

# Local Assemblies - Councillor Survey

\* Required

## Introduction

1. Ward Assemblies (subsequently Local Assemblies) were established following the Mayor's Neighbourhood Commission in 2007. The aim was that they would help to deliver the "empowered and responsible" priority of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

The Assemblies form part of the Council's Constitution being defined as 'an important consultative mechanism [that] provide a conduit to the Council and other public service providers through which the local community can prioritise local issues and advise the Council, including on the determination of the Locality Fund'. The constitution does not define the operational management or frequency of the meetings.

Local Assembly delivery has been coordinated and managed by the Assemblies Team since 2008, working with local Co-ordinating Groups, running regular Assembly meetings, open to all local residents, and operating within Lewisham Council's Cultural and Community Development Team in the Community Services Directorate.

Assemblies gives residents a chance to:

- Find out what is happening in their ward
- Discuss and share what matters to them
- Work with their councillors and others to identify solutions and shape the future of their neighbourhood.

Assemblies also provide councillors with a key route to taking forward their community leadership role and engaging directly with ward residents. The role of councillors in community leadership is described here:

<https://lewishamcouncil.sharepoint.com/sites/MembersInfo/bwc/SitePages/Role%20of%20the%20Councillor.aspx>

One major strength of Assemblies over the years has been that each ward has been able to take a flexible approach in the way they work to address the needs of their own community and the priorities of ward councillors. For example, in Telegraph Hill ward, a community network has been developed to engage with a range of voluntary and community sector organisations working in partnership. The Assembly meetings run alongside this, but the majority of local operational issues are discussed by partners at network meetings, also attended by Councillors.

Assembly meeting attendance has been varied over the years depending on the topics being discussed, the demographics of the population and time of year.

2. In 2019, a programme of budget cuts was agreed which included removing all funding for the running costs of assembly meetings as outlined on page 40 of this report: <https://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s62492/Budget%20Report%20Appendices.pdf>; see also <https://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?AllId=21763>. This means that whilst ward officers are still in place to run assembly meetings, there is no operational budget for covering items such as printed publicity, venue hire, refreshments etc.

There were also proposals to reduce staffing in the delivery of Assemblies, leading to agreement that the minimum number of Assemblies per ward should be two online Assemblies per year.

This approach was informed by the successful online delivery of all Assembly meetings during COVID-19 but it is acknowledged that this is a significant reduction in Assembly delivery overall. A review of Assemblies was undertaken in 2021 to address budget constraints. As part of the review, the following approaches were suggested:

- hosting online meetings in addition to in-person meetings
- encouraging a 'community-led' approach where local organisations take the lead on organising meetings

The review recommended:

- A minimum of two formal Assembly meetings, delivered on-line, per year with greater coordination of wider activity and advantage taken of other existing structures like the Police's Safer Neighbourhood Teams Ward Panels
- The delivery of additional face to face events throughout the year in partnership with the local community groups and organisations

As services resumed following the pandemic and during planning for the first NCIL programme, it was suggested that the shortfall in council-led Assembly meetings could be mitigated by community-run, in-person Assembly meetings and community development activities organised through VCS groups, who could apply for NCIL funding to meet the costs.

VCS groups were encouraged to do this in all wards. However, only seven out of eighteen (at the time) wards submitted successful applications.

The NCIL-supported approach has now been operational for 15 months, complementing the minimum number of Council-led online Assemblies organised by community development officers as described above. There are significant inconsistencies across the borough relating to numbers of assembly meetings and resources available to host and promote them in different wards. Whilst the flexibility of approach referenced above has always meant differences in Council-led Assemblies, the current discrepancy in number of meetings and resources available to run them has been heavily influenced by the introduction of NCIL funded projects. While there is an expectation and targets relating to community-led Assemblies in the seven wards which received NCIL funding, in the other (now) twelve wards, officers have been attempting to work with community partners to deliver community-led Assemblies, without additional resources. This has been challenging and has resulted in variable degrees of success, depending on the number of VCS partners in the ward, how closely they have worked with the Council previously, and how relevant the role of community-led Assemblies are to those organisations' core services and mission.

3. Questions and concerns have been raised across wards and by councillors about the disparity in resources. The Executive member with responsibilities for Assemblies has, in partnership with Safer Stronger Scrutiny Committee, requested that the views of councillors are sought via the questionnaire below in order to gauge the experience and views of individual councillors to help us move forward in developing a more consistent offer.

The questionnaire will help us assess your views about Assembly meetings, what further information, support and resources are needed to deliver Assemblies, and what can be done to improve and or change how Assemblies are run. The initial responses from this survey will be considered by the Safer, Stronger Scrutiny Committee on 7th November 2023, with a full report returned to the Scrutiny Committee alongside responses to questions and issues raised.

Please respond to this survey by **midnight Wednesday 1st November**.

Thank you for your time. \*

I have read the text on this page

## Respondent details

### 4. Name \*

### 5. The ward you represent \*

- Bellingham
- Blackheath
- Brockley
- Catford South
- Crofton Park
- Deptford
- Downham
- Evelyn
- Forest Hill
- Grove Park
- Hither Green
- Ladywell
- Lee Green
- Lewisham Central
- New Cross Gate
- Perry Vale
- Rushey Green
- Sydenham
- Telegraph Hill

### 6. Were you new to the role of Councillor when you were elected in May 2022? \*

- Yes
- No

## Your local assembly

7. How successful do you think Council-led Assemblies have been in your ward? \*

- Very successful
- Fairly successful
- Limited success
- Not successful

8. Please tell us why you gave the answer above \*

9. How successful do you think the Community-led assembly approach has been in your ward \*

	Not applicable	Not successful	Limited success	Fairly successful	Very successful
Your NCIL funded community-led assemblies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your non-funded partnership approach to community-led assemblies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Please tell us why you gave the answer above \*

11. Please tell us your view of the overall approach of NCIL funded Assemblies from NCIL application to delivery of meetings.

12. How were your meetings promoted (select as many as apply) \*

- Email to residents via Ward Officer mailing list
- Email to residents via Councillor contact list
- Promotion to residents via community organisations and housing providers
- Promotion to residents via NCIL funded organisations
- Posters
- Leaflets
- Social media via Council communications service
- Social media via Councillor contact list
- Don't know

13. If applicable, which platforms did the Council's communications service use to promote your meetings?

14. If applicable, which platforms were used via the Councillor contact list?

15. Which of the following statements best describes your experience of the promotion undertaken to publicise your assembly meeting? \*

- Comprehensive coverage
- Good coverage
- Adequate coverage
- Limited coverage
- Poor coverage

16. Please explain your reason for the above answer \*

17. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor and 5 excellent), how would you rate your assemblies in the following areas \*

	1	2	3	4	5
Disseminating information to residents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seeking community views on the Council's plans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing space for community groups to share updates on their work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing a forum for identifying and addressing emerging needs, issues and concerns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing a space for residents to constructively question and challenge the council	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. Please provide any further comments regarding the role performed by assemblies

19. In relation to venues for meetings in your ward, please give us your view on their adequacy and appropriateness.

\*

20. Is there anything you feel we need to improve in accessing better venues in your ward?

21. How do you rate the support you receive from the Community Development Team where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent? \*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

22. Please tell us why you gave the rating above. \*

23. Do you think the meeting format and agenda work to achieve the stated objectives of assemblies? \*

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

24. Please tell us why you gave the answer above. \*

25. What could be done to improve our Assemblies?

26. Is there anything else you'd like to share about the Local Assembly programme in Lewisham?

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