Local Government Candidates Survey 2017

Survey of Local Government Candidates 2017

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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1. Introduction

The Welsh Government, with the support of the Local Government Data Unit ~ Wales (the Data Unit) carried out of a survey of local government election candidates for the May 2017 elections. This was the second survey of local government election candidates, the first having been conducted following the 2012 elections.

As part of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, local authorities are required to conduct a standardised survey of councillors and candidates for election to the office of councillor in their areas. The survey is to include both county and town and community councillors and candidates and asks a prescribed set of questions that included (but was not limited to) questions about gender; sexual orientation; language; ethnicity; age; disability; religion or belief; health; education and qualifications; employment; and work as a councillor. The Data Unit conducted the 2017 survey on behalf of the local authorities.

The main aim of the survey is to provide timely information on the demographic profile of local authority councillors and candidates. The intention is that the survey will be repeated during each ordinary election to track changes in candidates' and councillors' characteristics over time.

A review of the methodology and questionnaire took place following completion of the 2012 survey and publication of a report from the expert group on local government diversity[1]. The methodology used, and any changes from the previous survey, are outlined in the methodology section. The 2017 questionnaire is a statutory instrument. Any changes made to the 2012 questions are highlighted in the report.

In terms of how the data have been analysed and presented in this report, it is important to note that the survey findings have not been weighted and confidence intervals have not been calculated. What this means in practical terms is 1) there are unknown margins of error around the numbers derived from the survey; and 2) comparisons between the results from the 2012 and 2017 surveys should not made, because the statistical validity of differences between the two surveys cannot be verified.

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[1] http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/localgov/140305-expert-group-report-en.pdf

The Data Unit conducted a detailed analysis of the 2017 survey data and this report summarises demographic characteristics of elected councillors and unelected candidates, focusing particularly on characteristics which signal diversity. It is intended that the information provided will support the Welsh Government and the political parties in the development of policies to increase the diversity of those who stand as county and community councillors.

The term 'county' is used for county and county borough candidates/councillors and the term 'community' is used for community and town candidates/councillors throughout this report.

2.   Executive Summary

- There were 3,449 county candidates and 7,326 community candidates in the 2017 local government elections. Overall, 36 per cent of county candidates were elected as county councillors and 90 per cent of community candidates were elected as community councillors.
- The survey yielded 1,701 responses. The response rate for county candidates was 24 per cent and for community candidates was 17 per cent. The responses rates ranged from 26 per cent in Denbighshire to 11 per cent in Powys.

Previous experience

- Among county councillors nearly two thirds (62 per cent) had stood in a county election previously and around a half (51 per cent) had been elected previously. Among community councillors 57 per cent had stood for election previously and 53 per cent had been elected previously.

Gender

- Around two thirds (67 per cent) of county councillors were male, a similar proportion of unelected county candidates were also male (72 per cent). Among community councillors and unelected community candidates 65 per cent were male.

Age

- Nearly half (47 per cent) of county councillors were aged 60 or above compared to nearly two fifths (39 per cent) of unelected county candidates. There were similar proportions of community councillors and unelected community candidates who were aged 60 or above, 55 per cent and 47 per cent respectively.

Ethnicity

- Among county councillors 1.8 per cent were non-white compared to 2.3 per cent of unelected county candidates. Among community councillors 1.2 per cent were non-white compared to 1.9 per cent of unelected community candidates.

Religion

- Two thirds (66 per cent) of county councillors stated they were Christian compared to 56 per cent of unelected county candidates. Around two thirds (69 per cent) of community councillors also stated they were Christian. This compared to 61 per cent of unelected community candidates.

Sexual orientation

- Among county councillors 7.1 per cent stated they were lesbian, gay or bisexual compared to 6.9 per cent of unelected county candidates. The proportion of community councillors and unelected community candidates who reported being lesbian, gay or bisexual were 3.7 per cent and 3.3 per cent respectively.

Health and disability

- Physical health was reported to be good or very good for 89 per cent of county councillors and 85 per cent of community councillors.
- The proportion of county councillors who considered themselves to have a disability was 12 per cent compared to 16 per cent of unelected county candidates. Among community councillors 15 per cent considered themselves to have a disability compared to 18 per cent of unelected community candidates.

Education

- Two thirds (66 per cent) of county councillors and community councillors had a qualification equivalent to NVQ Level 4 or above. The proportion of unelected county candidates with a similar level of education was 73 per cent compared to 63 per cent of unelected community candidates.

Employment

- Around a third (31 per cent) of county councillors were retired compared to 24 per cent of unelected county candidates. Among community councillors 42 per cent were retired compared to 32 per cent of unelected community candidates.

Welsh language

- Welsh was stated as the main language of 15 per cent of county councillors and 9 per cent of unelected county candidates. Similarly, the proportions stating Welsh as their main language was 17 per cent of community councillors and 8 per cent of unelected community candidates.

3. Methodology

3.1 The survey was conducted before, during and after the local government elections held on 4 May 2017. The questionnaire was made available to candidates for both county and community elections as part of their nomination packs. The survey was conducted online with paper copies available on request.

3.2 The 2012 survey was conducted after the election to allow for analysis of elected candidates (councillors) and unelected candidates. This approach did not collect information on all candidates and there was potential non-response bias from unelected candidates. For this reason, as well as those outlined previously, direct comparison of results from 2017 and 2012 is discouraged.

3.3 The 2017 survey was designed to reduce non-response bias from unelected candidates by being available prior to the election. Some unique identifiers were collected as part of the questionnaire to allow linkage to their candidate record to understand if the candidate was elected or unelected following the election. 79 per cent of responses were received before the election, 21 per cent were received after the election.

3.4 Candidates can stand in county or community elections, or both. A summary of the overall number of candidates is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Candidates by election type

	Number	Percentage
All candidates	9,352	100
County only	2,026	22
Community only	5,903	63
Both County and Community	1,423	15
Total County	3,449	37
Total Community	7,326	78

3.5 It is also possible for candidates to stand for more than one community seat. Of the 7,326 candidates in community seats, 75 candidates (1 per cent) stood in more than one community seat. Where candidates stood for more than one seat they have been counted only once. Candidates that stood for more than one seat have been categorised as elected if they were elected to at least one of these seats. Candidates

that were elected are referred to as councillors in this report. Candidates that were unelected in all seats in which they stood are referred to as unelected candidates.

3.6   Uncontested seats are those that did not receive sufficient candidates to require an election. Candidates in uncontested seats are categorised as elected for this analysis.

3.7   A number of candidates responded to the survey more than once, as a result of receiving multiple nomination packs or reminders/prompts sent from the Data Unit or the local authority. Only one survey response has been included per candidate – where duplicate responses were both complete (full) responses, the most recent response was selected for inclusion in the analysis.

3.8   Overall, 9,352 candidates stood for election. There were 3,449 county candidates and 7,326 community candidates. The survey yielded 1,701 valid responses and a summary of survey responses and response rates by election type is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Response rates by election type

	Candidates	Proportion elected (%)	Survey responses	Response rate (%)
All	9,352		1,701	18
Elected	7,220	77	1,272	18
Unelected	2,132	23	429	20
County	3,449		811	24
Elected	1,254	36	329	26
Unelected	2,195	64	482	22
Community	7,326		1,256	17
Elected	6,571	90	1,100	17
Unelected	755	10	156	21

3.9   Response rates of all candidates ranged from 26 per cent in Denbighshire to 11 per cent in Powys. The number of candidates and survey responses received in each local authority is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Response rates by local authority

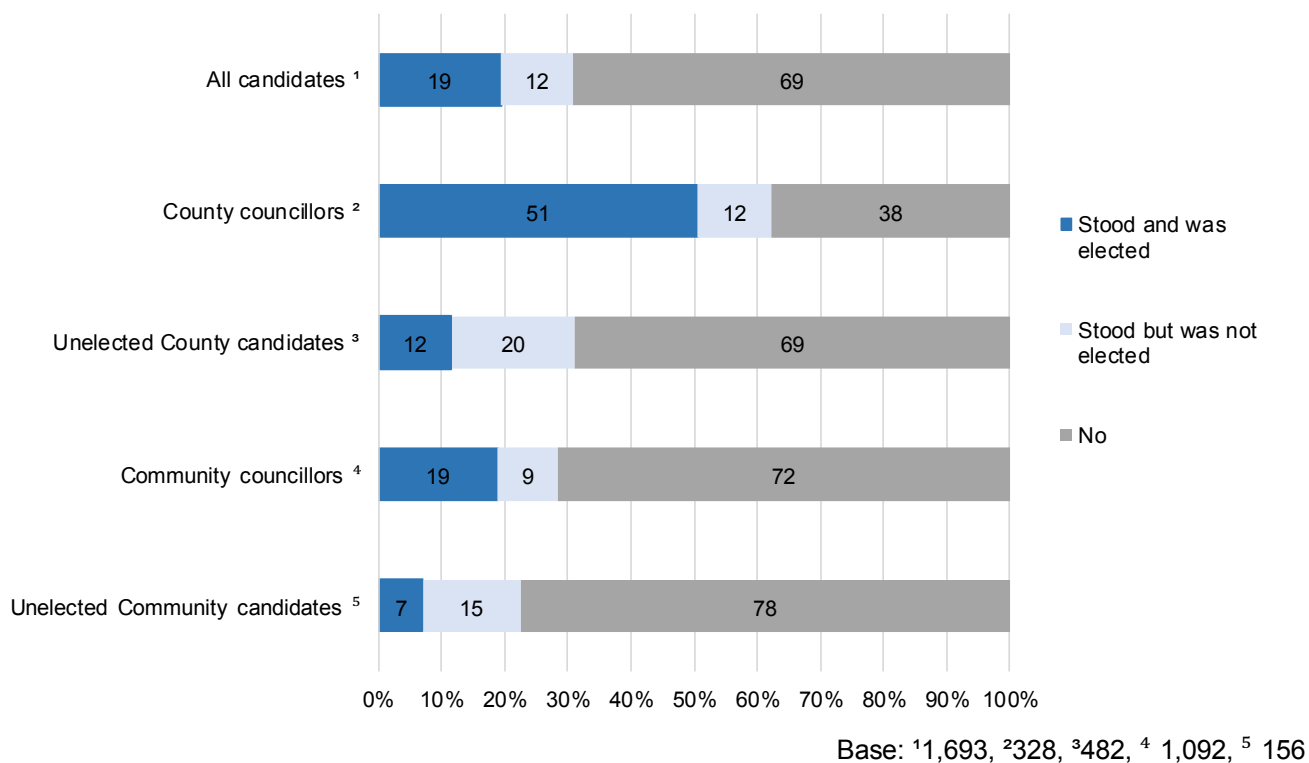|	Candidates	Responses	Response rate (%)
Isle of Anglesey	363	48	13
Gwynedd	719	100	14
Conwy	389	65	17
Denbighshire	421	108	26
Flintshire	440	96	22
Wrexham	426	94	22
Powys	977	109	11
Ceredigion	534	63	12
Pembrokeshire	683	141	21
Carmarthenshire	847	133	16
Swansea	419	101	24
Neath Port Talbot	343	77	22
Bridgend	333	76	23
The Vale of Glamorgan	385	101	26
Cardiff	371	67	18
Rhondda Cynon Taf	338	58	17
Merthyr Tydfil	77	23	30
Caerphilly	340	73	21
Blaenau Gwent	122	27	22
Torfaen	173	29	17
Monmouthshire	400	74	19
Newport	252	38	15

3.10 Some respondents chose not to answer certain questions. The analysis includes only valid responses for each question, therefore questions have a different base number of respondents. These bases are stated below figures/within tables.

3.11 All figures in the report refer to the candidates that responded to the survey, not to all candidates that stood in the elections.

4.   Previous experience as a County councillor

4.1   Although a similar question was asked in the 2012 survey, the question changed in 2017 and direct comparison of results is not possible.

Figure 1: Have you stood for election to a County or County Borough Council in the past?

Base: [1] 1,693, [2] 328, [3] 482, [4] 1,092, [5] 156

4.2   Around a third (31 per cent) of candidates had stood for election as a county or county borough councillor in the past; 19 per cent had been elected previously.

4.3   Of those elected as county councillors in 2017, 62 percent had stood for election as a county councillor in previous elections, and 51 per cent had been elected previously.
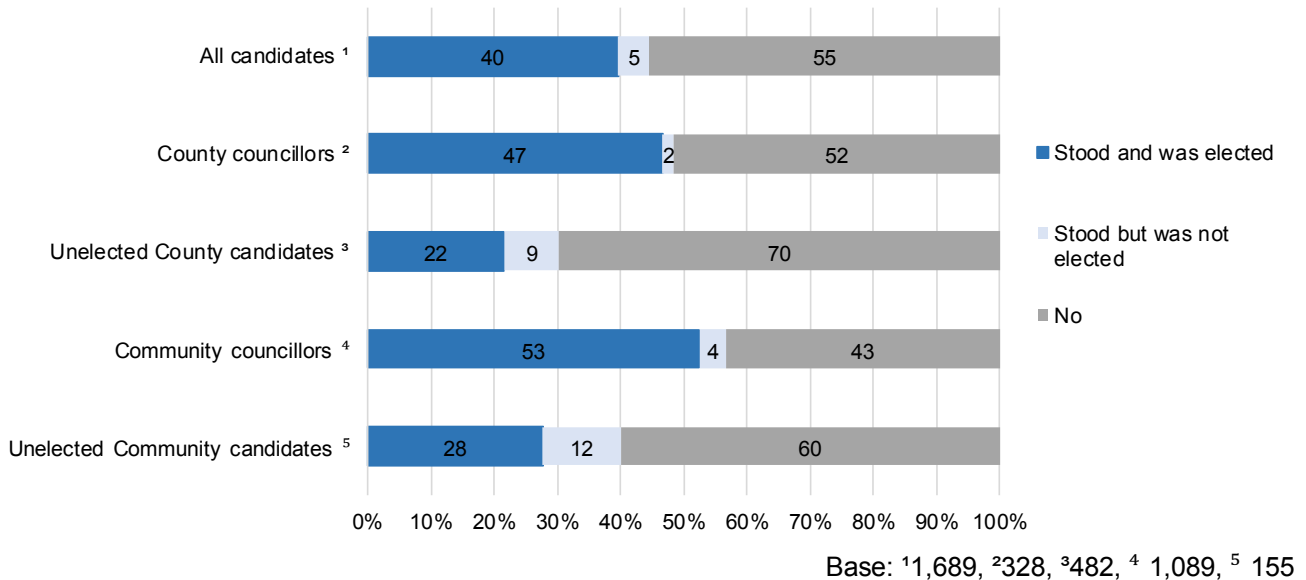
4.4   The total number of years that candidates had previously served as county councillors ranged from less than a year to more than 55 years. The median length of previous service was 9 years. Around 36 per cent of those that had served as a county councillor before had done so for 10 years or more. Candidates were asked to include all periods of office and were not asked about any breaks in service.

4.5   A fifth (20 per cent) of unelected county candidates had also been unsuccessful at election in previous years.

5.   Previous experience as a Community councillor

5.1   Again, this question was asked differently in the 2017 survey compared to 2012, so direct comparison of the results is not appropriate.

Figure 2: Have you stood for election to a Community or Town Council in the past?

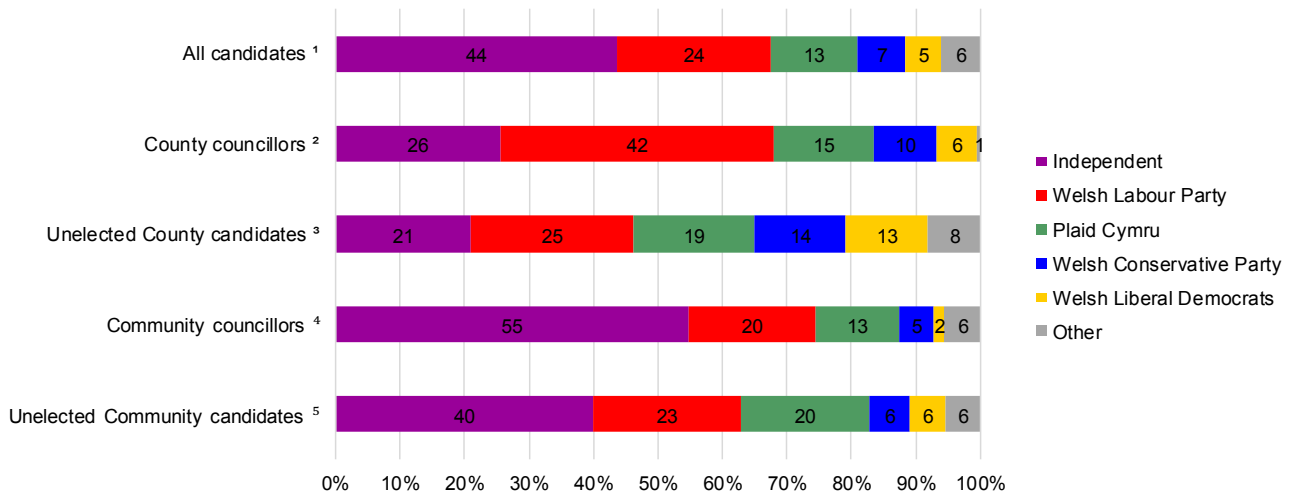Base: [1] 1,689, [2] 328, [3] 482, [4] 1,089, [5] 155

5.2   Around half of candidates had stood for election to a community or town council in the past (45 per cent); 40 per cent had been successfully elected previously.

5.3   Of those that were elected as community councillors in 2017, over half (57 per cent) had stood for election to community councils previously; 53 per cent were successfully elected previously.

5.4   The total number of years that candidates had previously served as community councillors ranged from less than a year to more than 55 years. The median length of previous service was 9 years. Around 48 per cent of those that had served as a community councillor before had done so for 10 years or more. Candidates were asked to include all periods of office and were not asked about any breaks in service.

6.   Party affiliation

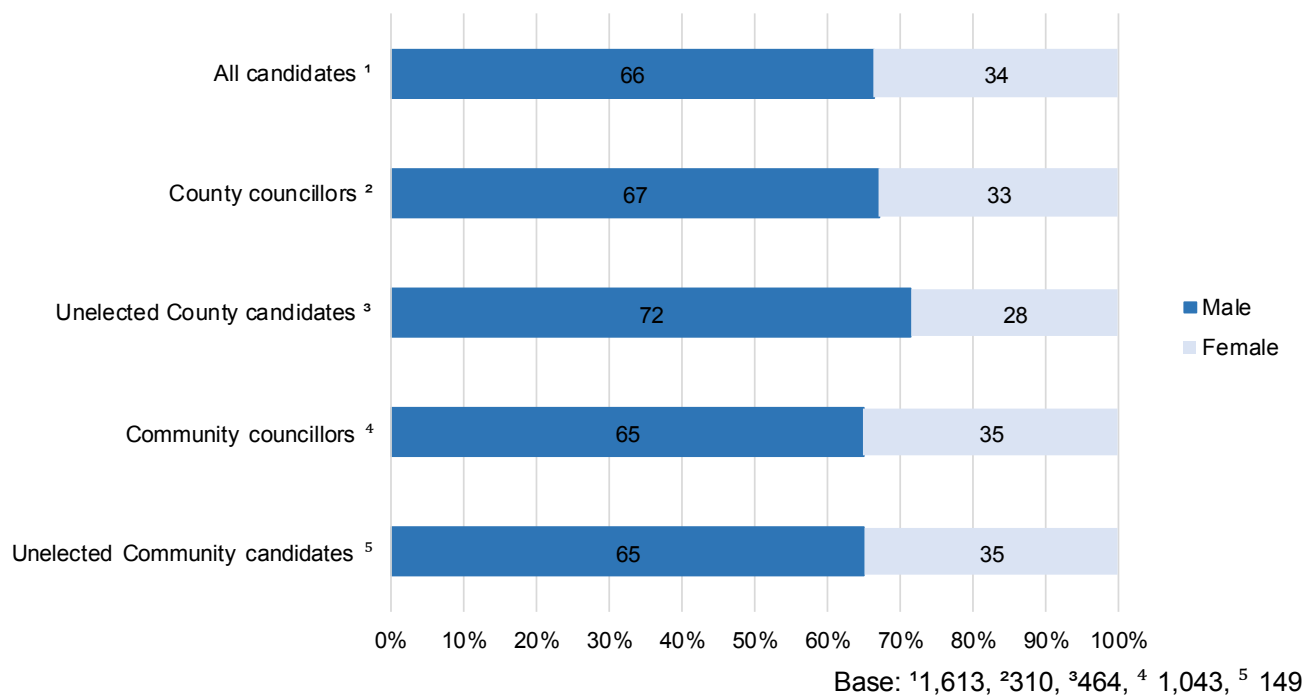**Figure 3: Which party, if any, are you representing/did you represent?**

Base: [1] 1,578, [2] 325, [3] 466, [4] 1,000, [5] 145

6.1   Of county councillors that responded to the survey, 42 per cent said they were representing Welsh Labour, 26 per cent ran as Independent, 15 per cent ran for Plaid Cymru, 10 per cent ran for Welsh Conservatives, 6 per cent ran for Welsh Liberal Democrats and 1 per cent ran for other parties.

6.2   Amongst community councillors, 55 per cent ran as Independent, 20 per cent ran for Welsh Labour, 13 per cent ran for Plaid Cymru, 5 per cent ran for Welsh Conservatives, 2 per cent ran for Welsh Liberal Democrats and 6 per cent ran for other parties.

6.3   A small minority of respondents, 7 per cent, chose not to answer this question.

7. Gender

Figure 4: Gender of survey respondents
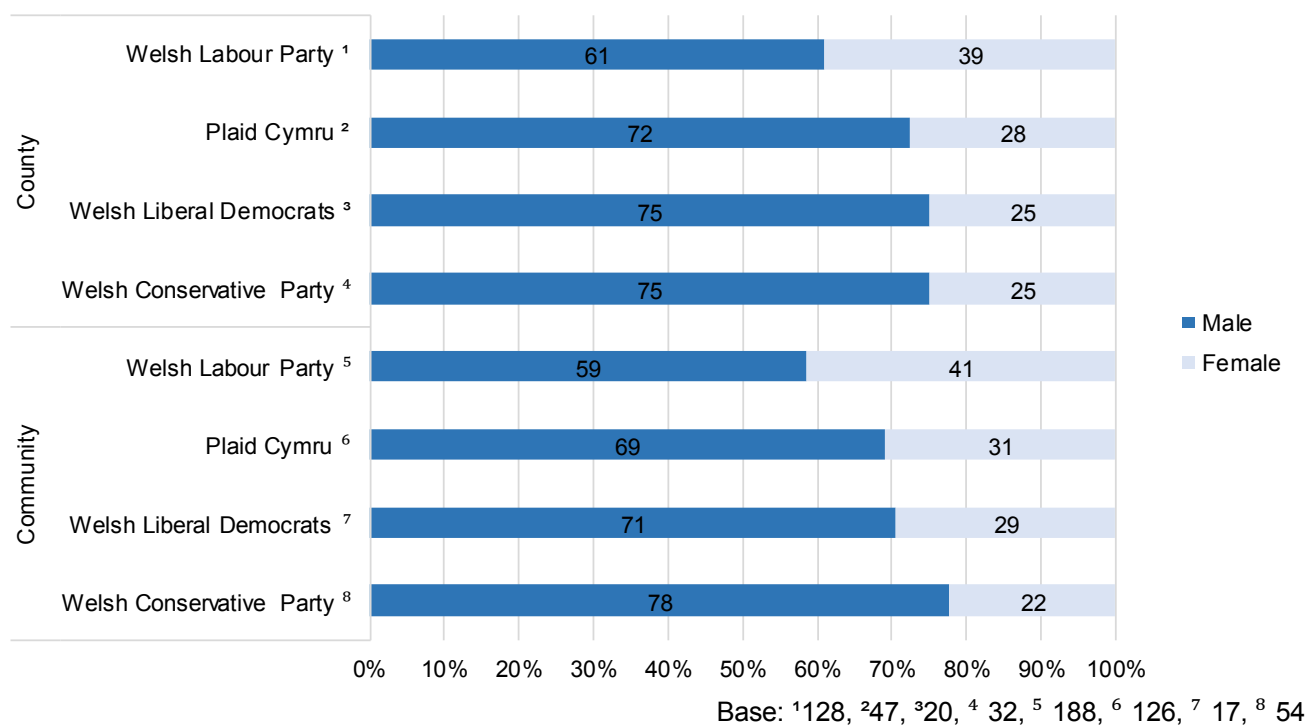

Base: [1]1,613, [2]310, [3]464, [4] 1,043, [5] 149

7.1 The survey found that overall, 66 per cent of candidates were male and 34 per cent were female. These percentages were similar for the councillors and the unelected candidates in both county and community elections.

7.2 A third of county councillors (33 per cent) were female and 35 per cent of community councillors were female.

7.3 A small minority of respondents, 5 per cent, chose not to answer this question.

7.4 Gender and party affiliation

Figure 5: Gender and party affiliation of elected councillors

Base: [1]128, [2]47, [3]20, [4] 32, [5] 188, [6] 126, [7] 17, [8] 54
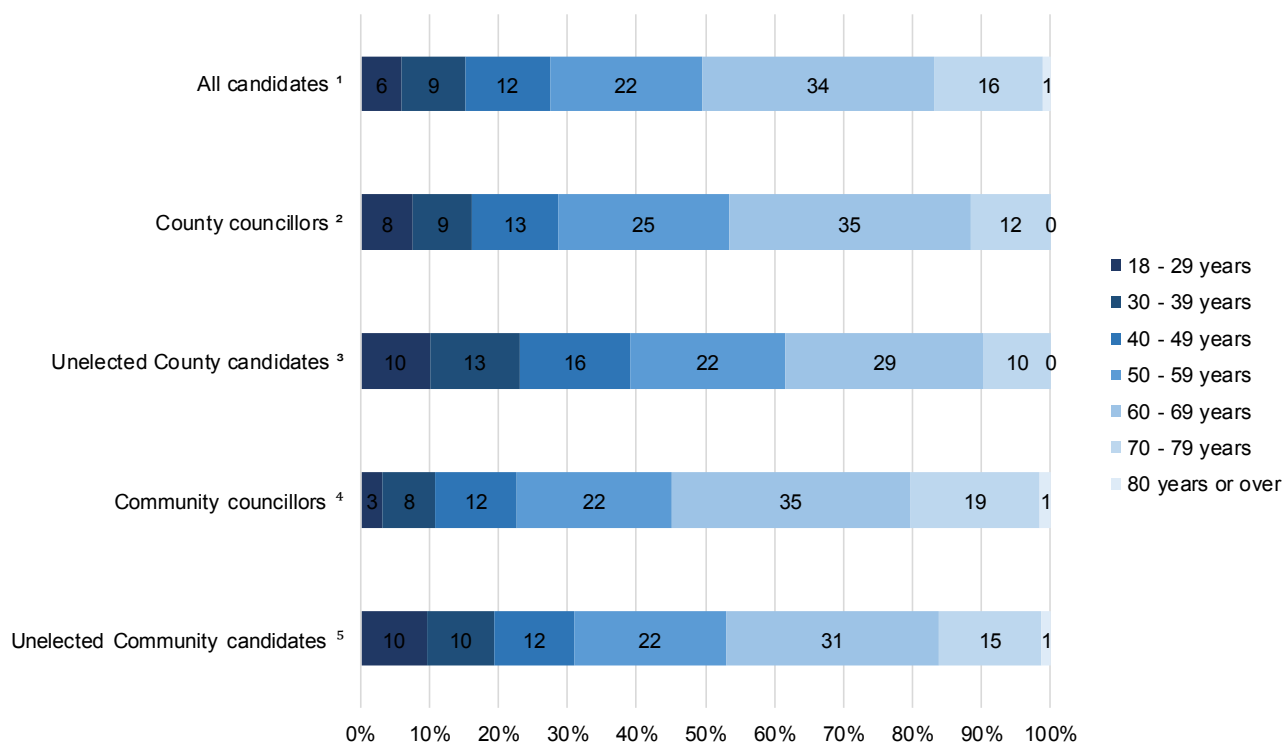
7.5 The survey found that the proportion of female councillors ranged from 25 per cent to 39 per cent between political parties.

7.6 The pattern was similar for community councillors, with a slightly higher proportion of Welsh Liberal democrats (29 per cent) and lower proportion of Welsh Conservatives (22 per cent) being female.

8. Age

Figure 6: What age band were you in on your last birthday?

Base: [1]1,684, [2]328, [3]481, [4] 1,085, [5] 155

8.1 The survey found that 50 per cent of candidates were aged 60 years or older.

8.2 Among elected councillors, 47 per cent of county and 55 per cent of community councillors were aged 60 years or older.

8.3 A small minority of county councillors (8 per cent) and community councillors (3 per cent) were aged 18 to 29 years. Amongst unelected county and community candidates 10 per cent were in this age bracket.

8.4 Looking at gender and age, 34 per cent of all county councillors were males aged 60 years or over, 13 per cent were females aged 60 years or over, 34 per cent were males aged 18 to 59 years and 20 per cent were females aged 18 to 59 years.
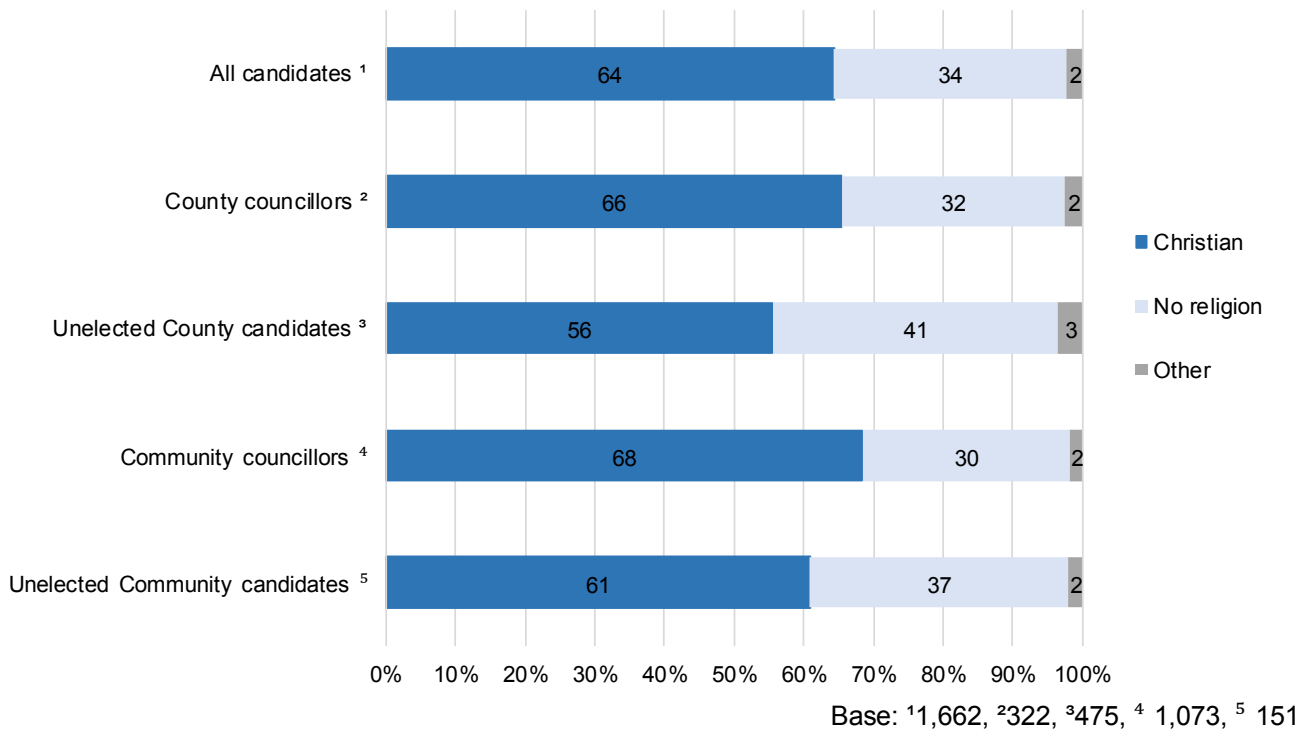
9. Ethnicity

Table 4: What is your ethnic group?

	White (%)	Other ethnic group (%)	Base
All candidates	98.2	1.8	1,682
County councillors	98.2	1.8	326
Unelected County candidates	97.7	2.3	482
Community councillors	98.8	1.2	1,083
Unelected Community candidates	98.1	1.9	155

9.1 A large majority of candidates (98 per cent) reported they were from a White ethnic group (Welsh/English/Scottish/Northern Irish/British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller and any other White background).

9.2 Candidates from other ethnic groups (including Mixed/Multiple, Asian/Asian British, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and Other ethnic groups) accounted for only 1.8 per cent of all candidates.

9.3 Similarly, 1.8 per cent of county councillors and 1.2 per cent of community councillors stated that they were from non-white ethnic groups.

10. Religion

Figure 7: What is your religion?

Base: [1] 1,662, [2] 322, [3] 475, [4] 1,073, [5] 151

10.1 Around two thirds of candidates (64 per cent) reported they were Christian (all denominations), while 34 per cent had no religion, and 2 per cent answered "other" (including Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim Sikh and 'any other' religion).

10.2 There was little variation across the samples of county and community councillors and unelected candidates.
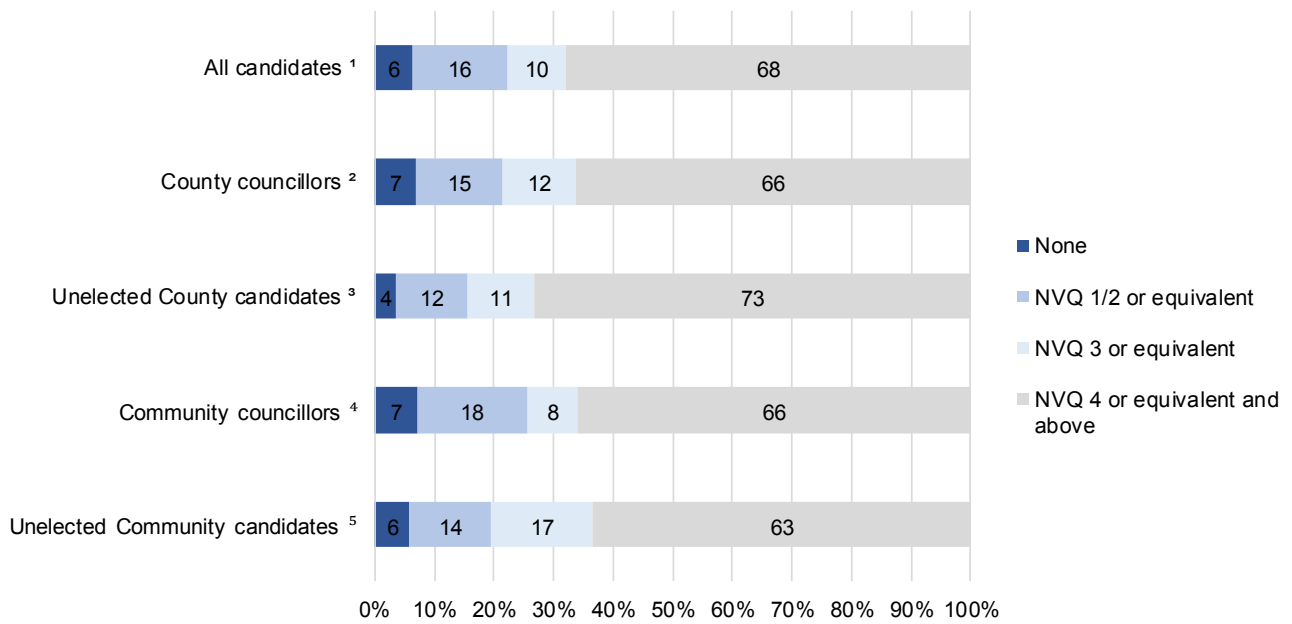
11. Sexual orientation

Table 5: Sexual orientation of survey responses

	Heterosexual / Straight (%)	Lesbian / Gay / Bisexual (%)	Other (%)	Base
All candidates	94.0	4.9	1.0	1,661
County councillors	92.6	7.1	0.3	324
Unelected County candidates	91.6	6.9	1.5	478
Community councillors	95.1	3.7	1.1	1,068
Unelected Community candidates	96.7	3.3	0.0	152

11.1 The survey found that 94 per cent of candidates identified as heterosexual or straight, 5 per cent as lesbian, gay or bisexual and 1 per cent as 'other'.

11.2 The percentage of candidates identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual ranged from 3 per cent of unelected community candidates to 7 per cent of county councillors.

11.3 While questions about sexual orientation can be affected by under-declaration in surveys, it is interesting to note that only 2 per cent of survey respondents chose not to answer this question. This is a smaller proportion than those who did not disclose their gender (5 per cent) or political party affiliation (7 per cent).

12. Education and qualifications

Figure 8: What is your highest educational qualification?

Category	None	NVQ 1/2 or equivalent	NVQ 3 or equivalent	NVQ 4 or equivalent and above
All candidates [1]	6	16	10	68
County councillors [2]	7	15	12	66
Unelected County candidates [3]	4	12	11	73
Community councillors [4]	7	18	8	66
Unelected Community candidates [5]	6	14	17	63

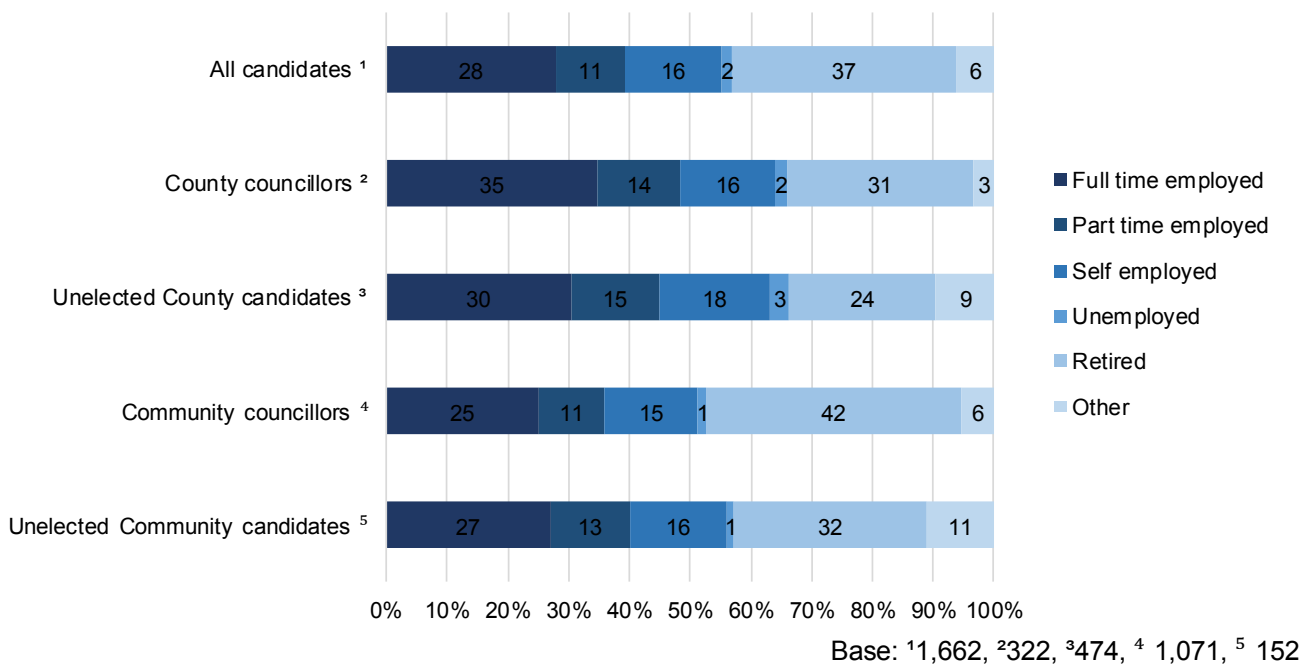Base: [1]1,666, [2]321, [3]480, [4] 1,074, [5] 153

12.1 Over two thirds of candidates (68 per cent) held a qualification equivalent to NVQ level 4 or above (i.e. a degree, post graduate or professional qualification). 10 per cent held a qualification equivalent to NVQ level 3 and a further 16 per cent to NVQ level 1/2. 6 per cent held no formal educational qualifications.

12.2 These proportions were similar across county and community councillors and unelected candidates.

13. Employment status

13.1 This question was asked differently in the 2017 survey so direct comparison to the 2012 results is not appropriate. Where candidates selected more than one employment status, their responses have been recoded into one primary economic status for analysis. This affected 151 candidates (or 9 per cent).

Figure 9: What is your current employment status?

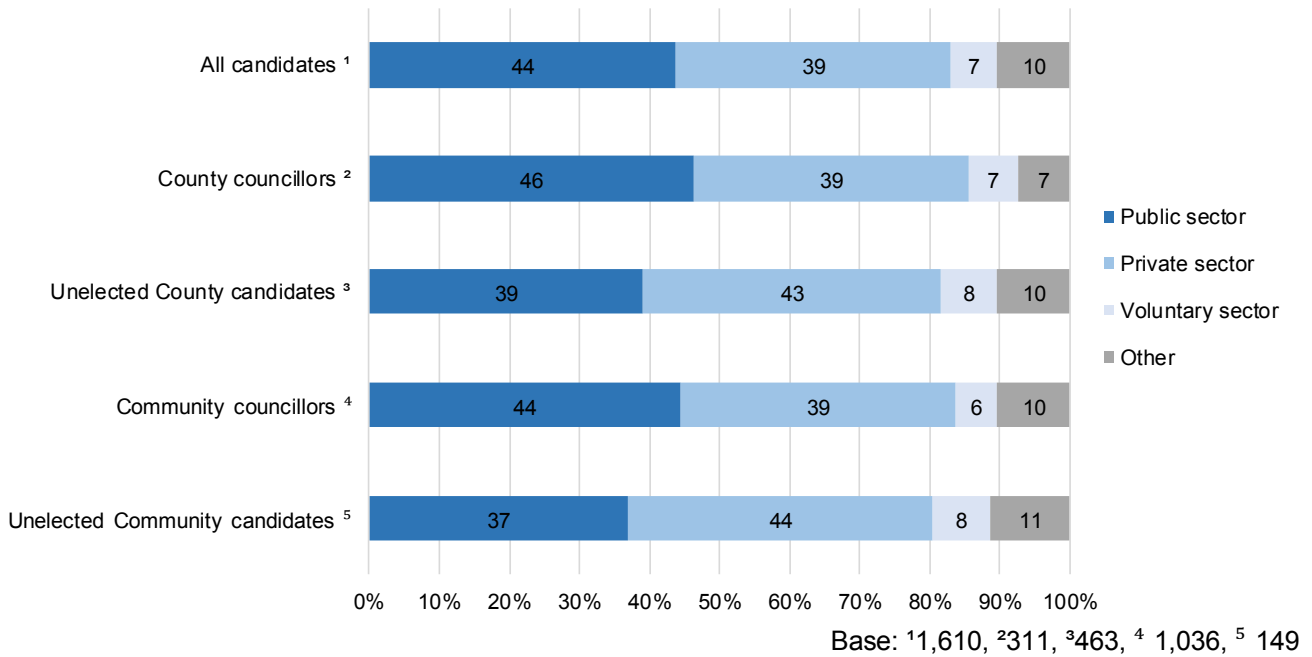Base: [1]1,662, [2]322, [3]474, [4] 1,071, [5] 152

13.2 Over a third (39 per cent) of candidates were employed either full time (28 per cent) or part time (11 per cent) and a further 16 per cent were self employed. 37 per cent of candidates were retired, and 2 per cent were unemployed. The remaining 6 per cent were full time or part time students, on maternity leave, looking after family or home, long term sick or disabled, on a government training scheme, unpaid carers, unpaid workers in a family business, or selected "other".

13.3 Among county councillors, 48 per cent were employees, 16 per cent were self employed and 31 per cent were retired.

13.4 The proportion of community councillors who were employees was 36 per cent and 42 per cent were retired.

13.5 Employment sector

Figure 10: What category best describes your current or most recent employment sector?

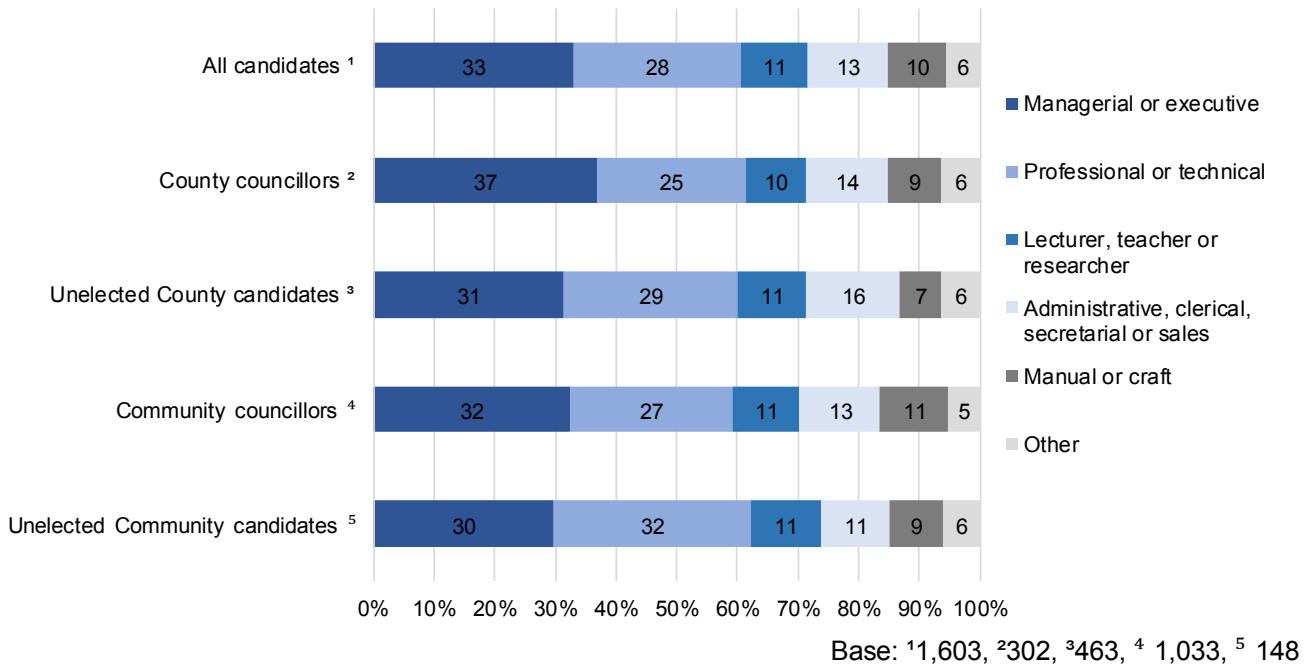Base: [1]1,610, [2]311, [3]463, [4] 1,036, [5] 149

13.6 The majority of candidates (44 per cent) stated that their current, or most recent, employment was in the public sector (including local government, central government, NHS, education and other public sector). 39 per cent worked in the private sector, 7 per cent worked in the voluntary sector and 10 per cent in 'other' sectors (including agriculture).

13.7 There was little variation across the different types of candidates.

13.8   Type of employment

Figure 11: Which category best describes your current or most recent type of employment?

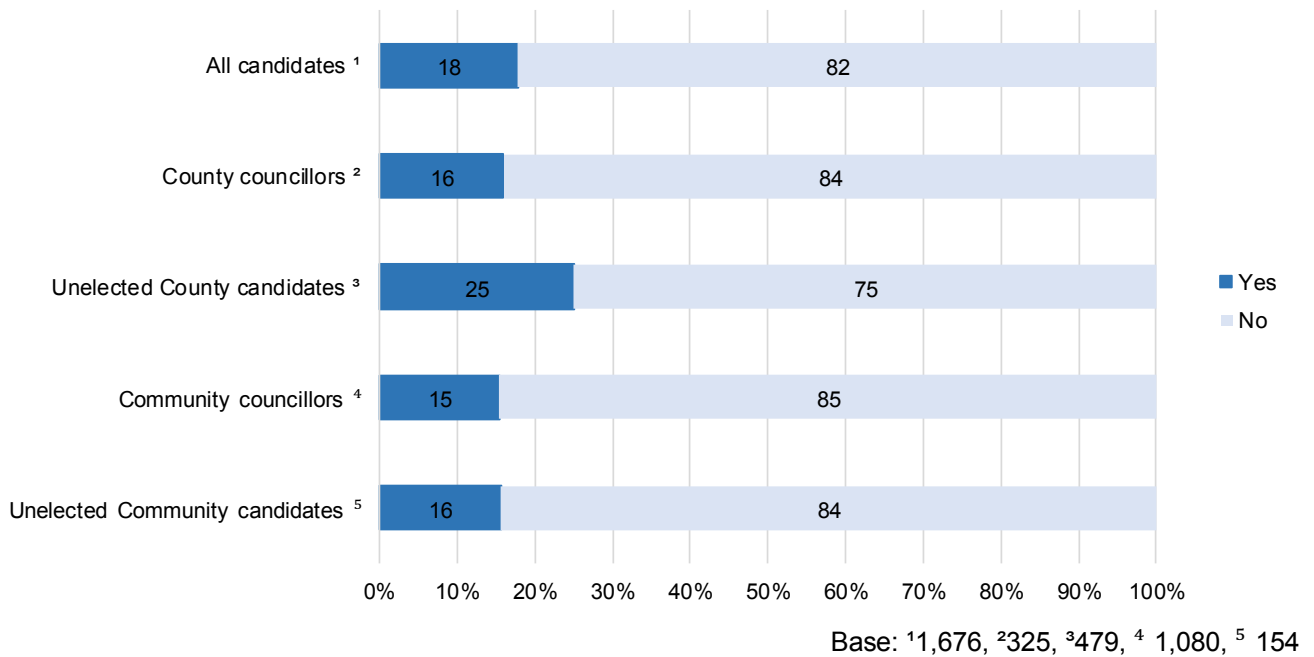Base: [1] 1,603, [2] 302, [3] 463, [4] 1,033, [5] 148

13.9   The majority of candidates currently, or most recently, worked in managerial/executive (33 per cent) or professional/technical (28 per cent) roles.

13.10   Once again there was little variation across the different types of candidates.

13.11 Parental responsibility

Figure 12: Do you have parental responsibility for a child aged 16 or under?

Base: [1]1,676, [2]325, [3]479, [4] 1,080, [5] 154

13.12 The survey found that 18 per cent of candidates had dependent children.

13.13 Among elected councillors,16 per cent of county and 15 per cent of community councillors had dependent children. 25 per cent of unelected county candidates had dependent children.

13.14 Among county councillors, 15 per cent of males and 21 per cent of females had dependent children.

13.15 Among community councillors, 14 per cent of males and 19 per cent of females had dependent children.
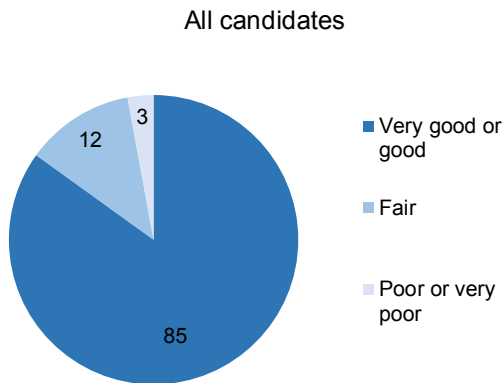
14. Unpaid help

Table 6: Have you given unpaid help, for example as a volunteer, trustee or board member, to any of these types of groups or organisations at any time in the last 12 months?

	All candidates (%)	County councillors (%)	Community councillors (%)
Community or neighbourhood group	54	60	59
Political party	43	61	32
Children's education/schools	36	59	36
Youth/children's activities (outside school)	23	32	23
The elderly	19	25	20
Environment group	19	22	18
Social club	18	21	18
Health, disability or social welfare group	17	18	17
Religious or faith based group	16	19	17
Sports or exercise (e.g. coaching)	14	17	13
Trade union	11	17	10
Education for adults	10	11	9
Citizen's group	9	12	9
First aid	9	7	9
Justice or Human Rights	8	5	7
Animal welfare group	5	4	5
Gender group	2	2	2
Sexuality group	2	2	1
Other	14	12	15
Base:	1,620	321	1,040

14.1 The most frequently reported unpaid activity was giving help to community/neighbourhood groups with 54 per cent of all candidates reported having done this in the last 12 months.

14.2 Among county councillors, the most frequently reported unpaid activity was giving help to a political party, with 61 per cent stating they had done so in the last 12 months.
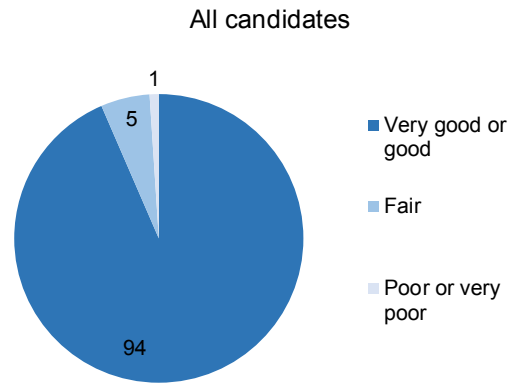
15. Physical and mental health

Figure 13: How is your physical health in general?

All candidates

- Very good or good
- Fair
- Poor or very poor

85
12
3

Base: 1,659

Figure 14: How is your mental health in general?

All candidates

- Very good or good
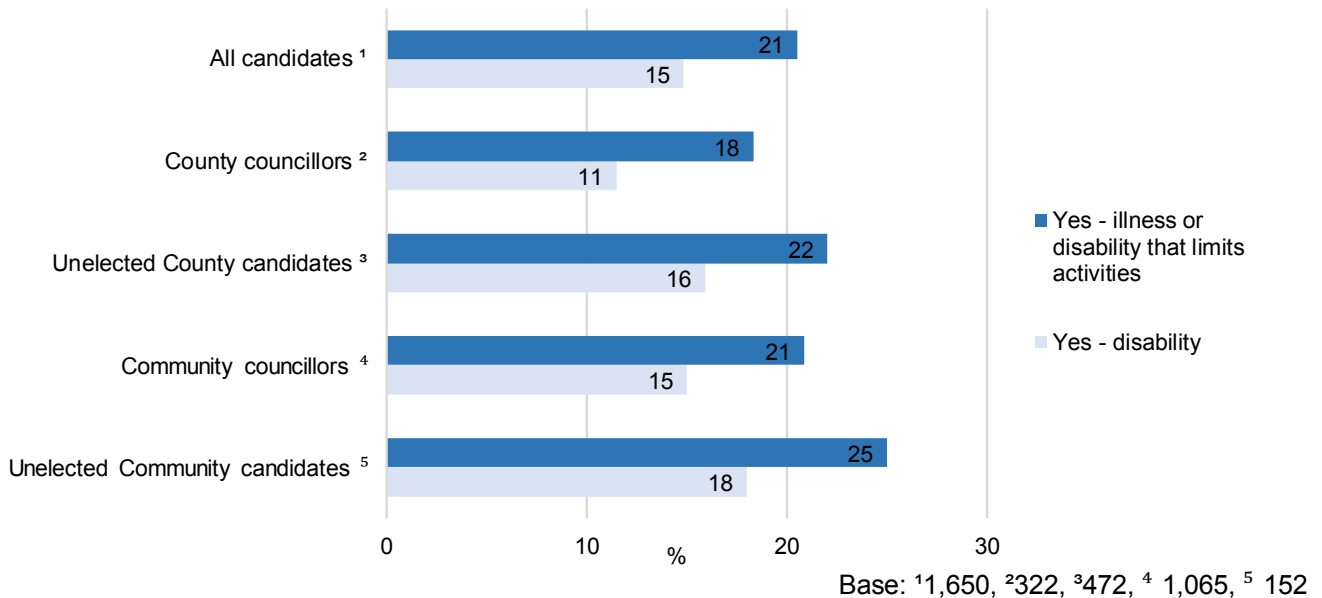- Fair
- Poor or very poor

94
5
1

Base: 1,663

15.1 A large majority of candidates (85 per cent) reported that their physical health was good or very good and 94 per cent that their mental health was good or very good.

15.2 Among elected councillors, 89 per cent of county and 85 per cent of community councillors reported that their physical health was good or very good. For mental health this was 93 per cent and 94 per cent respectively.

16. Disability

16.1 This question was also asked differently in the 2017 survey compared to 2012, making direct comparison of the results not appropriate.

Figure 15: Do you consider yourself to have a disability / Do you have an illness or disability that limits your activities in any way?

Base: [1]1,650, [2]322, [3]472, [4] 1,065, [5] 152

16.2 Of all candidates, 15 per cent considered themselves to have a disability and 21 per cent reported having an illness or disability that limited their daily activities.
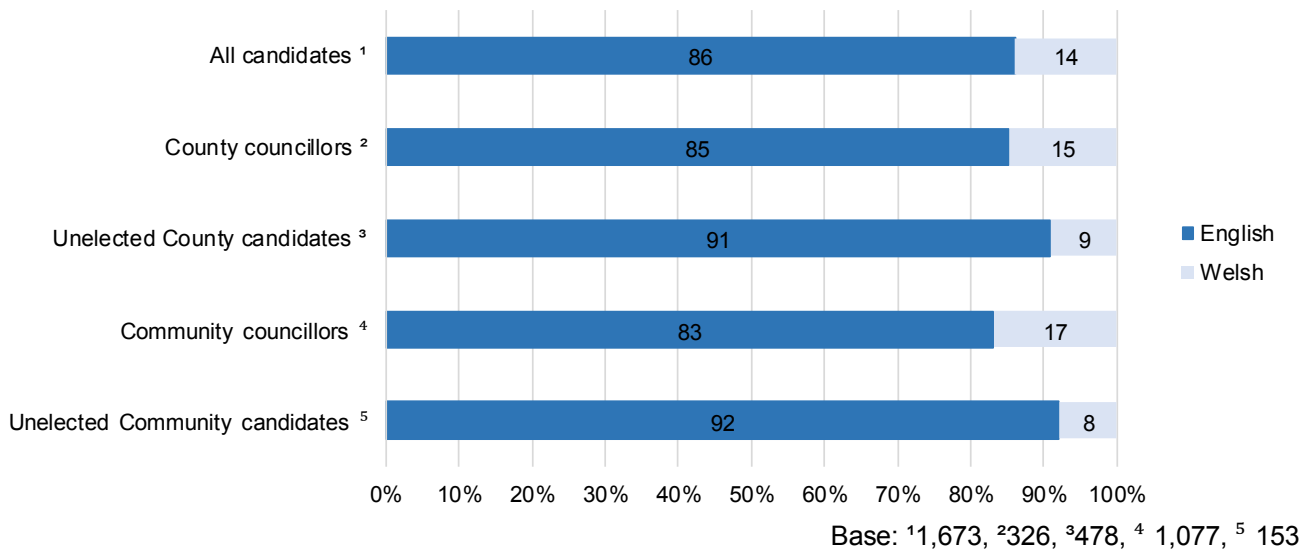
16.3 Among county councillors, 11 per cent considered themselves to have a disability and 18 per cent had a limiting condition.

16.4 In comparison, 15 per cent of community councillors reported having a disability and 21 per cent a limiting condition.

16.5 With regards to age, over three quarters of the candidates that considered themselves to have a disability were aged 50 years or over (77 per cent).

17. Welsh language

Figure 16: What is your main language?

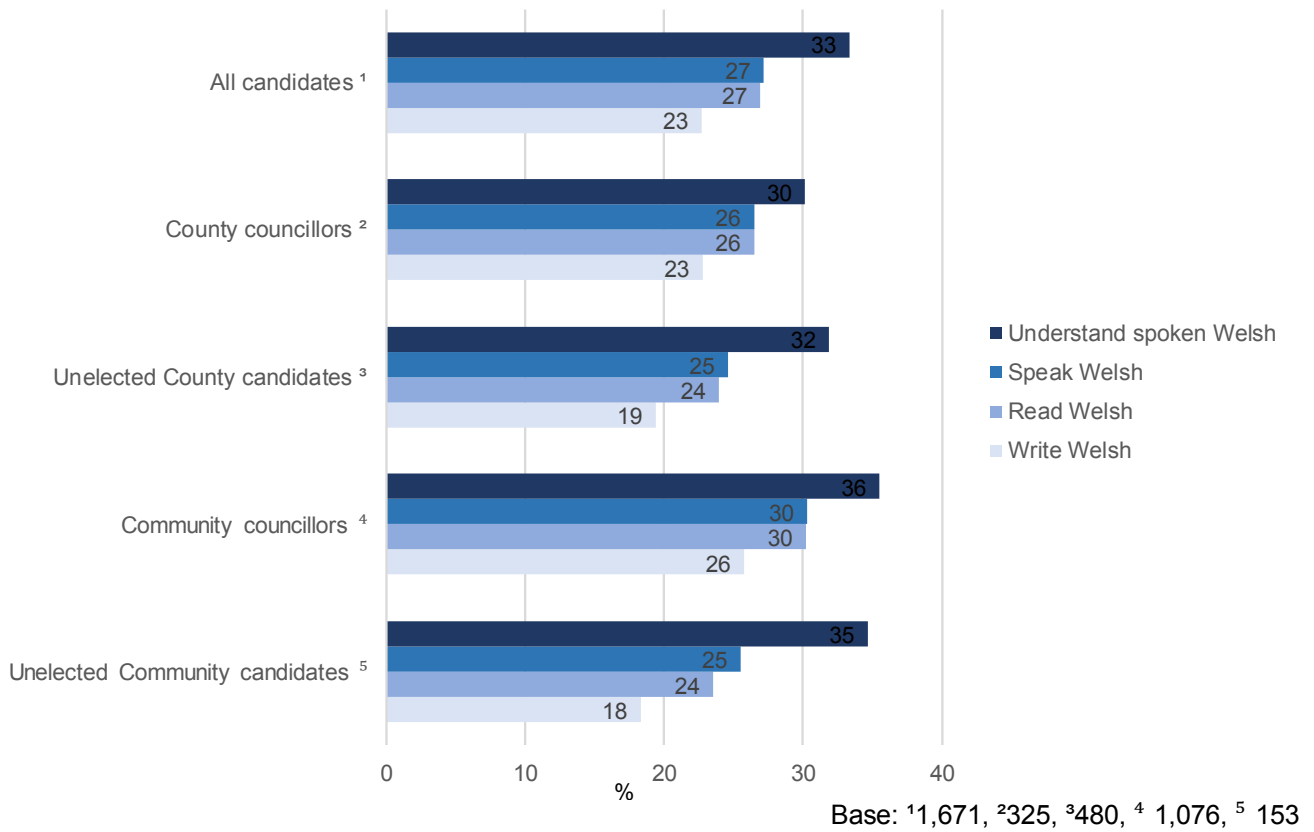Base: [1]1,673, [2]326, [3]478, [4] 1,077, [5] 153

17.1 A large proportion (86 per cent) of candidates said their main language was English and 14 per cent that their main language was Welsh. A small number of candidates (fewer than 5) stated that neither English or Welsh was their main language.

17.2 Amongst county councillors, 15 per cent said their first language was Welsh, compared to 17 per cent of community councillors.

17.3 These proportions may have been affected by the geographic pattern of survey response rates across Wales.

17.4 The survey was completed in Welsh by 9 per cent of candidates.

Figure 17: Can you understand, speak, read or write Welsh?

Base: [1]1,671, [2]325, [3]480, [4] 1,076, [5] 153

17.5 Among all candidates, 33 per cent said they could understand spoken Welsh, 27 per cent could speak Welsh, 27 per cent could read Welsh, and 23 per cent could write in Welsh.

17.6 A higher proportion of community councillors said they could speak Welsh than county councillors, at 30 per cent compared to 26 per cent.

18. Recommendations

18.1 A survey of local government election candidates is a key means of gaining information on diversity within candidates. The approach undertaken for the 2017 survey involved using candidate nomination information as the sampling frame. This approach has been successful in obtaining information about the candidate population that was not previously available.

18.2 Candidate nomination forms could be extended to support better understanding of candidate diversity. For example, fields for date of birth and political party are already included on nomination forms. Including a question on gender would provide valuable information on the candidate population.

18.3 Further analysis of the candidate population by political party or geographically would provide information to support diversity and inclusion strategy development.

18.4 Ways of boosting the survey response rate should be considered. Conducting the survey predominantly online was probably a factor in the reduced response rates for 2017 compared to those in 2012. The drive to conduct surveys online continues. Official online surveys are set to become more common and acceptance of this mode is likely to increase.