

MINUTES OF THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY WORKING GROUP

Wednesday 10 February at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Best, Kevin Bonavia, Juliet Campbell, Patrick Codd, Sophie Davis and Colin Elliott

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor John Paschoud

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Silvana Kelleher

1. Minutes Of Meeting Held On 23 September 2020

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: Programme Update Report

Rosalind Jeffrey (Strategic Transformation and Organisational Development Business Partner) introduced the report, which provided an update on the delivery of the Local Democracy Review's recommendations since the last meeting in September 2020.

The following was noted in discussion:

- Timescales for the delivery of longer-term proposals relating to open data will be fully defined once the new corporate structure and approach for data and insights is in place – engagement with members regarding their open data priorities will be key to this work. The importance of piloting and learning from smaller-scale initiatives was also highlighted
- The Lewisham Data Observatory provided a range of useful information about Lewisham and its people, but is not widely known – more should be done to raise awareness, although the Observatory should not be regarded as the only source of data
- Clear, up-to-date performance information (including how Lewisham compares to other boroughs) should be available on the Council website
- Task & Finish groups are intended to be another tool to support policy development, alongside the continued scrutiny of performance and decisions by non-executive members – the establishment of Task & Finish groups will not be mandatory

RESOLVED: Members of the LDWG noted the work undertaken across the review's three key themes since September 2020 and agreed the next steps outlined in the report, specifically the proposal to hold a final LDWG meeting in March 2021. They also requested that training and support be offered to members in relation to the Lewisham Observatory site.

4. Proposals For Planning (Recommendations #25-#30)

Cllr Davis and Emma Talbot (Director of Planning) introduced the final report on the delivery of Local Democracy Review's recommendations relating to Planning, following the interim report presented to the LDWG in February 2020.

The following was noted in discussion:

- Work to develop proposals following the presentation of the interim report was affected by COVID-19, but officers were able to learn from the temporary changes introduced within Planning as a result of the pandemic
- The proposals presented in the final report cover three key areas – decision making, consultation and engagement and communication – with an overall focus on openness and transparency in the Planning process, particularly around effective decision making at committees
- Appeals against decisions are managed by the Planning Inspectorate so the Council is not able to make changes to this process – officers will ensure that information provided to residents and other stakeholders is clear on this issue in future
- Local councillors are key to effective Planning decisions and will continue to be consulted on all applications in their ward through the introduction of a weekly list of Planning applications
- Officers will need to address data protection issues as part of further developing the approach to the automatic publication of letters of objections

RESOLVED: Members of the LDWG noted the contents of the report and the changes that have already been implemented:

- Use of closed sessions in planning committees for legal advice
- Uploading of PowerPoint officer presentations for planning committee members
- The preparation and use of committee informal protocol notes
- The use of external planning training to support planning committee members
- Permanent changes to the plan making sections of the SCI, following public consultation
- The temporary COVID-19 related planning changes and the learning from those

In addition, they agreed:

- Changes and improvements to the Planning web pages
- Officers progress updates to the Local Information Requirements to require the submission community audit to accompany every major development
- The development of a weekly list of applications for ward Cllrs to replace direct notifications
- The introduction of regular pre-application reviews for strategic cases (virtual)
- Preparation and updating of informal written protocols for how committees are undertaken to aid with public understanding and perception
- Officers develop and set up a programme of member training and engagement
- Greater use of the existing planning IT system to enable the public to monitor planning application progress
- New acknowledgement letters prepared to be emailed when an application is received
- Development of public consultation advice for developers and landowners for publication
- Prepare proposals for a new SCI and any necessary associated changes to undertake engagement with relevant stakeholders including:
 - A period of engagement with community groups as to how best to formally recognise them
 - A period of engagement with Members and the public regarding possible revisions to planning committees

They also agreed the further development by officers of the approach to the automatic publication of letters of objection (to follow the latest legal guidance).

5. Development Of Member Role Profiles (Recommendation #45)

Rosalind Jeffrey (Strategic Transformation and Organisational Development Business Partner) introduced the report, which provided a final update on the development of role profiles for all member positions.

The key points were noted in discussion:

- Member role profiles were useful in providing clarity about what was expected of each position, but they also play a key part in raising awareness of councillor roles and responsibilities amongst residents and Council staff – the final versions of the role profiles will be published on the Council website
- It is critical that the role profiles are updated to reflect changes to legislation and practice – members are key to this process and will have regular opportunities to provide feedback

RESOLVED: Members of the LDWG noted the contents of the report and agreed the draft set of member role profiles, subject to the amendments discussed at the meeting being made. They also noted that the Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Law, Governance and HR would have ongoing responsibility for ensuring that the role profiles are regularly reviewed and updated, in consultation with members.

6. Update On Hybrid (Public) Committee Meetings

Petra Der Man (Principal Lawyer and Deputy Monitoring Officer) introduced the report, which provided an update on the development of proposals to introduce hybrid committee meetings.

The following was noted in discussion:

- The temporary removal of the legal requirement for physical attendance at Council committee meetings comes to an end on 7th May 2021. If there is no change to the current legal position, then Council meetings will have to revert back to physical meetings from this date
- The Local Government Association (LGA) has been lobbying central government for an extension to the May 2021 deadline. If this does not happen, then two professional bodies – Lawyers in Local Government (LLG) and the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) – are considering court action
- Members again highlighted that, despite some challenges, virtual and hybrid committee meetings have potentially significant benefits for residents and councillors

RESOLVED: Members of the LDWG noted the content of the report, specifically the work to date and next steps outlined in section 6. They also requested that officers provide further information about the different systems currently available to the Council for holding virtual meetings, including the advantages and disadvantages of each option.