

APPENDIX H – SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMISSIONS

The Local Democracy Review Working Group also received written evidence submissions from the following individuals and organisations:

- ‘New’ councillors (individual submissions from councillors elected in 2018 were initially summarised by the Vice Chair of Overview & Scrutiny)
- Blackheath Society
- Lewisham resident (Lewisham Deptford CLP and Lewisham LCF member – evidence submitted in a personal capacity)
- Lewisham resident (evidence submitted anonymously)
- Lewisham Liberal Democrats (late submission received on 28th February 2019)

The issues and ideas they identified have been summarised and collated under the three themes of the review.

Overall

Issues	Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A concern was expressed that the Local Democracy Review Working Group (composed of eight Labour councillors) did not include members from other political parties in Lewisham and other local groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commit to creating a Challenge Panel in order to provide independent input to the review

Theme 1 – Openness & Transparency

Issues	Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Council’s website should be the ‘primary vehicle for rapid citizen communication’ but the design is not currently fit-for-purpose – it is too focused on service delivery and does not tell citizens what is happening (and what will happen) or keep residents up-to-date with progress against plans ▪ The Council needs to improve its communications to reach more of its residents in a more timely, reliable, targeted, consistent and accessible way by multiple channels and to explain their rights, obligations, opportunities and choices 	<p><u>Creating a culture of openness, trust and partnership</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a more customer-oriented culture ▪ Publish a regularly updated organogram of the Council’s structure ▪ Provide periodic updates on contentious areas of service (e.g. trade refuse collection in Blackheath Village) <p><u>Using appropriate communication channels</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Redesign the Council website (to include customer services & case work monitoring and a planning/housing portal)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Planning process tends to be dominated by people who are long-term homeowners and have the resources (in terms of time, networks and expertise) to object to new developments. People who may be in favour (e.g. renters, workers, people with young families) are often not well-established in the borough and do not have the time to campaign or attend evening meetings▪ The Council needs to change attitudes and culture to encourage a 'spirit of engagement and openness'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Greater use of IT and social media alongside traditional methods of communication▪ More local public meetings and other events to inform, explain and consult with residents▪ More targeted communication to allow residents to receive information about what most interests and concerns them <p><u>Democratic standards: language & reporting</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ More timely, reliable and consistent communication that meets legal and service targets in an appropriate and accessible way▪ Acknowledge all written approaches (especially via generic email boxes) and tell people when they are likely to receive an answer▪ Engage with complainants in a positive and constructive manner <p><u>Democratic standards: Planning</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Give more than the strict statutory notice for planning consultations and meetings wherever possible and use email/first class post for statutory notices▪ Maintain regular and effective engagement with interest groups and amenity societies▪ Keep objectors regularly informed about progress on planning cases as they progress through later stages▪ Keep the public and commenters regularly informed on the progress of formal consultations▪ Produce the Planning Annual Management report in a more timely way▪ Reinststate a Planning Helpline for simple, quick inquiries▪ Commission polling or surveys to establish broader attitudes to new developments in specific neighbourhoods▪ Review the role of amenity societies or neighbourhood associations, particularly in cases where they oppose social housing developments▪ Allow residents to lodge qualified support for a planning application (e.g. to say they back a proposal if certain design/building measures are met)
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Theme 2 – Public Involvement In Decision-Making

Issues	Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There was a recognition that whilst it is for officers to advise in their areas of expertise and for councillors to make final decisions and be answerable to their electors, it was also highly beneficial to involve citizens as much and as early as possible in decisions that will affect and sometimes shape their lives ▪ It was felt that Local Assemblies could, with suitable democratic and governance improvements and safeguards, involve citizens more in the issues that affect them both locally and across the borough. However, some felt that they were not currently operating effectively –practice between Assemblies differed, membership of co-ordinating committees was not open and published, not all Assemblies had up-to-date lists of priorities/projects and there were no clear rules about quorums or voting arrangements 	<p><u>Reaching and empowering seldom heard groups</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Actively reach and engage a broad spectrum of citizens to see what they want and think ▪ Alert citizens early to approaching issues and problems and get their help in addressing them ▪ Tell citizens regularly what the Council is doing and prioritising (and indeed what it is not or cannot do) and seek regular feedback <p><u>Developing a place based approach to public engagement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Give Local Assemblies more power and influence (once they have established consistent basic procedures and adequate resources to ensure openness and guard against abuse by pressure groups) ▪ Introduce community juries/citizen assemblies to ensure issues are thoroughly debated by a properly representative group <p><u>Council meetings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make greater time for a public contribution at meetings

Theme 3 – Effective Decision-Making

Issues	Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There were specific concerns about the structure of the Council – the Mayoral model could potentially concentrate too much power in one individual and reduce councillors’ influence on decision-making. Some felt that scrutiny had limited ability to change decisions, the allowance scheme could have a detrimental impact on the range of people selected as councillors as well as offering unhelpful financial incentives in the existing model of Overview & Scrutiny 	<p><u>Putting councillors at the heart of decision making: roles</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review the directly elected Mayor model and consider a return to a committee system ▪ Introduce term limits for the Mayor and councillors ▪ Allow councillors to elect cabinet members ▪ Review the remit of current cabinet portfolios ▪ Councillors should take on a role for a year at a time ▪ Provide councillors with secretarial and administrative support

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ward boundaries need to be kept under review in the light of changing populations and constantly changing levels of affluence/deprivation/need to ensure the system is fair and effective for all citizens ▪ There was a recognition that the workload of a councillor is extremely onerous and very difficult to do if working full-time. In addition, some councillors found it difficult to keep oversight of all matters with issues spread across so many committees and arising from widespread ward and community engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rotate the role of chair around planning committee members ▪ Rotate cabinet member roles to give all members the opportunity to become familiar with a wider range of Council services and exercise closer influence in policy and decision-making <p><u>Putting councillors at the heart of decision making: relationships</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review the councillors' code of conduct (including how they deal with casework and engage with Local Assemblies) ▪ More openness about the relationship and reporting structures between the officers and those committees that scrutinise their area of responsibility <p><u>Putting councillors at the heart of decision making: responsibilities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduce a Compliance Committee and Council Ombudsman ▪ Greater community involvement in the work of scrutiny committees ▪ Change the scrutiny structure – fewer chairs with SRAs, more focused investigations/task & finish groups, reduced number of committees and fewer meetings, more responsibility (and allowances) for vice-chairs, align the scrutiny structure with the cabinet portfolios, divide responsibilities on select committees so that each member has a specific area of focus ▪ Meetings should be restricted to two hours (or two and a half hours at the most) and standing orders should not be extended beyond half an hour
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