

Committee(s): Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub (Policy & Resources) Committee Policy and Resources Committee	Dated: 8 October 2025 16 October 2025
Subject: 2025 Election Engagement Campaign Review	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	Diverse Engaged Communities
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Dionne Corradine, Chief Strategy Officer	For Discussion
Report author: Siobhan Harley, Election Engagement Manager	

Summary

This report provides a review of the 2025 *Speak for the City* election engagement campaign and makes suggestions for improving future engagement.

The City continues to face significant challenges relating to candidate engagement: the smallest electorate in the Greater London area, the largest number of Council seats, and the most restrictive eligibility requirements. With no party structures to recruit or train candidates, the task largely falls informally to individuals and networks.

In addition to the campaign review, research was undertaken into the motivations and barriers of prospective candidates. Based on this insight, recommendations have been developed to improve future candidate recruitment.

This report's recommendations are focused only on engagement and do not cover electoral changes.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report and consider next steps to improve voter registration and candidate engagement in future elections

Main Report

Election Engagement Campaign

1. Building on the success of the 2022 campaign, the 2025-2026 Ward List achieved a decade-high of 21,011 (+7.2%). All voters have been required to register every year after the law changed ten years ago, which resulted in a fall in figures. Our ward list is now the highest it has been since this change was made. Furthermore, it has been rebuilt from a pandemic low of 13,748 (+65.4%) in 2021.
2. This year's increase was driven by worker voters, who are the focus of this campaign. 82% of workplaces with 250 or more employees registered at least one voter, with some large firms making the decision to register for the first time this year after our targeted outreach – including SMBC, Deliveroo, and Chubb. Overall, approximately one third of worker voters on this year's ward list were not on the previous Ward List, including more than half in Bishopsgate ward.
3. A new downloadable toolkit was introduced to support key contacts in promoting registration to workers and residents. This was the most visited page on the campaign website (after the homepage) and received strong positive feedback. It is recommended this resource is continued.
4. The most effective tactics in driving up the numbers of voters were targeted LinkedIn ads, letters from the Lord Mayor to key contacts in target businesses, and an in-person canvass of retail businesses that reached every single occupier over a period of three weeks. Efforts to reach more workers by offering short presentations about elections both within offices and remotely had limited impact.
5. Relationships with Livery companies, trade associations, BIDs and City Belonging Project contacts were also leveraged to promote registration across the Square Mile – and the team worked directly with property management companies and developers to encourage uptake at facilities they cover.
6. One of the most significant challenges for this campaign remains the lack of a corporate CRM. Business relationships are held by individuals across the City of London Corporation, but this information can be difficult to access or obtain. The importance of streamlining and centralising engagement activities within a CRM cannot be overstated. Significant time and expense went towards finding and updating contacts and encouraging buy-in from internal stakeholders.

Turnout

Figure 1: Turnout by ward, compared to 2022 (contested wards only)

Ward	Postal	Poll	Total	Electorate	Turnout	Change from 2022
Aldersgate	307	280	587	1558	37.68%	-6.97%
Bassishaw	150	101	251	754	33.29%	0.96%
Billingsgate	136	71	207	496	41.73%	4.45%
Castle Baynard	351	199	550	1748	31.46%	3.51%
Cripplegate	365	397	762	2158	35.31%	-10.15%

Farringdon Within	194	194	388	1304	29.75%	2.55%
Farringdon Without	280	113	393	3665	10.72%	-0.61%
Langbourn	90	102	192	472	40.68%	13.67%
Portsoken	205	140	345	699	49.36%	-8.30%
Vintry	54	96	150	306	49.02%	14.24%
Walbrook	108	71	179	460	38.91%	-3.05%
	2240	1764	4004	13620	29.40%	-2.7%

7. The campaign ensured voters were aware of key dates and candidates through a multi-channel approach that included digital communication and print advertising. The Guide to Candidates was again published on the Speak for the City website and every voter received a postcard which directed them to the guide.
8. Overall turnout (29.67%) was down slightly (-2.7%) from 2022 (32.37%). These figures are comparable to other Inner London Boroughs, e.g. Westminster 2022 (31.88%). Greater London average: 35.55% (2022).
9. Some contested wards achieved higher turnout than in 2022, notably Vintry (+14.2%) and Langbourn (+13.7%). Portsoken's turnout (49.36%) continues to be one of the highest local election turnouts in all of inner London (based on 2022 local figures).
10. There was a notable fall in voter turnout in Cripplegate (-10%). It is possible this is due to voter fatigue, as voters there have been to the polls 7 times in 3 years. Turnout was down from 2022 in all residential wards.
11. In 2022, postal vote applications were issued to all electors who did not already have a postal voting arrangement in place. This was due to the continuing conditions of the pandemic. In 2025 normal arrangements resumed where electors who needed a postal vote could request one. Returned postal ballots fell from 3,300 (60% of total ballots) in 2022 to 2,301 (55% of total ballots).

Candidate Recruitment and Diversity

12. 14 out of 25 wards were uncontested, but there was no drop in candidates. The same number of candidates stood in 2025 as did in 2022 (136). While it is not ideal for wards to be uncontested, the independent nature of the City's system means most candidates make the decision of where to stand independent of party coordination.
13. Engagement with prospective candidates was high and activities were robust:
 - a. 203 new individuals expressed interest in standing via the Speak for the City form.
 - b. The prospective candidate reception in November 2024 was attended by 130+ individuals and 88% rated the event as 'excellent'. Invitations to this event were distributed broadly through networks including Insurance Cultural Awareness Network, City Black Employee Resource Group, and ElectHer.

- c. 118 individuals attended three candidate briefings conducted by Electoral Services held in early 2025, which provided a thorough overview of the electoral process.
 - d. 26 prospective candidates booked one-on-one meetings with an officer through the Speak for the City website.
 - e. The opportunity to stand as a candidate was highlighted in the voter registration presentation delivered in person and online to workplaces who requested them, including large employers like LSEG and Herbert Smith Freehills.
 - f. Every resident and workplace contact received literature that highlighted the opportunity to stand alongside the information on voter registration.
14. To measure the effectiveness of our efforts to recruit more diverse candidates, we became the first Council in England to launch a candidate diversity monitoring form this year, which 44 candidates completed. The team are working on changing the culture around voluntary monitoring so that all candidates and members understand the importance of this exercise and our data improves year over year.
 15. The City continues to face significant challenges relating to candidate engagement: the smallest electorate in the Greater London area, the largest number of Council seats, and the most restrictive eligibility requirements. With no party structures to recruit or train candidates, the task largely falls informally to individuals and networks.

Prospective Candidate Research

16. After the election, a survey was sent to the full list of prospective candidates. 96 individuals took part. This was supplemented with in-depth interviews to more deeply explore the key themes that emerged.
17. The various City stakeholders groups were well represented among respondents: 38% workers, 27% livery members, 16% residents, 14% previous workers, and 4% other.
18. 75% of respondents had attended a candidate event or a 1:1 meeting with an officer this year. 36% ultimately stood as candidates while 64% chose not to.
19. Key findings from those who chose not to stand:
 - The top three reasons cited by those who chose not to stand were: concerns around how to campaign (61.7%), feeling they could not win (52.5%), and inability to commit the time (50.8%).
 - Almost 70% of respondents said 'encouragement from a current member' would have made them more likely to stand.
 - When asked if there is more that the City Corporation can do to encourage candidates, current efforts were broadly recognised and praised in qualitative feedback.

20. Key findings from those who stood:

- The top factors influencing their decision to stand were: encouragement from my peers/community (94.3%); understanding the role of a Common Councillor (94.1%); and the ability to commit the time required (91.5%).
- When asked to expand on reasons for standing, a few themes emerged: candidates felt they had experience to contribute to the City; close relationships in the City has provided them with the insight required to confidently campaign and understand the role; believing that the current system was undemocratic and a desire to advocate for change.

21. Key themes on motivations and barriers emerged from all respondents:

- **Commitment to service:** Prospective candidates are primarily driven by a desire to serve the Square Mile and give back to the community by providing their experience. Some are motivated by supporting current City initiatives and institutions, while others are focused on change and reform.
- **Importance of slate selection:** There is a strong perception that those not included on slates, arranged long before the election, are unable to succeed. First-time candidates almost universally reported that their key learning was needing to start the process much earlier than a year prior. Slates are common to all local authorities but are usually arranged by political parties.
- **Role of incumbent members:** While the team are aware of cases where members actively encouraged competition in their wards, some prospective candidates reported being actively discouraged from standing by incumbent Members. A number of female candidates in particular reported feeling that their candidature would be unwelcome.
- **Political guidance:** The guidance that prospective candidates are seeking on how to campaign and where to stand cannot be provided by officers. These two knowledge gaps were raised repeatedly and particularly in business wards. The non-partisan nature of City elections, and the lack of political party infrastructure, is one of the biggest contributing factors to the issue of uncontested elections. In other local authorities, political parties take on the long-term work of recruiting, vetting, and training candidates. They plan toward upcoming elections and work to stand candidates in every ward, even if they do not consider them winnable.
- **Restrictive eligibility criteria:** Among candidates who did not stand, one of the issues cited was the narrow eligibility criteria for candidates, which is more restrictive than other local authorities. To become a candidate, individuals are required to obtain the Freedom and either be registered on the Ward List, have resided in the Square Mile for the previous 12 months, or own a freehold or leasehold within the Square Mile. There are individuals who want to stand and are engaged with the City but cannot qualify – mostly commonly because their

organisation operates in a shared office space and isn't eligible to register voters. In other authorities, simply working in the area gives eligibility to stand.

22. Survey questions and quantitative summaries are included in the appendix.

Potential approaches to increase engagement

23. It is important to recognise that there are significant challenges to increasing voter registration and the number of candidates that cannot be solved by a year-long engagement campaign alone. This section will set out suggestions specific to engagement activity.

- a. **Robust, always-on engagement:** While *Speak for the City* has consistently succeeded in driving up voter registration, increasing voter registration and candidate engagement cannot be effectively or efficiently picked up once every four years. Continuing to support and invest in initiatives that operate across all City workplaces, such as the *City Belonging Project*, is key to building more relationships with workers and organisations, and creating a diverse pipeline of prospective candidates. Additionally, resource should be dedicated to supporting bi-annual candidate recruitment events to help give serious prospective candidates more time to build an effective campaign.
- b. **Member mentoring scheme:** Nearly 70% of candidates who chose not to stand said that encouragement from a current member would have made them more likely to stand. Members are best suited to provide the political guidance that newer candidates need to gain the confidence to stand. There was previously a group of members who informally took on this task. The committee should consider how this can be best reinstated.
- c. **Civic leadership training programme:** Another way to tackle the lack of structural support otherwise provided by parties would be for the City Corporation to support a civic leadership training programme, similar to those found in large US cities. These programmes are normally run by Chambers of Commerce or not-for-profit organisations. They are funded from a variety of sources and equip emerging leaders – typically nominated by their employers – with deep knowledge on their local government and community. Leadership New York and Leadership Tampa may serve as examples.
- d. **Candidate recruitment working group:** Creation of a working group that includes both Members and cross-departmental officers tasked with optimising the candidate experience and supporting prospective candidates could provide the best solution for coordinating always-on support.
- e. **Delivery of a corporate CRM:** The lack of a corporate CRM continues to make the task of worker voter registration extremely inefficient and difficult. There is currently no way of bringing together the organisation's data and insights across workplaces and target data effectively. The implementation of this project, which

is underway in DITS, will represent one the most significant improvements that can be made to the City Corporation's engagement work.

- f. **Address structural barriers around time:** One of the most frequently cited deterrents was the challenge of balancing City service with work and personal commitments. Members may wish to consider how the timing and number of committees impacts making the role of Common Councillor accessible to a wide range of professions and backgrounds. Sharing examples of how current Members successfully balance their responsibilities could also help to normalise participation.
- g. **Clarify the role and process:** Feedback highlighted widespread uncertainty about the responsibilities of a Common Councillor and the steps required to stand. To address this, we should consider producing clearer, more accessible materials outlining the role, expected time commitments, and election procedures. Practical examples, such as "day in the life" case studies, would help demystify the role and give prospective candidates greater confidence, showcasing individual members with diverse backgrounds and roles.
- h. **Improve accessibility and inclusion:** A few respondents expressed concerns about whether they would "fit in". Building visible pathways for diverse participation is critical. Establishing mentorship schemes with sitting Members and highlighting the City's growing diversity of Common Councillors would help challenge perceptions of exclusivity and make standing for election feel more welcoming and achievable.

Following this report and after feedback from Members and officers we develop the most viable suggestions further and bring them forward for approval.

Corporate and Strategic implications

- 24. The proposals contained in this report are key to the delivery of the Diverse Engaged Communities Corporate Plan outcome, in particular in its performance measures relating to voter registration, candidate recruitment and contested wards.

Financial implications

- 25. None

Resource implications

- 26. While there are no recommendations in this report, many of the ideas suggested will have resource implications when further developed in the future.

Legal implications

- 27. Election Engagement continue to work closely with City Solicitors to ensure that all activity is compliant, including with the GDPR.

Equalities implications

28. The aim of our Election Engagement work is to increase participation in the election and candidate diversity, making them more accessible to a wider and more diverse audience, including those with protected characteristics. The Community Engagement ideas for discussion contained in this report further aim to make the City Corporation accessible and accountable to a diverse range of City workers and residents.

Climate implications

29. The proposals included in this paper do not carry any significant implications for the Climate Action programme.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Prospective candidate survey questions
- Appendix 2 – Prospect candidate quantitative survey responses

Background Papers

Reports to Communications and Corporate Affairs Subcommittee

- 14 February 2023 – Worker Engagement: The City Belonging Project
- 28 February 2024 – 2025 Election Engagement Campaign

Reports to Policy and Resources

- 20 February 2020 – Common Council Elections in March 2021
- 7 May and 9 July 2020 – COVID-19 Implications – possible postponement of the City-Wide elections in March 2021
- 10 September and 8 October 2020 – Common Council Elections Change of Date from March 2021 to March 2022 – Bill for an Act of Common Council
- 19 November 2020 – Electoral Registration Update
- 10 December 2020 – Electoral Registration Campaign Manager
- 8 April 2021 – Election Engagement Campaign
- 8 July 2021 – Election Engagement Campaign Update
- 14 October 2021 – Election Engagement Campaign
- 20 January 2022 – Election Engagement Campaign
- 4 October 2022 – City of London Elections
- 18 March 2024 – City of London Corporation's electoral system

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Appendix 1

Prospective candidate survey questions

1. What is your relationship to the City of London? (Please tick all that apply)

- I work here
- I live here
- I'm a member of a Livery
- I have worked here previously
- Other

2. Thinking about your initial interest in standing for election in the City, how important were each of the following factors? (Scale of very important – somewhat important – somewhat unimportant – not at all important – don't know)

- To create change where in my community
- To meet new people
- To become more engaged with the City of London Corporation
- To build my professional experience
- To give back to the City

3. Is there anything else that shaped this initial interest in standing?

4. Prior to this year, have you stood for election in the City of London?

- Yes, I have stood as a candidate in the City of London before 2025
- No, but I have stood for election elsewhere in the past
- No, I have never before stood as a candidate for public office

5. How likely are you to stand for election in the City of London in the future?

Very likely

Somewhat likely

Somewhat unlikely

Very unlikely

Don't know

6, Did you attend any of the following in the run up this year's election?

Prospective candidate reception in November 2024

Candidate informational briefings in January 2025

1:1 meeting with an officer

I've attended a candidate information event in past years

7. Did you stand as a candidate in the 2025 City of London Common Councillor elections?

Yes

No

-----START BRANCH-----

BRANCH: THOSE WHO STOOD

7a. Did you win your election?

Yes – I am now a City of London Common Councillor

No – I was not elected

8a. How important were each of the following factors your decision to become a candidate? (Scale of very important – somewhat important – somewhat unimportant – not at all important – don't know)

- Encouragement from a current Member
- Guidance from City of London officers
- Encouragement from my peers/community
- Inclusion on a slate
- Confidence that I could win
- Feeling I had the time
- Understanding of the role of a Common Councillor
- Financial considerations

9a. Is there anything else you would like to add about why you ultimately decided to stand for election?

10a. Is there anything the City of London Corporation could have done to make your decision to stand easier?

11a. Please offer any additional comments on your decision, any resources or advice that would have made the election process easier, or anything else you'd like to add.

BRANCH: Those who chose not to stand

7b. Ultimately, how important were each of the following factors in shaping your decision not to stand? (Scale of very important – somewhat important – somewhat unimportant – not at all important – don't know)

- Lack of clarity on the role of a Common Councillor
- Unable to commit the time
- Unclear on the time commitment
- Concerns around approval from my workplace
- Concerns around how to campaign
- Need to attend daytime meetings if elected
- Financial considerations
- Did not feel I could win
- Wanted to stand with a slate but could not find one
- Could not decide which ward to stand in
- I wanted to stand as an Alderman not a Common Councillor

8b. Is there anything else you would like to add about why you ultimately decided not to stand for election?

9b. What factors would have made you more likely to stand? (Much more likely – Somewhat more likely – No more likely – Don't know)

- Encouragement from a current Member
- Encouragement from my peers/community
- Greater understanding of the role and time commitment
- Inclusion on a slate
- More guidance from City of London officers
- More resources/training on the process
- Confidence that I could win
- Better understanding of how to campaign in the City

- More evening instead of daytime meetings
- Improved financial support

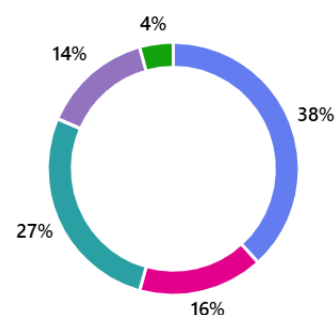
11b. Is there anything the City of London Corporation could have done to make your decision to stand easier?

12b. Please offer any additional comments on your decision, including *any* resources or advice that would have changed your decision.

Prospective candidate survey responses (quantitative only)

What is your relationship to the City of London? (Please tick all that apply)

I work here	62
I live here	26
I'm a member of a Livery	44
I have worked here previously	23
Other	7



Thinking about your initial interest in standing for election in the City, how important were each of the following factors?

Very important Somewhat important Somewhat unimportant Not at all important Don't know

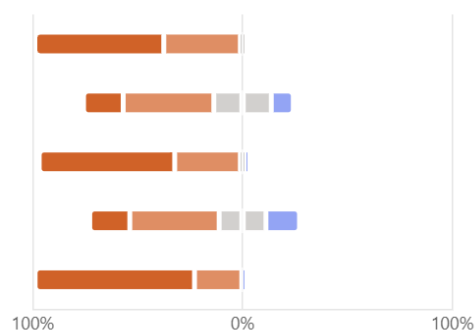
To create change in my community

To meet new people

To become more engaged with the City of London Corporation

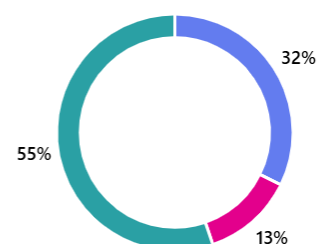
To build my professional experience

To give back to the City



Prior to this year, have you stood for election in the City of London?

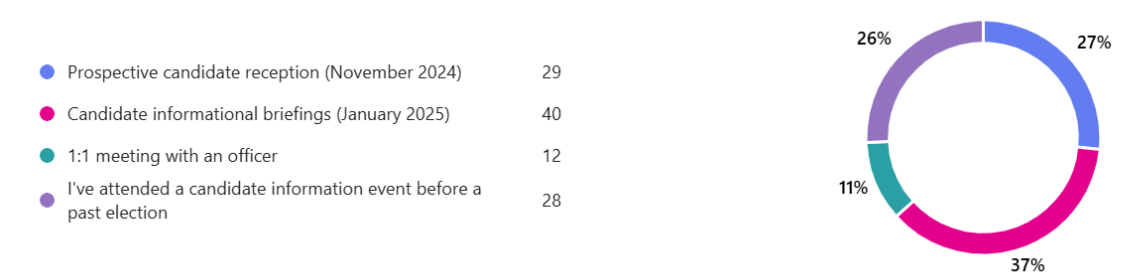
Yes, I have stood as a candidate in the City of London before 2025	31
No, but I have stood for election elsewhere in the past	12
No, I have never before stood as a candidate for public office	53



How likely are you to stand for election in the City of London in the future?



Did you attend any of the following in the run up this year's election?



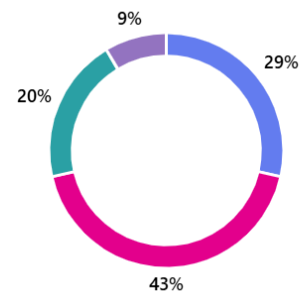
Did you stand as a candidate in the 2025 City of London Common Councillor elections?



Branch 1: Those who stood

Did you win your election?

Yes – I am a newly-elected City of London Common Councillor	10
Yes – I was re-elected	15
No – I was not elected	7
Other	3



How important were each of the following factors in your decision to become a candidate?

Very important Somewhat important Somewhat unimportant Not at all important Don't know

Encouragement from a current Member

Guidance from City of London officers

Encouragement from my peers/community

Inclusion on a slate

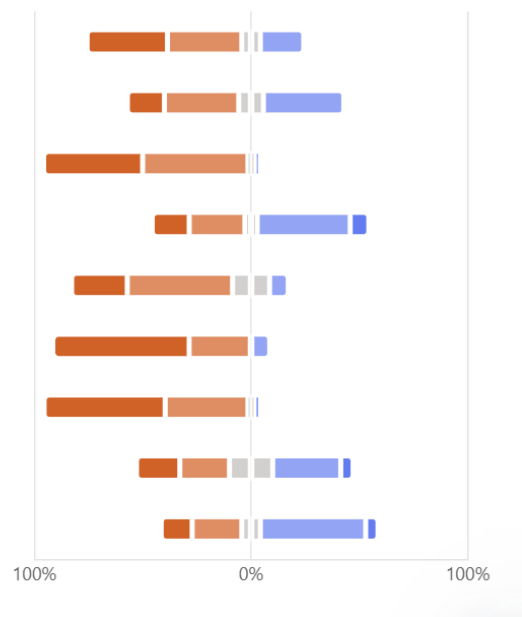
Confidence that I could win

Feeling I had the time

Understanding of the role of a Common Councillor

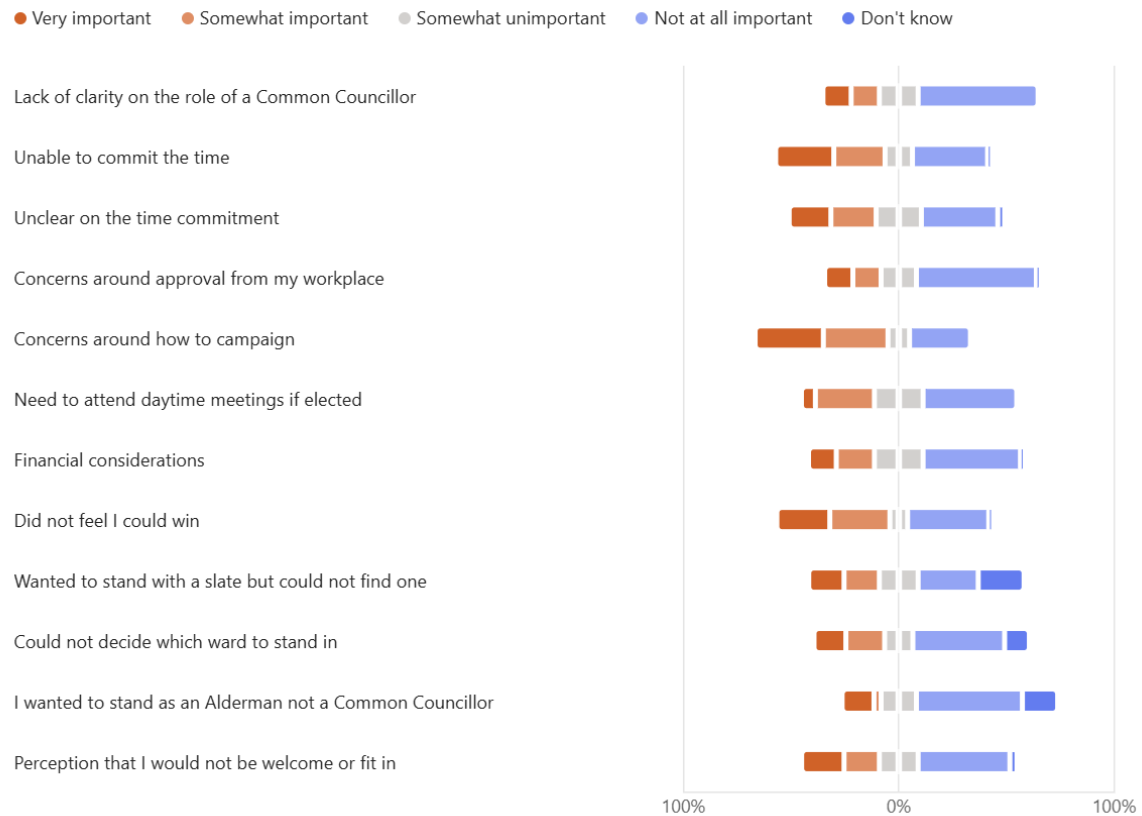
Financial considerations

Seeing Councillors from my same background



Branch 2: Those who chose not to stand

Ultimately, how important were each of the following factors in shaping your decision not to stand?



What factors would have made you more likely to stand?

