

**DRAFT Report of  
the Lewisham  
Barriers to Politics  
Working Group**

November 2017

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## 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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TBC – recommendations to be agreed at Barriers to Politics Working Group Meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2017

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# 3 ABOUT THE GROUP

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The Barriers to Politics Working Group was established by a Motion to Full Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2017 in the name of Councillor Clarke and seconded by Councillor Elliot.

Lewisham Council established the time-limited all-party Barriers to Politics Working Group to examine barriers to those wishing to enter politics as an elected member and, once elected, the barriers to remaining in post or progressing.

The Group's aims were to identify and investigate the various barriers that exist for individuals wishing to apply for or to undertake the role of a councillor, and to put forward recommendations to Full Council on how to address them. The Barriers to Politics Working Group focused on action the Council could take to remove or reduce barriers for individuals wishing to enter or progress in local politics, rather than action for political parties.

The Group's discussions were broadly focused on barriers in relation to the protected characteristics, the nine criteria by which all people are protected from discrimination by equalities legislation, as defined within the Equality Act 2010:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The Barriers to Politics Working Group invited expert witnesses and considered research conducted by campaigning organisations, charities and public bodies. In addition to evidence sessions, the group conducted surveys of existing councillors and residents to gather perceptions about the role and barriers which people had faced or thought they would face as a local councillor. The survey of residents was sent out through local assemblies, the Lewisham Life online newsletter and was featured in the News Shopper local newspaper. A summary of results from the survey of councillors can be found in Appendix A of this report and a summary of results from the survey of residents can be found in Appendix B.

Due to the wealth of evidence submitted to the Barriers to Politics Working Group it was agreed that reporting deadlines were to be extended from the original September 2017 Full Council meeting to November 2017.

## Membership

**Councillor Suzannah Clarke, Chair** (Labour Party, Grove Park)

**Councillor Jacq Paschoud, Vice-chair** (Labour Party, Bellingham)

**Councillor Maja Hilton** (Labour Party, Forest Hill)

**Councillor Colin Elliott** (Labour Party, Grove Park)

**Councillor Joan Millbank** (Labour Party, Telegraph Hill)

**Councillor Joyce Jacca** (Labour Party, Evelyn)

**Councillor Hilary Moore** (Labour Party, Grove Park)

### The following councillors also contributed to evidence sessions:

**Councillor Luke Sorba** (Labour Party, Telegraph Hill)

**Councillor Sophie McGeevor** (Labour Party, Brockley)

**Councillor Jim Mallory** (Labour Party, Lee Green)

**Councillor Liz Johnston-Franklin** (Labour Party,

**Councillor Paul Bell** (Labour Party, Telegraph Hill)

**Councillor Bill Brown** (Labour Party, Ladywell)

**Councillor James-J Walsh** (Labour Party, Rushey Green)

# 4 WORKING GROUP TIMELINE

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**Full Council (22 February 2017): Motion to establish the Barriers to Politics Working Group**

**First Evidence Session (14 March 2017): The Role of a Councillor**

**Second Evidence Session (18 April 2017): Gender, Age and Caring Responsibilities**

- Gill Kirkup and Sheila Thornton from the Milton Keynes Fawcett Group, co-authors of 'Exploring Women's Participation In Local Politics' gave evidence.
- Rebecca Manson Jones (Candidate in both the recent Brockley by-election and the GLA elections) and Madeline Petrillo (Lewisham Branch Leader) from the Women's Equality Party Lewisham and Greenwich Branch gave evidence.

**Third Evidence Session (27 June 2017): Gender, Age and Caring Responsibilities Cont.**

- Lauren Lucas, Project Lead (LGiU) for the Commission on Women in Local Government, gave evidence.
- A representative from the Lewisham Parent and Carer's Forum gave evidence at the meeting.
- Carers Lewisham provided written evidence which was considered at the meeting.
- Lewisham Positive Ageing Council provided written evidence which was considered at the meeting.

**Fourth Evidence Session (24 July 2017): Ethnicity and Disabilities**

- Ashok Viswanathan, Operations Manager at Operation Black Vote, gave evidence at the meeting.
- Will Davies, Advocacy Service Manager at Lewisham Speaking Up, and representatives from Lewisham Speaking Up gave evidence at the meeting.

**Fifth Evidence Session (6 September 2017): Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Religion or Belief**

- Rev Carol Bostridge, representative from the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), gave evidence at the meeting.

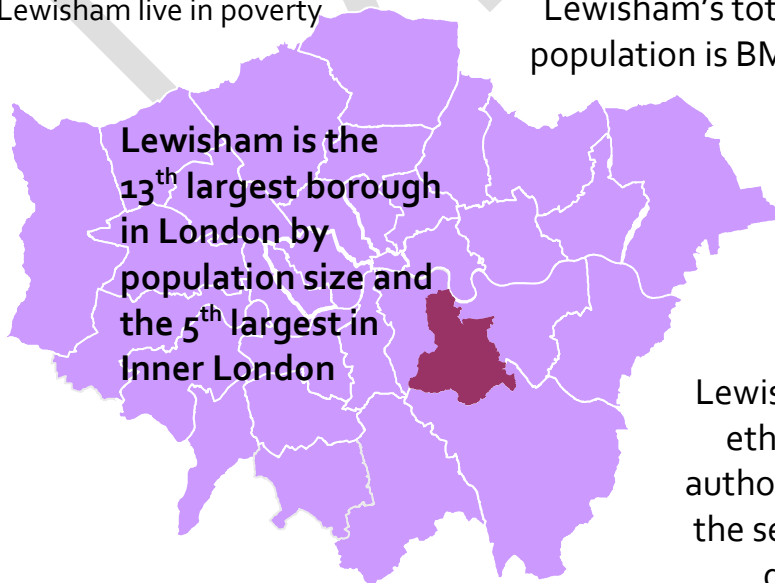
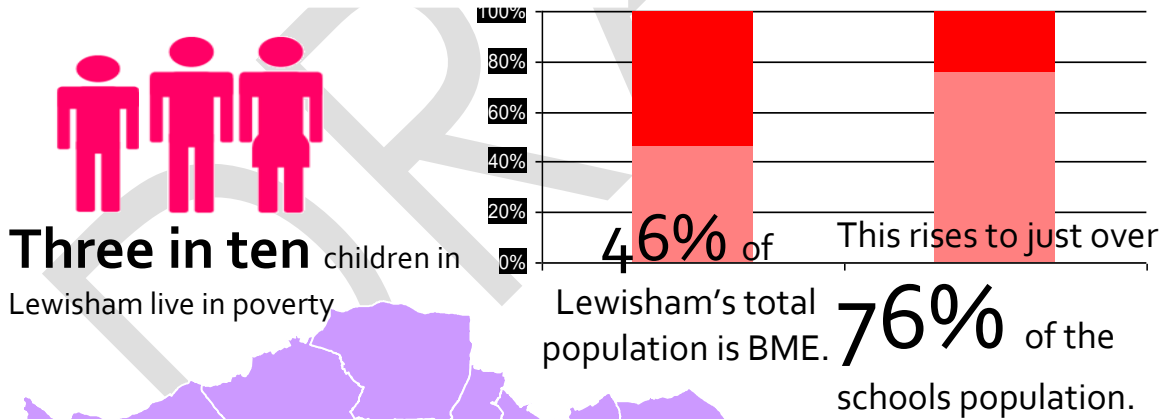
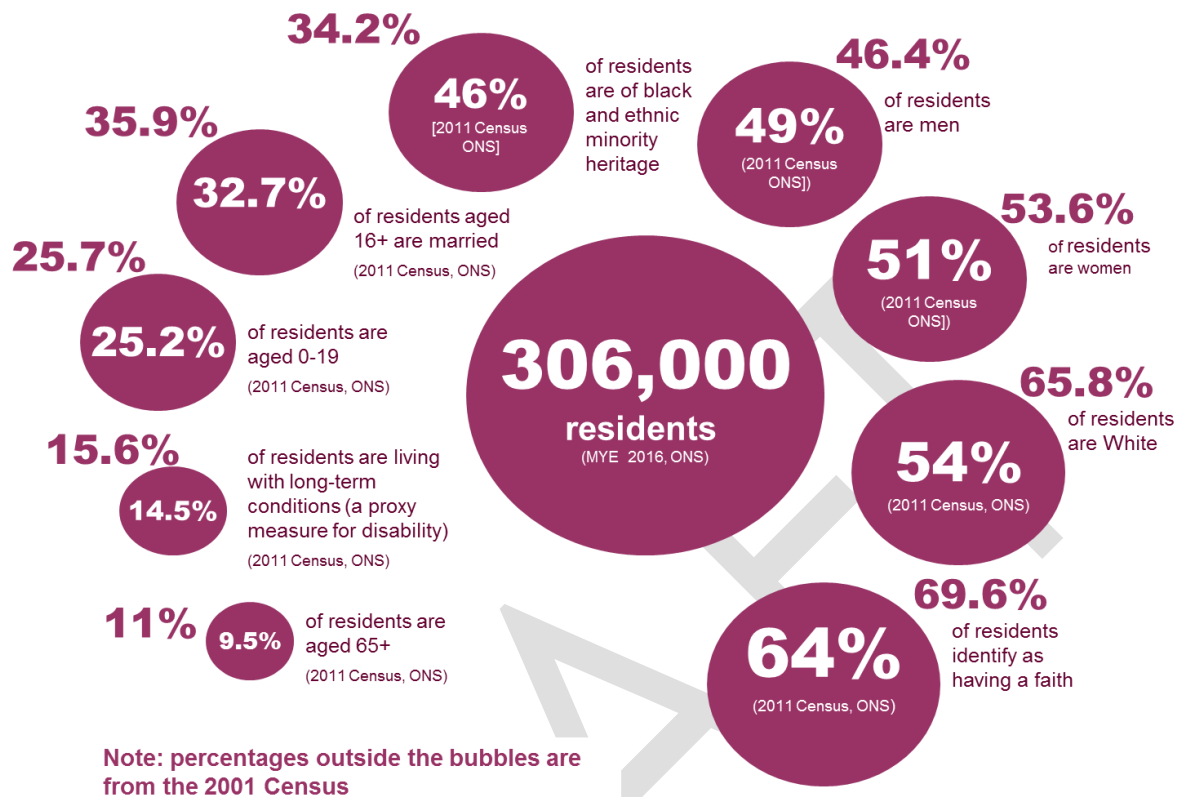
**Young Advisers meeting (9 October 2017): Age**

- Councillor Jacq Paschoud attended a Lewisham Young Advisers meeting to gather evidence on the perception of young people of the role of a councillor.

**Final Barriers to Politics Meeting (6 November 2017): Recommendations**

**Full Council (22 November 2017): Report to Full Council**

# 5 LEWISHAM PROFILE



Lewisham is the 15th most ethnically diverse local authority in the country and the second most ethnically diverse in London

# 6 THE ROLE OF A COUNCILLOR

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The Local Government Association (LGA) explains that a councillor has different roles to balance in the Councillors' Guide 2016/17. The LGA groups the role of a councillor across the following areas:

- Representing the local area
- Community leadership
- Developing council policy
- Planning and regulation

The five main areas of responsibility for councillors is defined in Lewisham Council's Handbook for Council Members (August 2016):

- deciding on overall Council policy and giving the authority political leadership
- making decisions within overall Council policy
- monitoring and reviewing performance in implementing policy and delivering services
- representing the area and the Council externally
- acting as advocates on behalf of constituents

No generic job description exists for councillors; responsibilities can broadly be grouped around the following three areas as defined within the Handbook:

1. **Advocacy:** raising casework; meeting with local people to discuss their concerns; presenting the views of your constituents to Council.
2. **Leadership:** chairing your local assembly; assisting your community in putting its ideas into practice.
3. **Representation:** representing the Council at other organisations in the borough, or city wide; prioritising the needs of the whole borough when making decisions; representing Lewisham at regional or national level.

Lewisham Council's Constitution does not prescribe the number of meetings a councillor must attend or the responsibilities a councillor must undertake. The Constitution does however state that councillors must attend a Council meeting at least once every six months in order to remain in post; councillors who are unable to meet this threshold due to exceptional circumstances may have this absence approved by Full Council.

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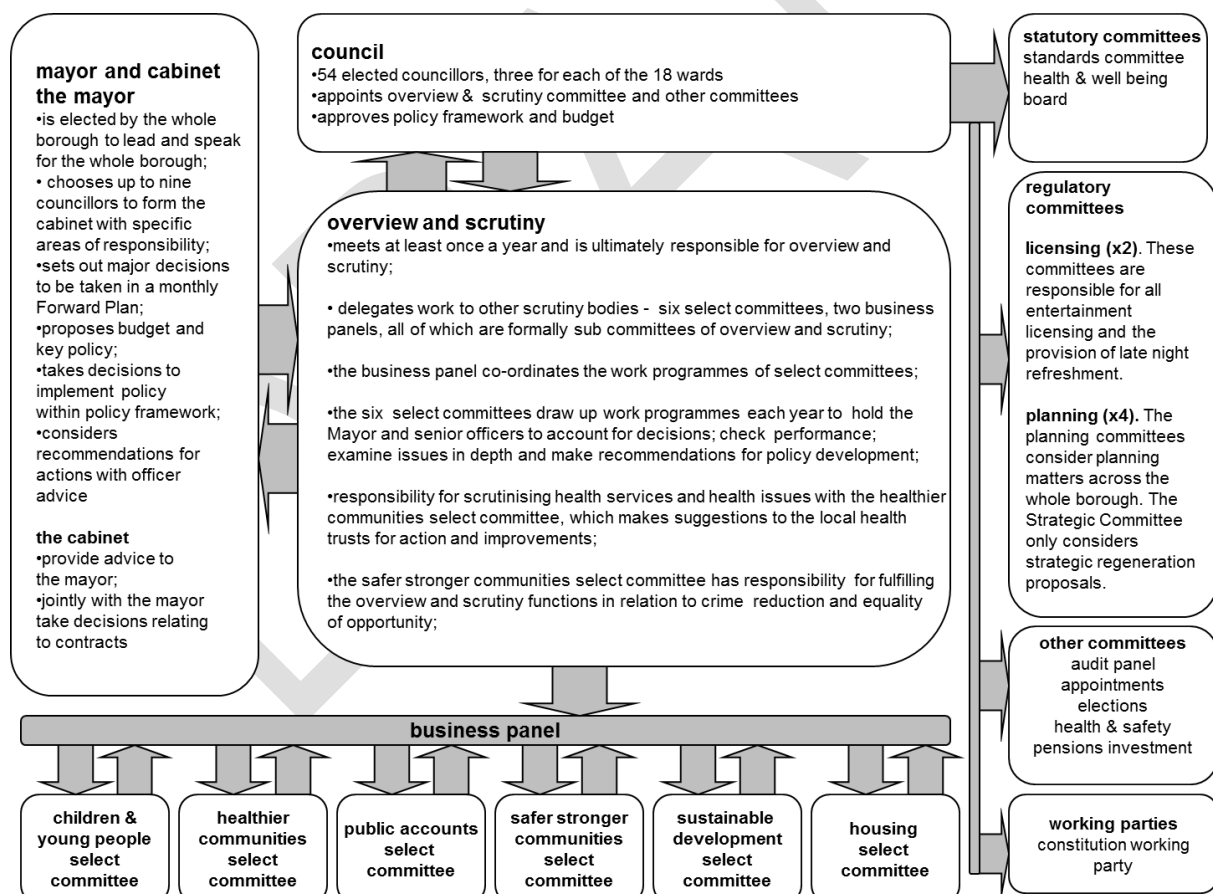
## Lewisham Council Structure

In the London Borough of Lewisham, Council consists of 54 elected councillors (three for each of the 18 wards) and appoints committees, approves the policy framework and budget. The Mayor is elected by the whole borough to lead and speak for the whole borough; the cabinet provide advice to the Mayor and jointly with the Mayor take decisions relating to contracts.

Overview and Scrutiny meets at least once a year and is ultimately responsible for providing scrutiny of decision-making. The Business Panel co-ordinates the work programmes of the six select committees. The Standards Committee and the Health & Wellbeing Board are statutory committees and the Safer Lewisham Partnership is the statutory board for the Lewisham Crime & Disorder Partnership, for which Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee carries out the scrutiny function. There are six regulatory committees: two responsible for licensing and four responsible for planning matters. The Council has several other committees – including Audit Panel, Appointments and Elections – and working groups.

In addition to the above Council meetings, councillors may also Chair a local assembly in their ward.

The below diagram outlines the key committees of the Council and their functions:



# 7 REMUNERATION & SUPPORT

## Basic & Special Responsibility Allowance

Councillors are not employees of the Council and they are not paid a salary for their duties. They do, however, receive an allowance designed to recompense them for the work which they undertake. The Basic Allowance amounts to £9,812 per year in the London Borough of Lewisham. The payment is made in monthly instalments; tax and National Insurance is payable on this.

In September 2014, Full Council, having regard to the advice of the London Councils remuneration panel and the advice of Sir Rodney Brooke, opted not to approve a scheme of allowances which included a Basic Allowance of £10,703. The current rate of Basic Allowance has remained fixed since the decision in 2014. The following table sets out the Basic Allowance payable to councillors in neighbouring boroughs:

Local Authority	Basic Allowance (2015/16)
London Borough of Bexley	£9,418
London Borough of Bromley	£10,870
London Borough of Croydon	£11,239
Royal Borough of Greenwich	£10,210
London Borough of Lambeth	£10,597
London Borough of Lewisham	£9,812
London Borough of Southwark	£10,832

As well as their basic allowance, a councillor may receive a special allowance in recognition of the fact they have taken on extra duties in addition to those carried out by every councillor (e.g. Chair of Scrutiny or Planning Committee or a Cabinet Member). These amounts vary between £67,909.92 for the Mayor to £6,146.43 for a Select Committee or Planning Committee Chair.

## Additional Allowances

Councillors are entitled to claim travel allowances for the use of a private car or a full refund for public transport for council duties outside the borough. Subsistence allowances can be claimed for any day in which an official duty lasts more than 4 hours, and a full cost reimbursement can be claimed for council duties which take a councillor away from home overnight.

In the London Borough of Lewisham, a carer's allowance of £9.40 per hour plus travelling expenses can be claimed to pay someone to take up a member's caring responsibilities while they are away from the home on Council business; this payment is based on the London Living Wage. The below table sets out carer's allowances payable to councillors in neighbouring boroughs:

Local Authority	Basic Allowance (per hour)
London Borough of Bexley	£5.27
London Borough of Bromley	No allowance
London Borough of Croydon	£8.80
Royal Borough of Greenwich	£9.15
London Borough of Lambeth	£7.00
London Borough of Lewisham	£9.40
London Borough of Southwark	£9.40

## Support for Councillors

Councillors in Lewisham are supported by a range of ICT options to assist them in carrying out their role. As well as access to computers, printers, fax and scanners within the Civic Suite, members are also offered a tablet device to use for Council business, as well as a mobile phone. Councillors are given a Lewisham email address and access to the Lewisham network; training is provided by officers to assist members when they log on to equipment for the first time and further training sessions are provided as required.

The Civic Suite in Catford contains a range of facilities to support councillors and is the venue for most meetings of the Council as well as a range of community and civic events. There are a number of committee rooms and the Council chamber which are used for public meetings. A members' room provides a computer linked to the Lewisham network, a phone and fax machine and a confidential waste bin for the safe disposal of confidential papers. A range of key corporate publications are also kept in the members' room for all members to access. Internal and external post, including committee papers, is collected for members and delivered to the homes twice per week via a courier.

Governance support staff (in the Overview & Scrutiny and Business & Committee teams) are available to support members, along with Communications staff, staff from the Mayor's office and political group officers. Casework officers are available to investigate and respond to member queries.

Meeting space is offered in appropriate Lewisham Council buildings for members to hold surgeries with constituents; if necessary, the Council will pay for members to hire suitable space in their wards for ward surgeries.

Members are entitled to a car park permit for the multi-storey car park in Catford or the open air car park behind Laurence House to facilitate attendance at meetings. These permits are offered to members free of charge.

Lewisham has a Member Development Strategy, which informs the planning and delivery of all member development activities. The objectives for member development in Lewisham are to:

- equip all Lewisham councillors with the skills and knowledge they need to carry out their roles as elected representatives within the Council and the local area they represent.
- fulfil the council's commitment to ensuring that all councillors have access to training and development opportunities.
- maintain member input and contribution to the member development programme, ensuring that the programme reflects emerging best practice, the needs of members and is aligned to corporate priorities.

Lewisham's member development programme provides opportunities for councillors to participate in ongoing development and training. Before serving on a committee which discharges any quasi-judicial function (such as planning or licensing) councillors are required to undertake training on their legal responsibilities. There is also compulsory training for councillors who have adoption, fostering or corporate parenting responsibilities.

Following induction, all non-executive councillors are invited to meet with the lead officer for member development (the Overview and Scrutiny Manager) in order to agree a personal development plan (PDP). The PDP is designed to help councillors to identify their strengths and to focus on areas for development and learning.

# 8 COUNCILLOR PROFILE

Data from the Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013, conducted by the Local Government Association was used extensively by the Barriers to Politics Working Group. It provides the most up-to-date 'snapshot' of local government representation and analyses of trends over time. The Census asked councillors about: their work as councillors, their views on a range of issues, their personal background. Information about the protected characteristics of councillors in Lewisham, London and nationally is analysed throughout this report.

## Becoming a Councillor

According to the Census, the most prevalent reason given by councillors, for taking on the role, was to serve the community (88.8% in London and 90% in England); the second most prevalent reason in London was for political beliefs (65.9% in London, cf. 54.4% nationally).

## Commitments

At the time of the 2013 Census, councillors in London had served for an average of 10.8 years, this compared with 9.5 years nationally. On average, councillors were members of 3.5 committees or subcommittees (this is in line with national position of 3.3 committees or subcommittees), and 55.1% of councillors in a London borough held one or more positions.

The below table shows the average number of hours per week a councillor spends on council business in London and England:

How time is spent (decimalised)	London (hours)	England (hours)
Attendance at council meetings, committees, etc.	7.8	8
Engaging with constituents, surgeries, constituent enquires, etc.	7	6
Working with community groups	4.9	4.5
Other e.g. external meetings, seminars, training, travel related to council, etc.	4	4.1
Average no of hours per week	22.5	21.3

Councillors in London spent an additional 5.4 hours per week on party/group business; this compared with 4.3 hours per week nationally.

Fewer councillors in London had received training and development opportunities in 12 months prior to the 2013 Census than councillors nationally (68.3% in London and 85% in England).

## Employment Status

A greater proportion of councillors in London were in full time paid employment than across England as a whole (27.3% in London and 19.2% nationally) and 34.4% in London were retired (cf. 46.6% nationally); of the councillors in employment, 22.8% responded that their employer provided no support. The majority of councillors undertake at least one other role in the community, for example, a school governor or magistrate (72.4%).

# 9 GENDER

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## Context

### Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013

- 36% of councillors in London and 31.6% of councillors nationally were female.
- 15.8% of male councillors who responded to the Census were Group leaders or deputy leaders, compared to 8.7% of women.
- On average, male councillors in England had been a councillor for 10 years, compared to women who had been councillors for 8.3 years.
- Female councillors spent 22 hours per week on council business compared with male councillors who spent 20.2 hours per week.
- The following table outlines the percentage of men and women with caring responsibilities.

Caring Responsibilities For:	Male (%)	Female (%)
Child/Children	12.9	17.9
Partner	8	7.8
Relative	5.6	11.9
Other	1.4	3.2
One or more caring resp.	24.6	35.1
No caring resp.	75.4	64.9

### Survey of Local Election Candidates 2014

- 26% of candidates who contested in the local elections in 2014 were female.
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## Evidence

The Barriers to Politics Working Group identified the support on offer from political parties and found that all major political parties actively campaign to encourage women to enter politics at a national and local level. The Working Group drew on wider research examining how men and women approach applications more broadly and found that men apply for a job when they meet only 60% of the qualifications, but women apply only if they meet 100% of them.<sup>1</sup>

In September 2016, the Fawcett Society published 'Exploring Women's Participation in Local Politics', an observational study of Milton Keynes Council Meetings to explore whether there were gender differences and/or inequalities in the way Council business was seen to be carried out in public fora.<sup>2</sup> Members of the Milton Keynes Fawcett Society gave evidence to the Lewisham Barriers to Politics Working Group. The research identified that women councillors were over-represented in committees such as corporate parenting, health and adult social care. The Fawcett Society's observational study found that in Full Council meetings, female councillors made up 33% of those councillors present in the meeting, but were only responsible for 19% of all interventions by councillors. Members of the Milton Keynes Fawcett Society told the Working Group that women

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<sup>1</sup> Claire Shipman & Katty Kay, 'The Confidence Code', HarperBusiness (April 2014)

<sup>2</sup> Ms. Gill Bryan, Ms. Margaret Gallagher, Dr. Gill Kirkup (Convenor), Professor Joan Swann & Ms. Sheila Thornton 'Exploring Women's Participation In Local Politics', Milton Keynes Fawcett Group (September 2016)

were observed to join discussions late in meetings; by this time many members of the public had left the chamber and hence did not observe these contributions.

Caring responsibilities was largely considered by the Barriers to Politics Working Group in the context of gender due to the disproportionate number of women with caring responsibilities as evidenced above. Evidence given to the Communities and Local Government Committee by the Centre for Women and Democracy stated that hours and commitments expected of councillors are very high, and not always geared to the needs of people who work or who have caring responsibilities.<sup>3</sup> It was also noted by the Barriers to Politics Working Group that there were many men with caring responsibilities and people from across different characteristics.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group further drew from evidence from the Centre for Women and Democracy which suggested that women are often particularly concerned about physical security, especially when working alone. The Communities and Local Government Committee were told that women in particular find the idea of being "on call" 24 hours a day, combined with personal details such as homes addresses being public, particularly worrying. This was particularly true for women who were living alone or with children.

Gill Kirkup and Sheila Thornton from the Milton Keynes Fawcett Group, co-authors of 'Exploring Women's Participation in Local Politics' attended a Barriers to Politics Working Group meeting to give evidence. The Group were told that the Fawcett Group's concerns lie within the fact that women's local authority representation is stagnating; while media and parties tend to concentrate on representation at a national level, put the desired impact of support organisations isn't happening at a local council level. The Milton Keynes Fawcett Group's recommendations were for both councillors and political parties and included that political parties should examine who is given roles on council committees and that councillors should take the training opportunities offered. The Fawcett Group's research found that although there was no direct correlation between men and women who were absent from meetings, the fact that women were unequally distributed, often meant that the absence of one woman was more noticeable.

Rebecca Manson Jones (Candidate in both the recent Brockley by-election and the GLA elections) and Madeline Petrillo (Lewisham Branch Leader) from the Women's Equality Party Lewisham and Greenwich Branch gave evidence to the Barriers to Politics Working Group. The representatives from the Women's Equality Party told the Group that their research covered wider society and that they had found that not only are women generally paid less, they also are time-poor due to increased numbers with caring responsibilities for children or parents. The Women's Equality Party also told the group that they had found that women believed that their time was better spent volunteering in the community if they wanted to bring about social change, rather than in local politics. The representatives from the Women's Equality Party recommended that councils should consider how being a councillor can fit around family and work life, compensation should be adequate and fair and that council work should be made more accessible and flexible.

Lauren Lucas, Project Lead (LGiU) for the Commission on Women in Local Government, attended an evidence session to give evidence and told the Barriers to Politics Working Group that progress of women in local government has remained almost unchanged in the last 10 years; at the current rate it would take 48 years to achieve equal representation between women and male councillors. Drawing on research conducted by the Commission on Women in Local Government, the Group were

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<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 'Councillors on the frontline', Sixth Report of Session 2012–13 (January 2013)

told that men tend to stay in their political positions longer than women do and this incumbency holds a big advantage for men in terms of electoral success. The report of the Commission, 'Does Local Government Work for Women?' published in July 2017, found that a third of councillors surveyed had experienced sexist comments from other councillors.<sup>4</sup> The Barriers to Politics Working Group were told that institutional barriers, such as a lack of childcare or diary clashes, could be addressed by greater flexibility in terms of the times of meetings, the provision of childcare and the better use of technology. The Barriers to Politics Working Group were also told that mentoring is an effective way of giving women confidence to put themselves forward for leadership positions.

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## Findings

Discussing the flexibility of the time of meetings, the Barriers to Politics Working Group found that varying the times of meeting may not make a great difference to reducing barriers faced by local councillors: day time meetings could negatively impact those in employment and evening meetings could negatively impact those with children.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group discussed utilising technology to tackle some of the practical barriers councillors with caring responsibilities may face, for example to take part in meetings, with the options of skype/conference calling a possible way forward. Caution was urged as it was felt that this wouldn't necessarily be beneficial on a regular basis as the Group found visibility was key to promoting political engagement amongst women, but accepted that technology could have a place in certain circumstances such as whilst on maternity leave.

The Group found that women held more positions in the wider community (for example, as school governors, voluntary committees and local charities) than men despite the fact that fewer women than men entered local politics.

Looking at caring responsibilities, members of the Barriers to Politics Working Group highlighted the fact that as a child grew older and as they grew more independent it may become easier for parents/carers to enter local politics. However, this would not always be true for councillors looking after children with disabilities. The Group endorsed the idea of members being more vocal of their personal caring circumstances which prohibit them from fulfilling their role as councillors to give other councillors more understanding about the barriers they face. The Barriers to Politics Working Group also identified financial barriers associated with caring responsibilities, for example, the sufficiency of the current carers allowance and the electorate's attitude towards a politician's expenses.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group felt that men had more access to informal networks which could help them advance their career as councillors. The Group identified that an informal women's councillor network could be a highly beneficial way of experienced women councillors supporting and engaging with other women councillors.

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<sup>4</sup> The Fawcett Society, 'Does Local Government Work for Women? Final Report of the Local Government Commission' (July 2017)

# 10 AGE

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## Context

### Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013

- The average age of a councillor in London was 56.5 years (cf. 60.2 nationally).
- Around one in eight councillors are under 45.
- The proportion aged 70 or over has increased from 13.8% to 22.2% between 2004 and 2013.
- A greater proportion of men were aged over 65 (46.2%) compared to women (38.6%). At the younger age bracket, 8.4% of male councillors are aged under 40, compared to 6.7% of female councillors.

### Local Elections Post-Polling Public Opinion Research 2013 (Electoral Commission)

- Approximately 32% of 18-24 year olds and 32% of 25 to 34 year olds vote in local elections; this compares to 43% of 18-25 year olds and 54% of 25-34 year olds voting in the previous General Election.

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## Evidence

In the context of political apathy, voter turnout suggests that young people are disengaged in local politics until they are much older than they are with national politics. The research considered as part of this report suggested that this is in part about the way information is presented, and the way in which they experienced and are involved in the local political sector from a young age.<sup>5</sup>

Detailed information about local election turnout is not available, however the 2013 Post Election Survey conducted by BMG Research for the Electoral Commission estimated local election turnout at 51%.<sup>6</sup> Of those aged 18-24 and those aged 25 to 34, 32% voted in each age bracket. Conversely, in general elections a spike in turnout can be observed between 18-24 year olds and 25-34 year olds; in 2015 an 11 percentage point increase can be observed (from 43% of 18-25 year olds to 54% of 25-34 year olds). Those aged over 65 were most likely to vote in local elections (72%). The 2013 Survey following the local elections found that 53% of voters and non-voters knew 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about the election.<sup>7</sup> Recent research in to young people's engagement with the EU referendum found that young people are less likely to vote in elections or join a political party, but are more likely to sign a petition, attend a protest and join a campaign on a singular issue than older people.<sup>8</sup>

Cllr Jacq Paschoud attended a meeting of the Lewisham Young Advisers, a group of young people who look at key decision-making reports and engage with service managers, policy-makers and elected members. The Young Advisers felt that they knew little about local politics, despite

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Berry & Patrick Dunleavy, 'Engaging young voters with enhanced election information', Democratic Audit UK (March 2014)

<sup>6</sup> Electoral Commission, '2013 local elections post-polling public opinion research' (May 2013)

<sup>7</sup> Richard Berry & Patrick Dunleavy, 'Engaging young voters with enhanced election information', *Democratic Audit UK* (March 2014)

<sup>8</sup> Katy Owen and Caroline Macfarland, 'A Generation Apart: Were younger people left behind by the EU referendum?', *CoVi(Common Vision)* (July 2016)



recognising that they were more politically engaged than their peers. Throughout the discussions with young people, education was identified as key to improving engagement: some young people had learned about national politics in Citizenship lessons and others had not received any Citizenship lessons.

The Young Advisers felt that some councillors were more visible than others and recommended that councillors visited local schools to increase the awareness of local politics amongst young people. The Young Advisers felt that there was no stepping stone between their group and being a local councillor despite the fact that they would be eligible to stand as local councillors once they reached the age of 18.

Research by the think-tank the International Longevity Centre for Help the Aged has found that for some, the beginning of retirement can result in a period of greater community engagement; involvement with political groups is particularly high amongst those aged 65 to 69 although participation declines swiftly with age.<sup>9</sup> As outlined in the findings from the Councillor Census 2013, the Barriers to Politics Working Group found that in practice, increasingly, councillors were remaining in post past the age of 70.

The Positive Ageing Council suggested that young people now seemed to show more respect than they did in previous years. Members of the Lewisham Positive Ageing Council felt that as a councillor they would have to be on call 24/7 and this could present a barrier for older councillors in particular. Some members of the Positive Ageing Council also said that they were fearful of modern technology and highlighted the fact that committee reports were now on tablets.

The Positive Ageing Council highlighted the impact being a councillor would have on family life and they thought that partners must also be made aware of commitments. Members of the Positive Ageing Council suggested that partners should be invited to a training session before selection as a candidate so a family could make an informed choice about the feasibility of their partner becoming a councillor.

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## Findings

The Barriers to Politics Working Group found that many councillors felt that working full time and being a councillor was challenging and that this might restrict younger people from entering local politics. Flexibility was said to be a barrier because of the constant changes in day-to-day council work and some councillors felt that they would not be able to take up full-time employment alongside being a councillor. The Group noted that the Council's Constitution does not prescribe the number of meetings a councillor must attend or the responsibilities a councillor must undertake; councillors must attend at least one meeting every six months, however if they are unable to do so due to exceptional circumstances, this can be approved by Full Council. The Barriers to Politics Working Group felt that there should be more clarity given prior to selection in relation to the Council's expectation of councillors.

Members raised concern over the pressures councillors might face in terms of progress and the impact that this might have on older and younger councillors. Members felt that councillors should be able to fulfil their role as best as they can, without the perception that they are not progressing. Progression is something that is appropriate at certain points of each individuals' life. It is fair for a

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<sup>9</sup> International Longevity Centre, 'Voice: a briefing paper on the voice of older people in society' (2008)

councillor to step into the role when they believe they are in a good position to fulfil all their obligations as best as possible, without the scrutiny of not being ambitious.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group identified that older councillors may feel pressure to retire from Council sooner than they would prefer to make room for younger councillors. The Group recognised that incumbency could present a barrier for younger councillors, but felt that caution was needed as not to simply shift barriers.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group recognised that more could be done to engage and inform young people about politics at a local level, and highlighted the importance of visibility.

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# 11 ETHNICITY

## Context

### United Kingdom Census 2011

- The table below shows the percentage of residents from each ethnic group at the time of the National Census 2011 across the population of England, London and Lewisham.

Area	White (%)	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups (%)	Asian/Asian British (%)	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (%)	Other ethnic group (%)
England	85.4	2.3	7.8	3.5	1.0
London	59.8	5.0	18.5	13.3	3.4
Lewisham	53.5	7.4	9.3	27.2	2.6

### Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013

- The vast majority of councillors were white (96%). These figures were similar to previous censuses. In 2010, 96.3% of councillors were white and in 2008 the figure was 96.6%.
- 1.6% of respondents who were not white were a local authority leader compared to 2.8% of white respondents.
- White councillors were over twice as likely to be party/group leader (7.6 percent compared to 3.4 percent).
- Respondents to the Census from other ethnicities were far more likely to become a councillor to resolve an issue (33.7% compared to 13.7%). White councillors were over twice as likely to say they became a councillor because they were asked to compared to councillors of another ethnicity (28.1% of white councillors compared to 13.6% from another ethnicity).
- Councillors from a non-white background were more likely to say that they had more influence than they had expected before entering the role (60% for other ethnicity and 40.8% for white councillors).
- Respondents who were from a non-white ethnicity were more likely to have one or more caring responsibility (38.6% compared to 27.5%).
- Approximately a third of councillors in England were women, but minority ethnic women were particularly under-represented; in 2010, 2% of female councillors were non-white and in 2013, 3.5% of female councillors were non-white.

## Evidence

The Barriers to Politics Working Group explored different organisations which campaigned to support people from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds to pursue careers in politics. Operation Black Vote and the Government Equalities Office's 'Black Asian Minority Ethnic Women Councillor Shadowing Scheme' ran in over 50 local authorities and 60 BAME women from across the country

took part.<sup>10</sup> The experience equipped the participants to stand for elected office and resulted in nearly a quarter of participants standing in the May 2010 local elections, with four participants elected as councillors.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group considered the work of the BAME Women Councillors' Taskforce which had conducted outreach events, a community leadership programme and a mentoring programme.<sup>11</sup> The Taskforce highlighted the importance of good communications between partner organisations to harness the valuable input of each and coordinate efforts from an early stage. The Taskforce recommended that a single clear summary of the steps to becoming a councillor is developed and highlighted the importance of supporting the individual journey to becoming a councillor. The Taskforce recommended that care is taken in matching mentors and that expectations should be managed along the way. The BAME Women Councillors' Taskforce highlighted the need for political parties to recognise that more support is needed to engage BAME women in party politics.

In 2017, the Fawcett Society's Commission on Women in Local Government found that Black, Asian, and minority ethnic women are underrepresented in local government.<sup>12</sup> Only 5.5% of women councillors responding to the Commission's survey identified as BAME, slightly greater than the 3.8% of men but vastly below the 14% of the England and Wales population which identifies as BAME. The Commission on Women in Local Government noted that due to the very small numbers of respondents to their survey who were BAME, they were unable to draw statistically significant conclusions. The data however did indicate that 24 of 48 BAME female respondents said they had experienced discrimination based on their protected characteristics other than gender, and 22 of 53 BAME male councillors respondents said that they had.

Ashok Viswanathan, co-founder and deputy director of Operation Black Vote (OBV) gave a presentation to the Barriers to Politics Working Group as part of the evidence sessions. OBV aims to change the picture of politics by firstly lobbying institutions and secondly encouraging communities, particularly African-Caribbean and Asian communities, which were traditionally less likely register to vote. The Barriers to Politics Working Group were told that in these communities, 25% of people are not registered to vote and over 50% of those registered do not go out to a polling station; this compared to 1 in 16 who are not registered to vote in the wider community. The Barriers to Politics Working Group were told that there is still a high level of distrust which manifests itself in the political arena. The Barriers to Politics Working Group were told that the barriers related to ethnicity which OBV seeks to address could be summarised as follows:

- Social: individuals from BAME communities often feel as though they have fewer networks available to them.
- Educational: individuals from BAME communities often feel as though they have less knowledge about political processes and systems.
- Financial: individuals from BAME communities often feel as though the cost of entering politics is a barrier.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.obv.org.uk/what-we-do/schemes-programmes-and-campaigns/councillor-shadowing-schemes-2011>

<sup>11</sup> Government Equalities Office, 'Evaluation of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women Councillors Taskforce' (2010)

<sup>12</sup> The Fawcett Society, 'Does Local Government Work for Women? Final Report of the Local Government Commission' (July 2017)

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## Findings

Lewisham Council ran its first Councillor Shadowing scheme as part of Operation Black Vote (OBV) in 2009 and the most recent was run in 2015. The Council has been commended for its work to improve participation in Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group found that being a member of a political party increases chances of candidates being elected, however the Working Group were told that the membership fees was seen as a barrier by candidates taking part in the OBV programmes. The Working Group felt that demystifying the process for entering politics was key to addressing the barriers which people from ethnic minority backgrounds face or perceive. The Group highlighted the fact that charges for political parties are not linked to an individual's income.

Taking part in initiatives such as those run by OBV were seen as effective in improving an individual's chances of participation and progression, however it was noted that they are not available to everyone. The Barriers to Politics Working Group highlighted that efforts to ensure networking opportunities were open to all regardless of their background were essential.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group recognised that none of the social, educational or financial issues which OBV sought to address were exclusive to ethnicity. The Group felt that most of the barriers related to communication and that it was in part the responsibility of councillors who were already 'on the inside' to engage the community.

# 12 DISABILITY

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## Context

### Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013

- Just over one in eight (13.2%) of councillors confirmed that they had a disability or long-term illness which had impacted them in the last 12 months. This proportion had fallen slightly from 2010 (14.1%), however it should be noted that the question in 2010 did not include the timescale.
- The proportion of councillors who had a long-term illness or disability was highest in the North East (16.8%), the West Midlands (16.1%), and the East Midlands (15.3%) and lowest in London (8.9%), the South East (11.4%) and the East of England (11.6%). The position in London remained fixed between the 2010 and 2013 Census of Local Authority councillors with 8.9% identifying themselves as having a long-term health illness.
- No differences were observed between male and female councillors in relation to whether or not the respondent identified as having a disability.
- In terms of ethnicity, 13.3% of respondents who were white identified that they had a disability, compared with 9.3% of respondents from other ethnicities.
- Few councillors aged under 40 had a long term illness, a proxy for disability (3.5%).

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## Evidence

The Barriers to Politics Working Group considered evidence from the 2010 House of Commons, Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation which found that "many disabled people are deterred from any sort of involvement in politics or public life by problems at a local level, with their councils".<sup>13</sup> The Group considered a survey conducted by Disability Rights: UK of disabled people who are board level directors; the survey identified that mentoring and support from senior staff were key to their success, however, the research also found that disabled people were significantly less likely to get that kind of mentoring and senior support.<sup>14</sup>

The 2016 Equality and Human Rights Commission response to the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities call for evidence, 'Smoothing the Pathway to Politics for Disabled People', was considered by the Barriers to Politics Working Group. One of the Commission's recommendations was directed at representation in local government: the Commission found that steps taken by local authorities to allow elected members and the public to fully participate in public life should be exemplary practice.

The Government Equalities Office has published 'Political Life: Disabled People's Stories' which sets out experiences disabled people have had in getting experience, standing for elected office and working in political life. The case studies give examples of barriers which people with disabilities have faced and how they have overcome them. One of the case studies by a former Parliamentary intern recognised that some people expect there to be people who have negative attitudes towards their involvement in politics because of their disability, but his experience was that people's attitudes are

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<sup>13</sup> House of Commons, 'Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation)' (2010)

<sup>14</sup> Disability Rights UK, 'Doing Seniority Differently' (2010)

very positive towards disabled people being involved in politics. However, one current councillor had experienced a lack of understanding from others within all sectors. Other case studies identified the cost of funding a British Sign Language translator or support worker as a barrier for candidates with disabilities. One candidate identified logistics for attending meetings as a potential barrier which he would overcome by thoroughly researching locations ahead of time.

The Local Government Association has published 'Make a Difference. Be a Councillor. A Guide for Disabled People' and introduced a mentoring scheme to support and encourage disabled people in politics as part of the 'Be a Councillor' Campaign. As part of the previous government's Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Strategy, the Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund was established; a cross-party group of MPs has recently called on the Government to reopen the fund.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group considered the barriers which those who care for other people with disabilities could face should they wish to pursue or progress in a career in local politics. The Group received evidence from Piers Goodman, Interim Adult Services Manager at Carers Lewisham, an organisation which supports carers in the Borough from the age of five, by providing advice, information, support and coping strategies. Carers Lewisham highlighted the importance of carers being able to discuss flexible working arrangements on a case by case basis, being able to access advice and support, and utilising technology to allow for more effective working.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group heard evidence from Will Davies, Advocacy Service Manager at Lewisham Speaking Up, and representatives from Lewisham Speaking Up, a charity for people with learning disabilities. Representatives from Lewisham Speaking Up told the group that if help was available to all those with disabilities, including those with disabilities that are not visible, this would provide equal opportunities. It was identified that a barrier to getting into politics for those who have learning disabilities is reading or writing difficulties, however Lewisham Speaking Up told the group that this shouldn't be an issue providing they have the right people supporting and encouraging them. Representatives from Lewisham Speaking Up said that some of the main things that would stop them from being councillors was the forms needed to stand as a candidate and also people asking them lots of questions about their disabilities.

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## Findings

The Barriers to Politics Working Group recognised that technology is of great use to supporting those with disabilities to enter or progress in local politics, particularly for those with learning difficulties. The Group highlighted that as reading and writing skills are essential for most jobs, including those in politics, learning disabilities like dyslexia can affect an individual's confidence and make it very difficult to progress; councillors recognised that the time taken to complete tasks had been identified as a barrier to politics across other protected characteristics and it might take those with learning disabilities longer to complete tasks.

Councillors thought that it would be beneficial for all if people were less judgemental and over-expectant of politicians. The Group felt that if a greater effort was made to communicate clearly, for example not using abbreviations, this would help to ensure that everyone understands what is being discussed and no one is being excluded. The Barriers to Politics Working Group agreed that it would also be beneficial to have digests of reports, for example with long reports or agendas; this would make things simpler without losing the quality of work.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group felt that Council documents should also be made friendly for those with different disabilities, for example, the options to change font or the colour of paper should be available. The Group recognised that the support required for councillors and candidates with disabilities would vary on a case by case basis and highlighted the benefit of having case by case discussions about support.

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# 13 SEXUAL ORIENTATION & GENDER

## IDENTITY

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### Context

- It is not possible to identify the representativeness of local and national politics in relation to the sexual orientation or gender identity of politicians as this information is not routinely collected: the Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013 did not ask any questions relating to sexual orientation.
- Nationally, sexual identity estimates are based on social survey data from the Annual Population Survey (APS). The questions collect information on self-identified sexual identity from the household population aged 16 and over in the UK. In 2015, 1.7% of the UK population identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). More males (2.0%) than females (1.5%) identified themselves as LGB in 2015; 4.6% of respondents identified themselves as “other”, “don’t know” or refused to respond.
- British voters returned a record number of openly LGB MPs to Parliament in the 2017 General Election; forty-five LGB MPs were elected in June 2017 (approximately 7% of all MPs), six more than in the previous parliament.
- Despite a growing number of openly LGB Members of Parliament, there are no openly transgender MPs in the UK. Labour Candidate Sophie Cook stood in the Worthing East and Shoreham Parliamentary Constituency in June 2017; although she was unsuccessful in being elected, the Labour party observed gains of 19.8% of the electorate in the constituency compared with the 2015 position (compared to 9.5% increase in vote share nationwide).
- Labour, Liberal Democrats, Conservatives, Greens and UKIP all have councillors who openly identify as transgender. The Labour Party elected its first openly transgender councillor in May 2016.

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### Evidence

The Barriers to Politics Working Group considered extensive research conducted by Stonewall. In their 2013 report, ‘Gay in Britain’, it was found that many political parties’ own lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) supporters believed they would face discrimination if they were to seek selection as a parliamentary candidate: 52% of gay Conservative Party supporters say they would face barriers in their own party, compared with 23% of gay Labour Party supporters and 20% of gay Liberal Democrat supporters.<sup>15</sup> At a local political, Stonewall found that an even higher percentage of LGB party supporters felt they would face barriers should they seek selection to run as a local councillor: 74% of party supporters thought they would face barriers from the Conservative Party if they were seeking selection to run as a local councillor; 39% would expect to face barriers from the Labour Party and a 33% from the Liberal Democrats.

In Stonewall’s report, Iain Stewart (Conservative MP for Milton Keynes South), highlighted the barrier that negative campaigning can play against LGB candidates and argues that “although all parties are

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<sup>15</sup> Stonewall, ‘Gay in Britain’ (2013)

signed up publicly and at leadership level, at constituency level there can sometimes be discrimination in subtle or unsubtle ways”.<sup>16</sup>

Stonewall had found that younger people, aged 18 to 29, were more likely to expect discrimination: 82% say this of the Conservative Party, 45% of the Labour Party and 37% of the Liberal Democrats. However, fewer LGB people in 2013 expected to experience discrimination if they sought selection by a political party to run for parliament than when the survey was conducted in 2008.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group explored some of the programmes available to support lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals: for example, Stonewall has run a Leadership programme for senior LGBT individuals for 14 years which brings together senior leaders who identify as LGBT from across a range of sectors and industries.

Perception in the media and discrimination was identified as a cause for concern: in 2013, 76% of gay people surveyed believed that LGB politicians were subject to greater scrutiny, including by the media, compared to heterosexual politicians.<sup>17</sup> Senior leaders believe that a culture of openness results in fewer issues and Stonewall recommends that political parties collect monitoring information about candidates and members – although this information is not currently readily available publically.<sup>18</sup>

The Commission on Women in Local Government recognised that it is hard to identify whether or not LGBT+ women are underrepresented due to challenges in measuring these identities in the wider population.<sup>19</sup> Surveys carried out by the Commission did however find that many of the LGBT+ women councillors who responded had experienced multiple discrimination.

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## Findings

The Barriers to Politics Working Group recognised that it is daunting to stand for election regardless of an individual’s sexual orientation and the fear of being scrutinised because of sexual orientation adds to this. The Group recognised that Lewisham Council is proactive in championing equality and noted the review of LGBT provision conducted by Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee.

Language plays a key part in engaging LGBT individuals in political life and more broadly. The Barriers to Politics Working Group recognised that sometimes discrimination might not be direct or immediately obvious – for example, terms like “family values” might be used by heterosexual candidates when standing against an LGBT candidate.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group highlighted that there are four strands that form LGBT, yet little activity or awareness in relation to transgender individuals is observed within the Council. The Group recognised that some individuals are very vocal about their sexual orientation and others are not; it is important to respect these wishes for privacy but ensure that people feel that they can openly discuss their sexual orientation or gender identity should they so wish.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group were cautioned by a current councillor who openly identified as gay that people who identified as LGBT should not be pigeon-holed; for example, there is

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<sup>16</sup> Stonewall, ‘Gay in Britain’ (2013)

<sup>17</sup> ibid

<sup>18</sup> ibid

<sup>19</sup> The Fawcett Society, ‘Does Local Government Work for Women? Final Report of the Local Government Commission’ (July 2017)

sometimes a misconception that people who identify as LGBT have a greater concern about HIV and other STDs.

Councillors championed the idea of a councillor survey in which people were given the opportunity to identify who they are, and felt that this would create a culture of openness. Members of the Barriers to Politics Working Group commended the work of the Young Mayor's programme as young people in Lewisham are having conversations about sexual orientation openly.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group felt that visibility was crucial and that LGBT role models would help encourage LGBT individuals to engage in politics. Although visibility and openness was found to be extremely important, the Group noted that there would also need to be infrastructure, for example LGBT networks, to support this.

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# 14 RELIGION OR BELIEF

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## Context

- 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

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

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## Evidence

The Barriers to Politics Working Group considered Religion or Belief both broadly across public life and in the context of the political sphere. In 2015, Baroness Butler-Sloss chaired the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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% to 52.8%).

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<sup>20</sup> Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, 'Life Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good'(2015)

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

A 2015 YouGov poll asked the public whether they view party leaders at the time more positively or negatively because of their religious beliefs.<sup>22</sup> 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.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group considered research conducted by 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'.<sup>23</sup> The group heard that having a religious minority background meant that MPs were more likely to raise 'minority issues' generally.<sup>24</sup>

When surveyed, the majority of respondents believed that religion and politics should be separate, and 74% 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).<sup>25</sup>

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%).<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

The Barriers to Politics Working Group explored religious groups which 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.

Rev Carol Bostridge, representative from Lewisham's Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) and the Free Church (Baptist), gave evidence to the Barriers to Politics Working Group. Rev Carol Bostridge explained that there was a strong base of faith groups in Lewisham and the Council has made the groups feel welcome and valued. The Group were told that often people engaged with religious groups were very busy in the community and often felt that they did not have time to be a councillor. Rev Carol Bostridge highlighted that joining a political party can create a dilemma for people if they feel the values of the political party conflict with their personal beliefs. The Group were told that a lack of awareness as to the requirements and the role accompanied by the media perception and risk scrutiny of someone's religion are often factors which can dissuade people from entering politics

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<sup>22</sup> William Jordan, 'A third of British adults don't believe in a higher power', *YouGov* (2015)

<sup>23</sup> Ekaterina Kolpinskaya, 'Does religion count for religious parliamentary representation? Evidence from Early Day Motions'(2016)

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

<sup>25</sup> Richard Dawkins Foundation, *Religious and Social Attitudes of UK Christians in 2011* (2012)

<sup>26</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, 'Citizenship Survey: April 2010 - March 2011, England' (2011)

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

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## Findings

The Barriers to Politics Working Group recognised that being involved in a process or policy that conflicts with an individual's personal beliefs could act as a barrier to those who belong to a religious group as much as those who have no religion or belief. The Group highlighted the fact that conflicts were far less likely to occur at a local level than a national level due to the fact that law-making occurs at a national rather than local level; communication was felt to be key to addressing these concerns.

Councillors recognised that social media can act as a platform for criticising politicians and this in turn could result in individuals feeling uncomfortable voicing their beliefs. Often politicians are forced to justify the actions and words of others with whom they share a religion or belief, rather than their own actions and words. It was also noted that some politicians have resigned due to the fact that they feel unable to reconcile their religious and political beliefs.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group highlighted the fact that it was important not just to focus on Christianity but other religions too. The Group felt that Lewisham Council was very good at planning around Christian holidays, but felt that the Council should be better at taking account of non-Christian holidays and obligations when setting meetings to show that Lewisham is inclusive. Councillors felt that buildings should be more inclusive and that a quiet space for religious reflection, not just for staff and councillors but members of the public, and this would contribute to a welcoming environment for people of different religions or beliefs.

# 15 RECOMMENDATIONS

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TBC – recommendations to be agreed at Barriers to Politics Working Group Meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2017

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# 16 CONCLUSIONS

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The Barriers to Politics working group has identified that many of the barriers to entering or progressing in local politics transcend multiple or all protected characteristics. The Group identified that representation and visibility at a local level contributed to wider political and community engagement and that communication plays a key role in addressing barriers.

Women are underrepresented in local and national politics. The research presented within this report suggests that this could be due to a lack of information about the election processes, and a tendency for women to be less likely than men to apply for positions when they are unsure about whether or not they will be successful.

A disproportionate number of female councillors have caring responsibilities than men (35.1% of women, compared to 24.6% of men) although this is in line with disparity observed within the population as a whole. Caring responsibilities were found to create a major barrier for candidates and councillors. The Group has found that assistance needs to consider individual circumstances in order to truly provide support; for example, allowances for caring should be sufficient to cover true costs.

In the context of political apathy, voter turnout suggests that young people are disengaged in local politics until they are much older than they are with national politics. The research considered as part of this report suggests that this is in part about the way information is presented, and the way in which they experienced and are involved in the local political sector from a young age.

Many of the barriers to entering or progressing in local politics which individuals face by virtue of their ethnicity are the same as those faced by other groups. The Barriers to Politics Working Group has found that providing support and opening networks should be the responsibility of everyone, not just campaign groups or organisations.

The Barriers to Politics Working Group has found that many of the barriers faced by candidates and councillors are exacerbated for councillors with disabilities, but that being mindful of this at all levels and utilising technology effectively can go some way to mitigate these challenges.

It is not possible to identify the representativeness of local politics in relation to the religion or belief, sexual orientation or gender identity of politicians as this information is not routinely collected. In instances where the information is requested, it is not always shared.

An increasing number of openly LGBT individuals are entering politics at a national and local level, however many people still perceive they will face barriers from political parties should they wish to stand for election. More people expect barriers at a local level than at a national level, and this could be due to both subtle and unsubtle discrimination.

A culture of openness, regardless of background, has been found to be effective in encouraging individuals representing all of the protected characteristics to feel empowered to stand in local elections or progress as councillors.

The recommendations of the Barriers to Politics Working Group are intended to provoke thought and action across Lewisham Council and more broadly. Although the Group has recognised that great progress has been made in some areas, more can be done to ensure that there are equal opportunities in politics and there are great benefits associated with better representation.



# APPENDIX A: COUNCILLORS SURVEY

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The Barriers to Politics Working Group sent a survey to all councillors in the London Borough of Lewisham. The survey ran from 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017 until 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2017, and 30 councillors responded during this time. Due to the sample size, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the representativeness of Lewisham Council, however the survey does offer insight and context about councillors in the Borough.

## Lewisham Councillor Profile

- Of the 30 councillors who responded, 28 provided their gender: 11 respondents were female (39%) and 17 were male (61%).
- Of the respondents who provided their age, 5 were aged under 40 (17%), 6 were between 40 and 50 (21%), 6 were between 50 and 60 (21%), 10 were aged between 60 and 70 (34%), and 2 were aged over 70 (7%).
- Of the respondents who chose to give information about disability, 4 of the 29 respondents considered themselves to be a disabled person (14%).
- Of the respondents who chose to give information about sexual orientation, 4 of the 29 respondents identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB).
- Of the 29 respondents who chose to give information about their ethnicity, 25 were from a White background (86%), the remaining 4 councillors were from Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) or multiple ethnic group backgrounds (14%).
- Of the 28 respondents who provided information about their religion or belief, 14 identified as having no religion (54%) and 12 identified as Christian (43%).

## Becoming a Councillor

- The primary reason why Lewisham Councillors took on the role was to "serve [their] ward and local community", followed by the desire to "influence decisions in [the] local area".
- Before becoming councillors, 21 responded expected to spend between 10 and 19 hours per week carrying out the role (70%) and 7 expected to spend less than 10 hours (23%).
- No respondent thought that they would spend most of their per week time on party commitments; 15 respondents thought they would spend most of their time attending council meetings (50%) and 12 respondents thought they would spend most of their time engaging with constituents (40%).

## Being a Councillor

- Half of councillors who responded were members of 5 committees, the second most popular response was 4 committees (4 respondents; 13%).
- The majority of councillors (17 respondents; 57%) received between 10 and 20 emails per week from residents. The majority of councillors received between 20 and 30 emails per week from officers (12 respondents; 40%) and the 72% of the remainder received less than 20 (13 respondents)
- Of the councillors who provided their gender, 4 women (36% of female respondents) and 3 men (17% of male respondents) had never held a position of special responsibility. Nearly two thirds of respondents who had never held a position of special responsibility (4 of the 7

respondents; 57%) did not hold the position because either they did not think they would be selected or had not been selected.

- Of the 10 respondents who indicated that they had claimed additional allowances (e.g. for travel or caring responsibilities), 2 responded that they were not sufficient to cover costs and 5 responded that they were sufficient.

## Commitments Outside of Council

- Of the councillors who provided their gender, nearly three quarters of female councillors (73%; 8 respondents) had caring responsibilities, three quarters of male councillors (75%; 12 respondents) did not. The majority of councillors with caring responsibilities indicated that this impacted on their ability to undertake their councillor role (5 female, 3 male).
- 8 councillors who responded to the survey indicated that they were retired (27%) and 10 indicated that they were in full-time or part-time employment (30%). 11 councillors (37%) indicated that their employment status had changed because they became a councillor.
- 21 councillors (70%) indicated that they held positions outside of the council, such as a school governor or trustee of another organisation; 12 male respondents (71%) and 8 female respondents (73%) indicated that they held positions outside of the council.

## Comments from Respondents

- Several respondents raised concern about the impact of taxation on allowances, particularly the additional allowance for caring responsibilities. Some respondents to the survey felt that as allowances were linked to the London Living Wage, once Employer's National Insurance for example was taken into account, allowances did not cover the true cost of employing a carer. Similarly as allowances were subject to tax, one councillor was concerned that the allowance for caring responsibilities would barely cover 60% of the true costs incurred.
- When surveyed, several current Lewisham councillors felt that they were only able to stand for office once they were older and had retired. Several councillors felt that they would not even start to pursue a career in local politics until they had finished working due to the time commitments of the role.
- When surveyed one Lewisham councillor highlighted that they were considering not standing again as a local councillor because they were finding it increasingly difficult to hear what people are saying in meetings.
- Multiple respondents identified the length of meetings, and the time required to prepare for meetings, as a challenge. The time meetings finished presented difficulties, including in travelling, for some respondents.
- Several respondents indicated that as many training opportunities are held during work hours, it is difficult for some councillors to attend. Other respondents indicated that being a councillor had impacted on their ability to progress in a career.
- Multiple respondents highlighted the challenge of balancing council meetings, with community events and political party commitments and indicated that diary clashes sometimes occur.
- Many of the respondents who provided comments indicated that caring responsibilities presented a barrier to attending meetings and participating more generally.

# APPENDIX B: RESIDENTS SURVEY

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The Barriers to Politics Working Group conducted a survey of residents entitled 'Understanding Attitudes to Entering Local Politics'. The survey ran between 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017 and 24<sup>th</sup> October 2017 and was completed by 85 residents. The survey was promoted in the Lewisham Life e-Newsletter, in the News Shopper local newspaper and through local assemblies. The purpose of the survey was to establish what residents' perception of the role of a councillor is, how their expectations are set and what would support them to consider local politics. Due to the sample size, it is not possible to conduct detailed analysis across the protected characteristics, however the findings do provide insight into the perception of residents. External data in relation to the protected characteristics is presented throughout this report.

## Respondent Profile

- Of the 85 respondents, 82 chose to provide their gender. 48 respondents were female (59%) and 34 were male (41%).
- 78 respondent chose to provide information about their ethnicity; 66 respondents identified as White (85%) and 12 identified as from Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) or multiple ethnic group backgrounds (15%).
- 76 respondents chose to provide information about whether or not they had a disability; 9 respondents identified as disabled (12%).
- 69 respondents chose to give information about their religion; 34 identified as having no religion (49%), 30 identified as Christian (43%).
- 68 respondents chose to give information about their sexual orientation; 10 respondents identified as LGB (15%).
- 39 respondents were in full time employment (46%), 16 were self-employed (19%), 12 were in part-time employment (14%) and 11 were retired (13%).
- 35 respondents indicated that they had caring responsibilities (41%), the majority of these respondents were female (24 respondents; 69%).

## Community Engagement

- 24% of respondents 'strongly agreed' that they were engaged with their local community and 26% of respondents 'agreed'. 19% of respondents 'disagreed' that they were engaged with their local community and 13% 'strongly disagreed'.
- 66% of respondents indicated that they either volunteered or held a position in the community (for example, as a school governor or magistrate).
- Little difference can be observed between female respondents who strongly agreed or agreed that they were involved in the local community (47.9%) than male respondents (47.1%). Despite this, male respondents were more likely to indicate that they strongly agreed (26.5%) than female respondents (16.7%).

## Local Politics

- Of the 85 respondents to the survey, 38 indicated that they had previously attended a council meeting (45%). The majority of respondents who had attended a council meeting did not have caring responsibilities (54%), although this is in line with the respondent profile.

- Male respondents were more likely to say that they agreed or strongly agreed that they were involved in local politics (41.2%) compared to female respondents (37.5%). Half of the 34 men who responded to the survey had attended a council meeting, compared to 37.5% of the 48 female respondents.
- 26 respondents indicated that they had not had any contact with their councillor (31%), the remainder had contact at council meetings, surgeries and local assemblies for example.
- A higher proportion of male respondents hadn't had any contact with their local councillor (35.3%), compared to female respondents (29.2%).

## Standing as a Councillor

- Of the 85 respondents to the survey, 11 indicated that they had previously stood as a candidate in a local election (13%), 23 respondents hadn't stood previously but had considered it (27%).
- Respondents who had not stood as a councillor in a local election were asked why they had not and were able to give multiple reasons. The main reason why respondents had not stood in a local election was because they were too busy (24 responses; 19%), the second most popular reason was because the respondent felt that they didn't know enough about the role (22 responses, 18%) and the third most popular reason was because the respondent didn't think they would be successful in being elected (21 responses; 17%).
- A higher proportion of female respondents to the survey hadn't considered standing as a councillor before (64.6%) compared with male councillors (50%).
- Two thirds of female respondents who had not considered standing as a councillor said that this was in part or wholly due to the fact that they did not think they would be successful in getting elected, this compared to less than one third (28.6%) of male respondents.

## Resident Comments

- Multiple respondents indicated that they had not stood as a councillor in a local election because they required more information, for example about how to juggle work commitments with being a councillor and also about local political party meetings.
- Two respondents who gave additional comments about why they had not stood as a councillor cited caring responsibilities. Many additional respondents indicated that time commitments, for example for meetings, would act as a barrier to them entering politics.
- Three respondents who gave additional comments about why they had not stood as a councillor indicated that this was due to long standing councillors meaning they thought it would be difficult to get elected and a perception that the political party is a closed group.
- Several respondents indicated that they had not entered local politics because they were unable to align their views with a political party.
- Multiple respondents indicated that the political make-up of the London Borough of Lewisham would mean that they didn't think they would be elected.
- Several respondents indicated that the cost of being elected, particularly as an independent candidate, would prevent them from standing in a local election.
- Two respondents indicated that they perceived that they would not be taken seriously as a candidate in a local election due to their age and their ethnicity respectively.
- The most common comment in relation to the barriers to standing as a candidate was that many respondents didn't know "where to start". One respondent suggested information sessions for those interested in becoming a councillor.