



## **Council elections – what to look for**

Local body elections are underway. Candidates are being nominated and the leaflets are in the letterbox ready for voting in September.

Voters are looking at the candidates and considering their vote based on their aspirations for their local community.

Businesses are a key part of every community and will closely scrutinise candidates' promises, because local government has a big impact on local business.

Local businesses –which are overwhelmingly small businesses – have legitimate questions for candidates, including:

- Are council policies helping small businesses survive and grow?
- Is rates money being spent responsibly?
- Are rates higher for small businesses than for other voters?

It's not widely known that small businesses pay a disproportionately high share of rates in most communities.

Many councils impose business differentials where businesses pay higher rates than households; over the whole country, this results in small businesses paying nearly half the entire rates bill.

Businesses do not receive extra services for this extra rating burden.

A key question business voters should ask of candidates is whether they support higher rates for small business or whether they support removing the business differential

Whether rates money is being spent responsibly is a related question.

Local government has the responsibility of spending rates money on local infrastructure: footpaths, local roads, reticulated sewerage and water pipes and so on.

Many voters consider that such public goods should be councils' main focus, and spending on other things should have a lower priority.

Small business voters will want to know whether candidates' main spending priority is on local infrastructure - or things like sponsoring sports teams or arts events, event management, social subsidies, international travel for councillors and so on.

Responsible spending by councils keeps rates stable; less responsible spending brings continually increasing rates.

The question of whether council decisions are helping small businesses survive and grow is important.

Council decisions such as issuing or declining resource and building consents, the level of associated fees, planning, zoning, land supply and other decisions can have a big impact on local business and local development.

Business voters will be very interested in what candidates say about this.

Councils have important role in facilitating business-friendly cities. This includes things like fair rates, reliable infrastructure, and lowering council barriers to doing business

Local businesses will want to ensure the election of candidates who respect business needs and aspirations and who intend to treat the business community the same as other communities under their authority.

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