

APPENDIX C – EVIDENCE FROM ONLINE CONSULTATION

As part of their evidence-gathering work, the Local Democracy Review Working Group designed a comprehensive public consultation, which could be completed either online or as a paper-based form. This consultation ran from 2nd October 2018 to 27th January 2019, receiving 705 responses in total. The issues and ideas identified by respondents have been summarised and collated under the three themes of the review, together with the quantitative data.

Respondent Profile

- 643 respondents lived in Lewisham
- 202 respondents worked in Lewisham (of whom, 80 worked for the Council and 10 worked for a partner organisation)
- 17 respondents were local councillors
- 21 respondents were school governors
- 64 respondents represented a local community group/s
- The wards with the highest number of respondents were Ladywell (61), Forest Hill (53) and Lewisham Central (49)

Demographics

544 respondents consented for their personal data to be used in order to undertake equalities monitoring:

- The largest group of respondents (14.3%) were aged between 60 and 64 years old
- The gender of respondents was evenly split between male (48.2%) and female (47.2%). Only one respondent stated that their gender identity was different from the gender they were assigned at birth
- A high proportion of respondents (64.5%) identified as White British. 86.2% of all respondents stated that English was their first language
- The majority of respondents (80%) did not consider themselves to be a disabled person. Of those who did consider themselves to be a disabled person, 31% described their disability as physical or mobility-related
- 10.5% of respondents identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual
- Nearly half of respondents (49.6%) stated that they had no religion
- 14.7% of respondents had caring responsibilities - of those, 32.4% provided care for more than 11 hours per week
- 67.8% of respondents owned their own home

Theme 1 – Openness & Transparency

Quantitative Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 55% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that ‘I know about the Council’s decision-making processes’ ▪ 58% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that ‘I understand the Council’s decision-making processes’ ▪ 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘I am interested in how and why the Council makes decisions’ ▪ 44% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that ‘the Council makes open decisions in public’ ▪ 53% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that ‘it is easy and straightforward to find information about Council decisions’ ▪ 89% of respondents felt that local councillors had an important role to play in ensuring the Council’s decision-making processes were open and transparent ▪ The most commonly used ways for respondents to access information were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Council website (78%) ○ Lewisham Life (67%) ○ Accessing information, agendas and papers relating to Council meetings and the decisions to be taken at them (44%) ○ Viewing records of decisions taken at Council meetings (37%) ○ Attending Council meetings (28%) ▪ 29% of respondents described their overall experience of using the Council’s current ways of accessing information as ‘positive’ or ‘very positive’ (a further 34% did not have an opinion and 4% had not used any of the mechanisms) ▪ 83% of respondents thought that the Council could do more to improve access to information ▪ 54% of respondents had accessed information from another Council

Issues	Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There was a general lack of awareness about the different ways to access information, including attending Council meetings 	<p><u>Creating a culture of openness, trust and partnership</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Change the Council culture, focusing on public service

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many respondents stated that it was difficult to find information by searching on the website, particularly with regards to Council decision-making. Others felt that accessing some information was relatively straightforward (e.g. refuse collection schedules), but making a query or asking for action was difficult and lengthy ▪ There were also mixed views about Lewisham Life – some respondents found it to be a useful publication for accessing information and sharing local news, others found it ‘more glossy than informative’ ▪ Some respondents had positive experiences with the Planning process, but others did not understand why their application had been refused and/or found the technical language difficult to understand ▪ Many respondents found they had to be very proactive to find information and that it sometimes lacked consistency across different sources ▪ Many respondents felt that important information was not communicated clearly and was difficult for the average person to understand ▪ Some respondents felt there were limited opportunities for people with disabilities or language barriers to engage with the Council ▪ There were mixed views regarding the channels through which information can be accessed: some respondents encouraged the use of digital technology, others found digital channels difficult to access and would prefer to speak to someone face-to-face or by telephone ▪ There were also mixed views about the range of channels available – some respondents felt there were too many and should be centralised whilst others felt that residents should be able to access information via ‘multiple and diverse channels’ ▪ Many respondents felt the decision-making process was complex and did not understand how decisions were made ▪ Some respondents found that the information provided by the Council was incorrect or out of date whilst others had 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involve staff (particularly lower-graded officers) more effectively in Council decision-making ▪ Ensure performance information relating to Council services is readily accessible (open data) <p><u>Using appropriate communication channels</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Redesign the Council website so that it is more ‘visually-appealing’, user-friendly and easier to navigate (e.g. better search functionality and clearer links to minutes/decisions made in meetings) ▪ Live-stream Council meetings and publicise decisions made at these meeting on the website and social media ▪ More publicity about the different ways of accessing information ▪ Include information about current planning applications, major decisions (including budgets) and other significant changes in Lewisham Life and/or ward assembly newsletters ▪ Introduce monthly email updates with a (potentially ward-based) summary of Council news and decisions – have a yearly round-up, make hard-copy updates available via Lewisham Life, at stations, supermarkets etc ▪ Introduce ‘information champions’ at Council sites to help residents access the information they need ▪ Provide printed information to all residents about the Council and how to access services (including eligibility, choices and what to do if there is a problem or conflict) ▪ Establish a Q&A Forum led by councillors and officers ▪ Ensure information is available in hard-copy format as well as online (as some people do not have access) and distribute it via community hubs e.g. libraries ▪ Communicate more proactively with residents e.g. an ‘Introduction To The Borough’ pack when Council Tax names change at an address ▪ Tell residents what services they receive from the Council (as opposed to what is being cut) e.g. streetlights, refuse collection, parking etc
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<p>experienced a delayed response to enquiries or no response at all (e.g. social media, complaints)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some respondents felt that it was easier in other Councils to speak to someone face to face or over the phone and their websites offered more interactivity, such as a 'chat' function ▪ There was a perception among many respondents that Council officers did not willingly give residents information and that residents' suggestions or recommendations were not always welcomed – 'they do not openly release information and make it easy to find' ▪ Some respondents criticised the Council's wider attitude to openness and transparency, particularly in relation to private contractors and developers and staffing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use posters/noticeboards in public places and Lewisham Theatre billboards (e.g. to publicise Q&As from the Mayor) ▪ Use digital technologies to give updates about the Council's decision-making: ▪ Provide detailed updates to residents about what is happening via a regular email bulletin or social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create a Lewisham Council app or 'citizens area' on the Council website that provides local ward information, latest news and issues (with the ability to for residents to leave messages and vote) ○ Develop an online chat function on the website so residents can ask questions ○ Install interactive touchscreens in public places (e.g. bus stops) enabling residents to view frequently asked questions, respond to public consultations and vote on key issues ○ Introduce online videos (by the Mayor) outlining what is being discussed at each Council meeting ▪ Undertake a public awareness campaign to encourage residents to get involved and explain how the Council works, who is who etc, focusing on citizenship, democracy and transparency at all levels of Council decision-making <p><u>Democratic standards: language & reporting</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Present information in a more accessible and straightforward way (including the use of visual approaches e.g. graphs, infographics), with face-to-face contact and telephone numbers to call for information ▪ Include a summary at the beginning of all Council reports that condenses the relevant information into several easily understandable bullet points ▪ Use the NHS Accessible Information Standard ▪ Develop a clear and concise step-by-step guide (possibly visual or an animation) for employees and residents to demonstrate the different steps in the decision-making process
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	<p><u>Democratic standards: Planning</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make the Planning Portal more user-friendly (e.g. easier viewing of planning permission requests, search by address not reference number)
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Theme 2 – Public Involvement In Decision-Making

Quantitative Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 95% of respondents had voted in a local election in the last five years ▪ 53% of respondents had interacted with their local councillor/s in the last twelve months (of, which, 30% were raising an issue or concern) ▪ 49% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that ‘the Council always seeks to involve the public in decision-making’ (a further 31% were undecided) ▪ 38% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that ‘all residents are able to get involved if they choose’ (a further 31% were undecided) ▪ 38% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that ‘public involvement has a genuine impact on Council decision-making’ (a further 30% were undecided) ▪ The most commonly used ways for respondents to get involved in decision-making were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Responding to a Lewisham Council consultation (63%) ○ Responding to a statutory Planning consultation (38%) ○ Signing or organising a petition/e-petition (37%) ○ Taking part in a Local Assembly (30%) ○ Attending a civic event (26%) ▪ 30% of respondents described their overall experience of using the Council’s current ways of getting involved in decision-making as ‘positive’ or ‘very positive’ (a further 32% did not have an opinion and 11 had not used any of the mechanisms) ▪ 55% of respondents did not feel that their involvement allowed them to have a genuine impact on the decision/s made ▪ 81% of respondents thought that the Council could do more to improve public involvement in our decision-making processes

- 74% of respondents had never used another Council's methods for involving the public in decision-making
- 80% of respondents would like their local community to have more influence over some decisions
- 23% of respondents were currently involved in decision-making organisations within their local community
- 82% of respondents felt that the Council could do more to encourage and support public involvement in community decision-making

Issues	Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The main reasons why respondents said they had voted in the last five years were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Voting is a democratic right/civic duty ○ Ability to influence policies/decision-making and hold politicians to account, mechanism for their voice to be heard ○ 'If members of the public don't vote, then they shouldn't complain about the outcome' ○ Register dissatisfaction and oppose current administration ▪ There was a general lack of awareness about different issues that the Council dealt with and the range of ways that the public could be involved in decision-making. Some respondents felt that the Public Questions process did not allow sufficient time for resident participation. There were also mixed views about Local Assemblies. Some respondents felt that they were useful (especially more informal meetings) and valued their ability to hold councillors and officers to account, but others raised concerns about coordination, accessibility, community representation, opportunities for open debate and ability to influence Council policy ▪ Some respondents did not feel that they had the right skills to make a meaningful contribution ▪ A number of respondents recognised the limitations on public involvement (predominantly that it tends to be led by the 'same small group of unrepresentative people' but also the need to 	<p><u>Reaching and empowering seldom heard groups</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide more information about how the public can get involved in decision-making and why it is important (via different channels e.g. online, Lewisham Life, posters in schools or GP surgeries etc) ▪ Create more opportunities for (face-to-face) public involvement at convenient times for those who work full-time or have childcare/caring responsibilities (e.g. evening/weekend consultation meetings) ▪ Simplify/shorten consultations and encourage a wider range of people to participate (several respondents cited Southwark Council as an example of good practice e.g. engaging locals at each step of the consultation process for the Canada Water Development Plan, Surrey Quays Shopping Centre) ▪ Create better and stronger relationships between the Council and local media/press ▪ Establish a 'Town Crier' to notify residents electronically when their input is required ▪ Use other opportunities to encourage public involvement e.g. door knocking and registering electors ▪ Information about decision-making should be more readily available to residents and staff, including when decisions are to be made, who makes them and the reasons behind them (particularly in relation to budget cuts)

<p>balance different opinions, statutory restrictions) whilst others queried that need for increased involvement, stating that ‘the public have given [the Council] permission to make decisions on our behalf’; ‘you just get the agitators and moaners, not reasoned and balanced input’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many respondents who had used another Council's methods for involving the public in decision-making found them broadly similar to Lewisham (in both positive and negative ways), but there was a perception amongst some that other authorities seemed ‘more genuinely interested in what ordinary people though, and keen to take their views on board’ ▪ A few respondents provided positive feedback about their experience of getting involved in decision-making, where their views were heard and/or altered the outcome (e.g. Planning applications, car-parking in Lee Green, education inquiry, school governor) – ‘it can be surprisingly satisfying to have one’s voice listened to and respected’ ▪ However, there was a strong perception amongst respondents that involvement required significant effort on the part of residents, but their views were frequently ignored or dismissed. A large number felt that they lacked information about how specific decisions were made – ‘it’s hard to involve people when they cannot see the direct impact on them to then be able to prioritise their time to the community’ ▪ Some respondents expressed cynicism about the Council’s attitude to public involvement in decision-making, regarding mechanisms (especially consultations) as tokenistic ▪ Many respondents regarded traditional pressure/special interest groups as having ‘too much influence’ and felt that the Council should actively engage with a wider range of community groups (particularly young people, carers, residents with disabilities, those from a BME background or with a language barrier) in more creative ways that better suited their needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide examples of how the decision-making process works (including where the Council changed its mind after consultation, which could encourage greater public participation) ▪ Be honest about the limitations in decision-making and reasons for taking particular decisions even if they are unpopular ▪ Publish feedback from all consultations (including statutory Planning consultations) and demonstrate how the Council used the information gathered to inform decision-making ▪ Provide more clarity about the scope for genuine involvement (i.e. informing or consulting) and engage the public in shaping decisions and options at a much earlier stage (co-production, co-commissioning, joint delivery of services etc) ▪ Improve outreach to under-represented communities and encourage more ‘ordinary people’ to be involved in local politics (by encouraging ‘a culture of active citizenship’) ▪ Introduce creative events in shopping areas, GP surgeries, churches, pubs and clubs to capture the views of local people (e.g. using short questionnaires) ▪ Improve support for community and voluntary groups ▪ Develop training in the role & responsibilities of community participation, create community champions ▪ Introduce a weekly or monthly forum on specific local issues, facilitated by the Council but not run by Council officers, where debate is encouraged and everyone is welcome ▪ Encourage the local BME community to set up organisations that are specific to their needs ▪ Work in partnership with local third-sector organisations and community groups in order to involve ‘harder-to-reach/seldom-heard’ residents <p><u>Developing a place based approach to public engagement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhance the role of Local Assemblies (e.g. more outreach, neighbourhood rather than ward-based, increased decision-making powers and funding), vary the times, location and dates
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	<p>of meetings, introduce an independent chair when contentious issues are being discussed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use Local Assemblies to give residents more information on important Council decisions that are under consideration as well as reporting back on the results ▪ Use the expertise of the community by creating more opportunities for participatory democracy/collaborative decision-making (including setting up Citizen Assemblies or other representative 'resident groups' to work with officers to assess solutions and help make decisions) ▪ Consider devolving some budgets and/or decision-making functions to the community where appropriate ▪ Utilise different democratic tools e.g. public votes, 'mini referenda' petitions, Facebook polls, online/text voting, crowd sourcing etc ▪ Letting communities tackle local infrastructure projects or take over vacant commercial premises ▪ Utilise the software used by Madrid City Council (decide.madrid.es) ▪ Introduce pilots for the distribution of s.106 money at ward-level (e.g. via Local Assemblies) <p><u>Young people</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish mechanisms for giving young people a sense of place in the community by building intergenerational relationships (e.g. programmes in schools for pupils to volunteer at care homes, help older residents with gardening etc) ▪ Develop a programme to get more people, especially younger people, involved and increase the pool of people available as councillors, school governors, leaders of local voluntary groups etc ▪ Work in partnership with schools and services that have direct contact with residents, young people & communities in order to obtain their views <p><u>Council meetings</u></p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review the format of Council meetings (e.g. end at 10PM, time slots for members of the public wanting to hear decisions or to make representations, daytime sessions for elderly residents/those who are unable to attend meetings at night)
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Theme 3 – Effective Decision-Making

Quantitative Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The most important features of effective decision-making were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have clear aims and desired outcomes (67% of respondents considered this to be ‘very important’) ○ Respect human rights (65% of respondents considered this to be ‘very important’) ○ Have a presumption in favour of openness (62% of respondents considered this to be ‘very important’) ○ Be based on consultation and the taking of professional advice from officers (41% of respondents considered this to be ‘very important’) ○ Be proportionate to the intended outcome (38% of respondents considered this to be ‘very important’) ▪ 73% of respondents felt that the Council could do more to improve the effectiveness of its decision-making

Qualitative Data

Issues	Ideas
<p>There were clear ideas about what the role of councillors should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many respondents regarded councillors as the primary point of contact between residents and the Council, stating that they have a duty to communicate what the Council is doing and explain what decisions have been made and why ▪ Respondents frequently described councillors as their elected representatives, considering it critically important that they understood the needs and views of their electorate ▪ A large number of respondents felt it was vital that councillors were regularly held to account by the electorate (including at Local Assemblies) and also regarded them as having a key role in scrutinising wider Council decisions <p>However, there were mixed views regarding interaction with councillors:</p>	<p><u>Putting councillors at the heart of decision making: roles</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduce Proportional Representation/Single Transferable Vote ▪ Review the directly elected Mayor model and consider alternative options e.g. committee system ▪ Full Council should elect cabinet members ▪ Introduce an additional executive body which has powers to overturn decisions – this should comprise one Councillor from each ward, elected by the Council ▪ Provide more administrative support to councillors (not just Cabinet members) <p><u>Putting councillors at the heart of decision making: relationships</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make sure other political parties within the borough are consulted (where appropriate)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Several respondents cited positive experiences of engaging with their councillor, but others raised concerns about accessibility/visibility (particularly between elections) and a few choose not to interact – ‘I have always felt that I was too busy and did not have pressing issues’; ‘I am well aware that their time is valuable and have no desire to take it up with what can seem like trivialities e.g. problems with bins, potholes, bad signage’ ▪ Some respondents did not know who their councillors were and/or did not fully understand the role of a councillor ▪ A few respondents felt that their councillors were not open and transparent about decision-making or did not put the needs of their constituents first when making decisions – ‘some are in it to help them on a political career journey and we, local residents, are just a step along the way’ ▪ There was also a perception amongst some that the performance and effectiveness of councillors varied across wards ▪ Some respondents described Lewisham as a ‘one-party state’ with no opposition. There was a perception amongst some that a lack of political opposition in the Council could lead to ‘lack of scrutiny’ ▪ Some respondents felt that the current structure of the Council reduced councillors’ influence on decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More publicity about councillors’ surgeries and the different ways residents can contact their councillors (use Lewisham Life, but consider developing an app) ▪ Councillors should be more visible, engaging with residents ‘where they are’ (e.g. street surgeries, visiting parks, supermarkets, GPs etc) and using social media more consistently (improve media training) ▪ Improve the recruitment and training of councillors so that they have the ‘skills and experience to manage local infrastructure successfully’ ▪ Introduce clearer standards for managing casework (including oversight mechanisms) ▪ Councillors should have more powers within the consultation process (e.g. speaking up for residents who are unhappy) ▪ Provide more information about the views and priorities of ward councillors beyond the standard party platform (e.g. publish their voting record) as well as updates about what they have been doing for their community <p><u>Putting councillors at the heart of decision making: responsibilities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More pre-decision scrutiny ▪ Ensure Council meetings last no longer than two and a half hours ▪ Move to a ‘task and finish’ model for Overview & Scrutiny ▪ Review the process for choosing chairs of Overview & Scrutiny committees ▪ Ensure councillors are more representative of the local community (e.g. increased numbers of female and BME councillors) ▪ Review special allowances and consider extending them to more roles ▪ Reduce the power of Executive Directors (e.g. decisions on spending should be limited to £100k)
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