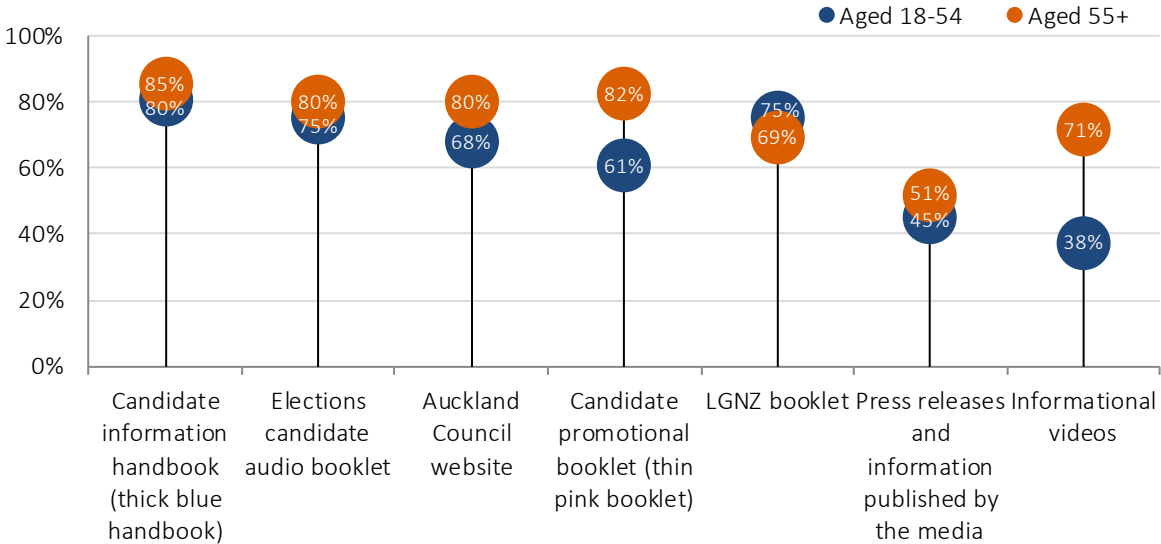


Figure 18. Reported usefulness of different candidate resources, by age

Younger candidates were slightly less likely to rate the email communications from Auckland Council and the Electoral Officer as helpful (67% of younger candidates vs 75% of older candidates).

**4.5 Differences by new and returning candidates**

As with age, there were few differences between first-time and returning candidates in terms of awareness, usage and rated usefulness of different information sources, with some exceptions described below.

One notable difference between the two groups related to the awareness and usage of the candidate information handbook. Awareness among returning candidates was high (85%) but usage was low (60%), whereas for first-time candidates, awareness was lower (76%) but usage was higher (68%).

Both groups rated the resources similarly in terms of usefulness, with the exception of the candidate promotional booklet, LGNZ booklet and informational videos, where first-time candidates felt these resources were more helpful.

Percentage of **first-time** and **returning** candidates rating different resources as useful

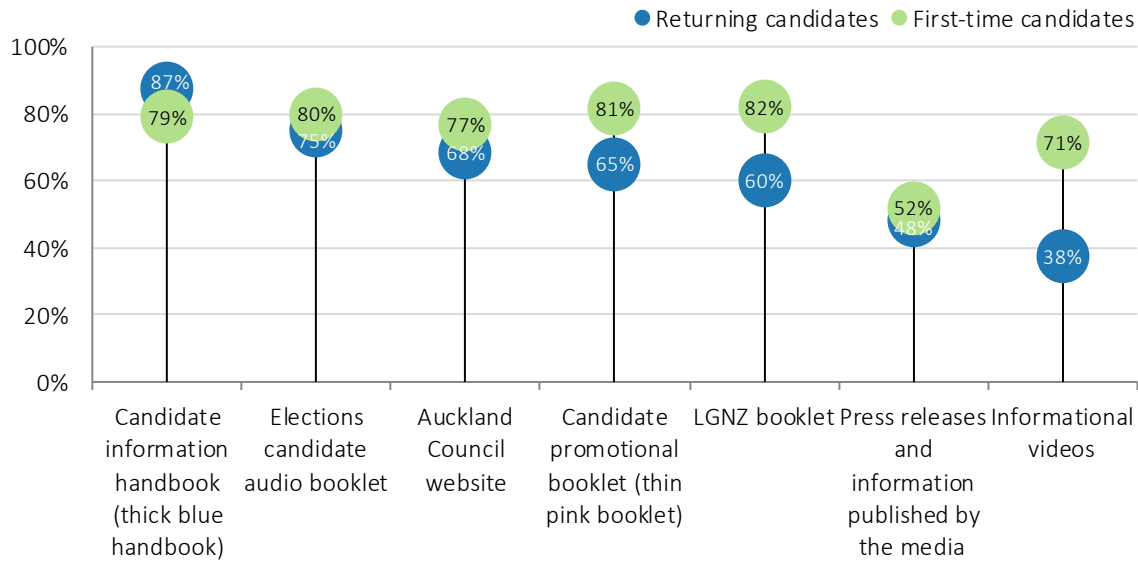


Figure 19. Reported usefulness of different candidate resources, by term

Seventy-five per cent of first-time candidates found the email communications from Auckland Council and the Electoral Officer to be helpful, slightly higher than 68 per cent of returning candidates.



## 5.0 ‘Show your love’ candidate website

Auckland Council developed the ‘Show your love’ website as a way to engage voters. The aim of the website was to help voters find information on candidates.

The website provided Aucklanders with information on the election process, who the candidates were and their policies. The website was designed to encourage visitors to participate in voting and to find out more about candidates in their community.

The website went live in early July in a limited capacity and in full capacity from 16 September through to 8 October, 2016. Candidates were given the opportunity to contribute information about themselves and their policies to the website, beyond their candidate profile submitted during nomination.

Most of the candidates who responded to the survey reported contributing to the ‘Show your love’ website.

### Most candidates contributed to the 'Show your love' candidate information page

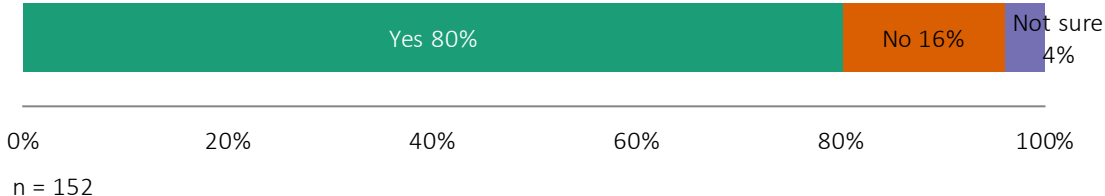


Figure 20. Contribution to the ‘Show your love’ candidate information page

Those who did not contribute to the webpage were more likely to be older (see Section 5.2) and Māori, and less likely to be Chinese, Indian and Samoan.

Approximately half of all candidates who reported contributing were unsure whether it had a positive impact on their campaign, with roughly even numbers of the remainder feeling the website did and didn’t benefit them, respectively.

## Candidates who used 'Show your love' were mostly unsure whether it benefited their campaign

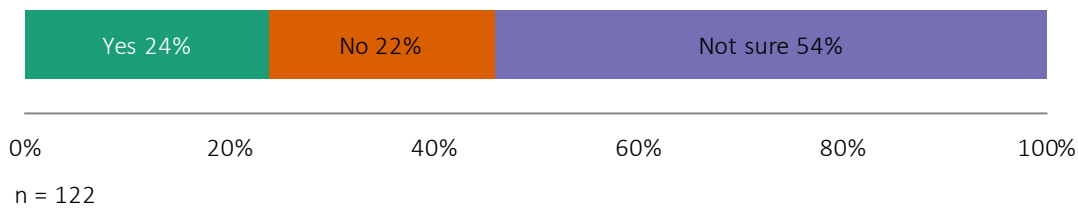


Figure 21. Ratings of whether the 'Show your love' page benefited candidates

Six in 10 candidates who reported using the website were satisfied with the candidate information and content form on the website. Most of the remainder (30%) were neutral, with a minority of respondents (12%) reporting some dissatisfaction.

## Most candidates were satisfied with the 'Show your love' candidate information and content form

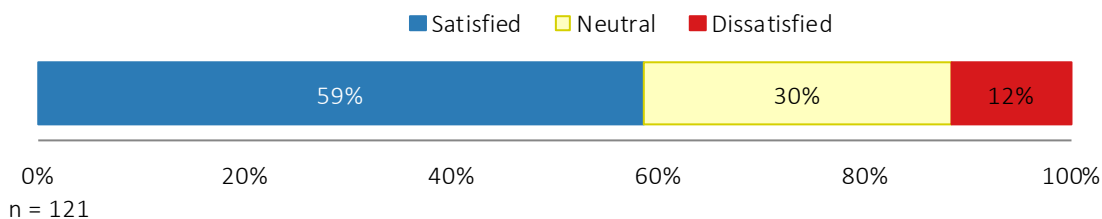


Figure 22. Satisfaction with the 'Show your love' candidate content form

### 5.1 Feedback from candidates

Forty-nine survey respondents provided comments and suggestions on the 'Show your love' website. Many of the comments related to the functionality of the website; firstly, candidates noted that they and others they knew had found it clunky to use and to contribute to.

*I'm no website expert ... you know how to fix it ... just do it ... site was crap.*

*Just that it was a bit clunky to use, I had varied feedback from other people who used it to look me up.*

*I found the form very difficult to fill in. I had trouble moving between the pages and wasn't sure how to submit it. It was fortunate for me someone on the council saw I hadn't submitted it and was able to assist.*

*Felt technically challenged to be able to put my information on this website. Did not feel confident to do so hence chose not to do it but would have liked to.*

*This was super clunky, and if you were running for two positions you couldn't copy and paste any information. One of my pages failed and I missed the cut off, your IT team could have cared less.*

*The election website that we uploaded our profiles to was dreadful.*

*The council website was confusing and hard to navigate. Also the opportunity to put your information on the council website was flawed and didn't work on several occasions. So it was an unfair advantage for those it worked for. Unacceptable.*

Secondly, a number of respondents felt that the word limits on their responses made it very challenging to communicate the ideas they wished to share with voters.

*The word limit on responses was difficult. It was like trying to tweet a response! I understand that with so many candidates you need to keep things brief but it was probably a little too brief.*

*The word count was okay for one question but when there were two or three combined questions the word count needed to be increased as it was impossible to respond to the question well.*

*I know some of my friends and family voted for me after discovering my profile on the candidates' website, which I'm grateful for. However, I would like the maximum limit for profile/personal info to be extended for next time. Given what I wanted to say, in order to appeal to a targeted voting audience, there was no room for my academic and career credentials etc.*

Thirdly, candidates were also dissatisfied with their inability to track the number of visits made to their sites and update them during their campaigns.

*Providing information about how many people visited my profile and whether they used the links would be useful.*

*Would be good to know how many hits my candidate page is receiving during the election and total received at the conclusion of voting period.*

*It was crazy that you couldn't update it once it was launched. These sort of social platforms need to be updatable - that's what creates interest and repeat engagement.*

In addition to issues of website functionality, respondents also noted that it was rarely and/or inadequately used.

*[There was] little or no take up from other candidates in [the] ward. [There was] little public awareness of [the] website. [It was an] under-utilised resource.*

*I suspect that few voters actually took the time to access the website for detailed information about candidate policies and positions. People I've spoken to simply referred to the voter booklet and ticked candidates by looks or name recognition.*

A number of candidates believed that the content of the 'Show your love' website was unsuitable or biased.

*The info site looked like a[n] amateur designed it. We could have entered our information into basic docs ... but they should have been converted to a polished and professional layout after the entry of data was completed.*

*Cheesy - too cartoonish - didn't really dial up the seriousness of local government. If you want people to take it seriously then communications need to embrace this and make it feel like it's worth your while and that it's important.*

*The questions asked on 'Show your love' seemed somewhat slanted in favour of what Auckland Council staff may have wanted as answers.*

*'Show your love' wasn't the best tag line - lots of negative comments from people unfortunately.*

Other issues identified by respondents included the timing of the engagement process, the unsuitability of the template for the range of candidate roles available, and the inflexibility of the campaign during the voting process.

*The hits on my video showed not many visited the website, the engagement process should have started earlier.*

*It was too tightly structured to be useful for the DHB role I stood for and somewhat overly structured for the local board role too.*

*It is disappointing that the 'Show your love' campaign did not seem to have the flexibility to address real life conditions during the voting period. E.g. as it became clear which areas had the lowest turnout of the whole Auckland region, it was apparent to candidates in those areas that no changes to scheduled activities resulted, in order to create a more intensive focus in areas that needed more support to lift civic participation. Past turnout trend data by local board area should have been sufficiently instructive as to where the most help would be needed, but it seemed that*

*a schedule of locations and times had [to] be pre-planned, and could not be deviated from.*

Some candidates, however, were positive about the website, for a range of reasons.

*It is [a] good idea and gave some good tips.*

*I was quite impressed with the quality of the website, especially about its user-friendly interface and visibility of the contents. It was easy to use and I'm pretty sure it drew [the] interest of many residents into the election. Thank you for putting your effort into building such [a] website.*

*Every bit helps! But there was also competition from Generation Zero and Massey University (VoteLocal). The 'Show your love' site had the advantage that candidates' views and positions were not massaged or edited - we got to speak for ourselves, in our own words (for better or worse).*

*Loved the 'Show your love' website.*

## 5.2 Differences by age

Younger candidates were both more likely to contribute to the 'Show your love' website and feel that it benefited their campaign, although the majority of all candidates were still unsure of the extent of this benefit.

Younger candidates were more likely to **contribute** to the 'Show your love' website

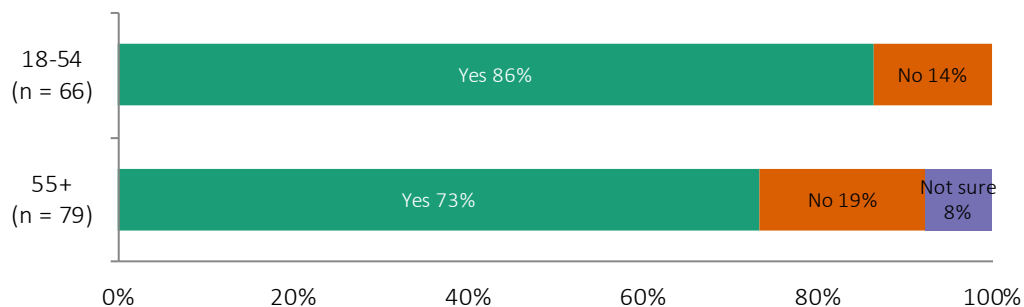


Figure 23. Contribution to the 'Show your love' candidate information page, by age

## Younger candidates were more likely to think contributing to 'Show your love' benefited their campaign

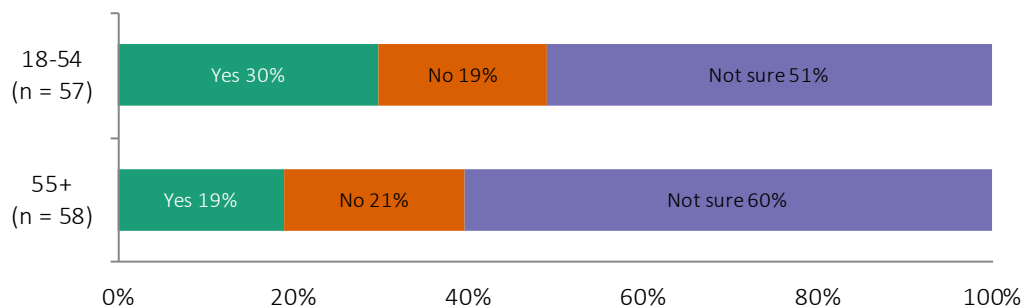


Figure 24. Ratings of whether the 'Show your love' page benefited candidates, by age

The level of satisfaction with the candidate information and content form on the website was the same for younger and older candidates.

Although both younger and older candidates made a range of comments focusing on the functionality of the 'Show your love' website, older candidates were more likely to refer to their own or others' lack of engagement with the site and the difficulties they or others they knew had experienced when they tried to use it.

### 5.3 Differences by new and returning candidates

A slightly greater percentage of first-time candidates contributed to the 'Show your love' website than returning candidates (83% vs 77%, respectively).

Both groups of candidates felt that their contribution was similarly beneficial to their campaign, and were equally satisfied with the candidate information and content form on the website.

## 6.0 Election results

Election results were posted on the Auckland Council website from 2pm on October 8 for the 2016 elections. All successful and returning candidates were also personally phoned.

Candidates were asked how they would like to be notified of the election results if they were to run again.

Candidates ranked their first, second and third preferences between email, phone and website communication. A contact preference index was then created, where first preferences were allocated 3 points, second preferences allocated 2 points and third preferences 1 point.<sup>17</sup>

The index shows email to be the preferred method of contact, followed closely by phone. Website was the least preferred option.

### Email the most preferred election outcome contact method using the [contact preference index](#)

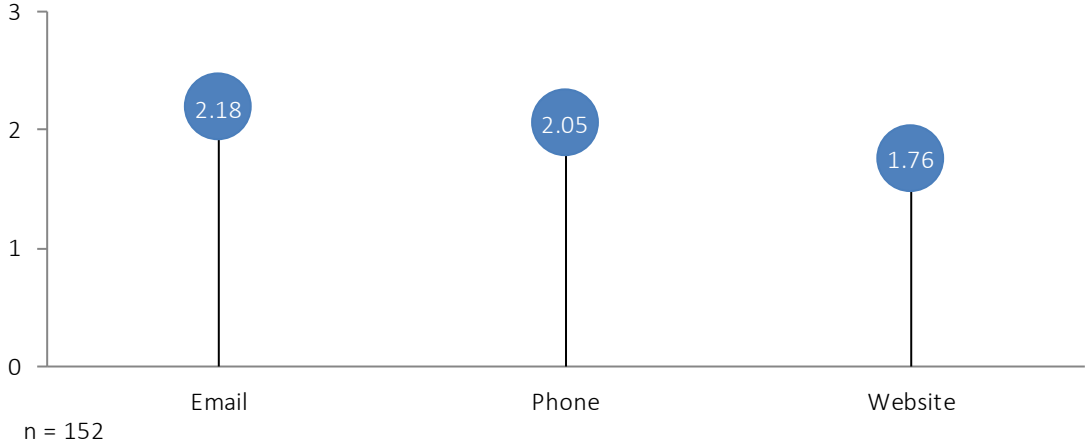


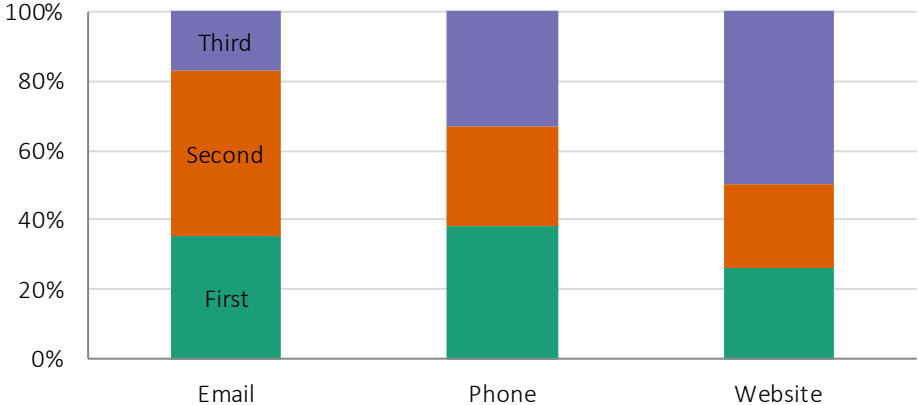
Figure 25. Election results contact preference index

If we look at the results without indexing candidates' preferences, email was ranked as first preference by 36 per cent of candidates (compared to 38% for phone and 26% for website), and second preference by 47 per cent of candidates (compared to 28% for phone and 24% for website). Note, although phone was ranked as first preference by 2 per cent more candidates than email, email was much more strongly preferred over phone as a second preference. The combination of first and second preferences, seen in Figure 26, resulted in email receiving a higher overall index value.

<sup>17</sup> The total score for each contact method was then standardised to the number of respondents ranking each option.

The percentage of candidates who ranked email as their least preferred contact method (17%) was much lower than for the other two contact options (33% for phone and 50% for website).

### Email the most preferred election outcome contact method



n = 152

Figure 26. Election results contact preferences

### 6.1 Differences by age

The overall preference for email was shared by both age groups.

### 6.2 Differences by new and returning candidates

There was a slight difference in contact preferences, with first-time candidates preferring to be contacted by email, and returning candidates preferring to be contacted by phone. The differences were, however, small.



Email the preferred contact method amongst **first-time** candidates whereas phone preferred by **returning** candidates

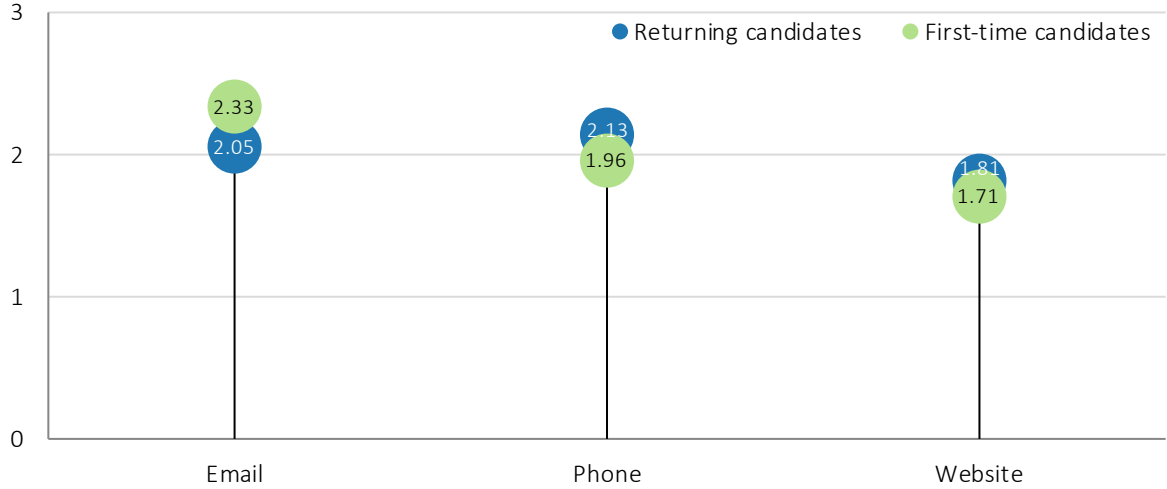


Figure 27. Election results contact preference index, by term

## 7.0 Understanding elections

In addition to providing context for participants' ratings of various aspects of the 2016 election experience, candidates' responses also indicated a lack of understanding of various aspects of the elections process.

### 7.1 Responsibility for enrolment

As noted in the Introduction, the Electoral Commission is responsible for voter enrolment while responsibility for candidate and voter awareness lies with Auckland Council.

*I got feedback from electors that they didn't think it was a valid use of ratepayer funding, and that the responsibility for voter awareness and turnout was the Electoral Commission, not council. Lots of people, particularly older residents, thought it was frivolous spending.*

*About 50 per cent of those 18-30 [years old] I met at bus stops and train stations during [the] three week voting period hadn't received papers because they hadn't updated their enrolment addresses. If they still lived with their parents at their family home, 100 per cent were enrolled. If council election staff had spent time June-September at bus stops and train stations 6.30am-9.30am and 3-7pm with enrolment forms and got those taking public transport to fill them out I think 95 per cent of young people would have been enrolled and far more would have then had the opportunity to vote. Far more cost effective than all the advertising that was spent...*

*It is enrolment that is the key. If residents were enrolled where they live then they are far more likely to vote.*

*Waste of money - if you want people to vote in [local government elections], better use of money is to pay people money to spread the word e.g. pay students to door knock to enrol people or check [those who are] enrolled. Then go to churches, schools etc. to tell them to enrol AND to vote!!*

### 7.2 Voting method

Current legislation limits voting methods for local elections to postal or booth voting only; decisions about this are made by central government. Auckland Council has advocated for the use of online voting, however, the decision to authorise this change lies with central government.

*Make voting accessible - NOT THROUGH THE MAIL. No matter how much money the council invests in booklets and campaigns, the only way to actually improve voter engagement is to make voting accessible. The Love your Auckland campaign would*

*have actually [been] a success if voting was online using RealMe or if there was a voting day and place for those who are transient. That is why we are seeing such a low voter engagement. The argument that voting online isn't safe is invalid when you can bank online and when people are receiving multiple voting papers from their house because the previous renters had left and some people are filling out 10+ other peoples' voting slips. It's archaic and needs to change.*

*Love your Auckland would work a hell of a lot better with electronic voting and [a] voting period way shorter than three weeks. Make it a day, give it a sense of urgency.*

### **7.3 Nomination process**

Specific aspects of the nomination process are dictated by the Local Electoral Act 2001 and hence outside Auckland Council control. For example, the involvement of party politics in local elections; the requirement to include 'does not live in the area' in candidate profiles where they live outside the boundaries of the area they are running in; or the information made public for each candidate.

*We are actually in the [ ] so my profile to the wider public of 150 words had to start with a 'does not live in the area' which many take straight away to mean not a local. It tends to give a negative bias and ... I wanted to focus on the positive. My suggestion is that in the future you allow wording from the candidate to explain why they live outside the area in which they are standing that is separate from the 150 word opportunity.*

*I would like to have more info on each candidate running for local elections such as their home address, office address, phone contact, email contact etc.*

*There should be no element and indication of any sort of party politics in local board elections. It should be free of politics.*

The order of surnames in voting papers is, however, decided on by Auckland Council's Governing Body.<sup>18</sup>

*The process favours the people with the surnames A --> M : suggest in future this be mixed up : A quick check of the records will validate this: I am [ ], I am always on the [ ] page in the booklet, and [ ] on the ballot paper.*

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<sup>18</sup> The Local Electoral Regulations state that the decision about ordering must be made before the electoral officer gives public notice after the closing of nominations. The decision is generally only made once in a three year election cycle.

## **8.0 Areas for improvement**

While the sections above suggest a range of areas for improvement, the following main focus areas are suggested.

### **8.1 Make nomination processes clearer and easier**

While most candidates were able to find the nomination information they needed and felt the information was accurate, there is significant scope to improve the nomination process.

Young people, as well as non-Pākehā candidates, found it harder to find information and felt that the information they did find was less accurate, indicating that there is scope for improvement in relation to these candidates.

A number of suggestions for improvement offered by candidates revolved around shifting toward an online nomination platform although this is not permitted under the current legislation. Further efforts should also be dedicated to improving clarity around nomination rules for candidates.

### **8.2 Increase awareness of the ‘Stand for council’ message**

There is an opportunity to continue to increase awareness of the ‘Stand for council’ message, especially amongst non-Pākehā and first-time candidates. Council should continue to build on the awareness raised during the 2016 elections by developing communications that speak to the motivations and priorities of new candidates, and which are delivered through channels that are most likely to engage these candidates.

Low levels of local government voting in these and other demographic groups provide an additional opportunity to engage potential voters as well as prospective candidates in these communities.

### **8.3 Build on communication channel successes**

Candidates had a high level of engagement with specific media during the campaign and there is room to build on these successes, particularly with Facebook, online advertisements, newspaper advertisements, and posters in libraries and council buildings.

There were some notable differences by age, where younger candidates were more likely to hear about the campaign online (Facebook and online advertisements), but also via physical infrastructure such as posters in libraries and council buildings, and through community

centres or events. For first time candidates, newspaper advertisements appeared to have a high impact.

#### **8.4 Ensure all candidates are aware of and have access to every resource available to them**

Candidates reported finding the resources provided helpful, however many candidates were unaware of all the resources available to them. There is therefore scope to improve the awareness and usage of available resources.

In particular, the candidate information handbook – which contained critical information on the election process and was rated as helpful by more than eight out of 10 users – was only used by 62 per cent of candidates.

Auckland Council and the Electoral Officer should consider further developing an electronic candidate ‘welcome pack’ with clearer references to available resources, as well as re-evaluating the design of the Auckland Council elections webpage in light of candidate search priorities.

#### **8.5 Improve the functionality and impact of the ‘Show your love’ website**

The ‘Show your love’ website was widely used by candidates, but most were unsure whether it benefited their campaign. Increased publicity of this resource amongst voters is needed to increase its impact.

Candidates made a number of suggestions in relation to improving the design of the website, from the perspective of both candidates inputting their information and potential voters using the website.

Tangibly, candidates suggested increasing the 150 word count restriction, enabling copying and pasting of information across different fields, allowing candidates to update information throughout the campaign, and enabling candidates to track the number of page views over time.

#### **8.6 Ensure customer-facing staff are adequately informed**

A number of candidates mentioned interacting with Auckland Council staff who were unaware of the nomination process and where to access the resources available to candidates. Auckland Council and the Electoral Officer should work to ensure all service

centre, call centre and other customer-facing staff are adequately trained prior to the 2019 election.

## **8.7 Ensure all communications are clear**

A small number of candidates noted issues with the accuracy of information received from Auckland Council and the Electoral Office. Additional quality control processes should be considered to ensure all communications are well written and concise.

## **8.8 Review the communication of the election responsibilities of Auckland Council and other parties**

Participant comments indicate a lack of understanding of Auckland Council's remit in local body elections, including voter enrolment, online voting and candidate/voter awareness. A review of the ways in which these processes are explained to candidates, in which resources, and through which media, is a first step towards ameliorating this issue.

## **8.9 Broaden the provision of assisted voting support**

Acknowledging the development of Auckland Council's assisted voting for visually impaired Aucklanders, candidates suggested building upon the lessons learnt and broadening assistance to Aucklanders with other disabilities.

## Appendix A Demographic differences by age

Compared to older candidates (aged 55 and over), younger candidates (18-54 years) were:

- less likely to be New Zealand European (72% vs 82%)
- more likely to be standing for the first time (56% vs 44%)
- slightly more likely to be female (52% vs 47%)
- similarly likely to run for local board (91% vs 90%), ward (2% vs 1%) and mayor (8% vs 9%)
- similarly likely to be elected (38% vs 41%)

## **Appendix B Demographic differences by new and returning candidates**

Compared to returning candidates, first-time candidates were:

- more likely to run for local board positions (93% vs 87%)
- younger (with 51% aged 18-54 vs 40% of returning candidates)
- less likely to be New Zealand European (74% vs 81%)
- more likely to be male (55% vs 45%)
- less likely to be elected (25% vs 55% of returning candidates)





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