

DOES YOUR LOCAL COUNCIL REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF ITS POPULATION?

**A pilot diversity survey in the
London Borough of Camden**

MAY 2023

Dr. Alex Bulat

Dr. Omar Hammoud Gallego

KEY POINTS

1. We need to know who our elected politicians are to be able to evaluate the quality of our democratic processes, especially in the current period of high social and economic distress.
2. In this research, we identified and filled a gap in our knowledge about who our local councillors are, and explored barriers to individuals willing to actively join the political process, including currently underrepresented communities.
3. It is important to know if local politicians are representative of the communities they serve, to increase satisfaction with democracy and ensure that policies promoted by councils truly reflect their residents' priorities.
4. Our Camden pilot survey found that on some important characteristics, there is more progress to be made for councillors to fully represent the diversity of their borough. This is likely to be the case in other London boroughs. In the second phase of this research, we will expand this analysis and collect data on all of London's 33 councils.
5. Preliminary, we recommend councils and political parties to promote policies to increase the diversity and representativeness of local councillors by reaching out to those communities currently underrepresented across the various boroughs in London, in particular younger people and those with a migrant background.

IN THIS REPORT

INTRODUCTION	4
.....	
WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT LOCAL COUNCILLORS:	
A summary of Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs) and Local Government Association (GLA) Councillor Census data	6
.....	
PILOT SURVEY RESULTS: London Borough of Camden	13
.....	
MEET YOUR COUNCILLORS: Camden Councillors case studies	18
.....	
CONCLUSION: Findings, limitations, and further research	24
.....	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	25
.....	
ANNEX:	
Questionnaire for 2023 Diversity Survey of Local Councillors - Pilot Survey (London Borough of Camden)	26
.....	

1 <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/business-and-economy/supporting-londons-sectors/challenge-ldn/civic-data-innovation-challenge>

INTRODUCTION

Who are London’s local politicians? How representative are they of their own communities? The answer is simple: we do not know.

It is not possible to comprehensively assess the diversity of London’s local councillors based on existing data. We cannot accurately establish if they are representative of the communities they serve, as research on many diversity characteristics, such as their socio-economic background and migration status for example, is not currently available, as pointed out recently by a House of Commons Library research paper (Uberoi and Johnston 2022).

In this report, we outline a first step towards finding a solution to this lack of information about our democratic political representatives. We describe a methodology to collect data on councillors’ diversity - often known as equality, diversity and inclusion data, or EDI - and present the results of a pilot study conducted in the London Borough of Camden in April 2023. Our study relies on a mixed-methods research approach, which combines both a quantitative survey analysis as well as qualitative analysis of open-ended questions and follow-up interviews. If further funding is made available for research in this area, we plan to scale up this methodology and collect data in all of London’s 33 councils, to provide a reliable and comprehensive picture of the diversity and representativeness of local politicians.



Why is this important?

Why do policy makers, residents, and politicians themselves, need to know if local politicians - or politicians more in general - are broadly representative of the communities they serve? Academic research has shown that politicians from different backgrounds act in different manners. For instance, gender, ethnicity, income and class all define well how politicians act once elected, and therefore the type of policies they support (Carnes and Lupu 2015; 2023). Politicians’ background matters also because evidence suggests citizens are more likely to be engaged if they feel represented. For instance, studies have shown that women are more likely to vote if they can vote for a female candidate (Uberoi and Johnston 2022). This is all the more important in a context of long term decline in trust in politics across Britain (Clery et al. 2022).

While some research on the representativeness of MPs has been conducted (Quilter-Pinner et al. 2022), the little research that exists in the United Kingdom on local councillors’ representativeness suggests that these are indeed less diverse than the populations they allegedly represent, with likely important consequences for policy in their communities (Sobolewska and Begum 2020). As an example from the little data available, according to the 2022 Census of Local Authority Councillors, the average age of councillors in England is 59.5, with only 15% of councillors 45 years of age or under. The under-representation of many segments of society - beyond age - also matters because many politicians use local council positions as springboards for national politics. Moreover, local representation is crucial because more representative politicians would increase civic and democratic engagement, especially from marginalised communities, as shown in the report *London Voices* (Hammoud-Gallego et al. 2021). Finally, as Bulat and Gergs (2020) indicate in their report for the NGO the3million, there is indeed a significant research gap in the area of local representation, which this report seeks to fill.

This report is a small-scale, pilot project with the aim of applying our data collection methodology to all of London’s 33 Councils and thus provide a clear overview of who London’s representatives are, and establish if they actually represent the communities they serve. This research will have wide implications not only for local politics in London, but will also serve as a blueprint to understand who elected representatives actually are, and where action is needed to foster the civic and democratic engagement of communities across the country, and consequently increase citizens’ satisfaction with how our democracy works.

Our report is outlined as follows: first, we present evidence on the existing data on elected representatives’ socio-economic and diversity characteristics. Second, having shown that little data currently exists, we present the findings from our own pilot survey of councillors conducted in the London Borough of Camden matching - where possible - our data with data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Census of 2021. We also asked councillors about the challenges they face, or believe underrepresented groups face when in office. To complement our quantitative findings, we present three case studies of local Camden councillors to illustrate the diversity of pathways to politics as well as recommendations for increasing the diversity of local councillors. We conclude our report by summarising our findings, their implications, their limitations, and making the case for the

importance of funding further research on democratic representation.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT LOCAL COUNCILLORS:

A summary of Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs) and Local Government Association (GLA) Councillor Census data

Before conducting a pilot survey of councillors in the London Borough of Camden, we decided to inquire about existing data sources on the socio-economic and personal characteristics of local councillors, or EDI data. We identified two possible sources: councils themselves, through the use of FOI (Freedom of Information) requests, and the LGA (Local Government Association) Councillors' census of 2022, conducted across England.

FOI Data

We sent an FOI request to all of London's 33 borough councils on the 27th of January 2023. Specifically, we asked councils if they held any of the following data, and - if positive - if they could share a summary of that data with us:

1. Data on the following characteristics of elected councillors: age, education level, employment status, racial or ethnic background, disability, sexual orientation and party affiliation.
2. Data on councillors' nationality/ies or country of birth.
3. Any other diversity and inclusion data on elected councillors.

Of the 33 borough councils we submitted FOI requests to, 30 answered (over 90% of all London councils), with only three of them not responding at all (Barnet, Haringey, and Southwark). Out of the 30 borough councils who answered, 16 reported not collecting any of the data requested. The rest, 14 councils, answered that they hold some of the data we requested. We report the results of our FOI requests in the table below.

LOCAL AUTHORITY	FOI RESPONSE
London Borough of Brent	The Council holds data on racial or ethnic background, disability, sexual orientation, party affiliation, gender and religion. No data was shared with us.
London Borough of Bromley	They do not collect most of the data requested. They do, however, hold data on their Councillors' employment, using the following categories: employed, self-employed, and no employment. Some aggregate data on employment and disability was shared with us.
London Borough of Camden	The Council provided aggregated information on gender, ethnicity (though many not declared), disability, age, sexual orientation (though many not declared), religion (though many not declared), nationality (though many not declared), country of birth (though many not declared). Data on caring responsibilities, employment, and education was not collected.
London Borough of Enfield	The Council does not collect most of the data requested. Only age (which is not public) and employment (which is available online) are collected.
London Borough of Greenwich	The Council only holds data on ethnicity, which they have shared. Data on employment (though not systematic) and party affiliation is available on the Register of Interests . The Council does not hold any other data.
London Borough of Hackney	The Council holds data on party affiliation, age, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.

LOCAL AUTHORITY	FOI RESPONSE
London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham	<p>The Council holds data on party affiliation, sex, age, and in some cases disability, and/or racial or ethnic background.</p> <p>However, the Council did not share the data as exempt from FOI under Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act 2018.</p>
London Borough of Hillingdon	<p>The Council does not collect any of the data requested, with the exception of employment, which is available online under the Register of Interests.</p>
London Borough of Lambeth	<p>The Council does not collect most of the data requested.</p> <p>However, they did provide aggregated data for age, ethnicity (many non-respondents), and sexual orientation.</p>
London Borough of Newham	<p>The Council does not collect most of the data requested.</p> <p>However, the Council has provided us with aggregated data on gender and age groups.</p> <p>Employment is sometimes recorded under the Register of Interests.</p>
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	<p>The Council does not collect most of the data requested.</p> <p>However, the Council has provided us with aggregated data on gender and age groups.</p> <p>Employment is sometimes recorded under the Register of Interests. The Council provided some aggregate data on age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender, religion. Data on education and employment is not collected.</p>
London Borough of Sutton	<p>The Council does not collect most of the data requested.</p> <p>Some employment data is available online under the Register of Interests.</p> <p>The Council holds data on age, gender and ethnicity. However, as they consider it personal data, it was not shared with us.</p>

LOCAL AUTHORITY	FOI RESPONSE
London Borough of Wandsworth	<p>The Council provided aggregate data about gender, education (categories: prefer not to say, bachelor, masters), employment (categories: prefer not to say, retired, in some form of other employment), disability (yes, no, prefer not to say), age, ethnic background, religion, and sexual orientation.</p> <p>Party affiliation is available online as well as some data on employment on the Register of Interests.</p>
City of Westminster	<p>The Council provided anonymised data on party affiliation and age for all Councillors.</p> <p>Any other data they might hold was not shared as the Council considers it personal data as defined by the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).</p>

The results from the FOI requests show that many councils do not hold any information about who their councillors are. Even the few councils who do hold some information, do not collect it systematically, especially as compliance seems mostly based on voluntary participation.

From the FOI requests, we learnt, for instance, that in the London Borough of Camden there are more female than male councillors, that the most common religion is 'no religion', and that Camden councillors' country of birth can be as diverse as Angola, Bangladesh, Somalia or Zimbabwe. We also learnt that in the London Borough of Westminster the average age of Labour councillors is 47, compared to 55 for Conservative councillors, or that in Richmond 16.7% of councillors declared a disability, 59% are male, and 26% report having no religion.

We also learnt that 54% of Wandsworth councillors are female, 9% report a disability, 70% are white British, 36% have no religion, and 86% are heterosexual. Finally, from Hackney, we learned that most of their councillors are non-White British. Most Hackney councillors have diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Black British, Orthodox Jews, and Asian or Asian British, among others. All these results, despite their partiality, provide a glimpse of how important this type of information can be, to be able to establish how diverse and representative local politicians actually are, especially if this data can be matched to Census data.

To summarise, most councils do not hold comprehensive data on their own councillors, with very few exceptions of specific councils holding some data on characteristics such as ethnicity, age and disability. Data on employment is generally available under the 'Register of Interests' of each councillor's council website. However, in many instances, no employment data is reported.

LGA Local Councillors Census Data

We also contacted the LGA (Local Government Association) to ask about the data they held on London Councils, as part of their Councillors' Census of 2022. On January 24th 2023, we were provided with council-level anonymised aggregate data for all of London's **33** Councils. One limitation of this data, however, derives from its low response rate, with some Councils having only 4 Councillors responding to the ethnicity question, and the highest responding Councils with **24** responses, in two Councils only.¹

The EDI-relevant data collected by the LGA Councillors' Census 2022 comprises aggregate information about the following: party affiliation, employment status (full-time, part-time, etc), occupation (administrative, clerical, secretarial, or sales; lecturer, teacher or researcher; managerial or executive; manual or craft; professional or technical), employment sector (public sector, private sector, charity/community/voluntary sector), highest qualification, sex, gender identity, age, ethnic groups, sexual orientation, long-term health problem, caring responsibilities (child/children, partner, relative, other, none, any). The data collected by the LGA is not publicly available in a disaggregated form.

Having analysed the LGA's data we had to acknowledge that this data also would be insufficient to get a thorough understanding of the representativeness of our locally elected councillors. Not only little data is available, but important information such as their education, class, migratory status, experience of barriers in their activity as councillors is not collected at all. We therefore decided to develop a methodological framework based on a mixed methods research approach to collect otherwise as-of-yet unavailable data.

¹ We thank Stephen Richards from the LGA for providing us with access to the 2022 Councillors' Census data.

PILOT SURVEY RESULTS:

London Borough of Camden

Having established that very little data is currently being collected by councils or publicly available through the LGA on the socio-economic and personal characteristics of councillors, we decided to run a pilot survey in London Borough of Camden. Our aim with this pilot project was to test the success of this methodology in collecting data from councillors themselves.

We chose Camden as one of the most diverse boroughs in London, with only 52% of its population being born in the UK, where only 59.5% of its residents identify as 'white', and where the most common religion is 'no religion' with 34.6% of total residents, according to the 2021 ONS Census data.²

The pilot survey collected socio-economic and personal data on local councillors with two main purposes. First, we tested to what extent councillors are willing to answer questions concerning their personal characteristics and opinions about the challenges they face as councillors. Second, we created a dataset that would allow us to match councillors' general characteristics to the census data of the boroughs they represent. While we would not expect councillors to precisely mirror the communities they represent, as discussed in the introduction to this report, research has shown that politicians' characteristics, such as their gender, ethnicity, income, or class identification have important consequences for policy making, as legislators behave differently depending on their background (Carnes and Lupu, 2015; 2023).

This pilot survey focused on five specific areas capturing the diversity of local councillors:

1. Questions about their personal characteristics;
2. Questions about their citizenship and migration background (if any);
3. Questions about their educational level, socio-economic background, as well as class identity;
4. Questions about their pathways to politics and challenges faced by councillors in general;
5. Questions about the barriers they experience as councillors, as well as the barriers that they think underrepresented people in general experience.

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000007/>

Findings from the Camden pilot survey

We distributed the survey questionnaire³ to all of 54 Camden councillors. To ensure a high response rate, we sent two reminders after the initial email every two weeks. We also called councillors who had a mobile phone number published on the Council's website, left voice and text messages where relevant. We also left a message through Camden Council to those who have not published their mobile phone numbers online.

Out of 54 councillors, 19 answered fully to our survey. This is a remarkable response rate of 35% which is high for surveys with politicians.⁴ While our dataset does not

include all councillors, it can be considered a representative sample on which to draw preliminary conclusions on their composition. Where Census data exists, we compare our findings to those of the 2021 ONS Census. One concern of our preliminary results is that - as with all surveys - certain profiles of individuals are more likely to answer surveys than others. In the next phase of this project, we will address this possible gap in the response rate by engaging in person with councillors to explain to them the importance of this research and ensure their participation, also through the mediation of party representatives, councils, the GLA or the Mayor's office.

Councillors' personal characteristics

The surveyed Camden councillors are most likely to identify as White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British (57%), or as White only (10%), whereas 20% identify as Asian, Asian British, or Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African. An additional 10% identify as Jewish. This data contrasts with data from the 2021 ONS Census, which suggests that only 35% of Camden's regular residents identify as English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British, whereas 26% identify as Asian, Asian British, or Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African.

In terms of councillors' faith, 36.8% identify as Christian, 31.6% have no religion, 21.1% identify as Jewish, with only 5.3% identifying as Buddhist and another 5.3% as Hindu. In this regard councillors broadly reflect Camden's religious

diversity as - according to the 2021 ONS Census data - 35% of Camden's usual residents have no religion and 31% are Christian. No councillor surveyed identified as Muslim, which contrasts with 16% of Camden population identifying under that religious category.

Concerning sexual orientation, 78.9% of councillors describe themselves as straight/heterosexual, with 10.5% identifying respectively as bisexual, gay or lesbian. All councillors surveyed identify with the sex they were registered at birth. No census data is available to match against these findings. The survey shows 63.2% of Camden councillors identify as female and 36.8% as male, against census data of 53% female and 47% male.

³ See Annex for full questionnaire.

⁴ For instance, according to Kertzer and Renshon (2022), for survey experiments on American political elites, the average response rate is only 15%.

Camden councillors are also more likely to be older than the resident population of Camden, with 31.6% being 65 years of age or more, compared to only 12% being that same age group in the usual resident population.

Moreover, 16% of councillors report a disability, that is a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting 12 months or more, a similar proportion (15%) to the Camden population that considers itself disabled under the Equality Act.

Councillors' Citizenship and Migration Background

Overall, 84.2% of councillors were born in England, compared to only 52% of usual Camden residents. 89.5% were born with British citizenship, and only 15% hold a second passport, which in our sample is mostly Irish (66.7% of those who have a second nationality).

councillors responded as follows: 42.1% did not identify as having a migratory background; 42.1% identified as second generation migrants (one or both parents was not born in the UK); 10.5% as third generation migrants (at least one grandparent was not born in the UK); and 5.3% as first generation migrants (moved to the UK as a child or adult).

Moreover, when asked about their identification with any given migratory category, Camden

Councillors' educational level, socio-economic background, and class identity

Asked about if they identified with any social class, 63.2% of Camden councillors reported identifying as middle class, 26.3% as working class, and 10.5% as having no class identity.

Regarding their educational experience, most councillors report having studied in comprehensive and/or sixth form colleges (36.8%), followed by grammar schools (26.3%), and private schools (26.4%). For some context, only 7% of the British population attended private schools (Sutton Trust 2019). Most councillors - 63.2% - have university level education at postgraduate level (e.g. MA, PhD), followed by 21.1% at an undergraduate level. These are categories roughly comparable to the Level 4 category or above of the 2021 Census, in which roughly 49% of Camden residents fall. Only 15.8% of councillors have GCSE-level or no formal qualifications, compared to 20% of the resident population at that educational level. Of those who went to university, 60% attended Russell Group institutions for their undergraduate studies, Oxbridge graduates making 20% of total respondents who went to university.

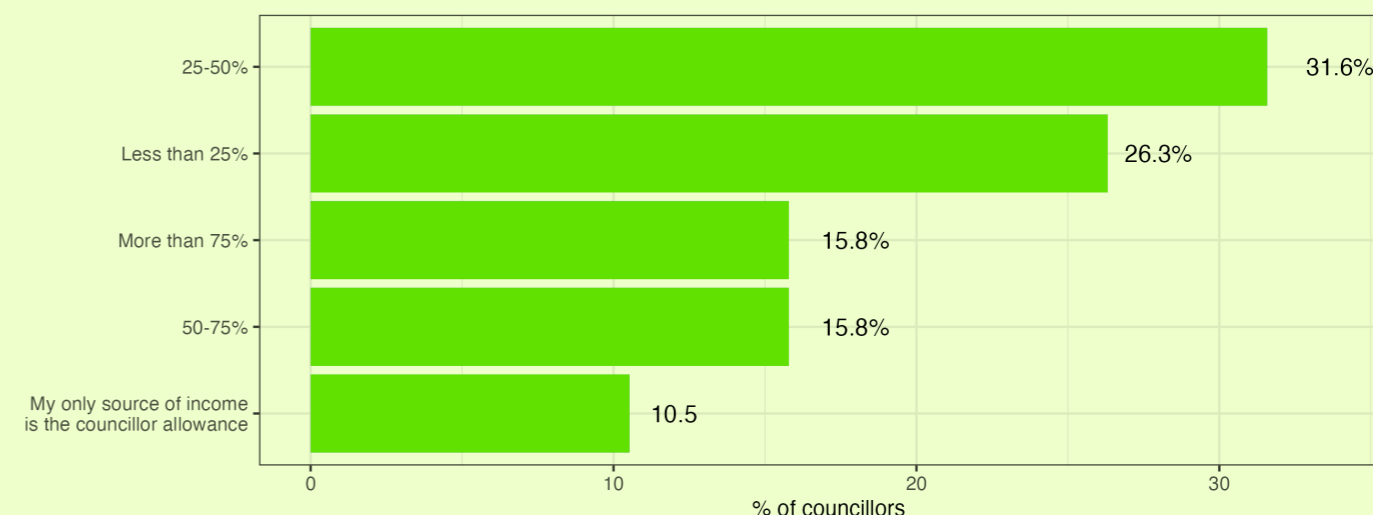
In terms of their occupational class, councillors' working in the manager and professional class are the absolute majority of respondents with 68.4%, whereas 15.8% are retired - compared to 9.1% of Camden residents according to the 2021 Census. A further 10.5% work in the intermediary, self-employed and lower supervisory category. Regarding their sectors of employment, education, charity, human health and social work are the most often cited categories.

We further asked about councillors' housing conditions with the following results: 36.8% reported currently owning their home through a mortgage or loan; 26.3% owning outright their homes; 21.1% live in subsidised rental places (e.g. council houses, social rent); 15.8% rent privately.

Concerning their socio-economic status, we asked councillors two questions regarding their income. First, we asked what percentage of their annual income (before tax) does the councillor allowance they receive account for. The response distribution is as shown in Figure 1

below. The distribution of the percentage of their annual income their councillor's allowance accounts for suggests that for roughly 40% of councillors their allowance accounts for 50% or more of their total annual pre-tax income.

FIGURE 1 What percentage of annual income does the councillor allowance account for?



Source: Survey of Camden Councillors. Annual income refers to before tax. N = 19 councillors.

Second, we asked about any possible other sources of income on top of their allowance, with 35.3% reporting income from full-time employment, 23.5% from part-time employment, and 23.5% from self-employment. Additionally, 17.6% received income from shares, stocks and dividends, with 23.5% also receiving a pension.

In this case, 63.2% of respondents say that councillors should receive an allowance and that the current one is too low, whereas 26.3% responded that councillors should receive an allowance and that the current allowance is about right. Only 5.3% agreed that councillors should be considered full-time workers and receive at least the minimum wage with corresponding benefits. Finally, one respondent suggested allowing councillors to choose if to keep working alongside their councillor positions - and therefore be given an allowance - or alternatively recognise their council work as full-time employment remunerated at least according to the local Living Wage.

In this final part of this section, we presented councillors with the following statement:

“The Independent Panel of London Councils recommends that all councillors should receive a basic allowance of at least £12,014 a year.”
What statement best reflects your views on councillors allowances?

Councillors' pathway to politics

In this brief section of the survey we asked councillors about the age in which they first joined a political party to understand when their involvement in party politics first became concrete. The average age is 27, although the median is 20, suggesting a skewed distribution by some outliers in our sample. The average and median age for standing in an election

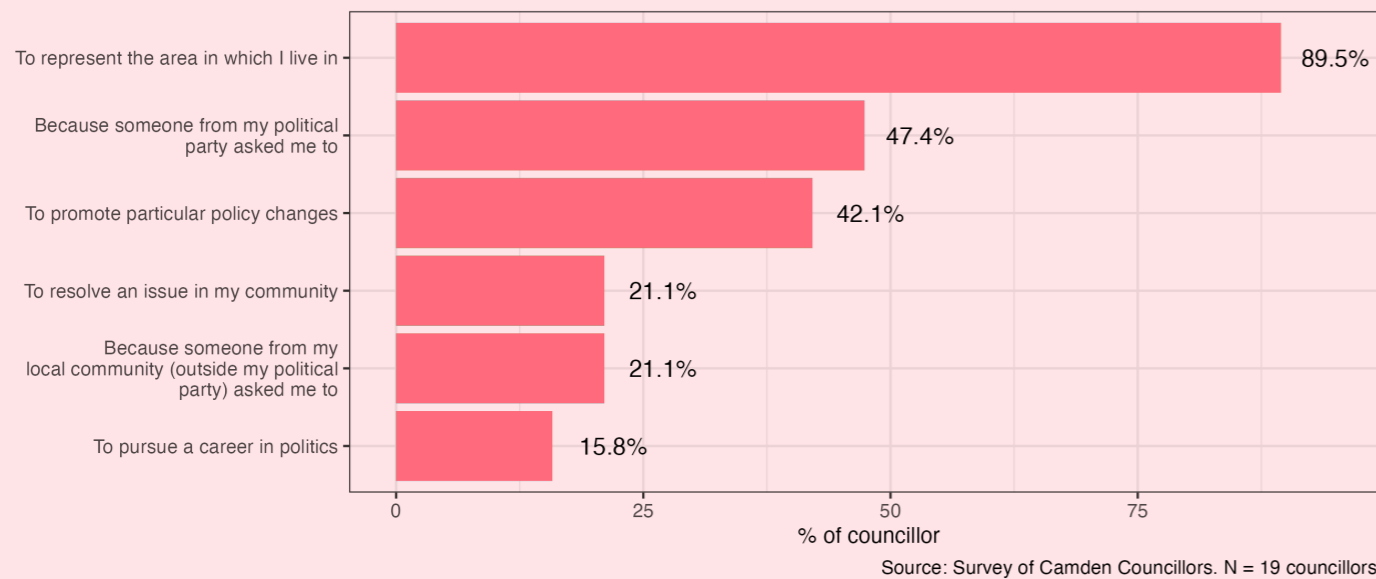
as local council candidate was 40, while the average age when councillors first got elected was 41 (median of 40). To sum up, the data suggests that most councillors engaged early in party politics, around their early 20s, but - on average - 20 years passed between them first joining a party and finally running for local office.

Barriers to becoming a councillor

In this section we asked about the main reasons for becoming a councillor. As Figure 2 shows, 89.5% of surveyed councillors responded that they became councillors to represent the areas

in which they live, 47.4% because someone from their political party asked them to, and 42.1% to promote particular policy changes, among others.

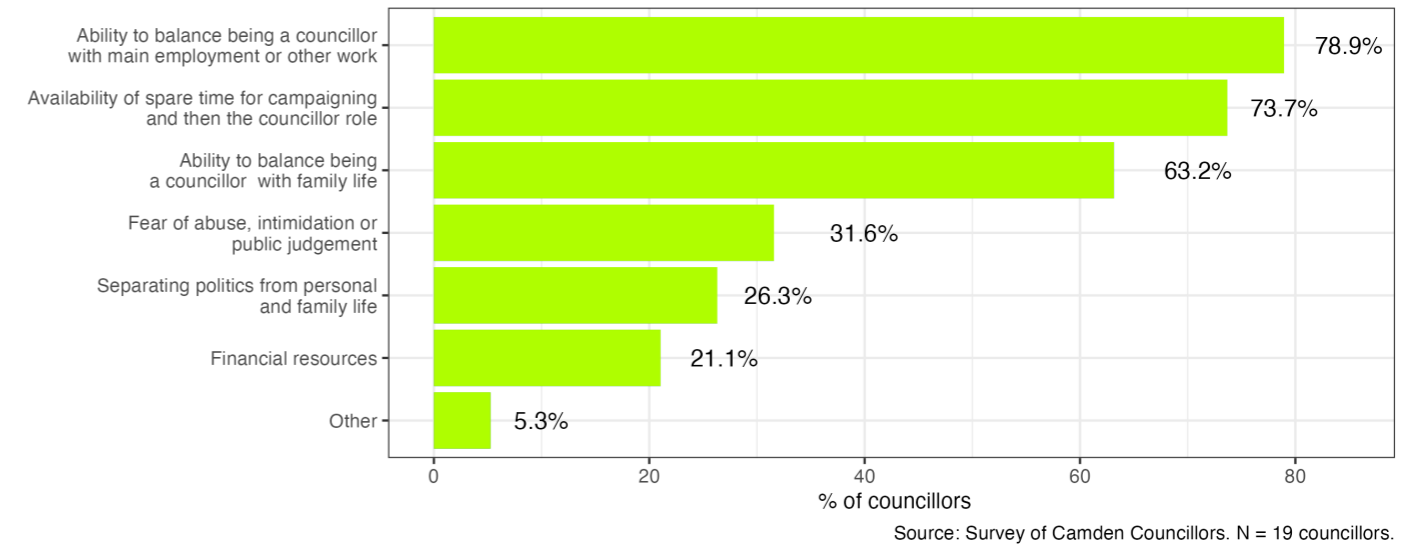
FIGURE 2 What are your main reasons for becoming a councillor?



We continued the survey by asking councillors about two types of challenges. First we asked them about the challenges they face in their jobs as councillors. As shown in Figure 3, 78.9% responded 'their ability to balance being a councillor with their main employment or other work', 73.7% 'the availability of spare time

for campaigning and then the councillor role', 63.2% 'their ability to balance being a councillor with family life', and 31.6% mentioned their 'fear of abuse, intimidation or public judgement'. In the 'other' category, a councillor mentioned antisemitic abuse as one of these challenges.

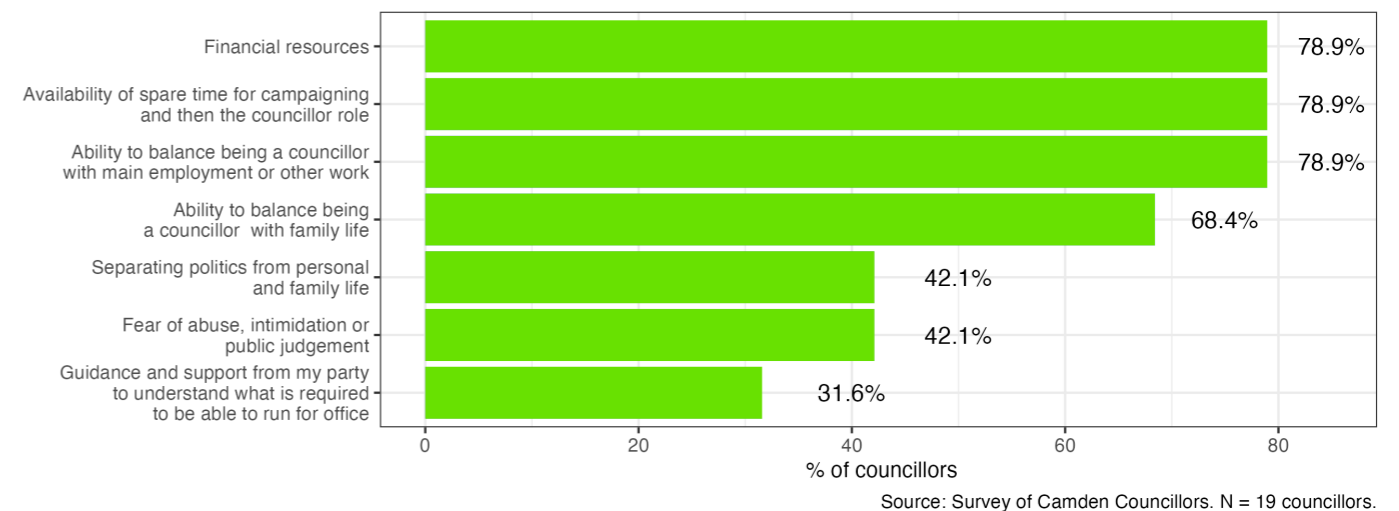
FIGURE 3 What are the main barriers to becoming a councillor that you have experienced?



Second, councillors were asked about the challenges they believe people who are underrepresented in politics more generally face about being a councillor. As shown in Figure 4, 78.9% responded 'their ability to balance being a councillor with their main employment or other work', 'the availability of spare time for campaigning and then the councillor role', and 'financial resources'. Additionally, 68.4% selected also 'their ability of being a councillor with family life', and 42.1% mentioned both 'fear of

abuse, intimidation or public judgement', and 'separating politics from personal life'. In the 'other' category, councillors also mentioned the lack of politically-active networks, and lack of knowledge about possible benefits from being a councillor as additional challenges that underrepresented people face. Tellingly, current councillors think that underrepresented groups are especially financially vulnerable, and that is one of the main reasons for them not engaging more with local politics.

FIGURE 4 What are the main barriers to becoming a councillor that you think people underrepresented in politics face?



100% of councillors agreed with the following statement:

“A diverse and representative body of councillors positively impacts the policy making process.”

The very last question of the survey asked councillors about any comments they might have on any barriers that people from underrepresented backgrounds face when seeking to become local councillors. Below are a few excerpts from those responses:

“[...] I mostly became a councillor because existing councillors asked me to stand and because there was a quota for women and they needed more women.

So quotas and positive action can make a difference because it makes those who are already involved in politics reach out to others who aren't and try harder to include them.”

“It's often a thankless task as you can't please everyone and are pretty powerless, also much of the work concerns committees and reading and understanding reports on areas of work you know little about.”

“Even councillors now get personal abuse and threats. I've had a death threat and the support you get from your council is minimal”.

Finally, some councillors mentioned ‘transparent party selection’, ‘local experience of hate crime’ as well as a ‘lack of obvious role models’ as some of the challenges people from underrepresented backgrounds might face.

Case Studies

The diversity and wealth of experience of local councillors cannot be captured by quantitative survey analysis alone. We conducted in-depth interviews with three local councillors to show some of the challenges as well as opportunities of being a local councillor.

CASE STUDY 1:

Councillor Shah Miah

Shah is a lawyer by profession. One day, he was at home and a couple of local Camden councillors were leafleting. He offered to distribute some leaflets in his building. At the time, he was unemployed and had more time to volunteer. The councillors encouraged him to be more involved, so he joined the party, attended branch meetings and a few months later, he was elected BAME officer and treasurer.

He started canvassing with the local party teams but did not think then of becoming a councillor. However, just before the last election, one councillor retired. When the vacancy appeared, local branch members encouraged Shah to stand for it. He was selected and then elected. Shah reflects that he probably got involved in politics “by accident” - if it was not for that day seeing local councillors leafleting, he may not have been a local councillor today.

It's the small casework wins that matter

Shah spends most of his time on residents' casework. It's the small wins that matter a lot to residents. He gives the example of a disabled woman waiting for years to have some much needed repairs in her house. After listening to the issue, Shah managed to place an urgent request for the repairs. “She was overwhelmed with joy - after all these years it's all done!”

Shah uses his legal background to set up advice surgeries for residents and he enjoys getting good outcomes for residents, especially on housing which is the main issue locally in his experience.



“It's obviously easier if you're privately wealthy”

Shah thinks Camden is representative as a council in general, but would like to see more working class voices involved in local democracy. White working class people, especially young people, are still underrepresented in his view.

Resources are the main barrier to becoming a local councillor. Shah mentions councillors who have two part-time jobs alongside council duties. As someone who is self-employed and has no family responsibilities, Shah found his journey in politics relatively easy. However, he acknowledges that the current allowances are barely enough to pay for a room in a shared flat in central London. Being a councillor is “not a part-time job”, it's “not only a committee meeting and 1-2 cases a week”. Shah thinks that if we want local councillors to “do the job well”, the pay needs to support basic needs.

What's your advice to new councillors?

“It's a very rewarding position. Become active in the branch, work your patch, go campaign and generally put the hours in, you'll get to know the issues and the people, and if you got something to offer, put yourself forward and hopefully get elected!”

Photo: Councillor Shah Miah in his local area.



Photo: Councillor Jenny Mullholland and fellow councillors in Gospel Oak.

CASE STUDY 2:

Councillor Jenny Mullholland

Growing up in a town north of London, she “mostly thought politics was men in suits”. She reflects on turning the radio off when politicians were interviewed as “no one was answering the questions”. Where she grew up, her parents were amongst very few Labour voters in a conservative area and she had the sense her views were underrepresented in local government.

Jenny then lived in the Middle East and saw ‘a lot of inequality’ which motivated her to become more political. She was also motivated after seeing her friends working in the voluntary sector and civil service speaking about the impact of austerity. After moving to London for work and joining the party some years later, she started doorknocking and building connections locally. She helped local residents and saw how casework made a difference. Then, the local

council leader encouraged her to stand as a councillor, part of a drive to get more women involved in politics. This coincided with a by-election in the ward she lived in.

“The most popular name for a local councillor is John”

Jenny thinks a lot has changed for the better in terms of local politics representation, especially on socio-economic background. However, there is a need to increase diversity within local wards. She gives the example of her own ward where there are three councillors identifying as white, while the area has a large Somali and Bangladeshi population. She speaks about how some residents approach councillors due to seeing someone look like them in politics and therefore have more trust to contact them.

“If I can only achieve one thing, it would be to make members of the public realise that councillors and (council) officers are people, they’re human beings.”

Jenny spends “a lot of time talking and listening to people”. This is the most rewarding part of being a local councillor. The one-to-one conversations with residents on the doorstep, having coffee with local organisations and attending community events are what keeps her motivated in politics.

There is “never a dull moment in local politics”. Between volunteering to help children to do arts and crafts at local events, to attending local community health events, speaking to residents about damp and mould issues, making recommendations to foster carers, scrutiny committees and the internal Labour group meetings, there are always several things on the agenda at once.

A lot of her work focuses on making the council more accessible to residents. For instance, Jenny gives the example of a project to pedestrianise a street, where she

pushed for the consultation to be available in different community languages, for sheltered accommodation to receive paper copies and for a market stall to engage residents. Jenny wants to break down the barriers of “us and them” between councillors and council officers and council residents.

“To be able to give your best, you have to look after yourself a bit.”

Although she did not find it difficult to enter politics, Jenny faced challenges after she was elected. She was employed full-time alongside her council role and the work became unmanageable. From personal experience, Jenny speaks about the risk for councillors to become overwhelmed, and the importance of planning ahead on how to balance council work with employment or other responsibilities. She would like to see more support for councillors in terms of access to work, parental leave policies and childcare.

What’s your advice to new councillors?

“The main lesson that I’ve learned is that any grief you get is usually not directed to you as a person. Remember not to take anything personally and that anything you do is positive.”

Photo: Councillor Jenny Mullholland in her local area.



CASE STUDY 3:

Councillor Heather Johnson

At a local cafe in her ward, Regent's Park, Heather had many stories to share from her almost 30 years as a councillor. Heather moved to Camden when she was 4 years old. Her father was a Labour councillor locally for a few years, so politics was a topic at the dinner table. However, Heather did not start as a 'career politician'. She started being involved in politics through the trade union movement and left a career in science to campaign for tenants' rights. However, she reflects that the fact her father was politically active gave her confidence.

After many campaigns on housing, she became active in her local party. Fellow party members asked her if she would consider standing as a candidate for local council, but initially she was not sure due to her employment. A change in her employment meant that she put her name forward and was elected in 1994.

"Camden has always been a diverse council"

Coming from a working class background, Heather thinks that class has not been a barrier locally and there have always been strong voices from working class communities in the council. However, some things have changed with time - there are 'a lot more women' as well as increased racial and ethnic diversity in the council now than 30 years ago.

"You've got to have the right kind of support"

Although she did not experience many barriers herself and her work was flexible to allow time for council duties, Heather reflects on the challenges faced by younger councillors as well as women with caring responsibilities in particular. "That's where the allowances are important" and provisions for childcare support. In her view, political parties have made significant progress in electing women councillors, but there needs to be appropriate support to be able to keep women in politics.

Every day can be different in the life of a local councillor!

Heather started by being on the housing committee as it was her area of expertise, but later filled in other roles, including planning and children's services. From campaigning on local issues such as social housing and the impact of HS2 to guaranteeing the pensions fund is safe for local government workers, a day in the life of a local councillor is never quite the same as another. Heather emphasises that there is a lot more to local politics than it is perhaps seen by residents. She is on the board of a number of voluntary sector organisations, is involved with local schools and the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, amongst others.

Photo: Councillor Heather Johnson in the local area.

What's your advice to new councillors?

"Choose your area of interest well. I would also say, don't be afraid to take on something new!"

CONCLUSION

Representative politicians are essential to ensure citizens' satisfaction and engagement with the functioning of democratic institutions. Yet, there is a clear gap in our knowledge about who our local representatives are. In this report, we have shown that currently no data source can fill this existing gap. Given these data limitations, we developed a methodological framework to ask councillors questions on their socio-economic and personal characteristics, as well as their opinions on the challenges they and underrepresented groups face.

The results of our Survey of Camden Councillors has shown that this knowledge gap can be filled successfully. With a 35% response rate, we have been able to enhance our understanding of who Camden's local representatives are, what are the main challenges that they face, and if they are representative of their own communities. While this is only a small sample, limited to one borough, it shows the possibilities for public debate and awareness about the state of our democratic institutions that could arise from a more comprehensive knowledge of who our representatives are.

If further funding becomes available, the next phase of this project can implement the learning from this pilot to finalise a survey instrument that can be used annually London wide for all councils and match the results with relevant census data. If this survey was distributed by the GLA and the Mayor's Office as part of their civic data initiatives, we can drastically improve our current response rate and reach the majority of elected councillors. This new data source, which will also include data about the challenges involved in being an elected local councillor, will allow us to present policy suggestions to enhance the inclusion of underrepresented groups in the political arena.

Democracy works only if citizens feel represented by those who hold elected office.

The main barrier to that - as we have shown - is that we do not currently have that information to assess if elected councillors represent their communities. With this first step, in this report we have shown that this gap can be filled, and that such knowledge matters. In turn, this knowledge will form the basis to spur change into the way councils and political parties work to ensure broader engagement and more representative elected councillors. Knowledge can lead to change. It is an opportunity that should not be wasted.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Carnes, N. and Lupu, N. (2015). Rethinking the Comparative Perspective on Class and Representation: Evidence from Latin America. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(1), 1-18.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12112>

Clery, E., Curtice, J., Frankenburg, S., Morgan, H., and Reid, S. (eds) (2021) *British Social Attitudes: The 38th Report*. London: The National Centre for Social Research. <https://bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-38/democracy.aspx>

Carnes, N. and Lupu, N. (2023) *The Economic Backgrounds of Politicians*. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 26 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051921-102946>.

Gergs, C., and Bulat, A. (2020). *Mind the gap An analysis of EU citizens' political participation and representation in the UK*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/> (Accessed April 21st 2023)

Hammoud-Gallego, O., Lawall, K., McRae, I., Moise, R., Wang, S., & Bulat, A. (2021). *London Voices: the journey to full participation*.

<https://www.londonvoices.co.uk>

Kertzer, Joshua D., and Jonathan Renshon. "Experiments and Surveys on Political Elites." *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2022, pp. 529-50,

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051120-013649>

Quilter-Pinner H, Patel P, O'Grady T and Collignon S (2022) *Closing the gap: Parliament, representation and the working class*, IPPR. <http://www.ippr.org/research/publications/closing-the-gap>

Sobolewska, M., and Begum, N. (2020). *Ethnic Minority Representation in UK Local Government (07/07/2020)* - *John Smith Centre*. <https://www.johnsmithcentre.com/research/ethnic-minority-representation-in-uk-local-government-07-07-2020/> (Accessed April 21st 2023)

Sutton Trust (2019). *Elitism in Britain: The educational backgrounds of Britain's leading people*. The Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811045/Elitist_Britain_2019.pdf

Uberoi, E. and Johnston N. (2022). *Political Disengagement in the UK: Who is disengaged?* House of Commons Library, Research Briefing, N.07501, pp. 1 - 71.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7501/>

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR 2023 DIVERSITY SURVEY OF LOCAL COUNCILLORS – Pilot Survey (London Borough of Camden)

This is the questionnaire as it was distributed to Camden Councillors. We welcome further suggestions for further inclusion or changes in the questions for the second phase of this research to be conducted London wide.

Sample: Pilot on Camden Councillors (54 respondents)

Distribution method: Online self-administered survey or phone call/in person

Dear Councillor,

Thank you for taking part in this survey. This survey is a pilot project developed by the Migrant Democracy Project and Polish Migrants Organise (POMOC) financed by the Mayor of London as part of the 2022 Civic Data Innovation Challenge.

SCOPE

The aim of this survey is to collect information on the diversity of local councillors, the conditions and challenges facing local councillors across London. This is an initial pilot survey, which - if successful - will be replicated across all London boroughs. The data will be used to write a report on the diversity and representativeness of local councillors across London.

CONTACT

This survey is conducted by Dr Omar Hammoud Gallego (omar@pomoc.org.uk) and Dr Alex Bulat (alex@pomoc.org.uk)

DATA PROTECTION AND INFORMED CONSENT

The data collected in this survey is processed by Polish Migrants Organise (POMOC) contracted researchers in accordance to POMOC data policy and the Data Protection Act (UK GDPR) 2018.

By taking this survey I consent to my survey responses to be used for the purposes of research as stated above.

SECTION 1: ETHNICITY

Q1: How would you describe your ethnic background? (Census 2021)

- Asian or Asian British
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background, please specify: _____
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
- Caribbean
- African
- Any other Black, Black British, or Caribbean background, please specify: _____
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background, please specify: _____
- White
- English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Roma
- Any other White background, please specify: _____
- Other ethnic group
- Arab
- Any other ethnic group, please specify: _____
- Prefer to self-describe (?)
- Don't wish to answer (?)

SECTION 2: RELIGION

Q2: What is your religion?

- No religion
- Agnostic
- Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Humanist
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Pagan
- Quaker
- Sikh
- Spiritual
- Any other religion, write in [Open Box]
- Prefer not to say

SECTION 3: SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Q3: Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- Straight/Heterosexual
- Gay or Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Other sexual orientation, write in [Open Box]

Q4: What is your sex?

- Female
- Male
- Other

Q5: Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

- Yes
- No, write in your gender identity [Open Box]

SECTION 4: AGE

Q6: What is your age group?

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18 to 25 | <input type="checkbox"/> 36 to 39 | <input type="checkbox"/> 50 to 55 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65 or more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 26 to 29 | <input type="checkbox"/> 40 to 45 | <input type="checkbox"/> 56 to 59 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30 to 35 | <input type="checkbox"/> 46 to 49 | <input type="checkbox"/> 60 to 64 | |

SECTION 5: DISABILITY

Q7: Do you have any physical or mental conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?

- Yes
 No
 Don't know
 Prefer not to say

IF response to question above is YES, then question below:

Q8: Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

- Yes
 No
 Don't know
 Prefer not to say

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-disability-survey-research-report-june-2021/uk-disability-survey-research-report-data-tables>

SECTION 6: CITIZENSHIP AND MIGRATION

Q9: What is your country of birth?

- England
 Wales
 Scotland
 Northern Ireland
 Republic of Ireland
 Elsewhere, write in current name of the country [Open Box with matching option from predetermined list]

Q10: IF Other, then another question with dropdown menu with options.

- Another, write in current name of the country [Open Box with matching option from predetermined list]

Q11: What was your nationality at birth? [Tick as many options as apply]

- British
 Irish
 Other

Q12: IF Other, then another question with dropdown menu with options.

- Another, write in current name of the country [Open Box with matching option from predetermined list]

Q13: Do you hold another nationality?

- Yes
 No

Q14: IF Yes, then another question with dropdown menu with options.

- Another, write in current name of the country [Open Box with matching option from predetermined list]

Q15: Do you identify with any of the following categories?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> First generation migrant (I moved to the UK as a child or adult) | <input type="checkbox"/> Third generation migrant (at least one of my grandparents was not born in the UK) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Second generation migrant (one or both of my parents was not born in the UK) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other migrant identity: _____ |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above |

SECTION 7: SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Q16: Which type of social class do you feel you belong to?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working class | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Middle class | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Another class, please specify [Open Box] | https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39094/bsa33_social-class_v5.pdf |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not have a class identity | |

Q17: How would you describe your occupational class?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managerial and professional | <input type="checkbox"/> Other please specify: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• BSA categories• Census 2021: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Semi-routine or routine | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Retired | https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc/soc2020/soc2020volume1structureanddescriptionsunitgroups |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economically inactive | |

Q18: In which sector do you work?

- Wholesale, retail and motor trade
 Financial services
 Human health and social work activities
 Education
 Construction
 Manufacturing
 Other, please state: _____

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/industryandoccupationenglandandwales/census2021>

Q19: Do you (or your family or household) own or rent where you currently live?

- Own it outright
 Buying it with the help of a mortgage or loan
 Part own and part rent (shared ownership)
 Private rent
 Subsidised rent (e.g. social rent, council)property)
 Live here rent-free (including rent-free in a relative or friend's property)
 Prefer not to say
 Other: _____

Q20: Where were you educated?

- At a comprehensive and/or sixth form college
- Grammar school and/or sixth form college
- Private school, non-boarding
- Private school, boarding
- Other, please specify: _____

Q21: What is your highest level of education?

- A Levels
- GCSEs
- Technical Qualifications
- University Education Undergraduate (e.g. BA, BSc)
- University Education Postgraduate (e.g. Master's, PhD)
- Vocational qualifications
- No Qualifications
- Other please specify: _____

IF response to question above is University Education, then question below:

Q22: In which university did you pursue your undergraduate studies?

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/nss-data-provider-level/>

[List of All UK Universities]

COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCE QUESTIONS

Q23: What percentage of your annual income does the councillor allowance you receive account for?

- My only source of income is the councillor allowance
- More than 75%
- 50-75%
- 25-50%
- Less than 25%

Q24: If you receive income from other sources than the councillor allowance, please tick all that apply

- Full time employment
- Part time employment
- Self-employment
- Own business
- Shares, stocks, dividends
- Income from renting property
- Other, please specify: _____

Q25: The Independent Panel of London Councils recommends that all councillors should receive a basic allowance of at least £12,014 a year.

What statement best reflects your views on councillor allowances?

- Councillors should conduct their duties entirely in volunteer time
- Councillors should receive an allowance but the current allowances are too high
- Councillors should receive an allowance and the current allowances are about right
- Councillors should receive an allowance and the current allowances are too low
- Councillors should be considered full-time workers and receive at least minimum wage with the corresponding benefits
- Any other view, please state: _____

SECTION 8: POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Q26: (For those belonging to a political party) At what age did you join a political party?

[Free text number answer for exact age?]

Q27: At what age did you first stand as a local council candidate?

[Free text number answer for exact age?]

Q28: At what age did you first get elected as a local councillor?

[Free text number answer for exact age?]

Q30: What are the main barriers to becoming a councillor?

a. For me individually

- Availability of spare time for campaigning and then the councillor role
- Financial resources
- Guidance and support from my party to understand what is required to be able to run for office
- Ability to balance being a councillor with main employment or other work
- Ability to balance being a councillor with family life
- Fear of abuse, intimidation or public judgement
- Separating politics from personal and family life
- Other, please state: _____

Q29: What are your main reasons for becoming a councillor? (Multiple choice)

- To represent the area in which I live in
- To promote particular policy changes
- To pursue a career in politics
- Because someone from my political party asked me to
- Because someone from my local community (outside my political party) asked me to
- To resolve an issue in my community
- Other, please state: [free text]

b. For people from less represented backgrounds in politics

- Availability of spare time for campaigning and then the councillor role
- Financial resources
- Guidance and support from my party to understand what is required to be able to run for office
- Ability to balance being a councillor with main employment or other work
- Ability to balance being a councillor with family life
- Fear of abuse, intimidation or public judgement
- Separating politics from personal and family life
- Other, please state: _____

Q31: Which of the following statements best reflects your views?

"A diverse and representative body of councillors..."

- Positively impacts the policy making process
- Negatively impacts the policy making process
- Has no impact on/is not relevant the policy making process
- Other, please state: _____

Q32: Do you have any additional comments on any of the barriers people from underrepresented backgrounds face if wanting to become a local councillor?

[Free text]

Q33: This is a pilot survey. Our aim is to collect feedback from Camden councillors to be able to replicate the survey London-wide in future. Please use this space to write your feedback about the survey.

Were there any questions you think should be asked which were not asked?

Any feedback on the survey's questions?

[Free text]

END OF SURVEY

FINAL TEXT: Thank you for taking some time to answer this survey. Data from this survey will be essential to study the representativeness of local councillors across London, what are the conditions they face, and existing barriers - as well as solutions - for increased political engagement from all London communities.