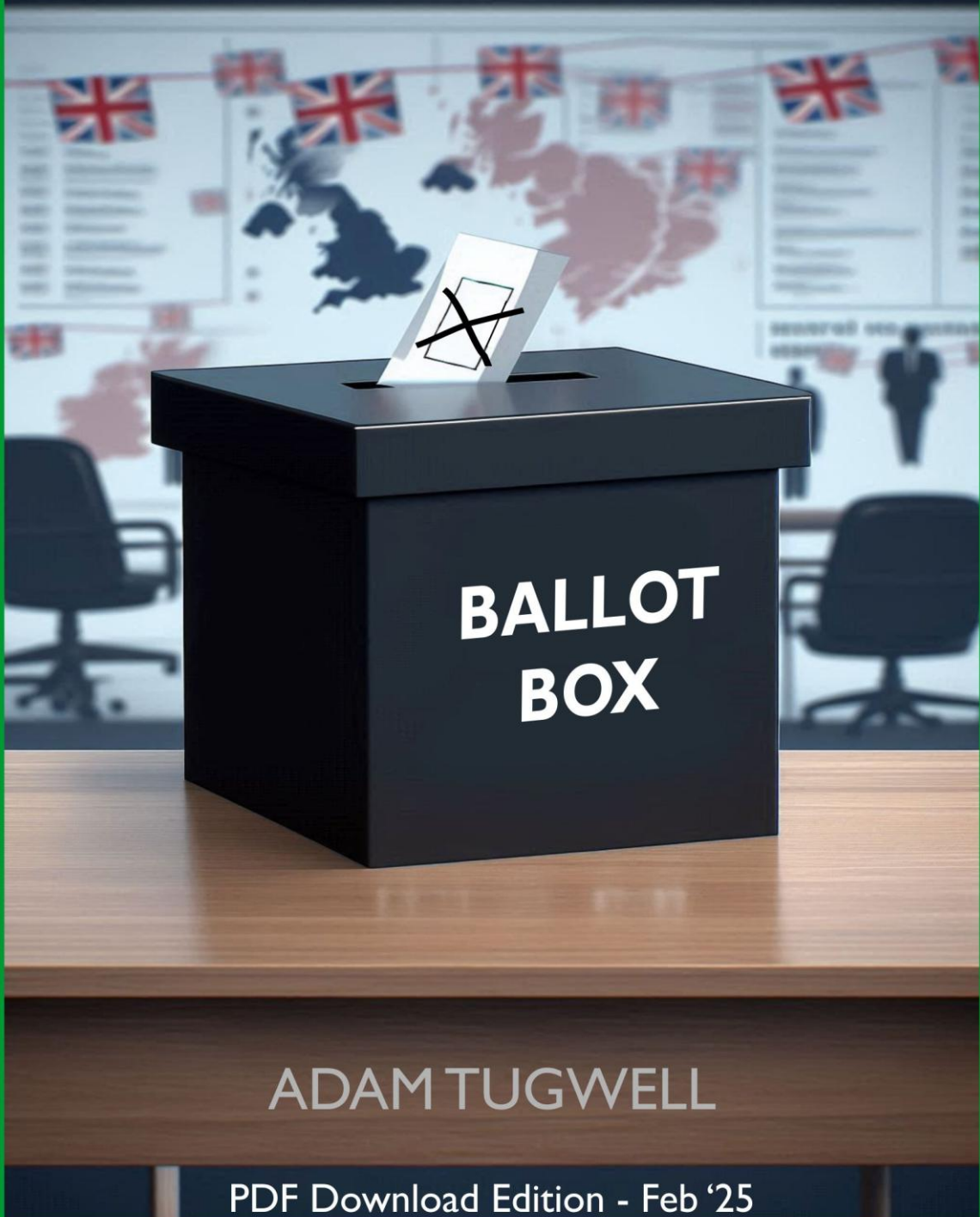


How to get Elected



ADAM TUGWELL

PDF Download Edition - Feb '25

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HOW TO GET ELECTED

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HOW TO GET ELECTED

Preface

In 2013, I had been a Borough Councillor for six years. I was representing a mixed rural and market town Ward near Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire and had also been Chair of the Council's Licensing Committee or Local Licensing Authority since the beginning of my second term in 2011.

Since being a teenager, I'd always seen politics as a way to achieve something better for everyone. However, I'd also been aware of the way that 'democracy' had appeared to work in the UK and had opted to join and run and work with a political party.

That September, in a decision which felt instant but had been several years in the making, I finally accepted that British politics is fundamentally broken.

That the party-political system in the UK is rotten to the core.

That no matter how genuine the reasons for getting involved in politics, representing *any* political party today requires elected public representatives who are aligned with political parties to forget any obligation to prioritise the best interests of their Electors.

That there is a *de facto* requirement to ignore opportunities to deliver public policy which will consider and ultimately be of benefit to all.

Knowing that my decision to leave my political group would almost certainly result in losing my seat in the next round of Elections for that Authority in 2015, *because of the way things work and how I felt at that time*, I went ahead and did so anyway. My role as a Councillor was never just about 'me' or the political party, after all.

The period of time since I left active politics has continued to provide me with good opportunity for reflection.

Whilst I find frustration at every turn as I look at the public realm, I recognise that politics is still a good place to observe, to watch and yes – a place to learn.

Learning is after all the first and biggest step to making a difference to anyone's life experience – not least of all our own.

Today, although many of us have no idea how, we also know that one way or another, things simply have to change. That there really could be something far better for us all. And that the Politicians who are currently in charge should either be showing considerably more concern or should simply be replaced.

No matter the political party, tribe or leaning that they have, an increasing number of people are thinking about the possibility of seeking election to one or more of the Tiers of Government in the UK. As the way to make that difference. As the way to do something tangible and deliver that 'how'.

If I was now in that very same position, *but without the experience of British politics that I now possess*, I know that I would be grateful for the opportunity to speak to someone who was prepared to help me. To hear a helpful voice that would honestly tell me what I could expect. What I really needed to consider, and what I could do to help myself with my aim and wish to help others as a campaigner and as a good politician and public representative as I campaign for election and then begin to fulfil my responsibilities once elected.

In early 2018 I wrote and published the e-book for Kindle 'How to get Elected' as the conversation that I would like to have.

Now, in early 2025, I feel that the political and government environment has changed sufficiently enough that the original work could do with an update, and that it might help more if How to get Elected were to be made available in more ways.

How to get Elected offers a guide, suggestions, ideas and the benefit of experience to those seeking election, either completely without help, or with minimal support or guidance from an established political party that will never be as invested in the community, in the same way a dedicated public representative can and should always be.

I hope that it will offer anyone considering this pathway to help others and our communities and perhaps be the political mentor to them that I never had.

Adam Tugwell
February 2025

Introduction

If you are thinking about running in a UK Election, How to get Elected could be for you

It feels like the political world has gone completely mad.

'They don't know what they are on about' is a thought that most of us will share, the moment we start thinking about today's politicians.

Whilst we may not choose to say it openly and loud, few will disagree with the idea that our political classes are out of touch and pretty much 'in it for themselves' – *even where they represent a political party that we may have voted for unquestioningly at every election, for all of our lives.*

As you are here and reading this page, we can be reasonably certain that you are either

- a) A political anorak (yes, they really do exist) or
- b) Thinking seriously enough about running for an elected office that you are beginning to do some research.

Whilst the political anoraks are very welcome here, 'How to get Elected' has been written with helping anyone from group 'b' firmly in mind.

It doesn't matter where your loyalties lie, or whatever political philosophy you might follow. If you really want to hold the responsibility and fulfill the gift of trust that comes with being elected by members of the public, there is a process which alone and on your own you will almost certainly need to follow. *A process that will also help you to succeed and become a good representative of the people, once you have been elected and taken your seat.*

Getting elected sounds very simple. But for most, the reality is very different.

It's very easy to make mistakes, lose motivation, get sidetracked or distracted and then find yourself waiting perhaps 4 years or even longer for another opportunity to make the contribution to the community that you may now be seeking.

In the form of this book, I will cover and discuss all of the key issues, considerations and actions that you would normally have to take to get yourself elected without the help of an organised political party, whilst keeping yourself in the running and out of trouble with everyone else and politicians who may have much more experience of the 'political system', as you do.

There are no guarantees in politics.

If you do everything that you possibly can to the best of your ability and spend every available minute doing so between now and your next opportunity to get elected, it is still possible that someone else will get there first.

That's just the way it is in politics *today*.

It's a reality that you must accept and be respectful of as you work on, develop and deliver your strategy and plan.

Hopefully, you are here because you sincerely believe in and want to make the most effective contribution that you can in delivering 'something better' for all.

I wish you every success with your worthy aims. We have never needed genuinely selfless and considerate politicians more than we do right now, and especially those who are prepared to make every effort to make their responsibility count.

What is 'How to get Elected'?

How to get Elected began as a website, which has evolved into an eBook for those thinking about running in public elections in the UK, primarily as independent or 'non-aligned' candidates.

How to get Elected is also for members of political parties who are aiming to do the very best that they can on behalf of their constituencies, wards, divisions and the electors that they represent too.

Whilst pages are dedicated to talking about getting elected as an MP and the issues that surround setting up a new political party, these are not the primary focus of this Book.

How to get Elected is here to focus upon the areas of politics where right now, anyone who is motivated enough, has enough self-belief, courage of their convictions and is ready to listen and consider the opinion of others, really *can* begin to make a difference for their local community, if they so choose.

The places where real differences can and are ready to be made are Parish & Town Councils, Borough & District Councils, County Councils and Unitary Authorities. What we collectively call **Local Government**.

How to get Elected has been written to help you plan, campaign and ultimately provide good representation, so that you can positively influence the things that local authorities do.

Good luck.

Part 1 – What you should know and do before you decide to run

1. Age & Eligibility to become a Candidate

The basic formal requirements to become an official candidate and run for a local council are as follows.

To be eligible, you must be:

- A British or a citizen of the Commonwealth or European Union
- At least 18 years old
- Registered to vote in the area or have lived, worked or owned property there for at least 12 months before an election

Legal eligibility is often considered to be the only real factor preventing anyone from running as an independent candidate in a local election.

The political parties have their own selection processes and you can read more about those later when we will discuss *joining a political party*.

Whether or not you are ready to take on the responsibility of being a councillor is a question that only you can answer.

It is as likely that a candidate of 18 years of age could be a brilliant community representative within a multi-seat parish or town council ward. Whilst another, aged 38, could be the poorest choice possible for a single-seat county council division.

If you are unsure about your choice or decision, it might be useful to seek the unbiased opinion of others.

You might also take some time to think about the life skills and experience that you will bring to the role.

Being a good councillor is not just about being passionate about issues and public speaking alone.

To be a good public representative, you must be able to put yourself in the position of others and then relate that experience within the bigger setting. It will be necessary for you to communicate arguments and where possible, solutions too which will need to be objective and considerate of different views if they are to really make a difference to the people you will be representing.

Having experience from as many different areas of life as possible, where you have already interacted comfortably with as many different kinds of people as you can will help you to do this.

Being able to have a conversation with someone experiencing a housing problem one minute and then walking into a meeting with the council's chief executive officer to discuss something completely different the next is a real possibility.

You must have both the confidence AND the flexibility to be who you will need to be, exactly when you need to be it.

2. Ask yourself, is Politics really for me?

Even though everybody seems to hate politicians, politics can appear to be a very glamorous place when you are thinking, "It would be different if it was me".

Also, it's not unusual to like the idea of having power. So, when we want power very much, politics really can seem like the best place to be.

Hopefully, you will be one of the growing numbers who will be ticking 'none of the above'.

That's great.

The problem is that many of the people who have not become involved in politics to serve the better interests of people and our communities are motivated in very shallow and selfish ways.

There are plenty of them too. And that means the presence of a self-serving mentality can create an unpleasant working environment for people who are there for genuine reasons and care about the impact and consequences of everything that they do.

As a good politician, you should never take things personally. But you must also be aware that plenty of other politicians already do.

That means you could easily find yourself feeling victimized. You might even feel threatened by others in what seems to be a very personal way, *just because you are doing your best and doing what you do.*

Making complaints to appropriate authorities is now encouraged as a politician. And if you feel threatened, you always should do so.

But it is also important to understand that even threats and bad behaviour of this kind come at different levels and can present itself to even highly experienced politicians in many different ways. *Some of which are very subtle and not that easy to define.*

Odd as it may seem, anger leveled against anyone in politics can be quite innocent. It may just be the result of your achievements having upset someone who in some way sees your success as being their loss.

It never is. But you will certainly struggle to get anyone who is that small-minded to see it that way!

If you can see yourself managing to keep going when others appear to want to do everything possible to make you quit, and you can do so whilst also keeping a smile on your face and continuing to do the best that it is possible for you to do, the rough and tough of politics *might* just be suitable for you.

3. Success in Politics is NEVER guaranteed

I know I am right!

I can do much better than the people there now!

I can provide a real voice for voters!

These are all views which will sound familiar to anyone who has run in a public election in the UK and may be very much along the lines or exactly how you are feeling about the prospect of becoming a politician right now.

Unfortunately, you are not alone.

Just in the election you plan to fight, there may be many others.

The others may be members of political parties with all kinds of support.

Other candidates may have been elected many times before. They may even be considered publicly to be 'successful'.

One of the most difficult and frustrating aspects of running for a publicly elected office is the competition that you will face.

Even if you are 100% certain of the justification and righteous nature of your campaign, *and why you are the best person to have that role*, it doesn't mean that the people you are asking to vote for you will 'get it'. Indeed, to many people, you may be seen to simply be very wrong.

As in most things, perception is everything in politics. How you are perceived as a candidate by the people you are asking to elect you will ultimately reflect their choice.

Regrettably, no matter how credible you may be as a candidate, your importance to voters may be something that is simply not yours to influence.

Only so much of getting elected is about the work you do, the words you say and the effort you make - *even when you do much more or really are a better option than every other candidate.*

Party Politics plays a regrettable, yet significant part of what will happen on any Election Day when you are a Candidate. So, if the Election you are fighting falls on the wrong day – *for instance you are running for your local district council on the same day that there is a General Election*, the results of the local election you are fighting might well be dictated by the national poll – just the very same.

Yes, it's wrong.

No, it's not fair.

But it's how politics works in the UK and one of the most important things you can do to help yourself emotionally before you make a start, is understand and accept that your success within the political world is played out very much like a game.

If you don't understand the rules or are not willing to work with them, you would be very wise to decide not to play this game.

4. It's not about you

Many of the key failures in UK politics today can be attributed to the egos of politicians.

If you've already talked to other people about the perception of those in political office, it's almost certain that you will have heard someone say that having a big ego is part of what being a politician is about.

Put simply, politics isn't or rather shouldn't be about having an ego.

It just looks that way because that's how politics has got itself into the mess that it's in today.

Yes, a good politician needs to be confident. Yes, a good politician needs to have guts. Yes, a good politician must be prepared to say things that some people may not be very happy to hear.

But if you are going to represent other people openly, honestly and with motivation, that is all about what's best for them, you will need to use these skills and abilities with honesty, integrity and with the common good in mind at all times.

There is a distinct difference between someone drawing attention to themselves unintentionally as they make an argument on behalf of others, and someone who is grandstanding purely for the benefit they perceive they will receive for themselves.

Oddly enough, when you do things and are supported for the right reasons, the detail rarely gets overlooked.

This is an integral part of becoming a good constituency councillor and is a skill that will quickly define you amongst your peers as someone who is looking to get the right results.

If you are always true to your electors, you will make allies in places you would not normally expect, and when it comes to really making a difference, they could provide the support that you really need.

Yes, big egos do get people elected and regrettably to very high office too. But a poor politician's personal gain is very much the electorate's loss.

Shallow politicians will only ever deliver shallow policies, no matter how good they try to sound or how good they might look.

If you are and can be true to the best interests of the people who elect you, no matter what adversity or distractions should come your way, you will always be successful as a politician. Even if the results of your battles don't always *appear* to go your way.

REMEMBER: it's not about you. Getting elected is all about what's best for the people who are going to vote for you and everyone within your constituency, once you have successfully been elected.

5. Once you are in Politics, your footprints will follow you wherever you go

With the Internet now available to almost everyone on their phone, and public records of almost every kind now being made transparently available wherever they are located, it is inevitable that we all now create a footprint with everything we do publicly.

Whilst I will discuss communication, social media and media relations later, it is important to understand just how far reaching any news of your public activities can and will be.

Whether right or wrong, good or bad; people you meet socially, prospective employers, admission committees, people you might want to date, and many others besides will have easy access to any material that features your name and activities, that has found its way on to the Internet.

What will find its way on to 'the net'?

For the purposes of making a decision about whether to campaign and run to become a politician, it would be sensible to consider everything – YES EVERYTHING you do and say to anyone as having the potential to find its way into the public realm.

For a start, that will include:

- Anything you say in public
- Anything you say to anyone about what you are doing, or what you have planned
- E-mails (Nothing should be considered private or personal – even if you state that its content is confidential)
- Pictures
- Articles which mention you in newspapers and/or online news pages
- Public Records (Nomination papers, interests, voting history, attendance, comments etc.)
- Blogs
- Social media posts (*Please be aware that as soon as you are a candidate or have told anyone that you are likely to be, the chances that anyone reading your posts will screen shot anything they believe can be used to trip you up will increase rapidly!*)
- Any other form of digital communication including but not limited to WhatsApp, Telegram and any other form of group or direct messaging that might be shared in future – *even if that seems unlikely because you trust those you are communicating with at the time.*

Anything political can be divisive.

Politics creates barriers or walls in relationships that would otherwise be perfect (Take Brexit and the Remainers vs Leavers as a very real example).

We have no control over how anyone will react to the position we take on anything politically. Because it is possible for each and every one of us to feel so passionate about our beliefs that we can feel automatically opposed to any alternative viewpoint.

It takes a lot of thought and a deep level of self-awareness for anyone to see the opinions of others as an outward expression of the private person that another person is.

It is challenging for many to understand and accept that political expression is not personal and is not usually leveled against them personally in any way.

As a rule, we should always treat politicians and their views as being of no threat to us personally.

Regrettably, that's not how many people think *or feel able to think* today, and that means it becomes necessary to be aware of what the worst could be that anyone might think of us, and what that could mean.

If you can be objective in politics, you will always know it is possible to win. But you have very limited influence on how others will perceive you or your past.

Going forward, it is therefore essential to always do the right thing.

Politics can be a very unfriendly place. If you have any information about you which is already out there on 'the net', which you would potentially find embarrassing, difficult to

explain or might be seen by some as a way to hurt you for their own purposes, think very carefully about whether you want to expose yourself to emotional pain in that way.

6. The downside of having a public profile

When we are young, it is not uncommon to imagine what it would be like to be famous, and to be recognised wherever we go.

Some of us make it a life aim to be famous and well known.

Some find fame or a high-profile arrives as a consequence of the job or jobs that we choose to do.

What we don't realise when we covet the idea of being well known publicly is that it can have as many negative consequences for us as positive ones, and possibly a whole lot more besides.

Whilst you may not be thinking about becoming our next Prime Minister, it is important to be aware that as soon as you begin campaigning to get yourself elected, you will become known publicly by people you don't already know – and almost certainly by people who don't agree with some or perhaps everything that you have to say.

Politics solicits very different reactions from people in a way which can make someone you thought you knew very well seem like they are a complete stranger.

You could easily lose friends by getting involved in politics, simply because different political viewpoints often thrive on building stereotypes based on the political opinions of others.

We don't have to look far to see this today. You will almost certainly know some people who voted leave and others who voted remain in the European Referendum in June 2016 which has resulted in the so-called 'Brexit'.

No matter how careful you are in what you say, write or discuss publicly with others, there will always be some who will automatically view you as being an enemy, from the moment you go public and tell people that you want to be a politician.

Some will never see you as a normal person again and will only ever see you in the light of any public office that you attain, or the campaign you have run as you try to get there.

It is wrong for people to view politicians they don't 'identify' with in this way.

But if you are going to go forward and seek election with your eyes wide open, you must accept that people will automatically judge you and be ready to judge you on the basis of everything you do.

You do not get the choice over what people can judge you for either.

Once you step into the public spotlight, it is essential that you consider everything you do to be fair game and a source of information that can be used for some political purpose by someone else, AT ANY TIME.

REMEMBER: You are always on duty the moment you step into the public eye.

7. Being a politician can be very frustrating

As you go up the Tiers of Government, the more politics and an ongoing war of ideas will become apparent with almost everything you do.

As elected seats become part of much bigger local authority areas where there might be 30 or more councillors 'sitting' from different political groups, your vote can also feel very insignificant too.

This is especially the case if you are fighting against policy which is being promoted by a political group which has a controlling majority on the council but doesn't even have a representative in the area you represent.

However, there are many positives – if you are prepared and willing to focus your energies on what you CAN do.

What you can ALWAYS do as a councillor typically revolves around directly helping the people you represent within your Ward or Division, and fighting to make sure that issues you do not appear to win are nonetheless raised, debated and recorded on the public record, so that your electors can see and know that you have done all that could be done.

8. Seek unbiased opinion on whether running for a Council Seat is a good idea

OK, so this sounds like stating the obvious.

But is it really?

To be elected successfully, your preparation begins the moment you start thinking about what you have to do to get elected – and what you are going to do once you have been elected - if and when you get there.

In the first instance, you need to decide if your approach and the ideas that you have – *your 'platform'*, are going to resonate with enough people to give you a fighting chance of success when election day arrives – and you should be doing this right now, before you even think about starting any kind of campaign.

For many of us, the first thing we do with an idea like running in an election, is immediately go and seek the advice of friends, family and our loved ones.

Yes, we always need the encouragement of those close to us. But the people we know well who care about us have a habit of being biased – *and not always for the best*.

Their opinion could easily set you on an unfruitful pathway to a lot of avoidable heartache and hard work. Or alternatively turn you away from doing something which could ultimately prove to be very positive and beneficial for everyone else.

More often than not, people who are close to us will tell us what they think we want to hear – *and in politics, that really doesn't help anyone*.

If you've identified issues upon which you can base a good campaign, talk to people who could vote for you and who are outside of your normal social group and ask them what they think of what you have to say.

Don't grandstand and roll out impromptu speeches to anyone who will listen. That will just annoy them and make you look little more than a fool.

Ask questions; see how people feel. Discover why their experiences have made them think in a particular way.

Find out what the different experience from their choice would look and feel like.

It will not take many conversations with different people to tell you whether you might be going the right way.

What is more, you are likely to gain even further insight into the perspectives of others that could well support and develop your own thoughts and arguments.

SUGGESTIONS:

- **DON'T** tell people who are strangers what you are thinking about doing, or why you are asking the questions. You will draw unnecessary attention to yourself before you have even decided if you want to see the process through – and may even break Electoral Law by doing so.
- **DO** take the opportunity to speak to everyone you can. Everyone likes to feel their opinion is valued and you will soon become aware of common themes and facts that deserve greater focus. What is more, every conversation is a step nearer to being comfortable talking to anyone in any situation – a prerequisite for becoming a good and respected politician.

9. Running for Council as an Independent or 'Non-Aligned' Candidate

How to get Elected was written with people in mind who want to run as Independent, 'Non-Aligned' or what we should perhaps start calling 'Open' Candidates.

Some people will make a very clear argument of the benefits of joining a political party before becoming a candidate.

Being 'independent' and appearing to be alone in politics can immediately sound like a very lonely place.

When you look at how democratic decisions are typically made by a majority of votes, seeming to be a councilor on your own can also look like it will be a very isolated place where you have the power to influence very little – *especially when a large political group may appear to be in control.*

I say 'appear to be in control', because looks are often very deceiving. It has regrettably become the case that in most of our Councils and even in our Parliament too, the power sits with the people or person at the top of a hierarchy.

'Junior' councillors belonging to a political party therefore have perhaps even less influence than an Independent, and as such are very much restricted in what they can really do.

The unspoken truth is that whilst political parties were at some point created in order to 'get things done', they have long since passed their point of being able to achieve any real good.

Political parties are some of the least democratic organisations that now exist.

It's all good if the people or person at the top of a political party know what they are doing.

But the political parties themselves exist only to secure their own futures.

That means political parties don't have room for anyone becoming a politician 'wearing their colours' who has a genuine, public centered desire and motivation to get things done.

Sadly, genuinely good and well-intended people who do get through candidate selection and then get elected, will soon have a very difficult time with their political party if they do not 'toe the line'.

This isn't to say that councils and publicly elected bodies don't do anything democratically.

It's just what they do and what they appear to achieve will rarely be all that it seems.

As an independent councillor, you can ALWAYS represent the best interests of the people who elected you without any requirement to defer to some bigger plan or idea that may not actually be in the best interests of the people you represent at all.

Regrettably, some of the decisions made by a local authority may not even be in the best interests of all the people living in the area, which is under the council's control, when that council is controlled by a political group – no matter how many wards or divisions that there might be.

Being independent will give you the opportunity to work with others to achieve results which will be beneficial for all, whilst allowing you to stay true to your responsibilities to the people who elected you.

On the rare occasion when an issue is very specific to the ward, division or constituency that you represent, you will have nothing stopping you from going the right way for your residents - even if every other councillor votes another way.

Being a member of a political party will mean you cannot do this at the times when it will really count.

In principle, the idea of political parties has its benefit in bringing like-minded politicians together, in order to get things done.

But this process is not restricted to political parties alone. Ultimately, if you have your priorities right and are ready to remain true to what you are aiming to do, you can group up or vote with anyone, at the times when they are looking at solutions to problems and developing policy in the same way that you do too.

With us all now being in times of great uncertainty, independently minded politicians who are not tied to the ideologies and political philosophies of the political parties that exist today, may well be a big step towards the solution to all the problems that we have.

However, for independents to achieve the results that we already need and for them to deliver the change that will almost certainly be required to come, independents will need to be open to working proactively and grouped alongside others in order to succeed. *Open* to the differences in experiences and therefore the ideas that we all have. *Open* to putting what's right for others before what is right just for them. *Open* to a new way of working together with others which delivers on aspirations and facilitates the development of a new way of government working which is open, transparent and delivers the kind of life experience for all that we all would want to see.

Change has to start somewhere, and more of us being elected to our councils as independents will soon encourage and help others to consider their options and to then decide to join with others, work with others and perhaps create a new beginning in UK politics too.

10. Which Local Authority should I run for?

If you've decided that you want to become a councillor, but are not sure of where you could achieve most, help others in the way you would like, or potentially achieve the biggest

impact, it would be worth considering the roles and responsibilities of the different Tiers of Government, and what work Parish & Town Councils, Borough & District Councils, County Councils and Unitary Authorities do.

Many people think of all councils being or doing the same thing.

In some cases, where there are unitary authorities, they basically are.

Otherwise, if you want to influence things in a particular way it is important to know where each local authority's responsibilities lie.

If you are already an activist, your decision may be much easier. For instance, if you feel your community needs far more dog and litter bins, you are most likely to influence this by becoming a member of your local Parish or Town Council – if one exists in your area.

If you are fed up with building on the green belt or on flood plains, being elected to your local Borough or District Council - where Planning Decisions are made, will be your best step.

If tackling potholes is your thing, it will be your County Council.

11. Where is it easiest to get Elected?

If you are asking yourself where it is easiest to get elected, you may be thinking about politics for the wrong reasons.

Being entrusted with a publicly elected office is a great responsibility. One which everyone standing for election should take VERY seriously indeed.

If taking the time and making the effort to secure enough votes to win an election sounds like too much work for you, 4 or 5 years with the responsibility of fighting for what's in the best interests of your electorate certainly will be.

12. How much work will it take to get Elected?

Very few candidates find running in elections easy.

Being a candidate is usually a lot of work – if you are taking the prospect of being elected seriously.

The hard work often begins long before the election itself is called.

Some elections are not contested. When this happens, and you are the only candidate, or there are the same or a lower number of candidates including you standing for election than the number of seats available for the Ward or Division, you become 'Elected' without having to actually run a campaign.

Non contested elections happen more regularly at Parish & Town level, where interest in becoming a councillor varies, and there can be a number of seats representing a Parish or Town Ward.

However, non-contested elections do happen at Borough and District level frequently too, and it is technically possible to be elected without contest as a Member of Parliament, if nobody decides to stand against you!

It is sensible to expect that an Election will always be contested and prepare on the basis that if you are going to win, then you will have to run a good campaign and fight very hard for votes.

As a candidate, the amount of work necessary to win a seat will in many ways be based upon the number of electors there will be for your Ward or Division on the Electoral Roll, coupled with its physical size and location.

The number of electors is fewest for a Parish or Town Council Ward and will increase as you go up the Tiers of Government.

In real terms, if you want to meet everyone personally who you are likely to represent if elected, you will have a greater chance of this if you run for a Parish or Town Council Seat.

The bigger the area a seat covers, the more help you will need to reach everyone and once you reach County or Unitary level authorities, direct contact with every voter will be almost impossible to achieve.

It is important to also be aware that as you go up the Tiers of Government, the level of politics increases too, and this can have a considerable impact on the type of campaign you will need to run and how much effort you will need to make in communicating your messages to the people who you will be asking to trust and elect you.

Part 2 – The things you need to know

13. Whenever the Election is – you need to get started - NOW!

When you have access to all the information about the next local elections in your area, it will be easy to see the election process itself as being between the date that the election is officially called - which is usually at the end of the March before the election, and Election Day itself, which is usually the first Thursday in the May of that year.

This period – between the date when the Election is ‘called’ and the day of the Election is the formal campaign period, when all political and electoral activity must be carried out under the requirements set down by the Electoral Commission under Electoral Law.

There are very specific rules about what you can do, say and the amount of money you can spend on your campaign during this period, and I will come back to this later.

What you shouldn’t do is fall into the trap of thinking the only time that anyone is running for an election, is during the formal election period itself.

Anyone who is going to get elected and then get re-elected as a good councillor will understand and respect the fact that *everything they do* has the potential to have an impact on the result of the next election.

However, what a good community representative will not do, is only focus on doing things that they believe will get and keep them elected – as regrettably most of today’s politicians sadly do.

Yes, there is a difference.

You should be under no illusion that if you do your job well and always keep the best interests of the people you represent – or aim to represent firmly in mind at all times, you will gain the support of people you didn’t even expect.

That way, even when you don’t achieve the results that you might have hoped for, in terms of doing what’s right and maintaining your integrity and the relationship you have with your electors, you will always win.

So, whether the next election you can run in is this coming May or is in a year, two years or even three years’ time, if you are committed to representing local people and doing what’s right, your work needs to begin *right now*.

14. Get to know your local Democratic Services Department

We all love to hate our local councils (At least until we are part of them!).

But whatever the council you hope to be elected to represent by your Ward or Division, it is essential that you get to know the role of the Democratic Services Department at your local District Level Authority, which takes responsibility for managing ALL Elections in your area.

Your local District Level Authority or Council will usually but not always be known as a Borough, District or City Council, unless it is a Unitary Authority, in which it could be a County or perhaps a Metropolitan Borough or similar.

This will be the same local authority which collects the Council Tax for residents in the area where you are planning to run to be elected.

All the information you need about who to contact, the name of the Monitoring Officer (which is very important if you should experience a problem during your official campaign) and the timetables you will need to keep to, will be available on this specific council's website.

The website should also provide the address where you will need to attend to submit your Nomination Papers, provide information on how and when you can obtain your Candidate Pack, and also advise upon how you make an appointment to do so (Your Nomination Papers will need to be checked to make sure they are 'valid' – and it's very important that you give yourself enough time to re-do them if there's a problem!).

It is very easy to think of the Council as being in some way against you as a new candidate. But the Officers you will meet and interact with as a candidate may well be the same as the ones you will have lots of dealings with very quickly if you successfully become an Elected Member.

As such, it is in your mutual interests to have a positive and professional relationship, even at this stage.

Whenever the next election for your Parish, Town, Borough, District, City or Unitary authority might be, if you are going to run, you must keep up to date with all the information that your local Democratic Services Department makes available.

15. The Tiers of Government – an overview

One of the things people often overlook is that there is a series of different Local, Regional and Central Government Authorities to which anyone eligible can be Elected as a Member, and they all have responsibility for different parts and areas of government or public service delivery.

Once you begin campaigning, you will quickly come to realise that many voters do not understand the structure of government and where responsibility for different public services is held.

The structure of Government can be confusing for many reasons, and this is why it is important for you to understand:

- a) What the authority you wish to be elected to itself does, and
- b) What all the other authorities covering the same area do – *as you may quickly find yourself needing to contact them.*

The different authorities are known as the Tiers of Government. Because they overlap, literally on top of each other in the same geographical area.

It is currently possible for a voter to have different elected representatives representing them at up to 5 different levels, depending upon the local structure of government and where the responsibilities for any specific geographical areas lie.

The Tiers of Government are:

1. Parish & Town Councils
2. Borough & District Councils (District Level Authorities)
3. County Councils
4. Unitary Authorities (an amalgamation of the responsibilities of 1 and/or 2 & 3)
5. City & Regional Mayors
6. Parliament (The Westminster Parliament, headed by The Prime Minister)

16. Parish & Town Councils

Arguably the most accessible form of Government in the UK today is local Parish and Town Councils.

Parish and Town Councils are also the most diverse local authorities, in terms of their size, the regularity of when they meet, their budget, and the assets and activities which they have responsibility for.

Parish & Town Councils typically only exist within rural or countryside Boroughs or Districts and they often hold responsibility for the area around and including a Village, a definable/outlying area of a Town or a group of very small Villages or Hamlets (Parish), or alternatively an area known as a Town which itself is not big enough demographically (have enough people living there or registered to vote) to qualify as a Borough or District in government terms.

The responsibilities of Parish & Town Councils typically include:

- Community Assets (Which includes village halls, town halls, public toilets, other community buildings, playing fields, parks, green spaces etc., which have belonged to the parish/town historically OR have been 'adopted' as a result of development)
- Litter Bins (Paying for their purchase and installation, choosing the site etc.)
- Dog Bins (Paying for their purchase and installation, choosing the site etc.)

- Benches (Paying for their purchase and installation, choosing the site etc.)
- Bus Shelters (Paying for their purchase and installation, choosing the site etc.)
- Cleaning and maintaining Community Assets
- Setting the Parish or Town 'Precept' – the amount every household contributes to the running of the Council, which is paid as part of their 'Council Tax'
- Grants
- Consideration of planning applications as an official 'respondent'
- Representing the community where appropriate
- Supporting other community stakeholders and local organisations (where appropriate)
- Other responsibilities which are specific to the council

It doesn't look or sound like a lot of responsibility. But for those who really care about the community in which they live and the shared experience they have with others who live and work there too, becoming a member of a local parish or town council can be very rewarding as it is possible to experience the impact of the work and decisions made first-hand.

Parish & town councils will always have at least one officer known as a clerk, who is responsible for administration and communication. The clerk is the person you would normally contact to make enquiries about the work of the council.

Information regarding the area which the parish or town council covers (its electoral constituency), its parish wards, the number of councillors elected for each, the electoral cycle (When the council will next be elected) should be available from the council itself via its website, or alternatively by contacting the clerk.

Otherwise, the Democratic Services Department of the corresponding District Level Authority should be able to help, or you can find information from the Local Government Boundary Commission [HERE](#).

17. Borough, City & District Councils (District Level Authorities)

Borough or District Councils provide the administrative hub of local government.

They oversee and manage a wide range of public services that voters experience on a regular or day-to-day basis and hold key responsibilities for our local environment.

Councillors are elected to Borough or District Council Seats as Representatives of 'Wards'. Wards typically cover the same area as a multiple of Parish Council Wards (where they exist).

District Level Authorities typically provide Electoral Services for ALL public elections, irrespective of the Tier of Government, through their Democratic Services Departments.

It will be your District Level Authority that you will need to contact regarding the local elections process and requirements to become a candidate in an election in the location over which the authority presides.

The responsibilities of District Level Authorities normally include:

- Planning
- Building Control
- Licensing (Sale of Alcohol, Taxi & Private Hire, Scrap Metal Collection, Gambling, Sex Shops, Street Trading)
- Housing
- Environmental Health
- Refuse & Recycling collections
- Maintaining Parks & Green Spaces
- Street Cleansing
- Setting the Council's Annual Budget or 'Precept' – the amount every household contributes to the running of the Council, which is paid as part of their 'Council Tax'
- Electoral Services (non-political)
- Flood Prevention & Emergency Planning
- The collection and redistribution of Council Tax
- Community facilities (Sports halls, swimming pools, public toilets, car parks)

District Level Authorities are perceived by many in politics to be where responsibility really begins.

Elections are rarely uncontested for District Level Authorities and most councils at this level are under the control of a political group or made up of elected members who have been elected as representatives of well-known political parties.

Once elected, Members usually have the opportunity to join various committees and contribute in different roles with varying levels of responsibility, depending on the structure of the council.

Some of these committees, such as those with Licensing or Planning responsibility, are considered apolitical and quasi-judicial in nature.

18. County Councils

County Councils make up the highest tier of local government and provide a range of public services that are typically more strategically focused, as opposed to the more 'day-to-day' nature of the work of District Level Authorities.

Their area of control usually corresponds with the geographical boundaries of Counties.

Councillors are elected to County Council Seats as Representatives of 'Divisions'.

Divisions typically cover the same area as several District Level Authority Wards, which themselves typically cover a multiple of Parish Wards. (where they exist)

The responsibilities of County Councils typically include:

- Education (The Local Education Authority)
- Adult Education
- School Buildings & Infrastructure
- Highways (Minor roads and the major roads not under the control of the Highways Agency)
- Footpaths and Public Rights of Way
- Waste Disposal Strategy (Rubbish disposal sites, waste incinerators etc.)
- Social Services
- Public Transport
- Education Transport
- Transport Planning
- Strategic Planning
- Emergency Planning
- Setting the Council's Annual Budget or 'Precept' – the amount every household contributes to the running of the Council, which is paid as part of their 'Council Tax'

County Council Elections are rarely uncontested, and most County Councils are under the control of a Political Group or made up of Members who have been elected as representatives of well-known political parties.

Once elected, members usually have the opportunity to join various committees and contribute in different roles with varying levels of responsibility, depending on the structure of the council.

19. Unitary Authorities

In some areas, the roles and responsibilities of Parish & Town and/or Borough & District and County Councils have been amalgamated and made the responsibility of one local authority for that area.

The areas Unitary Authorities cover typically correspond with a Borough/District Boundary or a County Boundary but could mirror the area covered by a multiple of former Borough/District or County Councils.

Competition for a seat on a Unitary Authority is likely to be much greater than fighting for a seat on a Borough/District Council or a County Council Division – especially if 'unitary status' has recently been obtained and the way that councilors are elected to the Authority has been changed.

20. Multiple Seat Wards & Divisions

Surprising as it may sound, it is sometimes the case that more than one, and perhaps as many as 6 or even more councilors will represent the same electoral area for the same authority in a multiple-seat Ward or Division.

Having a multiple number of seats for the very same election can make life interesting for the people who count the votes after Election Day.

Having multiple-seat Wards and Divisions is also one of the ways that serious attempts are made to ensure that there is a balanced number of residents being represented by Councillors within different Local Authorities.

You will normally find multiple seat areas are where there are a lot more people living in a geographically small area, which itself cannot be divided into smaller areas for the purpose of administering an election.

If you are considering running within a multiple-seat Ward or Division, don't be put off by the idea that there is more than one seat and that you are going to run alone.

There are no rules saying that any political party or group has to have a candidate for every seat.

It might actually be of benefit to you, as voters may feel they get the opportunity to support the party or candidate to whom they feel their political allegiances lie but can also support a local independent candidate at the same time.

Think of it like this, if you have enough people do that with one political party as others do with another, you might get twice the number of votes or either candidate!

REMEMBER: If you are running alone in an Election like this in a multiple seat Ward or Division and are out canvassing, it is always a good idea to make people aware that they have the opportunity to vote more than once at the same time, and that they can vote for you AND a party candidate too.

21. By Elections and The Electoral Cycle

A normal election or civic cycle for a local authority is a term of 4 years, which will only normally be changed or delayed in a time of emergency.

At the end of each cycle or term, often all, but sometimes a proportion of a council's total number of seats will be automatically vacated and put back up for election.

Where Local Authorities run more than one Electoral cycle, each respective term will last for 4 years.

This means that the overall balance of power could effectively be changed each and every time that one of the cycles ends and the Seats ending their electoral cycle are put back up for a Vote.

As a councillor elected at the beginning of an election cycle, your maximum term before having to seek re-election or step down would normally be 4 years.

When an Elected Member or councillor decides to step down, leave or resign from their position or seat part way through the cycle, or is unable to continue for some other reason, a By Election will be called just for that specific seat.

By Elections can happen at any time throughout the election cycle.

The process is very much the same as a full Council or Local Election in terms of the number of days between the Election being called and the Election itself, and when Nominations have to be submitted, and all other administrative requirements have to be fulfilled.

However, a By Election can and often is only run for a single Ward or Division, or for one of the seats within it if it has multiple seats.

A By Election will be run to coincide with other Elections if one is scheduled for a similar time, and the local Monitoring Officer does have some discretion over the dates of By Elections. Whereas scheduled Local Elections are normally held on the first Thursday in the corresponding May.

With this level of flexibility, it might be the case that you will know a By Election is coming for a certain Ward or Division several months before. Alternatively, you could have very little notice at all.

Notices of By Elections are posted in the same way as normal Local Authority Elections, so you will leave yourself very little time to develop a campaign if you wait for the news to reach you in this way.

Local Media and the Council Minutes will be the most reliable sources of news for you to become aware of when a By Election is due.

But hearing by word of mouth from people involved with the council itself will always help you a lot more when information like this first becomes available.

22. Data Protection

From the moment you begin campaigning, whether you have been recognised as an Official Candidate for an Election or before this has happened, it is likely that people will share information about themselves which you MUST always consider to have been shared confidentially and in trust.

Whether there are laws or regulations that cover your conduct as a councillor once you have been Elected, or before, when getting yourself elected is just your aim, you **MUST** embrace the principles of Data Protection with everything that you do.

This means that any personal information you are given or obtain has been shared for your use alone, unless there is a very good reason to share what you know with an appropriate person or authority.

The only exception would be when there is a need for immediate intervention, because a person is clearly at risk from harm.

Otherwise, you should always ask the permission of the person, family, a parent or guardian **BEFORE** communicating information you have been given in trust to anyone else.

If for any reason you do need to share information with an appropriate authority you should be confident in the legitimacy of that person's post or responsibility and keep records – preferably e-mail copies, of everything you share and discuss with them, including when the contact was made.

ALL personal information you have regarding ANYONE – even their names and contact details must be held securely and not be accessible to anyone other than yourself.

Password and preferably encrypted protection of such documents as a minimum is a must.

Occasionally, you will become aware of a story or a valuable insight into a broader issue for the community, which could be illustrated by information that one resident or their family can give. If you feel this to be the case, you **MUST** ask the permission of the person and/or family before using their names and any information about them in any material you publish, communication you have with the media, or any reference you make to them in public.

You should also never publish photographs of people in which ANY of them can be identified – no matter how difficult it may seem, without asking their permission first.

In the case of children and young people under the age of 18, or adults who may be considered vulnerable, you **MUST** obtain the permission of their parent or guardian before taking and/or publishing their picture.

NEVER assume consent to take pictures, just because someone attends a meeting or an event which has been organised by you.

If you are in any doubt about permission **DO NOT PUBLISH!**

If you have no legitimate reason to keep personal information you should delete or destroy it immediately.

Data Protection is one of those things which it is not only useful to read up about, but to also keep up to date with too.

As such, I cannot recommend highly enough that you research and keep up to date with ALL data protection rules, as these will certainly help you once you are elected and be a good thing to know about in the meantime too. (Take a look at the Information Commissioners Office Website and Google Data Protection and GDPR / General Data Protection Regulations)

HOW TO GET ELECTED

Part 3 - Developing your Campaign

23. Identify the Local issues

You are likely to already have a grasp on at least some of the issues facing the community where you are seeking election.

However, as a good councillor, making it your business to be aware of everything going on in your area at community level will be essential to help you be the representative that you need to be.

Issues often overlap, and if you don't ensure that you are equipped with an objective view, the issues that you are passionate about will suffer from an unintended form of isolation, because you have no knowledge of how gaining success with one issue will impact upon others.

Information about what's going on, what's upsetting people, and what you can potentially do to help the people you are aiming to represent is available from many different sources.

My best advice is that you introduce yourself to all of them, build links and relationships with and within all, and never close yourself off to any source of information.

Just bear in mind that every organisation or business has an agenda of its own and it is healthy to have this at the back of your mind when you are considering their news and any messages that it conveys.

Council Meetings, Minutes & News

Whatever council you are aiming to run for, it is really important to be aware of what ALL the local authorities are doing in the area where you will work.

You can and should attend meetings of other councils covering the area where you are seeking election as often as possible, whether they are above or below the council you have targeted within the Tiers of Government.

Even if you go straight for a county level seat, the information from a parish council meeting can be invaluable because Parish and Town Councils are the most accessible form of Government and therefore the most likely to be accessed by the voters who are important to you.

Equally, if you are going to be a great parish representative, it really helps to know what your district and county level authorities are doing too!

If you can't attend, it's not the end of the world. Minutes, Reports and Agendas are available on the websites for District and County level authorities as a matter of course, and most Parish & Town Councils are now in the position to do the same.

Make sure you follow all the councils representing the area you will be working in on social media, and check that you follow each department that is communicating its own news too – e.g. Education at a County Council. Planning, Licensing, Refuse collections at a District level Authority.

Local Media

It's really important to have and maintain a realistic view of all media, and particularly your local newspapers, online news and radio stations.

They are all highly discerning about what *they* consider to be news, and their view of what makes good news is likely to be very different to your own – *particularly if you are looking ahead to how issues can and might grow as time passes.*

What the news channels bring light to as current affairs in political terms is often the tip of an iceberg that grew in darkness from the bottom up.

Listening to, reading and following all of your local media on social media is a very good idea, because it will help you keep track of the developing bigger picture in the wider area around you, and see how events elsewhere may contribute to shaping strategic level policy nearer to home.

BBC Local Radio is currently one of the best sources for the news that you will need to be aware of most. If you cannot listen regularly, follow their social media accounts and keep an eye on the BBC Local News web pages too.

REMEMBER TO THINK CRITICALLY. The 'news' content provided by the media is often much more opinion than news.

Facts, figures and even stories themselves are frequently presented to encourage a particular reaction or certain point of view and in this sense, local media is often no different to the national channels.

Social Media

Probably the easiest way to focus on as many news sources as possible, social media is a great way to find out what all your stakeholders are doing, planning and thinking about the issues which they are specifically facing.

Follow **ALL** the key organisations in your area.

For example:

- Councils
- Council Departments
- The Police
- The Fire Service
- The Ambulance Service
- The Environment Agency
- The Highways Agency
- Local Travel Companies
- Prominent local businesses – especially those with a high profile in the local community
- Charities such as Food Banks, Rotary, Lions, RSPCA
- The Hospitals serving your area
- Schools
- Local Interest Groups – particularly those focused on local issues
- The local branches of the Political Parties
- Councilors representing the same area from the other tiers of government
- Your local MP

Whilst tempting to do so, there will be little benefit to following other candidates or their political parties. Run your own race and concentrate on running it as best you can, using all of the available time and energy that you have!

Schools

With at least one school, if not several in almost every Ward or Division, keeping an eye on news from all of them in the area you are targeting will be very useful.

Schools often have communities of their own which can be very vibrant and naturally focus on educational issues.

Education based issues will be a key focus for county council candidates. However, other community focused matters do come into focus such as road and community safety, and the use of community buildings or recreation resources, which might be important if a school has limited space of its own.

Most schools have a social media presence, and it will be in your interest to follow them, whilst also keeping an eye on their websites.

Once you are elected, it will be to your benefit to introduce yourself to local head teachers and possibly the boards of governors too, so that you can open up a clear channel of communication and help them with any issues that relate to your areas of responsibility as their local councillor.

Local Charities, Voluntary Organisations & Interest Groups

You may be surprised by just how many local charities, voluntary organisations and interest groups there are around you, particularly in cities, towns and built-up areas.

Some will already be known to you for the work they are doing in the community, or the campaigning that they are doing.

Others will be working away in the background but will be mentioned in the minutes and agendas of council meetings, on notice boards and in a broad web search of charities, voluntary organisations and interest groups in your area.

When you find them, check out their websites. If the work they are doing is community focused, follow them on social media and look for opportunities to attend events that they might be holding, which you will be able and welcome to attend.

Surprising as it may sound, just attending events and taking the time to say hello to people and introduce yourself is a very effective way to get yourself known and pick up useful information on current and upcoming issues.

You don't need to speak, grandstand or try to force your way into the limelight. Just being present and showing that what they are doing is important enough for you to share your time with them is usually enough.

When you have been seen a few times in different places, people will begin to get more interested in who you are, what you are doing and what you have to say.

Social Clubs, Pubs & word of mouth

Just talking to people from the area you are hoping to get elected is always a good way to pick up information on the issues that are on the minds of voters locally.

Canvassing and questionnaires are probably the best way to get direct intelligence from your potential electors. But this will nonetheless be seen as a formal process.

A more relaxed way to get to know people and find out what they think is to visit local social clubs and pubs, picking up information by word of mouth as you do.

Once people know who you are and what you are doing, many will take the opportunity to tell you what they think about things when you find them in a social setting.

Barriers often come down and there is that feeling that you all have something in common and might actually be friends.

Just having a chat with local people can reveal an awful lot about what's on the minds of many other people locally and this kind of insight can help you no end.

You do need to be cautious with this approach, however.

Please bear in mind that you will also encounter a lot of gossip and one-sided truths. So, if you do hear something that is of interest, use it as a guide to investigate further and check the facts, rather than seeing it as an immediate opportunity to get carried away with a new approach or course of action.

Drinking with potential voters – even if the circumstances appear friendly and convivial, can also be one of the quickest ways to remove the respect that local people might have for you.

Always remember to focus on asking questions and listening to what you are being told.

This is not the time to preach any kind of plan or manifesto!

The Emergency Services

Always follow the Police, Ambulance and Fire Services in your local area.

They are all very active on social media and will have informative websites for you to read and follow too.

The news from the Emergency Services will often be incident led. It may not even appear to be massively relevant on an event-by-event basis.

However, you will pick up common themes with incidents that they all report and may also pick up useful pointers about strategic issues which could have a broad impact across the responsibilities of different local authorities across the area.

24. Information sources that you MUST use

The nuts and bolts of any political campaign will be your understanding of what the authority you are campaigning to win a seat with has been doing; has achieved and where it has not been doing as well as it perhaps should.

The key facts that you will require, along with the history of how decisions have been made and who was involved in making those decisions will be available as a public record.

There is an expectation that government at all levels will be transparent with its decision making and policy development. As such, the records of public meetings and those involving committees and sub committees are usually available on the local authority's website.

This means that you should be able to access the information that you need very easily and usually with just a few clicks.

Suggestions for reading:

- The Agendas of Meetings

- The Minutes of Meetings
- Reports on Public Consultations
- The Council's Strategy Documents
- All other documents which have been publicly released.
- The attendance records and voting history for any sitting councillor you may be running against as a candidate in an election

Local Authorities may now have many years' worth of historical documents available online.

As a sensible rule, just read up on documents covering the work of the authority during its past 4-year term. Unless there is a significant issue which you would like to see addressed, which has been 'active' for longer and it will help you to obtain research from the start that will provide the full history or chronology of events.

If information you need to access is not available publicly, it may be protected, or otherwise available through a FOI Request, (Freedom of Information) for which an administration fee may be payable. If you wish to access information in this way, you should contact the authority involved directly.

25. Putting out a Questionnaire

If you are new to politics and political campaigning, it is likely that the very best way to open up communication with the people you are going to ask to vote for you is to distribute and then collect a questionnaire.

Questionnaires are a very effective way of opening up dialogue with people in your area, allowing voters to tell you about what concerns them and how you could represent them better.

They also begin the long-term task of demonstrating that you not only care about the people you represent and *what is important to them*. But you are also prepared to listen and find out how you can make a difference *for them*.

The questionnaire process is simple. But it must be seen through and completed fully if you are going to gain maximum value from the process.

The questionnaire process:

- A. Design a questionnaire
- B. Test your questionnaire
- C. Print enough copies for the area where you are planning to seek election
- D. Deliver your questionnaire
- E. Knock on every door to collect your questionnaire
- F. Collate your results
- G. Communicate your results

A. Design a Questionnaire

Probably the most important part of the process to get right is designing your questionnaire.

You may already have a good idea about the issues that the community is experiencing. Whether its speeding traffic, over development, antisocial behaviour, regularity of bin collections or any one of a number of many other issues – some which will almost certainly be very specific to the area.

Even if you are certain that you know what the issues are, it is always a good idea to ask people for their opinion – *whilst also being certain that you are not attempting to influence them with your own.*

What is very important, is that you should not attempt to mislead people in the area you will be seeking election, by drawing attention to issues which will fall outside the scope and responsibility of the council you hope to represent and/or that would be your responsibility as an elected councilor – *if you are successful.*

This is why it is essential that you understand what the authority you are campaigning to represent is responsible for, as well as what it is not.

Yes, you might get elected by promising to deliver results that would never be within your control or sphere of influence.

People are not stupid, and they will learn not to trust you in a heartbeat – the moment they understand that you have deliberately misled them.

Tips for your questionnaire:

- REMEMBER – this exercise is about learning how other people feel about issues affecting their lives. It is not an opportunity to preach or grandstand your own views. *Doing so will just annoy people and switch them off to what you can do.*
- Think of questions which are closed – i.e. they can be answered with a simple yes and no.
- Questions should be about local issues, not ideas.
- Use a simple word-processing programme like Microsoft Word, and a type face no smaller than 12pt.
- Make sure it is easy to read and remember that it is likely that at least some of the people who will read your questionnaire will have difficulty reading. So, keep plenty of space between questions.
- DO NOT write anything that is defamatory about anyone – even if you believe the information to be true.
- DO NOT ask for personal information of any kind.
- If you do ask for people to provide any information about themselves, you MUST ask them to confirm that they are happy for you to hold their data. Add a check box to be sure.

- Do not try to lead people with your questions – if you want an honest response.
- Avoid attempting to influence people in the way that you write your questions. A simple test is to look at your question and check if you are using a word or words like *because*, or have edited what you have said to remove them.
- ALWAYS provide an opportunity for people to tell you about issues you have not raised with your questions.
- ALWAYS tell people who you are and what you are doing.
- Provide an e-mail address at the very least at all times and ensure that all contact details required during a formal election campaign period are correctly available on your questionnaire.
- Invite people to contact you to ask you questions and tell you more.
- If you would be uncomfortable asking any of your questions face-to-face, DON'T ASK THEM – as they are likely to be received in the same way.
- Make clear when you will be calling around to collect completed questionnaires.
- Collect your questionnaires personally.

B. Test your Questionnaire

Even good politicians can get things wrong.

What we write and how it sounds as our internal voice may not be how it comes across to others, so it's always better to check.

Before putting ANY literature through doors, ALWAYS get a few different people to read through and feedback on what you have done.

If the people you ask to review your work are open and honest, you may feel prickly towards what they have to say. But take it on board – and always act upon genuine advice from people who do not have something to gain by influencing you to make changes or go a different way.

C. Print enough copies for the area where you are planning to seek election

It's really important that you visit every house in the area where you are seeking election.

You may not want to do so, for reasons as simple as you know a councillor lives in the house next door and you feel it's almost certain that the people who live there will not vote for you.

The funny thing about politics is that it doesn't work like that. The person who lives next door to a councillor could end up being your greatest supporter – *and as one vote could be all you need to secure a win, you should never let any kind of illogical fear rule out visiting just one house!*

The Democratic Services Department at the local District Level Authority should be able to provide details of the numbers of properties in the Ward or Division you are going to target.

However, there may be restrictions upon how much information they will give you outside of a formal Campaign period, and even then, you may have to provide certain commitments to how you will keep any data secure and what purposes you will use it for.

Get in touch with the relevant Democratic Services Department to find out how you can get a copy of the Electoral Roll.

D. Deliver your Questionnaire

Delivering a leaflet is one of the quickest ways to get to know your patch and the people within it.

It gets you seen by people who wouldn't otherwise recognise you, and putting a name to a face will be one of your greatest allies in securing votes from local people to fight for local issues.

If you have decided to run in an election that is coming up quickly, you may need to get some help.

Just be sure that whoever is delivering leaflets for you is someone you trust to represent you wherever they may go.

E. Knock on every door to collect your Questionnaire

Developing a relationship with voters is essential in local politics.

When there isn't a national election taking place that coincides with the date of the local election and people are not so tribal with their votes, the people who know and trust you could really make all the difference and, in some cases, give you a significant win.

When you speak to people and ask their opinion, they will feel that they are important.

This can apply to people who might even vote for one of the main political parties at other times.

People not only like to know they can access the politicians who represent them. But that their public representatives are ready and waiting to listen to them too.

When you call at a door, it is really important to be polite. Introduce yourself and who you are and tell the people you are calling on that you recently delivered a questionnaire.

Some people will have thrown them away. Others will simply be too busy with life to want to talk. Some will be rude (Remember it's not personal – most people have a very low opinion of politicians these days). But many will be only too pleased to talk.

Once you have spoken to a few different people on the doorstep, you will get an idea of what really works.

When you are collecting a questionnaire, just keep the focus on the information you are being given and leave without discussing what you plan to do and leave it until another time.

F. Collate your results

When you have collected ALL of your questionnaires – *that means all of those you have had returned completed AFTER visiting every relevant address*, you need to collate your results.

The best way to do this is on a spreadsheet with a programme like Microsoft Excel.

A good idea is to set up a box for yes and a box for no against each question. Then put a 1 in the next space in the column or row against the yes or the no for each question for every form.

You will then be in a position to use the spreadsheet formulas to count up the numbers.

Using a spreadsheet is a very safe and simple way to manage your results.

You can easily check that you haven't missed anybody or have any misleading information as the number of no's added to the number of yes's for any one question should always add up to the number of questionnaires.

As you work through the questionnaires, you will begin to see patterns emerging. Some might not be what you were expecting – and it's here that you will define yourself against many others, by doing the right thing.

Never try to manipulate data to suit your own needs.

Whether ignoring the results of a question that doesn't appear to help you or trying to read the information in a way that helps an argument, but which is misrepresentative or simply untrue, you will do yourself no favours and immediately fail the people you want to represent.

Tip:

Always be open. If real data tells you the majority of people want things to go a certain way – as their representative, that's what you must go with.

G. Communicate your results

If you are in the build up to an election (The period immediately before the election), a good questionnaire and the results from it will serve you very well as the basis of your Election Manifesto.

Ideally, the best time to put a questionnaire out for this purpose, will be a few weeks before the Election is formally called – in perhaps February or early March - if your election is part of the normal cycle, and isn't a by-election.

ALWAYS give yourself enough time to complete the process!

If you do this, you can use the data you have harvested to support your campaign, knowing that your words will resonate with the majority of people AND have the added bonus that they will know you have been listening to them too.

At other times, the best way to communicate what you have found will be through a newsletter, by social media or through a blog – which in my experience, local people will soon begin to read *when you are talking about the real issues which are important to them.*

26. Canvassing before or during an Election Campaign

Probably one of the things that anyone new to politics will fear most of all is canvassing – or going from door to door, speaking to residents and finding out what they think.

Believe it or not, once you have started to gain some experience, canvassing can be a lot of fun.

Canvassing gives you the genuine opportunity to speak one-to-one with the people you are asking to vote for you, and also to find out why other people might be seeing you in a different way and possibly misunderstanding you and what you have to say.

As a rule, you should always canvass voters personally.

If that's not possible, those canvassing on your behalf should be reliable members of any supporting team that you have.

Either way, you or your team should knock on every door in the Ward or Division where you hope to get elected during the Formal Election Campaign - at least once.

If possible, you should visit doorsteps more.

When I was first elected, my running mate and I had knocked on every door twice and in some cases three or four times right up to 9pm on the day of the election itself.

You don't have to wait until it's actually election time before you canvass.

If you want to be taken seriously by voters, you would do well to visit everyone, every few months as an absolute minimum, before you are elected, and once you are elected too.

Suggestions for Canvassing during an election campaign:

- Make a plan for covering certain areas and give yourself enough time to cover a set part of it every evening or Saturday during the election campaign.
- Knock on every door and wait long enough for someone to answer.
- When you do get an answer, always try to smile and be polite.
- Introduce yourself and tell them what you are doing briefly. (*You should devise and remember a sentence that says something like 'Hello, I'm Adam Tugwell and I'm running for Tewkesbury Borough Council as an Independent Candidate in the Elections on 4th May, when I very much hope to be elected to represent you'.*)
- Ask them if they are planning to vote and who they are thinking about supporting. (*Do bear in mind that they do not have to tell you this, just because you have asked!*)
- At this point, you should know if pursuing a conversation where you can discuss your manifesto is a good idea. Basically, if they tell you they are voting for another candidate in a very clear way, wish them a nice day and be on your way!
- If they are open to talking, don't immediately see a green light to grandstand your ideas.
- Ask them how they feel about the area and what they would like to see being done.
- DON'T criticise or talk negatively about the other candidates – no matter how you feel about them. You are running your own race!
- DON'T make promises you cannot keep.
- DO run through your commitments. But keep them brief and to perhaps no more than 3 to 5 'bullet points'.
- Be prepared to talk through any or all of your commitments.
- NEVER lie if you feel cornered by a question or comment in any way. *Be honest and say you will research a topic if you have found yourself challenged by what someone has said – it's a great way to open up communication if you offer to go back or contact them by e-mail or by phone – and they will feel really valued if you do.*
- Make sure that they have a copy of your literature if you have already delivered some, and your contact details, for if they wish to get in touch.
- When you have left the property, make a note about how many votes you believe you can expect from that household.
- If possible, use a copy of the Electoral Roll to do this.
- The Electoral Roll will provide names of the people in each house, but it is safest not to use the names to address people when they answer the door, just in case it isn't them! *Names appear on the Electoral Roll which may not be the names people use in their day-to-day lives. You will avoid feeling embarrassed, red-faced or silly, if you happen to stumble upon someone like this by greeting everyone in the same way.*

REMEMBER: You must not refer to yourself as being a 'candidate' for any election in any way, written, spoken or otherwise, unless and until you have been formally recognised as being a candidate for that specific Election by the Democratic Services Department at the Council managing the Election you plan to run in.

Suggestions for Canvassing at other times:

- Make a plan for covering a certain area, giving yourself enough time to complete it on a Saturday morning.
- A week or perhaps two weeks before, visit each of the houses and deliver a small leaflet outlining the issues you are working on and making clear that you would like to know what residents think about these, or anything else which might be of concern to them.
- On the leaflet, tell them when you will be returning, and ask them to display the leaflet where it can be seen on the day you are going to return. That way you will only knock on doors where people want to talk - which won't by any means be all. But you will also save yourself a lot of time too. (People will remember that you have been to their house and have given them the opportunity to speak to you, even if they don't take up the offer)
- When you call at a house, like when you are canvassing at election time above, be polite, smile and introduce yourself, making reference to your note. (Which will hopefully be easy for you to point at)
- Ask them what they would like to talk about, let them speak and make sure you listen!
- Be open about your thoughts about what you can do.
- Don't make promises you cannot keep.
- Always be prepared to signpost someone who can help them if you genuinely know that you cannot.

Once you have learned and established a canvassing routine and the best way to interact with people on the doorstep, the experience will be incredibly useful.

Something to bear in mind about canvassing:

One thing you should never do is get involved in an argument on somebody's doorstep - especially over your policies.

It is important to be aware that you don't always know who you are talking to on a doorstep, and if they support another candidate, they may consider it a good investment in supporting the other candidate by wasting your time.

The logic being that you will have less time to spend with people who might support you, if you are on their doorstep fruitlessly trying to convince them to change their mind!

27. Leaflets & Campaign Literature

Canvassing, questionnaires and social media are highly effective ways to get yourself known in your community and to maintain a presence with the people you will be asking to vote for you.

However, people are not always at home when you call, and during the election campaign in particular, you need to be sure that your story has reached as many potential voters as possible – *even if for some reason it is not possible for you to meet.*

Leaflets are a great way to achieve this and support your efforts both before the election campaign and during it too.

You will need to take a different approach before and during the formal election campaign itself.

During the election campaign, what you spend is very important and this is why you must plan what material or literature you are going to produce, along with every detail of who will produce it and what it will cost you too.

The upside of producing your own literature is that it will make your campaign feel much more authentic and real to you. So, enjoy writing, designing and producing it!

Producing leaflets and campaign literature - The Key Points:

- A. Election Address
- B. Standard photo-copied or home-printed leaflets
- C. Calling cards
- D. Get out the Vote Cards
- E. Design
- F. Printing
- G. Things to bear in mind

A. Election Address:

For your election campaign, you really should produce and deliver a higher quality and preferably colour leaflet which has been printed professionally.

A good size for this purpose is an A5, four-page booklet, which if you were producing yourself would be rather like folding a page of A4 and using it like a book.

Always use a type size no less than 12pt that is easy to read such as Arial or Times New Roman. (Check with a few different people to understand what works best)

Producing an Election Address is the ideal opportunity to tell people a little bit about yourself and your background. Be sure to do so in a way which will explain why you are running and asking for the support of local voters in a way which will make sense to the reader.

Your Election Address is also the best way to 'go public' with your Election Pledges or 'Manifesto'.

Once published, you can also publish your Pledges on your blog and social media accounts, where you will have room to provide more information that will help readers.

A good time to deliver your Election Address will be about a week after the Official Candidates List has been confirmed by the Democratic Services Department.

This way, when people begin to compare the election literature from all the candidates who have delivered to their address, they will be equipped with the best information possible.

B. Standard photo-copied or home printed leaflets:

With no election coming up in the near future, a two-sided black and white leaflet in a newsletter form is a great way to keep in touch.

Ideally your leaflets should be sized A4. But A5 would also be fine.

As with an Election Address, always use a type size no less than 12pt that is easy to read such as Arial or Times New Roman.

Producing this type of leaflet outside of an election period is an ideal way to provide a newsletter that will keep everyone up to date with what you have done, what you are doing and what you are planning to do.

During an election period, this is an ideal quick-to-produce format that you can use to pick up and highlight new or recurring issues which have come to your attention whilst out canvassing.

During the election campaign, this type of leaflet would ideally go out to voters in the last week to ten days before the election.

C. Calling cards:

Not everyone will be at home when you call.

Sometimes you will not find a way to return when you might like to. So, leaving a calling card is a great way to let people know that you have visited.

Whilst they are referred to as 'cards', an A4 sheet cut into four parts with the same information and design on each part is a great way to produce something simple which will do the job very well and is very cost effective to produce on your PC.

Using the same principles with size and font for your typeface as Leaflets and an Election Address, your message need only be very short.

Let your potential voters know that you called and were sorry to have missed them but will be happy to answer any questions if they would like to get in touch.

Just remember to have all your contact details on the calling card too!

D. Get out the Vote cards:

If you have any money left in your Election Expenses Budget, a great way to support your final push for support on Election Day is to deliver a 'get out the vote' card.

Much the same size and design as your calling cards, a 'Get out the Vote' card needs to be very simple and written as a very polite and gentle reminder that it is literally Election Day 'today', and that the Voter taking the time go to the Polling Station and supporting you will be greatly appreciated.

If possible, your 'Get out the Vote' cards should be delivered to everyone who does not have a Postal Vote.

The best time to deliver Get out the Vote cards is first thing in the morning on Election Day. ideally before everyone has left for work or the school run etc.

E. Design:

If you have no experience of using design software, designing a leaflet will probably sound like a very challenging task.

The good news is that most computers that have Microsoft Office Software loaded on them will have a programme called Microsoft Publisher.

MS Publisher is easy to use and ideal for producing high quality and easy to read leaflets which will get your message across.

If you are unsure how to use MS Publisher to complete a specific task, just Google it, remembering to start your question with 'How do you get MS Publisher to.....'

F. Printing:

If you are getting leaflets printed professionally, you MUST ask if the printer is happy to produce political flyers and/or leaflets.

This is particularly important for an Election Address or any material you have printed by them for use during the formal campaign, as you will have to include their details.

All of your leaflets will need a blank margin around the edges. Printers call this the 'bleed', and if you are setting up a design which is going to a professional printer, it will be a good idea to ask them what bleed will be required BEFORE you begin your design.

You should be able to find a low-cost printing company on the Internet. Just search for low-cost printing or something similar and see what pops up.

Most printing companies of this kind will do a quick turnaround and should be able to get your finished leaflets back to you within a week.

Nonetheless, it's a good idea to get them planned, checked and printed in good time and you would be well advised not to leave creating an Election Address until the election has been called!

When you are printing leaflets at home, it will be a good idea to set up a test page with a picture, diagram or type across it. You can then check what margins you will need to leave available as a bleed at the top, bottom, left and right of the page.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Plan your leaflet, Election Address, calling card as far in advance as possible.
- Write your material first, whether it's news, election pledges or notifying people of an event that you have planned.
- The only leaflet you really should get produced by a professional printer is your Election Address. The others will be much quicker to produce on a printer at home or at a reasonably priced photocopy store.
- Use a design programme like MS Publisher which you are likely to have on your PC
- Set up your leaflet, either testing the print area on your home printer or checking on the margin or bleed area you will need with the printing company first.
- Use a Font which is easy to read, such as Arial, Aptos, Times New Roman, Verdana or Gill Sans.
- Use a font size of 12pt or greater for any part of the main body of text – That's the part you want people to read.
- Leave plenty of space around your articles, pictures etc.
- Check on the information you MUST include for material you publish and distribute during the election period itself. If you print the material yourself and have no agent, it will only be your details required. But if a printer and agent are involved, you MUST recognise them with appropriate wording too.
- Either way, ALWAYS include your contact details so that people can get in touch.
- Check your draft design with a few people before you get it printed. *Pay special attention to how easy it is to read and whether the first impression is either busy or that there might be too much space.*
- Check the spelling and grammar and get someone else you trust to check it too. *Innocent mistakes like these are very easy to miss but can be very costly further on!*
- Add pictures where you can. Have a portrait picture of yourself which sits alongside your name (And SMILE!)
- Have your Election Address ready in time to distribute at the beginning of the election campaign – that's once the Official Candidates List has been confirmed.
- Print at least one leaflet later in the election campaign, say in the last week to ten days, which covers up to date news and issues which you have identified as you have been campaigning.
- When Canvassing always carry a calling card so you can let people know you have been to visit when you call at their home or business and they are out.

- REMEMBER that anything and everything you produce to be used during the Election Campaign MUST be accounted for financially. *Your Election Address will almost certainly be the most costly expense you will have, and you should budget for this FIRST before you think about other leaflets or anything else you might like to spend money on.*
- YOU MUST NEVER EXCEED YOUR ELECTION EXPENSES BUDGET!!!

G. Things to bear in mind:

REMEMBER:

- You shouldn't publish opinions, gossip or anything personal in nature about anyone – even if they are another candidate.
- It's ok to mention people in a factual way i.e. about what they have or haven't done – as long as you can produce evidence to support any facts that you mention.
- 'Play the ball, not the man'
- Hearsay or word of mouth is NOT factual evidence!
- Never lie or create stories.
- Never make false promises or suggest you will be able to influence matters that you will not.
- Be sure that the information you are discussing is relevant to the work you will have the ability to do and the authority you are working to be elected to.
- If you are going to refer to someone else's work, reference the work openly and the source it came from.
- Always ask permission to reproduce work and/or pictures which have/has a copyright and acknowledge that it does.
- Where possible, ask the permission of the copyright holder first and remember that even as an independent representative, some people will not be happy to be linked directly or otherwise with a political campaign.

28. Contact information you should always publish

It's very easy to overlook the role of your contact information when you begin working with your wider community and the general public.

It is an essential part of good communication that you keep your potential electors aware of what you are doing and why.

It's also vital that people you want to vote for you have the opportunity to contact and interact with you effectively.

Get this right, and the circle of good communication between you as a public representative, and people as the members of the public you will represent, will be complete.

Becoming a politician isn't about you, it is about the role that you will fulfill.

From this point of view, it is sensible to treat your campaigning and election activity, and then what you will ultimately do as a councillor as being like a job.

You wouldn't use your personal contact details to advertise the company you work for, and your political work should be no different.

There is no need for you to put your home address on the material you publish at any time outside of a formal election campaign period. However, you do need to provide people with a telephone number and an e-mail address to make the interactive process work.

Rather than use your own phone and the e-mail address that you use for things like your banking and online shopping, it is a very sensible idea to get yourself a pay as you go phone, and a free e-mail account with one of the well-known platform providers.

A separate phone number

You may be thinking 'I already have a phone... what's wrong with using that?!'

Well, in some respects absolutely nothing. But if you are out having a drink or a meal with friends, taking your children to school or on holiday with your family, you might not want to take a call from an angry resident who has just had his flowerbeds trashed by a car cutting across a verge or corner.

Keeping communication streams separate is just a sensible step that will help you to be professional with all the community work that you do.

Most of the main mobile phone networks and the well-known supermarkets sell basic mobile phone packages with plenty of data and airtime to get started for around £20 or even less.

This is a very good investment and a cost-effective way to add a simple layer of personal protection to what you are doing in public.

A separate e-mail address

Just like having a separate phone number, having a different e-mail address for your campaigning and election activity really is a must.

It's very simple to get another e-mail address and you can set up an additional account for free with providers such as Google and Outlook, and can either use your name or as with social media, include a reference to your area or something like that in your new address.

By having a new e-mail address just for your campaigning, you can choose when you pick up the messages which come in as a result of your political work and keep your community work separate from everything else that you do.

The most important thing – for practical reasons – is that a separate e-mail account will make keeping your records much easier.

It doesn't matter what kind of communication it is, and whether you sent or received it. Keeping copies of everything is essential to what you do.

You don't know when you might need to return to conversations you had or information you were given in the present moment at a future time, and when I say future, I literally mean something you do now could only become relevant in a few years' time.

To put it in perspective, when people get upset about something, they can quickly develop a long memory. Emotional upset and anger can lead anyone to remember events very differently to how they actually were. It may not be deliberate or intentional on the part of someone who might have a grievance with you. But all the same, you need to protect yourself against all eventualities.

Use your separate e-mail account to make sure you keep clear and documented evidence of everything which was written, sent and received, and can access at any time.

Records are most definitely one of a politician's best friends!

29. Using the Media in Local Elections & Campaigns

At a time when there are so many TV and Radio stations to choose from that we can easily lose count, it is very easy to assume that you have got to be prominent in the media if you are going to be a success in politics.

Many existing politicians already mistake media relevance as a key priority.

They focus their best efforts on policy announcements, events and making associations with others that will be considered 'newsworthy'.

They consider getting their picture, a story about them or even an interview with them in the news as being more important than achieving real results for the people who elected them.

In many ways it is because so much media chasing goes on in politics that so little good work actually gets done.

So, when we consider that the news is probably more than 95% opinion, it is easy to see how coveting media attention can become a trap of a very special and troubling kind.

Locally, the rise of the Internet and social media has been a game changer in just about every respect, and it is sensible to see the change for what it really is.

The regional press has been decimated virtually overnight. Not because of news moving online. But because classified advertising and the massive profits that it once generated have.

Local, evening or regional news was for a long time subsidised by this advertising. But as news at a local level really doesn't 'sell', this benefit has now gone and so has the opportunity to get the same consistency of journalism at a local level.

This isn't a 'forget local media' speech. It's a 'local media has its place' approach, with the suggestion that you focus on doing what you have committed yourself to do – putting your community first before going up blind alleys, chasing the beginning of a media rainbow.

If you are doing your job in the best way that you can, the media will find their way to you without you ever having to chase them*.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Focus your primary effort on connecting with the people you are going to ask to elect you. Do this through canvassing, questionnaires and attending local public meetings where you can and should take the opportunity to speak and/or ask questions.
- Utilise your social media accounts at every turn. Blog about local issues, making sure you use and include words which are like labels for your area, such as street names, estate names, bus route names and numbers, the local council's name etc. *Make it a conversation and talk about things that matter to local people. Things that are real.*
- Write, print and deliver a regular newsletter and put it through every door in the Ward or Division where you hope to get elected. It is easy to think that everyone has easy access to the Internet, Twitter and Facebook, but they don't. *Put your news in forms which are accessible to everyone, and you will pick up support from people who may not even read it that way!*
- Comment on articles which are relevant to your campaign, which are published by the local papers online. Use your name and contact details, and talk positively about how things can be done differently, rather than focusing on why what you are reading may seem so wrong. Always link your comments to your Facebook and Twitter accounts so that your followers can see that you are active and also read what you have to say about other local issues as they arise.
- Facts are your friend. When you do have a story which isn't just exciting for you but has a genuine feel that it is going to be important to more people, along with some interesting and quantifiable facts to support it, drop the news desk at your local not-for-profit and smaller community focused Radio stations a line. *(BBC Local Radio is as ambitious as you need to be. They will pick up far more local news of the kind which matters in a local election than the commercial stations, who appear to*

behave like they are national stations with a local presence. If your story really 'has legs', a bigger news channel will soon pick it up from there)

REMEMBER: News is a consequence of what you do, not the reason for doing it. Focus on the important things and the unimportant things will take care of themselves.

** In 2007, I was a newly elected Councillor at Tewkesbury Borough, when Gloucestershire experienced an unprecedented flooding event one July Afternoon. In itself, the speed and nature of the flood which followed was something extraordinary. But those very same floods inundated the Mythe Water Treatment Works on the banks of the River Severn at Tewkesbury and polluted the supply of drinking water to massive parts of Gloucestershire. When supplies ran out that Sunday, I took to my Ward delivering bottled water to residents, then spending over two weeks coordinating and delivering supplies across the area. That same Monday, I was surprised to have a call from Radio 5 Live asking me if I could spare a few minutes to be interviewed live on air...*

30. Public Speaking

One of the key aspects of becoming a good campaigner, councillor and politician is giving a voice to others who don't have one – whatever the reason may be.

In its most literal interpretation, this means that you must be prepared to speak in public, or to groups of many people, and work to become an effective communicator when you do.

Before you are elected, public speaking opportunities may be limited to asking questions at meetings, giving an overview of yourself and why you are standing, or perhaps taking part in a hustling, *if one has been organised in the area where you are seeking election.*

The same principles apply to public speaking, no matter the circumstances – and this includes interviews.

So, if you consider your approach and prepare yourself now, you will be ready when you know an opportunity to speak may be coming up, or when you find yourself asked to speak without any time to prepare.

Ideally, your aim should always be to speak to other people the same way.

So, whether you are talking to ten, a hundred, a thousand or many more people through a television camera, the very best you can be will be when you speak to them all as if they are alone and you are talking to every person one-to-one.

I did say ideally. But reality is rarely ideal and when it comes to public speaking and interviews, just about everyone you can imagine suffers with nerves before they begin to talk.

If they don't, it probably means that they don't care about what they are about to say.

If you follow the principles of How to get Elected, you will always have the understanding and knowledge to answer questions appropriately off-the-cuff, *even when you find them challenging.*

In terms of writing a script, the only time you should really do this is when you are literally giving a speech or providing a formal response or question in an environment where getting the form of words across accurately is the primary aim.

For example, when I was a Borough Councillor, writing a script to follow was what I would do if I was addressing the Planning Committee about a contentious issue, or talking to a large group of people about a subject where it was essential to cover all the details and not get any facts wrong.

When you know you are going to be in a situation where you might have the opportunity to speak or ask a question about a certain topic, you should always prepare by reading up and researching the topic in detail first.

Identify some key facts and numbers from a source or sources you can legitimately refer to.

Either try to remember them or write yourself a small prompt note that is easy to see or you can keep on the top of your notes or in your hand. *(Remember to ALWAYS keep notes and information you are carrying away from other people's view!)*

If you find yourself caught out with a question you cannot answer, NEVER be tempted to lie.

Be honest and tell people that you don't know the answer. But will make it your priority to find out. (You can always use it as an excuse to follow up if it's appropriate to do so).

REMEMBER: When you are in a room speaking or debating with other people, it is very easy to fall into the trap of thinking that others are getting their messages across more effectively and clearly. Or that they don't even have to try.

It's NOT real – this is just the way that listening to other people speaking about the same subject can affect you emotionally, when you are putting effort and meaning into what you are doing.

The best way to deal with this kind of experience is to simply focus on what you are going to say yourself and make sure you say it. Even if it sounds like someone else has said it before.

NEVER be put off by the behaviour of other speakers who use ridiculing others as a way to try and enhance their own performance.

These are usually the worst offenders for having little to say of any value to anyone but themselves.

This is a very important thing to bear in mind that will help you keep perspective.

31. Using social media to get Elected

Good communication with the people you are going to ask to vote for you is essential.

The good news is that social media makes this task a whole lot easier than it was just a few years ago.

Whereas you might have had to be delivering newsletters through people's doors regularly at that stage, you can do so much more with social media than you could then.

Before I say any more about the positives, we have to recognise the negative impressions that we have of social media and why.

The chances are that you might not want to use social media at all, because you have heard of things like Twitter trolls, fake news, being 'cancelled' and all sorts of other problems that come with using services like Facebook and Twitter.

The news makes using these free services sound very risky if not bad, and there is always a risk that you will have a bad experience in some way.

The upside outweighs the downside however. And if you stick to a few clear rules about what you post or publish yourself, and the material you republish or link as something you like or repost – *which can easily be taken as a recommendation by others – even if you didn't mean it to be*, then you can be reasonably safe, most of the time.

We have all heard the jokes and horror stories about people publishing posts about their underwear, what they ate for breakfast or when they went to the toilet.

Yes, some people want to share their entire lives with the online world. But there are no rules saying that you have to do that.

To be a good political communicator, all you need to do is publish material, which is going to appeal to your voters, keep them interested and better still, make them want to get involved.

Some basic rules for social media:

- Have a separate account or accounts for your political work and campaigning. *Voters will recognise you as being your role in the community and will not find value in hearing about your day-to-day activities as a normal person!*
- Never publish material that you cannot be sure to be accurate or true – unless you make clear that is your position. If you there is any possibility that you could be linked with material which is potentially untrue or misleading by publishing a link – DON'T!

- Never attack anyone personally in any way. Politics is actually about the work of politicians and the results of what they do – NOT about the people who do it, who are just as human as you (even when they don't act like it!). *Always remember the mantra 'play the ball, not the man' and you will be fine.*
- Never take comments made by anyone personally. Once you start publishing as campaigner, activist or candidate, there will be people out there who just want to disagree with you simply because of what you do. *Take it as a compliment and bear in mind that they wouldn't be attacking you if they didn't feel the work you are doing is a risk to what they themselves do!*
- When you do feel you are justified in criticising something, focus on what is wrong and explain why it is wrong and how the situation could be improved.
- Use facts to back your arguments whenever you can.
- Focus your material on action.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep.
- Be aspirational but keep it real – Talk about your vision for something better but acknowledge the obstacles at the same time.
- Always be positive.
- Avoid gossip and hearsay.
- Always report threatening behaviour to an appropriate authority – as if you follow the rules above, you will not have anything you need to apologise for.

REMEMBER: As soon as you publish something online or to the Internet, it is likely to remain 'out there' in some way for good.

Even if you delete something, it is possible that someone, somewhere will have kept a copy.

There are accounts which specialise in publishing deleted Tweets and social media entries.

It will be in your best interests to avoid publishing something which has the potential to embarrass you later, rather than being embarrassed by something before you accept that this statement is true.

Social media options:

There are a range of social media options for you to use.

I am going to focus on the ones that are more mainstream. That's the ones which are more likely to reach the people who are likely to vote for you or support you in some other way.

My best advice and suggestion would be to use all of them.

That way, you will reach a wider audience and find that they complement each other.

They are:

- Facebook

- Twitter
- Blogging
- LinkedIn

Using Facebook to get Elected

Facebook is a key tool in your election and campaign armory. It is a way to make direct links with voters and then build and develop a good relationship with them where you can keep them in touch with what you are doing and gain support by word-of-mouth as you keep moving on.

As you are looking to work in and for the benefit of your community, you can easily set up a Facebook Page, which can be dedicated to what you are doing.

To do this, you will need a normal Facebook account. But you can and ideally should keep the two separate.

Once you are set up, Facebook will allow you to have an easy to remember address for your page like mine for this Book which is @HowToGetElected.

This will be really useful to have on all of the literature you print and put through people's doors.

Once you are set up, you can talk about everything you are doing. Add pictures and treat your Facebook Page like your own online news portal.

People like to read about their local area, and it will not take you long to work out what kind of stories will resonate with people, and how you need to present them in order to get through.

Publishing at least daily is a very good idea, because it keeps what you are doing looking fresh and like something that people now need.

Like most things, using Facebook is about practice. As long as you stick to the rules of using social media, you are unlikely to go wrong.

Using Twitter to get Elected

Twitter is a multipurpose election and campaigning tool, which has a broader focus than Facebook – but is just as good in getting your news out to the people who count.

The key to twitter is being able to get your news out in as short a space as possible, either as a sentence or as a link to another one of your social media accounts, where you have a lot more information ready for your readers to visit and find out.

Always remember to keep the rules for social media in mind.

To set up a Twitter account, just visit Twitter (X) and follow the instructions.

Your Twitter address or 'Username' should be something that is easy to remember.

Ideally your Username will be your own name. But as more and more people join Twitter, it is possible that someone else, perhaps from the other side of the World will already have that name and be using it on Twitter too!

Your Username will be limited to a fixed number of digits, so you may need to be creative.

If your own name isn't available in full, perhaps it could be something like @David_Village.

You will have choices – and it's worth taking your time to decide.

You may be required to confirm your account with an e-mail confirmation or by providing your phone number. But this information will normally remain private and just between Twitter and you.

To begin with on the profile area of your Twitter Account, add a picture of yourself along with a brief description of what you are there to do.

An address for your blog is a great idea, as you will quickly pick up interest in your published and pre-prepared material too.

On the Twitter account for this site – which you can find @How2GetElected, you will see that there is a logo and a background.

You can do something like this too but remember that this is all about representing other people and as such, the focus in this sense should be about you.

Have a quick look at my own Twitter account @AdamTugwell to see what I have done there.

Subscribing:

Twitter or 'X' does give you the option to subscribe and get a blue tick, with the added ability to write much longer tweets or posts.

There really is no need to pay for these services and it will be one less thing to remember for your election expenses if you do not.

The key thing is to make sure that you write every tweet or post as a conversation piece – even though it is very short and use words like place names to help others who are searching for news in your area.

People will soon start following you and look for your posts if you keep them useful and informative.

32. Using Blogs to get Elected

Hands up, blogs are a really good tool for getting your message 'out there'.

What is more, you can easily post links straight to your Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn Accounts, and if you set up and use one of the main platforms such as WordPress or Blogger, these free and easy to use tools will provide easy to link options as part of the publishing process.

Writing a blog can be the foundation of your campaign to get elected and be a brilliant reference point for all that you do.

To get the very best from your blog, it is essential that you write frequently, write like you are having a conversation, and keep writing about the material which is important to all that you do.

You have the flexibility to add pictures and links, references to other sites and even downloads such as questionnaires or your campaign addresses.

You will not go far wrong if you stick to the rules of using social media too.

Whilst there are other platforms available, I would advise only using WordPress or Blogger, simply because they are free, and have been developed to make life very easy for people who want to do what you are planning to do.

Your blog address is important and should be based on your name or the area where you will be working.

You can pay for your own domain address if you would like to, if it's available.

For example, for the Blog I still publish, I started with www.adamtugwell.wordpress.com, but upgraded this one by purchasing the domain name www.adamtugwell.blog. However, the Blog I have online which carries a lot of the things I published when I was a Councillor between 2007 and 2015 can be found at www.ashchurchwithwaltoncardiff.wordpress.com .

Please bear in mind that if you buy a domain during and only for use during the formal election campaign, you are likely to have to add this to your election expenses!

I suggest you have a good look at WordPress and Blogger and see which you feel comfortable with most.

WordPress

WordPress is accessed directly, and you can explore the options for setting up an account at www.wordpress.com

There are many free templates available, as well as the more sophisticated versions that you can buy.

The free ones are perfectly fine, and after a little editing, will look very personal to you.

To see my own WordPress-based Blog, please visit www.adamtugwell.blog

Blogger

Blogger is much like WordPress, except that it is based on having an account with Google first – which you may already have.

Like WordPress, the site is basically free to use. There are many templates to choose from and you can create a really good online presence which is personal to you.

33. Using LinkedIn to get Elected

Of the online social media tools, I have highlighted on How to get Elected, LinkedIn is probably going to be least effective in connecting with voters.

That's not to say LinkedIn doesn't have its uses. But as what is probably best described as Facebook for professionals, it is much more effective as a networking tool and as a way to get yourself literally linked to a wider audience and like-minded people doing what you are doing, but outside the geographical area where you are working.

It is still worth having a LinkedIn account, even if you do not want to pursue links with other people planning to do what you are doing, as there are likely to be at least a few residents or business owners operating in the area you wish to target who only use this type of social media.

Setting up an Account is easy if you follow the link www.linkedin.com , and once you have set up a profile, all you need do is post your blog, Facebook and Twitter posts to your LinkedIn account.

You will soon find people wanting to 'Link', and it's always worth having a look at their profile to see who they are and what they do before you accept.

Find me at www.linkedin.com/in/adamtugwell

33. Using video to get Elected

Depending upon how confident you feel about using film, an increasingly effective way to reach the people you are asking to vote for you will be by publishing videos using YouTube and TikTok – especially if you are running a campaign over a larger area where it will be very difficult for you to visit every voter.

Contrary to what a lot of the posts will tell you if you research making videos for these platforms, you do not need to invest lots of money in expensive cameras to film yourself speaking for what will ideally be no more than a minute or two at a time – to create what is called a 'short'.

Shorts are all you need to produce to connect with voters and can be filmed by using the video function on a smartphone with the screen-side camera facing you.

If you follow the basic rules for social media; treat it like you are having a conversation with one person, and make sure you use content that is relevant to the area and the people you are reaching out to, you may be surprised by the response.

Both YouTube and TikTok provide smartphone apps, although it may be best to set up your accounts and profiles on a desktop first.

Please note that using video or any digital platform as the preferred option in a local election campaign is not a good idea, especially when seeking election to the most local Tiers of Government such as Parish & Town or Borough & District Councils, as a lot of the people you need to reach – and more importantly CAN reach by knocking on their front door – will not be using these services. Video for the more local elections will just be added value – IF you have the time!

Part 4 – The Election

34. The Electoral Commission

In a democratic system, it is important that the rules governing elections are kept as far away from political influence as possible.

Sometimes, this isn't possible as decisions are too big to not be made by the sitting government.

But as far as the management of elections and the money involved in financing political campaigns is concerned, the independent body that oversees and regulates all of this is called the Electoral Commission.

Your local Democratic Services Department manages the elections under its control according to the rules that have been set by the Electoral Commission.

I strongly recommend that you visit the Electoral Commission Website and download the relevant candidate guides and read them too, as they will be a great help in providing you with a clear view of the rules which as a candidate you will be expected to adhere to.

Whilst you are campaigning and during an election itself, your point of contact on the official side of everything will be your local Democratic Services Department. However, it is very useful to understand the rules that they are working to, just in case they don't always get everything right.

Please visit www.electoralcommission.org.uk

35. Election Expenses

As a candidate, it's really important that you understand that there are rules governing elections that you **MUST** follow.

If you don't follow the rules, you could find yourself being disqualified as a candidate before you even get started on your formal campaign.

If elected, you could find yourself losing your seat.

Worse still, you could even find yourself being charged with a criminal offence.

Some of the most important rules you need to focus on as early as you can, are those concerning your election expenses.

The basic rules:

All candidates running in the same election or Ward/Division/Constituency are entitled to spend the same amount on their election campaign.

You can spend less than the allocated spend for your election if you wish. But you cannot spend more, as this would give you an unfair advantage in a democratic process.

You (or your election agent) MUST submit a signed declaration of your election expenditure after the election has taken place. The information you provide must be accurate to the best of your knowledge and understanding.

As an independent, whatever you spend on an election campaign must be provided or financed by you or by your supporters.

There is currently no public funding available for election campaigns in the UK of any kind.

If you have no formal organisation supporting you, it is essential that you keep a record of where any money, goods or services 'in kind' you have received have come from, along with the financial value of what you have received to support your campaign.

How much you can spend on your election campaign:

The key information you will need about how much you can spend on your election campaign should be contained within the candidate pack you will receive from the Democratic Services Department. However, the Democratic Services Department will answer questions for you concerning election finances when information is available.

If you are not provided with the figure for your specific maximum election spend by the Democratic Services Department, you will need two figures to calculate what you can spend in total on your election campaign.

The figures needed to calculate your election spend:

- The total number of voters in the Ward or Division where you are going to be a candidate. [Electorate]
- The allowance or allocation per voter for the Ward or Division where you are going to be a candidate. [Allocation]

The total number of voters will be available from the Electoral Roll and can be checked with the Democratic Services Department.

The Allocation figure – per voter, should be in your candidate pack.

The calculation for your maximum election spend can be made as follows:

Electorate x Allocation = Maximum Election Spend

For example, in a Ward with an Electorate or total of 2149 people registered to vote, where the spend or Allocation per voter is 39p (£0.39), the Maximum Election Spend would be £838.11 (Eight Hundred and Thirty-Eight Pounds and Eleven Pence)

The calculation would be as follows:

$$2149 \times 0.39 = 838.11$$

The Allocation per voter will probably sound small when you first see it and will almost certainly be in a multiple of Pence. But when you calculate your budget in this way, it will begin to make a lot more sense.

What you can spend your budget on:

What you spend your election budget on is where you need to be really careful.

Anything you spend on your campaign – either directly OR indirectly, is likely to be considered as an election expense.

This means that if you have 5 volunteers helping you during the campaign and after canvassing one day you all go to the pub and you buy them lunch, the value of the bill you pay for the food and drink you all consume might be considered as an election expense.

What you should spend your budget on will be things like:

- Printing
- Paper
- Printer Cartridges
- Design & Artistic Work (If you cannot do it yourself or find a volunteer to assist)
- Phone calls
- Rosettes
- Stickers
- Loud hailer or megaphone hire

You will need to be frugal and buy only what you need.

Anything purchased specifically for the election must be accounted for – even if you do not use it or need it.

Make sure you buy the minimum number of extra items possible to allow for mistakes, damage and wastage and no more.

You do not have to account for the time of volunteers, no matter what they do for you, as long as they have not been paid by you, or by someone else on behalf of you – even if that payment was offered by a third party as a gift.

Ideally, your expenditure should be for goods and services ONLY. Otherwise, things will get messy and probably expensive very quickly. Your budget won't go that far!

REMEMBER:

You only have to stick to the rules on Election Expenses during the formal Election Period.

Whatever work you have done and whatever you have spent and used BEFORE the Election is formally called will not count as part of your Election Expenses.

This is why giving yourself as much time as possible to campaign and develop your presence in the community BEFORE an election is potentially so beneficial.

You can begin your campaign at any time!

Other:

If you are unsure of anything at any stage, ALWAYS give the Democratic Services Department a call and preferably obtain the response you need by e-mail.

36. Proposers, Seconders & Signatories to support your Nomination

To formally become a candidate in a Local Election, once the election has been called, you will need to submit the signatures of a Proposer and a Secunder (for All Elections) on your Nomination Form, which will normally be provided as part of the Candidate Pack.

For elections to District Level Authorities and above, you will also be required to submit the signatures of a further eight people (Signatories) who support your Nomination as a Candidate.

All of these signatures MUST come from residents who live within the Ward or Division in which you are seeking election, who in turn MUST themselves be recorded and eligible to vote on the Electoral Roll for that same area.

It is a very good idea to work out who you are going to ask to be your Proposer, your Secunder and your other Signatories as early as you possibly can.

In all cases, you must make your Proposers, Seconders and Signatories aware that their name will be noted as a public record, and that they be published as part of the Formal Notice of Candidates, which will be circulated locally within the Ward or Division once the Nomination window has closed and all Candidates for the Election in that area have been recognised.

If your Proposer or Secunder are unhappy with being publicly recognised for their support of your candidacy, you should not use their signatures.

In no circumstances should you use any signature without them being aware of what it has been used for.

REMEMBER:

It's really easy to make a mistake on Nomination Papers. Not in the sense of what information you give generally, but by using a Proposer, Second or Signatory who isn't eligible to support you.

If this happens and you submit your Nomination Papers, the Democratic Services Department will reject your Nomination and you will have to start all over again – and when I say start all over again, that means going back to all of your Signatories and getting them to sign again, because you cannot make changes to your Nomination Form!

The best ways to make sure you remove as much risk of a problem as possible are as follows:

- Check with your Proposer, Second and Signatories that they are ALL happy to support you, and have their name recognised in the public domain.
- Check that your Proposer, Second and Signatories are ALL eligible voters and that present on the Electoral Roll for the Ward or Division where you will be seeking election.
- If possible, have two different sets of Signatories. Yes, that's 2x Proposers, 2x Seconds, 16x normal Signatories and complete 2 separate Nomination Forms. *(Check with your Democratic Services Department if they will allow you to make copies. Otherwise, make sure you get yourself a duplicate set of Candidate Forms)*
- Obtain ALL of your signatures as early as possible during the Formal Campaign.
- Submit your completed Candidate Forms to your Democratic Services Department as early as possible – just in case you need to correct a mistake! *(You will normally be given a schedule of dates with the Candidate Pack and from this will be able to find out when the Democratic Services Department will be making appointments to receive Candidate submissions. Get an appointment as early as possible!)*

SUGGESTIONS:

- DO NOT simply accept a Proposer's, Second's or Signatories word that they are on the Electoral Roll without checking that they are. *(Some people are unaware that they are not Registered. Others never got around to Register. A few may have even lost their Registration without being aware. It doesn't matter why they aren't there; you need signatures from people who are OR YOUR CANDIDACY WILL NOT BE VALID!!!)*

37. Your Manifesto & Election Pledges

Getting elected is rarely about just one issue. Different people have different priorities and in terms of the people we elect to represent us locally, our choices will be formulated no differently.

Realistically, this means that even if there is one local issue that you feel really passionate about, you will need to broaden your understanding of and response to other issues too.

You need to be able to communicate what you have to offer in a way that will appeal to all of your potential voters. Not just a few.

Questionnaires, canvassing and identifying the issues is a process which takes time, but is well worth it.

It means that when the time for your election campaign arrives, you will be equipped and have a good understanding of 3 to 5 real issues facing people locally – perhaps more. Issues that you can use to develop a Manifesto upon which you will build your Campaign. Issues upon which you can base your Pledges – that's your commitment to voters regarding what you will aim to do.

Your Election Pledges need to be realistic, but aspirational. Solid, but with an open appreciation of what the political environment may allow you to achieve or realistically do. Simple, but with an understanding of the complexity of what it takes to get things done in government.

It is important that you never lie. That you never create issues just to get attention. Or make promises that you know you can never keep.

Always be sure that your Election Pledges reflect what you can realistically influence and not responsibilities of another authority – i.e. relating to something that in the role you would be elected to, you could never actually do.

Use language that shows enthusiasm for what you are doing, as genuine passion always has an advantage in gaining support and convincing people that you can win.

However, you should never mislead people by talking in a way which you know deep down is not you or shows you to be something that you know you are not.

REMEMBER:

You can fight for anything. But there is a difference between saying you will fight for something and saying you will change something.

Be honest about your plans and what you know you can actually do.
People will then be far more supportive of you.

Some ideas for Pledges:

Unless you are campaigning with a running mate in a multiple seat Ward or Division, you should never have the same Election Pledges as any other Candidate. *Even then, you might only share a few.*

From this point of view, it is essential that you identify your own issues as the basis for your Election Pledges and Manifesto.

The issues which will appeal to most people can usually be narrowed down to a few.

It will be useful for you to research and understand how they relate to the local people who you are going to ask to vote for you and tailor them to your area.

These may include:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Building on the Greenbelt
- Buses and Public Transport
- Bus Shelters
- Council Tax
- Community Resources & Public Buildings (Museums, Recreation Centres etc.)
- Community Transport
- Dog Bins
- Environment
- Flooding & Flood Protection
- Green Spaces
- Libraries
- Litter
- Local Grants
- Parking
- Planning
- Policing
- Potholes
- Refuse Collections
- Road Safety
- Social care
- Schools
- Speeding
- Street Cleansing
- Young People

REMEMBER: Depending on the level and type of authority you are seeking election to, you will be restricted to what you can actually influence or do. Do not make promises you know you can never keep!

38. Your Competition

Unless you are fortunate enough to find yourself in an uncontested election, you will have competition from other candidates during the Election Campaign itself, and possibly before it too.

It's very easy to lose focus on what you are doing yourself and be unsettled by what other candidates might be doing, particularly if they publish a message which sounds very strong, or they are featured by the local media in some way when you have not.

This experience is quite normal for anyone getting into politics for the first time, and one that even a lot of experienced politicians have too!

What you should bear in mind is that when you are promoting a message and 'putting yourself out there' in public, it is perfectly normal to become sensitive to anything that might bring into question what you are doing.

The good news is that this is normally an emotional response rather than a logical one.

In fact, your competition will very probably feel in some way insecure when they become aware of anything you do!

These kinds of response are normal.

The very important thing that you need to remember is that every moment you spend worrying about your competition or what they are doing is a moment that you could have spent positively promoting yourself or the work that you have, could and will do.

As far as your competition is concerned, keep perspective on everything you hear. It is in their interests to make you feel uncomfortable and all you need to be focused on is everything that you do.

Run your own race!

39. Election Agents

Once you have your Candidate Pack and the Formal Election Campaign is underway, you will hear a lot about Election Agents.

Don't worry. It sounds like a very important role. But in a council election, you are unlikely to ever need one as an independent candidate.

In fact, it is not uncommon for Election Agents to delay things for candidates who are running on behalf of a Political Party, who are unlikely to have a choice whether they use one or not.

You could say that an Election Agent is rather like a candidate manager who is recognised formally by the Electoral Process.

An Election Agent can do many things on your behalf, including submitting your Candidate Forms and your Election Return, after the Results are known.

They can also assume the role of key point of contact with the Democratic Services Department and be the first port of call if there is a legal issue during the campaign.

As a lone, independent or non-aligned candidate, there will be very little benefit to you having an Election Agent.

In many ways it will be much better for you to assume the responsibilities of being your own Agent, unless you are able to rely on the support of an Agent who has experience of the Electoral System and running in elections previously.

The Political Parties usually have professional Election Agents who will work from a local or regional office, where in some cases several Election Agents will be based.

Whilst they can take away a lot of the administrative requirements of the Election Process, they are also likely to be responsible for and carrying out the same role for all the candidates running for that Party in that same Election.

As such, times and deadlines can be stretched by the efforts of candidates which might not be as sharp as your own, as a Party Election Agent will group all of your submissions together, in order to save on their time.

40. The opening of Postal Votes

Postal Votes have to be in before Election Day, and a special session will be called for the Opening of Postal Votes for Each Ward and Division.

Your local Democratic Services Department will be able to tell you when the Postal Votes will be opened for your area.

You will be allowed to attend, perhaps with one other person. But you will normally be expected to confirm who will be attending prior to the session itself.

Attendance is not required, and your time is likely to be better used working on your Election Campaign, talking to potential voters and knocking on doors.

The Agents for the Political Parties usually attend the Opening of Postal Votes on behalf of candidates, just to check that procedures are followed and everything appears normal.

The process is usually governed very tightly in order to prevent observers from gaining an idea of how the Postal Votes have been allocated.

What you should remember is that with Postal Votes being cast earlier in the Election, the Result can look very different when the Postal Votes are opened, to that which is confirmed at the Count itself.

41. Election Day

Election Day itself is likely to be the busiest day of your election campaign.

Why? – Because you do need to remind people to vote!!!

If you have enough money left within your Election Expenses Budget, the first thing you can do – preferably before people have left for work, is deliver an additional ‘get out the vote’ leaflet or note, just to remind people that its Election Day and you are hoping for their support.

During the day itself, you should visit all the Polling Stations that are serving the Ward or Division where you are seeking election.

The staff running the Polling Stations have often committed themselves to the full fifteen-hour day and perhaps more, so politely introducing yourself and perhaps thanking them too will be a great way to show your support and appreciation.

If you have been told by older or infirm Voters within the Ward or Division that they are going to Vote for you, there is nothing wrong with offering them a lift and helping them to the door of the Polling Station and back.

This is something you need to be minded of whilst you are canvassing for planning ahead.

If you have enough support, you can appoint ‘tellers’ to ask and monitor how many of the people who said they would Vote for you have actually attended, as they leave the Polling Station. *(You/They can cross off the names of Voters supporting you against the notes you have made on a copy of the Electoral Roll)*

This is a long and boring task and requires people who have a lot of patience, as Voters are under no obligation to tell anyone how they voted, and tellers will as such often find themselves rebuffed.

The benefit of appointing tellers is that as the evening of Election Day arrives, you can target your missing voters and literally ‘knock them up’ to remind them to get out and vote.

Believe me, it certainly works, and I have witnessed candidates knocking on doors as late as 9pm to gather perhaps no more than 15 votes in that last stage of the day, then going on to secure their seat by only 10!

When the Polling Stations have closed, there should be enough time to get freshened up and have a quick bite to eat before the Count will be ready to begin, if the Count is taking place immediately after the Polls have closed.

My best advice is that you use this time well. Because an overnight Count can make your Election Day a very long one indeed!

42. The Count

When you've got to the very end of the Election Campaign and Election Day itself, the only thing left when the Polling Stations close at 10pm is the Count itself.

What usually happens next is usually a mad dash between the Polling Stations and the venue that has been selected to hold the Count.

Local Authority Election Counts can be delayed if the Election Day itself is shared with a National Election or Referendum, or if the local authority managing the elections has chosen to do so. If this is the case, the Count is most likely to take place during business hours on the Friday after the Election.

The time of the Count itself is always at the discretion of the Returning Officer who will be in charge at the Count itself.

The Count will begin as soon as possible at the allotted time but can be delayed if Ballot Boxes have been delayed or if a complaint has been made regarding the conduct of the Election.

As a candidate, you will automatically be invited to the Count and asked to identify anyone you wish to take with you, as access is normally by invitation only.

It is normal to take your spouse or partner along with your agent and/or some close family members or people who have worked on your campaign.

The number of those able to attend will be limited. So don't be disappointed if you are only able to take one or two key people with you.

There are no rules that say candidates must attend the Count. So, if you feel you would rather not go, nobody will chase you.

Once the Count begins, not all Wards and Divisions will be counted at the same time and you may have to wait for your own Count to begin – so take refreshments or have money available to buy some, as these will normally be provided. (Check with your Democratic Services Department if you are unsure)

When your Count is underway, you and your representatives will be allowed to watch the counting take place.

It is a really good idea to take this opportunity to watch as you will soon begin to get an idea of how the election has gone for you.

When the Count has been completed, the Returning Officer will speak to the Candidates quietly first, to confirm the results.

If the Count is very close, you can request a recount.

Recounts are worth requesting if there are literally only a few votes between winning a seat and not being elected.

A small margin of error is always possible, and I have seen an independent win a seat against a Party Candidate on a recount, when the initial count had suggested a result that went the other way!

When the results are either clear, or have been accepted by all the Candidates, the Returning Officer will then formally announce the Result of the Election to the Hall.

The good thing about being told quietly first is that if the result has been a disappointment, you will have a few moments to gather yourself before everyone else is told.

Regrettably, Counts can feel pretty raucous at times, especially if the members of political party are in a competitive mood and forget what public elections are actually about.

The thing to remember is that it is all noise and even Candidates who are seeking election for the 3rd or perhaps 4th time will be feeling very nervous up and until the Results are finally in and confirmed.

Part 5 - Being a good representative

43. Ethics & Principles for Politics

Regrettably, we live at a time when many people think that all politicians lie and that they don't have any principles.

Some of today's politicians have adopted the principle that if they tell people things are different, *they simply will be different*.

They won't.

As you are here reading How to get Elected, I am hopeful that you are one of a growing number of public minded individuals who want to put aside self-interest, and work towards the goal of creating something better for all. Whether that should be working alone or working with other like-minded people – no matter what background they might come from.

Having rules that you stick to – a personal code if you like, is essential to have in your toolkit, if you are determined to succeed as a local campaigner and good politician, working towards the goal of delivering something better for all.

Ultimately, we all have the ability to make choices and decisions which rise above any form of bias and focus on the best results for all – *even when those around us argue that we are being impractical or suggest that we simply don't understand how everything works*.

Doing what is right can be a very lonely place. But you can always sleep at night, if you always stick to what you know to be right, remain open to changing your mind when you realise you are wrong, and treat others with respect and courtesy at all times - *even when their behaviour has upset you in some way*, you will never go far wrong.

Following next are the few basic principles that all politicians could benefit from adopting, using and 'living' in politics.

If we all did so, this Country would soon become a very different place!

People before Politics.

Every decision that politicians make should be focused on the benefit to the majority of people; not the priorities of the few or of the politicians themselves.

Practicality before Perfection.

We all like the idea of living in a perfect world, but perfection can only ever be an aim in an imperfect world and politicians must make decisions based upon their practical impact; not just on what they would like to see.

Policies made in isolation lead to isolationist Policies.

Just as one policy may be used as an excuse not for enacting another, new policies should not be created without consideration of their real impact upon or collectively with others.

Politicians now need to review the whole system and not use the size of this task as an excuse for not doing so.

Politics is better when it isn't Personal.

Politics should never be about personalities and when it is, it is a sure sign that those talking are thinking primarily about themselves.

Fear is no excuse in itself.

Any policy made only with emotion and feeling in mind does not consider the wider picture and the full implications.

Too many decisions have historically been made by politicians because of a climate of fear.

Over-reaction and under-reaction can be destructive in equal measure.

However emotive a subject can be, emotions are personal and do not reflect consideration for what is best for the majority in its strictest and most comprehensive sense.

One size never fits all.

We are all different and policies must recognise and embrace those differences in all ways, but without recourse to any form of discrimination whether that be positive or negative.

Decisions affecting us all similarly should be made by central government, whilst decisions based upon locality should rest in the locality with local people and their public representatives.

Central government has as much responsibility to reflect, consider and act upon the decisions made by local representatives as it does have the right to ask others to respect the decisions which are made universally for us all.

Lifestyle choices should be for those living that life.

The preferences and actions of individuals should never be questioned or put in doubt so long as they do not compromise the physical safety, security, lifestyle and freedom of choice of others.

A crisis of conscience for one, is no excuse to obstruct the lifestyle choices of another.

Government should never support it as such.

44. Make critical thinking your second nature

Sadly, critical thinking – or the skill of breaking down information and identifying the relevant points and facts within a message, is not something that is often taught in a way which really helps people to become discerning in respect of what they read, hear or see.

We've all heard of 'fake news'.

So much of the information we receive is now being questioned that we can easily fall into the trap of discounting or ignoring sources which we do not already know or use - just because they are unfamiliar, whilst we can also place too much reliance upon the sources that we have always used.

A significant level of the content of all news we access is simply opinion. Whilst an 'angle' makes us feel happy when we are reading a source with which we unthinkingly identify with (*The paper we have always read, or a political blog which echo's the particular brand of politics we follow etc.*), it is easy, even for the most intelligent of us to overlook key facts, events and possibilities, when the noise of the writer or speakers opinion has drowned out the points which are not a key part of what they want us to hear.

Giving a genuine voice and true leadership to voters requires politicians and community representatives to have an open mind; to be able to analyse information and pick out the relevant details or salient points – often in real time, which could be a conversation or a debate, and then effectively translate it in terms of its impact(s) and consequence(s).

In the local and national news

The good thing about critical thinking is it is a skill which can be learned and developed.

Focusing on points of information about actions taken and events that have already happened, rather than what a commentator thinks about it OR what they are speculating will happen as a result of an action or event, is a very good place to begin.

Equally, information about planned or scheduled events is helpful to know.

Whereas what a commentator tells us they think is likely to happen during that event helps nobody.

If you only follow news from one or perhaps two different sources each day, it would be sensible to start following other sources too, and definitely ones which you might immediately feel uncomfortable about planning to read or follow.

If you follow the headlines from all the main newspapers and magazines on your Facebook feed, or on Twitter for instance (*No you don't need to subscribe to them all*), you will soon start to become attuned to the real content of the news and start disregarding the noise that you have no need to follow.

Word of mouth, gossip and the things that 'people you know' tell you

As a potential candidate, thinking about running in a local council election, it's easy to ignore the national news and to think the rules for the local information that 'finds its way to you' are different.

It isn't.

They aren't.

If anything, you would be wise adopt an even more robust approach to dealing with the information which finds its way to you by 'word of mouth' and gossip – *which in this sense means anything that ANYBODY in your community tells you, that you would not otherwise have been aware of.*

Inhabitants of the political world, whether they are politicians, activists, officers or community workers, can be some of the worst gossips you could imagine.

It is easy to become snared in the elephant trap of assumed truth, trusting a source which has told you something that they heard from someone else, who heard it from someone else, who themselves heard it from someone else who was actually there when something happened...

Things to consider when you receive information:

- TRUST NOTHING YOU CANNOT SUBSTANTIATE!!!
- Run your own race. DO NOT unwittingly become the voice or mouthpiece for someone else's campaign - whatever it might be, as their words can easily invalidate your own.
- Always listen carefully to everyone, whether you consider them to be friends or foes. *Filter out their opinion from what they say or write and translate the validity of the messages that they are really providing.*
- Do not repeat, resend or retain gossip or speculation in any form UNLESS you need to do so for purposes such as making a legitimate complaint about someone else's conduct or behaviour to an appropriate authority.

- If the news you are given could be useful, check out the facts and confirm whether the information is true.
- ALWAYS validate information you are going to base or build an argument upon.
- If you have 'validated' information, keep a record of the source and if possible, a link to any articles, documents or copies of the information that you have found.
- Quote these sources when you speak or write. But only repeat or reproduce the information exactly as it was published by the original source. NEVER CHANGE ANYTHING YOU USE FROM ANOTHER SOURCE – NO MATTER HOW TEMPTING OR EASY IT MAY SEEM
- Follow as many different news sources as possible on Facebook and Twitter.
- Watch the news and *make notes of what the news actually is.*
- Watch current affairs programmes and focus on the facts which guests use to build their arguments vs the opinion they wrap around them.

45. Know your stuff

We have sadly become all too familiar with politicians talking around questions when being interviewed, rather than giving a direct answer or any meaningful facts.

Worse still, it is becoming increasingly popular to 'double down', backing up or repeating such responses and the opinions which surround them, simply because some people think by doing so will make any difficult questions go away.

They don't. And being seen to be deliberately economic with the truth, or 'spinning' news in a way which suits politicians or their party's needs has played a very big part in the developing mistrust of those in public life.

Whenever you speak, write or even publicly discuss issues – *whether difficult to address or not*, it is vital to have researched, understood and retained as many of the key facts that you can, and to have developed a viewpoint or interpretation which fits with the information you have received.

Facts and the genuine knowledge that you have are the anchors which give you credibility in the public eye.

Writing & producing literature

When writing about topics, you will normally have the luxury of time to validate information and facts before you send or publish whatever you have produced.

It is a very good habit to use that information and ensure that you have included as much factual data as you can to support your argument or conclusions.

Speaking, debate & Interviews

The upside of public speaking, debate and scheduled interviews is that you will normally be aware of what you will be asked to talk about, or what specific points or issues you may wish to raise.

As with writing or preparing documents that you will later publish, you should research your subject well, prepare key facts to support what you will say and be comfortable that you can communicate your interpretation without losing your way or talking your way around the houses.

The downside of public speaking, debate and interviews of any kind is that it is likely that you will be asked questions to which you have not prepared a response.

If you keep on top of your subject and think about the implications of all new facts as you do so, your preparedness will allow you to provide responses that demonstrate how well researched you are.

Sometimes, you will be asked a question of some kind for which it was in no way possible to prepare. When you do, don't bluff, blag or be tempted to lie or shift the focus on to something or someone else.

The best thing you can do is come clean; be honest and tell the interviewer or person questioning you that you don't have that information to hand; that you were unaware of the events/actions that they have raised, or that you are not in a position to comment at that stage.

Even a Prime Minister, with all the support that they have, can and will be caught out by questions that they were not expecting.

It is human to not have the answers to everything and the people who might vote for you will think of you as being much stronger for being consistently honest, rather than if you lie in an attempt to cover up feeling momentarily weak or vulnerable.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Be as prepared as possible.
- Research your subjects as widely as you can.
- Use credible sources for information.
- When you write, use facts and validated information as anchors to build your arguments and conclusions upon.
- Use links to your sources as much as possible.
- When you are going to be interviewed or speak publicly and know what you might be talking about, research the subject and have your facts and interpretation ready.

- If you are asked a question in which the questioner provides news or information you were previously unaware of, do not respond to the information as if it were a credible fact. Be clear that you are unaware and would need to check or review that information before commenting further.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, come clean and be honest. Say you don't know and never be tempted to lie – no matter how easy it might feel to do so.
- If you feel put on the spot, don't point the finger, start blaming others or make it personal about someone else in an attempt to get yourself out of bother.

46. Make yourself available

If you are taking your responsibility to the community seriously, you will need to accept that people will contact you at times which suit them, rather than times that ideally suit you.

People see councillors, public representatives and politicians differently to themselves.

As such, they have very different expectations, and it is important that you always keep this in mind.

Using e-mail as a standard communication medium can be a great help. But there are still many people who prefer to speak in person or by phone, and *they will expect you to make yourself available at a time that will work for them.*

The idea of making yourself available is more frightening than the reality will be.

The times when you will have to go out on dark nights, early on Sunday mornings or at times you might think your community work could get in the way of other things in your life will probably be few and far between. But when they come, it will be essential that you allow as little as possible to get in the way.

The upside is that if you don't put unnecessary walls in the way of providing access to people who want to take you up on the offer of help, people will rarely be ungrateful for the work that you do, even if it is not necessarily apparent.

If you do receive messages or requests for visits that you cannot immediately respond to properly or are for some reason unable to accommodate, you should always respond and briefly explain the delay and what you plan to do.

47. Always respond to legitimate Communication

From the moment you begin campaigning, it is likely that people will contact you by phone, text, e-mail or social media.

When you receive genuine enquiries – no matter who they are from, you should ALWAYS respond.

If you cannot answer a question or provide the information that the person is seeking immediately, respond and let them know what you intend to do.

DON'T promise to respond by a certain date or time, if speaking or obtaining information from other people is involved.

DON'T commit to delivering an outcome or to doing anything where you have no control over the results.

If you have said you will get back in touch with someone, make sure that you do.

If you cannot help someone, be honest and tell them why. If possible, signpost or introduce them to someone who can.

People will be very understanding when you communicate openly and are honest with them. However, they will soon lose patience and may even be happy to tell others how they feel they have been wronged if you don't.

If any direct messages you receive are rude, threatening or clearly political in nature, there is no need to respond, and you may be best advised not to do so.

If you feel threatened, you should report this to an appropriate authority.

Responding to proper questions or comments on social media can be difficult when there is an audience involved. If you receive an open message which other people can see but involves providing a response which would be inappropriate for others to read – *for instance if it involves contact details, names of others or private information*, you should respond only by asking the person contacting you to get in touch in a direct or private way.

You can then deal with the matter with due regard to privacy etc.

Unless you are very confident using social media, it is advisable not to get into any form of debate with anyone on any social media platform.

There are many users of these platforms who deliberately attempt to 'bait' other users and draw them into making comments which could be embarrassing or used to paint others in a negative light.

Avoid them and what they are doing whenever and wherever possible!

48. Never make it personal

To get a real idea of what it is actually like to be a local councillor and politician, it is important to talk about how you can very quickly make life unnecessarily difficult for others and make yourself very unpopular too.

Believe it or not, making things personal as a campaigner, activist or politician whilst working in the community and in public, is probably one of the worst things anyone can ever do.

If you genuinely want to take responsibility on behalf of others, you will need to understand and also accept that people who disagree with you will often see you personally as the problem, rather than paying any regard to the quality of your arguments or the facts that you use to make your case.

Think about how you might feel if someone else has a platform to speak on that you do not. They might be saying things that you don't agree with, or perhaps even know to be completely wrong.

It can make you feel angry. You might feel desperate to speak. Worse still, you might even feel that because they seem to be the one that people are listening to, that what you have to say yourself will actually be what everyone else sees as being wrong.

When that kind of feeling or emotion takes over – *and I can assure you that it does for even the most confident public speakers and debaters you could think of*, it is essential to keep your cool.

You should never resort to becoming angry and making what could be a knee-jerk response to what you are experiencing as feeling a type of pain.

Reacting like this will almost certainly look and feel like you are making your response about them – and by them, I mean about them *personally*.

Being a good and effective politician is about allowing the strength and legitimacy of your arguments to win the day. *Even when it might appear you haven't actually won.*

It might also help to understand that in most cases, those very same people who are upsetting you with what looks like ice-cold surety and confidence will be feeling exactly the same way as you do too!

Now that's the easy bit. YES – THE EASY BIT!

Regrettably, that's the proactive bit. It's the approach you need to learn and practice all of the time.

Unfortunately, the political environment often requires you to be responsive as well as proactive.

Responding to politicians who make it personal

Many existing politicians do nothing other than make their arguments personal and about the person they are thinking or talking about.

When you are their target, never making it personal can be the last thing that you want to do.

However, this is the time when seeing such behaviour for what it is can really help you most of all.

Poor politicians make it personal when they aren't in control of their arguments.

They deflect questions when they don't know what they are doing.

When they have no idea how to solve a problem, how something works or they don't have any idea what they should actually do, poor politicians use name calling and abuse as what they believe to be a way to make everyone think that they are actually at the top of their game.

When you are on the receiving end of rudeness and even angry or threatening behaviour, it becomes very difficult to respond in a positive, calm and generous way.

But with practice and patience, you will soon learn that arguments using you as the target, rather than what you do are never actually about you.

They are about how somebody else is feeling about what they are doing, and you will soon learn to respond in a very professional and understanding way.

Sadly, politicians who have built their success by being good at attacking others personally will rarely learn to do politics in any other way.

That's why it is so important that politicians and community representatives who can take and exercise their responsibility in a better way, can work through these challenges and see them for what they are.

They will then be taken seriously and be respected for what they are trying to do for all.

49. Always check the cap is screwed tight on the tomato ketchup

You are probably wondering what on earth 'always check the cap is screwed tight on the tomato ketchup' could possibly be about. We are discussing How to get Elected after all!

This page is about always paying attention to detail and remembering who we are. A suggestion that you should never let your guard down in company wherever you might be.

Some cautionary advice is that you should always be minded that you never have genuine friends in politics, and you must therefore keep yourself very safe unless and until you are absolutely sure.

The reason for the title is it is perhaps the best way to illustrate the ubiquitous presence of otherwise meaningless opportunities for you to trip yourself up on a campaign, as a councillor or in politics if you lose focus and take your eyes off the ball.

Being a good campaigner, councillor and politician is about always being conscious of everything we do and the consequences thereafter. Not just in the big things, but in the small things too. *Because in the reality which is politics, it can often be the detail which counts.*

A Cautionary Campaign Tale...

In the Election Campaign leading to my first District Level Seat with Tewkesbury Borough Council, I was fortunate to be working with volunteers and other candidates running for the same Authority.

We were working together on the principle that many hands made light work (*Which in politics is not necessarily the case as the more voters the actual candidate meets the better*) and would spend evenings and Saturdays taking it in turns to cover significant parts of our respective target Wards.

After what felt like a successful Saturday morning covering a lot of the area, which was soon to become my Ward, we all headed off for lunch at the local Hungry Horse pub.

When the meal arrived, I immediately headed for the condiments table and returned with a glass bottle of Tommy K.

As I neared the table, I began to shake the bottle, firing the cap and much of the contents across a wall and over one of the other candidates who had travelled some 10 miles or more to help.

I had been relaxed, excited about the feedback from our mornings work and was not thinking about where I was or who I was with.

I had let my guard down.

I didn't really know the people I was with and had lost sight of almost everything. Just because in that specific moment, we had all had commonality from our morning's experience sharing just one thing.

How many other instances can you imagine where it would be easy for you to do exactly the same?

Part 6 – Other things to consider

50. News & Information Sources worth following

It is essential that you keep abreast of all the news which is relevant to your campaign and the authority you are hoping to join as a member.

This means it is not only wise to follow the news and publications from that authority itself, but to also follow the news and developments relating to ALL of the Tiers of Government and/or their representatives in the area which you will share if you are successfully elected.

For all of the local Tiers of Government (Parish/Town, Borough/District, County, MP, MEP)

- Follow their Twitter Account
- Follow their Facebook Page(s)
- Follow/Read the council website
- Follow/Read the MP/MEP's website/blogs
- Read any newsletters or community magazines that they produce

Other local sources

- Follow/Read the websites of all the local branches of political parties
- Follow local schools, community groups and membership organisations on Twitter and Facebook
- Follow/Read the local newspaper(s) online, on Twitter and Facebook

National

- Follow all of the national newspapers on Facebook and Twitter (see below)
- Follow all of the political journals and commentary sites on Facebook and Twitter (see below)
- Sign up to all 'daily updates by e-mail' opportunities
- Sign up to updates from Parliament and the Office for National Statistics

Podcasts

Another source of good information is the growing list of podcasts and videos that are now available on many different platforms.

Like newspapers and the mainstream media, it is necessary to be aware that even the most entertaining and credible speakers on podcasts and videos can have their own agendas and may be watchable enough that the facts they share are easily overwhelmed by opinion.

My advice would be:

- a. Watch or listen to as many different podcasts or videos talking about the same issues as possible
- b. Always use critical thinking
- c. Pay close attention to who they are advertising and any companies or commercial interests that are supporting them
- d. Investigate anything that doesn't make sense or that you find intriguing
- e. Be aware that sharing your 'viewing or listening list' with others may result in them making assumptions about your politics and beliefs – whether you cover all the bases or not.

Links

Below are some links to other Websites and Blogs which you might find useful.

If you have a website or Blog which you feel may be useful to other readers of How to get Elected, please get in touch and let me know.

About becoming a Councillor:

www.gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/become-a-councillor

www.beacouncillor.co.uk

Data Protection:

www.ico.org.uk/

Find a Council:

<https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>

When you become a Councillor:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/>

51. Joining a Political Party

If you have found 'How to get Elected' whilst thinking about joining a political party to become a candidate in an election, you may still find some significant benefit from everything that this book can provide.

There are good and even great politicians within all of the political parties. However, there aren't enough of them to make the difference that the electorate needs.

'How to get Elected' has been published to provide an alternative route to what the political parties currently offer.

Whilst the political parties pretty much have a monopoly on elections at Parliamentary level, independent candidates, or candidates affiliated with small or local political parties often have just as much opportunity as the main political parties to get elected locally, too.

The upside of joining a well-known political party is that you can lean on the experience of others whenever you need it. You may have access to and the support of volunteers and activists who will physically help to campaign on your behalf. You will also, almost certainly have an Election Agent provided by the local party who will keep you in line with Electoral Law requirements and have the costs of printing and potentially even the design of your campaign literature – which may be negligible - covered too.

The downside is that you will normally have to go through a selection process like applying for a job. Others – often sitting councillors or party officials will decide for you whether you are fit to be a party candidate and if you are, where you will be able to run. (This may not be where you live if the party already has incumbent councillors representing the seat who do not intend to 'stand down' at the next local election).

When you are campaigning as a party candidate, you will usually be expected to openly show support for other party candidates. This might mean campaigning in other areas or promoting affiliations that could be (seen as) negative towards your own campaign.

Once you have won a seat as a party candidate, the seat is never really considered to be truly representative for its specific electorate, or even to be your own by the party – *even though you are the named candidate and occupant of the role.*

The first call on your loyalty will always be to the Party.

If you would like to learn more about membership of the well-known existing political parties, please follow the links below:

[The Conservative Party](#)

[The Green Party](#)

[The Labour Party](#)

[The Liberal Democrats](#)

[The Party of Wales \(Plaid Cymru\)](#)

[Reform UK](#)

[The Scottish National Party \(SNP\)](#)

52. Getting Elected as an MP

In theory, it is possible for anyone to get elected as an MP, as long as they are eligible to become a candidate.

The reality is that our current political system doesn't support candidates who are independent from the well-known political parties and without running for one of them (Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, Reform or SNP) you are unlikely to pick up sufficient votes to even have your deposit returned. *(Whilst no financial commitment is required to become a candidate for a Council Election, this is not the case if you wish to run for Parliament).*

There are exceptions. For example, former BBC Reporter [Martin Bell](#) successfully won the Tatton Seat from the incumbent Tory MP Neil Hamilton in 1997, after both the Labour and Liberal Democrat Parties withdrew their candidates.

However, getting elected to Parliament as an independent is now incredibly rare, in no small part because of the very tribal way that people generally vote in national or General Elections.

Regrettably, it is because of the control that political parties have over the national elections, that so much power currently rests in the hands of a handful of people.

This is one of the key causes for so many of us feeling so disenfranchised by a political system which basically focuses not on the will of the electorate, but on the ideas and will of the few.

It would be wrong to discourage anyone from running as an independent candidate in a Parliamentary Election. But right now, the chances of even one being elected are very slim.

It is important to be aware that without a significant local issue that can really rally everyone to a single cause, you may well enjoy the experience of running, taking part in hustings and even having a little media attention too. But the upshot is that it could be extremely emotionally draining, and you will never match the resources and supporting infrastructure which the political parties have available to them for Elections of this scale and of this kind.

If you really want to make a difference as an Independent, getting elected to local government really is the best place to start, to learn and to really begin to make a difference!

Part 7 – Looking forwards to the future rather than backwards to the past

We do need new people to come forward; to bring change and to introduce a new dimension in politics; to create a new paradigm that genuinely serves the best interests of us all.

But those who want change also have to see the situation for what it is, and ‘play the game’ that it has all become.

As a population, we most certainly do deserve something better, and it is possible to have it too.

We just have to be realistic about the route that we will have to travel to get there and what the true cost and implications of that journey might be.

But if you are thinking about starting a party or standing in an election and you think that your own ideas are the best, or that your own interpretation of someone else’s political philosophy is the only way we will win; the fact is that we are already one person nearer to everyone losing a whole lot more.

Can you be the independent or ‘open’ mind that will help the UK to decide?

53. Starting something ‘new’ together

Even the most passionate and tribal political party supporters will struggle to avoid acknowledging the general disillusionment and feeling that many people now experience with British politics.

The fact is that all of the mainstream political parties – even Reform UK, will continue the same way that they currently doing so at their own – *and our* peril.

For many of us, seeing yourself as being cut off and without even the remotest hope of being able to influence anything in Government is not a pleasant experience. Least of all, when we see decisions being made which we can in no way relate to, or changes taking place in our own communities or neighbourhoods that simply have no reflection on what we or anybody else that we know seems to think or feel.

A lot of people toy with the idea of putting up or shutting up where today’s political mess is concerned.

It is also a pretty safe bet that whilst they may not openly talk about it, many of the people that you know will have experienced one of those moments where they just ‘know’ that things could somehow be a lot better and that the way things are today simply aren’t right.

Some already have the platform to speak loudly about the injustices of a political system that serves its own interests before anyone else.

Yet many more normal people outside the world of politics and celebrity are frustrated by the seemingly endless status quo, where nothing ever changes for the better and politicians happily tell us that everything is improving when quite frankly, just about everyone but they seem to know that it really isn't.

It comes as little surprise then, that in elections, a growing number of people are voting for political parties and independent candidates outside of the 'traditional' remits of the Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat Parties, and that there is in fact a growing number of political parties being established right across the UK.

Very few politicians are prepared to openly acknowledge the lack of balance and consideration for the consequences of ill-considered policy making throughout Government.

Those who genuinely do almost certainly share the desire of all people outside of politics to see something different to what everyone else today seems forced to experience.

However, those that do understand both the situation and the way that British politics works will also probably question just how much benefit the creation of a plethora of new movements will bring to us all. When what the UK needs is change of a very radical and meaningful kind. Change that we all need to experience right now.

The realities of starting a new political party

To get some real perspective on the impact a new political party is likely to have, the history of Reform UK provides a very clear guideline.

Originating as the Anti-Federalist League in the early 90's, it took the movement over 20 years to get its first MP genuinely elected to Parliament under the UKIP banner and then, only through the focus of the electoral magnifying lens which is a Parliamentary By-Election.

With its basis as a three-stage single-issue party (AFL, UKIP and then The Brexit Party), before suggesting that Reform UK is itself a new broad-based party, it is arguably only what would be at very best a rare and perhaps unique combination of a cause célèbre – which gave UKIP a nationwide profile – and now the current political climate that leaves the electorate looking for change, which has placed the Reform Party in a position of being 'mainstream electable'.

Had The European Union not been the UK's political bogeyman for such a long time, the anti-EU movement itself would have almost certainly been absorbed by one or perhaps all of the main parties long ago, if indeed the creation of a new political stream beyond that of the others had been necessary in the first place.

This fact probably demonstrates the greatest threat to any new party, as finding traction with any issue that is palatable in mainstream thinking is unlikely to take place much before one or more of the other political parties adopts a position on the same footing.

We only need to observe the way that Labour and the Conservatives in particular are struggling to regain or rather recapture the initiative from Reform over issues such as illegal immigration to understand what happens when an issue finds its way from the outside into what political commentators might call the centre ground.

However, in this instance, we are again seeing party political machines manoeuvring themselves with the objective of securing future power, rather than engaging in any kind of meaningful change that demonstrates an understanding of the real issues which sit behind the public discontent.

As I write and edit the revised edition of How to get Elected in early 2025, it would certainly appear to be the case that if the current parliament in the UK should go to full term, it is increasingly unlikely that substantial forms of both the Conservative and Reform UK parties will be left, and that the two will have amalgamated and become known as one or the other, or in some completely different way.

It is almost impossible to entertain the idea that anything 'new' will genuinely succeed in being the change, for as long as so many quietly remain comfortable with the status quo, even though the realities of managed decline are beginning to bite hard for some.

The Political Party Paradox:

We want change. We all know this. We also know that the establishment isn't working for us. But it's called the establishment for a very good reason.

When you consider the history and conditions which have supported the longevity and then the rise of Reform UK, you soon begin to realise that the biggest problem facing any new party will be its ability and likelihood of it becoming big enough to reach and engage enough people to gain the national level of recognition and momentum which could see it effect the kind of change that we all now actually need, when all of the political parties in the frame actually share so much in common.

Nobody should be under any illusion that as an electoral force the best AFL, UKIP or The Brexit Party could ever have hoped to achieve would be to win the support of the biggest parliamentary party for perhaps one or two key policies, and then sell itself in compromise against everything else, just to have its moment of power.

Whilst the dynamic certainly appears to have changed and Reform are at least neck and neck if not ahead of Labour and the Conservatives in the Polls as I write, even an early General Election called in the Autumn of 2025 or sometime in 2026 or 2027 would be long enough for everything to have changed and for the real similarities that are driving all the 'different' political parties that we currently know to have been 'found out'.

In reality, the de facto choice of established political parties will continue to morph or adapt their policies to be seen to answer the 'Reform question' and in doing so, work to assure themselves either a working parliamentary majority or to become the influence behind it once again at the earliest available opportunity.

You may think that the die is already cast. But we are already experiencing the fallout from the political stalemate that has ensued from a situation where all the Westminster political parties are culturally the same, and have become a 'Uniparty', *even if their philosophical viewpoints don't quite appear to match.*

The hard fact is that we are facing a situation where we need a majority of MP's to work together to address all the issues and to change all the policies which will impact upon those issues, whilst ensuring that the impacts of those changes do not then themselves cause other problems that people looking for balance and fairness in their lives simply do not need.

The situation creates a dilemma and significant paradox.

We are all either consciously or subconsciously aware that we do need political parties in the sense that they exist today – or an acceptance and appreciation of common ground between a majority of politicians, in order to effect the change for the better that we need within a genuine democracy.

However, we are all just as equally aware that it is being of the establishment that provides the platform or powerbase to enact change; ground which is currently infested with a self-serving political culture and political party system that quickly excludes voices for change and sings the song of populist thought whilst giving it nothing more than hollow meaning.

So how can we really win?

The circumstances surrounding traditional politics in the UK dictates that it functions through a culture of compromise.

Furthermore, the contemporary political party machinery puts submissive compromise at the core of its recruitment and management processes.

However, if compromise is necessary in any way at all, the policies which result will not have genuinely been created with consideration of the best interests or of the consequences for all truly in mind.

In order for us all to win, it necessarily requires that there is a genuine change in mindset, whether that be for the incumbent political parties, including Reform – *which would arguably be a much more productive situation for everyone*; or that change itself manifests within the many new and existing groups and independent or 'open' minded people out here in our communities who so desperately want to see that change, that they are ready to stand for political office.

Moving forward

You may have heard the saying ‘you can’t beat the system’, and if you have come up against the way that government and all things Legal work, you will probably be able to see the truth in this statement – even when you know that the system is itself flawed and fundamentally wrong.

For those who have been burned by the frustrations and the ‘banging your head against a brick wall’ that comes with it, there is no pleasure in seeing new and enthusiastic people entering politics who either quickly become disillusioned with the realities of the system. Or who simply buy-in to a culture where all those that follow people who lead only for themselves then come to live and believe the idea that ‘that’s just the way it is’.

It may seem that way to those who are prepared to accept the status quo as it is and not take any risks.

But that simply isn’t the truth, and all it would take is for enough of the people already within the system to say ‘no more’ for a real difference to begin unfolding.

Change the system from within (But don’t buy in to the propaganda...)

The easiest way that we could create change would be for that change to come from within the system itself.

That would mean influencing politicians at all levels by becoming the voices that they have no choice but to listen to, i.e. part of the parties themselves.

The problem with this approach is that it has been tried all too many times.

Some very good and well-intended people have failed or ultimately have become part of the very problem that all of us ‘out here’ are currently experiencing.

As they say, absolute power corrupts absolutely...

Today we are experiencing the outcome of decades of the development of a political party system that favours the ascendancy of a whole generation of politicians who treat political office as little more than a job and career. Rather than being responsible to the electorate in the ways that most of us outside of the ‘bubble’ know that they should actually be.

Many Westminster party politicians get selected and promoted thereafter by saying and doing the right things for the right people, and a good number of sitting MPs today will have made it to Parliament by going along a career pathway which equips them to progress within the system extremely well but gives them little working knowledge of what the real world is like outside.

How can they make genuinely good decisions affecting the lives of others when they have no real life experience themselves?

The very sad and highly regrettable reality is that getting enough of our sitting MPs to change and give the British people the real voice that they should have through a majority is very unlikely.

The political culture of today says 'don't rock the boat or you will get thrown out' and very few politicians are brave enough to take on a system which takes control freakery into a whole new realm.

Change the system from without (But don't look at your fight as being one that you can win alone...)

This is where the creation of a new movement or party becomes the attractive option.

But with the realities of establishing just one party that could make a difference covered above, there has to be an acceptance that creating a whole plethora of organisations will in time prove to be no more effective than getting a similar number of independent MPs elected to Parliament.

On their own, small, localised and local community-based-issue parties will very occasionally gain enough momentum to get an MP Elected.

But as just one of 650, you can soon see how little chance there would be of making any measurable kind of difference for us all.

Working together is, however, a very different situation and if it were to be the case that genuine commonality could be found between all of the disparate groups that are currently 'out here' already, or which may be launched at some point in the future, the potential would then exist for something very special to happen.

Knowledge of the internet and social media makes the task sound very easy. But without a formula that lights that spark between a whole range of people who have had the independence of mind and motivation to get something 'of their own' started, the prospects for success are pretty slim.

After all, some may simply be falling into the trap of thinking that politics is all about one idea 'winning' against the ideas of someone else and it is likely to be the case that for many, that very idea is based upon an issue which is personal to them and perhaps just a few people that they know.

The truth of the matter is that if every politician made every decision and promoted every cause on the basis of what will serve the best interests of all, whilst also considering and making allowances for the impact of those decisions on everyone else as they do so, we would no longer require left-wing or socialist politics, parties of the centre ground, or indeed the politics of the right.

Tribal politics makes debate a competition, rather than a process of exploring the methods and plans that will genuinely solve the problems that we all face.

The cold hard reality is that however fair, just or right the ideas might be which underpin the motives of a new party; without losing the idealism, the philosophy and the 'my idea is better than yours' mentality, any new movement is unlikely to prove itself to be any better than the Conservatives, Green, Liberal Democrats, Labour or Reform UK Parties, given time.

Thinking a different way:

As a culture, we have been conditioned to look at everything we experience in terms of how it either relates to or affects us personally.

This has taken place at a subconscious or even subliminal level and anyone who really wants to effect change by creating a new political movement, must themselves become mindful of the processes which sit behind this for themselves, and then begin encouraging others to also be mindful of the impact that everyone and everything has on us, the people in our lives and the world we live in.

This is no mean feat and has to be achieved without getting sucked into any of the idealist elephant traps which litter this road, such as green energy, which while being very laudable, has significant practical implications for a society of 60 Million+ people and a situation which simply doesn't advocate the immediate binning of all other forms of energy or raising taxes on other things to subsidise it.

More and more people are waking up to the lack of balance and fairness in their own lives and those of others.

But just as in the case of the Hundredth Monkey or what we colloquially call 'memes' that virally attract attention in what seems like the blink of an eye, the kind of awakening and preparedness that we are discussing here will have to reach a point of critical mass or the seminal moment when a positive direction of travel that cannot be influenced by any of the powers that are aligned against it is achieved.

Regrettably we have to accept that this may not be a realistic prospect on an organic basis alone.

Wait for the wheels to fall off from the inevitable meltdown (That has probably already started...)

Bleak as it may sound and as unfavourable as it may be, change itself may well have to be precipitated by a meltdown or history-changing event which opens the general population to thinking in a very different way. *One that also leaves politicians who are not prepared to put the genuine need of the electorate first, with no power to prevent the ascent of those who are.*

Today, there are a considerable number of issues that at one degree or another could easily prove to be the catalyst or forerunner of an event, or series of events which create the seedbed for this situation.

54. More Reading

The greatest barrier to change is being comfortable with the mess that we are now in.

Yes, it sounds like a very contradictory thing to say. But if you can view the world as consisting of two groups of people:

- a. The people who are benefiting from the way everything works today, and
- b. The people who are losing out and are in pain from the way that everything works today

And then hear and understand that the number of people who believe they are in group a, still far outweighs those who know they are in group b,

You will then be able to see that we are all the victims of a collective situational bias and that there are currently not enough people to achieve the critical mass that will be necessary for change.

If you would like to consider and explore the different options for change, depending upon the circumstances, and also open up to a broader view of what is happening and what may lie ahead, I would invite you to read the other books and papers that I have written which are all available to buy and download from Amazon as books for Kindle, but may also be available as PDF downloads which will be FREE to read:

All of the following titles are available to purchase as complete eBooks for Kindle from Amazon using the links provided.

Where indicated, titles may also be available to download FREE as PDF Copies from [my Blogsite](#) in different forms, using the links provided.

If you would like to discuss any of the works listed, please get in touch.

Levelling Level (30 Mar 2022)

[Amazon](#)

From Here to There Through Now (3 Oct 2022)

[Amazon](#)

The Way of Awakened Politics for Good Government (3 Dec 2022)

[Amazon](#)

A Community Route (28 Mar 2023)

[Amazon](#)

Actions Speak Louder than Digital Words (8 Jun 2023)

[Amazon](#)

[PDF Download](#)

One Rule Changes Everything (23 Dec 2023)

[Amazon](#)

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Food From Farms Guaranteed (3G) (15 Feb 2024)

[Amazon](#)

[PDF Download](#)

Days of Ends and New Beginnings (7 Apr 2024)

[Amazon](#)

The Basic Living Standard (14 Apr 2024)

[Amazon](#)

The Grassroots Manifesto (18 Apr 2023)

[Amazon](#)

Officially None of the Above (18 May 2023)

[Amazon](#)

Our Local Future (18 Aug 2024)

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Who Controls Our Food Controls Our Future (14 Nov 2024)

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How to get Elected - New Edition (26 Feb 2025)

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