

MINUTES OF THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY WORKING GROUP

Wednesday, 12 February 2020 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Best, Kevin Bonavia, Patrick Codd, Sophie Davis, Silvana Kelleher and Sakina Sheikh

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Jacq Paschoud and Councillor John Paschoud

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Colin Elliott

1. Minutes Of Meeting Held On 18th December 2019

RESOLVED: The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record.

2. Declarations Of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Theme 1: Openness & Transparency

3A. Exploring Options For The Development Of A Council-Wide Open Data Approach (Recommendation #5)

Salena Mulhere (SGM Interagency Service Development & Integration) introduced the report and the key points to note:

- The report provides a definition of open data, as well as information about the potential benefits, barriers and risks associated with the approach
- It also summarises the Council's current approach to open data and the results of a benchmarking exercise with other authorities (demonstrating how different approaches have been implemented)

The following was noted in discussion:

- It is important to look at the benefits and costs of developing an open data approach – there are potentially opportunities to make savings (e.g. members of the public interrogating Council data might be able to identify areas for improvement)
- The starting point for this recommendation was the principle that data should be shared – accessible data is useful when engaging with residents as it provides a common evidence base for discussion and debate
- Although research shows that only 20% of datasets published by central government have been downloaded, it does not necessarily mean that the other 80% of data is not useful or should not be shared (the Council's approach to open data should not be shaped around this statistic)
- The Council website may not have the capacity to host data (option 2) – a significant amount of data and information has been lost. The value of historic data in observing trends over time needs to be fully recognised

RESOLVED: Members of the LDWG agreed the following recommendations:

1. Create a single contextual data webpage (hosted on the Lewisham Council website) which provides links to all the different data sources outlined in the report (Lewisham Data Observatory, Nomis, GLA Datastore and the Lewisham Council's JSNA site).
2. Further promote the Lewisham Data Observatory as the primary source of contextual information about the borough for residents, councillors and officers alike, including on the site outlined above, but also on the Council's intranet.
3. Merge Lewisham Council's JSNA site with the Lewisham Data Observatory to avoid duplication and site proliferation. This is an approach that other authorities have taken and will make it easier for users to access JSNA information and also reduce the number of locations where data is held.
4. Ensure that learning from the report is considered in the development of Lewisham Council's Digital Strategy and that the procurement of an open data platform such as DataPress (longer-term Indicative Option 3) also be explored as part of this development.
5. Develop a Council-wide data storage policy to ensure existing data is retained (where appropriate) for future use.

4. Theme 2: Public Involvement In Decisions

4A. Redesigning The Council's Approach To Engagement – Seldom-Heard Groups & Individuals (Recommendation #31)

Members of the LDWG were advised that this report had been deferred until the next meeting in order to ensure that all work currently underway to develop a coordinated approach to improving the Council's approach to engagement was captured.

4B. Developing A Civic Crowdfunding Model For Lewisham (Recommendation #39)

Salena Mulhere (SGM Interagency Service Development & Integration) introduced the report and the key points to note:

- The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the use of civic crowdfunding in support of Lewisham-based projects
- Sections 5-11 explain the concept and characteristics of civic crowdfunding, including the available models, benefits and challenges and ways in which local authorities can get involved
- Sections 12-15 focus on the evolution of civic crowdfunding in the borough via an overview of Crowdfund London, Lewisham Hive, Crowdfund Lewisham and Lewisham Local initiatives

The following was noted in discussion:

- It is important that all local groups are able to access civic crowdfunding opportunities if they wish to – projects that are put forward and funded should be representative of the whole community (in line with the work currently being undertaken around seldom-heard voices)
- Officers in the Community Development and Community Enterprise teams have a critical role to play in promoting civic crowdfunding opportunities and supporting organisations in the development of their projects

RESOLVED: Members of the LDWG agreed the following recommendations:

1. Crowdfund London should be actively promoted annually and signposted through the Community Development team, Lewisham Local and the council's [How to get funding for your project](#) website page.
2. Case studies of projects successfully funded through Lewisham Hive and Crowdfund Lewisham (e.g. 999 Club and Ignition Brewery) should be profiled through the Lewisham Life e-newsletter and the 'Good News Blog' on Lewisham Local.
3. Community Enterprise officers within the council should continue to provide email and telephone support that encourages local groups to consider civic crowdfunding models as a source of funding for their business ideas. This should also assist them in developing and more importantly promoting their civic crowdfunding projects. Existing 'toolkits' and user guides should be shared as widely as possible.
4. Community Enterprise officers should routinely scan civic crowdfunding platforms (Lewisham Hive, Crowdfund Lewisham etc.) to identify which projects are being initiated and whether any best practice advice might assist them in achieving their funding targets. This could also identify whether any match-funding opportunities exist.
5. The Council, in partnership with Rushey Green Time Bank, should consider an annual civic crowdfunding event for the voluntary and community sector. This could provide an overview of how the various models work, best practice advice on how to set up a project, and signposting to support tools and training. This event could also be scheduled to align with the Crowdfund London timeline which could be promoted at the event.

5. Theme 3: Effective Decision-Making

5A. Evaluating The Potential Options For Planning (Recommendations #25-30)

Emma Talbot (Director of Planning) introduced the report and the key points to note:

- The report outlines the work undertaken to date in response to the six Planning-focused recommendations – this includes looking at best practice (including LB Brent, which was Local Planning Authority of the Year 2019), benchmarking with other authorities and gathering feedback from various parties involved in Lewisham's planning process
- Three areas of focus have been identified (planning committees, consultation and engagement with the public and IT/website) – emerging options for each of these areas are outlined in section 6

The following was noted in discussion:

- A new Planning system needs to be procured in 2020/21 (as the provider of the system currently used will not be undertaking further development/investment)
- Officers spend a significant amount of time preparing items for planning committees – the focus should be shifted to fewer, more strategic items requiring committee attention. This would create more time for engagement with residents (at a point when they can genuinely influence decisions)
- The work to date has looked specifically at the Local Democracy Review's recommendations, but there is an opportunity to explore other areas (including external relationships e.g. with amenity societies)
- Benchmarking has demonstrated that Lewisham's thresholds for triggering committee consideration are much lower than other boroughs, which impacts on the number of meetings required – structural changes to the process (e.g. number of meetings/committees) cannot be made unless thresholds are reviewed

- Ward councillors should also be involved at the beginning of the planning processes, particularly in relation to large developments
- The feasibility of a triage process led by committee chairs should be explored (e.g. determining whether an application should be delegated to officers for a decision or presented to committee)
- More information needs to be provided online and processes should be automated where possible – this would create a better experience for residents and ward councillors as well as enabling officers to focus on more complex applications

RESOLVED: Members of the LDWG noted the work undertaken to date, potential options and next steps.

6. LDWG Programme Update Report

Salena Mulhere (SGM Interagency Service Development & Integration) introduced the report and the key points to note:

- The eight thematic areas have now been grouped under the three overarching themes within the Local Democracy Review's original terms of reference (openness and transparency, public involvement in decisions and effective decision-making)
- Section 5 provides an overview of work to date and next steps across each of these themes (the programme plan, which outlines the current status of each recommendation via a RAG rating system, has also been updated)
- Officers have taken significant steps to raise the profile of the LDWG's work, including attending Cabinet Briefing and EMT, delivering a presentation to senior officers at the Council's Leadership Event and hosting a stall at the all-staff event on 13th January 2020
- A comprehensive review of the work to deliver the Local Democracy Review's recommendation is in development and will be presented to the LDWG in March 2020
- Officers are also undertaking 'legacy planning' for the review – this will involve the development of an approach to coordinate and manage the delivery of key pieces of work beyond 2019/20 and ensuring that the changes which have taken place are fully embedded

RESOLVED: Members of the LDWG noted the work undertaken to date and proposed next steps. They also noted the updated Programme Plan and the suggested approach for programme closure and legacy planning.