

# NSW Candidate and Councillor Diversity Report 2017

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2016 and 2017 NSW Local Government Elections



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June 2019

# Candidate and Councillor Report 2017

## BACKGROUND

The NSW Candidate and Councillor Report 2017 is prepared by the Office of Local Government (OLG) following NSW local government elections, which are held every four years.

This report presents findings based on data provided by candidates and councils from the 2016 and 2017 local government elections.

Since the 2012 elections, the number of councils has reduced from 152 to 128. Of the 128 councils, 126 provided data; one council did not submit and Central Darling Council did not hold elections due to being under administration.

## REPORT DATA

This report presents findings on a range of information provided by candidates and councillors who contested the 2016 and 2017 local government elections.

This included information on diversity factors such as age, gender, occupation and experience as an elected representative of local government. The responses were submitted by councils to OLG. Data provided may be incomplete. For example candidates may not have responded to some, or any, of the survey questions.

Figures and calculations are based on actual completed responses to questions. Where there was a nil response for a category (eg. age), these responses were not included in the count and percentages are derived from actual responses.

## COUNCIL CATEGORISATION

Councils are categorised into five regional areas based on a range of criteria such as location, land area and population. The categories are referred to in the report and are listed below, with the number of councils in each:

Metro – 24	Metro fringe – 9
Regional Town/City – 37	Rural – 14
Large rural – 42	

## NSW AND NATIONAL DATA SOURCES

A number of external data sources are used in the report. These include:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016 census.
- NSW Electoral Commission 2016 and 2017 election results.
- Multicultural NSW.

## OTHER REFERENCES

- Why Local Government Matters, Summary Report 2015, ACELG, UTS, 2015
- NSW Electoral Commission Report on the Conduct of the 2015 State General Election
- Influencing change, Manion and Sumich, LGNSW 2013
- Challenges and Motivators, Manion and Sumich, LGNSW 2013
- Inquiry into civics and electoral participation in Victorian state parliamentary elections, Parliament of Victoria Electoral Matters Committee, 2018
- Stand for Council Survey, Municipal Association of Victoria, 2016
- Census of Western Australian Elected Members 2016 Centre for Regional Development. Maginn and Haslam McKenzie (2017)
- Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013. LGA Association England. Kettlewell and Phillips (2014)
- Candidate and Councillor Report 2012, OLG

## DISCLAIMER

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this publication, OLG is unable to independently verify the information provided by candidates and councils. OLG expressly disclaims any liability to any person in respect of anything done or not done as a result of the contents of the publication or the data provided.

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# Introduction

*“Apart from authenticity there is also an issue of expectations—we expect that those who share our characteristics will be more likely to understand and be responsive to us. Women politicians are more likely to be approached by women’s organisations, non-Anglo politicians by ethnic community organisations and soon.*

*There is an expectation that politicians who are different will feel obliged to represent difference, even if this is not always the case.*

*The degree of exposure to such advocacy is in itself likely to increase awareness and sensitivity to group issues.”*

**Dilemmas of Representation** – Papers on Parliament No. 34 Representation and Institutional Change: 50 Years of Proportional Representation in the Senate

Marian Sawer, December 1999

## The case for diversity

The NSW Councillor and Candidate Report 2017 tells the story of what local government representation looks like and how it is changing.

It presents findings on the candidates and councillors who contested the 2016 and 2017 NSW local government elections and makes comparisons with historical NSW election data and findings of other jurisdictions.

Councils are responsible for making significant decisions that can have a far-reaching impact on their community.

With community diversity represented on a council comes a range of perspectives and experience. As a result, more equitable, effective, and community focussed decisions can be made. By being more informed, policies and programs can be developed that address community needs.

This report provides a valuable evidence base that indicates the extent to which those elected to local councils reflect the people of NSW, and the communities they represent and make decisions for.



# Quick facts



**126 councils**  
reported on



**4,157**  
candidates  
and



**1,273**  
councillors

Less than **1%** of  
the population over  
**18** years of age stood  
as a candidate

**91%** of councils have  
less than **50%** female  
councillors

Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander  
candidate numbers  
increased by **6.8%**  
from **2012**

**30** councils have  
councillors  
with a disability

Metro councils have the  
highest representation  
of female councillors

Over **30%** of mayors  
are popularly elected

Top **3** occupations  
of candidates and  
councillors are  
professionals, retirees  
and self-employed

**44** councils have  
councillors under the  
age of **30**

After English, Italian,  
Arabic and Greek are  
the most common first  
language of councillors

Rural councils had the  
greatest candidate  
participation rate per  
capita

The majority of  
councillors have not  
served as a councillor  
before

**42%** of candidates  
declared membership  
of a political party

# Across the state and country

## National comparisons

Female representation on councils is below fifty percent across all jurisdictions in Australia.

Based on the most recent local government elections, held between 2016 and 2018, NSW has the lowest percentage of female representation at 31%. Tasmania leads all states and territories with 40%, followed by Victoria with 38%.

The NSW Government is committed to advancing equality for women. It will be undertaking further work to identify barriers to participation and continue encouraging women to stand for their community as a local government representative.

This work will support the *NSW Women's Strategy 2018-2022*, a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to advance social and economic equality for women and girls.

## Participation, representation and the NSW population

Demographic	Candidate	Councillor	NSW <sup>1</sup>
Male	62.5%	69.0%	49.3%
Female	37.5%	31.2%	50.7%
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	2.6%	1.9%	2.9%
Disability	3.1%	2.7%	5.4%
Linguistic diversity	10.0%	8.2%	26.5%

Age 18-29 <sup>2</sup>	8.9%	4.3%	16.0%
Age 30-59 <sup>2</sup>	53.5%	54.1%	40.0%
Age 60+ <sup>2</sup>	36.5%	40.6%	21.9%

<sup>1</sup> ABS census 2016

<sup>2</sup> Age data calculated on the percentage of total population

Table 1. **Candidate, Councillor and NSW diversity**

## Councils with high and low levels of participation

Participation levels varied across the State. Councils with the most candidates were Campbelltown City Council with 95 and Central Coast Council with 93.

Tweed Shire Council was the most highly contested with 76 candidates vying for 7 positions.

Coolamon and Carrathool Shire Councils had the only fully uncontested elections, receiving the same number of nominations as positions.

Brewarrina Shire Council had the highest percentage of candidates based on its population, at 0.81%. City of Sydney and Sutherland Shire Councils had the lowest rates, at less than 0.02% of the population.

In the 2016/17 NSW Local Government elections, 4,157 people, 0.06% of the eligible population by age, stood as a candidate for their local council.

Nearly one-third of the candidates were elected to the 1,273 positions available on the councils included in this report.

The core diversity groups identified in this report are female, Aboriginals, Torres Strait Islanders, people with a disability, those with a first language other than English and the young. As can be seen in Table 1, compared to the State population, all are underrepresented as candidates and as councillors.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders representation is closest to parity with the State population.

Rural councils had the highest participation rate per capita, twice large rural and quadruple other areas, population by age, stood as a candidate for their local council.

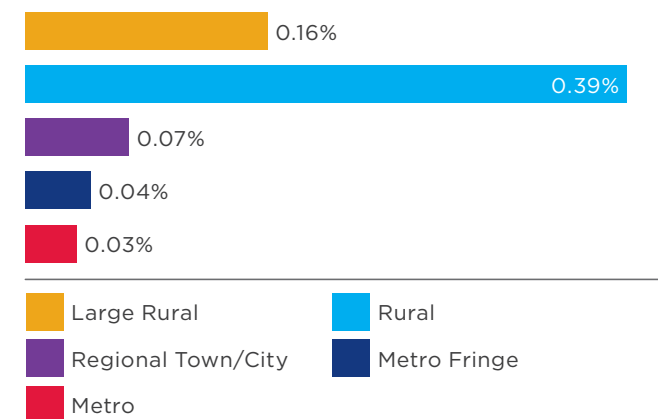


Chart 1. **Participation as a percentage of total candidates and population of the area**

# Profiles and how they have changed

## Typical candidates and councillors

The typical 2016/17 candidate was an English speaking male aged 60-69 years with a professional occupation, who did not identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or as having a disability and had not served as a councillor before.

This is similar to the typical candidate in the 2012 elections except that the most common age bracket then was 50-59 year olds.

The typical councillor reflects the typical candidate in every area except they have served as a councillor before. Again, this is the same as in 2012.

## Mayors reflect typical councillor

Mayors are either popularly elected or elected by their peers. As of the 2016/17 elections, mayors who are elected by their peers now hold office for two years instead of one. Those elected for the first two years and those popularly elected are reported on.

The typical mayor varies little from candidates and councillors. 72.2% are male with 95% having English as a first language. 3.2% identify as having a disability and the majority, 35.7%, are aged 60-69.

Most mayors had prior experience, however there is a higher proportion of mayors with no experience as a councillor (7.1%), than those who have completed five terms (6.3%).

Over 30% of mayors are popularly elected by the voters. A higher proportion of female mayors were elected by other councillors (31.4%) compared to those who were popularly elected (20%).





## Slight increases in most areas of diversity

In the case of diversity of candidates contesting the local government elections and the councillors elected, there have been slight improvements in most of the identified areas, albeit marginal in some cases.

Since the 2012 elections, the percentage of candidates and councillors has remained stable or increased slightly in the following areas:

- females
- Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders
- those with a first language other than English
- those aged 60+.

The percentage of candidates and councillors with a disability has dropped.

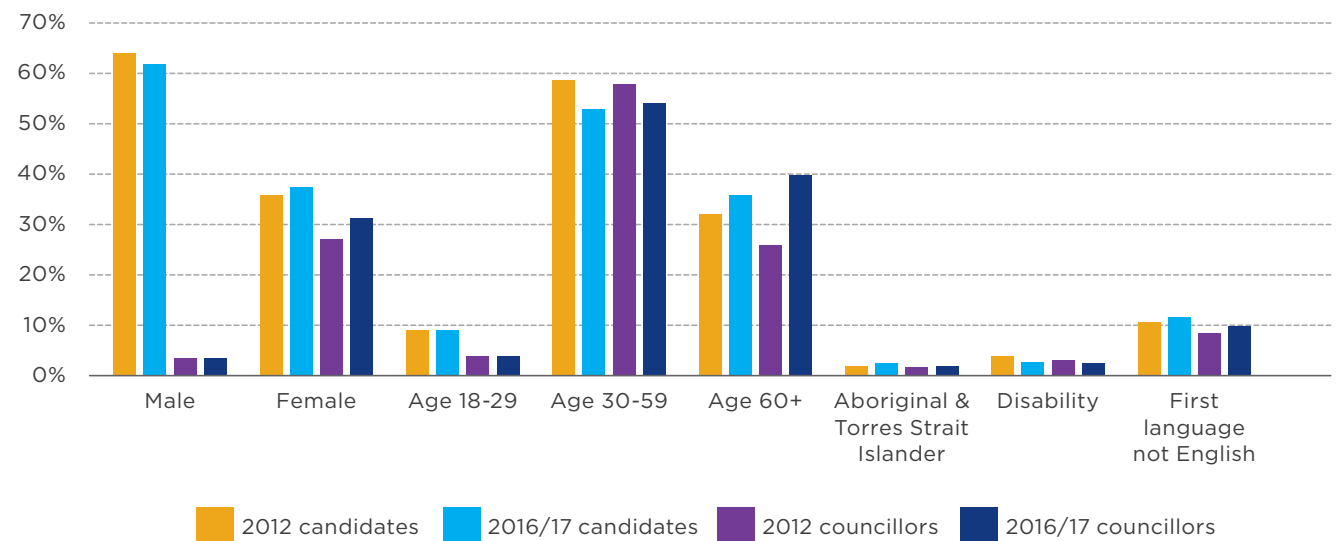


Chart 2. **Candidate and councillor diversity 2012 and 2016/17**

# Women

## While percentages increase, numbers fluctuate

The overall percentage of female candidates and councillors has increased marginally over the last three elections. However, in 2016/17, the actual number of women who stood for elections dropped from 1,610 to 1,558, compared to an increase between 2008 and 2012. (Table 2)

In 2012, 13 councils had the same or more female councillors than males. In 2016/17 there are 11.

Year	Female Candidates	Percent of all Candidates	Female Councillors	Percent of all Councillors
2016/17	1,558	37.5%	397	31.2%
2012	1,610	35.5%	390	27.8%
2008	1,480	33.3%	387	26.6%

Table 2. Number of female candidates and councillors by election year and as a percentage of all candidates and councillors.

## Quick stats

- 91.3% of councils have less than 50% of female councillors
- Over one-quarter of mayors are female, 27.8%
- Female mayors outnumber male in metro fringe councils 5 to 4
- Metro councils have the highest representation of female councillors
- Three-quarters of female candidates had not served on council before
- Nearly 10% of female candidates had a first language other than English
- Rural councils had the smallest percentage of female candidates and councillors

Most female mayors on record

2016/17 elections sees the highest percentage of female mayors on OLG records. Of all mayors, 27.8% are female compared to the previous high in 2008 of 23.0%. In 2012 18.8% of mayors were female.

All metropolitan and metro fringe councils have women on council. One-quarter of these have equal or greater numbers of women than men.

City of Sydney has the highest proportion of female councillors at 70.0%, closely followed by Bega Valley with 66.7%.

115 councils have less than 50% female councillors. 4 councils have no female representation. This is a marginal improvement from 2012, when 5 councils had no female councillors.

The 50-59 year age bracket was the highest represented age group for female candidates at 27.0% and councillors at 30.4%.

Just as rural councils have the lowest percent of female councillors, only 1 mayor of a rural council is female.

38.8% of female candidates and 33.1% of councillors identified as being members of a political party.

Lack of experience did not deter female candidates from standing, with 74.8% having no experience as a councillor, compared to 65.5% of male candidates.

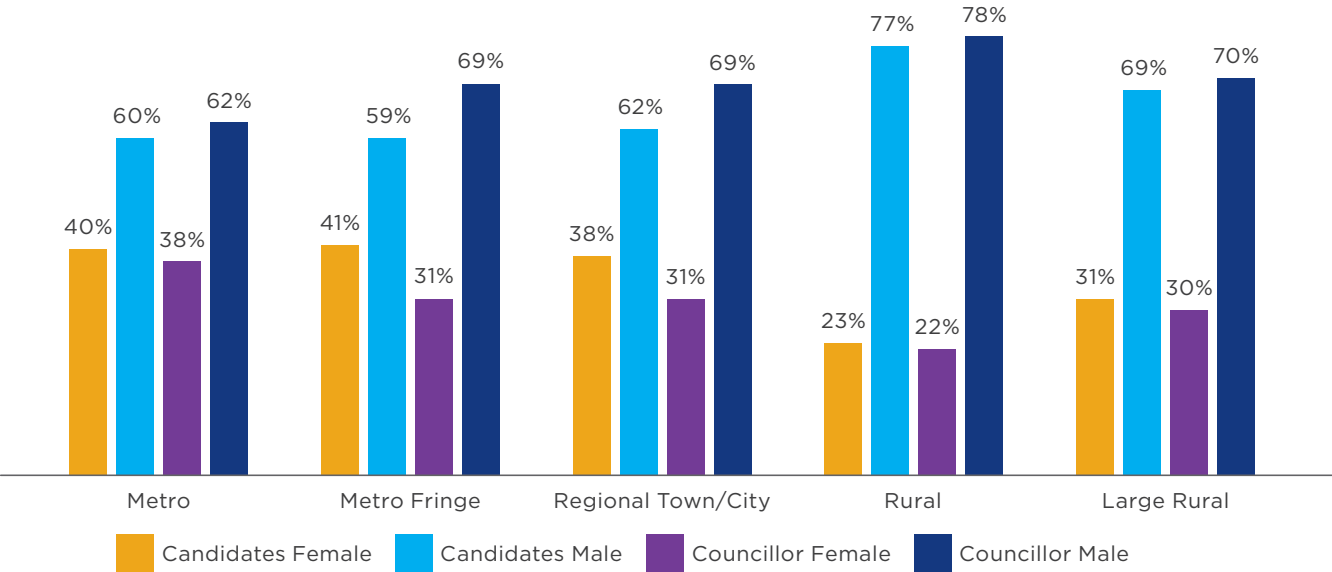


Chart 3. Female and male candidates and councillors by region

# Age

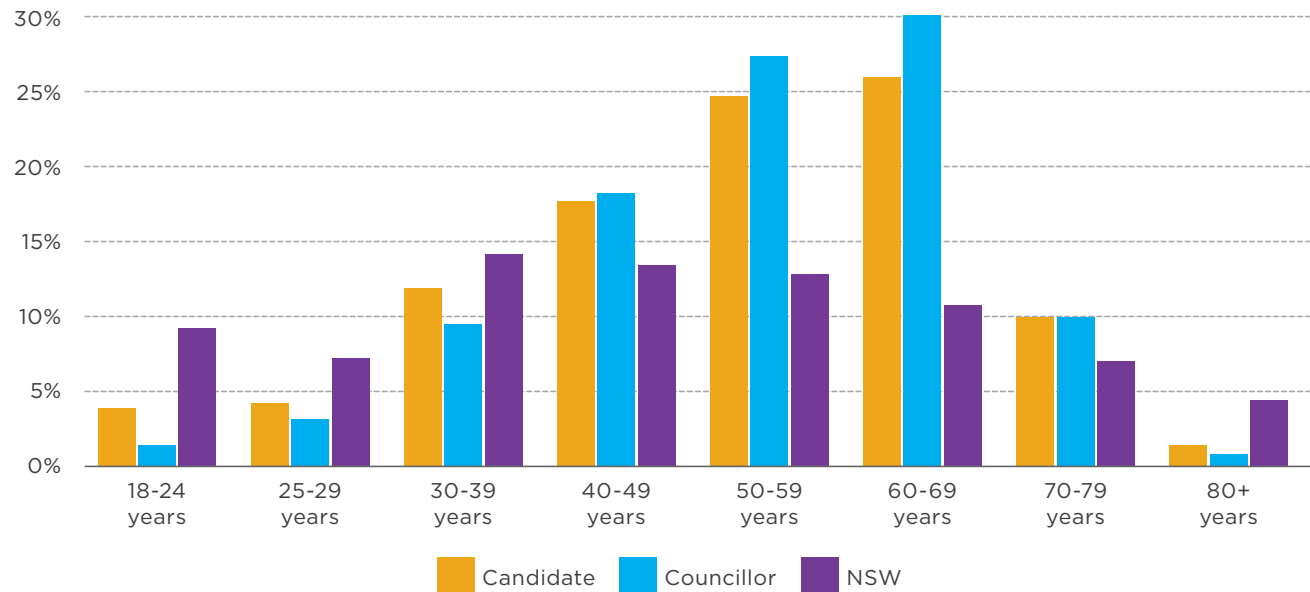


Chart 4. Female and male candidates and councillors by age brackets

## Age as an indicator for success

Half of all candidates and councillors are aged 50-69. This is around twice the representation of the NSW population in this age range.

Candidates aged 40-79 performed well at the elections. As can be seen in Chart 4, the percentage of councillors in each age bracket within this range is higher than the percentage of candidates.

44 (34.9%) councils have at least one councillor who is less than 30 years old. Of these, seven councils have two and one has three councillors in this age range.

Over one-third (37.5%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councillors are aged 60-69. 25.0% are aged 50-59 and 20.8% are aged 30-39.

### **Little change from 2012 in representation by age**

There was minimal change in participation and representation within age brackets when comparing the most recent results with those in 2012.

Those with the greatest growth in 2016/17 were candidates and councillors aged 70-79 who increased as a percentage of all candidates and councillors by 2.7% and 3.0% respectively.

50-59 year olds had the most significant downturn, dropping 2.4% in candidate percentages and 1.7% in councillor percentages.

### **Over and under-represented age groups**

The 60 -69 age bracket is the most over-represented age range on councils at nearly three times the NSW population of that age.

Aside from the 80+ age bracket, the under 30's are the most under-represented age category on councils, with only 4.2% elected as councillors, despite comprising 16.0% of the population.

Sutherland Shire Council has three councillors under 30 years of age, the highest number across the State.

### **Mayors older rather than younger**

Two-thirds of mayors are aged between 50 and 69. Seven mayors are in the 30-39 age bracket and one mayor is aged 80+. There are however no mayors under 30 years of age

Within the Sydney metropolitan area, the majority of mayors, 37.5%, are in the 50-59 year age bracket compared to the rest of NSW where the majority (40.4%) are in the 60-69 year age bracket.



# Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders

## New councillors

The majority of councillors who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander have previous experience as a councillor (58.3%).

Terms served as a councillor range from one term to seven terms, with one quarter having served one term.

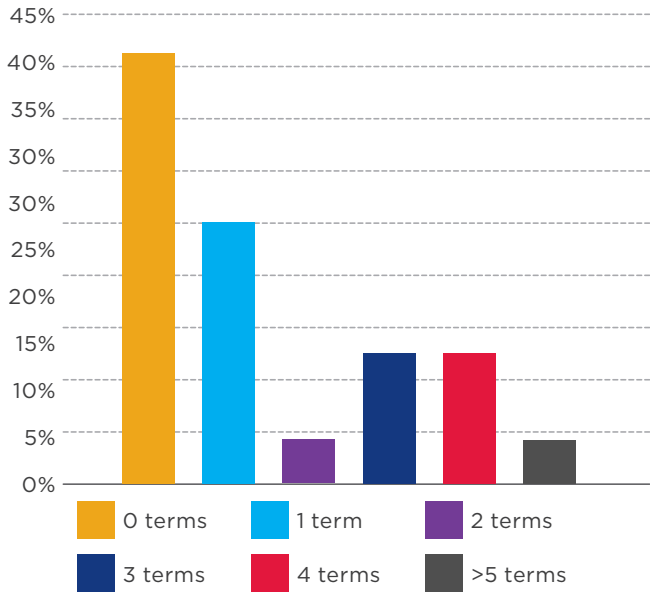


Chart 5. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander councillors previous experience

## Strong participation rates

In the 2016 census, Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders made up 2.9% of the population.

In the 2016/17 elections, 2.6% (110) candidates and 1.9% (24) councillors identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Demographic	Candidate	Councillor
Male	69.1%	87.5%
Female	30.9%	12.5%
18-24 years	8.2%	0.0%
25-29 years	4.5%	0.0%
30-39 years	16.4%	20.8%
40-49 years	14.5%	12.5%
50-59 years	28.2%	25.0%
60-69 years	23.6%	37.5%
70-79 years	4.5%	4.2%

Table 3. Demographics of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidates and councillors

Of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidates, less than one-third were female and only 12.5% of these were elected to council.

None of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidates aged between 18-29 were elected in 2016/17. This is a significant change from 2012 when 14.8% of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander councillors were in this age bracket.

In contrast, the councillor 30 to 59 year age bracket grew from 40.7% in 2012 to 58.3%.

## Candidate numbers increasing



Graphic 1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidate and councillor numbers since 2008

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidate numbers increased from 103 in 2012 to 110 in 2016/17, representing a 6.8% increase.

The number of female Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidates decreased from 36 in 2012 to 34 in 2016/17.

Candidate participation was strongest in regional towns and cities where 43.6% of all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidates stood for election.

However, two-thirds or more of all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander councillors are in large rural (37.5%) and rural (33.3%) areas.

## Councillor numbers drop

Unlike candidates, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander councillor numbers decreased by three, from 27 in 2012 to 24 in 2016/17, the same number as in 2008.

As in 2012, there are no mayors who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. In 2008 there was one.

# Disability

## Swing in disability representation

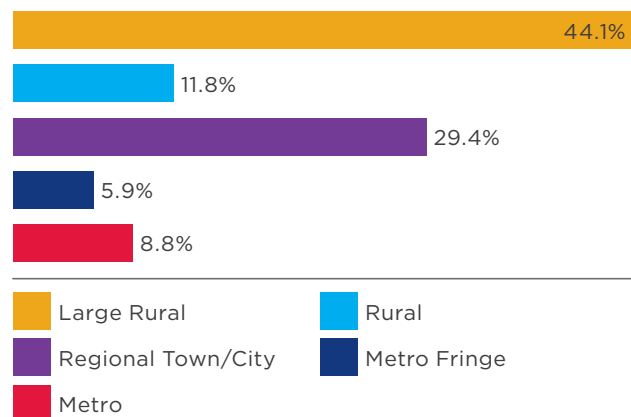
3.1% of candidates identified as having a disability. 38.8% of these were women, reflecting the male to female ratio of all female candidates (37.5%).

	2008	2012	2016/17
Candidates	2.9%	3.6%	3.1%
Councillors	3.2%	3.3%	2.7%

**Table 4. Percentage of candidates and councillors with a disability by election year**

Over the last three elections, the number of candidates with a disability increased from 130 to 160 from 2008 to 2012, and then decreased to 129 in 2016/17.

The largest proportion of councillors with a disability, 44.1%, are from large regional councils.



**Chart 6. Councillors with a disability by region**

# Language

## Language diversity similar



**Graphic 2. Percentage of councillors with a first language other than English over last three elections**

The percentage of councillors with a first language other than English is consistent with 2012 (Graphic 2). However, when looking at the actual number of councillors who identified as having a first language other than English, this number decreased marginally from 111 in 2012 to 105 in 2016/17.

407 candidates in 2016/17 had a first language other than English. As a percentage of all candidates, those with a first language other than English is 10.0%, a drop from 2012 of 11.7%.

The number of languages spoken by candidates also dropped from 81 in 2012 to 71.

Italian is the most common first language of councillors other than English. In 2012 it was Arabic.

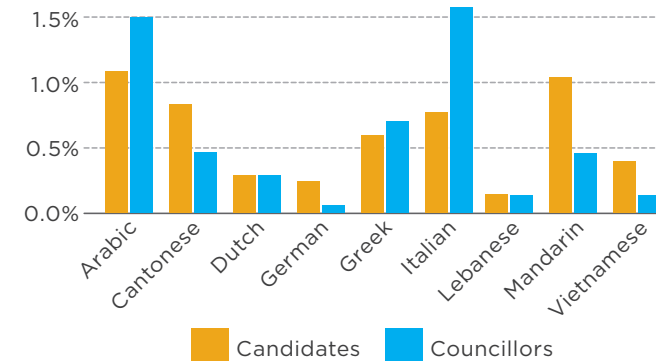
## Low representation

Over one-quarter (26.5%) of households in NSW speak a language other than English<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, 10.0% of candidates and 8.2% of councillors reported having a first language other than English.

For the first time, in 2016/17 a candidate identified their first language as being Auslan Sign Language.

44 councils have councillors with a first language other than English. Of these, 14 have at least 20% of their councillors with a first language other than English.

Fairfield City Council has the highest reported number of councillors with a first language other than English, at 69%. Griffith City Council, at 25%, has the highest number of councillors with a first language other than English outside of the Sydney area.



**Chart 7. Most common first language spoken by candidates and councillors after English**

<sup>1</sup> Multicultural NSW

# Experience

## Youth Councils

A number of councils in NSW have Youth Advisory Councils or Committees.

Younger members of the local community are able to nominate themselves and if appointed to the Youth Council, provide advice to their Councils about issues facing young people.

Membership often provides opportunities for direct communication with councillors and councils and may be an avenue for raising awareness and encouraging participation in local government elections.

Prior to being elected, one of the three youngest councillors at Sutherland Shire Council was a member of it's Youth Council.

## Length of tenure links to increasing challenges

A 2012 LGNSW report found that a key challenge for councillors was in balancing council and employment commitments. Qualitative feedback suggested that the significance of this increases with the length of tenure of representation.

The data collected by OLG could tend to support these findings. It shows a significant proportion, 39.4%, of councillors had no previous experience before being elected. 20.3% of those elected have served 1 term. There is then a steady decline, dropping to 4.0% of councillors who have served 5 terms, or twenty years.



# Occupation

## Property development

To address community concern and to increase transparency, the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2005* was amended to require candidates of council elections to disclose whether they are a property developer or a close associate to a corporation that is a property developer, as defined under the *Election Funding, Expenditure and Disclosures Act 1981*.

1.5% of candidates and councillors indicated in the data collected for this report that they were either a property developer or a close associate of a property developer<sup>2</sup>. The most common occupation of these candidates and councillors was self-employed, 26.6% and 31.6% respectively.

Of all candidates, 1.3% were real estate agents and they make up 1.0% of all councillors. One declared property developer ran as a candidate and was elected.

## Top occupations remain the same

The five most common occupations for both candidates and councillors are professional, retiree, self employed, manager and primary producer/farmer, as was the case in 2012. 72.5% of all candidates and 76.0% of all councillors fell into one of these occupations.

Primary producers/farmers were very successful at the elections. 61.9% of those who stood were elected.

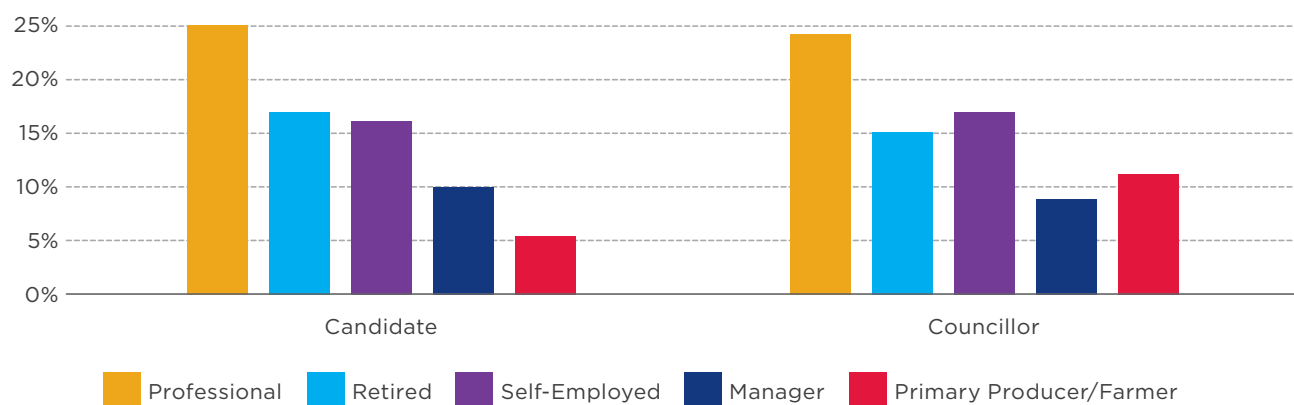


Chart 8. Five most common occupations of candidates and councillors

<sup>2</sup> 7.0% of candidates and 9.2% of councillors did not answer this question

# Incentives & barriers

## Why people stand for local government

It is frequently noted that local government is the closest form of government to the people. This is reflected in the number of candidates standing for election. In the 2016/17 local government elections 4,157 candidates stood for elections to councils compared to 934 candidates who stood at the State elections in 2015.<sup>3</sup>

The 2012 LGNSW report, *Influencing Change*, and recent surveys in Western Australia and Victoria, found that the key reasons for becoming involved in local politics is the desire for candidates to serve their local community.

Research has also identified that being recognised as a leader, and being asked to become a councillor were key factors in standing as a candidate.

## Inexperience no barrier to candidates or voters

Findings from this report indicate that a lack of experience is not a barrier to people running for council or being elected as a councillor.

71.9% of candidates had no previous experience as a councillor and 17.5% of these candidates were elected.

39.4% of councillors are serving their first term in 2016/17.

## Why become a councillor

Australians think that local government is the best level of government to make decisions about the local area.<sup>4</sup>

Surveys of elected representatives have found a strong sense of achievement as a result of their roles and that the experience, knowledge and skills gained are useful in other areas of their lives.<sup>5</sup>

Councillors in Victoria overwhelmingly supported the view that the positives outweighed the negatives when comparing initial expectations and actual experiences<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> NSW Electoral Commission

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<sup>4</sup> LGNSW

<sup>5</sup> ACELG UTS

<sup>6</sup> Municipal Association of Victoria



## Barriers to standing for local government

There are several key factors in reports and research that highlight barriers to people nominating as a candidate for public office. These include:

- A lack of knowledge about the formal political process and what can be seen as an arduous process in meeting legislative requirements
- Financial costs associated with running a campaign and the impact of the role on employment income
- Balancing official commitments and employment
- Family commitments
- Poor public perception of the elected body
- Age barrier where younger people face scepticism of their ability to perform.

For those choosing not to renominate after having served on council, the following three factors have been identified as the most relevant for both men and women in their decision:<sup>7</sup>

- Needing to balance work and council commitments
- Needing to balance family and council commitments
- Wanting to directly influence council decisions.



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