

Countback elections

What is countback?

A quick, cost effective way to fill a casual vacancy.

Countback allows the council to fill a casual vacancy using a recount of the ballot papers from the last ordinary election instead of requiring an attendance by election.

Council must pass a resolution at its first meeting following the ordinary election to use countback to fill a casual vacancy.

Model resolution

That Council, pursuant to section 291A(1)(b) of the *Local Government Act 1993*, declare that casual vacancies occurring in the office of a councillor within 18 months after the last ordinary election of councillors for the Council on 14 September 2024, are to be filled by a countback of votes cast at that election for the office in accordance with section 291A of the Act and directs the General Manager to notify the Electoral Commissioner for NSW of Council's decision within 7 days of this decision.

Why would a Council choose to use countback?

Pros

- Time efficient:
 - Casual vacancy filled within 49 days or less, whereas a by-election can take up to 3 months
- Cost effective:
 - **Small by-election** >\$50,000
 - **Metro by-election** >\$500,000
 - **Countback election** \$6,000 - \$10,000
- Electorate not required to vote again
- No penalties for electors not voting
- No impact on sitting councillors
- Minimal effort from Council.

Cons

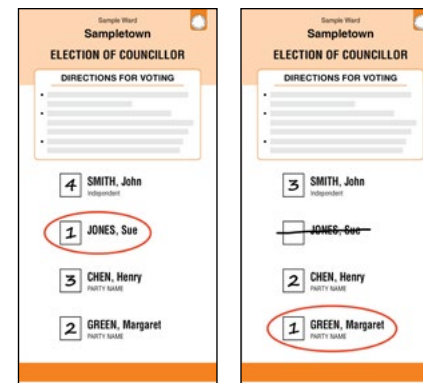
- No new candidates are able to be considered. Only unelected candidates from the previous ordinary election are able to apply
- Unelected candidates from the previous ordinary election cannot campaign to improve their vote.

How does a countback election work?

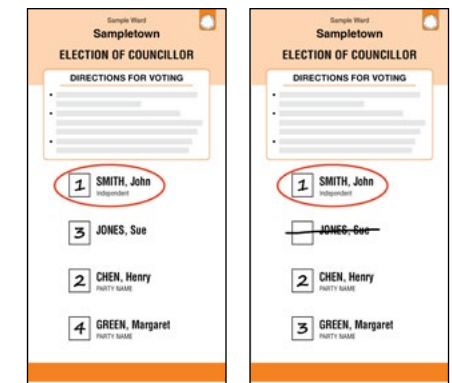
The count is conducted using the same ballot papers from the previous ordinary election which are stored as a data file in our computer count system.

Each ballot paper where the vacating councillor has a preference will be redistributed to the candidate with the next highest preference on that ballot paper by the count system. More examples, including ballot papers with groups, are available on our [website](#).

Example 1: Councillor Sue Jones resigns



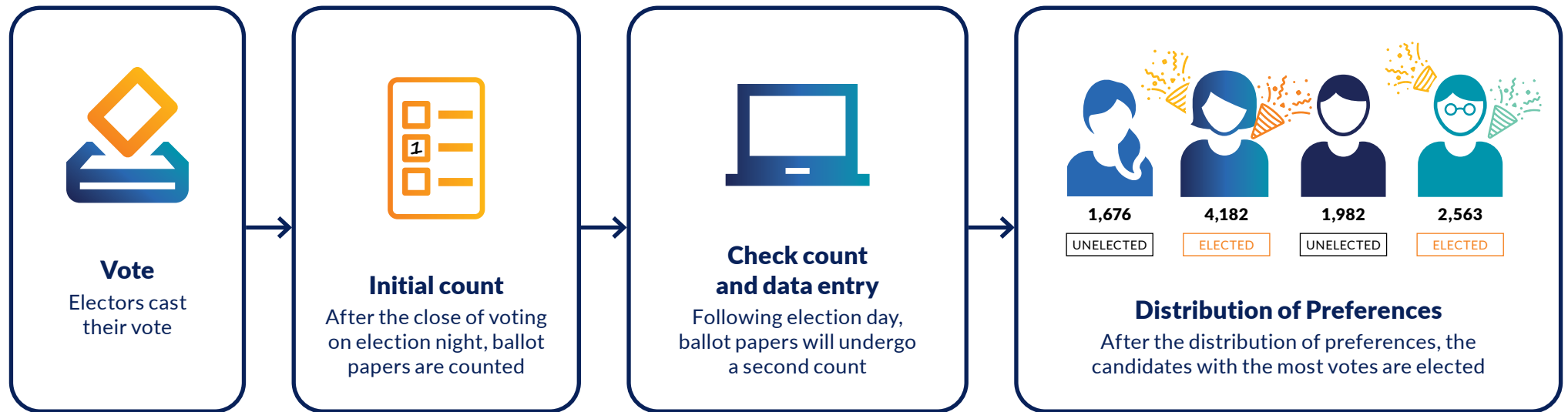
Example 2: Councillor Sue Jones resigns



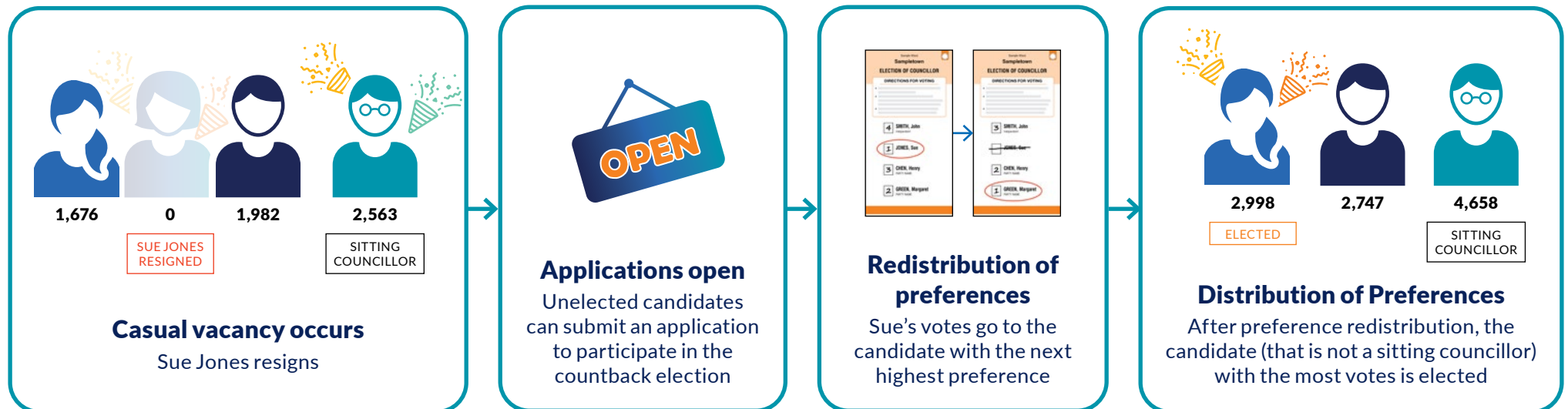
Left: Original ballot paper. Right: Countback preferences

How countback works in detail

Local Government election process



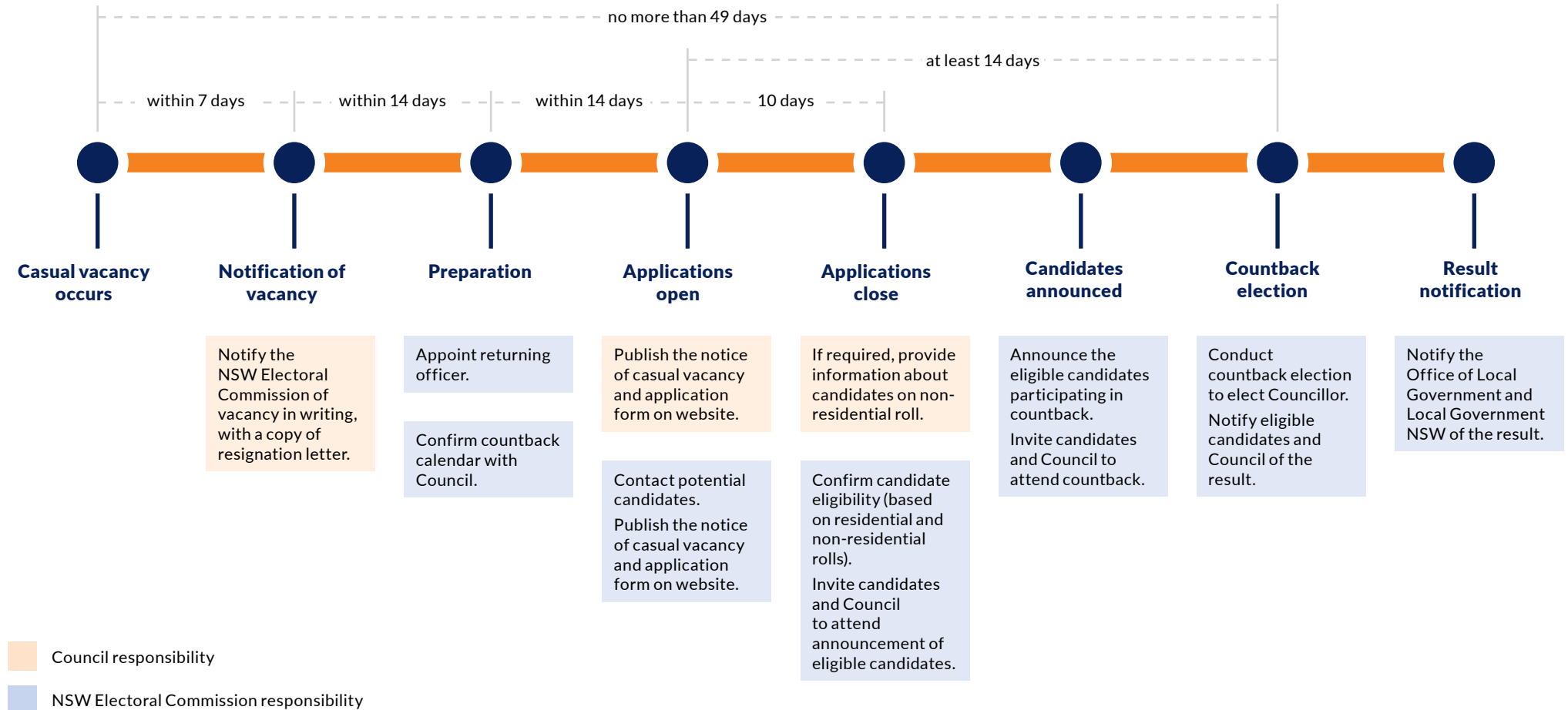
Countback election process



What is the timeline for a countback election?

Countback elections can only be used for 18 months after the Local Government ordinary elections. In the case of the 2024 local government elections, countback can only be used to fill casual vacancies until 14 March 2026.

The following summarises the steps involved in a countback election.



For more information about countback elections visit elections.nsw.gov.au/elections/how-counting-works/countback-elections