

# Local Democracy Review

## Report of the Working Group (Spring 2021)

**A democratic  
and open  
Lewisham**



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## 1. Executive Summary

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In July 2018, Full Council agreed to establish a Local Democracy Review Working Group, which consisted of eight councillors with a range of experience and responsibility across both the executive and non-executive arms of the Council. As a Working Group, we were tasked with making recommendations to the Mayor and Full Council about how we could:

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

More information about how we conducted the review and the evidence we gathered can be found in our [first report](#). This report and its 57 recommendations for change was agreed by Mayor & Cabinet and Full Council in spring 2019.

Our second report outlines the approach we took to deliver these recommendations, which was as a single programme with the recommendations grouped into eight thematic areas, each led by a member of the Working Group. It then provides detailed information about the work we undertook in each area and our key achievements, which include:

### Openness and transparency

#### Open data and online communications

- We made a number of improvements to our online communications offer, including a refresh of the Council website, the introduction of targeted e-newsletters and the use of new social media platforms
- We undertook a detailed review of how we use data, with a particular focus on making data we hold about our services available for anyone to access, use and share
- We introduced webcasting for all Council meetings so that residents who are not physically able to attend these meetings can choose to view them online, either via the live feed or at a time that suits them
- We are also using our existing governance system to pilot an approach for councillors to report and record their attendance at non-Council meetings on the Council website, which will ensure that residents have a greater understanding of the different elements of their role

#### Language and reporting

- We developed and launched a new Council-wide template for all reports, supported by detailed guidance for report writers, which aimed to improve their accessibility, consistency and quality
- We [created a form on the Council website](#) for residents to provide direct feedback on our reports and publications. This feedback will ensure that we are continually improving how we communicate, both internally and with our residents

### Public involvement in decisions

#### Effective engagement with younger and older people

- We reviewed our approach to online engagement with young people in order to identify how we could create more opportunities for them to feed their ideas into decision-making

- We worked with the Young Mayor’s Team and staff from the Council’s Education Service to design and pilot ‘Councillor Question Time’ sessions for secondary school pupils, which aimed to strengthen their understanding of local democracy by giving them an opportunity to raise issues directly with councillors in a place where they felt comfortable and confident
- We worked with the Lewisham Pensioners Forum (LPF) and representatives from Lewisham’s Positive Ageing Council (PAC) to map all our existing mechanisms for engaging with older people
- We reviewed our current mechanisms for providing feedback on public consultations and implemented a number of improvements, which have enabled us to better demonstrate how resident participation has had a genuine impact on the decision-making process
- We undertook a [detailed evaluation of the People's Panel model](#) to determine whether it could potentially broaden resident participation and provide a more balanced and representative viewpoint on key issues

### Place-based engagement

- We tested out different ways of supporting engagement and action at a neighbourhood level, including the use of [Commonplace](#) as part of the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) funding programme
- We undertook a [detailed evaluation of the Citizens’ Assembly model](#) to determine whether it would enhance our existing place-based engagement approach, particularly in relation to empowering seldom-heard groups and individuals
- We researched [civic crowdfunding](#) and explored opportunities to test the [Place Standard Tool](#), potentially as part of existing regeneration programmes or within the NCIL process

### Seldom-heard voices

- We conducted desktop research into the challenges and barriers facing seldom-heard groups and individuals. The key learning point for us was that people who are seldom-heard do not lack a voice simply because they belong to a particular group or have a certain protected characteristic. They have a voice, but are often not heard due to the assumptions made by people about why and how they should be involved
- We built on the desktop research by undertaking an [Appreciative Inquiry](#) with a small number of community organisations to explore how the Council could listen to and learn from seldom-heard voices
- We held the first of what we hope will be several ‘Seldom-Heard Voices’ conferences, led by the voluntary sector, in May 2021 to explore how we could collectively address the different types of barriers to participation we identified in our research

### Effective decision-making

#### Planning and Licensing

- We worked closely with Planning staff to undertake a major review of the service. This included assessing current processes and protocols, meeting with local amenity groups and other stakeholders, making a ‘secret shopper’ planning application, benchmarking our performance against other London boroughs and visiting Brent Council – Local Planning Authority of the Year 2019 – to establish best practice
- We then used this information to develop a set of options for how the service could work differently in future, which were focused on three key areas – decision-making, communication and consultation and engagement

## Councillor roles, responsibilities and relationships

- We developed role profiles for all the different positions that a councillor could hold, from elected member to Cabinet Member, in order to promote greater awareness of councillor roles and responsibilities, both within the Council and amongst residents
- We changed the title of Chair of Council to Speaker to make it easier for residents to understand the responsibilities of the councillor appointed to this role
- We undertook an audit of all Mayoral and Full Council appointments, using information in the Constitution and on the Council website as well as engaging directly with organisations who had councillor appointees
- We undertook a benchmarking exercise with other London boroughs to gather comparative information about councillor champions

Given their similar focus on councillor roles and responsibilities, Full Council agreed that the ongoing delivery of the 31 recommendations made by the Barriers to Politics Working Group in November 2017 should become part of our work. More information about how we supported the delivery of these recommendations can be found [here](#).

## Overview and Scrutiny, including Council meetings

- We conducted a comprehensive assessment of our current approach to scrutiny and used this information to establish six key principles for a new scrutiny structure
- We then developed three potential options for our new structure and held a number of consultation events with councillors in order to identify their preferred option, which was to retain the current scrutiny structure, but also introduce Task & Finish Groups
- We also made changes to our wider scrutiny processes, including reducing the number of members on each Select Committee, reducing the number of meetings per year for each Select Committee and developing a regular information digest, including performance information, for use by all committees
- We reviewed how Full Council meetings operate in other London boroughs to understand how we could make our meetings more accessible and encourage more residents to participate

Our report then explores the impact of COVID-19 on the three overarching themes of the review. We found that the pandemic has presented a number of new challenges and opportunities in relation to local democracy, including how we build on our renewed local leadership role and increased levels of trust, use digital technology to reshape engagement and decision-making and retain the ethos of community action and collaboration.

Although some recommendations were ‘quick wins’, many others have involved transforming existing structures and ways of working or testing out new approaches and ideas. As a result, there is still more to do to implement some of these changes. Cllr Bonavia, in his role as Cabinet Member for Democracy, Refugees & Accountability, will therefore continue to oversee the delivery of ongoing work and liaise with other members of the Working Group in relation to specific areas, such as Planning.

At its heart, the Local Democracy Review has always been about the culture of local democracy, not just the infrastructure. However, fully embedding this culture change, as the borough begins its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, will need to be the responsibility of the organisation as a whole, together with our partners and residents.

## 2. About The Local Democracy Review

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The Local Democracy Review was the first comprehensive review of local democracy in Lewisham since the current governance arrangements were established in 2002. During that period, the Council experienced a number of significant changes, including legislative reform and the introduction of new legal responsibilities, such as the transfer of Public Health policy from the NHS, as well as budget cuts of £165m between 2010 and 2018 due to central government austerity measures. The borough's population also increased to over 300,000, becoming younger and more diverse.

We knew that, despite these changes, having a strong local democracy was as important as ever. However, our decision-making processes needed to better reflect and fit our new environment. It was in this context that the Lewisham Mayor Damien Egan pledged in his 2018 election manifesto to launch a review that would make the Council '*even more democratic, open and transparent*'.

In July 2018, Full Council agreed to establish a Local Democracy Review Working Group, which consisted of eight councillors with a range of experience and responsibility across both the executive and non-executive arms of the Council. As a Working Group, we were tasked with making recommendations to the Mayor and Full Council about how we could:

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

More information about how we conducted the review can be found in our [first report](#).

### 3. Developing The Recommendations

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We wanted the recommendations we made to the Mayor and Full Council to be informed by as many different views and experiences as possible. As a result, our approach to evidence-gathering focused on getting out across the borough and engaging directly with residents. We attended more than 40 face-to-face events, including meetings with local assemblies and voluntary organisations, drop-in sessions at community centres and lunch clubs. We also organised a pop-up local democracy stall in Lewisham Shopping Centre and worked with the Young Mayor's Team to run democracy workshops in Lewisham secondary schools.

Alongside this, we created an online consultation so that people who were unable to attend a face-to-face event would still have an opportunity to share their views. Our consultation received over 700 responses from residents, Council staff and councillors and we also received a number of written submissions from councillors, members of the public and local amenity societies. We also received evidence from several local democracy experts, including Nesta, Dr Simon Griffiths at Goldsmiths, University of London and Professor Colin Copus, Emeritus Professor of Local Politics at De Montfort University. A detailed summary of all the evidence we gathered during the review is available as an [appendix to our first report](#).

To support our all our engagement activity, we launched a dedicated Local Democracy Review website and email address, which provided more information about the review and enabled residents to contact us directly. This website received over 3,000 visits between October 2018 and January 2019.

We then collated and analysed all the evidence we had gathered and used the findings to help us develop a draft set of recommendations. As part of this process, we worked closely with other local authorities and local democracy experts. This included holding workshops with the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) and Kirklees Council to test our emerging ideas as well as participating in a roundtable discussion with colleagues from Hackney Council.

In our [report](#), we addressed each of the key areas of focus for the review – openness and transparency, public involvement in decisions and effective decision-making – in detail and set out our [57 recommendations for change](#). All of our recommendations were agreed by Mayor & Cabinet and Full Council in spring 2019.

## 4. Delivering The Recommendations

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Our first recommendation was that a Local Democracy Review Working Group of eight councillors should be retained to oversee the delivery of the 57 recommendations made by the review. Six of us who had previously been part of the Working Group were joined by two new councillors.



**Cllr Kevin Bonavia  
(Chair)**



**Cllr Sakina Sheikh  
(Vice Chair)**



**Cllr Chris Best**



**Cllr Juliet Campbell**



**Cllr Patrick Codd**



**Cllr Sophie Davis**



**Cllr Colin Elliott**



**Cllr Silvana Kelleher**

At our first meeting in May 2019, we agreed that we would manage the delivery of the recommendations as a single programme of work. However, in order to ensure that this approach was practical, we grouped the recommendations into eight thematic areas. Each member of the Working Group acted as a 'LDWG Champion' for an area, with a second member as co-lead to provide support and resilience. This allowed each of us to focus on an area of particular interest and also made it easier to maintain accountability and progress work outside formal meetings.



We held a further four public meetings during 2018/19. At each of these meetings, we provided an update on the delivery of projects and activities in our thematic area and collectively discussed and agreed how we would take the work forward. [All the agendas and minutes from these meetings can be found on the Council website](#) and a full list of the reports we received (including links to each document) is attached as [Appendix B](#).

Our final meeting was due to take place in March 2020, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In late summer 2020, Full Council agreed to extend our work until March 2021, with an additional responsibility to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the three overarching themes of the review. We held two further public meetings during this period to review our progress and capture our learning and evidence relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 5. Key Achievements

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### Theme 1 – Openness and Transparency

#### Open data and online communications

##### **Recommendations**

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

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

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.

##### **How did we deliver these recommendations?**

Whilst the review focused on openness and transparency in relation to democratic processes and decision-making, we found that access to information at a broader level was also a key issue for residents. Many knew little about the responsibilities and services of the Council in general, let alone specifically about how it made decisions and the ways that they could access information about these or be involved in the decision-making process. In practical terms, many residents told us that the Council website was hard to use and they had experienced difficulties locating information or asking for action.

As a result of our findings, a number of recommendations in this thematic area focused on how we could improve our online communications offer. We undertook a major refresh of the Council website in 2019 and, following this, we developed a ‘find my nearest services’ citizen

portal, which allowed residents to enter their address and find targeted information, such as bin collection days and their closest libraries or schools. We also increased our use of tools such as spatial mapping to make information on the website, like the [Building for Lewisham programme](#), more visual and engaging. Alongside this, we introduced targeted Lewisham Life e-newsletters and alerts as well as making better use of single issue emails to promote important issues, such as the Transport for London (TfL) consultation on the Bakerloo Line extension or our Borough of Culture bid. Following specific feedback from young people about our use of social media, we have now introduced LinkedIn as a new channel and developed online videos to promote community events, such as Small Business Saturday. However, we know that we could always do more to improve our online communications, particularly ensuring that our website is designed around the needs of users and accessible to all.

Another key recommendation in this thematic area was around open data, specifically how we could make data we hold about our services available on the Council website for anyone to access, use and share. As part of our discovery work, we found that although – in line with the Local Government Transparency Code – we published some data, such as expenditure over £250, the salaries of senior managers and the value of our social housing assets [on our website](#) as well as on [data.gov.uk](#)<sup>1</sup>, our current open data offer was otherwise fairly limited. However, we did find that there were many sources of contextual data<sup>2</sup> about Lewisham available online, including the [Lewisham Data Observatory](#), Nomis, GLA Datastore and Lewisham’s Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) site. Although it was not strictly open data, we were keen to promote the use of the Lewisham Data Observatory as a single source of information about the borough as we recognised that this was a key building block for embedding evidence based decision-making across the Council. As a result, we have held training sessions with councillors and Council staff to support them in using the Lewisham Data Observatory and merged the JSNA site with the Observatory to ensure that key information is available in one place.

We also researched how other organisations have approached open data, which involved meetings with experts at the Greater London Assembly (GLA) and the Open Data Institute as well as a visit to [‘Bristol is Open’](#). We discovered that there were many potential benefits to implementing an open data approach, including greater transparency about and wider scrutiny of service performance and more empowered and engaged residents, which would contribute to our aim of creating a culture of openness, trust and partnership. However, a key learning point for us was that open data is only useful to the extent that it is used<sup>3</sup> – we will need to engage with residents and other stakeholders to ensure that any data we publish is relevant and/or interesting to them. Since the review, we have created a new corporate team to improve the way that we use our data, with a focus on performance management and analytical capability.

In addition, we have introduced webcasting for all Council meetings, starting with Mayor & Cabinet and Full Council in October 2019. As a result, residents who are not physically able to attend these meetings can now choose to view them online, either via the live feed or at a time that suits them. Since April 2020, there have been over 35,000 views of our webcasts.<sup>4</sup> We are also using our existing governance system to pilot an approach for councillors to

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<sup>1</sup> A website which aggregates data published by central government, local authorities and other public bodies.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Contextual data’ in this context refers to information about Lewisham as a place and the demographics of its residents.

<sup>3</sup> An analysis of datasets on <https://data.gov.uk> (central Government’s open data library) found that 80% of the datasets published had never been downloaded.

<sup>4</sup> A view is defined as a contact lasting for more than a minute.

report and record their attendance at non-Council meetings on the Council website, which will ensure that residents have a greater understanding of the different elements of their role.

## Language and reporting

### **Recommendations**

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. This should be applied to all written and online communications.

All decisions should generally be published within two 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).

### **How did we deliver these recommendations?**

From the review, we learned that the language and format of our decision-making reports meant that people often struggled to understand what decision was being made and the reasons for it. This frustration was shared by many councillors, who found the length, language and style of reports they received to be impenetrable at times.

As a result, we developed and launched a new Council-wide template for all reports, supported by detailed guidance for report writers, which aimed to improve their accessibility, consistency and quality. We undertook detailed research into Plain English and accessibility principles in order to establish a best practice standard. We then designed the guidance and template to support staff in achieving this standard, such as requiring them to include a Plain English summary and a glossary explaining any technical terms as well as providing links to online 'readability' tools. Real-time feedback from councillors and Council staff during the 'soft launch' in late 2019 enabled us to refine the guidance and template before they were rolled-out more widely. [The template is now used for all Council reports.](#)

More widely, many residents told us that important information was not always communicated clearly and was difficult for the average person to understand. To address this, we [created a form on the Council website](#), with a link in the footer of all reports, for residents to provide direct feedback. This feedback is regularly monitored and shared with councillors and Council staff to ensure that we are continually improving how we communicate, both internally and with our residents. We also produced guidance to support Council staff in publishing committee decisions on the Council website within two working days, so that residents can quickly and easily access information about decision-making.

## Theme 2 – Public Involvement in Decision-Making

Effective engagement, including younger and older people

### Recommendations

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

### How did we deliver these recommendations?

We found from the democracy workshops we held with young people that they knew about their local issues and often had a clear idea of how they would like to work with the Council to solve them. However, when it came to understanding of how they could feed their ideas

into decision-making or participate in local democracy, they were largely unaware of how to do so.

One particular suggestion they made to address this was that the Council should improve its online presence and use social media as an engagement tool, rather than just for communication. In order to explore these ideas in more detail, we worked with the Young Mayor's Team to design and deliver a survey with young people, as well as reviewing our current approach to online engagement with them. We found that our existing online channels had a much better reach with older age groups – for example, although the Council website had specific areas dedicated to young people, 18-24 year olds made up only 5.7% of users. Similarly, this age group had a low level of interaction with Council consultations (1.7% of respondents overall) and the Lewisham Life e-newsletter. Although it was a relatively small sample, the majority of respondents to the survey told us that they wanted to hear more about decisions that the Council is making, our response to the climate emergency and information about local charities and voluntary organisations. We have ensured that the information we gathered, particularly in relation to interests and channel preferences, informs the development of our online communications offer.

Another suggestion from the democracy workshops was that councillors should be more accessible in places where young people are, such as schools and youth centres. As a result, we worked with the Young Mayor's Team and staff from the Council's Education Service to design a 'Councillor Question Time' session for secondary schools. This session aimed to strengthen young people's understanding of local democracy by giving them an opportunity to ask questions of and raise issues directly with councillors in a place where they felt comfortable and confident. We successfully piloted Councillor Question Time sessions at two schools in March 2020 and are planning to roll them out across more secondary schools once the COVID-19 recovery is fully underway.

From the review, it was also clear that we need to engage better with older people, taking their needs into account and ensuring that their views are heard. We therefore worked with the Lewisham Pensioners Forum (LPF) and representatives from Lewisham's Positive Ageing Council (PAC) to map all our existing mechanisms for engaging with older people. This exercise revealed that, in reality, there were many well-established groups and networks supporting older people across the borough, but not all Council staff were aware of them. In order to ensure that these mechanisms are fully utilised in future, we updated the Council's engagement guidance with the information we gathered during the mapping exercise and publicised it on the intranet, so that it can be easily accessed by staff when they need it.

More widely, we heard some evidence of cynicism about the Council's attitude to public involvement in decision-making. Some people regarded mechanisms like formal consultation as tokenistic and felt that the rationale for how subsequent decisions were made was not always clearly explained, leading to the perception that their views had been disregarded. In particular, people told us that they had not received feedback from consultations in which they had participated, either in a timely manner or at all. In order to address these issues, we reviewed our current feedback mechanisms and implemented a number of improvements. These included enabling the mailing list function on all consultations so that results could be emailed directly to respondents when they were available, ensuring that the 'we asked, you said, we did' section on CitizenSpace, our online consultation platform, was completed and published for every consultation and using the Lewisham Life e-newsletter to profile consultations. These improvements have enabled us to better demonstrate how resident participation has had a genuine impact on the decision-making process, which we know is key to building trust with the local community.

Similarly, our review found that whilst there was a core group of people who were actively involved in sharing their views, not just through consultations but also regular attendance at

meetings or asking questions at Council meetings, a wider majority did not know how to get involved or chose not to do so. As a result, several of our recommendations focused on exploring the use of engagement tools which could potentially broaden participation and provide a more balanced and representative viewpoint. One such tool was a People's Panel (or Citizens' Panel) which are typically used by local authorities to identify community priorities and consult both service users and non-service users on specific issues. We undertook a [detailed evaluation of the model](#) and identified a number of strengths, including the presence of a readily available group of residents that can be consulted at short notice, the opportunity to target consultation at specific sub-groups, including age, ethnicity or gender, and response rates to consultations which are likely to be higher than with the general public. However, our evaluation also found that there were a number of potential weaknesses with the model, including that in reality panels are rarely representative of the local population, managing a panel effectively takes considerable time and resources and the risk that panels might make recommendations that cannot be delivered. Having considered the findings of the evaluation, we decided not to recommend setting up a People's Panel at that point, but instead explore more bespoke options for involving seldom-heard communities in the business and decision-making of the Council.

### Place-based engagement

#### **Recommendations**

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

#### **How did we deliver these recommendations?**

Our Local Assembly programme was established in 2008 to create a forum for residents to discuss local issues and enable councillors and the community to work together to improve their area. Whilst some residents told us during the review that they found Local Assemblies to be a valuable engagement mechanism, many others raised concerns about accessibility, community representation, opportunities for open debate and their ability to influence Council policy. We are currently reviewing the Local Assembly programme and exploring how engagement and consultation with communities at ward level could be undertaken in a more efficient and innovative way through officers working directly with communities, involving councillors and community organisations as needed.

We learned that, for many people, their 'local area' was much smaller and more focused than a ward, so we needed to explore different ways of supporting engagement and action at a neighbourhood level. For example, we used [Commonplace](#) as part of the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) funding programme in order to help residents and other stakeholders identify priority themes and rank potential projects. By using this online platform, we were able to reach a broader audience and facilitate open and informed conversations about different neighbourhoods. Since then, we have used Commonplace for a number of projects, including [Lewisham's Local Plan](#) and the [Catford Town Centre framework](#). We are also exploring opportunities, potentially as part of existing regeneration programmes or within the NCIL process, to test the [Place Standard Tool](#), which provides a framework for place-based conversations between local communities, the public sector and voluntary organisations. It asks a series of questions relating to fourteen themes, such as facilities and amenities, public transport and identity and belonging, allowing participants to identify strengths and weaknesses in their area. This evidence can then be used to develop and prioritise actions for improvement. We know from our work with Kirklees Council that they [successfully tested the Place Standard Tool](#) in July 2018 – 240 residents took part in the conversations and 140 Place Standard Tool assessments were completed.

In addition, [we researched civic crowdfunding](#), which is where citizens, often in collaboration with government, propose, fund and deliver projects that aim to deliver public value. A key learning point for us was that, since civic crowdfunding projects do not often provide funders with financial rewards, the feeling of 'making a difference' is an important motivating factor, with people generally investing in projects that will impact themselves and their local community. We found that six Lewisham-based projects had successfully secured £247k of funding from the Crowdfund London programme between 2014/15 and 2019/20. The Council has also used the Spacehive and Crowdfunder platforms to manage our Small & Faith Grant funding process, with the 999 Club raising £20k to fund their first Summer Shelter and Ignition Brewery (a not-for-profit enterprise that creates meaningful jobs for residents who have a learning disability) raised £24k. We have committed to continue promoting and supporting Lewisham-based civic crowdfunding initiatives, working with local voluntary groups to help them access funding.

Finally, we undertook a [detailed evaluation of the Citizens' Assembly model](#), where a small group of residents are brought together to discuss an issue and reach a conclusion about what they think should happen, to determine whether it would enhance our existing place-based engagement approach, particularly in relation to empowering seldom-heard groups and individuals. From our research, we found that Citizens' Assemblies can be useful in drawing attention to a specific issue, providing different perspectives on complex problems and helping to make the case for change to the wider public. However, the process can be complex and resource intensive and it is often difficult to establish a broad, representative group of people. Having considered the findings of the evaluation, we decided not to recommend setting up a Citizens' Assembly at that point, but instead explore how existing borough-wide mechanisms for civic participation could be better utilised routinely, with Citizens' Assemblies utilised when there was a specific issue to be explored.

## Recommendations

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.

## How did we deliver these recommendations?

The majority of recommendations within the 'Public Involvement in Decisions' theme were focused, in different ways, on how we could better reach out to seldom-heard groups and individuals. The evidence we gathered during the review confirmed that we needed to engage more effectively with a wider cross-section of our community, so that more residents felt able to participate in our decision-making processes when they wanted to. However, it soon became clear that we needed to go further, actively prioritising those residents who were not represented in decision-making and tailoring our approaches to meet their needs.

As a starting point, we conducted desktop research into the challenges facing seldom-heard groups and individuals. We found that, according to the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (Iriss), there are many factors which could contribute to people who use services being seldom-heard, including disability, ethnicity, sexuality, communication impairments, mental health issues, homelessness and geographical isolation. The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) were a useful resource, having produced several reports exploring the barriers that seldom-heard people have experienced when using social care services. They identified four different types of barriers:

- **Attitudinal**, such as staff treating adults using their services as if they were inferior or had limited potential
- **Organisational**, such as lack of continuity in service provision, emphasis on formal meetings and reliance on digital technology
- **Cultural**, such as concerns about being labelled as a 'service user' or a perception that a particular service or group was 'not for them'
- **Practical**, such as limited access to interpreters, lack of information about rights and services and long, complex documents

We recognised that these types of barriers existed in many areas of the Council. However, the key learning point for us was that people who are seldom-heard do not lack a voice simply because they belong to a particular group or have a certain protected characteristic. They have a voice, but are often not heard due to the assumptions made by people about why and how they should be involved. This situation is often exacerbated when people belong to more than one seldom-heard group or have multiple protected characteristics, so it is important for organisations to understand how their different identities overlap and are connected. This is not only reflected in the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services' definition of seldom-heard<sup>5</sup>, but also the [social model of disability](#), which states that

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<sup>5</sup> The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (Iriss) defines seldom-heard groups as 'under-represented people who use or might potentially use social services and who are less likely to be heard by social service professionals and decision-makers'.

people with impairments are 'disabled' by the barriers operating in society that exclude and discriminate against them.

We built on the desktop research by undertaking an [Appreciative Inquiry](#) with a small number of community organisations to explore how the Council could listen to and learn from seldom-heard voices.<sup>6</sup> The main themes emerging from this work were:



It was clear from the Appreciative Inquiry that utilising our already strong relationships with Lewisham's voluntary sector organisations would be key to future work in this area. We held the first of what we hope will be several 'Seldom-Heard Voices' conferences, led by the voluntary sector, in May 2021 to explore how we could collectively address the different types of barriers to participation we identified in our research. We know that the next steps will involve further practical work to reshape our approach to engagement, both at a community level and more corporately, as well as using insights and other data from residents at all levels of the organisation in the design and delivery of our services.

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<sup>6</sup> The organisations involved were the Front Room Club at St Luke's Church, Calabash Centre, Lewisham Speaking Up/People's Parliament, Ladywell Children & Family Centre/Baby Hub, Lewisham LGBT+ Forum and the 'Women Together' project at Lewisham Refugee & Migrant Network. We used local demographic knowledge to identify organisations who would be invited to participate in the Appreciative Inquiry – for example, the Calabash Centre tends to attract older people from a Caribbean background, which is particularly significant in Lewisham as this ethnic group represents nearly 10% of the borough's population, according to recent GLA projections whilst engagement with the Lewisham Refugee & Migrant Network reflects the Council's commitment to being a 'sanctuary borough' (welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries and protecting the rights of all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees).

## Theme 3 – Effective Decision-Making

### Planning and Licensing

#### **Recommendations**

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.

#### **How did we deliver these recommendations?**

A key message from residents throughout our review was that information about decision-making processes within Planning, particularly the legal basis on which decisions can be made, was not clearly and widely communicated, leading to significant confusion and frustration.

As a result, we worked closely with Planning staff to undertake a major review of the service. This included assessing current processes and protocols, meeting with local amenity groups and other stakeholders, making a 'secret shopper' planning application, benchmarking our performance against other London boroughs and visiting Brent Council – Local Planning Authority of the Year 2019 – to establish best practice. We also analysed the learning from the emergency COVID-19 measures that we had put in place at the start of the pandemic.

We then used this information to develop a set of options for how the service could work differently in future, which were focused on three key areas – decision-making, communication and consultation and engagement. We discussed these options as a Working Group and confirmed a number of changes, including improvements to the Planning webpages, the introduction of informal written protocols for committees, a revised programme of member training and better use of the current IT system so that residents can monitor the progress of their applications. We will be consulting with councillors and residents about potential changes to the structure of planning committees during the summer

as well as working with amenity societies and community groups to explore the best way of formally recognising their role.

More information about the Planning review can be found in our [report](#).

[Councillor roles, responsibilities and relationships](#)

## **Recommendations**

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

## **How did we deliver these recommendations?**

The evidence we gathered during the review revealed that many residents valued their local councillors and regarded them as an important link between the Council and the wider

community. However, it was clear that a significant number did not understand what councillors did, what they were responsible for or even how to contact them. Internally, we found that there was sometimes a lack of understanding and support between councillors and Council staff in relation to decision-making.

In order to promote greater awareness of councillor roles and responsibilities, both within the Council and amongst residents, we developed role profiles for all the different positions that a councillor could hold, from elected member to Cabinet Member. We used information from the Constitution, committee terms of reference and the Members Information Site as well as best practice from the Local Government Association and other local authorities to complete these role profiles. However, we also gathered detailed feedback from councillors, particularly those who were currently undertaking the role, to ensure that the role profiles reflected real-life practice and experience rather than being based solely on desktop research. As part of our work to create clearer and more engaging ways of explaining how the Council works and encouraging residents to stand as councillors, we will redesign the relevant sections of our website, which will include making the role profiles publically available to all.

We changed the title of Chair of Council to Speaker in October 2020 to make it easier for residents to understand the responsibilities of the councillor appointed to this role. We also undertook a benchmarking exercise with other London boroughs to gather comparative information about councillor champions. We will use the learning from this benchmarking exercise to explore ways in which we could further develop the councillor champion role.

In addition, we reviewed all Mayoral and Full Council appointments, using information in the Constitution and on the Council website as well as engaging directly with organisations who had councillor appointees. We created an online survey at the start of the review so that these organisations could easily provide information about the responsibilities of their councillor appointee. It also ensured that the information we captured was comprehensive and standardised. As a result of this work, we were able to identify out-of-date appointments and have now formally updated the list of organisations to which councillors can nominate themselves or be appointed to by the Mayor.

Given their similar focus on councillor roles and responsibilities, Full Council agreed that the ongoing delivery of the 31 recommendations made by the Barriers to Politics Working Group in November 2017 should become part of our work. More information about how we supported the delivery of these recommendations can be found [here](#).

## **Recommendations**

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

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

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

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

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.

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.

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 two hours, being extended by half an hour only in exceptional circumstances.

## **How did we deliver these recommendations?**

During the review, we heard from some of our scrutiny colleagues that they did not feel their important role was always as valued, understood or supported as it could be across the organisation. In particular, some felt that they had too little involvement in the decision-

making process. We also heard that councillors were expected to attend a large volume of meetings, limiting the time available to get involved in their community and making it difficult for them to maintain oversight of all matters.

As a result, we conducted a comprehensive assessment of our current approach to scrutiny, which included reviewing statutory guidance, identifying examples of good practice and benchmarking our structure against other London boroughs. We used this information to establish six key principles for a new scrutiny structure:



We then developed three potential options for our new structure and held a number of consultation events with councillors in order to identify their preferred option, which was to retain the current scrutiny structure, but also introduce Task & Finish Groups. These groups will be responsible for undertaking in-depth reviews of key local issues in order to support policy development. Following agreement by the Constitution Working Party in October 2020 to amend the Council’s Constitution, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee is now able to agree the establishment of up to three Task & Finish Groups each year. We anticipate that the first Task & Finish groups, if formally agreed, will begin work in summer 2021.

We also made changes to our wider scrutiny processes. This included reducing the number of members on each Select Committee to six (except for CYP Select Committee), reducing the number of meetings per year for each Select Committee to five, restricting agendas to a maximum of two or three items and developing a regular information digest, including performance information, for use by all committees.

Alongside this, we reviewed how Full Council meetings operate in other London boroughs to understand how we could make our meetings more accessible and encourage more residents to participate. We made some initial changes to the format of our meetings in early 2020 as a result, including the introduction of public viewing screens in the foyer of the Civic Suite and a pilot pre-registration process for residents who wanted to ask supplementary questions at the meeting.

## 6. Exploring The Impact Of COVID-19 On Local Democracy

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### Theme 1 – Openness and Transparency

During the pandemic, there was an increased recognition about the need for and importance of a localised response to COVID-19, not just in relation to Public Health. Local authorities were close enough to the most vulnerable to understand and respond to their needs and geographically best placed to work with anchor institutions, critical infrastructure providers and businesses to revive local economies. Regular [resident satisfaction surveys](#) undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA) have shown that, at a national level, public trust in local authorities grew dramatically during the pandemic. In June 2020, 71% of respondents to the survey said that they trusted their local council ‘a great deal’ or ‘a fair amount’.<sup>7</sup> When asked who they trusted most in relation to local decision-making, 73% of respondents said their local council. Although these figures were slightly lower in the latest survey conducted in February 2021 (66% and 71% respectively), it is apparent that public support for local government remains strong.

We knew from the review that transparency and open communication were key factors in building and maintaining public trust, as well as a crucial mechanism for managing COVID-19 effectively. Our communication with residents during the pandemic took many different forms, including the Mayor’s weekly e-newsletter, online public health campaigns, targeted engagement by Council services and practical support via our Incident helpline and inbox. Research undertaken as part of our borough-wide resident engagement exercise (‘Voices of Lewisham’) has shown that, overall, the public response to our efforts was positive. However, we know that during the early stages of the pandemic, some residents experienced challenges accessing information or understanding our messaging, which may have increased their anxiety. These challenges were not limited to local authorities and were particularly acute for more disadvantaged groups. For example, Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) highlighted the lack of information in appropriate formats for patients with learning disabilities. Whilst many of these issues were the result of rapidly changing circumstances and national guidance, it is clear that we still need to do more to improve our knowledge and understanding of the communities we serve.

The report by Lewisham CCG also highlighted another feature of the pandemic, which was the prevalence of misinformation about COVID-19. We realised that, in order to ensure important public health messaging reached the right people, we had to move beyond simply using different channels, such as social media for young people, and reach out directly to communities. As a result, we developed a COVID-19 Community Champions programme to provide clear and trustworthy information about the pandemic to Lewisham residents. Over 100 volunteers from a range of backgrounds, including voluntary and community sector groups, BAME community groups, staff groups, health providers, business owners, local councillors and faith leaders, participated in the programme. This ‘trusted individuals’ approach, which we explored as part of our Appreciative Inquiry with seldom-heard groups and individuals, will be developed further as part of our strategic communications offer.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated the use of digital technology. Like other local authorities, we used technology to ensure that essential public services, including schools and housing, could continue and our staff were able to work from home. We knew from our review that, although some residents preferred telephone and face-to-face communication, many encouraged the use of digital technology as a quicker and more convenient way of accessing services. However, given the nature of the pandemic, the vast majority of

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<sup>7</sup> This was the first time that positive responses to the question about trust in local authorities had reached 70% (since polling began in 2012).

activities, information and services (both within the public sector and society as a whole) have moved exclusively online, without offering offline alternatives or with offline alternatives limited or restricted. This has placed those without digital access at even greater risk of exclusion than before the pandemic.

We explored the concept of digital inclusion in our first report, recognising the need to balance the financial benefits of digital services and people's changing expectations with the needs of more vulnerable residents. Our focus then was broadly on people who were not 'digitally literate', meaning they lacked the ability, confidence and skills to use digital devices and the internet. Digital literacy was still an issue during the pandemic – a report by Lewisham Speaking Up, a charity for people with learning disabilities, highlighted the need for training and tailored personal support to enable its users to access online services. However, research by the Centre for Ageing Better, a charitable foundation working on behalf of older people, reveals that groups who may have traditionally been reluctant to use technology have started to adapt. For example, 75% of 50-70 year olds said that they were making video calls more often during the pandemic.<sup>8</sup> Instead, evidence gathered by the 'Voices of Lewisham' engagement exercise has revealed stories of people who were unable to afford broadband relying on expensive phone data and of families struggling to home-school their children with only one device in the entire household. COVID-19 has demonstrated that digital inclusion is as much about accessibility and affordability as it is about skills – if the future of Council services and, more widely, local democracy (in the form of public participation and decision-making) is digital, then we need to ensure that everybody is able to participate.

## Theme 2 – Public Involvement in Decisions

According to [research by Involve](#), a leading public participation charity, COVID-19 has contributed to a process of 'local democratisation' in two key ways. They suggest that the first example of this is in helping to 'normalise the participation of local people in the governance and management of services... that are important to them'. We have certainly seen strong evidence of community action in Lewisham during the pandemic. For example, 2,400 residents registered to volunteer for Lewisham Local (a 'hub' organisation who worked with the Council and other partners to coordinate support for vulnerable people who were isolated due to the COVID-19 pandemic), with many more volunteering within local faith institutions, community groups and foodbanks. There were also many examples of mutual aid groups, businesses, individuals and employers responding to calls for help with food and money. However, this phenomenon, which New Local have called the '[community powered approach](#)' to public services, was not just about collaboration within communities, but also between communities and public bodies. For example, 60 Council staff who are not employed in critical service areas are currently working for our COVID Action Team (at its peak, there were 140 staff), taking on a number of roles, including supporting shielding residents, delivering the test and trace system and distributing PPE. We also worked together effectively across shared boundaries with key partners and organisations in the borough, as demonstrated by the evaluation of Lewisham Local undertaken by Goldsmiths, University of London.

The second example cited by Involve is that the experience of the pandemic has 'further developed a trend toward more direct, inclusive and open public engagement in institutions'. Whilst traditional approaches to public engagement have been difficult to sustain during the pandemic, virtual engagement tools have made innovative and direct participation more possible. For example, both Camden Council's [Health and Care Citizens' Assembly](#) and Lancaster City Council's [People's Jury on climate change](#) moved online at the start of the

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/experience-people-approaching-later-life-lockdown-impact-covid-19-50-70-year-olds>

pandemic, holding virtual evidence sessions and participant-led discussions in order to identify priorities and develop recommendations. In Lewisham, we held an online residents' information session about the Lewisham & Lee Green Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN), which was led by the Mayor and Chief Executive. As councillors, we have also engaged with our constituents in different ways, with some of us using digital technology, such as Zoom video calls, to hold virtual surgeries.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a vastly disproportionate impact on different communities, exacerbating many existing inequalities. A [report by Public Health England](#) found that risk of dying among those diagnosed with COVID-19 was higher in those living in more deprived areas and for people from BAME groups. This is reflected at a local level, with non-UK born residents comprising 48% of all COVID-19 deaths in Lewisham (currently, 34% of our population is non-UK born) and those living in the most deprived areas of the borough having considerably higher rates of death. A national event hosted by the Ubele Initiative in April 2020 explored issues facing BAME communities, with three recurring themes highlighted – lack of access to emergency resources, a need for community voices to be included in the development of solutions and high food insecurity, with a particular need for culturally appropriate food.

However, we have also needed to consider other economic and social inequalities resulting from COVID-19, such as financial insecurity, mental and physical health crises, homelessness and food poverty, which have affected people who we would not normally see as 'vulnerable' or disadvantaged – for example, the number of residents claiming welfare benefits rose by more than 12,500 between March and November 2020 and foodbank usage has increased dramatically. As a Council, tackling health and socio-economic inequality is a key part of our Single Equality Framework, which sets out our ambition to achieve equality for every resident irrespective of their background or life experience. It has also prompted us to think more about the language that we use in relation to our residents. For example, evidence from Council staff who had volunteered for the Shielding Programme found that many shielding residents objected to the description of themselves as 'clinically extremely vulnerable', associating it with notions of victimhood and dependency whilst other residents welcomed the term, seeing it as a form of protection.

### Theme 3 – Effective Decision-Making

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person. This meant that local authorities had the power to hold public meetings remotely by using video or telephone conferencing technology. Since March 2020, we have successfully held all our public meetings remotely. This has included virtual Planning Committee meetings, which have a high level of public participation and sensitive decision-making. We found that although such meetings were resource intensive, requiring additional support from Council staff and required changes to practice, it was possible to retain the same quality of decision-making.

The Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a ['temperature check'](#) of local authorities in relation to remote public meetings in March/April 2021. All of the 243 authorities who responded said that they had made use of these powers to hold public meetings remotely. Nearly all respondents described virtual meetings as having worked well throughout the pandemic and as positively benefitting local democracy. These benefits included more transparency and overall visibility in the decision-making process, increased public interest in and participation with the democratic process and a reduced carbon footprint through no longer travelling to meetings. Respondents also noted that the greater accessibility of remote meetings could encourage candidates from under-represented groups to stand as councillors. Remote meetings were seen as particularly beneficial for existing or

prospective councillors with other commitments, such as caring responsibilities, employment or health issues as it made it easier for them to attend and participate.

The LGA 'temperature check' also asked local authorities how likely they would be to use legal powers, if they had them, to hold remote and/or hybrid meetings once the pandemic was over. 83% of respondents said that they would be 'very likely' or 'fairly likely' to conduct meetings remotely whilst 79% said they would be 'very likely' or 'fairly likely' to hold hybrid meetings. As a Working Group, we have been overseeing the development of an approach to hybrid committee meetings since our work resumed in September 2020. Following the government's decision not to extend the May 2021 deadline, all local authorities must now hold physical committee meetings – as a result, we have now implemented this approach.

In addition to their important political leadership roles, the COVID-19 pandemic has reaffirmed the importance of councillors' civic and community leadership roles. As local councillors in Lewisham, we have focused on supporting residents 'on the ground'. This has involved using our local knowledge to understand and represent the needs of our local communities, providing a forum for people to raise their concerns and feeding them back to the Council and also representing the Council in our communities. We have also acted as a first point of contact for residents and as a focal point for those seeking help, advice and support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 7. Next Steps & Conclusion

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This second report of the Working Group marks the formal conclusion of the Local Democracy Review.

We were aware that delivering the 57 separate recommendations presented in our first report within a single year would be extremely difficult, even without the onset of COVID-19. Although some recommendations were 'quick wins', such as changing the title of Chair of Council to Speaker, many others have involved transforming existing structures and ways of working or testing out new approaches and ideas. As a result, there is still more to do to implement some of these changes. The pandemic has also presented new challenges and opportunities in relation to local democracy, including how we build on our renewed local leadership role and increased levels of trust, use digital technology to reshape engagement and decision-making and retain the ethos of community action and collaboration. Cllr Bonavia, in his role as Cabinet Member for Democracy, Refugees & Accountability, will therefore continue to oversee the delivery of ongoing work and liaise with other members of the Working Group in relation to specific areas, such as Planning.

At its heart, the Local Democracy Review has always been about the culture of local democracy, not just the infrastructure. We know that the changes we have made in delivering the recommendations of the review have started to shift our organisational culture to one that encourages collaboration, creativity and leadership at all levels, with residents and councillors at the centre of what we do. However, fully embedding this culture change, as the borough begins its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, will need to be the responsibility of the organisation as a whole, together with our partners and residents.

## Appendix A – Overview Of Recommendations

Ref	Recommendation	Thematic Area	Status
1	A Local Democracy Working Group of eight councillors should be retained to oversee the delivery of the programme of work recommended within this report.	n/a	Complete
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.	n/a	Complete
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.	n/a	In Delivery
4	Clearer and more engaging ways should be explored for explaining how the Council works and the roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers.	Effective Engagement, Including Younger/Older People (Cllr Codd/Cllr Elliott)	In Delivery
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.	Open Data & Online Communications (Cllr Bonavia/Cllr Davis)	Complete
6	An improved, comprehensive and more joined-up approach to our electronic communications should be developed.	Open Data & Online Communications (Cllr Bonavia/Cllr Davis)	Complete
7	Young people should be actively engaged in informing the Council's wider approach to communication on social media.	Effective Engagement, Including Younger/Older People (Cllr Codd/Cllr Elliott)	Complete
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.	Open Data & Online Communications (Cllr Bonavia/Cllr Davis)	Complete
9	Improved ward pages and information should be developed as part of the improvement of our website.	Open Data & Online Communications (Cllr Bonavia/Cllr Davis)	Complete

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 increased use of Twitter and social media should be trialled.	Open Data & Online Communications (Cllr Bonavia/Cllr Davis)	Complete
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.	Open Data & Online Communications (Cllr Bonavia/Cllr Davis)	Complete
12	A 'citizens' portal' approach should be investigated, through which citizens can access relevant information and receive targeted communications.	Open Data & Online Communications (Cllr Bonavia/Cllr Davis)	Complete
13	Opportunities for councillors to record and report their activities and attendance at events other than formal Council meetings should be explored and introduced.	Open Data & Online Communications (Cllr Bonavia/Cllr Davis)	In Delivery
14	Infographics should be more consistently used to effectively convey relevant information about Council performance.	Open Data & Online Communications (Cllr Bonavia/Cllr Davis)	In Delivery
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.	Effective Engagement, Including Younger/Older People (Cllr Codd/Cllr Elliott)	Complete
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.	Effective Engagement, Including Younger/Older People (Cllr Codd/Cllr Elliott)	In Delivery
17	The model of councillor surgeries should be expanded to trial the benefits of Council surgeries, Partnership surgeries and virtual surgeries.	Effective Engagement, Including Younger/Older People (Cllr Codd/Cllr Elliott)	In Delivery
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.	Language & Reporting (Cllr Kelleher/Cllr Best)	In Delivery

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.	Language & Reporting (Cllr Kelleher/Cllr Best)	Complete
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.	Language & Reporting (Cllr Kelleher/Cllr Best)	Complete
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. This should be applied to all written and online communications.	Language & Reporting (Cllr Kelleher/Cllr Best)	Complete
22	All decisions should generally be published within two days of the decision being taken, in line with the constitutional requirements for Mayor and Cabinet decisions.	Language & Reporting (Cllr Kelleher/Cllr Best)	Complete
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.	Language & Reporting (Cllr Kelleher/Cllr Best)	Complete
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).	Language & Reporting (Cllr Kelleher/Cllr Best)	Complete
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.	Planning & Licensing (Cllr Davis/Cllr Bonavia) / Open Data & Online Communications (Cllr Bonavia/Cllr Davis)	In Delivery
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.	Planning & Licensing (Cllr Davis/Cllr Bonavia)	In Delivery

27	The most appropriate way to provide professional support and guidance to councillors responsible for planning decisions should be further explored.	Planning & Licensing (Cllr Davis/Cllr Bonavia)	In Delivery
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.	Planning & Licensing (Cllr Davis/Cllr Bonavia)	In Delivery
29	Ward members should be notified of all relevant applications and decision-making processes in a timely and appropriate manner.	Planning & Licensing (Cllr Davis/Cllr Bonavia)	In Delivery
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.	Planning & Licensing (Cllr Davis/Cllr Bonavia)	In Delivery
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.	Seldom-Heard Voices (Cllr Campbell/Cllr Sheikh)	In Delivery
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.	Effective Engagement, Including Younger/Older People (Cllr Codd/Cllr Elliott)	Complete
33	The introduction of a People's Panel should be explored reflecting the demographic of the borough.	Effective Engagement, Including Younger/Older People (Cllr Codd/Cllr Elliott) / Seldom-Heard Voices (Cllr Campbell/Cllr Sheikh)	Complete

34	A mechanism for the community to deliberate and set the focus of select committee investigations should be explored.	Overview & Scrutiny, Including Council Meetings (Cllr Sheikh/Cllr Campbell)	Complete
35	The Works Council should be better utilised to facilitate direct engagement between unions and councillors.	Councillor Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships (Cllr Best/Cllr Kelleher)	Complete
36	Mayor's Question Time should take place routinely both around the borough and virtually. This should be enshrined within the constitution.	Overview & Scrutiny, Including Council Meetings (Cllr Sheikh/Cllr Campbell)	Complete
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.	Place-Based Engagement (Cllr Elliott/Cllr Codd)	In Delivery
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.	Effective Engagement, Including Younger/Older People (Cllr Codd/Cllr Elliott) / Seldom-Heard Voices (Cllr Campbell/Cllr Sheikh)	In Delivery
39	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	Place-Based Engagement (Cllr Elliott/Cllr Codd)	Complete
40	Effective mechanisms for engagement and involvement of younger people and older people should be co-designed with our local groups and representatives.	Effective Engagement, Including Younger/Older People (Cllr Codd/Cllr Elliott)	In Delivery
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	Effective Engagement, Including Younger/Older People (Cllr Codd/Cllr Elliott)	Complete

	structure of councillor question time panels being developed in schools.		
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.	Overview & Scrutiny, Including Council Meetings (Cllr Sheikh/Cllr Campbell)	Complete
43	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	Overview & Scrutiny, Including Council Meetings (Cllr Sheikh/Cllr Campbell)	Complete
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.	Councillor Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships (Cllr Best/Cllr Kelleher)	In Delivery
45	Clarity and consensus should be developed around the roles and responsibilities, and anticipated work load, for the various responsibilities a councillor may undertake.	Councillor Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships (Cllr Best/Cllr Kelleher)	Complete
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.	Councillor Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships (Cllr Best/Cllr Kelleher)	Complete
47	All Mayors should be limited to a maximum of two terms only.	Overview & Scrutiny, Including Council Meetings (Cllr Sheikh/Cllr Campbell)	Advisory recommendation
48	The title of Chair of Council should be changed to Speaker.	Councillor Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships (Cllr Best/Cllr Kelleher)	Complete

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.	Councillor Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships (Cllr Best/Cllr Kelleher)	Complete
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.	Councillor Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships (Cllr Best/Cllr Kelleher)	Complete
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.	Councillor Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships (Cllr Best/Cllr Kelleher)	Complete
52	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.	Councillor Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships (Cllr Best/Cllr Kelleher)	Complete
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.	Overview & Scrutiny, Including Council Meetings (Cllr Sheikh/Cllr Campbell)	Complete

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.	Overview & Scrutiny, Including Council Meetings (Cllr Sheikh/Cllr Campbell)	Complete
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.	Councillor Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships (Cllr Best/Cllr Kelleher)	In Delivery
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.	Overview & Scrutiny, Including Council Meetings (Cllr Sheikh/Cllr Campbell)	This recommendation is the responsibility of political groups
57	Meetings should be better planned and managed so that they conclude their agenda effectively within two hours, being extended by half an hour only in exceptional circumstances.	Overview & Scrutiny, Including Council Meetings (Cllr Sheikh/Cllr Campbell)	Complete

## Appendix B – Reports Presented To The Local Democracy Working Group

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### Openness and transparency

- [Update on the development of a Council-wide approach to open data](#)
- [Update on the development of the new Council-wide template and guidance for all reports](#)
- [Update on the delivery of improvements to the Council's online communications offer](#)

### Public involvement in decisions

- [Update on changes made to the council's mechanisms for providing feedback on public consultations](#)
- [Update on the proposed approach to stakeholder engagement for the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy \(NCIL\) programme](#)
- [Detailed evaluation of the People's Panel model](#)
- [Detailed evaluation of the Citizen's Assembly model](#)
- [Detailed evaluation of the Place-Standard Tool](#)
- [Update on the use of civic crowdfunding initiatives in support of Lewisham-based projects](#)
- [Update on the work undertaken to ensure the Council engages effectively with younger and older people](#)

### Effective decision-making

- [Interim report on the review of the Planning service](#)
- [Final report on the review of the Planning service, with proposals for change](#)
- [Interim report on the development of member role profiles](#)
- [Final report on the development of member role profiles](#)
- [Report on the audit of all Mayoral and Full Council appointments](#)
- [Interim report on the review of the Overview and Scrutiny structure and approach](#)
- [Final report on the review of the Overview and Scrutiny structure and approach, with proposals for change](#)
- [Report on the delivery of the 'Barriers to Politics' review recommendations](#)
- [Report on the development of a hybrid committee meeting approach](#)
- [Update on the development of a hybrid committee meeting approach](#)