

Barriers to Politics Working Group

Appendix B: Evidence Session: Age and Caring Responsibilities

Lewisham Positive Ageing Council Steering Group Feedback

There can be a feeling that that younger people in politics don't respect age and what older people can give back. We are inclined to be cast aside, people forget our experiences and that we are useful and have a lot to contribute.

There can be a fear of putting yourself out there to try something so new.

Many people are just too busy in their retirement or older age – especially if you are a political person (with a small p) it is likely that you are already very involved in lots of groups and societies and already giving a lot of your time.

Many older people now have caring responsibilities: for grandchildren or for older relatives.

The rise in retirement age must be having an influence. When people retired at 60 they may have been inclined to feel they still had the energy to give a lot of their time. Now people are starting to retire later, they might feel differently – nearly 70 is quite different from nearly 60 years old.

Some councillors can give the impression that their attitudes to older people can be a barrier 'I'm too good for you', or 'I am humouring you' if older people have had that personal experience they may feel reluctant. Although young people seem to show more respect now than they did.

There is possibly there is a feeling that you don't really know what to expect so taking the first step is hard, you would probably be ok once you started but the first step is the hardest and it is the kind of thing you would need to do alone. It's not like going to a new club where you can take a friend along.

Does being on call 24/7 through social media have an impact? We are not worried about begin contacted on twitter etc. but some have a fear of using modern technology; committee notes are on tablets now.

If you become a councillor, people are trying to get you at all hours and some people might not want that in their older age. If you are in a couple, the other person has to be as willing to be brought in as well. The family impact would be a huge decision.

Lewisham Positive Ageing Council Email Submissions

Peggy Fitzsimmons, Chair and founder of Positive Ageing Council, Via Email:

I am a retired councillor; I served for 30 years and in that time I witnessed many times that when we were at public meetings older are people would put their hand up to make a contribution and would either be ignored or dismissed. Many, many times this

attitude would lead to the older people to say that they are not interested in older people's contribution and also older people's items was mostly put on the end of the agenda and many times the meetings overrun so the last item would have to be missed. All of this attitude lead to me feeling disgusted as being a councillor for so long meant that I had not received this behaviour when I was younger.

That is why I asked our Mayor if I could set up a way so that older people could have a voice. The mayor then tasked me to set the proposal to have a "positive ageing council" which we did and now has attendees of 80 to 100.

This shows the reason why older people feel very reluctant to apply to become councillors

James Dobson, Chair of Seniors, Via Email:

The biggest barrier to getting in to and remaining in politics is the far too tribal party system. If you want to achieve a spread of representation there could be a number of positions held open for non-party demographically qualified individuals that could possibly be voted for separately by all or by their demographic peers

Christine Castro, Vice Chair Positive Ageing Council, Via Email.

The role of Councillor in our community is crucial to a well-run Council and therefore it is important that there are no barriers to any member of our community willing to take on this demanding responsibility.

Councillors become very busy people. On top of their day jobs, there will be many e-mails to answer, phone calls to respond to and sometimes, people needing help and advice knocking at their door and of course, there will be evening Council and Committee meetings.

I am sure this is all mentioned during the training offered, before the selection process to would-be candidates. But an extra pressure rarely mentioned, this is the effect of all this, on partners and family, who will inevitably be effected and may become resentful of the intrusions into their family life.

My firm suggestion therefore, is that partners should be invited to an early training session, so that candidates, with their partners, can decide together, before selection, whether the very valuable role of Councillor is feasible for them.