

Local Democracy Review: Report of the Working Group (Spring 2019)



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1. Chair's Introduction

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2. Executive Summary

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3. Review Context

This is the first comprehensive review of the Council's decision making to be conducted since the current governance arrangements were established in 2002. In that period, the borough has seen significant change, including a rapidly growing population, while central government austerity has reduced the Council budget by £165 million - this has seen the Council forced to halve its staff. However, we still make decisions on over 800 services that affect the lives of all Lewisham residents: having a strong local democracy and effective decision-making processes is as important as ever.

This review was instigated at the start of a new Council administration as pledged by our incoming Mayor, Damien Egan. A newly elected Mayor and a large number of new councillors made up the Full Council of Lewisham in May 2018 and in July of that year they tasked us with reviewing how the Council shared information and made decisions and how this could be further improved. The revitalised direction of the Council, as set out in our Corporate Strategy, is refocused on empowering and enabling all of our citizens, reducing inequality and using our resources and abilities to prioritise supporting those most in need. This review has been instigated and conducted in line with that focus of doing whatever is within our gift to improve the options and outcomes available to our citizens and reducing inequality wherever we can.

Our organisational values endure

- We put service to the public first
- We respect all people and all communities
- We invest in employees
- We are open, honest and fair in all we do

The scope, timeline, methodology and Terms of Reference for this review were set by Full Council in July 2018¹. We were tasked with undertaking a review and reporting back with recommendations by spring 2019. Our terms of reference are:

To make recommendations to Council about how the Mayor and Council could:

- Enhance their openness and transparency
- Further develop public involvement in Council decisions
- Promote effective decision-making

¹ <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s58396/Local%20Democracy%20Review.pdf>

4. Our Approach

We recognised that delivering this review was a huge undertaking.

The methodology for the review was set out for us by Full Council as:

- a) A review of the Council's current arrangements to involve residents
- b) A review of the methods used by other authorities to involve residents
- c) A review of methods used by other authorities to promote openness and transparency in Council decision-making
- d) Consultation with Overview and Scrutiny members about how to develop councillor participation in the scrutiny process
- e) Engagement with the Local Assemblies programme to explore best practice and the role of Assemblies in engaging with residents
- f) Engage the public, especially members of the public who are less likely to be aware or able to participate in the review, and other stakeholders
- g) Consult Mayor and Cabinet on any recommendations made and formulate recommendations for full Council, which incorporate advice on all relevant implications (including equalities, environmental, service, financial, legal and any other relevant matters)

At our inaugural meeting in September 2018 we received detailed information about our current methods for engagement and their recent usage². We then discussed at length how we were going to meet our ambitious target of gathering sufficiently, relevant and wide-reaching evidence to enable us to provide a comprehensive report and recommendations to Council by spring 2019.

The 3 key areas of focus as set out in the terms of reference were very clear. The breadth of issues which we were required to gain a comprehensive understanding of so that we would be able to provide recommendations for improvement was quite daunting. As wide a range of people as possible needed to be involved in sharing their views and experiences if real insight was to be gained and informed suggestions for enhancement were to be made.

We discussed how best to gather the essential evidence of the views and experiences of local people, as well as capturing the views and experiences of councillors and a wide range of experts. We agreed we needed to focus on getting out across the borough and hearing directly from as diverse a range of citizens and groups as possible. Though the time commitment was challenging alongside all of our various day to day councillor responsibilities, all 8 of us needed to go to as many meetings and events and venues as possible to talk to people directly to try and get a real sense of their views and experiences.

As well as the wide-ranging face to face engagement, we agreed that an online approach was also needed so that we could reach as wide an audience as possible. A detailed online questionnaire was created and publicised widely so that we could gather some quantitative as well as qualitative information, and so that everyone who wanted to share their views could do so, even if they weren't able to attend a face to face event. We launched a website to provide some more information and context to the review and to enable people to find out more and contact us directly via email.

We knew that we would need the insight, support and guidance of other local authorities and experts in the field of local democracy to help us consider and test out our findings and

² <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s59507/Introductory%20Report%20260918.pdf>

suggestions. We approached a number of regional and national authorities and leaders in local democracy and asked them to support our evidence gathering and considerations³. We held a roundtable with colleagues in Hackney and workshops with the LGiU and Kirklees Council to help us consider the evidence received and to assist and advise us in developing our recommendations.

Timeline

May 2018

During his election campaign, Mayor Damien Egan pledges to launch a review that will 'make our Council even more democratic, open and transparent'

18th July 2018

Full Council agrees to establish a Local Democracy Review Working Group

26th September 2018

Local Democracy Review Working Group agrees key areas of focus for the review and the subsequent plan for evidence-gathering

October 2018 to January 2019

Local Democracy Review Working Group engages with a wide range of residents, community groups and local councillors to seek their views and gather evidence

January 2019 to March 2019

Local Democracy Review Working Group reviews all the evidence gathered and develops their report & recommendations

- *30th January 2019: Workshop with LGiU*
- *6th February 2019: Workshop with Kirklees Council*

26th March 2019

Local Democracy Review Working Group formally agrees the final version of their report and proposed recommendations

27th March 2019

Local Democracy Review Working Group presents its report and proposed recommendations to Mayor & Cabinet

3rd April 2019

Local Democracy Review Working Group presents its report and proposed recommendations to Full Council

About the Working Group

In July 2018 the Council selected the eight councillors to be members of the working group collectively responsible for carrying out the review and devising recommendations for Mayor and Council to consider. The Council chose eight members with a range of experience and responsibility across both the executive and non-executive arms of the Council including 2 current cabinet members, the current vice chair of the overview and scrutiny committee and

³ See Appendix A

five further overview and scrutiny members. To ensure fresh eyes and a fresh approach, 5 of the 8 members of the group were newly elected to the Council in May 2018.

The working group is chaired by Cllr Kevin Bonavia, the Cabinet Member for Democracy, Accountability and Refugees. The vice chair of the group is Cllr Sakina Sheikh, newly elected in May 2018 and a member of both overview and scrutiny and planning committees. Cllr Chris Best is the Deputy Mayor and cabinet member for health and adult social care and has represented Sydenham ward for over 30 years. Cllr Juliet Campbell is vice chair of overview and scrutiny. Cllr Colin Elliott is in his second term as a councillor and is a former chair of the Standards committee and was a member of the Barriers to Politics Working Group in the previous administration. Cllrs Codd, Feis-Bryce and Gallagher were all newly elected in May 2018 and are overview and scrutiny members who also take part in decision making through licensing, planning and pension investment committees. All eight councillors also take an active role within their local assemblies.



**Cllr Kevin
Bonavia
(Chair)**



**Cllr Sakina
Sheikh
(Vice Chair)**



**Cllr Chris
Best
(Deputy
Mayor)**



**Cllr Juliet
Campbell
(Vice
Chair of
Overview
&
Scrutiny)**



**Cllr Patrick
Codd**



**Cllr Colin
Elliott**



**Cllr Alex
Feis-Bryce**



**Cllr Aisling
Gallagher**

5. Local Democracy in Lewisham

Place

The London Borough of Lewisham was formed as a result of the London Government Act 1963 (amalgamating the former Metropolitan Boroughs of Lewisham & Deptford) and officially came into existence in 1965. It covers an area of 13.4 square miles, and is the fifth largest borough by population in inner London.

Our population has increased from 250,000 people in 2001 to over 310,000 today; over the next ten years, the population is forecast to grow to nearly 350,000. Since 2001, the private rental sector has also doubled in size; it now consists of more than 30,000 homes and makes up more than 25% of households in the borough. The borough is also much more diverse today than in 2001, with approximately 46% of our residents coming from Black, Asian and minority ethnic households, rising to 76% for the school population. In addition, the Council has also reduced considerably in size following massive Government cuts of £165 million to Council budgets over the past eight years. Such dynamic change affecting our borough drives us to look for ever more innovative ways to build on our strong history of empowerment and inclusion and further encourage and enable people's engagement and influence on our democratic processes.

Governance

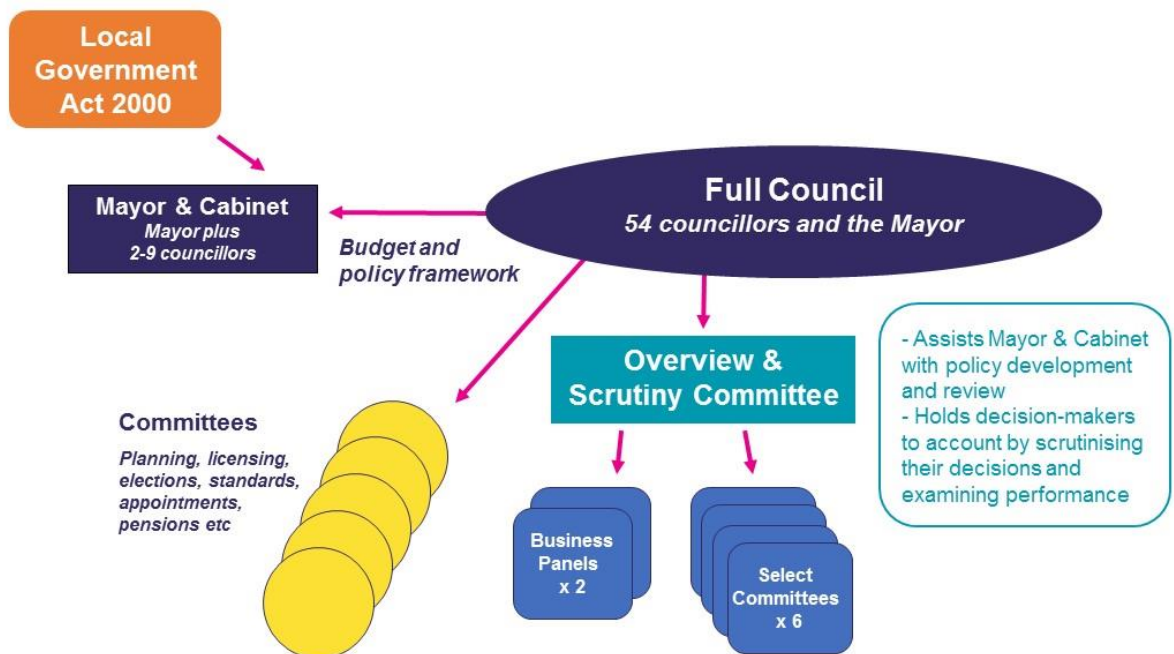
Lewisham has always been at the forefront of using local democracy to empower local citizens; we were one of the first authorities to adopt a directly elected mayoral model in 2002. A directly elected Mayor gives local people the power for choosing the person who leads the Council and acts as the spokesperson for the borough. Mayor Damien Egan was voted for by 40,000 people, receiving 54.3% of first preference votes. 54 councillors are also elected to the Council by local people, with each of the Council's 18 wards electing 3 ward councillors to be their representatives on the Council. Alongside the Mayor, the 54 councillors collectively form the full Council. Together they are responsible for setting the statutory policy and budget framework for the Council. They also together allocate councillors to the various committees responsible for decision making of including; planning, licensing and standards.

Within the agreed budget and policy framework set by full Council, the Mayor has the legal responsibility for all executive functions and must ensure that all decisions are within the framework set out by full Council. In setting his scheme of delegation once elected, the current Mayor decided to share his power with the 9 cabinet members so that decisions he is responsible for are made collectively in formal meetings of the Mayor and Cabinet by a majority vote. Mayor and Cabinet are referred to as "the executive".

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consists of all councillors who are not in the Cabinet. It is responsible for informing policy development, commenting on decisions before they are made and providing views on matters of performance. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is also responsible for reviewing decisions once made and if it has reservations about any Mayoral decision made but not yet implemented, the committee can "call in" the decision and require the Mayor and Cabinet to reconsider. The Mayor and Cabinet may amend or reaffirm the original decision.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee currently undertakes all of these important policy development and pre-decision scrutiny responsibilities through six thematic select committees. The call-in responsibilities are carried out through two business panels, who

also maintain an overview of the work of all of the thematic select committees to ensure that the overall approach of Overview and Scrutiny is coordinated.



There are also six regulatory decision-making committees. Two of these are licensing committees formed of 10 councillors. The licensing committees are responsible for all licensing functions of the Council under the provisions of the Licensing Act 2003, and the Gambling Act 2005. There are also four committees responsible for planning matters also made up of 10 councillors. These decide on planning applications submitted to the Council in line with the legal framework for planning.

The Council has several other committees made up of a mixture of executive and non-executive councillors including Appointments and Elections, panels including audit panel and time limited working groups. The Standards Committee and the Health & Wellbeing Board are committees of the Council, and the Safer Lewisham Partnership Board is the Crime & Disorder Partnership Board.

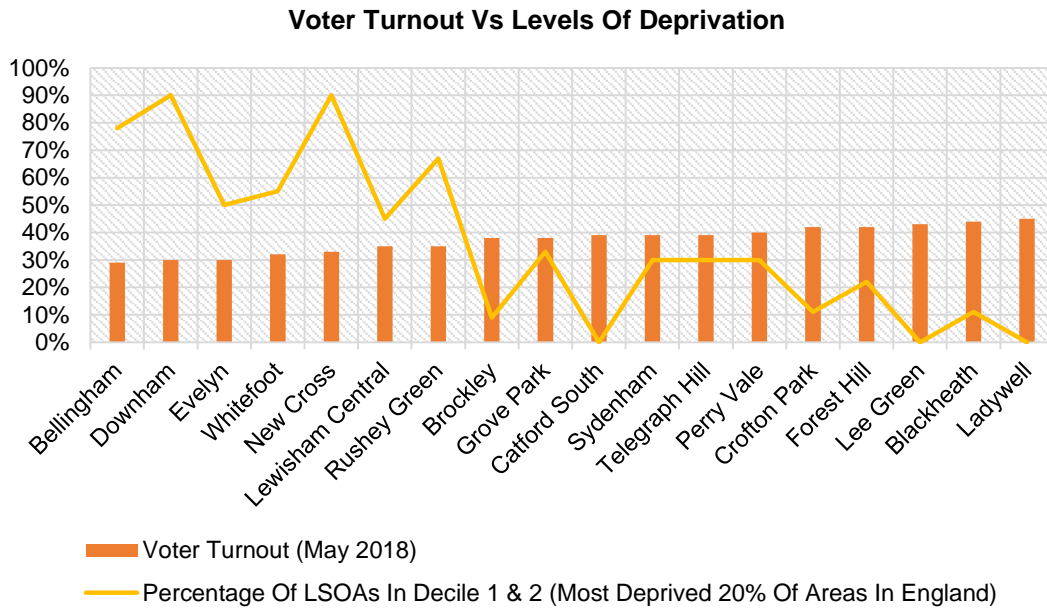
Engagement

People’s first thought when talking about democracy is often about voting. In the most recent Mayor of Lewisham and Council elections (May 2018), the average turnout in Lewisham was 37%, which is broadly in line with turnout across south east London and falling turnout nationally.

The graph below provides a breakdown of voter turnout by ward, which is compared with data from the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)⁴. It shows an interesting correlation

⁴ The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) has seven weighted domains of deprivation – income, employment, education, skills & training, health & disability, crime and barriers to housing & local services.

between deprivation and even lower turnout.



In contrast to falling turnout and evidence of some disengagement with political processes and parties amongst adults⁵, 9,334 pupils voted in the October 2017 Young Mayor elections, representing a turnout of 55%. There is something to be learnt perhaps from the campaigns and approach of our young mayoral candidates

The Council has a range of mechanisms for ensuring public involvement in Council decision-making processes. Some of these are legal requirements and others are discretionary (and recognised as good practice). However, whilst the Council can take account of a range of relevant factors, including the view of members of the public, by law Council decisions must be taken by the Local Authority.

Engagement with the Council’s decision-making processes is varied in both method and take up. Between July 2016 and July 2018, 25 petitions were presented to Full Council. There were 7,880 signatories, which equates to an average of 315 per petition. Any Lewisham resident can also ask a ‘public question’ at ordinary Council meetings in order to make an enquiry or raise an issue about Council services. In the same two-year period 72 individuals asked 244 public questions at Full Council; 29% of all questions asked in that period were asked by just five individuals. In addition, the Council regularly encourages contributions and participation from local people in the scrutiny process (particularly in-depth reviews which inform policy development) in order to ensure a balanced range of views is considered. Overview and Scrutiny was informed by the involvement of over 230 organisations and individuals in the 2014-2018 administration.

Since 2008, every ward in Lewisham has had a local assembly (open to anyone who lives, works or learns in that area) which meets up to four times a year and is chaired by the three ward councillors. Each local assembly is allocated a fund of £15k per year to run projects which address agreed priorities for the area. Each assembly can make one referral each year to a Mayor & Cabinet meeting, unless the Mayor agrees otherwise. They can also ask the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to address issues of concern in their locality.

Since 2004, Lewisham has had a Young Mayor and Deputy Young Mayor who are directly elected by pupils from schools and colleges across the borough. They serve a one-year term

⁵ See Appendix I submission of Professor Griffiths.

and are responsible for advising the Mayor on issues relating to young people. They also make recommendations to Mayor and Cabinet about how a budget of £25k should be allocated. Ideas are developed in consultation with different groups of young people and presented to Mayor & Cabinet for approval. The Young Mayor and Deputy Young Mayor are supported by a group of approximately 25 Young Advisers (drawn from a range of young people's initiatives), who act as an informal cabinet. These young people play an active role in community development and engagement across all age groups by increasing participation with the Local Assemblies programme and intergenerational work with Lewisham's Positive Ageing Council, which is open to anyone aged 60 or over who lives, works, learns or volunteers in Lewisham.

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6. Exploring Our Review Themes

As outlined, we have been tasked with making recommendations to Council about how the Mayor and Council could enhance their openness and transparency, increase public involvement in Council decisions and promote effective decision making to collectively enhance local democracy. Over the following pages under each of those three headings in turn we have outlined how and why we feel the Council needs to make changes in each specific area.

However, when the evidence we reviewed across all three areas is examined collectively, it is also clear to us that our organisational culture needs to be considered further. Relationships and communication between the Council and the wider people of Lewisham, and between officers and councillors are strong in places, but there is more that we can do to further build a stronger culture of trust, understanding and effective communication and engagement.

We need to move with the times. It is clear to us and those who responded to our consultation that we need to make ourselves accessible to everyone. We need to explore new and innovative ways to share information and support engagement. We need to improve the basic level of understanding what the Council does and roles and responsibilities within the Council. We need to improve our use of language and the spaces and places where we should be present amongst our communities. We need to continue the journey that we have begun as part of this review, and actively seek out those who are seldom heard in our communities and empower and enable them to engage with us. We need to ensure officers and councillors work collectively as “one Council” where we are all fully supported and enabled to carry out our important roles within the Council for the benefit of the citizens of Lewisham. This report and our 57 recommendations set us on the road to becoming an even more open and accessible organisation with a culture of openness, trust, engagement, respect and support at the heart of all our interactions.

A Local Democracy Working Group of 8 councillors should be retained to oversee the delivery of the programme of work recommended within this report.

The Local Democracy Working Group should provide the structure and support through which the recommendations are further developed and tested where appropriate. They will take account of relevant guidelines for effective local democratic processes.

We need to work collectively to build further trust and confidence in our democratic processes. We need to change our language and behaviour to influence a culture change that embeds the idea of the citizen at the heart of all we do.

Theme 1 – Openness & Transparency

Openness and transparency, and the perception of both, underpin effective democracy. For trust to exist and local democracy to flourish, citizens need to have confidence that the Council can be relied upon to be open and honest.

Creating a culture of openness, trust and partnership

The Local Government Act 1972 and associated legislation sets out the Council’s legal requirements in terms of making information available about its meetings and subsequent

decisions. Our Constitution further sets out the Council's decision-making structures, processes and citizens' rights in terms of access to information. However, a perception of openness and transparency in terms of local democracy is much wider than the Council fulfilling its legal responsibilities. It is informed by people's day to day experiences of interacting with councillors and officers of the Council. This was reflected in the wide range of responses we received to our online consultation and in the conversations we had across the borough where people were keen to talk to us about their individual experiences of getting information from the Council. What was also clear from those conversations was quite how little many people knew about the responsibilities and services of the Council in general, let alone specifically around how it made decisions and how they could be involved in some way.

Whilst we were focused primarily on openness and transparency in relation to democratic process and decision making, it became immediately clear that accessing information about or from the Council at a wider level was an overarching concern for many people who. A number of residents recounted difficulties in contacting the Council, particularly knowing which department to contact, finding the right information on our website or getting to speak to the right person on the phone or in person. Many also reported that they did not receive timely responses to enquiries – this was echoed by local councillors.

These sorts of experiences present a fundamental challenge to how open and transparent we are perceived as being. If citizens feel that they can't get information or responses from us when they are seeking them then they will not believe that we are open and transparent when we are making decisions. This will impact on their trust and engagement with us in the future. We need to develop our practices and approach across the organisation in a number of ways so that we are open and accessible by default and thereby better create a culture of openness, trust and partnership. This shift in culture is fundamental to further fostering faith and engagement in an effective and empowering local democracy.

We received a wide range of ideas from individuals, community groups, staff, unions and local councillors about how the Council could improve how, when and where it provides wider access to information (and communicates with) local people. These have been incorporated within our recommendations in relation to openness, transparency and public involvement. Taken collectively, these practical changes should hopefully begin to shift our organisational approach to openness, leading to even greater trust, understanding and partnership with our citizens.

In addition, we have been impressed by the "open data" approach taken by other local authorities in the UK and abroad whereby raw data held by a local authority is provided to the public on a digital platform so that it can be interrogated and also used by citizens and organisations to develop their activities⁶.

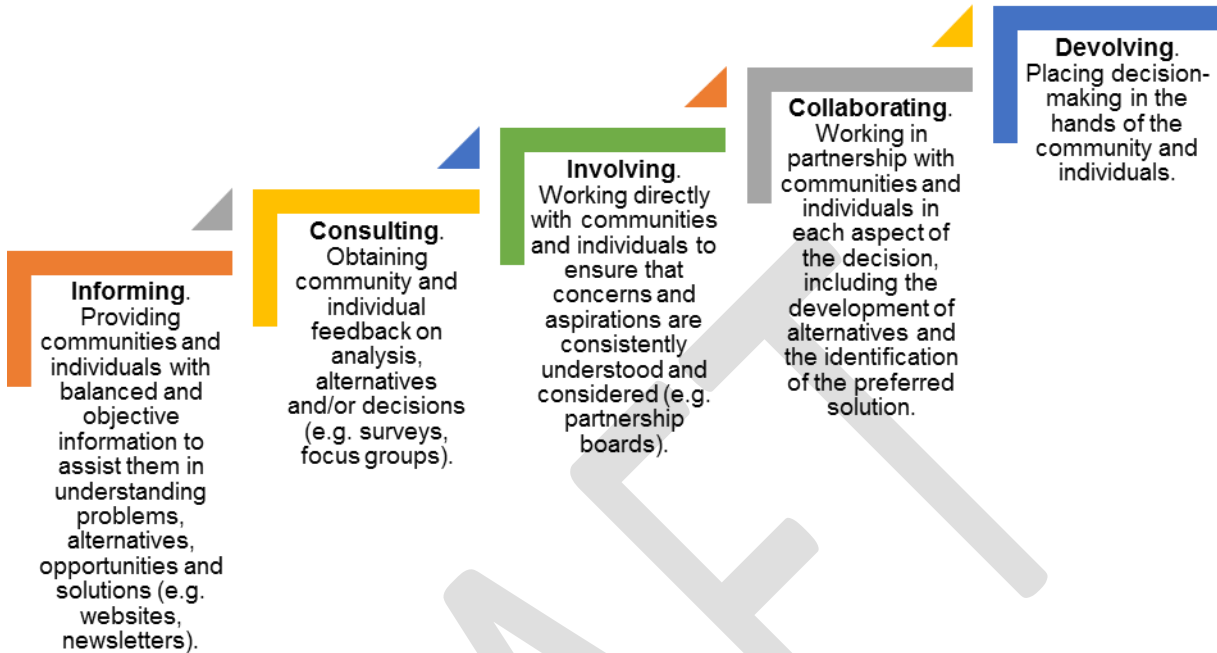
Clearer and more engaging ways should be explored for explaining how the Council works and the roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers.

An open data approach – sharing raw data the Council has so people can interrogate the data and draw their own conclusions – should be explored.

⁶ See Appendix I the submission of NESTA

Using appropriate communication channels

It is clear that the first step to enabling and empowering communities to be involved in decision-making is informing (see ladder of engagement below), and at the basic level this includes ensuring understanding and access to information.



<https://www.england.nhs.uk/participation/resources/ladder-of-engagement-2/>

In the modern world, the Council website is increasingly our front door to our citizens and the world. It should be a first port of call for all those who want to engage with us in that way, and it should be accessible, informative and useful for all our citizens. Specific concerns about the Council website were raised repeatedly in the online consultation and by residents at several engagement events. Many found the website hard to use and the information they were looking for difficult to search for or locate. Others felt that accessing some information was relatively straightforward (e.g. refuse collection schedules) but making a query or asking for action was difficult and lengthy. Nearly all students who participated in the secondary school workshops were aware that the Council had a website, but few had ever used it. This was also the case for several Lewisham Council apprentices. Whilst this is just one channel of information, and whilst it is important we remember it will never suit all of our citizens particularly those with additional needs; it is the hub of information and advice that all of our social media channels should refer back to, where all of our meeting and decision and service information should be easily available and it absolutely must be the best it can be.

We also received specific ideas relating to the use of digital technology and social media. Our experience of local democracy can feel very out of step with our lives as private citizens. We expect to be able to interact, comment, challenge, collaborate and express our opinions on issues in real time. The technology is readily available for us to be able to do this for many aspects of our lives and we need to explore how we can better utilise this technology in Lewisham. In particular, the website's design and functionality are key elements in ensuring open and transparent democracy. We should also make better use of video, such as regularly webcasting meetings and other events and creating short video "vox-pops" by elected members and citizens involved in shaping or using local services. All these improvements need to be balanced with the accessibility of information in other places and other formats.

In the workshops carried out in our schools, we heard from our young people how they would find it easier to engage with the Council and its decision making if there was a more current and comprehensive use of social media. We are aiming to redesign local democracy for the future and we're strongly aware of the responsibility that we have to engage our young citizens and recognise the changing expectations of access and channel shifting in the modern world. We want to develop an environment and a culture that nurtures people's understanding, interest and engagement in local democracy from a young age.

There are a range of ways to do this and we need to find the right channels for Lewisham that reach our communities young and old and enable everyone to access information in the way that best suits them. We need to test out the wide number of ideas we received throughout the review and involve our communities in telling us how well the different channels work for them.

An improved, comprehensive and more joined-up approach to our electronic communications should be developed.

Young people should be actively engaged in informing the Council's wider approach to communication on social media.

The capacity and accessibility of our website should continue to be developed and improved, informed by the views and requirements of citizens, councillors and officers.

Improved ward pages and information should be developed as part of the improvement of our website.

Expanding the range of channels that people can use to access timely information about decision making meetings should be explored. A range of methods such as webcasting, pre and post meeting "vox pops" and an increased use of Twitter and social media should be trialled.

The Local Democracy Review website should be retained and used in part to test ideas and recommendations related to online communication in the first instance.

A "citizens' portal" approach should be investigated, through which citizens can access relevant information and receive targeted communications.

Opportunities for councillors to record and report their activities and attendance at events other than formal council meetings should be explored and introduced.

Infographics should be more consistently used to effectively convey relevant information about council performance.

Better online communications with young people should be co-designed with the young mayor and young advisors and then with wider groups of young people across schools and the borough.

We also heard mixed views regarding the channels through which information can be accessed. Some respondents to the online consultation encouraged the use of digital technology, but many others, particularly those that we spoke to face to face around the borough, found digital channels difficult to access and would prefer to speak to someone face-to-face or by telephone. Digital exclusion (the inability to access online products or services or to use simple forms of digital technology) disproportionately affects vulnerable

people, low-income groups, the elderly and the more marginalised communities in society.⁷ In 2016, Doteveryone (a think-tank which champions responsible technology) launched Go ON Lewisham, a pilot project which aimed to tackle digital exclusion and increase levels of basic digital skills across the borough. Yet, recent research by the ONS suggests that Lewisham still has a digital exclusion rate of 6.7% (i.e. residents who are lapsed or non-internet users).⁸

The financial imperative to, and the associated financial benefits of, going 'digital by default' are recognised. We also acknowledge that the expectations of many of our younger and working age citizens are of improved digital channels to access information and share their views. However, many members of the public still want to be able to ring or visit the Council and speak to someone who can deal with their enquiry. Automation can build a barrier between the public and the Council, and digital exclusion is something we must consider given the age and deprivation profile of our borough, so the various interfaces between the public and the Council need to be carefully considered.

Councillors and officers should routinely and regularly be, and provide information in, places that constituents use and meet. This includes making better use of noticeboards across the borough.

The model of Councillor surgeries should be expanded to trial the benefits of Council surgeries, Partnership surgeries and virtual surgeries.

Democratic Standards: Language & Reporting

Whilst we always comply with the legal requirements of making meeting information and reports available, there is clearly much more we can do to make information easily accessible, understandable and useful to a wider audience. It is clear to us that the language and format used in our decision-making reports can be a barrier to people being able to clearly understand the decision being made and the reasons for it. This is a frustration often shared by Councillors, who also find the length, language and style of reports they receive impenetrable at times. Whilst the legal content of decision-making reports is strictly governed, there is almost universal frustration with various elements of our reports. There is clearly more we can do to improve this. Clear reporting is fundamental to open and transparent decision making and this must be consistently improved and embedded across every department of the Council.

The accessibility of information relating to Council decisions was also a significant issue for the public. Many respondents to the online consultation and residents attending face-to-face events felt that important information was not communicated clearly and was difficult for the average person to understand (e.g. the use of technical jargon).

Our democratic information is quite traditional, in fixed formats and some people felt difficult to find. If we are serious about encouraging more understanding of and engagement with our decision making, our democratic content must improve. It must be clear, timely, interesting and accessible so that it is of value and relevance to our citizens.

⁷ <https://www.thetechpartnership.com/basic-digital-skills/digital-exclusion/>

⁸

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/datasets/internetusers/current>

A clear set of practical democratic standards should be developed and introduced across the Council. The standards should provide clarity and consensus about the roles and responsibilities of councillors, officers and citizens in decision making processes.

An improved style guide and template for all officer reports should be developed and introduced to consistently improve the accessibility and standard of reports.

The report template and guidance should require a clear “plain English” summary and a “timeline of engagement and decision making” to be present at the beginning of every report.

Underpinning the development of the improved style guide to improve the accessibility of reports, consideration should be given to utilising appropriate tools such as the Flesch Reading Ease Readability Formula, and also to seeking appropriate support and accreditations such as those offered by the Plain English Campaign and the British Dyslexia Association.

All decisions should generally be published within 2 days of the decision being taken, in line with the constitutional requirements for Mayor and Cabinet decisions.

An open channel/portal should be provided for people to provide direct feedback on the accessibility of reports and publications so there is ongoing learning and improvement based on direct feedback from citizens.

A Glossary of Terms should be provided in reports where necessary to explain some of the key phrases used in local government (jargon” shouldn’t be used, and reports should be plain English).

Democratic Standards: Planning

Planning was an area of particular focus for many respondents to the online consultation, at quite a few local assemblies and also for Councillors. Planning and licensing committee meetings are important non-executive decision-making meetings where the role of the Council and councillors is set out in law. The Strategic Planning Committee considers strategic regeneration proposals and major developments and its membership includes the Chairs of the other three planning committees and two executive members.

The three planning committees each consider planning matters across the whole borough. Over the course of an average year 39 members are involved in planning decisions across 33 meetings held in public across the four committees. The scope for councillor decision making is limited to very strict criteria as set out in planning law.

We have heard overwhelmingly that our communications around planning decision making processes are currently causing frustration for many. Our explanation of the basis on which planning decisions can be made and the implications for councillors if decisions are made other than in accordance with that clear criteria is not clearly and widely communicated. Improving our communications in this area would likely lead to a reduction in frustration and confusion that surrounds the planning decision making process for some. The management of expectations of applicants, objectors and councillors would be greatly enhanced if there was much clearer information made available, generally and specifically, at each stage of the process. This important decision-making area needs addressing comprehensively through both wider general communication and access to information, through further development of

and clarity about roles and responsibilities between officers, councillors and the public and finally through a targeted focus on planning reports and meetings.

Communications policies for licensing and planning need to be updated in line with the democratic standards being developed to include effective digital communication. More effective and timely use of electronic communications should be a key focus, including an improved presence on the website and the online publication of notices.

Clearer information should be provided to councillors, citizens, applicants and objectors about the role and power of planning and licencing committee and local councillors.

The most appropriate way to provide professional support and guidance to councillors responsible for planning decisions should be further explored.

A consistent, proportionate approach should be adopted to the provision of submissions and objections to planning and licensing committees. Full provision with suitable redaction should be the standard approach, with summaries also provided where appropriate.

Ward members should be notified of all relevant applications and decision-making processes in a timely and appropriate manner.

If required, the Planning Statement of Community Involvement should be reviewed in line with the democratic standards once developed, and the other relevant recommendations made within this report.

Theme 2 – Public Involvement in Decision-Making

We have a long history of working collaboratively with and alongside our communities and partners to improve our borough and services. Pre-austerity we were at the forefront of participatory engagement activity with approximately a 1000 strong citizens' panel and the early introduction of Local Assemblies. Austerity has forced us in recent years to cut back on the resources made available to support formal public engagement mechanisms, but we have continued our local assemblies programme, our work with and supporting our vibrant third sector has continued, and we have continued to meet our statutory requirements for consultation. We currently have a number of ways for involving the public in decision-making, ranging from resident consultations and petitions to more collaborative approaches. We wanted to understand how effective our current arrangements currently are and what more we might need to do to improve our approach in this area.

Reaching and empowering seldom heard groups

Our online consultation was completed by over 700 individuals. An analysis of the equalities monitoring information provided by those respondents who chose to complete it showed us that the respondents included a much larger number of older people and homeowners than is reflective of the profile of the borough⁹. The ethnicity of respondents did also not fully reflect the diversity of the borough. Carrying out this review has shown the working group first-hand the challenges of attempting to engage widely with our diverse communities to ensure they are all able to share their views and influence decision making.

In order to obtain as wide a range of participation in the review as possible, the working group members made themselves directly available across the breadth of the borough at a wide range of events and locations on some 40 occasions. Nevertheless, we were unable to reach out as widely to all those seldom heard voices as we would have liked to. What we have found from those we have met is a general lack of awareness of the range of ways that the public can and should be involved in decision-making. Whilst there are a core group of people who are actively involved in sharing their views through regular attendance at meetings and regularly asking questions at Council meetings, it is evident that a wider majority do not know how to get involved and/or choose not to do so. We undoubtedly need to engage with and enable a much wider cross section of our communities for them to feel confident and able to actively engage with our decision-making processes when they want to.

It is clear to us that to increase and improve public participation in decision-making, the first building block is the general awareness raising and accessibility of information about the role of the Council as discussed under openness and transparency. Following on from that we also need to increase the level of understanding and awareness of what citizen participation is, why it is important and how to do it. We need to provide information about decision-making and public participation that is easier to understand, and this information needs to be readily and appropriately available to citizens and staff via a wide range of appropriate channels. We need to bring this to life for people so that it is relevant and understandable with examples of how our decision-making processes work.

However, we also believe that we need to go further. We need to develop and improve how we attempt to engage with seldom heard groups and individuals across the borough. We need to actively engage with a wider range of people in more creative ways that better suit their needs – 'be genuinely interested in the views of your citizens'; 'get out on the street and

⁹ See Appendix C Online consultation demographic information, compared to the 2011 Census <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/2011censuspopulationandhouseholdestimatesforenglandandwales/2012-07-16>

speak to people as much as you can'; "go to the people [and] stop expecting them to always go to you'. One size does not fit all: Decisions shouldn't just involve "the usual suspects".

Whilst the diagram on page 15 is the "ladder of engagement" and everything within it is termed "engagement" in decision making. However, there is a gap between informing and consulting that is not adequately described in the diagram. Even when people are informed it doesn't mean they are prepared to engage. There is a level of engagement and relationship building that is more than just giving people information and should come before and improve the reach of consultation. "Engagement" is a general approach to listening, learning and considering wider people's views and building a relationship and mutual understanding, a key part of a ward councillor's role. Consultation is a more formal process designed to record views on a specific matter and seems often to be viewed with some cynicism. The missing link here is "engagement". Wider relationship building and listening to people's views and concerns needs to be common place as it will build relationships, trust and understanding and shape formal consultation and formal decision making.

We heard from our community groups, unions, individuals and experts that we need to engage more consistently with them. We need to value the knowledge of our citizens and be clear about who we need to hear from for each decision and who is likely to be most impacted, not just who finds it easiest to tell us. We can't consult on every single decision the council makes, but we can be more selective in our methods – and we would make better informed decisions as a result.

We don't pretend that we have identified a single easy solution to this all. However, the evidence we have gathered to date from our communities, experts and wider learning point to a need to explore different approaches to engage and empower those communities who remain on the periphery or under-represented in current participation. We have heard from Kirklees, and know from our local assembly programme, that engagement around local place and local concerns can be powerful, and we want to further explore how to do this better with our seldom heard citizens, both through our local assemblies programme and more widely.

Whilst further work needs to be carried out in reaching out to seldom-heard groups, we should explore the benefits and feasibility of tools that counter-balance the unintended heavier weighting that decision-makers could place on the views of those citizens that are already well engaged with the Council. One such tool is the use of people's panels to ensure representation of all our diverse communities. People's panels and similar approaches enable a representative form of consultation, ensuring a response that adequately represents the views of our minority and marginalised communities.

From those who do engage with the Council we heard some evidence of cynicism about the Council's attitude to public involvement in decision-making, regarding mechanisms (especially formal consultations) as tokenistic and that the rationale for subsequent decisions is not always explained leading to the perception from some that residents' views are disregarded. This chimes with what we heard from Professor Simon Griffiths and Colin Copus that attitudes to politics have changed generally and that for various reasons, people are more sceptical about traditional way of doing things:

"It's also worth noting, as Stoker and Crick have done – "in defence of politics" – politics is an innately disappointing activity. It's about compromise. In a world where we act like consumers, who expect to get what we want, of course the compromises of politics are disappointing." (Quote from Professor Griffiths).

Professor Griffiths confirmed what we had experienced: the majority of people aren't engaged with traditional political decision-making structures and are frustrated with the historical "political class". People are more active locally about issues and causes that matter

to them rather than engaging formally with traditional democratic decision-making structures. If we want to involve more people in local decision making, we need to reach out to them on those issues and reach out to alienated groups.

“Reach out to alienated groups. Respond to technological changes and go to where people are.” (Quote from Professor Griffiths).

We also heard repeatedly that people hadn’t had feedback either at all or in a timely manner as to the outcome of their engagement and if we want to build a culture of trust and openness in the current climate we need to improve at how and when we provide feedback about their engagement.

The Council needs to develop and improve how it attempts to actively engage with seldom heard groups and individuals to inform decision making that will impact on them. A further piece of work to consider how best to achieve this, and test out various mechanisms should be undertaken. In the first instance the third sector, faith groups and other public sector partners should be actively involved in shaping and informing this work.

The Council needs to better manage its consultation and engagement mechanisms, systems and processes to ensure that people directly and collectively receive appropriate feedback as to the outcome of the consultation exercise they have taken part in.

The introduction of a People’s Panel should be explored reflecting the demographic of the borough.

A mechanism for the community to deliberate and set the focus of select committee investigations should be explored.

The Works Council should be better utilised to facilitate direct engagement between unions and councillors.

Mayor’s Question Time should take place routinely both around the borough and virtually. This should be enshrined within the Constitution.

Developing a place-based approach to public engagement

Lewisham is currently comprised of 18 wards, each of which has a Local Assembly which meets at least three times a year. All three ward councillors attend the local assembly in their ward and anyone who lives, works or learns in the ward can attend. Local assemblies are an important part of the Council's Constitution and allow councillors and the local community to work together to improve the local area. It provides a forum for local residents to:

- discuss and share what matters to them
- work with councillors and others to shape the future of their neighbourhood
- find out what is happening in their ward
- consider how funding available to their ward is spent.
- refer matters to Mayor and Cabinet for consideration.

There were mixed views about our Local Assemblies. Some respondents felt that they were useful and valued them as a forum to hold the Council to account, but others raised concerns about coordination, accessibility, community representation, opportunities for open debate and ability to influence Council policy. Many citizens and councillors who responded to the consultation had participated in local assemblies commented that a relatively small and unrepresentative group of already democratically engaged people attend and more should be done to increase participation more widely.

We need to ensure that local assemblies evolve and better reflect the local social economic and demographic profile of the area in terms of both attendance, approach and involvement and projects supported. We need to recognise that for many people their “local area” that is important to them is smaller and more focused than a ward. We need to explore how to engage on this basis with our local communities within our wards as Kirklees have done. There are a range of tools and models and approaches to building community involvement, capacity and cohesion and we need to consider what the Council can and should do to harness and support engagement and activity at a local neighbourhood level. Colin Copus’s thoughtful input to our review provides an excellent starting point for further consideration of which models and approaches we should take forward in due course.

Colin Copus quotes: **Local self-identifying neighbourhoods provide a solid base for engagement and participation and the council should be structured to be able to support such communities in identifying problems, developing solutions and taking action within their neighbourhoods**

Successful engagement, leading to improved decision-making rests on links between councils and individual citizens, communities, organised and unorganised groups to stimulate local activity and wider political engagement

The literature shows that an effective way of responding to pressures emerging from communities for participation and the needs of diverse communities is not to replace representative democracy with a participative variant. Rather, it is to employ a diverse range of participatory, consultative and deliberative tools to provide a flexible and a wide range of mechanisms by which the public can engage with both councillors and officers

The purpose and aims of the current local assembly model should be further reviewed to improve and expand the engagement and influence over council policy developed through any ward-based mechanism. In the interim, local assemblies should be provided with step by step guidance as to how to utilise their powers to place items on the agenda of Mayor and Cabinet for discussion.

Following on from our current model of local ward assemblies, opportunities for place-based involvement should be further explored and developed as a potential mechanism of further focusing and improving engagement with and empowerment of seldom heard communities.

As part of further developing a place-based engagement and involvement approach:

- civic crowdfunding should be developed
- the place standard tool should be trialled
- a model of citizens assemblies should be considered, initially in relation to discussions around the allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds.

Young People

Like many of those who responded to the consultation, Lewisham's young people recognise voting as an essential aspect of democracy. This is evident from the high turnout figures at successive Young Mayoral elections. In a series of workshops held at local schools, young people told us that they felt democracy was about "everyone having their say". The young people we spoke to, including Lewisham's Young Mayor, knew about their local issues – homelessness, youth crime, transport and the environment – and often had a clear idea on how they would like to work to solve these issues. However, when it came to their understanding of how they could feed their ideas into decision-making or participate in local democracy, young people were largely unaware of the options/mechanisms available to do so. Although they knew who the Young Mayor was, young people tended not to know who their councillors were but were keen to have more contact with their local representatives. It was clear that young people had a strong desire to have their say and be listened to. Young people suggested that the council improve its online presence and use of social media, conduct more surveys online but also to be more accessible where young people are (schools, youth centres etc.).

Effective mechanisms for engagement and involvement of younger people and older people should be co designed with our local groups and representatives

Councillors, local schools and parent governors should work together to increase the understanding and engagement between young people and local decision making that impacts on them. This should include the development of a structure of councillor question time panels being developed in schools.

Council Meetings

We received extensive feedback from councillors and those who had experience of participating in or observing Council meetings held in public. As the formal overarching responsible body for the Council, they are often the focal point for the public. Those who had experience of our Full Council meetings and other Council meetings had many suggestions as to how they could be improved to better facilitate public engagement. There are frustrations from all quarters with the format and length of many of our meetings, and the perception that they do not always adequately support or prioritise public involvement. The role and format of our Full Council meetings need to better increase opportunities for contributions from the public, and we need to explore various ways in which they can be more accessible to the public.

The role and format of Full Council meetings should be reviewed where possible and a more thematic and engaging approach developed, utilising the announcements section of the formal agenda and maximising the opportunities for contributions from the public.

When reviewing the format of Full Council meetings, further consideration should be given to ways to:

- ensure maximum possible attendance in the meeting room
- enable collective observation from an alternative venue if necessary
- explore a pre-registration process for supplementary questions to ensure more questioners have the opportunity to speak within the allotted timeframe.

Theme 3 – Effective Decision-Making

We have identified a number of challenges and ideas for improving our openness and transparency, particularly the ways that citizens access information and how we report on our decision-making. We have also reviewed and developed ideas about how we might improve our wider public engagement and involvement in decision-making. This section therefore looks more specifically at the roles, relationships and responsibilities corresponding to effective decision-making in Lewisham, outlining the key challenges within our current approach and the suggestions for improvement we have developed in relation to the roles, relationships and responsibilities necessary for effective decision-making.

Putting councillors at the heart of decision making: Roles

The Mayor and fifty-four Councillors are the democratically elected representatives of the whole borough, collectively forming the Council and having ultimate responsibility for the Council's Constitution and all decision-making that takes place within its confines. All 54 councillors play a key role in Council decision-making either by sitting on the executive, being part of our comprehensive overview and scrutiny structures and being on one or more of our large number of non-executive committees. As well as making decisions, councillors have a role to play in their wards in supporting people to access information about and influencing Council decisions that will/may impact on them, by actively seeking their views and representing their views at the appropriate committees of the Council.

Local councillors represent and support local residents in several ways. They engage with local people widely, informally through street surgeries, door knocking and campaigning and attending events and activities within their ward. Councillors hold surgeries on a regular basis to provide an opportunity for any ward resident to meet their councillor and raise any local issues or concerns with them. This often takes the form of individual casework that the councillor supports the member of the public with addressing with the Council. Collectively the engagement with, and feedback from, local people that councillors receive informs the councillor's participation in Council meetings and decision-making both in relation to their particular ward and the borough as a whole. Some councillors are also appointed to represent the Council on external bodies.

It is abundantly clear that many of our citizens value the role of councillor, frequently describing them in positive terms– 'they are crucial to providing an open discourse'; 'councillors occupy a privileged position, bridging the gap between local people and the Council'. However, we know that a significant number of citizens (and Council staff) do not understand the role of councillors, what they do, what they are responsible for or even how to contact them. There are a variety of reasons for this, including confusion with the role of an MP, a lack of engagement with the Council or local politics and democracy generally. We need to ensure that we recognise and better promote the critical role of councillors as a fundamental part of our local democracy and representatives of local people in our decision making.

High levels of deprivation and local government funding reductions at an unprecedented level mean that the challenges facing our local communities are increasing. Some of the decisions facing councils are also getting ever tougher as a result, and councillors remain the fulcrum of local democracy around which the Council must align. The time required of councillors to support, engage with and represent their local constituents with diminishing resources in these challenging times requires a huge effort on their part. Using their time

effectively to fulfil their myriad of responsibilities, inclusive of actively participating in decision-making on behalf of their residents, becomes ever more challenging.

The role of all councillors, as the representative voice and champion of all of their constituents, should be secured at the heart of all council communications and decision-making processes and outlined clearly through the democratic standards.

Clarity and consensus should be developed around the roles and responsibilities, and anticipated work load, for the various responsibilities a councillor may undertake.

Building on the excellent work of the Barriers to Politics working group: ensuring the delivery of their recommendations should become part of the ongoing responsibilities of the Local Democracy Working group.

All Mayors should be limited to a maximum of two terms only.

The role of Chair of Council should be changed to Speaker.

Putting councillors at the heart of decision making: Relationships

It is also clear that citizens want more direct contact with local decision makers, and this is part of what we have tried to address in our recommendations around public involvement and engagement. Whilst councillors undertake various decision-making roles on various committees, they are all fundamentally the ward representative for all the people living within their wards. What we have heard through the process of carrying out this review is that councillors should be at the heart of the Council – many citizens considered it vital that councillors understand the needs and views of their electorate and were visible, approachable and familiar, engaging with residents ‘where they are’ (e.g. street surgeries, schools, community centres, supermarkets, GPs) and actively seeking the views of and building relationships with their local constituents at every opportunity. In return, it is important to ensure they have the time and support they need to be able to do that.

In addition to time and support, we need to ensure that expectations around councillor roles are more clearly set out and understood by all, including councillors’ key responsibilities and how they are the cornerstone of local democracy and decision making. This area was reviewed in detail by the Barriers to Politics Working Group in 2017, and a large number of its recommendations chime with the challenges we have uncovered, and therefore we want to follow up on the work carried out back in 2017 and ensure that those recommendations are taken forward, along with our own.

A disconnect in understanding and support between members and officers has been found in some areas in relation to decision making. Clarity about the different roles of officers and members needs to be improved for the benefit of all officers, members and citizens. Planning decision-making was a particular area where we have heard frustrations from councillors and the public about the support they had in understanding the various roles, and that frustration is having a negative impact on some decision-making meetings. We recognise that the need to improve understanding also extends to the relationship between officers and councillors, enabling them to work together as “one Council” where they are fully supported and enabled to carry out their important roles within the Council for the benefit of the citizens of Lewisham. Respect and mutual appreciation for the distinct roles of officers and members in decision making needs to be reinforced.

The collective understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of officers and councillors needs to be improved. Gaps in understanding and support need to be effectively bridged in a variety of ways to improve understanding, relationships and ultimately decision-making processes. Appropriate and proportionate support for all elements of a councillor's role should be provided.

Putting councillors at the heart of decision-making: Responsibilities

Whilst we heard from some people that they appreciated the visibility and leadership the role of the Mayor provided for the borough, we also heard from a few of our citizens and colleagues that they felt the role of Mayor concentrates too much power in one individual. The directly elected mayoral model itself was not within the scope of this review, having been democratically selected by the citizens of Lewisham in a referendum.¹⁰ However, we found that the directly elected mayoral model was not of concern to the majority of respondents to the consultation either online or at face to face events, nor is it of itself seen as an impediment to openness and transparency, public involvement or effective decision-making.

People were overwhelmingly far more focused on their individual experiences and local engagement with the Council and councillors, which chimes with the national view of politics and engagement in democracy, as advised by Professor Griffiths. Nonetheless, there are a range of ways to further diffuse power and increase involvement within the current decision-making structures within the Council, and it is on these that we focused in our bid to identify practical ways to ensure more effective decision making.

Immediately after his election, the current Mayor agreed his scheme of delegation where he delegated his powers to be shared collectively with the members of the Cabinet which we welcome. We should explore how we can further involve councillors and develop their responsibilities more widely and in partnership with communities which should be further explored.

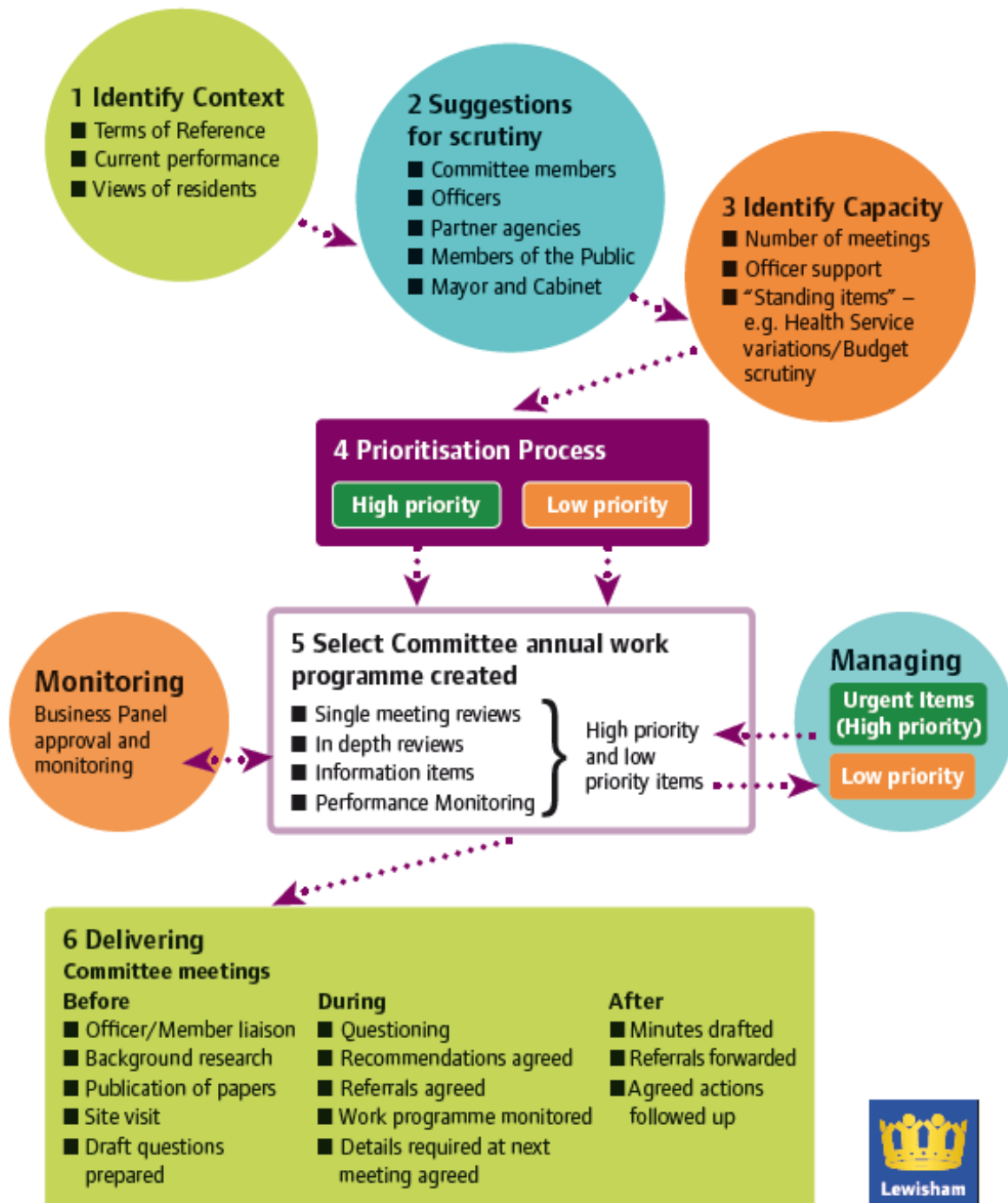
Whilst people often think solely of the Executive when talking about decision-making, the other equally important arm of effective decision making – Overview and Scrutiny – is often overlooked. We recognise the important role that Overview and Scrutiny have in ensuring effective decision-making, by informing and influencing decisions before they are taken, reviewing them once they have been made and ensuring performance remains in line with the anticipated benefits in the months and years post-decision.

This comprehensive system sees scrutiny members engaged in scrutinising the full range of Council business and ensures that policy and service development in Lewisham has strong member input. It also allows members the opportunity, as community leaders, to make sure the local community's needs are reflected in the decisions made by the Council and its partners (see Scrutiny Work programme process overleaf)

¹⁰ To revisit the executive model would require a second referendum across the borough.

Work Programme: Setting, monitoring, managing and delivering

Setting



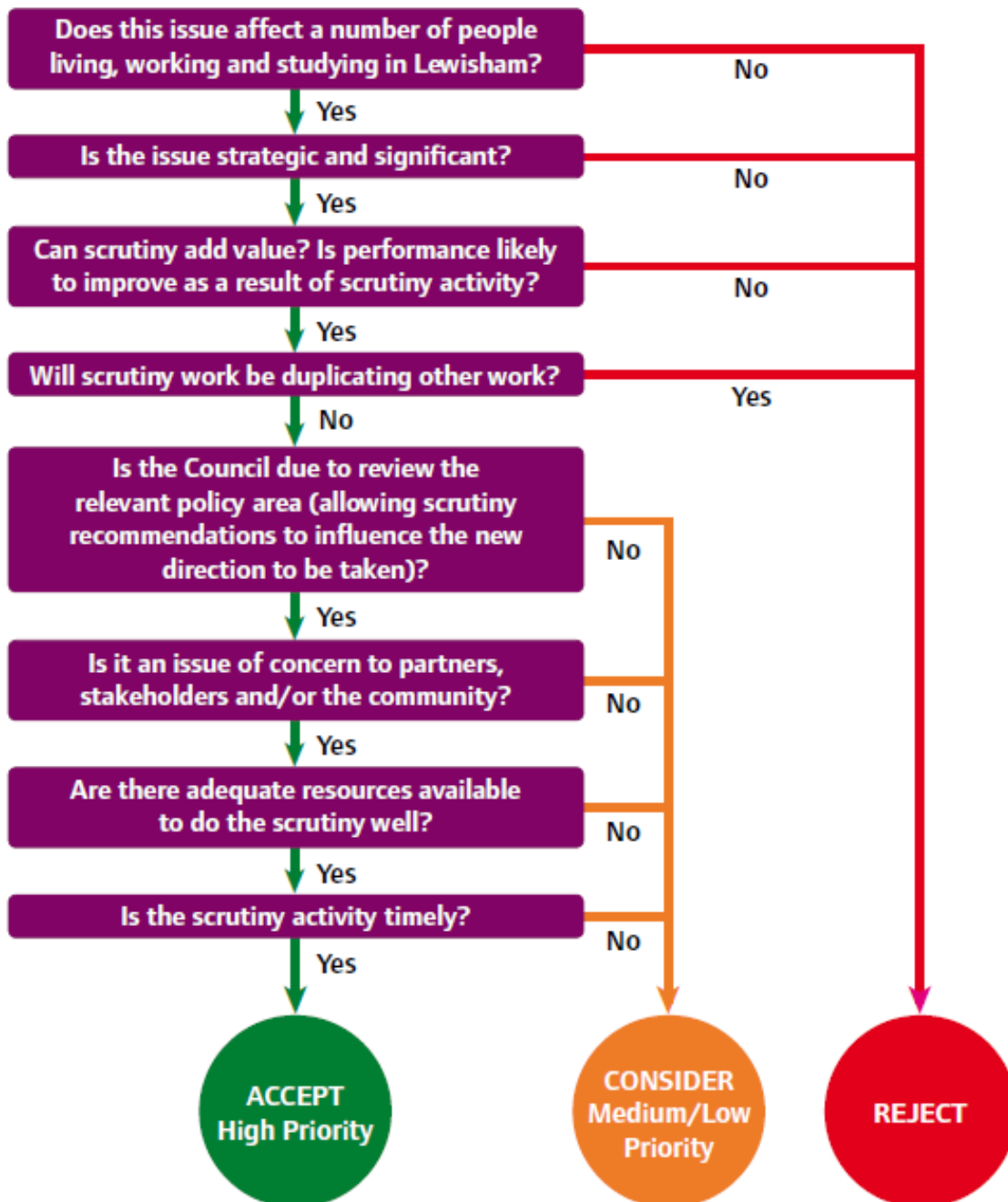
As is clear from the scrutiny work programme process set out above, the time commitment involved in being a scrutiny member is significant. In addition to the large volume of meetings that take place each year, a lot of activity takes place outside of formal meetings, including consultation with residents and service users, visits and service observations.

We have heard from some of our scrutiny colleagues that they do not feel that their important role is always as valued, understood or supported as it could be across the organisation. In particular, some feel that they have too little involvement in the decision-making process. Although the select committees do engage in pre-decision scrutiny and are involved in policy development, they feel this is often not systematic or early enough and regarded as too far removed from the exercise of executive power. We also heard that councillors are expected to attend a large volume of meetings, limiting the time available to get involved in their community and making it difficult for all councillors to keep oversight of all matters.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has suggested that Overview and Scrutiny should not aim for comprehensive coverage of all Council business but intervene “by exception” where its involvement can specifically make a difference. This is in line with Scrutiny’s current prioritisation process (see below), but it seems that perhaps more could be done structurally to reinforce this.

Scrutiny could focus on fewer issues that are more closely linked to Council priorities to ensure that decision making in key priority areas is scrutinised and more effective. A different structure might enable Scrutiny to be more responsive and flexible and focus on fewer issues that are more closely linked to Council priorities. We need to ensure that scrutiny members have more time available for policy development.

Scrutiny work programme – prioritisation process



Our current structures support strategic leadership, accountability and community leadership well. However, councillor workloads are very high, with many councillors fitting their substantial Council responsibilities around work outside their Council duties. We believe that the future will present ever greater demands on councillor time. Our view is that it is inevitable that the increased emphasis on the role of local assemblies and councillor led

place-based engagement in future will require much more input from all councillors at a ward level.

We need to consider remodelling Council governance structures to ensure that we get the most out of all elected members in using their time and interests to shape the Council's policies and decisions. That means examining ways in which all councillors have more say in policy decisions and redesigning the current overview and scrutiny committee structure to make it more flexible via a more task and finish approach to improve policy development.

We have identified the direction we need to take with overview and scrutiny, but we know detailed work needs to be done to find the best structure and approach.

The working group endorses the Mayor's current scheme of delegation and recommends a collegiate approach to decision making within the council, utilising the knowledge and talents of all 54 councillors and officers wherever possible.

Opportunities for further diffusing power within the Mayoral model should be further explored through consideration of what further matters could be reserved to full council.

An audit of councillor appointments to outside bodies should be undertaken to ensure that they are appropriate, relevant and the responsibilities of the councillor for every appointment are clear and transparent.

A further review should be carried out to identify the best structure and approach for overview and scrutiny to increase its impact and effectiveness whilst reducing the current comprehensive time commitments for all non-executive councillors. This should be inclusive of a greater focus on policy development through "task and finish" in-depth review work, and should give consideration to the separation of policy development from scrutiny of performance and decisions; not all non-executive councillors should be required to be on a scrutiny committee to allow a greater flexibility of approach and focus, and a fairer distribution of the workload across all councillors various roles and responsibilities. The revised structure should be ready for implementation at the Full Council AGM in 2020.

Whilst the review of Overview and Scrutiny structure and approach is underway, Overview and Scrutiny should operate within its current constitutional arrangements but with a greater focus on early and pre-decision scrutiny, and community engagement where possible.

Further utilisation of the role of councillor champions, or individual councillor led commissions should also be considered for all councillors, alongside the development of the task and finish approach to policy development to ensure a plethora of ways in which councillors can lead the focus of the Council.

A wider range of topics that are not part of any party programme should be debated at Full Council with the absence of the whip

Meetings should be better planned and managed so that they conclude their agenda effectively within 2 hours, being extended by half an hour only in exceptional circumstances.

7. Recommendations

Having considered the extensive evidence we have gathered, we have developed a large number of practical recommendations setting out how we believe the Mayor and Council could:

- Enhance their openness and transparency
- Further develop public involvement in Council decisions
- Promote effective decision-making'

Sustained focus on delivering these as a priority, ensuring leadership of the ongoing culture shift required, and clear oversight and management of the further work to develop and deliver improvements required.

RECOMMENDATIONS	Short-Term (0-3 Months)	Medium- Term (4-9 Months)	Longer- Term (9+ Months)
1. A Local Democracy Working Group of 8 councillors should be retained to oversee the delivery of the programme of work recommended within this report.	✓		
2. The Local Democracy Working Group should provide the structure and support through which the recommendations are further developed and tested where appropriate. They will take account of relevant guidelines for effective local democratic processes.			✓
3. We need to work collectively to build further trust and confidence in our democratic processes. We need to change our language and behaviour to influence a culture change that embeds the idea of the citizen at the heart of all we do.			✓
Theme 1 – Openness & Transparency			
<i>Creating a culture of openness, trust and partnership</i>			
4. Clearer and more engaging ways should be explored for explaining how the council works and the roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers.		✓	
5. An open data approach – sharing raw data the Council has so people can interrogate the data and draw their own conclusions – should be explored.			✓
<i>Using appropriate communication channels</i>			
6. An improved, comprehensive and more joined-up approach to our electronic communications should be developed.		✓	
7. Young people should be actively engaged in informing the Council’s wider approach to communication on social media.		✓	
8. The capacity and accessibility of our website should continue to be developed and improved, informed by the views and requirements of citizens, councillors and officers.			✓
9. Improved ward pages and information should be developed as part of the improvement of our website.			✓
10. Expanding the range of channels that people can use to access timely information about decision making meetings should be explored. A range of methods such as webcasting, pre and post meeting “vox pops” and an		✓	

RECOMMENDATIONS	Short-Term (0-3 Months)	Medium- Term (4-9 Months)	Longer- Term (9+ Months)
increased use of Twitter and social media should be trialled.			
11. The Local Democracy Review website should be retained and used in part to test ideas and recommendations related to online communication in the first instance.	✓		
12. A “citizens’ portal” approach should be investigated, through which citizens can access relevant information and receive targeted communications			✓
13. Opportunities for councillors to record and report their activities and attendance at events other than formal council meetings should be explored and introduced.		✓	
14. Infographics should be more consistently used to effectively convey relevant information about council performance.		✓	
15. Better online communications with young people should be co-designed with the young mayor and young advisors and then with wider groups of young people across schools and the borough.		✓	
16. Councillors and officers should routinely and regularly be, and provide information in, places that constituents use and meet. This includes making better use of noticeboards across the borough.		✓	
17. The model of Councillor surgeries should be expanded to trial the benefits of Council surgeries, Partnership surgeries and virtual surgeries.			✓
<i>Democratic Standards: Language & Reporting</i>			
18. A clear set of practical democratic standards should be developed and introduced across the Council. The standards should provide clarity and consensus about the roles and responsibilities of councillors, officers and citizens in decision making processes.		✓	
19. An improved style guide and template for all officer reports should be developed and introduced to consistently improve the accessibility and standard of reports.		✓	
20. The report template and guidance should require a clear “plain English” summary and a “timeline of engagement and decision making” to be present at the beginning of every report.	✓		
21. Underpinning the development of the improved style guide to improve the accessibility of reports, consideration should be given to utilising appropriate tools such as the Flesch Reading Ease Readability Formula, and also to seeking appropriate support and accreditations such as those offered by the Plain English Campaign and the British Dyslexia Association.		✓	
22. All decisions should generally be published within 2 days of the decision being taken, in line with the constitutional requirements for Mayor and Cabinet decisions.	✓		

RECOMMENDATIONS	Short-Term (0-3 Months)	Medium- Term (4-9 Months)	Longer- Term (9+ Months)
23. An open channel/portal should be provided for people to provide direct feedback on the accessibility of reports and publications so there is ongoing learning and improvement based on direct feedback from citizens.	✓		
24. A Glossary of Terms should be provided in reports where necessary to explain some of the key phrases used in local government. ("jargon" shouldn't be used and reports should be plain English).	✓		
<i>Democratic Standards: Planning</i>			
25. Communications policies for licensing and planning need to be updated in line with the democratic standards being developed to include effective digital communication. More effective and timely use of electronic communications should be a key focus, including an improved presence on the website and the online publication of notices.		✓	
26. Clearer information should be provided to councillors, citizens, applicants and objectors about the role and power of planning and licencing committee and local councillors.	✓		
27. The most appropriate way to provide professional support and guidance to councillors responsible for planning decisions should be further explored.	✓		
28. A consistent, proportionate approach should be adopted to the provision of submissions and objections to planning and licensing committees. Full provision with suitable redaction should be the standard approach, with summaries also provided where appropriate.		✓	
29. Ward members should be notified of all relevant applications and decision-making processes in a timely and appropriate manner.		✓	
30. If required, the Planning Statement of Community Involvement should be reviewed in line with the democratic standards once developed, and the other relevant recommendations made within this report.			✓
Theme 2 – Public Involvement in Decision-Making			
<i>Reaching and empowering seldom heard groups</i>			
31. The Council needs to develop and improve how it attempts to actively engage with seldom heard groups and individuals to inform decision making that will impact on them. A further piece of work to consider how best to achieve this, and test out various mechanisms should be undertaken. In the first instance the third sector, faith groups and other public sector partners should be actively involved in shaping and informing this work.			✓
32. The Council needs to better manage its consultation and engagement mechanisms, systems and processes to ensure that people directly and collectively receive appropriate feedback as to the outcome of the consultation exercise they have taken part in.		✓	

RECOMMENDATIONS	Short-Term (0-3 Months)	Medium- Term (4-9 Months)	Longer- Term (9+ Months)
33. The introduction of a People's Panel should be explored reflecting the demographic of the borough.			✓
34. A mechanism for the community to deliberate and set the focus of select committee investigations should be explored.		✓	
35. The Works Council should be better utilised to facilitate direct engagement between unions and councillors.	✓		
36. Mayor's Question Time should take place routinely both around the borough and virtually. This should be enshrined within the constitution.	✓		
<i>Developing a place-based approach to public engagement</i>			
37. The purpose and aims of the current local assembly model should be further reviewed to improve and expand the engagement and influence over council policy developed through any ward-based mechanism. In the interim, local assemblies should be provided with step by step guidance as to how to utilise their powers to place items on the agenda of Mayor and Cabinet for discussion.		✓	
38. Following on from our current model of local ward assemblies, opportunities for place-based involvement should be further explored and developed as a potential mechanism of further focusing and improving engagement with and empowerment of seldom heard communities.			✓
39. As part of further developing a place-based engagement and involvement approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ civic crowdfunding should be developed ▪ the place standard tool should be trialled ▪ a model of citizens assemblies should be considered, initially in relation to discussions around the allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds. 			✓
<i>Young people</i>			
40. Effective mechanisms for engagement and involvement of younger people and older people should be co designed with our local groups and representatives.		✓	
41. Councillors, local schools and parent governors should work together to increase the understanding and engagement between young people and local decision making that impacts on them. This should include the development of a structure of councillor question time panels being developed in schools.		✓	
<i>Council meetings</i>			
42. The role and format of Full Council meetings should be reviewed where possible and a more thematic and engaging approach developed, utilising the announcements section of the formal agenda and maximising the opportunities for contributions from the public.		✓	

RECOMMENDATIONS	Short-Term (0-3 Months)	Medium- Term (4-9 Months)	Longer- Term (9+ Months)
43. When reviewing the format of full council meetings, further consideration should be given to ways to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ensure maximum possible attendance in the meeting room ▪ enable collective observation from an alternative venue if necessary ▪ explore a pre-registration process for supplementary questions to ensure more questioners have the opportunity to speak within the allotted timeframe. 		✓	
Theme 3 – Effective Decision-Making			
<i>Putting councillors at the heart of decision making: Roles</i>			
44. The role of all councillors, as the representative voice and champion of all of their constituents, should be secured at the heart of all council communications and decision-making processes and outlined clearly through the democratic standards.			
45. Clarity and consensus should be developed around the roles and responsibilities, and anticipated work load, for the various responsibilities a councillor may undertake.		✓	
46. Building on the excellent work of the Barriers to Politics working group: ensuring the delivery of their recommendations should become part of the ongoing responsibilities of the Local Democracy Working group.			✓
47. All Mayors should be limited to a maximum of two terms only.			
48. The role of Chair of Council should be changed to Speaker.	✓		
<i>Putting councillors at the heart of decision making: Relationships</i>			
49. The collective understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of officers and councillors needs to be improved. Gaps in understanding and support need to be effectively bridged in a variety of ways to improve understanding, relationships and ultimately decision-making processes. Appropriate and proportionate support for all elements of a councillor's role should be provided.			✓
<i>Putting councillors at the heart of decision making: Responsibilities</i>			
50. The working group endorses the Mayor's current scheme of delegation and recommends a collegiate approach to decision making within the council, utilising the knowledge and talents of all 54 councillors and officers wherever possible.			✓
51. Opportunities for further diffusing power within the Mayoral model should be further explored through consideration of what further matters could be reserved to full council.		✓	
52. An audit of councillor appointments to outside bodies should be undertaken to ensure that they are appropriate, relevant and the responsibilities of the	✓		

RECOMMENDATIONS	Short-Term (0-3 Months)	Medium- Term (4-9 Months)	Longer- Term (9+ Months)
councillor for every appointment are clear and transparent.			
53. A further review should be carried out to identify the best structure and approach for overview and scrutiny to increase its impact and effectiveness whilst reducing the current comprehensive time commitments for all non-executive councillors. This should be inclusive of a greater focus on policy development through “task and finish” in-depth review work, and should give consideration to the separation of policy development from scrutiny of performance and decisions; not all non-executive councillors should be required to be on a scrutiny committee to allow a greater flexibility of approach and focus, and a fairer distribution of the workload across all councillors various roles and responsibilities. The revised structure should be ready for implementation at the Council AGM in 2020.			✓
54. Whilst the review of Overview and Scrutiny structure and approach is underway, Overview and Scrutiny should operate within its current constitutional arrangements but with a greater focus on early and pre-decision scrutiny, and community engagement where possible.	✓		
55. Further utilisation of the role of councillor champions, or individual councillor led commissions should also be considered for all councillors, alongside the development of the task and finish approach to policy development to ensure a plethora of ways in which councillors can lead the focus of the Council.		✓	
56. A wider range of topics that are not part of any party programme should be debated at Full Council with the absence of the whip.		✓	
57. Meetings should be better planned and managed so that they conclude their agenda effectively within 2 hours, being extended by half an hour only in exceptional circumstances.	✓		

8. Conclusion

Lewisham is a vibrant and diverse place with extremes of both opportunity and engagement. This was reflected in the range of people that proactively engaged with the review and those that we were unable to reach. Our work to engage with and enable all of our communities needs to continue, with an ever greater focus on those who most need support to help them better understand and help shape the local decisions that affect their lives.

Taken collectively, and in light of some of the challenges reported to us about accessing information generally or in specific interactions, our findings suggest that we need to think about shifting our organisational culture. Our use of language, our attention to the channels and methods of communication we use, our approach to reporting all need to be much more citizen focused. We need to be open by default with our data.

We need to ensure that councillors and officers work collectively across the organisation to reinvigorate a culture of openness and partnership in line with the "Lewisham Way". We all need to be clearer about our roles and responsibilities, about how and why we make decisions and why they are relevant to our citizens. This can be done (in part and as a start) through delivering the practical changes and ongoing work we recommend to be carried out in partnership with wider members, officers, unions, partners and most importantly our citizens across the borough.

DRAFT

9. Appendices

- Appendix A – Engagement with Expert Organisations
- Appendix B - Literature Review (Professor Colin Copus, Director Of The Local Governance Research Unit, DeMontfort University)
- Appendix C – Evidence From LBL Online Consultation
- Appendix D – Evidence From Face-To-Face Engagement
- Appendix E – Evidence From Schools Workshops
- Appendix F – Written Evidence Submission From Chair Of Council
- Appendix G – Written Evidence Submission From Overview & Scrutiny
- Appendix H – Summary Of Additional Written Evidence Submissions From Local Councillors & Residents
- Appendix I – Written Evidence Submission (NESTA)
- Appendix J – Summary Of Oral Evidence Submission (Dr Simon Griffiths, Senior Lecturer In Politics at Goldsmiths, University Of London)