

MINUTES OF THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY WORKING GROUP

26 September 2019

Present: Cllrs Best, Bonavia, Campbell, Codd, Davis, Elliott and Kelleher.

In Attendance: Cllr Brown

Also Present: Barrie Neal (Director of Corporate Policy & Governance), Salena Mulhere (SGM Interagency, Service Development & Integration) and James Bravin (Principal Officer – Policy, Service Design & Analysis)

Apologies: Cllr Sheikh

1. Minutes Of The Meeting Held On 17 July 2019

RESOLVED: The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record.

2. Declarations Of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Delivering The Recommendations Of The Local Democracy Review: Update Report

Salena Mulhere (SGM Interagency, Service Development & Integration) introduced the report and the key points to note:

- The report pulls together all the actions which have taken place since the last meeting in July as well as planned activity until the next meeting in December.
- An online form for providing feedback on reports has been created and is currently being tested. It will be included in the developing report template/guidance.
- This meeting was due to have an evaluation of Citizens' Assemblies to consider – work has been done evaluating the effectiveness of Citizens' Assemblies as an engagement and involvement mechanism looking at Camden and Lewisham's previous use of an assembly. Work is also underway to evaluate a People's Panel approach in response to a separate recommendation and, rather than review one separately from the other, both evaluations will be presented at the next meeting so the group can review the two models alongside each other and consider if either, neither or both should be recommended for use at this time.
- Culture change is one of the overarching themes of the Local Democracy Review. Some of this is being taken forward practically through the 'Lewisham Way behaviour framework that HR are developing for staff, some of it through some of the practical information and guidance being created and readied to share (report template and guidance, role profiles, comms strategy etc)

In response to questions the following was noted:

- Citizens' Assemblies and People's Panels would both have significant costs attached to them so if one or both are going to be recommended to be used it is important that the Working Group are sure that they will be a cost effective and efficient way to provide the required improvements in engagement and involvement, specifically in the context of the numerous potential ways of improving engagement and involvement that were suggested for further investigation in the recommendations of the review.

- A new report template and guidance are currently being developed by officers, overseen on behalf of the group by Cllr Kelleher. The template and guidance is taking account of all relevant Local Democracy Review recommendations and also the new accessibility legislation. They are currently being trialled with a few officers and will be introduced in the next couple of months, with the expectation that by the end of the municipal year all reports will be in the new format. Members are keen to receive clearer and more concise reports from officers across all committees.
- Kevin Flaherty has been looking at options for alterations to the format of Council meetings to trial and will be sharing some information soon.
- Cllr Bonavia has met with Trade Unions and discussed the Works Council and how it operates. The Works Council currently only needs to meet under certain conditions and doesn't meet regularly so has not met for a number of years, but a meaningful way for the unions to engage with members is needed.
- The 'councillor roles, responsibilities and relationships' area of work is considering the wide range of responsibilities that councillors have to undertake, and work is underway to quantify the time commitment for each role. From this work, a cumulative time commitment for meetings for each councillor could be estimated.

Each LDWG champion present then gave a brief overview of work in their area and next steps:

Seldom-Heard Voices

Cllr Campbell reported that to inform learning about better ways to engage, officers were undertaking an 'appreciative enquiry'. Healthwatch and Rushey Green Timebank have helped with the development of the enquiry approach as both have experience of carrying out appreciative enquiries in Lewisham. It is quite a long process to set up and deliver and it needs to be done on an individual level. Through open discussions, the enquiry is seeking to find out what positive experiences people have had in terms of engagement to inform learning of positives to build on and build into Council practice. Selection of groups has focused on third sector organisations and those working primarily with:

- Migrants and refugees
- BAME communities
- Single parents
- Carers (informal carers of family or friends, not paid care workers in this instance)
- People with mental and/or physical health support needs

Cllrs Bonavia and Best suggested that Speaking Up be contacted to take part in/support the enquiry as they were practiced in empowering people to be involved in decision making.

Open Data & Communications

Cllr Bonavia reported that he had visited Bristol with officers to learn about their Open Data approach and had also met up with Theo Blackwell. In Bristol there was a lot of focus on "Smart City", but open data is our primary focus. There is some open data on our website currently but we want to identify other data sets we can add, but will need to "walk before we can run", perhaps using the Local Democracy Review website to test out some options.

It was noted that the infrastructure in the Civic Suite made webcasting challenging, but work was ongoing to deal with the glitches.

Effective Engagement

Cllr Codd advised that work was underway to develop an engagement with young people. He advised that the work being done to evaluate the use of Citizens' Assemblies was very good, and he anticipated the same level of detail in the People's Panel report currently being worked on by officers.

Language & Reporting

Salena Mulhere advised that the report template and guidance were currently in development. Members confirmed the importance of this area in making sure a template and guidance were developed that led to improved reports, which were clear and easier to understand for both councillors and residents. Use of plain language, clear recommendations and clear implications are important so that up front in the reports members know what the key information is.

Guidance and expectation has been circulated to all officers that all decisions should now be published within two working days, as recommended. The focus has been on training and compliance. If councillors notice that they are not published, please flag it with the relevant officer and let Salena know too if there are persistent issues.

Planning

Cllr Davis advised she has been working closely with the relevant directors and has had meetings with planning and legal officers, and planning committees and chairs and locally interested parties. She has also visited Brent and some benchmarking of practice in other boroughs has been looked at, as well as having reviewed the website and all public facing documents relating to planning, reviewed the Statement of Community Involvement and carried out a mystery shopper exercise with further engagement planned.

Once she has pulled all of this together, Cllr Davis and officers will put together a series of recommendations. Although the Local Democracy Review planning recommendations have different timescales, delivery of them all has been grouped together as they are all interlinked and a further update will be provided at a future meeting.

Place – Based Engagement

See other items.

Councillor Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships

Cllr Best gave an update on the report that was later on the agenda regarding an audit of appointments and advised she will liaise with Kevin Flaherty regarding the necessary changes to the long list of approved duties using a form of words modelled by the Local Government Association.

Role profiles are about to be developed that will be of great use, a bit more work is needed then they will be circulated for input.

RESOLVED: To note the work undertaken to date and proposed next steps.

RESOLVED: To note the updated Programme Plan and Work Programme (Appendices A and B).

RESOLVED: To recommend officers contact Speaking up regarding taking part in the appreciative enquiry taking place as part of delivery of the "seldom heard" recommendations.

4. Delivering the Overview & Scrutiny Review: Update Report

Salena Mulhere introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- The work to date and three indicative options aimed to stimulate thought and discussion amongst councillors. The three options are not fully worked up but they are all viable based on resources and an initial legal review. Charlotte Dale has led on an outstanding piece of work to gather the detail of scrutiny structure and practice across London, Ros then did some further analysis and broke it down further by Mayoral authorities.
- Lewisham has some of the highest number of standing committees and the most meetings every year. A quantitative look at numbers does not provide evidence regarding impact and effectiveness.
- It is proposed that the three options are shared with members tomorrow for consultation during October through drop-ins and roundtables where members can share what they like and what they do not like. Option A best meets the six principles of the recommendation as it reduces the number of meetings by a quarter and reduces the time commitment for all members, enabling more members to choose where they focus primarily.

Cllr Campbell advised that under all options there was the requirement to reduce the number of select committee meetings to enable task and finish to be developed, this would also require select committees to not carry out in depth reviews as this style of work will be undertaken through task and finish. Cllr Campbell further reinforced that the consultation is not about councillors choosing A, B or C, but it is about discussing the principles of each and how they could work best.

The following was noted in discussion:

- The structures at other authorities were looked at to inform the development of potential approaches and changes to practice, but different authorities may have different views on what is “effective”.
- The focus should be about what best delivers effective Council work. It should not be about what councillors are suited to.
- There is a separate recommendation (#34) about mechanisms for involving public in scrutiny.
- Cllr Brown is currently visiting other boroughs and speaking to them about effective scrutiny.
- Impact is ordinarily quantified and outlined through an annual report and an end of administration report.
- The current supporting resources could support each of the options as outlined. The level of reduction in standing committee meetings would dictate the resources available to support a task and finish approach. It is widely recognised that the level of and quality of support to scrutiny in Lewisham is at the higher end of the spectrum.

The Chair thanked the LDWG champions, Councillor Bill Brown, Charlotte Dale and other officers for their hard work on this.

RESOLVED: To note the work undertaken to date.

RESOLVED: To note the initial three options

RESOLVED: To note the timeline for consultation and decision.

5. Update on Audit of Councillor Appointments To Outside Bodies (Recommendation #52)

Salena Mulhere introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- The aim of developing role profiles is to help councillors, officers and the public understand what is expected in the different roles councillors undertake – this is true also of external appointments.
- Once audited, a view can be taken about if they are still relevant and appropriate, and updated information about the status of the organisations is also gathered.

In discussion it was noted:

- It would be good for councillors to also evaluate their experiences, to feedback what their experiences of external appointments have been, what the challenges have been and what support might be beneficial.
- It would also be good to quantify the time expectations for each individual external appointment as councillors gave examples of where the expectation of the organisation was not clear to them before undertaking the role.
- Ros will be asked to ask current appointees to feedback about the time commitment each responsibility has taken.
- Appointments are made by the Executive, the focus is on are they still relevant.
- Officers will clarify whether councillors are permitted to receive expenses from outside bodies for travel or training.
- The revised list of suggested appointments will be taken to the constitutional working party.

RESOLVED: To note the work undertaken to date and proposed next steps.

6. Improving Feedback To Members Of The Public Following Consultation & Engagement (Recommendation #33)

Salena Mulhere introduced the report. In discussion it was noted:

- A thorough piece of work has been carried out by Stewart to review all of our corporate guidance and practice.
- The LDWG champion has been impressed that there is a corporate team who provide support and oversight to consultation across the organisation.
- With a team that has some oversight, there is the ability to ensure consultations can be improved.
- Consultation leads within the corporate team work across different projects and have limited resource for the consultation work. They rely on relationships to positively influence officers across the council to follow best practice but aren't in a position to monitor everything.
- Some of the updates within this report should be highlighted on the LDR website
- It is important to remember that the use of tools such as Commonplace are to facilitate and support ongoing conversations, not just to pop up and have isolated consultations

RESOLVED: To note the improvements to consultation feedback processes and tools implemented by officers between July and September 2019.

7. Evaluation Of New Community Engagement Approaches In The Allocation Of NCIL Funding (Recommendation #38/39)

Salena Mulhere introduced the report. The key points to note in the resulting discussion were:

- Councillors felt that Commonplace could have been used more effectively with better examples and more interaction.
- It was not as clear as it could have been which stage of the process (stages one and two) that it was, and this might result in people giving comments that are relevant to a different stage which could be a risk.
- Collaborative work is be possible and ward councillors and Local Assembly officers need to work together on projects that cross Ward boundaries.
- Officers should also be allowed to put forward bids and should be encouraged to do so.

RESOLVED: To note the content of the report.