



Local Democracy Working Group

Local Democracy Review – Report Of The Working Group (Spring 2021)

Date: 12 May 2021

Key decision: No

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors: Assistant Chief Executive

Outline and recommendations

In July 2018, Full Council agreed to establish a Local Democracy Review Working Group consisting of eight councillors. They were tasked with making recommendations about how the Mayor and Council could enhance their openness and transparency, increase public involvement in Council decisions and promote effective decision-making.

Members of the Working Group gathered a wide range of evidence during the review and produced a comprehensive report, which identified 57 recommendations for change. Mayor & Cabinet and Full Council agreed all these recommendations in spring 2019. They also approved the appointment of eight councillors to a retained Local Democracy Working Group.

The purpose of this report is to introduce the draft Report Of The Working Group (Spring 2021), which is attached at Appendix A. This second report provides detailed information about the delivery of the recommendations (overseen by the retained Local Democracy Working Group), including key achievements across the programme, as well as exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the three overarching themes in the review's terms of reference.

The Local Democracy Working Group is recommended to approve the draft report, agree that any amendments required be delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive and refer the report to Mayor & Cabinet and Full Council for approval.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

May 2018 – Mayor Damien Egan promises to launch a review that will make the Council *‘even more democratic, open and transparent’*

July 2018 – Full Council agrees to establish a Local Democracy Review Working Group consisting of eight councillors. They are tasked with making recommendations about how the Mayor and Council could enhance their openness and transparency, increase public involvement in Council decisions and promote effective decision-making

September 2018 to January 2019 – the Local Democracy Review Working Group gathers evidence from a wide range of residents, community groups and local councillors (including an online questionnaire completed by over 700 respondents, workshops at four secondary schools and attendance at over 40 events)

January to March 2019 – the Local Democracy Review Working Group collects their evidence into a final report, which identifies 57 recommendations for change

March to April 2019 – Mayor & Cabinet and Full Council agree the report and recommendations of the Local Democracy Review Working Group

May 2019 to March 2020 – the retained Local Democracy Working Group oversees delivery of the recommendations, with the final meeting postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic

September 2020 – the Local Democracy Working Group is extended so that it can complete its outstanding work and also consider the impact of COVID-19 on the three key themes of the review

Reason for lateness and urgency

The report has not been available for five clear working days before the meeting and the Chair is asked to accept it as an urgent item. The report was not available for dispatch on 4th May 2021 as this date was within the pre-election period. The report cannot wait until the next meeting as this is the final meeting of the Local Democracy Working Group and members need to consider the report urgently so that it can be presented to Mayor & Cabinet and the Council AGM for approval.

1. Summary

1.1. This report introduces the draft report of the Local Democracy Working Group (Spring 2021). It provides detailed information about the delivery of the recommendations agreed by Mayor & Cabinet and Full Council in spring 2019, including key achievements across the programme, and also explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the three overarching themes in the review's terms of reference.

2. Recommendations

2.1. The Local Democracy Working Group is recommended to:

- Approve the draft report as attached at Appendix A
- Agree that any minor amendments required to facilitate publication of the report be delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive
- Refer the report to Mayor & Cabinet for agreement and endorsement

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- Refer the report to Full Council for agreement and endorsement

3. Policy context

- 3.1. The recommendations of the Local Democracy Review are consistent with all the Council's corporate priorities (outlined in the Corporate Strategy 2018-22) as effective decision-making underpins the delivery of every commitment within the strategy. However, the recommendations are particularly relevant under the priority of:
- *Open Lewisham* – Lewisham is a welcoming place of safety for all where we celebrate the diversity that strengthens us

4. Background

- 4.1. In July 2018, Full Council agreed to establish a Local Democracy Working Group consisting of eight councillors. They were tasked with making recommendations about how the Mayor and Council could:
- Enhance their openness and transparency
 - Increase public involvement in Council decisions
 - Promote effective decision-making
- 4.2. Members of the Working Group gathered evidence from a wide range of residents, community groups and local councillors during the review (including an online questionnaire completed by over 700 respondents, workshops at four secondary schools and attendance at over 40 events). They also participated in two workshops with the [Local Government Information Unit](#) and the [Kirklees Democracy Commission](#) as well as working closely with other local democracy experts. The Working Group then collated their evidence into a final report, which identified 57 recommendations for change.
- 4.3. In spring 2019, all the recommendations made by the Local Democracy Review were agreed by Mayor & Cabinet and Full Council. They also approved the appointment of eight councillors to a retained Local Democracy Working Group which would oversee delivery of all the recommendations during 2019/20.
- 4.4. At their first meeting in May 2019, the retained Working Group agreed to manage the implementation of the review as a single programme of work, with the recommendations clustered into eight thematic areas. Each member of the Working Group acted as 'LDWG Champion' for a thematic area, supported by a second member (this approach enabled members to focus on their particular areas of interest whilst also providing opportunities for further development). Officers also supported individual LDWG Champions with the delivery of projects and activities across their thematic area.
- 4.5. Regular Local Democracy Working Group meetings took place throughout 2019/20. Each LDWG Champion provided an update on work undertaken in their area at these meetings and officer reports on the delivery of specific recommendations were also presented for consideration.
- 4.6. The fifth (and final) meeting of the Local Democracy Working Group was scheduled to take place in March 2020, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was later agreed that the duration of the working group should be extended so that it could complete its outstanding work and also consider the impact of COVID-19 on the three key themes of the review. The LDWG met again in September 2020 and a second meeting was scheduled for December 2020, but this was postponed until February 2021 as a result of the second COVID-19 lockdown.

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5. Report

- 5.1. The draft Report Of The Working Group (Spring 2021) is attached at Appendix A.
- 5.2. The purpose of this report is to update Full Council on the activities of the Local Democracy Working Group by:
 - Summarising the work undertaken to develop the review's report and recommendations
 - Providing detailed information about the delivery of the recommendations, including the approach taken and key achievements across the programme
 - Exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the three overarching themes in the terms of reference (openness and transparency, public involvement in decisions and effective decision-making)

6. Financial implications

- 6.1. The Local Democracy Review was delivered with a budget of £10k, primarily by using existing expertise and resources within the Corporate Policy team. No further budget was allocated for the delivery of the 57 recommendations and there was an expectation that implementation would be achieved within existing resources wherever possible, given the Council's ongoing budget savings process. As a result, a significant number of officers within Corporate Policy, plus senior managers in other services (such as Planning and Communications) were involved in managing the overall programme and supporting the delivery of specific projects and activities, in addition to their existing roles and responsibilities. Where required for specific recommendations, detailed financial implications were provided for consideration by the appropriate decision-maker/s as part of a separate report.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1. Some of the Local Democracy Review's recommendations (such as the development of a new report template and guidance) were able to be implemented by the Local Democracy Working Group without a formal decision. Where required for specific recommendations, detailed legal implications were provided for consideration by the appropriate decision-maker/s as part of a separate report.

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1. Where required for specific recommendations, equalities implications were provided for consideration by the appropriate decision-maker/s as part of a separate report, taking into account the priorities set out in the Council's Comprehensive Equalities Scheme (CES) and, subsequently, the Single Equality Framework (SEF).
- 8.2. The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 8.3. In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

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- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- 8.4. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation, or other prohibited conduct, or to promote equality of opportunity or foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. It is a duty to have due regard to the need to achieve the goals listed in the paragraph above.
- 8.5. The weight to be attached to the duty will be dependent on the nature of the decision and the circumstances in which it is made, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. The Mayor and Council must understand the impact or likely impact of the decision on those with protected characteristics who are potentially affected by the decision. The extent of the duty will necessarily vary from case to case and due regard is such regard as is appropriate in all the circumstances.
- 8.6. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled 'Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice'. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11, which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-codes-practice>

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-technical-guidance>

- 8.7. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:
- The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
 - Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
 - Engagement and the equality duty: A guide for public authorities
 - Objectives and the equality duty. A guide for public authorities
 - Equality Information and the Equality Duty: A Guide for Public Authorities
- 8.8. The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties, and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty-guidance#h1>

9. Climate change and environmental implications

- 9.1. There are no specific climate change and environmental implications arising from this report.

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10. Crime and disorder implications

10.1. There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

11. Health and wellbeing implications

11.1. There are no specific health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.

12. Background papers

- [Local Democracy Review: Report Of The Working Group \(Spring 2019\)](#)
- [Local Democracy Working Group \(All Meetings\)](#)

13. Glossary

Term	Definition
Full Council	Full Council is a meeting of all 54 Lewisham councillors, which is chaired by the Speaker.
Local Democracy Review	The Local Democracy Review was a councillor-led review of local democracy in Lewisham, which made recommendations about how the Mayor and Council could enhance their openness and transparency, increase public involvement in Council decisions and promote effective decision-making.
Local Democracy Working Group	The Local Democracy Working Group is a group of eight councillors who are responsible for implementing the recommendations of the Local Democracy Review during 2019/20. It has now been extended until January 2021.
Programme	A set of related projects and/or activities, which are managed in a coordinated way in order to achieve an overall goal.

14. Report author and contact

14.1. If there are any queries about this report, please contact Rosalind Jeffrey (Strategic Transformation & Organisational Development Business Partner) by email (rosalind.jeffrey@lewisham.gov.uk) or telephone (020 8314 7093).

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