



Using local council elections to advance your campaign

The run-up to an election is a great time to secure commitments from politicians. Candidates standing to be local councillors are trying to out do each other and appeal to voters so tend to be much more responsive and amenable when they're in campaigning mode.

There are plenty of ways you can use your local election to make progress on getting the council to go pesticide-free. A key part of any pre-election campaign is to create a local buzz about the issue so that candidates feel like they are hearing about it all over the place. Here are some top tips:

1. Find out when your next local election will be taking place

Local councils vary enormously in terms of how often they are elected. While some councils (such as those in London) hold elections for their entire membership every four years, others elect just a third of their councillors annually. Find out when your next local council elections will take place and how many candidates will be up for election by searching online or contacting your local council.

2. Ask political parties to include a commitment to going pesticide-free in their local manifesto

The main political parties will often publish a manifesto ahead of local elections. Sometimes it will apply just to your local area while on other occasions it may cover a whole city and therefore encompass many councils. While it is no guarantee, getting a commitment to going pesticide-free into a political

party's manifesto is an excellent way of making it more likely that they will take action if elected.

Prioritise including a pesticide-free commitment in the manifesto of the party most likely to win control of your council. While it can be good to include it in as many manifestos as possible, sometimes having it in the manifesto of a losing party can put off other parties (for example, a Conservative Council may be put off implementing a policy that was included in the local Labour Party manifesto) so do think carefully.

Parties usually publish their manifesto a couple of months before elections and will start writing them a month or so before. Do reach out to the local offices of political parties as early as possible. Three months before a local election is ideal.

3. Contact your existing local councillors to see if they will make a public commitment to making the council pesticide-free if re-elected

Reach out to your existing councillors either by email or phone. You should be able to find their contact details on your council website. It makes sense to start with the councillors who represent the ward where you live since you will be voting directly for them. Your ward councillors will usually hold a weekly 'drop-in surgery' so find out from your council when this is held and go talk to them about whether they would support going pesticide-free.

You could also try contacting councillors that currently hold relevant positions in the Cabinet such as head of the environment committee. Ultimately it is worth contacting all existing councillors but be prepared



for them to push back saying they will only speak to people who live in their ward. A good response to this is that going pesticide-free is a decision made by all councillors so it makes sense to talk to them about it.

Ask councillors to commit publicly to going pesticide-free if re-elected and, as an incentive, tell them that you will publicise their promise to other local voters. They can make their public commitment on social media, on their website (if they have one) or through the local press.

If you are struggling to get commitments from councillors of a particular political party, find out if councillors elsewhere from that party have committed to or (even better) have actually gone pesticide-free. This might persuade your councillors that going pesticide-free is not against the official position of their political party.

Here is a quote from PAN UK that you can include in any emails you send to councillors:

“Since 2015, more than eighty councils around the UK have ended, or significantly reduced, their pesticide use in urban spaces. There are plenty of safe and sustainable non-chemical alternatives to pesticides available, and many towns and cities around the UK and beyond have proven that going pesticide-free is possible.”

There is some more sample text at the end of this guide.

4. Get other local residents and businesses on board

Publicise your pre-election campaign to others in your local area and find a way for them to show their support for your efforts. The easiest ways to do this is to create a petition calling on all candidates to commit to making the area pesticide-free if elected. Online petitions aren't always great for targeting just people in your area so you may want to stick to a paper petition. If you do want to do an online petition (so that it can be shared on social media) then you can

create one using a petition site such as [change.org](https://www.change.org). As long as you make sure the petition text is identical, then you could even promote petitions both online and offline and combine the signatures when you hand them in.

To collect signatures offline, consider running a stall at local events or see if local businesses or community spaces might promote it. Some local business may give you permission to do a few hours on their premises talking to customers and collecting signatures. You could even try knocking on doors in your area but only if you feel confident and safe to do so.

When you have enough signatures, you can hand them in to local political party offices or at the council itself. The petition should be addressed to all candidates so don't worry if you end up handing in the same signatures to different parties.

5. Attend a local hustings event and ask a question

A hustings is a meeting where election candidates or parties debate policies and answer questions from the audience. There will often be at least one hustings event held in your local area in the run-up to an election. Sometimes there will be even be a few hustings, with each themed to a different topic.

Make sure to attend at least one hustings in your local area and ask a question to put candidates on the spot to explain whether they would support going pesticide-free. Here is a sample question:

“The Council continues to use toxic pesticides to manage weeds across its public spaces. These chemicals have been linked to an array of human health problems, and further deplete our local biodiversity. If elected, will you commit to phase-out urban pesticides and adopt alternative weed management plans?”

Write down each candidate's responses so you can refer to them, or quote them, later.





6. Use the local media to your advantage

Your area probably has at least one local newspaper or even a radio or TV station. Find out how to contact them. Make sure to look out for community-based media as well as more mainstream outlets like the BBC's local stations.

There are a range of ways in which local media can help your campaign including:

- 🔥 Choose a 'launch' date for your pre-election campaign (e.g. one month before the election is a good date to pick) and contact local media asking them to cover it. A short press release could be helpful for this purpose. Include what you're hoping to achieve, why and how it links to the election.
- 🔥 Invite local media to the hustings event and let them know you will be asking a question about going pesticide-free.
- 🔥 If you are able to secure public commitments from candidates (either at a hustings or elsewhere) make sure to tell local media that promises have been made. Coverage in local press will make it more likely that politicians will fulfil their promises once elected.
- 🔥 Tell local media about your petition to demonstrate that there is widespread support in the area for going pesticide-free.

7. Get local like-minded groups on board

You will have a much better chance of raising the profile of your pre-election efforts if you get like-minded groups in your local area to lend their support. Do some research to find out what groups exist and how you might reach out to them. The types of local organisations mostly likely to support your aims are groups which focus on gardening and allotments, growing food, and/or the environment (such as local Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth groups). You might also try local faith-based organisations and more general community-based organisations and centres.

They can show support in a range of ways including:

- 🔥 Telling their members about going pesticide-free and getting them to sign your petition
- 🔥 If you have created an online petition, they can promote it on their website or via social media
- 🔥 Providing contacts or introductions to local journalists, councillors or candidates
- 🔥 Sharing the campaign on social media
- 🔥 Supporting your press release by providing a quote
- 🔥 Attending a hustings event
- 🔥 Lobbying existing councillors or candidates directly



8. Mobilise local celebrities

If your area has any local celebrities or well-known local residents ask them to get involved in the campaign. Good things to ask them to do include:

- 🔥 Spread the word on social media
- 🔥 Provide a supportive quote for a press release
- 🔥 Share the petition
- 🔥 Make an appearance at a stall or event you are running

Sample text

Below is some suggested text for any emails or letters you send to candidates, existing councillors, local journalist and/or like-minded individuals and organisations. However, the more you personalise and target your approach the better:

As a local resident I am deeply concerned about toxic pesticides being sprayed in our parks, playgrounds, pavements and other public spaces.

Many of the chemicals being used have been linked to serious health problems including cancer and Parkinson's. Pesticides are also devastating urban biodiversity by contaminating the natural resources relied upon by wildlife such as birds and bees.

Urban pesticide use is unnecessary and there are lots of safe and sustainable non-chemical alternatives available.

Since 2015, more than eighty councils around the UK have ended, or significantly reduced, their pesticide use, proving that going pesticide-free is possible.

Make sure to follow-up post-election

If your pre-election campaigning is successful then hopefully a few candidates who committed to go pesticide-free will be elected. They will have received kudos (and maybe even votes) for making the promise to go pesticide-free and it is now time to make good on it. Write to congratulate them on their appointment and remind them of their promise. You may also want to connect them with each other so they know they have allies on the council.

Hopefully this is all it will take to get them to act but often it takes more persistence. Give them a few months to get their feet under the table and then get in touch again. Offer to help them drive it forward, treating them as allies rather than targets.

The key thing is not to give up until they act!



Brighton and Hove Environmental Hustings

There are a number of other campaigning resources and further information about the wider Pesticide-Free Towns Campaign on our website at:

<https://www.pan-uk.org/pesticide-free>



It doesn't have to be this way...

Help PAN UK make our towns and cities pesticide-free

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