

<b>Barriers to Politics Working Group</b>			
<b>REPORT</b>	Barriers to entering and progressing in politics faced due to religion or belief		
<b>KEY DECISION</b>	No	<b>Item No:</b>	4
<b>WARD</b>	N/A		
<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>	Executive Director for Resources & Regeneration		
<b>CLASS</b>	Part 1	<b>Date:</b>	6 September 2017

## **1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1. This report provides context for the Barriers to Politics Working Group to consider as part of the evidence session on barriers related to religion or belief which people face when running and progressing as a local councillor.
- 1.2. This report provides information on research and campaigns which have looked at the perceptions of politics and the barriers people might face whilst running for and progressing in elected office.

## **2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1. The Barriers to Politics Working Group is recommended to:
  - Note the report.
  - Consider the evidence provided at the meeting.

## **3. CONTEXT**

- 3.1. The Equality Act 2010 defines the following characteristics as protected characteristics:
  - age
  - disability
  - gender reassignment
  - marriage and civil partnership
  - pregnancy and maternity
  - race
  - religion or belief
  - sex
  - sexual orientation
- 3.2. Lewisham's Comprehensive Equality Scheme (CES) 2016-20 sets out how the Council will meet its duties to improve the quality of life and life chances of all Lewisham's residents as well as the various equality groups afforded specific protection under the Equality Act of 2010. The scheme contains the following five overarching objectives:
  - tackle victimisation, discrimination and harassment

- improve access to services
- close the gap in outcomes for our citizens
- increase mutual understanding and respect within and between communities
- increase participation and engagement.

3.3. The London Borough of Lewisham has a population of 306,000 (the 13th largest in London and the 5th largest in Inner London). The population of the borough has increased by 30,000 since the 2011. By the time of the next national Census in 2021, the population of the borough is forecast to reach 321,000 (a 16 per cent increase on 2011). Children and young people make up 25 per cent of Lewisham's population, whilst those aged over 65 comprise of 10 per cent of the population.

#### 4. RELIGION OR BELIEF CONTEXT

4.1. At the time of the United Kingdom Census 2011, the breakdown of religions across the London Borough of Lewisham, London and England as a percentage of the total population was as follows:

Religion	Lewisham (% of total population)	London (% of total population)	England (% of total population)
Has religion	63.9	70.8	68.1
Christian	52.8	48.4	59.4
Buddhist	1.3	1.0	0.5
Hindu	2.4	5.0	1.5
Jewish	0.2	1.8	0.5
Muslim	6.4	12.4	5.0
Sikh	0.2	1.5	0.8
Other religion	0.5	0.6	0.4
No religion	27.2	20.7	24.7
Religion not stated	8.9	8.5	7.2

4.2. Christianity was the most populous religion for Lewisham residents. The biggest change between the United Kingdom Census 2001 and 2011 was an 8.4 per cent percentage point reduction in Lewisham residents citing Christianity as their religion (down from 61.2 per cent to 52.8 per cent); this is in line with the position nationwide (in London, the number of residents citing Christianity as their religion reduced from 58.2 per cent in 2001 to 48.4 per cent in 2011, and across England the figure reduced from 71.7 per cent to 59.4 per cent).

4.3. Over a quarter of Lewisham residents have 'No Religion', and this increases to a third of residents in Blackheath, Brockley, Crofton Park, Forest Hill and Telegraph Hill. Between 2001 and 2011 there has been a 6.8 per cent overall increase in the per cent of residents with 'No Religion' (up from 50,780 to 75,155 residents).

4.4. No comprehensive details about the religion or belief of MPs is routinely collected.

4.5. The Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013 did not collect any information on the religion or belief of councillors so it is not possible to comment on the representativeness of local politics.

- 4.6. The only survey collecting information on the religion or belief of local election candidates was carried out by the Welsh Government, with the support of Data Unit Wales, following the May 2012 elections (results from the second survey following the 2017 elections are expected to be published later this year). Of the sample of elected councillors, 83 per cent said they were Christian in comparison to 70 per cent of unelected candidates (this compares to 57.6 per cent of the Welsh population at the time of the UK Census 2011). The survey found that 15 per cent had no religion (compared to 32.1 per cent of the Welsh population at the time of the UK Census 2011) and 2 per cent responded 'Other'. 'Other' comprises the responses Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and 'any other religion' (compared to 2.7 per cent of the Welsh population at the time of the UK Census 2011).

## **5. RELIGION OR BELIEF CAMPAIGNS AND RESEARCH**

- 5.1. In 2015, Baroness Butler-Sloss chaired the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life. The Commission's report 'Life Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good' noted the decline in Christian affiliation and made recommendations to increase diversity in political representation (including representation of different religious groups in the House of Lords). The report also noted that the way different religions are represented can create polarisation, particularly in relation to the way Islam is portrayed in the media.
- 5.2. Former Liberal Democrat party leader Tim Farron recently stood down from his position, citing that a focus on his faith has meant that he found himself "torn between living as a faithful Christian and serving as a political leader".
- 5.3. Cathryn Victoria Haigh in PoliticsMeansPolitics.com, a UK weekly politics magazine, argues that the electorate is voting for "political representation, not religious representation", and for politicians "to speak as though [they] are first and foremost representing everyone, so long as they fall in line with [their] own beliefs, is a potentially dangerous road to tread". A ComRes poll, commissioned by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association in 2016, found broad support for separating religion and politics: 62% of 2000 people across all faiths surveyed said there is "no place in UK politics for religious influence of any kind". A 2012 Ipsos MORI survey of those who ticked 'Christian' on the UK Census 2011 found that 73% strongly agree or tend to agree that religion should not have a special influence on public policy.
- 5.4. A 2015 YouGov poll asked the public whether they view party leaders at the time more positively or negatively because of their religious beliefs. The overwhelming majority (71-75%) said that in each case it would make no difference, but slightly more people were likely to view politicians more positively due to their atheism than negatively, while about the same number of people viewed politicians more positively than more negatively due to membership of the Church of England.
- 5.5. Sam Killermann, author of 'A Guide to Gender: the Social Justice Advocate's Handbook', argues that "in a society where most people (politicians in particular) have some sort of faith that guides their decisions, it's impossible to have a true separation of church and state." Killerman proposed a system where political decisions are made based on arguments "that stand on their own merits without a religious crutch".

- 5.6. Ekaterina Kolpinskaya, Associate Lecturer in Quantitative Methods at the University of Exeter, in her paper ‘Does religion count for religious parliamentary representation? Evidence from Early Day Motions’ studied Jewish and Muslim parliamentary representation. Kolpinskaya found that having a religious minority background alone does not make MPs more likely to raise issues of concern for their respective minority groups and argues that this is because the constraints of party discipline and parliamentary procedure limit the opportunities MPs have to act on behalf of their backgrounds. Kolpinskaya found that having a religious minority background meant that MPs were more likely to raise ‘minority issues’ generally, through analysis of 5,160 Early Day Motions (EDM) sponsored by all politicians from Jewish (38) and Muslim (11) backgrounds elected to the House of Commons between 1997 and 2012 and a control group of 25 non-minority politicians.
- 5.7. In terms of wider community engagement and religion or belief, figures released by the Department for Communities and Local Government published in the report following the last Citizenship Survey in September 2011 demonstrate that there is almost no difference in participation between those with no religion (56%) and Christians (58%). The proportion of Hindus and Muslims participating in civic engagement and formal volunteering was the lowest of all religion or belief groups, at 44% respectively.
- 5.8. Religious groups can provide networks for supporting politicians with shared religion or beliefs: for example, Christians in Politics is an all-party, non-denominational organisation which seeks to encourage and inspire Christians to get involved in politics and public life. Christians in Politics is constituted by the Conservative Christian Fellowship, the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum and Christians on the Left. Christians in Parliament is a group which supports and encourages MPs and House of Commons staff through, weekly Bible study and prayer groups, events and written briefings to bring “Biblical reflection to contemporary political discussions”.
- 5.9. Religion or belief as set out in the Equality Act 2010 also covers non-belief or a lack of religion or belief. The National Secular Society has called for local government meetings to be “conducted in a manner equally welcoming to all attendees”, and has argued that formal council meetings should be conducted without any form of religious worship. In 2012, the High Court ruled that the prayers as part of the formal meeting of a Council was unlawful (under the Local Government Act 1972). The Local Government (Religious etc. Observances) Act 2015 now permits “prayers or other religious observance” as part of business at a meeting of a local authority.

## **6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

- 6.1. It is not possible to identify the representativeness of local and national politics in relation to the religion or belief of politicians as this information is not routinely collected. In instances where the information is requested, it is not always shared.
- 6.2. A national and local decline in the percentage of residents citing Christianity as their religion can be observed: Lewisham saw an 8.4 percentage point reduction in residents identifying as Christian between the 2001 Census and 2011 Census (down from 61.2 per cent to 52.8 per cent).
- 6.3. When surveyed, the majority of respondents believed that religion and politics should be separate, and 73 per cent of Christians strongly agree or tend to agree that religion

should not have a special influence on public policy (based on a 2012 Ipsos MORI survey of those who ticked 'Christian' on the UK Census 2011). Politicians have described being unable to reconcile their religion or beliefs and their political role.

- 6.4. Studies at a national level have found that having a religious minority background does not make politicians any more likely to raise issues of concern for their respective minority groups, however, it does make them more likely to raise 'minority issues' more broadly.
- 6.5. Community engagement does not differ greatly between those with a religion and those who identify as having no religion, however, some particular religious groups are less likely to volunteer in the wider community for example.

## **7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. The equality implications are set out in the body of this report.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. The legal implications are set in the body of the report.