

<b>Committee:</b> Policy and Resources	<b>Date:</b> 19 November 2015
<b>Subject:</b> Barriers to Standing as a Common Councilman	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Town Clerk	<b>For Decision</b>

### **Summary**

At its meeting on 17 July 2015, the Policy and Resources Committee considered a discussion paper on whether there were any barriers which might deter people from standing for election to Common Council. A number of actions were agreed which, amongst other things, included the redevelopment of the *Becoming a Councillor* website page and undertaking research into what London boroughs do to ascertain the demographics of their Council.

This report updates the Committee on the progress of the agreed actions and seeks Members' views on whether any further work needs to be taken in this regard.

### **Recommendation(s)**

Members are asked to note the actions taken so far and consider whether any further work needs to be done.

### **Main Report**

#### **Background**

1. At its 17 July 2015 meeting, the Policy and Resources Committee considered a discussion paper on whether there were any barriers which might deter people from standing for election to Common Council. The report highlighted a number of possible barriers such as the qualifications for standing for election, time commitment, the timing of meetings and employer buy-in to employee support.
2. The Committee agreed the following:-
  - That Officers examine what action London boroughs undertook to ascertain the demographics of their Council Members. This followed discussion on the demographics of the Court of Common Council and the merits of undertaking a survey;
  - Additional information being included on the City Corporation's website about becoming a Common Councilman; and

- Consideration being given to meetings taking place in part during lunch rather than either side of it to better accommodate working members.
3. An update on the outcome of these actions is set out below.

### **City Corporation's Website**

4. The Committee was keen to ensure that more information about becoming a Common Councilman was made available on the City Corporation's website. A new page has since been developed in consultation with Members of your Resource Allocation Sub-Committee and is now available on the website. As requested it is informal in style, refers to some of the more unique activities undertaken by Members and it includes the name of a contact officer. The page is available via the following link and also attached as an appendix:-

<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/about-the-city/elections-and-wards/Pages/becoming-a-councillor.aspx>

### **Demographics of the Council of London Boroughs**

5. In order to establish what, if any, action has been taken on the issue of whether London local authorities survey the demographics of their council membership the Local Government Association (LGA) and three London boroughs were approached for information.
6. The LGA was unable to provide any evidence of demographic surveys being undertaken. It directed officers to the Census of Local Authority Councillors from 2013 (the most recent one carried out) instead. The 2013 Census provided a comprehensive overview of local government representation in general and how it has changed overtime. It is split into three sections:
- A - Work as a councillor
  - B - Issues and views of councillors
  - C - Personal background of councillors
7. In terms of determining the demographics of council Members, Section C provided the most relevant information as follows:-

#### **Section C – personal background of councillors**

- Councillors' gender profile, ethnic origin, disability status and caring responsibilities have changed very little between 2001 and 2013. In 2013, 67.3 per cent of councillors were male (70.7 per cent in 2001) 96 per cent were of white ethnic origin (97.3 per cent), 13.2 per cent had a long-term health problem or disability and 27.9 per cent had one or more caring responsibilities.
- Councillors had an average age of 60.2 in 2013, similar to 59.7 recorded in 2010, and up a little from 57.8 in 2004. Around one in eight (12.0 per cent)

were aged under-45, a proportion which has changed little since 2004. The proportion aged 70 or over had increased from 13.8 per cent to 22.2 per cent over this period.

- The proportions of retired councillors have increased slightly year-on-year from 36.8 per cent in 2001 to 46.6 per cent in 2013. At the same time, the proportion of councillors in full-time employment has decreased steadily from 27.2 per cent in 2001 to 19.2 per cent this year, whereas there has been very little variation in the proportions of councillors who are self-employed or work part-time between 2001 and 2013.
- Two-thirds of councillors (66.6 per cent) held other voluntary or unpaid positions such as school governorships (37.2 per cent).
- The proportion of councillors whose highest qualification was degree level or equivalent rose from 50.2 per cent in 2004 to 58.8 per cent in 2013. Conversely, the proportion of councillors with no qualifications has steadily fallen since 2004 (from 14.0 per cent to 5.2 per cent).

8. Three London boroughs (Lewisham, Lambeth and Ealing) were also approached about the demographics of their Council Members and again there was no evidence of demographic surveys being undertaken.

**Lewisham:** confirmed that it did not hold any records on the diversity of its Councillors and knew of no legal obligation to keep or ask for such information. Councillors are elected on a party political basis and any attempts to influence selection on an age/gender/ethnic basis could only be undertaken by political parties.

**Lambeth:** stated that it did not examine the diversity of its councillors regularly. It had reached out in the past to communities that were harder to reach through mainstream communications.

**Ealing:** stated that it had quite a diverse spread amongst its Councillors. Whilst it made a reasonable effort to encourage people to become Councillors, only members of political parties were selected. It was up to the individual parties and their policies to determine who stood for election.

The intervention of party politics is a major factor in determining the diversity of London borough councillors. It is the job of the political parties to decide who stands for election to Council. As the City Corporation is largely non-party political, it cannot rely on the decisions of political parties and therefore any attempts to address the issue of diversity can be undertaken only by other techniques.

## 8. **Timing of Committee meetings**

The timing of meetings has been considered previously on a number of occasions and significant changes to timings have been rejected. The

Committee nevertheless felt that consideration should be given to altering the start time of meetings slightly so that they take place in part during lunch rather than either side of it to better accommodate working Members. To ascertain whether there was any appetite for such a change the matter will be raised at the informal meeting of the Court on 12 November 2015 and the outcome of this reported verbally at the Committee meeting.

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