

# recommendations

## Promoting democracy

1. Local authorities should be charged with a statutory duty to facilitate local democratic engagement by:
  - a) proactively disseminating clear and accessible information on how local governance works: what councils and councillors do; what the responsibilities of other agencies are; how local agencies relate to one another (or not); even how to register to vote and how exactly to vote;
  - b) facilitating more active civic participation in a range of areas (such as tenant and residents' associations, school governorship etc). This may well require a more specific capacity building/community development approach;
  - c) raising interest in and providing information on how to stand as a councillor;
  - d) proactively promoting the role of councillor and the activities of elected members.

Principal authorities should also provide information and facilitate democratic engagement in respect of the parish and town council tier.

To support this recommendation central government departments must work far more effectively together than hitherto, to ensure a consistent and positive approach to local government.

2. The LGA/IDeA should develop and provide a framework of advice and best practice guidance for this new function.
3. In order to ensure that as many people as possible can participate in local representative democracy, the role of a councillor must be compatible with full-time employment and an executive councillor with full or part-time employment. The leader of a council should be able to work in addition to council duties; it is recognised that some leaders of larger authorities may wish to work full-time on council duties, but they should not be required to do so.
4. Local authorities must recognise that elected councillors provide crucial two-way links between local councils and their communities. They carry into the council the views of the public and explain the decisions of the council to the public. As such, they must be given the tools to work effectively at the interface of local representative and participatory democratic processes.

## Councillors' role

5. Local authorities, in conjunction with guidance from the LGA, should develop and introduce clear role descriptions of what is expected of councillors. Similar role definitions should be developed in conjunction with NALC for the parish and town council tier.

## Direct contact

6. Local authorities need to recognise the importance of direct contact between councillors and the public and assist councillors to be more visible and accessible in their locality by:
  - a) providing and supporting opportunities for democratic engagement where councillors can meet with their constituents face to face;
  - b) placing councillors at the heart of well-supported area and neighbourhood-based structures;
  - c) utilising councillor-led scrutiny processes to enable councillors to interact with their communities;
  - d) making much more active use of digital and social networking technologies.

## The public eye

7. As part of their corporate communications strategy, local authorities and councillors should promote the role of councillors using a range of communication tools, for example by:
  - a) Using the media and communications resources of the council to work to build positive relations with the local media;
  - b) Making use of council newsletters and other media publications;
  - c) Harnessing technological solutions – such as email, web 2.0, blogs and texting – to make councillors' activities more visible.

## Public service broadcasting

8. Public service broadcasters should ensure that they fulfil their remit to facilitate civic understanding, particularly in relation to local government and democracy.
  9. Ofcom should, as part of their periodic reviews of whether public service broadcasters are fulfilling their remit to facilitate civic understanding, comment in particular on coverage of local government and democracy.
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## Campaigns

10. All local authorities should take seriously their key role in publicising and communicating the decisions made by the council and the work of councillors and organise and resource themselves accordingly. This should include signing up to the LGA/IDeA Reputation campaign.
11. There should be further work at the national level to actively promote to under represented groups, the opportunity to stand and serve as councillors.
12. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity should be examined, with a view to its amendment or withdrawal, in order to free up councils to publicise the role and work of their members more effectively without fear of breaking rules.

## Young people and citizenship

13. The Department for Children, Schools and Families, in conjunction with Communities and Local Government and the LGA, should work with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to ensure that the role of councils and councillors and the value of local democracy (including the parish and town council tier) is mainstreamed within the citizenship curriculum, and strongly reflected in national guidelines and best practice.

## Youth engagement

14. Local authorities should be required to develop and implement strategies to engage meaningfully with young people, (ensuring that any such initiatives involve elected councillors), by:
  - a) involving them meaningfully in consultation processes, for example by consulting with schools wherever policy impacts upon the lives of their pupils;
  - b) utilising methods such as youth mayoral elections, political speed dating, and work experience/internships with councillors;
  - c) encouraging pupils to interact with their councillors by discussing with them areas of particular concern or interest.

## Voting age

15. The Ministry of Justice should reduce the voting age to 16 years.
  16. The Ministry of Justice should review the candidacy age, four years after the introduction of voting at 16 years, to assess whether the candidacy age should be lowered to 16 years.
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## Reserve candidates

17. At the time of local elections, political parties should be able to publish a list of reserve councillors, who can replace a councillor of their party who stands down during their term, avoiding the need for a by-election. A by-election will be required if: an independent stands down; if a petition demanding a by-election is signed by an equivalent number of residents of the relevant ward as equates to 25 per cent of the turnout at the last election or 10 per cent of the electorate, in that ward, whichever is the lower; or if the incumbent party chooses to hold one.

## Electoral arrangements

18. A uniform cycle of all-out four-yearly local elections should be introduced across the whole of England. All authorities in a given region should be elected on the same day, but not all regions should hold elections at the same time. Local elections should not take place on the same day as national or European elections. Parish and town council elections should take place on the same day as other local elections in their region and principal authorities should always cover the cost of administering parish and town council elections in full without passing them down to the lower tier.

## Multi-member wards

19. In view of the potential positive impact that multi-member wards can have in terms of encouraging the election of under represented groups and encouraging teamwork and the sharing of responsibilities between councillors, multi-member wards should be adopted throughout the local government electoral system.

## Voting incentives

20. In the interests of seeking new ways to engage the electorate, local authorities should be enabled to develop and use schemes which incentivise voting, for example by offering voters a chance to enter into a lottery.

## Single transferable vote

21. In the spirit of local experimentation and because there is a view that STV can increase the diversity of councillors, local authorities should be enabled to pilot STV if they wish. Any pilots should only be introduced following a majority vote and a preceding period of consultation, and should be in place for a minimum of two terms.
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## Term limits

22. The Government should introduce legislation to bring into force, after a transitional period of four years, a statutory requirement to limit councillors to serve five consecutive terms; and to limit leaders and directly elected mayors to serve three consecutive terms.

## Political restrictions

23. Political restrictions based on salary level should be abolished. Restrictions (see recommendation 24) should be retained for very senior posts and certain politically sensitive roles, with Councils' Standards Committees having the ability to implement restrictions to other posts where considered necessary in particular circumstances.
- a) Very senior posts are: Chief Executive, Statutory Chief Officers, Non-statutory Chief Officers, Monitoring Officers, and Deputy Chief Officers;
  - b) Politically sensitive roles are: those directly giving regular advice to the Council or any of its committees or other meetings of elected members; and/or speaking on behalf of the Council on a regular basis to journalists or other media;
  - c) The rest of the workforce are: unrestricted but with the option for restrictions to be applied to a post if deemed appropriate by the Council's Standards Committee after proper advice and consideration.
24. Restricted activities should be limited to:
- a) standing for election as an MP, MEP, AM or a councillor on a principal authority; or
  - b) holding office in a political party, including acting as an election agent or sub-agent.

## Equalities

25. The Government, working with the EHRC should amend relevant guidance to make it clear that local authorities' new duty to facilitate democratic engagement (see recommendation 1) is covered by the equalities duties.
26. The Government, working with the EHRC, should amend the relevant legislation to include specific requirements for councillor equalities targets as an element of Race, Gender and Disability Equalities Schemes.
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27. The EHRC should be asked to assess local authorities' compliance with their councillor diversity targets (see recommendation 26) as set out in their Equalities Schemes, and to work within those authorities who are least reflective of their communities, the bottom 10 per cent, to assess whether they should make more efforts to change the situation, and if necessary to support initiatives to help them to do so. The EHRC should make an assessment at the time of whether lack of representativeness may also be due to inaction by local political parties or indeed the wider community.
28. The EHRC, IDeA and DIALOG should seek to revise the Local Government Equality Standard framework to give local authorities a clearer responsibility to promote equality of opportunity in terms of opportunities for participation as elected representatives.
29. In recognition of the important role of local authorities in promoting equality of opportunity for participation as elected representatives, councillor diversity should be formally commented on as part of performance assessments, though it should not directly affect CPA/CAA scores.
30. Disabled people should not encounter additional barriers to serving as a councillor, therefore:
- a) all candidates considering themselves as having a disability should be offered an assessment by a trained officer to assess their needs in advance of arrival in post and to consider any reasonable adjustments that can be made;
  - b) guidance should be provided to local authorities clarifying which of councillor's duties are covered by the requirement for reasonable adjustments;
  - c) councillors should be treated as council employees, including under the Access to Work scheme, as the lack of cover for 'unofficial' duties could provide a disincentive for disabled councillors.

## Political parties

31. National party leaderships should:
- a) recognise more visibly the value of councillors and work with them proactively, so they can be seen to be an integrated part of the system of governance;
  - b) encourage local parties to recruit as candidates suitably able people who share their values and have demonstrated leadership qualities but who may not have a lengthy record of party activity.
32. We support the recommendation made by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, that the EHRC and the Electoral Commission should work together to seek a voluntary agreement on the part of political parties to behave as if they
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are bound by the positive duty in the Race Relations Amendment Act. We also recommend that the agreement covers disability and gender equality duties.

33. The recommended move to member wards provides opportunities to address gender and other imbalances in representation, and we would encourage political parties to select a range of candidates including those who are women, and/or from ethnic minority backgrounds and other under represented groups.
34. The provision of any public funding for political parties at the local level should be dependent upon political parties signing up to a voluntary agreement as at recommendation 32, and should specifically be dependent upon demonstrating progress in terms of equalities targets as set out in their Race, Gender and Disability Equalities Schemes.
35. A dedicated fund should be established to provide public money to political parties, specifically for projects aimed at improving the recruitment, training and selection of candidates.
36. Political parties should, in conjunction with local authorities and in association with organisations leading this work, such as Operation Black Vote and the Fawcett Society, develop training and outreach programmes, to assist those who need the opportunity to develop the presentational and political skills to stand as candidates.
37. The LGA and IDeA should assist local political parties in determining best practice in candidate selection, by developing advisory materials and training programmes to support them.
38. As recommended by the Lyons Inquiry into Local Government, party groups should extend exceptions to enforcing the party whip on the grounds of conscience to allow councillors greater leeway to represent ward issues.

## Support

39. Councils should adopt modern business and meeting processes which seek to remove potential barriers to participation. This should include:
    - a) ensuring meeting times are accessible to both members and the public, with a preference for early evening meetings to enable working councillors to attend;
    - b) ensuring meetings are chaired efficiently and have agreed maximum lengths;
    - c) making use of modern technology to enable involvement in meetings without the need to attend in person;
    - d) ensuring paperwork for meetings is concise and focused and provided in a timely fashion;
    - e) making meetings as welcoming and inclusive as possible.
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40. The Government should introduce legislation in order to enable involvement in meetings including, but never limited to, voting, without the need to attend in person.
41. The IDeA/LGA/LGLC should develop a Charter regarding minimum standards of member support which local authorities should agree to provide. This should at least include:
- a) administrative support for case work, communications and diary management;
  - b) research support for ward work;
  - c) IT equipment for use at home, (PC or laptop, broadband access etc) and IT support;
  - d) arrangements and publicity for surgeries;
  - e) arrangements for child and dependent care cover (at minimum fully covering costs, and preferably organised home care);
  - f) social networking training and support.
42. Councils should support councillors to develop their skills by offering:
- a) a flexible and time-sensitive induction programme, which utilises a range of learning methods;
  - b) an option for 'refresher' and 'ongoing' training for all councillors;
  - c) personal development plans regarding development needs and opportunities;
  - d) opportunities to be partnered with mentors within and/or outside one's own council;
  - e) self and peer review schemes leading to tailored support packages for councillors;
  - f) training in approaches to community development.
- Minimum standards of development support should form part of the support Charter proposed in recommendation 41.
43. The IDeA's Charter of Member Development should be further developed to recognise good service to representatives, and it should be agreed that councils should only be awarded the Investors in People status if they can demonstrate a high level of service to councillors, not just to council employees.
44. As part of the support Charter proposed in recommendation 41, there should be an expectation on councillors that they take up appropriate training and development opportunities offered to them by their local authority.
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45. Political awareness and an appreciation of the councillor role should be regarded as a core training need for local authority officers. In recognition that few opportunities are available for officers to observe councillors carrying out council duties, specific awareness raising opportunities should be developed including councillor involvement in officers' induction events/programmes and opportunities to shadow members in their ward work.
46. The Department for Communities and Local Government, in liaison with local government groups, should issue clear guidelines regarding which member support activities should be considered political and which non-political, and therefore which activities can be funded by local authorities. It should be made clear to councils that surgery support and case work support is always legitimate.

## Employers

47. Employers should ensure that they have in place an HR policy in respect of time-off work for public duties, including for work as a local councillor. These should be agreed with trades unions or employee representatives, as appropriate.
48. Local authorities should use established and new avenues to actively liaise with local employers. They should:
- a) engage with local employers to raise awareness of the role and its transferable skill-set; and explain employers' duties in respect of time-off;
  - b) recognise the contribution made by local employers of councillors for example by sending letters welcoming and thanking them for their support;
  - c) equip councillors for and assist them in negotiating with employers;
  - d) provide information packs to both councillors and employers;
  - e) involve employers in shadowing/induction events etc.
49. The IDeALGA should:
- a) develop a generic employers information pack, to be adapted for local use;
  - b) develop generic information for councillors for negotiating with employers, to be adapted for local use;
  - c) reintroduce a Good Employers' Award;
  - d) work with employer organisations to publicise the role employers have in supporting councillors.
50. A financial compensation scheme, to be administered by local authorities should be developed which allows small businesses to claim a flat rate for absences resulting from employees' councillor duties. Appropriate rates should be included in the National Framework on Allowances (see recommendation 57), and should take account of regional variations in pay.
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## Accrediting and recognising service

51. The IDeA/LGA should work with local authorities to promote a model of accreditation of councillor skills based on best practice. This should enable the validation of the everyday skills developed by councillors, such as negotiation and communication skills, and also allow councillors to undertake more formal course-based qualifications.
52. The IDeA/LGA should work with local authorities to develop schemes for recognising and celebrating individuals' service and skills as a councillor and providing an opportunity to remain civically active.
53. Opportunities should be explored for national and trade media to recognise councillors through public service awards or similar.

## Parachute payments

54. A national framework for members' allowances (see recommendation 57) should include a scheme of 'parachute payments' for elected mayors, leaders and executive portfolio-holders who lose office through the action of the electorate. The payments should be at least equivalent to statutory redundancy pay and linked to time served in office.

## Exit interviews

55. In order to understand and address the needs of and opportunities provided by individuals who stop being councillors, all local authorities should undertake exit interviews, with a view to:
    - a) providing the council with systematic evidence of why councillors decide not to stand for re-election and whether anything can be done to address this; and
    - b) providing individuals with opportunities for them to continue to be civically engaged.
  56. In order to develop a clear understanding of the profile of councillors:
    - a) the census of local authority councillors should be continued;
    - b) the LGA/IDeA should reinstate their national exit survey;
    - c) a census of parish and town councillors should be introduced;
    - d) the survey of candidates standing for election should be continued.
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## Allowances

57. A national framework of guiding principles for members' allowances schemes should be developed. It should specify a national minimum basic allowance for each type and size of authority. Councils should have regard to the national framework in framing their own schemes but should be able to opt to appoint their own local or regional independent remuneration panel. The framework should also make recommendations in respect of parish and town councillors.
58. All councillors should be entitled to access to the local government pension scheme, and any allowances for serving on joint authorities should also be taken into account.
59. The Department for Work and Pensions should review the earnings disregard for benefits in respect of members' allowances, and in particular move to disregard renounced members' allowances for benefits purposes.
60. The National Framework for members' allowances (see recommendation 57) should not preclude small allowances being made available to councillors to communicate with their electorate, including where content is explicit about their political allegiance and activities.

## Effectiveness

61. In order to maintain confidence in local councillors, Local Authority Standards Committees should be empowered to suspend and claw back part of the basic allowance on the limited occasions where councillors are measurably failing to fulfil their role description.

**All of these recommendations are intended to encourage debate for the benefit of the future of local government. However, there was considerable discussion around some of the more contentious recommendations; and not all of the recommendations were unanimously agreed by the Commission.**

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