

New Zealand's elected members: A profile

Analysis of the 2016 elected members' survey

February 2019

**We are.
LGNZ.**

Te Kāhui Kaunihera o Aotearoa.

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Foreword



Local government is not only the sphere of government that is closest to citizens, it is also our most immediate form of democracy. Our system of local democracy enables citizens to make decisions about matters that affect them directly, their streets, their neighbourhoods, and their districts, cities or regions. At a time when democracy is challenged in many parts of the world – the democratic recession as some have called it – we have a duty to ensure that our democracies work and provide all citizens with a voice through which they can not only exercise their democratic rights, but also have the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to local matters of significance.

Much has been written about the importance of voting and voter turnout as an indication of democratic health, but an effective democracy involves much more than simply the numbers turning up to vote. Voting is meaningless if there isn't a diverse range of candidates to choose between and a mix of policy options to consider. Those elected need a mandate to act (and the requisite powers and funding) in the local public interest.

Mandate is also associated with the notion of legitimacy. Democratic legitimacy in a representative system of government not only involves the willingness of voters to vote, but also the degree to which those elected both represent and reflect the character of the electorate. If we are to encourage our young to become active citizens, they need to see themselves reflected in the democratic bodies elected to represent their interests.

Every three years since 1998 LGNZ has undertaken a survey of elected members to build up a national profile of local government representation. By understanding the nature of our membership, LGNZ is able to respond to ministerial and media queries; focus on raising the profile of local government amongst under-represented groups as part of future candidate promotion campaigns, and assist councils to develop strategies which provide under-represented communities with opportunities to participate.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Cull". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dave Cull
President
LGNZ

Introduction

Since 1998, Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) has carried out a survey of newly elected members to build up a profile of the people who are tasked with governing our communities. Prior to 2010 the survey was limited to councillors and mayors. With the creation of Auckland Council in 2010 and the establishment of its co-governance model involving government body members and local board members, the survey was extended to include members of all councils, all local boards and all community boards (see **Appendix A**, Methodology).

Following the 2016 survey, questionnaires were sent using Survey Monkey, to all 1573 members, 52 per cent of whom returned the completed questionnaire. Please note that no results are available for the cohort of elected members elected in 2013 due to a low response rate.

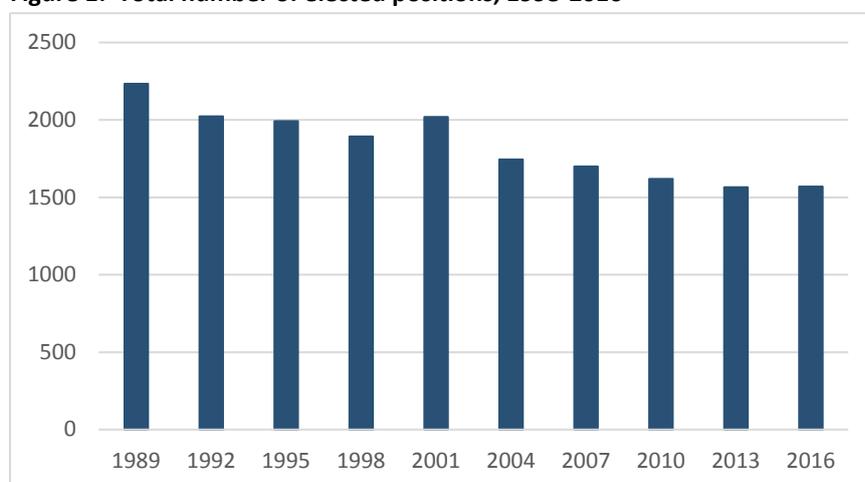
Table 1: Number of elected bodies and elected positions, 2016

	Elected bodies	Elected positions
Auckland local boards	21	149
Community boards	110	529
Territorial authorities	67	775
- <i>Auckland Council governing body</i>	1	21
- <i>City councils</i>	12	160
- <i>District councils</i>	54	595
Regional councils	11	120
Total	208	1573

Source: DIA 2016

Since 1989 the number of elected positions has substantially declined, at the same time that New Zealand's population has grown significantly, resulting in an unusually high ratio of citizens to each elected member. High ratios make it difficult for elected members to represent the interests of their electorates and are regarded as a factor in low electoral turnout; see Figure 1. The number of elected members has stabilised since 2013.

Figure 1: Total number of elected positions, 1998-2016

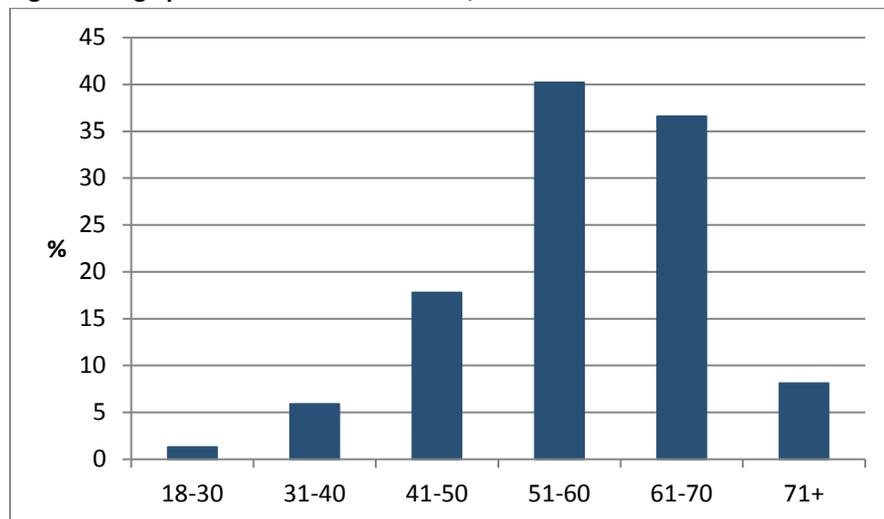


Source: DIA

Age of elected members

In any discussion about the representativeness of elected bodies three factors are often highlighted; age, gender and ethnicity. All three are frequently used as measures of diversity. The age profile of those elected in 2016 is heavily dominated by those between the ages of 40 and 70 years old; see Figure 2.

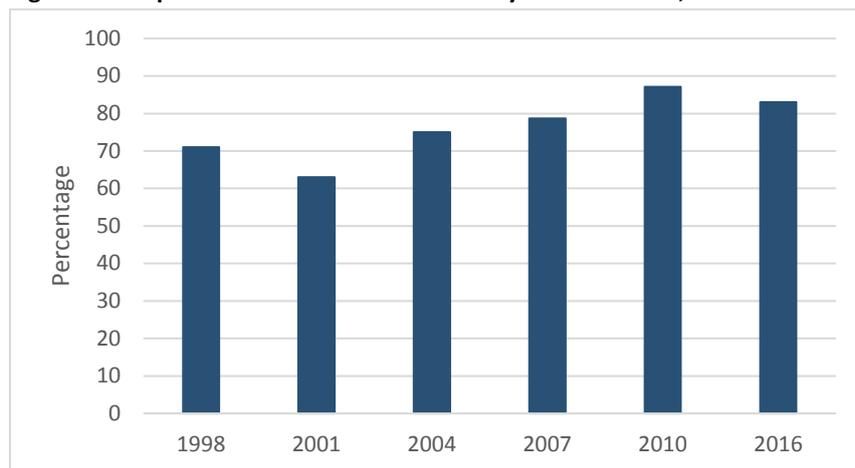
Figure 2: Age profile of elected members, 2016 - 2019



Source: LGNZ

The age profile of those elected in October 2016 continued the pattern found in previous surveys of elected members being older than the populations they represented, with approximately 83 per cent of those elected in 2016 being 51 years or older. Compared to previous surveys the proportion of members in the 51 plus age group elected in 2016 was the second highest since surveys began in 1998 (noting the lack of data for 2013); see Figure 3.

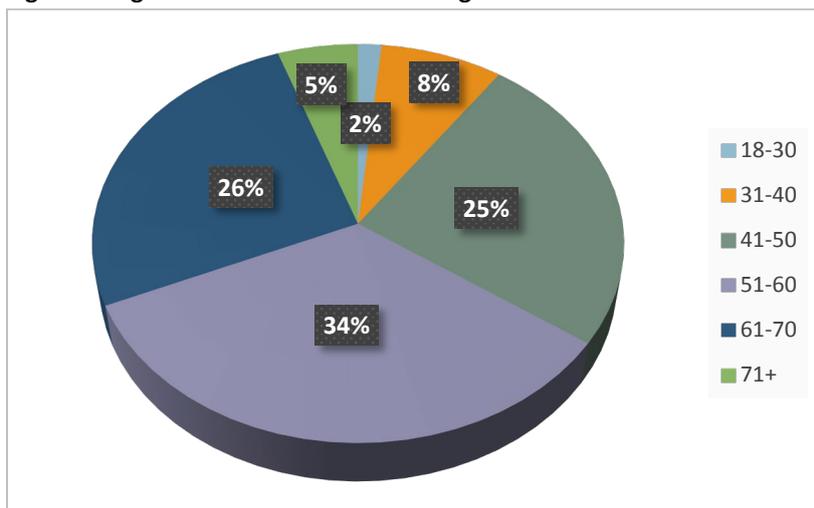
Figure 3: Proportion of elected members 51 years and older, 1998-2016



Source: LGNZ

The proportion of women older than 51 years elected to councils and local/community boards was 65 per cent, significantly below the average figure of 83 per cent; see Figure 4.

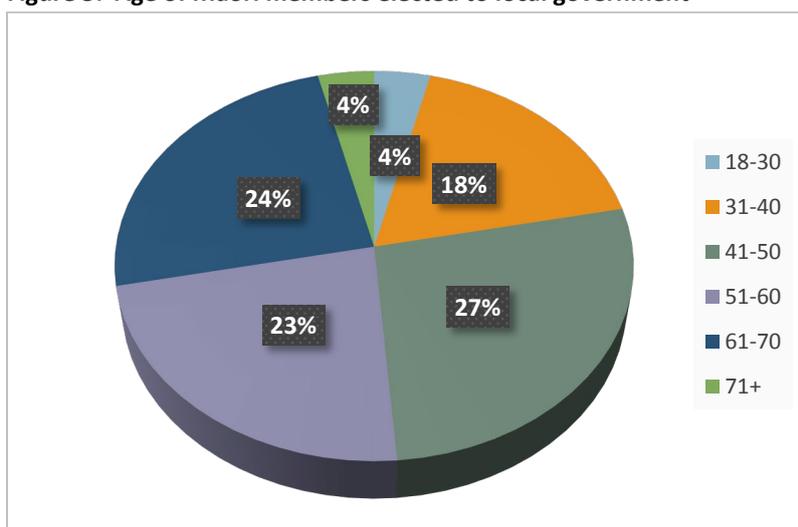
Figure 4: Age of women elected to local government



Source: LGNZ

Similarly, the proportion of Māori elected members over the age of 51 years was 68 per cent, also well below the average of 83 per cent; see Figure 5.

Figure 5: Age of Māori members elected to local government

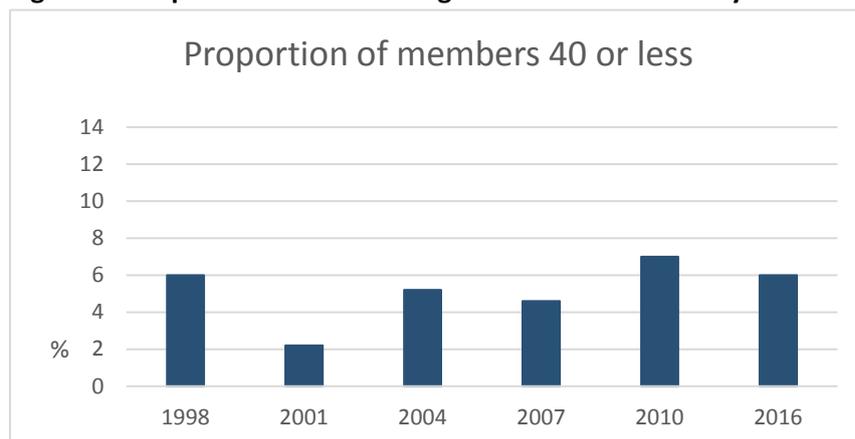


Source: LGNZ

Younger elected members

Since 1998 the proportion of elected members aged 40 or under has averaged 5.2 per cent, ranging from 2.2 per cent in 2001 to 7 per cent in 2010. In 2016 the proportion was 6 per cent, down slightly from 7 per cent in 2010. Interestingly, the proportion of young elected members was the same following the 2016 election as it was following elections in 1998; see Figure 6. In comparison, the proportion of elected members aged between the age of 18 and 40 years after the 2012 local body election in New South Wales, Australia (NSW) was 13 per cent.

Figure 6: Proportion of members aged between 18 and 40 years



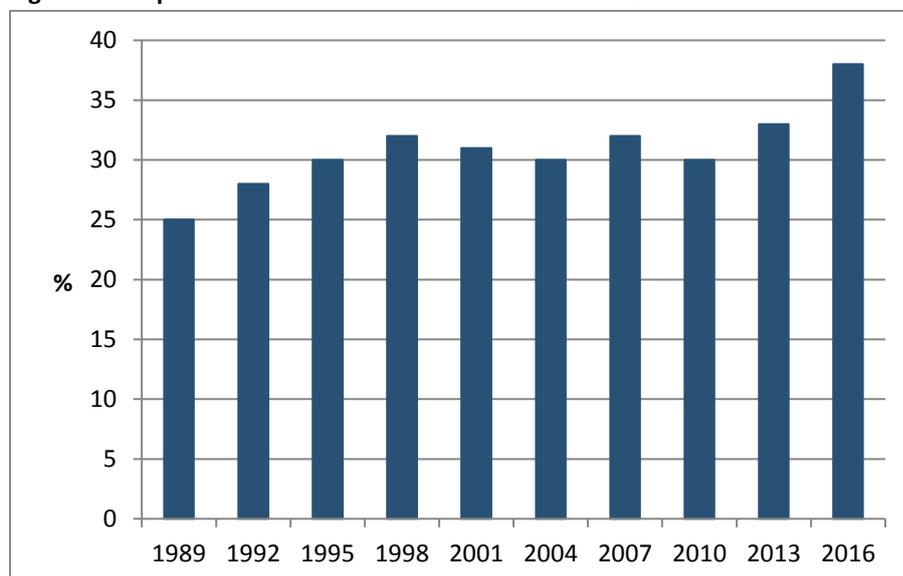
Source: LGNZ

The predominance of older elected members is not limited to local government in New Zealand. Candidates standing for the 2010 local government elections in the United Kingdom had an average age of 53 (Rallings et al., 2010). Three years later, in 2013, the average age of councillors had increased to 60.¹ The largest cohort of elected members in NSW local government in 2012 was the group between 51 and 70 years old.

Gender

Of the survey respondents, 39 percent were women, very close to the actual proportion of elected members who are women at 38 per cent; see Figure 7.

Figure 7: Proportion of women elected members since 1989



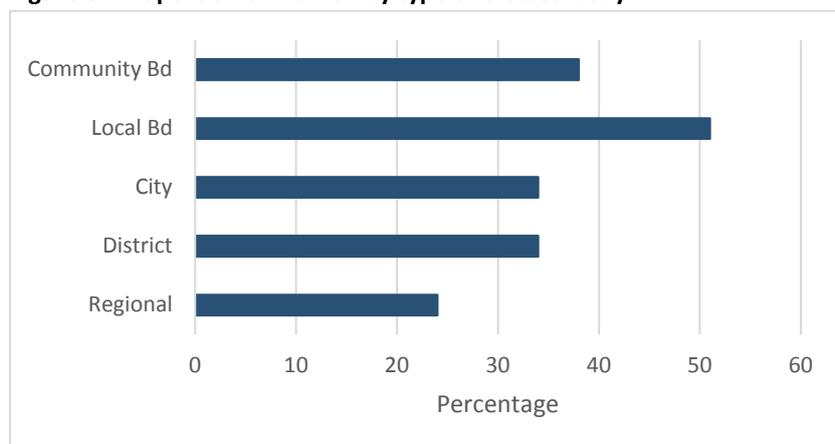
Source: LGNZ

Since 1989 the proportion of elected members who are women has grown from 25 per cent to 38 per cent. Please note that prior to 2010, which saw the establishment of the Auckland co-governance model, data was for councillors and mayors only. Since 2010 all elected members,

¹ See www.local.gov.uk/national-census-local-authority-councillors-2013

representing councils, local boards in Auckland and community boards, have been counted. Figure 8 shows the relative proportion of women candidates and elected by type of elected body.

Figure 8: Proportion of women by type of elected body



Source: DIA

The highest proportion of women is found in Auckland’s local boards, where they make up 50 per cent of members. The smallest proportion, under 25 per cent, is found in regional councils. Regional councils have the smallest proportion of female elected members.

In comparison to local government in New Zealand, the 2013 census of councillors in England found that 67 per cent of councillors were male and 32 per cent female. The proportion of female councillors had increased from 29 per cent in 2001.

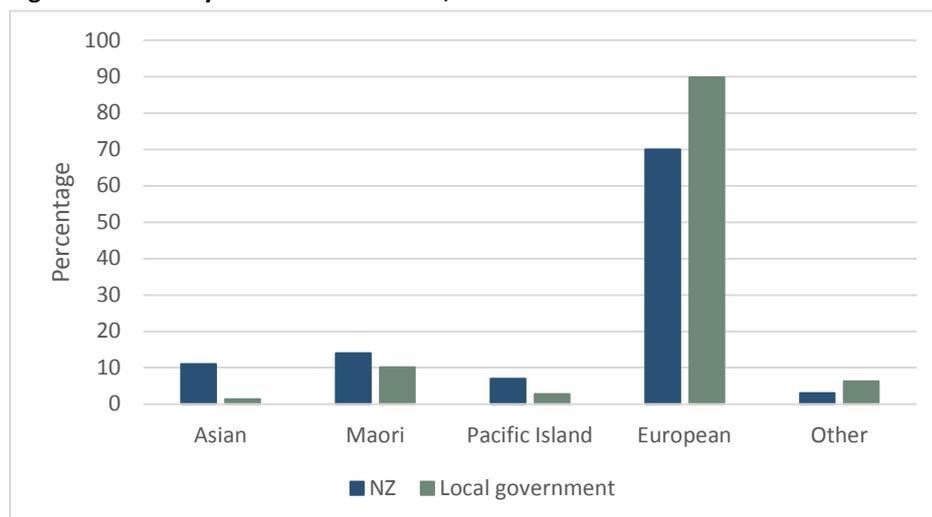
Ethnicity

The survey asked respondents to identify their ethnic group in order to provide information on the degree to which our elected representatives reflect the diversity of their communities. The four largest ethnic groups represented in local government are Europeans (89.8 per cent), Māori (10.1 per cent), Pacifica (2.1 per cent) and Asian (1.4 per cent). The share of members who identify as European is significantly larger than the same share of New Zealand’s overall population.

In making these comparisons however, it is important to note that ethnicities are not evenly distributed throughout the country. The majority of people who identify as Asian or Pacifica live in Auckland, a city which contains 35 per cent of New Zealand’s population but only 10 per cent of the country’s elected positions²; see Figure 9.

² From 2016 numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to ability of respondents to identify multiple ethnicities.

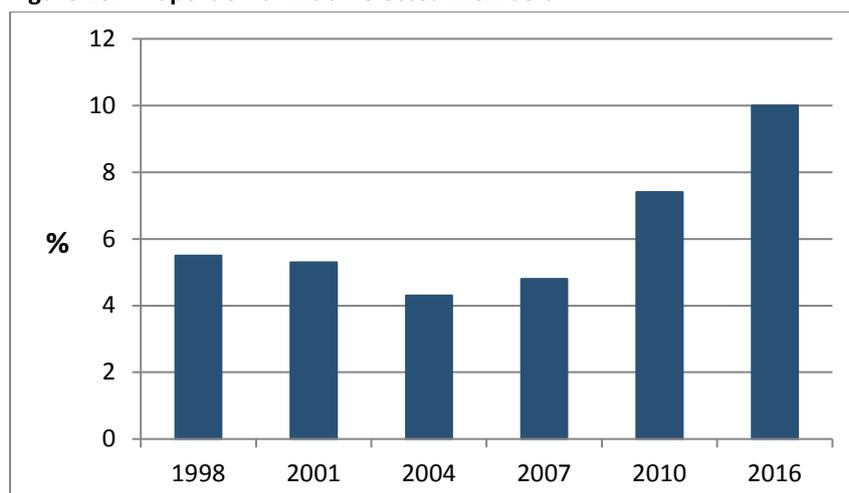
Figure 9: Ethnicity of elected members, 2016 - 2019



Source: LGNZ

Since surveys began the number of elected members who identify as Māori has almost doubled, with most of the growth occurring since 2007; see Figure 10.

Figure 10: Proportion of Māori elected members



Source: LGNZ

Over the period that elected members have been surveyed an increase in ethnic diversity has begun to occur. The 2016 cohort is the most diverse since 1998; see Table 2. By comparison, the census of elected members in England shows that 96 per cent of councillors described themselves as white, with 4 per cent coming from an ethnic minority background (Rallings, 2010)

Table 2: Changes in ethnicity (percentage)

	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	2016
NZ Māori	5.50	5.30	4.30	4.8	7.40	10.10
NZ European	93	92	94	87.3	90.46	89.8
Asian						1.4
Pacific Island						2.8
Other ethnicity	1.50	2.50	1.40	6.3	2.10	6.30

Source: LGNZ

The survey also asked respondents to identify the country in which they were born. Just over 90 per cent were born in New Zealand, with the second biggest group, 4 per cent, born in England; see Table 3.

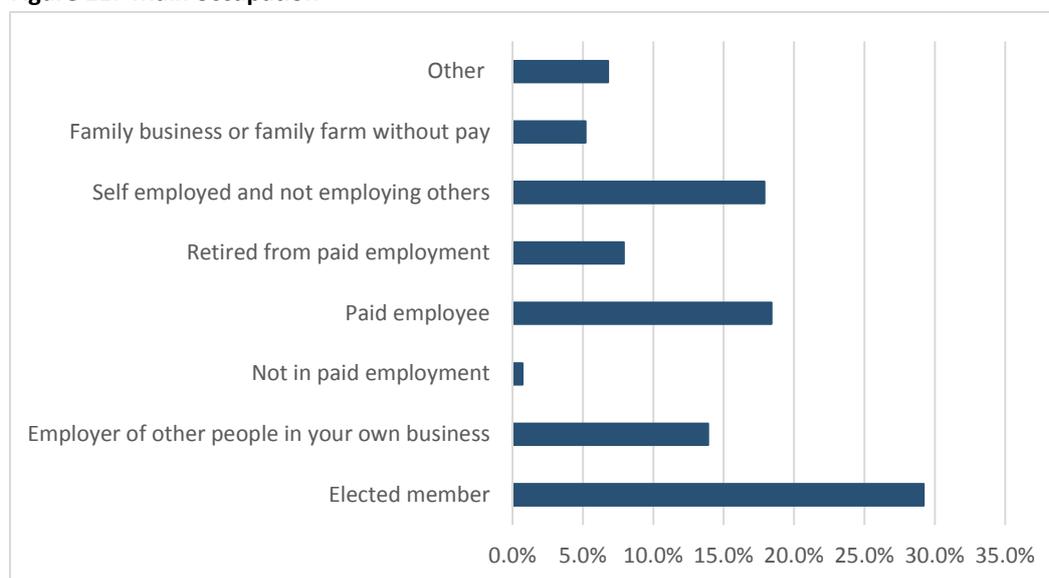
Table 3: Place of birth

Australia	0.5%
China	0.0%
Cook Islands	0.0%
England	3.7%
India	0.0%
New Zealand	90.9%
Philippines	0.2%
Samoa	0.5%
South Africa	0.9%
Other (please specify)	3.3%

Main occupation and primary source of income

The survey asked respondents to state their main occupation prior to the election (and in many cases continuing), with nearly 30 per cent identifying their main occupation as elected member. The second largest occupation, consisting of just over 18 per cent of elected members, was paid employee.

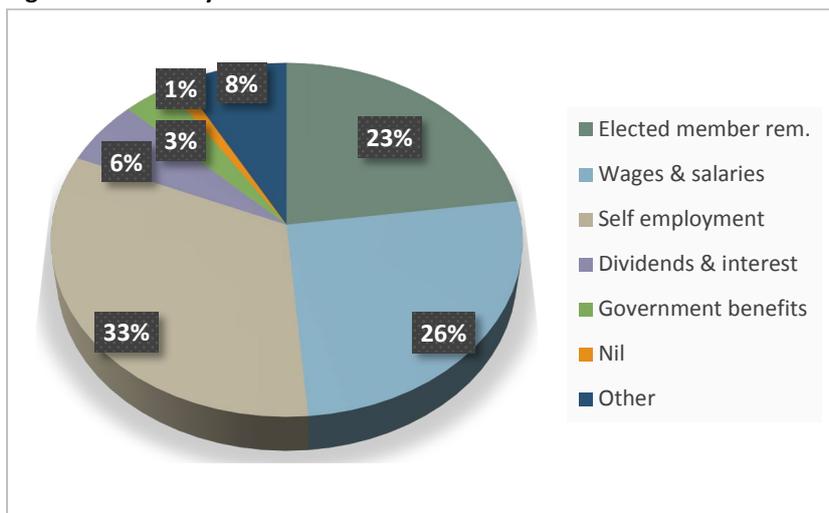
Figure 11: Main occupation



Source: LGNZ

While nearly a third of respondents identified their main occupation as elected member, the most common primary source of income was from self-employment (33 per cent). The second most common source of income results from wages and salaries (26 per cent), with elected member remuneration being identified by 23 per cent of respondents; see Figure 12.

Figure 12: Primary source of income



Source: LGNZ

The income sources for the majority of elected members have remained consistent since 2010, see Table 4.

Table 4: Trends in primary income sources

2010	2016
Self-employment (32%)	Self-employment (33%)
Wages (26.9%)	Wages (26%)
Elected members' salary (20.2%)	Elected members' salary (23%)
Superannuation (10%)	Other (8%)

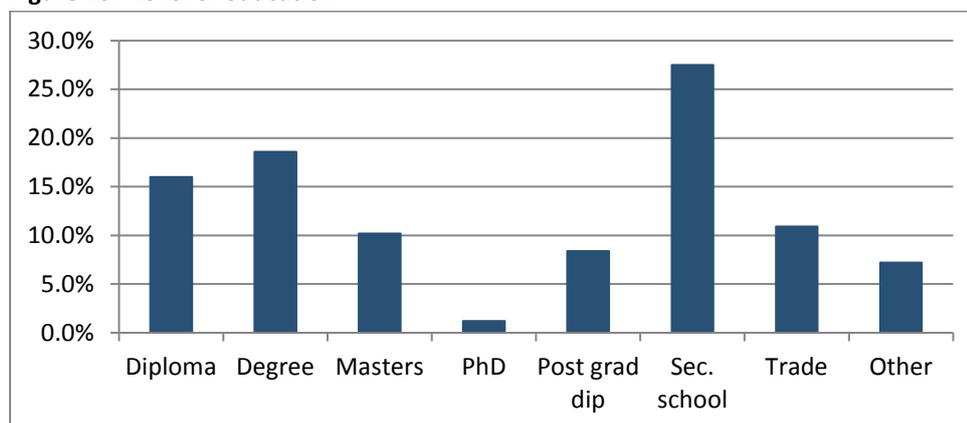
Source: LGNZ

In comparison to elected members in New Zealand, the largest occupation groups in NSW local governments were professional and self-employed.

Education

The educational achievement of the largest group of respondents was attending secondary school (27.5 per cent), a slightly lower proportion than in 2010, when it was 31 per cent. (The share of New Zealand’s population that achieved secondary school qualifications is 35 per cent). The proportion of respondents with a graduate degree in the 2016 cohort was 19 per cent, similar to the 2010 cohort. The proportion with a trade qualification in 2016 was 10 per cent.

Figure 13: Level of education



Source: LGNZ

Primary caregiver for dependent children or not

The survey of the 2016 cohort asked whether or not members were the primary caregiver for dependent children. This question was the result of issues raised in the previous triennium by councillors who found the demands of raising children while being a councillor difficult, often because of the meeting times scheduled by their councils. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) stated that they were primary caregivers.

The survey further asked those who were primary caregivers whether or not the time commitment involved in being an elected member enabled them to meet their responsibilities as primary caregivers. Approximately two thirds of respondents did not agree that being an elected member limited their ability to be a caregiver, however nearly a third (31.3 per cent) did find it limiting; see Table 5.

Table 5: Does being an elected member enable caregiver responsibilities to be met?

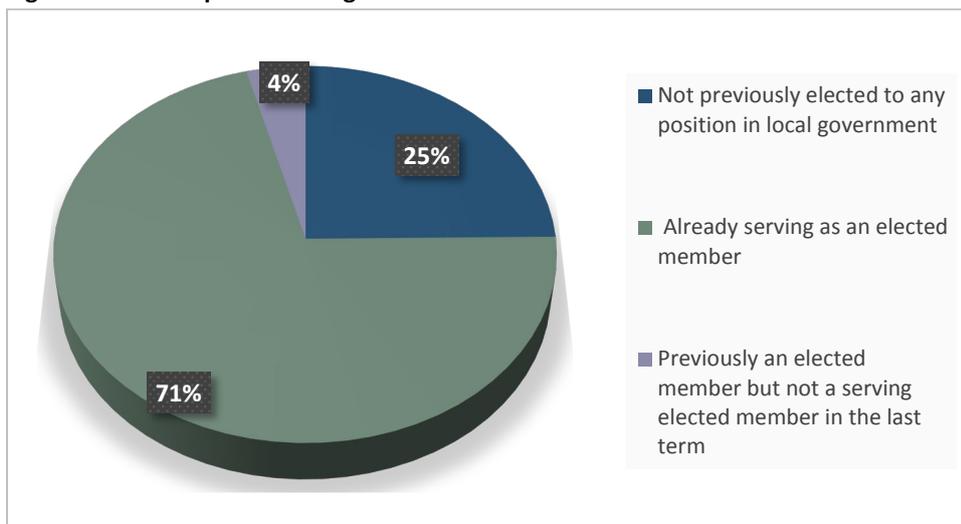
Yes	68.8%
No	31.3%

Source: LGNZ

Status prior to the 2016 elections

The survey sought information on the number of candidates who were previously elected members and had stood for re-election. One quarter of those elected in the 2016 elections were elected for the first time. In comparison, the proportion of councillors elected for the first time in NSW following the 2012 elections was 40 per cent. Figure 14 describes the status of elected members prior to being elected. Approximately 2 per cent of elected members were previously Members of Parliament.

Figure 14: Status prior to being elected



Source: LGNZ

When those who had previously been elected members were asked how many terms they had served, the results showed that more than a quarter had served four terms or more; see Table 6.

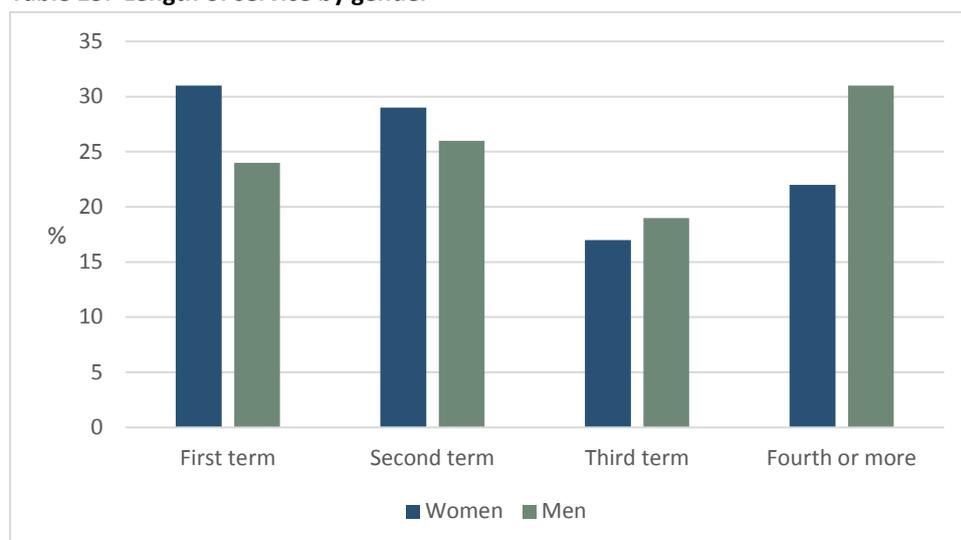
Table 6: Length of service

Length of service	%
First term	26.5
Second term	27.0
Third term	18.2
Fourth term or more	28.2

Source: LGNZ

When replies were analysed to identify the gender of respondents a pattern emerged which showed that female elected members are more likely to be in their first or second term, while male elected members are more likely to be elected for the third, fourth, or more times; see Figure 15.

Table 15: Length of service by gender



Source: LGNZ

Reasons for standing

Elected members were asked to provide the reason why they decided to put themselves forward for office. The three most common replies were:

- To serve their community (83 per cent);
- Feeling they had skills to offer (69.7 per cent); and
- To represent their community/neighbourhood (59.7 per cent).

Reasons indicating a level of dissatisfaction with their local council were only the sixth most common answer, constituting 18.1 per cent of replies; see Table 7 below for the eight most commonly given reasons.

Table 7: Most common reasons given for standing

Reason given	Percentage
To serve my community	83.0%
Felt I had skills to offer	69.7%
To represent my community/neighbourhood	59.7%
Interested in local government	50.6%
To be a leader in the community	42.5%
To champion a specific issue	16.4%
Dissatisfied with the way things were run	18.1%
To gain political experience	6.6%

Source: LGNZ

A sample of the other reasons given for standing is provided in **Appendix B**.

References

DIA (2016) *Local Authority Elections Statistics 2016*, accessed from www.dia.govt.nz..

Rallings, C, Thrasher, M, Borisyuk, G and Shears, M (2010) *Local elections candidate survey 2010*, Local Government Group, Local Government House, Smith Sq. London, SW1P 3HZ

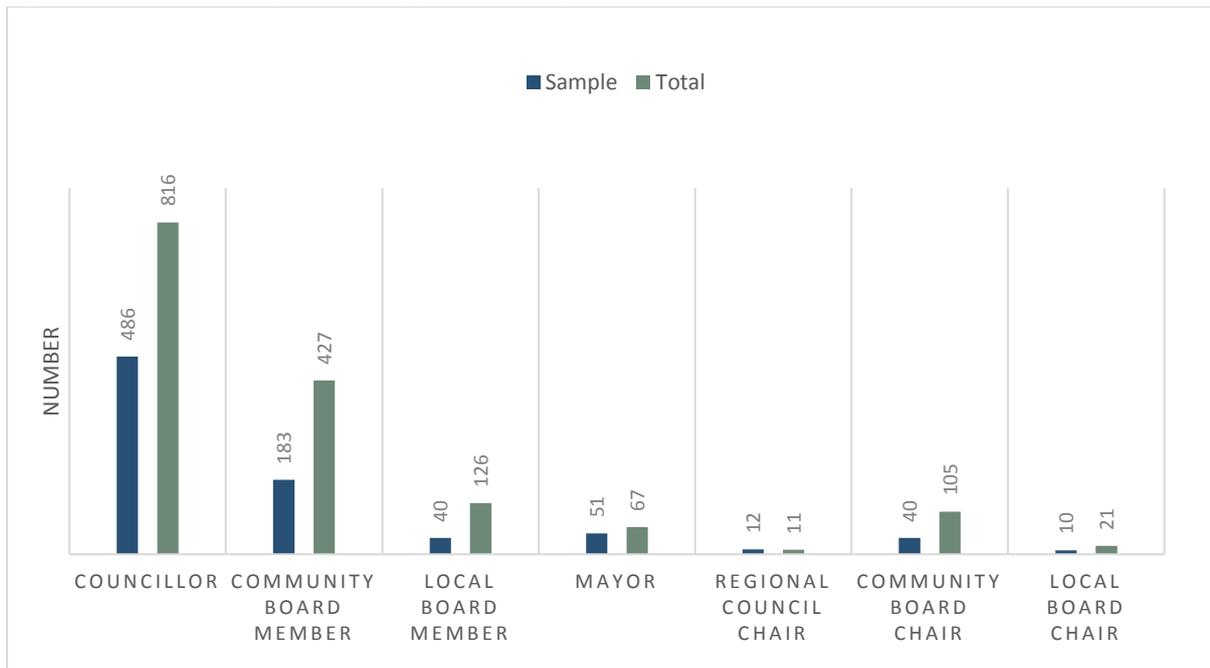
NSW councillor and candidate Report 2012, Local government elections, Office of Local Government, Sydney

Appendix A

Methodology

Of the 1,573 elected members 822, or 52%, answered the survey, which was delivered by Survey Monkey in December 2016 and early 2017. Figure 1 shows the number of respondents compared to the total number of potential respondents in each position.

Figure 1: Number of respondents by position compared to total



The response rates within each position were:

- Councillor 60%
- Community board member 43%
- Local board member 32%
- Mayor 44%
- Regional council chair 100%
- Community board chair 38%
- Local board chair 48%

The number of elected members who responded to the survey was 822 out of a population of 1,578, a response rate of 52 per cent.

Appendix B

Reasons given for standing

Other reasons for standing for office included the following:

- We needed young people on Council;
- Need the money to top up my pension;
- There was nobody willing to stand;
- I was asked to stand again to try to prevent increasing party political influence in council, also involving undue public criticism from within;
- To try and get common sense to be used. Not theory only;
- Help our diverse community understand Council better;
- Asked to continue on behalf of my communities. To help bridge the gap between local government and the people we serve;
- To encourage the people to have more voice for more robust decision-making. To also support local government in their learning of how to engage with the people more effectively for better outcomes;
- Believe in creating affordable infrastructure to assist ratepayers, and to ensure ratepayers have a choice, rather than relying on regulation;
- To ensure progressive projects continue to be implemented throughout the district;
- To grow as a person, to educate myself to be able to support, advocate and empower others who normally wouldn't get a voice;
- My age group was not represented - I felt that it was too unbalanced prior to 2013;
- To limit the size of Council both in terms of spending and regulation;
- Advocate for efficient core services and to future proof our community for generations to come;
- I felt last three years spent learning the ropes. Now it's time to become "effective"; and
- My community has specific problems, mostly not shared by Council's other communities, and in danger of being overlooked. Our sky-high electricity prices; our lack of affordable seniors housing; our reliance upon sea transport and, therefore, jetties and wharves; our dependence on tourism and minimal input into other industries (e.g. aquaculture). All these, plus major funding and bureaucratic issues have to be tackled urgently for the well-being of my community, but would be low on Council's list of priorities without constant lobbying.