

## **Community Radio Awards 2025**

### **Entry for Elections & Political Coverage of the Year**

#### **Vote WNC: NLive Radio**

On Thursday 1 May, West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) held its second ever election. Votes were counted the next day.

NLive Radio, in collaboration with journalism students from the University of Northampton, staged a six-hour live election results programme, broadcast from the count itself. The programme ran from 2pm-8pm on Friday 2 May. The students presented, produced and reported the show. There were bulletins every half hour and an X feed.

The first WNC, elected in 2021, had been 66% Conservative, 20% Labour, with a smattering of Liberal Democrats and Independents. Reform UK had no councillors. The 2025 election turned that on its head. Reform UK became the majority party with 55% of the seats. The Conservatives dropped to 22%, with Labour, the Lib Dems and Independents making up the rest. The Conservative, Labour and Lib Dem leaders all lost their seats.

#### **Criteria 1: Presentation and quality of entry**

Evidence provided in this document and the attached audio.

#### **Criteria 2: Identification of the target audience and engagement with that audience**

NLive Radio's core audience is aged 30-50 and lives in Northampton. They have a strong interest in Northampton and in local issues, but they are not necessarily well-versed in councils.

An essential part of the first 90 minutes of the programme – before the results started to be declared – was to explain straightforwardly the role of the council and why it mattered. Two-ways with reporters therefore included an overall view of council services and detailed looks at potholes, fly-tipping, housing, adult social care and child protection.

In the two weeks before the election, the students had followed a range of candidates around the campaign trail and interviewed members of the public about their views. The concerns the students picked up about potholes and flytipping led to the decision to prioritise those topics in the two ways, along with the high-cost areas of adult social care and child protection. The radio audience was directed towards the X feed accompanying the programme, while the X posts in turn directed viewers back to NLive Radio. Mindful the audience would normally hear music at the time the programme was broadcast, songs were periodically played throughout.

#### **Criteria 3: Planning the Coverage**

The count was held on Friday 2 May. The first results were expected from 2.30pm onwards. Council officials hoped to have a final result by 7pm. We therefore planned a programme from 2pm to 8pm. WNC initially offered to accredit just two reporters and refused a request to broadcast the programme from the count. Negotiations changed this, enabling us to broadcast the programme from the acceptance room at the count (where successful councillors were taken to sign the paperwork) and to accredit three reporters within the actual count hall next door on a rotating basis. A rota of presenters, bulletin readers, producers and reporters was drawn up. Bulletins were scheduled every half hour.

The scene-setting two ways and a series of packages from the campaign trail were commissioned to fill the first 90 minutes. Students created graphics for each ward, ready to tweet all the results as they came in. We spoke to all the political parties to alert them to NLive Radio's presence at the count and to encourage candidates, whether they won or lost, to participate in live interviews. All parties agreed.

#### **Criteria 4: Delivery of the coverage**

Reporters fed back the results to the presenters and bulletin readers, while producers guided the politicians on air. The heart of the programme was the frank, illuminating and often raw interviews with the politicians as they faced up to the prospect of victory or defeat. This brought the human drama and impact of the election alive.

Reform UK said it would only permit one lead candidate to speak. Producers persuaded a second Reform UK councillor to come on the programme. Multiple Labour candidates agreed to do interviews. This abruptly changed early in the afternoon when the party banned all its candidates from doing interviews. Nevertheless, the producers secured one interview with a Labour candidate, conducted after Labour agents held a vigorous row with both the candidate and the programme team. The agents stood over her, gesticulating to her to get off air during the interview. Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Independents and Greens gave interviews readily.

Reform was challenged on its experience, lack of knowledge and about the candidacy of Ron Firman, a candidate who had posted racist social media posts about both the Grenfell fire tragedy and illegal immigrants. The Conservatives were challenged on the reasons for their collapse and the controversies which dogged them locally, most notably the domestic abuse allegations which forced the abrupt resignation of their leader the previous year.

Every result was tweeted, along with video of declarations, photographs and audiograms on [https://x.com/Journalism\\_UON](https://x.com/Journalism_UON)

Although we had to come off air at 8pm before the final results were declared, the social media operation continued to inform the audience, and the final results were tweeted at 9.36pm.

[https://x.com/Journalism\\_UON/status/1918404153379876864](https://x.com/Journalism_UON/status/1918404153379876864)

#### **Criteria 5: Overall quality of the coverage**

NLive Radio performed a significant public service that day for its audience and the voters in Northampton. Our election programme was the only comprehensive coverage of the WNC results. It explained the issues and challenged the politicians. BBC Northampton's drivetime programme managed just two hits, shortly after 4pm and 5pm, from reporters. Its bulletins had a clip of just one politician. It would not cover the election results in depth on air until the Tuesday breakfast show, after the bank holiday. Both BBC Northampton and the local paper did live blogs, but without the powerful interviews with the politicians who prioritised appearing on NLive Radio. The WNC results were not covered that evening by either BBC Look East or ITV Anglia.

The difference in the scale of coverage – and the pivotal public service role being played by a community radio station - was noted by the Shadow Culture Secretary, Stuart Andrew MP, who attended the count and who was interviewed on our programme.



