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Garry Kitchin : Why Pirate Party UK members should stand in the 2018 Local Elections [1]

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This year there will be local elections electing over 4,000 Councillors. This article will argue that the Pirate Pirate UK should fully contest them.

Why should I stand as a Pirate Candidate in my local area?

Elections can very hard for small political parties. They can cost a lot of money, and stretch a small membership to breaking point. History would point to very little success for all this effort. So why do it?

Smaller political parties suffer greatly from a lack of recognition among the general public. This is true of the Pirate Party UK too. Those who follow politics closely have probably heard of the party, but would struggle to know its key messages. Amongst the much larger group of voters, who only switch on politically for a few weeks before an election, I suspect the name of the Pirate Party doesn't even register. The only way to improve this is to get out ourselves and spread the message. No-one else will do this, so if we won't do it, no-one will.

This short period of voter's attention is key. Every candidate that stands for the Pirate Party is another name and logo on every single ballot paper in that area. When people see Pirate candidates alongside Labour, Conservative and the Lib Dems, it sends a message that we have arrived and that a genuine alternative, not just another colour to pick from, is ready.

During a local election campaign it is very common for local papers to approach candidates for perhaps a 100-200 words statement that is printed or published online before the election day. Some areas arrange a hustings, where candidates can attend and speak to people in the community. Each of these should be organised so that every candidate gets equal time and status.

For those wanting to do a little more, there is canvassing and leaflets that can be employed. It's really easy to agree with party members on private forums, but that doesn't achieve a single vote. Far more is learned by talking to people face to face or dropping them a leaflet so they can reach us. The people out there who votes we are seeking probably don't follow our Facebook feeds, nor read a chat on Discord. We need to talk to them and find out what issues they face in the community. We need to explain to them how our policies can help them.

The great news is that in local elections far more people are willing to support non-mainstream candidates than in general elections. In many wards mainstream parties take voters for granted under football team politics. By actually making the effort to talk to people out in the open, it can result a gaining many votes.

Local elections are not about running the country, but electing community representatives that people can trust to help them navigate council services. Voters are willing to support independent candidates or candidates from smaller parties if they feel they can trust them – something only done by meeting people.

Local elections are a fantastic bow-first launch for the Pirate Party UK. They can be tricky, but we can gain a lot of ground in one go. Apart from the transport costs of getting signed paperwork to the Electoral Services in your local authority in person, there literally need not be any other costs incurred. For those wanting to do more social media campaigning, such as targeted Facebook advertising, this can be a cost of tens of pounds. If leaflets are wanted, a ward of 12,000 houses would costs hundreds of pounds. However, a smaller number, a few thousand that a person can deliver by themselves, can be done for tens of pounds too. Canvassing door-to-door has limits on how many people you can meet as a lone candidate, or with few helpers. However, I highly recommend some canvassing due to the high quality of feedback and value in understanding the issues most pertinent to your electorate.

One thing I have omitted is how much fun standing for election is. The above list of activities should not be seen a chore. Seeing your name on a ballot paper alongside the logo of the party who's values you uphold feels great. Talking to voters can result in some negative feedback for sure, but it's amazing how many people are really happy to listen to you and the good conversations make up for any bad ones. Finally, for anyone interested in electoral politics, nothing beats being at the count itself. It's a very special atmosphere and it's a privilege to be there at the heart of our democratic process.

So ask yourself, do you really want to promote the values of the Pirate Party? If you do, really think about standing in the local elections. It's not that hard, and myself and the Pirate Party UK Leadership will support you every step of the way. During an election, instead of spending a few hours chatting on Discord about how much you agree with other Pirates, go out there and drop a few leaflets through letter boxes. Engage the electorate and enjoy the experience.

If you are interested, please get in touch via any of the contact points - Discord, e-mail or the website.

Best wishes,

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