

<b>Barriers to Politics Working Group</b>			
<b>REPORT</b>	Barriers to entering and progressing in politics faced due to sexual orientation or gender identity		
<b>KEY DECISION</b>	No	<b>Item No:</b>	3
<b>WARD</b>	N/A		
<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>	Executive Director for Resources & Regeneration		
<b>CLASS</b>	Part 1	<b>Date:</b>	6 September 2017

## **1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1. This report provides context for the Barriers to Politics Working Group to consider as part of the evidence session on barriers related to sexual orientation or gender identity which people face when running for and progressing as a local councillor.
- 1.2. This report provides information on research in to the barriers people face due to their sexual orientation or gender identity whilst running for and progressing in elected office. The report highlights campaigns and research focused on sexual orientation and gender identity.

## **2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1. The Barriers to Politics Working Group is recommended to:
  - Note the report.
  - Consider the evidence provided at the meeting.

## **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 has a population of 306,000 (the 13th largest in London and the 5th largest in Inner London). The population of the borough has increased by 30,000 since the 2011 Census (this represents a 9% increase since 2011). By the time of the next national Census in 2021, the population of the borough is forecast to reach 321,000 (a 16% increase on 2011). Children and young people make up 25 per cent of Lewisham's population, whilst those aged over 65 comprise of 10 per cent of the population.

#### **4. SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY CONTEXT**

4.1. Nationally, sexual identity estimates are based on social survey data from the Annual Population Survey (APS). The questions collect information on self-identified sexual identity from the household population aged 16 and over in the UK. In 2015, 1.7 per cent of the UK population identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). More males (2.0 per cent) than females (1.5 per cent) identified themselves as LGB in 2015; 4.6 per cent of respondents identified themselves as "other", "don't know" or refused to respond.

4.2. British voters returned a record number of openly LGB MPs to Parliament in the 2017 General Election; forty-five LGB MPs were elected in June 2017 (approximately 7% of all MPs), six more than in the previous parliament.

4.3. The Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013 did not ask any questions relating to sexual orientation and hence it is not possible to comment on the representativeness of local councils. In the next Census of Local Authority Councillors in 2018, questions on sexual orientation will be included.

4.4. No survey of candidates in local elections in England has asked respondents questions about their sexual orientation. However, the Welsh Government, with the support of Data Unit Wales, carried out a survey of local government councillors and candidates following the May 2012 elections (results from the second survey following the 2017 elections are expected to be published later this year). The survey found that 2 per cent of elected councillors identified as LGB (in line with the national position) in comparison to 5 per cent of unelected candidates. The survey found that the majority of elected councillors identified as heterosexual or straight (98 per cent). The survey did not ask respondents if they identified as transgender, or if their gender identity was different from that assigned to them at birth.

4.5. Despite a growing number of openly LGB Members of Parliament, there are no openly transgender MPs in the UK. Labour Candidate Sophie Cook stood in the Worthing East and Shoreham Parliamentary Constituency in June 2017; although she was unsuccessful in being elected, the Labour party observed gains of 19.8% of the electorate in the constituency compared with the 2015 position (compared to 9.5% increase in vote share nationwide).

- 4.6. Labour, Liberal Democrats, Conservatives, Greens and UKIP all have councillors who openly identify as transgender. The Labour Party elected its first openly transgender councillor in May 2016.

## **5. SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY RESEARCH AND CAMPAIGNS**

- 5.1. Research by Stonewall in their report 'Gay in Britain', published in 2013, found that many political parties' own lesbian, gay and bisexual supporters believe they would face discrimination if they were to seek selection as a parliamentary candidate: 52 per cent of gay Conservative Party supporters say they would face barriers in their own party, compared with 23 per cent of gay Labour Party supporters and 20 per cent of gay Liberal Democrat supporters.
- 5.2. Stonewall has found that those aged 18 to 29 more likely to expect discrimination; 82 per cent say this of the Conservative Party, 45 per cent of the Labour Party and 37 per cent of the Liberal Democrats. However, fewer LGB people in 2013 expected to experience discrimination if they sought selection by a political party to run for parliament than when the survey was conducted in 2008.
- 5.3. Stonewall's report considered perceptions at a local political level and found that 74 per cent of party supporters thought they would face barriers from the Conservative Party if they were seeking selection to run as a local councillor; 39 per cent would expect to face barriers from the Labour Party and a 33 per cent from the Liberal Democrats (22, 16 and 13 percentage points higher respectively than comparative figures at a national political level).
- 5.4. Perception in the media and discrimination has been identified as a cause for concern by Stonewall: at the time of their 2013 survey, 76 per cent of gay people believed that LGB politicians were subject to greater scrutiny, including by the media, compared to heterosexual politicians.
- 5.5. Iain Stewart, Conservative MP for Milton Keynes South, has highlighted the barrier that negative campaigning can play against LGB candidates and argues that "although all parties are signed up publicly and at leadership level, at constituency level there can sometimes be discrimination in subtle or unsubtle ways."
- 5.6. Stonewall made a series of recommendations to political parties in its 2013 report, 'Gay in Britain', including that parties should ensure that candidates do not produce campaign literature deliberately designed to highlight an opponent's sexual orientation and political parties should monitor the sexual orientation of their members and candidates.
- 5.7. The Commission on Women in Local Government's report, 'Does local government work for women?' recognised that it is hard to identify whether LGBT+ women are underrepresented due to challenges in measuring these identities in the wider population. Surveys carried out by the Commission did however find that many of the LGBT+ women councillors who responded had experienced multiple discrimination.

- 5.8. In 2014, Wiltshire Council published 'LGBT Public Sector Forum Role Models' which provides stories and case studies from LGBT leaders across Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council and the wider public sector. Swindon Council Leader 2006-2013, Rod Bluh, shares his personal experience in the publication, he says that "the more you are open and confident about yourself and your relationship, the less it is an issue for others".
- 5.9. In 2016, media outlets reported that a transgender Conservative councillor was called "he" by a Labour rival at a Bolton Council meeting and this was being treated as a hate incident by police.
- 5.10. In May 2016, an Equality and Diversity Review Group commissioned by Oxford City Council's Scrutiny Committee recommended, among other things, that the Council adopts gender-neutral terms on forms as part of its ongoing work to be as inclusive as possible, for instance, giving consideration to adding the title Mx in addition to the more established gendered titles such as Mr, Mrs, Miss and Ms.
- 5.11. Stonewall has run a Leadership programme for senior LGBT individuals for 14 years: the programme brings together senior leaders who identify as LGBT from across a range of sectors and industries.

## **6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

- 6.1. It is not possible to identify the representativeness of local and national politics in relation to the sexual orientation or gender identity of politicians as this information is not routinely collected. In instances where the information is requested, it is not always shared.
- 6.2. An increasing number of openly LGBT individuals are entering politics at a national and local level however, many people still perceive they will face barriers from political parties should they wish to stand for election. More people expect barriers at a local level than at a national level, and this could be due to both subtle and unsubtle discrimination.
- 6.3. Senior leaders believe that a culture of openness results in fewer issues and Stonewall recommends that political parties collect monitoring information about candidates and members – although this information is not currently readily available publically.
- 6.4. Language plays a key part in engaging LGBT individuals in political life and more broadly.

## **7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report at this time.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1. The legal implications are set in the body of the Report.

## **10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

10.1. Appendix A: Stonewall, 'Gay in Britain' (2013)