

Barriers to Politics Working Group			
REPORT	The Role of a Councillor		
KEY DECISION	No	Item No:	4
WARD	N/A		
CONTRIBUTORS	Executive Director for Resources & Regeneration		
CLASS	Part 1	Date:	14 March 2017

REASONS FOR LATENESS AND URGENCY

This report was not available for the original dispatch because the motion was agreed at Full Council on 22nd February; this would not have allowed sufficient time to prepare the report in advance of despatch for the Barriers to Politics Working Group on 3rd March. The report is urgent and cannot wait until the next meeting of the Barriers to Politics Working Group because the content of the report will inform the discussion on the role of the councillor and the approach of the Working Group.

Where a report is received less than 5 clear days before the date of the meeting at which the matter is being considered, then under the Local Government Act 1972 Section 100(b)(4) the Chair of the Committee can take the matter as a matter of urgency if he/she is satisfied that there are special circumstances requiring it to be treated as a matter of urgency. These special circumstances have to be specified in the minutes of the meeting.

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report sets out the role of the councillor and the council-provided support in the London Borough of Lewisham. The purpose of this report is to inform the Barriers to Politics Working Group's discussion on the expectations and experiences of councillors.
- 1.2. This report provides a national and London context including councillor demographics, how councillors use their time and the support available to them.
- 1.3. This report identifies current campaigns and research into the barriers to politics and provides information and an approach to the areas of focus for the Barriers to Politics Working Group.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1. The group is recommended to:
 - Agree the focus of each of the four evidence sessions.
 - Discuss and agree key questions for a survey of councillors.
 - Discuss and agree key questions for a survey of residents.

3. CONTEXT

3.1. The Equality Act 2010 defines the following characteristics as protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

3.2. Lewisham's Comprehensive Equality Scheme (CES) 2016-20 sets out how the Council will meet its duties to improve the quality of life and life chances of all Lewisham's residents as well as the various equality groups afforded specific protection under the Equality Act of 2010. The scheme contains the following five overarching objectives:

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

3.3. The London Borough of Lewisham is home to 292,000 people; Lewisham has the fifth largest Inner London population size and the 13th largest in London. Between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses the population of Lewisham increased by 30,000. By the time of the next Census in 2021, the population of the borough is forecast to reach 321,000. Children and young people make up 25% of Lewisham's population, whilst those aged over 65 comprise of 10% of the population. Over the years Lewisham's population has become increasingly diverse; currently some 54% of residents describe themselves as White, compared to 46% who are of Black and Minority Ethnic heritage. A greater proportion of residents in the London Borough of Lewisham are living with long-term conditions (a proxy measure for disability) than in inner London: 14.4% of Lewisham residents and 13.5% across Inner London.

3.4. The role of a councillor is set out in the London Borough of Lewisham Constitution. Local councillors are elected by the community to decide how the Council should carry out its various activities; they represent public interest as well as individuals living within the ward in which he or she has been elected to serve a term of office. Lewisham has a directly elected Labour Mayor, 53 Labour councillors and 1 Green Party councillor.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1. At Full Council, in February 2017, the motion was moved by Councillor Clarke and seconded by Councillor Elliot to establish a time-limited all-party 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.

- 4.2. Full Council agreed the following terms of reference for the Group:
- The Group aims to identify and investigate the various barriers that exist for individuals wishing to apply for, or undertaking the role of Councillor, and to put forward recommendations to Full Council on how to address them.
 - The Group will focus on barriers in each equality stream.
 - The Working Group will bring a report to Council by September 2017.
 - The Group will have the power to invite expert witnesses and to request relevant officers to attend meetings.
 - The Group will require appropriate officer time and resources to support its work.

5. ROLE OF A COUNCILLOR

- 5.1. The Local Government Association (LGA) explains that a councillor has many different roles to balance in the Councillors' Guide 2016/17. The LGA broadly groups the role of a councillor across the following areas.
- Representing the local area
 - Community leadership
 - Developing council policy
 - Planning and regulation
- 5.2. A councillor's primary role is to represent their ward or division and the people who live there. As well as being an advocate for local residents and signposting to the right people at the council, councillors must keep informed about the issues that affect them.
- 5.3. The LGA explains that councillors have a lead role in a council's partnership work with local communities and organisations. Local councillors contribute to the development of policies and strategies, bringing the views and priorities of the local area to debate. Part of a councillor's role is to make decisions, for example agreeing the policy framework and budget for the Council. A councillor may also be appointed to sit on a planning and regulatory committee.
- 5.4. The role of a councillor is defined in the London Borough of Lewisham Constitution: "councillors who are elected to represent local wards must both represent the people of the ward which elected them and, when involved in decision making, act in the interest of the whole area. They are all expected to contribute to the good governance of the area and to encourage community participation. They must respond to their constituents' enquiries fairly...Councillors are elected for a term of four years."

6. COUNCILLOR RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.1. 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

- 6.2. No generic job description exists for councillors; responsibilities can broadly be grouped around the following three areas as defined within the Handbook:
- Advocacy: raising casework; meeting with local people to discuss their concerns; presenting the views of your constituents to Council.
 - Leadership: chairing your local assembly; assisting your community in putting its ideas into practice.
 - 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.
- 6.3. 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 overview and scrutiny. The Business Panel co-ordinates the work programmes of the six select committees. There are two statutory committees: the Standards Committee and the Health & Wellbeing Board. 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. A diagram showing Lewisham Governance is attached at Appendix A. Members may also Chair a local assembly.
- 6.4. The Constitution does not prescribe the number of meetings a councillor must attend or the responsibilities a councillor must undertake, however, if a councillor fails for a period of six consecutive months from the date of his/her last attendance, to attend any meeting of the Council, then he/she shall (unless the absence was due to some reason approved by the Full Council before the expiry of that period) cease to be a member of the Council.

7. REMUNERATION

- 7.1. 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.
- 7.2. As part of the Council's Members' Allowances Scheme, all elected councillors in the are paid an annual Basic Allowance. 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 allowance.
- 7.3. In September 2014, Full Council, having regard to the advice of the London Councils remuneration panel and the advice of Sir Rodney Brooke, and to the guidance issued under the Local Government Act 2000, opted not to approve the scheme of allowances proposed by Sir Rodney Brooke which included a Basic Allowance of £10,703.
- 7.4. Full Council resolved not to accept that the updating of the scheme should continue for four years in accordance with the rate by which Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) salaries are changed in the preceding year. The current rate of Basic Allowance has remained fixed since the decision in 2014.

- 7.5. 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

- 7.6. 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). The current special responsibility allowances are set out in the Members' Allowance Scheme (Appendix B).
- 7.7. Members 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 Member away from home overnight.
- 7.8. 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

8. SUPPORT FOR COUNCILLORS

- 8.1. Councillors 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.

- 8.2. 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.
- 8.3. Governance support staff (in the Overview and Scrutiny and Business and Committee teams) are available to support members, along with Communications staff, staff from the Mayor's office and political group officers. There are casework officers in all directorates who investigate and respond to member queries.
- 8.4. 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.
- 8.5. Councillors are supported by officers with printing necessary information, for example papers for committee meetings. Internal and external post, including committee papers, is collected for members and delivered to the homes twice per week via a courier.
- 8.6. Party group offices are provided for groups with sufficient members; these offices have computers, phones and printers. There are also two small meeting rooms that are available for members to use. There is a multi-functional printer, scanner and photocopier for members which can use for colour printing.
- 8.7. 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.

9. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

- 9.1. Lewisham has a comprehensive 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 councils 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.
- 9.2. 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.

- 9.3. 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. Collectively, the plans provide the basis for the priorities of the member development programme. During the year, as issues for improvement are identified, councillors can ask for their development plan to be updated. Councillors are able to meet with the Overview and Scrutiny Manager at any time in order to review their training and development needs.
- 9.4. Throughout the year, training and development sessions are held for councillors, based on issues identified in PDPs and members ongoing discussions with the Overview and Scrutiny Manager. In addition, any councillor (or a senior council officer) can request an 'all member briefing' to provide information for councillors about a topical issue. In the past year there have been almost fifty member development, training and briefing sessions held and 240 individual attendances by members. These might be provided as courses, seminars or lectures with external providers such as: the Local Government Association; the Centre for Public Scrutiny or; the Institute for Local Government Studies. This year, sessions attended by members with external providers have included sessions on: sustainability and transformation plans; leadership; the future of crime and policing in London; young people's mental health; forced marriage and gender based violence.
- 9.5. Other training is provided in-house or delivered by external trainers at the Council's offices. In the past year members have attended sessions on managing meetings; scrutinising children and young people's services; key housing issues and finance and audit.
- 9.6. It is most often officers who provide all member briefings. In the past year, these have included: Lewisham's Education Commission; ICT; Members Personal Safety and Counter Terrorism and Protective Security.
- 9.7. The majority of councillors have attended one or more training sessions with officers from children and young people's services on safeguarding and members' responsibilities for looked after children.

10. GROUP SUPPORT AND EXPECTATIONS

- 10.1. Political groups may also set expectations for councillors representing a party as part of their selection process. Councillors who represent a political party, may be expected to participate in group meetings and contribute to the development of policies and strategies. Councillors may be expected by their party to support regular campaign and communications in the local community on behalf of their party.
- 10.2. Councillors who are members of a political party may have a number of key duties within the local branches, this could include:
- attending branch meetings and reporting and consulting on all council activity undertaken
 - campaigning with branch members on local issues
 - supporting policy discussion

- recruiting new members

10.3. The Council may appoint to the post of political assistant for a qualifying group as defined in Section 9 Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

11. COUNCILLOR PROFILE

11.1. The Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013 provides the most comprehensive 'snapshot' of local government representation and analyses of trends over time. The census asks councillors about:

- their work as councillors
- their views on a range of issues
- their personal background

11.2. Lewisham Council does not currently collect or maintain monitoring information on councillors; the Census provides detail by region, local authority type and political group. Local authority-level information is not published by the Local Government Association; available information at a local level is not examined in this report due to the low sample size. It should be noted that the Census was conducted before the 2014 local elections.

11.3. 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.

11.4. The below table shows the average number of hours per week a councillor spends on council business:

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

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

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

11.7. 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%).

- 11.8. 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).
- 11.9. The majority of councillors in London described themselves as effective or very effective in their role (93.6%), however 24% had less influence than expected; 6.5% of councillors in London Boroughs would not recommend being a councillor.
- 11.10. The average age of a councillor in London was 56.5 years (cf. 60.2 nationally); 10.2% of councillors in London were aged under 35 years, 46.7% were aged over 60 years.
- 11.11. A fewer proportion of councillors in London described themselves as having a long term illness, a proxy for disability (8.9% in London and 13.2% across England); this compares with 14.1% of the overall London population and 14.4% of the Lewisham population describing themselves as having a limiting long-term illness or disability.
- 11.12. Over a quarter of councillors in London had caring responsibilities (28.8%); of the total number of councillors in London, 18.7% have caring responsibilities for a child. In the context of employment status, 2.8% of councillors in London described themselves as not in paid work due to the fact they were looking after a home/family.
- 11.13. At the time of the Census, 84.3% of councillors across London were white ethnic origin (cf. 96% nationally); 11.8% were Asian, Asian British ethnic origin (cf. 2.8% nationally) and 2.1% were Black, African, Caribbean, Black British ethnic origin (cf. 0.6% nationally).
- 11.14. Over a third of councillors in London were female at the time of the last census (36% in London and 31.6% nationally). The proportion of women in leadership roles was much smaller than the proportion of men: 13% of council leaders across England were female. Across England, 53.7% of male councillors held one or more positions, compared to 51.4% of female councillors. On average, female councillors spend 22 hours per week on council business compared with male councillors who spend 20.2 hours per week on council business.
- 11.15. No information was collected on religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or marriage and civil partnership as part of the Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013.

12. CAMPAIGNS AND RESEARCH

- 12.1. 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. 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. 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.

- 12.2. 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 forums. The report observed major gender differences in distribution of roles and activities and participation in meetings. All major political parties actively campaign to encourage women to enter politics at a national and local level; Amplify is the new campaign to encourage women in the Labour Party to take on leadership roles.
- 12.3. The House of Commons Briefing Paper, 'Ethnic Minorities in Politics and Public Life', found that almost a third of councillors in England are women, but minority ethnic women are particularly under-represented; the report highlighted that the 2010 Census of Local Authorities Councillors found that around 2% of female councillors were non-white (this figure rose to 3.5% in the 2013 Census). In the London Borough of Lewisham, Operation Black Vote in partnership with Lewisham Council launched a unique Civic Leadership Programme to encourage Lewisham's future leaders.
- 12.4. In November 2010, a report on 'Experiences of and barriers to participation in public and political life for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT)' was presented to the Government Equalities Office. The report made a series of recommendations including that participation of LGBT people in both wider and formal public and political life needs to be 'normalised' through national and local awareness campaigns, and assertive outreach to LGBT communities by public and political bodies. The report 'Gay in Britain' by Stonewall found that three quarters (74%) of lesbian, gay and bisexual people think they would face barriers from the Conservative Party if they wanted to stand as an MP, more than a third (37%) would expect to face barriers from the Labour Party and more than a quarter (29%) from the Liberal Democrats.

13. SUGGESTED WORKING GROUP APPROACH

- 13.1. The Barriers to Politics Working Group has been tasked with examining the barriers to those wishing to enter politics as an elected member and, once elected, the barriers to remaining in post or progressing.
- 13.2. It is recommended that the Working Group considers the barriers to politics in the context of the protected characteristics. Underpinning each discussion will be five overarching objectives as defined within Lewisham's Comprehensive Equality Scheme (CES) 2016-20.
- 13.3. The Working Group has the power to invite expert witnesses and to request relevant officers attend meetings. It is proposed that organisations which have undertaken research or campaigns relating to the barriers to politics, including those set out in the Campaigns and Research section of this report, are invited to attend evidence sessions as expert witnesses or to submit written contributions.

- 13.4. It is recommended that four evidence sessions are broadly structured around the following key themes, with scope to cover other protected characteristics or broader themes in each of the sessions:
- a. Disability
 - b. Gender
 - c. Race
 - d. Sexual Orientation

14. NEXT STEPS

- 14.1. It is recommended that the organisations and individuals which have conducted research into barriers to politics are invited to appear at the Barriers to Politics Working Group evidence sessions as expert witnesses or make written submissions.
- 14.2. In order to establish a picture of barriers to accessing politics in Lewisham, it is recommended that the Working Group undertakes a survey to gather resident's perceptions of the role of a councillor and any barriers they feel they would face to prevent them standing for election.
- 14.3. In order to gather information about experiences of councillors in the London Borough of Lewisham, and if possible neighbouring boroughs, it is recommended that the Working Group undertakes a survey of local councillors. This will inform the Working Group of councillor's perceptions of the barriers to remaining in post or progressing in politics.
- 14.4. It is proposed that a final report will be presented to the Barriers to Politics Working Group in September 2017 for the Group to agree final recommendations for Full Council.

15. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

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

16. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 16.1. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report at this time. It is expected that any cost associated with the surveys will be met from existing service budgets.

17. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 17.1. The legal implications are set out in the body of this report.

18. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- 18.1. Appendix A: London Borough of Lewisham Governance
- 18.2. Appendix B: Members' Allowances Scheme for Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances 2014