

Cabinet response to the recommendations of the 'Does Local Government Work for Women?' task and finish group report.

The task and finish group recommended that where applicable the Leader of the County Council with responsibility for Governance, Property, ICT, Corporate Communications, Equality and Cohesion give consideration to the recommendations outlined in the report.

I have considered each of the recommendations adopted by the Internal Scrutiny Committee and my responses are as follows:

Local authorities to work with police to tackle abuse of council candidates

1. Personal safety be included in the 'Be a Councillor' information.

Response: I support this recommendation. The personal safety information is currently available and can be included on the webpage for the 'Be a Councillor' event.

2. The Electoral Commission be asked to include 'personal safety for candidates' in the guidance on candidate briefings.

Response: I support this recommendation, and will ask for a letter to be drafted to send to the Electoral Commission.

3. Consideration be given to further work to develop personal safety guidance for councillors with the appropriate agencies.

Response: I support this recommendation. As indicated previously, personal safety information is now available. I have asked Democratic Services to work with the relevant partners such as Police to further develop as required.

Reasonable adjustment policies for disabled councillors

4. A review of Committee floor provision be undertaken to ensure ongoing suitability for councillors with disabilities.

Response: I support this recommendation. Facilities Management Service have confirmed they will carry out an access audit of the committee floor to highlight any areas of concern. I have asked for this to be completed by end of May with

findings and any required recommendations being available by mid-June. Further to this a full review of the wider complex will be undertaken with a view to understanding where any accessibility barriers occur.

5. Clear guidance on the use of microphones in meetings be provided to all councillors.

Response: I support this recommendation, and have asked Democratic Services and Facilities Management to arrange this.

6. A statement on the support the council will provide for councillors with disabilities on county council premises be adopted (draft as at Appendix 'B').

Response: I support this recommendation.

Challenge racism and support BAME and Muslim women

7. An information and resource pack be developed for councillors to use with schools to further raise the profile of the role of councillors and with a view to encouraging future councillors from diverse backgrounds.

Response: I support this recommendation. Whilst in general I do not believe that Lancashire County Council has a problem with racism or failing to support particular groups, I am fully in favour of work to explain and promote the role of the council and the value of local democracy with school children, especially emphasising the point that being a councillor and making a difference is something anyone, no matter what their background, can aspire to. I have asked Democratic Services (with advice from the Education, Quality and Performance Service) to develop this.

8. The use of short cross party video clips through a range of social media avenues particularly within 'hard to reach' communities be explored to raise the profile of the role of councillors.

Response: I support this recommendation. I am aware that work has already begun to produce videos that could be utilised initially as part of the 'Be a Councillor' event to promote the role of councillors.

9. A 'Be a Councillor' event be held in summer 2019 to promote the role of councillors, highlighting the importance of councillors from diverse backgrounds through circulation of invitations to Lancashire BME Networks.

Response: I support this recommendation. Democratic Services are currently in the process of organising this event to take place on Monday 8 July and are liaising with the Equality and Cohesion team to provide details of organisations to circulate invitations to the event.

10. Engagement with mosque groups and the Lancashire Council of Mosques (LCM) be progressed to further support future women councillors.

Response: I support this recommendation. Invitations to the 'Be a Councillor' event will be circulated the LCM and other faith groups. Further engagement could be considered by political groups.

Legalise remote attendance at council meetings and use technology to support inclusion

11. Where appropriate and the technology allows, remote attendance at informal meetings be considered to be utilised in situations to support inclusion, noting that individual preferences of participants in any meeting must be taken into account.

Response: At this time, I do not support this recommendation. Currently, the law does not allow for remote attendance at formal meetings. Aside from a change to the law, there would need to be considerable work with Facilities Management and ICT to identify future equipment needs (and associated costs) before this could be further considered.

Childcare and caring costs must be covered

12. Consideration be given by council to the DBS checks requirement currently stipulated as part of the carers allowance payment, subject to the views of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Response: I do not support this recommendation. I believe, as I understand some members of the task group believed, that the DBS checks are important given the council's responsibilities around safeguarding, as well as the need to ensure that there are appropriate controls around the claiming of allowances.

13. Consideration be given by Full Council for an increase in the current carers allowance hourly rate, subject to the views of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Response: I support the recommendation that IRP should consider this further with the findings reported back to Full Council.

Introduce maternity, paternity and parental leave entitlements for councillors

14. A statement be adopted by the council setting out support available to councillors during pregnancy and for parental leave (maternity, paternity or adoption) (draft as at Appendix 'A').

Response: I support this recommendation and the draft document provided as at Appendix 'A' with the following amendments:

In relation to Paragraph 2.2 Supported Breaks, it's really important to emphasise that the basic allowance is not withdrawn or reduced for councillors taking any form of parental leave, or indeed if councillors experience long term illnesses which prevent their attendance, as long as they attend at least one meeting every 6 months. The very minimal requirement to attend a council meeting once in 6 months is not onerous, and of course I would fully support extending that if necessary for reasons relating to maternity, paternity or adoption leave, but I believe this should be on a case by case basis.

In relation to Paragraph 4 (4.1 to 4.5) Special Responsibility Allowances, who

holds the posts receiving an SRA is approved either by the Leader or by Full Council. In either case, I believe such decisions are matters in the hands of the political groups, and can be considered on a case by case basis. Therefore, this section should be omitted.

Standards committee to be established

15. Consideration be given by council on the outcome of the 'Standards in Local Government' review currently being undertaken and its potential implications.

Response: I support this recommendation. This report was released in January 2019. There are 26 recommendations to review in line with existing processes, most of which sit with Central Government and it would be appropriate at this time to await the response to these recommendations.

16. A review of the terms of reference of the Conduct Committee be considered to ensure that the membership of the committee reflects the nature of the complaint where it relates to discrimination.

Response: I support the intent behind this recommendation, but note that political groups are responsible for appointments to the committee, and so this can already be achieved by groups considering their appointees, including taking a flexible approach to membership and appointing on a case by case basis.

Codes of conduct to address sexism and discrimination

17. Consideration be given by the council to adopt the proposed revised Protocol for Members and Co-opted Members on Language and Behaviour, Appendix 'M' of the Constitution (as at Appendix 'C').

Response: I support this recommendation and the proposed revised protocol to be included as an appendix to the Code of Conduct.

Standards, training and transparency

18. Briefing sessions be offered to all councillors on the Equality Act 2010 and the protected characteristics to further support councillors understanding of contemporary issues.

Response: Public Sector Equality Duty training is already provided annually currently and includes explanation of the Equality Act 2010. This year additional briefings were made available including how we produce the equality impact assessment/equality analysis to raise awareness. However a further session could also be provided to members to reflect contemporary issues and this can be referred to the Member Development Working Group for further discussion.

Local authority gender equality networks to include women officers

19. Consideration be given for the development of a gender equality network to support women officers in challenging sexism experienced.

Response: I support this recommendation, although I recognise it's a matter for officers to establish and join such a group.

General recommendations

20. Links be established into the Fawcett Society regional networks to further support the work from this task group report through the sharing of best practice and ideas.

Response: I support this recommendation, and understand Democratic Services have signed up to this.

21. The gender balance on the committees of the county council be kept under review by political groups.

Response: I support this recommendation and invite political groups to take this into account.