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August 26th, 2025

Local election candidates should be contactable by voters

*In a digital age of social media online election campaigns, one would expect it's easy to contact political candidates. But, **Edward de Quay** argues, that is not the case. In the recent local elections, only a quarter of candidates offered a campaign email where they could be reached at by voters. When voters can't seek clarification about specific issues, the democratic process is weakened.*

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Election campaigns are increasingly digital, so you might assume candidates would be contactable with, at minimum, a campaign email. The [Climate Election](#) project focuses on candidate views on net zero, and in the runup to the 2025 local elections found it very difficult to contact the majority of them.

Only a quarter of candidates provided a campaign email for the May local elections, based on data available from [Democracy Club](#). There is no official national directory, and no requirement for a candidate to provide contact details. The Electoral Commission and council webpages point towards "[Who Can I Vote For](#)", a project of Democracy Club, for this information. This information is crowdsourced, and therefore incomplete, but is nonetheless the best available national dataset on election candidates.



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This is important because a **councillor** is elected to provide community leadership, and to serve and represent everyone in their ward. Having a campaign email address is a modest indication that a candidate is willing to enter dialogue with voters, which is part of the job if elected. Of course, that emails should be seen as the norm has happened quickly. 2001 was **the first “internet election”**, at a time where **36 per cent of UK households** had access to the internet. By 2020 96 per cent of households in Great Britain were connected.

Email is the most accessible form of online communication, used by **86 per cent of adults** in 2019. Many candidates use social media, but as the popularity of different platforms **varies considerably by age**, overreliance on a particular platform locks out groups of voters from the conversation in a way email does not. Candidates should be ready to represent the whole ward. We would not encourage selective access to our representatives offline, and it should be no different online. Having email as standard gives the greatest number the option of getting in touch.

The risks of providing candidates' contact details

The only requirement relating to candidate campaign materials (print and digital) is that they have an **“imprint”**. This imprint includes the name of the candidate and promotor, and a postal address. The promotor's address provides transparency as to who is running the campaign, but given the tight timing of an election is unlikely to be used for correspondence. It is also a security risk. Candidates are not required **to publish their home address**, but candidates in England promoting themselves do have to provide *an* address. For those without a physical campaign HQ, this will be their home. The recent Government **“strategy for modern and secure elections”** recognises this and commits to removing the requirement where a candidate is acting as their own promotor, but does not make recommendations about providing other contact details.

There are good reasons why candidates do not make contact details available. Firstly, **intimidation of candidates is commonplace**, with almost three quarters of local councillors experiencing some level of abuse or intimidation during the campaign period. There is a growing feeling amongst councillors that this behaviour, especially online, is **becoming normalised**. Providing an email address will inevitably invite unwanted correspondence. Sending a letter takes time and money, whereas sending a quick email, especially where the text is pre-written by a campaign group, has a very low effort threshold. Managing a campaign and a full inbox is time consuming, so it is possible most conclude that doorstep conversations are the priority.

The downgrading of local elections

Local elections are seen as less important than national elections. During the 2024 general election Climate Election identified an email address for 95 per cent of the 1757 candidates monitored, which is well above the quarter at this year's locals. Voter turnout at the 2024 General Election was **59.7 per cent** and local election turnout in 2025 was **34 per cent**. Put simply, most people don't vote at local elections, and they can be treated as mini-nationals, more about the party than individual. During the project several local party chairs provided blanket statements on behalf of all their area candidates or stated that all candidates shared the views of the national manifesto, rather than providing contact emails for individuals. It follows that candidates won't feel the need to be proactive if the vote is not going to represent their efforts.

Paper candidates (or "no-hope" candidates) are another feature. If a party wants to be represented on the ballot paper but knows there is no chance of winning, that candidate may understandably not campaign hard. This can backfire. In 2022 the Labour candidate for Hampstead Town had to be **got out of bed** after a very unexpected win in a Conservative safe seat. More recently, Arron Banks came a strong second for Reform in the race for Mayor of West of England, despite finding it "**a bit worrying**" that he might soon hold the "meaningless" post.



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Some local offices pointed out that direct email addresses were in fact available for candidates, but only on physical printed election literature, not online. This was an effort to keep national organised campaign groups and online trolls at bay, and to keep the conversation at a local level with actual voters (not responding to research projects like this one). Whilst it is frustrating from a research position if this information is not easily available, it goes without saying that a candidate is under no obligation to respond to contact from outside the electoral boundary.

Local doesn't necessarily mean accessible

A last thought is on geography. Parliamentary boundaries are very large in size and population, and availability of campaign contact details was good for the main parties at the 2024 general election. Councillors are elected in far smaller areas where it is often possible for voters to physically meet with their candidate. One party local branch was clear that most campaigning happens on the doorstep, so there was no need to list contact details online. This approach does however need to be mindful of accessibility to ensure everyone is able to participate, and the fact that not every voter will have a knock at the door or receive a letter. Democracy Club [feedback after the 2023 elections](#) was mostly frustration at the lack of candidate information available, so a small geography does not guarantee voter interaction offline.

Do emails mean votes

The argument around providing email details is about the democratic process more than it is about providing any advantage. In fact, it does not appear that being contactable by email gives any advantage. Looking at the data gathered by Democracy Club again, 32 per cent of Conservative candidates had email addresses, 27 per cent for Green, 25 per cent for Labour, 31 per cent for Liberal Democrats, and 16 per cent for Reform. Low email availability for Reform clearly did them no harm, [winning 41 per cent](#) of seats available.

Despite a range of good reasons not to provide a contact email, and a question mark as to whether it has any effect on the result, it remains odd that there is no requirement to provide one. The democratic process is weakened if voters cannot seek clarification about a candidate's position on issues of concern, or about the claims they make on election literature. It makes the interaction one sided and evasive. Providing an email address where voters can reach candidates' campaigns is simple to do (if difficult to manage), and would help reduce the lottery of social media channels or complete absence of online presence currently in play.

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