

# How To Run A Successful Election Campaign

## **Planning your campaign**

Perhaps the first thing you should do is to think long and hard why you want to become a councillor. Make no mistake; if the job is done correctly it is hard work and quite often a strain on your entire family.

OK, you still want to go ahead. Then decide on which seat you would like to challenge. Unlike political party candidates most independents want to represent the area where they live. So sound people out. This should obviously be done three or four months before polling day. Depending on the type of campaign you intend to run you may need a team of helpers and an election agent, but they are not essential. It is possible to go it alone and get elected without spending a penny. Generally speaking you should be thinking of running a proper campaign which means spending some money.

- **Law controls the amount of money you can spend on your campaign.**

The amount of money is based on the number of electors in the ward. Contact your council's election officer who will advise you on the amount you can spend for the seat. Once you know the spending limit you can then decide how much you can afford and tailor your campaign accordingly. You can hold fundraising events and ask for donations but remember all donations must be declared on your return of expenses form at the end of your campaign, whether or not you are successful. Your campaign may range from just submitting your nomination to running a full campaign including leaflets, election address, door to door & telephone canvassing and offering people to lifts, in a car, to and from the polling station.

- **You need to know how many houses are in each street and arrange them into delivery rounds.**

Before knocking on anybody's door or delivering a leaflet not only do you need to know how many voters live in the ward, but more importantly how many houses there are in each street. Otherwise you will not know how many leaflets you need. Each street must be put into delivery rounds for approximately 250 houses. Anymore may risk overworking your helpers. An averagely fit person can deliver about 250 leaflets in a hour providing the streets being delivered to are made up into a round which are linked together like the postman's round. Doing this can be an awesome task but well worth it. Your elections office may have a list of the number of houses in each street, which makes life easier but if they do not try the councils planning department or the delivery office at your local Royal Mail. If all else fails then you will have to count the number of houses in each street from the Register of Electors. You will be given a

copy of the register when you take out your nomination papers. Ideally though you need to devise your delivery rounds well in advance so use the copy at your local library it may be last year's but that does not matter unless there have been new houses built within the last year. Once you know the sub-totals of houses in each street total them up and the grand total is the number of leaflets you need for your ward.

- **The average ward has approximately 5,000 houses.**

A sympathetic manager at the Royal Mail may supply you with a copy of their delivery round system. But remember you may need to reduce them to rounds of around 250 as your helpers are not professionals. However, if you have to make up rounds yourself the best way is to buy a large A-Z Street Atlas of your area and simply arrange adjoining streets into rounds. Keep this sort of information in a safe place for any future elections you may contest.

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## **Insurance**

Cars are used throughout your campaign for a host of things. They ferry your voters to and from the polling station and can be used to carry a personal address system from which live or recorded messages can be amplified. They also transport you and your helpers to the different parts of the ward in which you are campaigning.

- **Remember all the cars you used for electioneering purposes should have extra insurance, as domestic car insurance does not cover them for use in an election campaign.**
- **Remember to get car insurance cover for the whole of your campaign (from the day you start to the day you hand in your election expenses), which could be two to three months.**

Public Liability and Personal Accident Insurance should also be considered. Public Liability covers what you say or write, which may have offended someone. Personal Accident insurance covers you for personal injury outside the car. Both can be obtained at little cost and will give you peace of mind.

- **Independent candidates may find it difficult to find an Insurance Company that gives this type of cover to single candidates. If there are other independents in your area try joining forces with them.**
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## Getting nominations?

### You must be able to comply with these rules

You must be aged 21 or over at the date of your nomination and a Commonwealth citizen, citizen of the Republic of Ireland, or a citizen of an EC Member state and either:

- be a local government elector (a voter) within the local authority, or
- have during the whole of the 12 months preceding the day on which you are nominated as a candidate, occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises of the area of the authority, or
- your principal or only place of work in the last 12 months preceding the day on which you are nominated as a candidate has been in the area of the authority, or
- you have lived in the area of the authority during the whole of the 12 months preceding the day on which you are nominated as a candidate.

There are certain things, which will disqualify you from being elected, and the authority will have a detailed leaflet on these. But in the main you are ruled out if;

- you hold a paid office under the local authority or a politically restricted post for another local authority
- you are bankrupt
- you have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment ( whether suspended or not) of not less than three months without the option of a fine during the five years preceding the election.

If you can satisfy these conditions then you must be nominated i.e. proposed, seconded and supported by eight other electors, who live in the ward you intend to challenge.

About two months before polling day make contact with your council's election office. Ask them for a timetable for the forthcoming election. The timetable gives you a number of dates e.g. notice of election, close of nominations, dates when postal vote applications must be received by and when your return of election expenses must be submitted. Most of the dates on the timetable are controlled by law so if you are too late, tough. When the notice of election date arrives go to your election office and pick up your bundle of papers which will include nomination papers, a timetable and a register of electors. You need to ask electors from the ward you are contesting to sign your nomination papers. Make sure you use your register of electors to check that they are registered.

- **If any of your nominators are not on the register or you submit an incorrect polling number your nomination will be void.**

You need a proposer, a seconder and eight more electors to sign each of your nomination papers. It is good practice to complete more than one nomination paper, as mistakes are easily made, but only one is needed. You can now start your campaign but wait until the close of nominations date is passed before you make a financial commitment.

- There is no need to spend money if the only nomination received is yours.
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## **How to Build Momentum**

People, especially activists, love to be part of a “special” group, to be “in the know,” and get the chance mingle with other like-minded people. Setting up incentive groups for your political campaign and encouraging people to attend will build momentum by motivating your helpers.

An incentive group is a committee and should be used for all aspects of your campaign, not just fundraising.

- **We’re All Friends**

Incentive groups can be used for attracting volunteers, such as setting up a “Friends of John Smith” committee. Such a group could gather once a week to address envelopes, make phone calls and discuss how the campaign is going. Incentive groups can also be used for voter contact activities.

- **Be Creative!**

It is important to be creative when designing incentive groups for your campaign. The crucial thing is to figure out what would motivate your helpers, and encourage them to enlist new members to your meetings. The campaign should endeavour to create a real sense of community in these meetings particularly the non-fundraising based ones. Provide motivation, encourage membership, and your incentive groups will grow and thrive.

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## **Invent Something New**

You can’t win a political campaign without momentum. With momentum campaigns roll to victory; without it they linger into defeat. It is surprising, then, that so few campaigns have a comprehensive plan to gain momentum, aiming their tools and strategy toward building this indispensable lifeblood of politics.

One very effective way to give your campaign momentum is to invent something “new”: a word or phrase, an image, a concept or idea. This tactic is extremely effective because it makes your message worth talking about, makes your candidate

instantly identifiable, and makes sure that your helpers can not only convey your message quickly, but are motivated to do it well. Regrettably, this tactic is also one of the hardest to pull off.

- **Inventing On the Local Scale**

A local candidate may be searching for a way to get out his or her message that the Housing Department needs to be more accountable for the waiting list for repairs to council houses. He or she could invent a new “housing report card,” and promise the voters that if elected, he or she would make sure that each time a tenant reported a repair they receive a report card for their completion, which would be returned directly to the housing manager. This “new idea” would be useful in generating buzz and momentum for the local candidate.

The campaign needs to be careful in planning its new idea to ensure that it is packaged in a way that is acceptable to the voters. Incentive groups and canvassing will tell the campaign if it needs to rethink the way it is presenting the idea, if the image it creates fails or if the idea is simply not exciting enough to generate momentum. The key is to be bold and not be afraid to present an exciting alternative to the voters who are used to hearing the same political messages over and over again.

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## **Canvassing**

The whole purpose of running a campaign is to get your name known throughout the ward and persuades voters to vote for you. Many independent candidates run away with the idea that just because they are well known in the street where they live there is no need to do anything else. An average ward has approximately 9,000 electors. That is a lot of people and most of them will have never heard of you. So you need to get your name known. Door to door canvassing is a good way of doing that and does not cost anything but it is time consuming. Therefore, you will need help to cover the entire ward. You need to ask every elector if they will support you. Some people do not tell the truth and say anything just to get rid of you but most people are honest. Once you have established support you should ask them if they need a lift getting to and from the polling station or if they need a postal vote. Telephone canvassing is another way of contacting electors but each telephone number must be looked up in the directory beforehand. Again this is time consuming, dependent on you having a number of helpers and there is also a cost element involved. All promises to vote for you should be recorded. Public meetings for single issues are a good way of getting people talking about you but make sure you know what you are talking about.

You may, from time to time, come across someone who is not on the register of electors. It is quite straightforward to rectify this. Voters can register throughout the year and you should be able to pick up a bundle of forms from your council's Electoral Registration Officer. Alternatively, click on the appropriate button on the above menu.

Print out the form, fill it in and post it to the Electoral Registration Officer at your own Town Hall.

- **Please note postal or proxy vote applications and registration forms cannot be sent via email.**
  - **Remember there is a qualifying date for each election.**
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## **Knock, Knock, Win –**

Door-to-door canvassing is an essential part of any campaign. The all the political parties, in local elections, use it because it delivers the goods at little cost. However, it is hard work. It takes a lot of planning, a lot of manpower, and a lot of time. But the effort is well worth the reward.

**Door-to-door canvassing accomplishes four main campaign goals, all with minimal cost:**

- **Door-to-door campaigning builds name recognition for the candidate in a way that leaflet drops cannot.**
- **A door-to-door program builds credibility in two ways. First, on the personal level, it builds credibility in the mind of the voter who is contacted because it shows that the campaign is alive. Second, on a larger scale, the program builds credibility by giving the impression that there is a large base of support for the candidate that is involved in a well-organized and formidable effort.**
- **Your door-to-door campaign is more effective than any other method for encouraging people to vote.**
- **Finally, door-to-door campaigning can be an useful means of building a volunteer organisation by locating interested people.**

No matter how large or small your campaign, don't skimp on your door-to-door efforts. Running a door-to-door canvass takes time and hard work, but you'll be glad you made the effort when you see the results.

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## **Conducting a Campaign Canvass**

Gone are the days when campaigning for political office was hit-or-miss, when the candidate decided his campaign message over a beer then went out and repeated that message as often as possible. Today, modern campaigns rely on the campaign canvass to determine the mood of the voters and their response to the candidate's message. If you want to win it is imperative that you canvass. If you don't canvass, your campaign is just walking in the dark.

Over recent years all the major parties have reduced the amount of door-to-door canvassing. This is because of lack of volunteers rather than because it did not work. Alternative methods of canvassing have taken over. Telephone canvassing saves a lot of time, manpower, and is not called off if it rains, but there is the little question of who pays the telephone bill.

No matter what method you use this section will give you a step-by-step guide to creating and executing your canvassing.

## **Guidelines for Volunteers**

- **Supervision**

Reliable canvass results rely on professional interviewing. Train your helpers. Do not expect them to know how to canvass if they have never done it before. I've seen volunteers get disgusted with interviewees who don't support the candidate, and others who ask questions in a way that implies what answer the person should give. Avoid these unreliable results by closely training your team.

- **Organisation**

Your canvassing operation must be well organised so that you can get the job done in a reasonable amount of time. Remember – making calls and asking questions takes lots of time. Election Agents should be in charge of the campaign and they need plenty of help.

- **But Don't Overload**

Don't overwork your helpers. You'll need their vigor and energy later in the campaign, especially on polling day. Keep your canvassers motivated by limiting the amount of work they do (two or three nights per week is about the most any volunteer can take). It can be soul destroying to canvass on your own. So make small groups of four or fives, letting one keep the records of the canvass while the others do the knocking.

## **Leafleting**

This is where the money goes but, used effectively can be an extremely useful tool in any campaign. Basically there are two sorts of leaflets, the introductory leaflet and the election address. The introductory leaflet is exactly that and should be used to introduce the candidate to the electorate. It can also be used as a single-issue leaflet linking the candidate to a particular local issue. A good tactic is to pick different local issues throughout the ward and change the topic of the leaflet from area to area, but that can be quite expensive. Remember most leaflets are 'door to dustbin' leaflets, which means they are picked up from behind the front door and taken directly to the waste bin. Usually one item is briefly read during that journey, so you should bear in mind that it defeats the object if there is too much information on them.

The election address is usually more formal. The major political parties usually have it printed on a better quality paper than an introductory leaflet. It should include your

photograph, curriculum vitae, major policies and a message from you but remember do not over fill it. If you shop around you can get some good deals from high street printers. If you have the time there is no reason why you can not publish your own on your computer, which is an excellent way of keeping the cost down. Window and car posters are also useful in bringing your name to the public's attention but, again, professionally produced can increase the total cost of the election.

- **Remember all printed material must include an imprint giving printer's, publisher's and candidate's names and addresses.**
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## **Direct Leaflet Shots**

Direct leafleting is one of the most important tools that local campaigns can use to reach voters effectively and affordably. To make your leaflet succeed, you have to plan your campaign and design your leaflet to be effective. Here are some basic guidelines:

- **Grab the voters' attention**

Remember, your leaflet is competing not only with every other campaign leaflet that is sent out, but with catalogues, bills, business advertisements, CDs from AOL, and all the other junk that falls through the letter box. To avoid being thrown in the bin with the latest supermarket circular, your leaflet needs to stand out.

Use big headlines and catchy graphics, with big sub-headings interspersed throughout the piece, drawing the reader through the leaflet. Let the voters read on for more information if they want to, but they should notice the headline and be able to follow your gist just by reading your sub-headings.

- **Graphics Rule**

Your text is important (especially for the press who read your piece), but the most important parts for the voters are the pictures. Use powerful graphics and pictures, including a color scheme that stands out but is easy on the eye. Leave lots of “white space” (the space around your text and graphics that is left blank) – it makes the piece easy to read. Your “white space” need not be white – for example, you may be using a light blue background.

- **To Stand Out, Don't be Standard**

Shy away from using the “good old fashioned” political colours and logos. If you do, your leaflet will simply blend in with all the other political leaflets that the voter receives. Your leaflet must GET NOTICED! That being said, keep it simple. Too many graphics, too many colours and your reader will get tired or think it looks “amateurish.”

- **Know What People Read**

After the headline, the most read part of the letter is the “P.S.” – if you’re sending out a letter-type leaflet, always put your number-one message in the P.S. People also read the captions on photos – always put informative captions on the photos you use. If a paragraph is particularly important, make it extremely short (2-3 lines) or use a “pullout” capital letter to start the paragraph – either one will make it more likely to be read by people who are just “scanning” your leaflet. Remember – before reading, almost everyone just “scans” to see if it is worth his or her time.

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## **Using the press**

The press can be your best friend or worst enemy. Learn to use them to your advantage. Establish a professional relationship with the editors and reporters of local newspapers. Feed them stories; do not wait for them to contact you. Most interviews can be done in person or over the phone but those, which you consider important, especially with lots of statistics, are better done in written form. Most reporters welcome a well-written press release because it saves them time writing it. Quite often press releases appear in the paper unedited. Some reporters may agree to an embargo, which is useful if you do not want the item to appear in the press before a certain date.

- **Remember people who buy a newspaper, read it.**

Free newspapers are also very useful because they are usually delivered to every household, thus ideal for getting your message or opinion across to the public at little expense.

A local newspaper in Greater Manchester, the Oldham Advertiser, published an article on February 28th 2002 explaining how to fight for a council seat. It makes very interesting reading whether or not you live in Oldham. You can read a text only copy by clicking on the 'Press Articles' link on the site menu.

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## **Using the Internet**

The Internet is easily the most modern media and can be a useful tool for most campaigns. Website design need not be expensive and is an easy way of creating an electronic leaflet, which is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. All you need to do is advertise its address. A Candidate's Home Page, which can be updated at any time, is also a useful idea. There is software available which is easy to use which allows the novice to create a reasonable page but publishing it on the world wide web may prove to be tricky for some.

- **For a more professionally produced WebPage register with PICX by using the Contact Page and or visit JackBit & Snap, the designers of this Website.**

There are other websites, which may prove to be useful. Your own council for example. Most Local Authorities have a web site and its address is usually 'www.council name.gov.uk'. Alternatively by clicking on the **UK Online** button in the menu above you can easily log on to your own local council website. Two other useful links are contained in the menu of this website, where more information can be obtained. They are the **Dept. of Transport, Local Government & Regions** and the **Local Government Association**.

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## **The Wrong and Right Way of Using the Internet**

The political Internet can be a valuable resource for any political campaign, so long as you know why you're using it:

### **The Wrong Reasons to Use the Internet**

- **I'll get lots of donations –**

No, unfortunately you won't. Unless your name is Paul McCartney, you won't be able to raise large numbers of donations through the Internet. You'll be better off doing it the "old-fashioned way," making calls and holding events.

- **Everyone will be talking about my great flash graphics –**

The reality is, your website won't be getting millions of hits, and most of the people who do find your site will be there for a reason – and it's not to see the coolest candidate site on the web.

- **With a website, I won't even have to campaign, my site will do the campaigning for me –**

This is the most damaging myth of all. Candidates, who simply put up websites and then sit back and expect to win, will be shocked come Election Day. There is no substitute for old fashioned campaigning, not even the Internet.

### **The Right Reasons to Use the Internet**

- **To get information out quickly and cheaply -**

The Internet is a great way to get press releases, issue papers, articles, and even campaign posters out to the public in a short amount of time.

- **To provide extra information for those who want it –**

Your campaign website is a great place to post your policies in more detail. But do not forget to mention the Internet address on your leaflets.

- **To supplement your other campaign activities –**

Almost every area of your campaign can feature a web component.

- **To stay connected with supporters –**

There is now a growing army of people with email addresses, which makes contacting them easier than it has ever been and cheaper too.

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## **Postal or proxy votes**

For the voters' convenience, everyone has the right to vote by post. New arrangements allow anyone who is on the Register of Electors to apply for a postal vote at any election. Different rules apply in Northern Ireland. Voters can ask for a one-off postal vote in advance of any election. Alternatively, they can ask for an automatic postal vote on a permanent basis or for a set period. If the voter is not registered to vote, they can now register to vote throughout the year.

- **If you would like further details on rolling registration please visit [www.rollingregistration.co.uk](http://www.rollingregistration.co.uk).**

Postal votes are well worth pursuing. While the overall turnout figures for local elections seem to be reducing year on year, the percentage of returned postal votes remains as high as ever. Obviously if someone has gone to the trouble to apply for a postal vote, the chances are, they are going to use it. Anyone can apply for a postal vote, not just because of sickness or infirmity, which can be permanent or for just one election. Another reason people apply for a postal vote is if they are unable to go to the polling station because of work or holiday arrangements. Proxy votes are when another person votes for someone else and the qualifications are similar to that of the postal vote application. You can apply for postal or proxy votes all through the year.

- **Remember there is a closing date for each election.**

You may from time to time come across someone who is in need of a postal or a proxy vote but as not applied for one. It is quite straightforward to rectify this. Voters can apply throughout the year and you should be able to pick up a bundle of forms from your council's Electoral Registration Officer. Alternatively, click on the appropriate button on the picx menu.

Print out the form, fill it in and post it to the Electoral Registration Officer at your own Town Hall.

- **Please note postal or proxy vote applications and registration forms cannot be sent via email.**

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### **On Polling Day**

On polling day you should have one of your helpers outside each of the polling stations collecting electors' polling numbers as they go in to vote.

- **Remember you cannot demand their number.**
- **You do not know how they voted but you know that they have.**

In the evening after crossing off the people who have voted from your master sheet you can call on the people who have not voted and encourage them to vote by offering them a lift. Ferrying electors who have booked a lift with you best use the time spent during the day.

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### **After the Election**

Well congratulations. You made it. How well did you do? If you were successful you must contact the Chief Executive at the Town Hall to make arrangements to swear in.

Whether successful or not the election work is not yet over. By law your agent, if you had one, must complete a 'Return of Expenses' form and both of you must complete a 'Declaration' form. If you have not already been given a set of forms by your Local Elections Office at your Town Hall then you can print out a set by clicking on the appropriate link in the menu bar at [www.picx.co.uk](http://www.picx.co.uk). For your assistance you can also view and/or print out the full guidance notes. You will need an Adobe Acrobat Reader software to do so. If you have not got one you may download one by clicking on the appropriate link at the bottom of this page.

If your campaign was not successful remember there is always next year. Keep your canvassing records and build on them.

- **Remember to thank your voters. A short letter in the local newspaper is all that is needed and you will be surprised just how many people remember.**
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