

Submission to the Labour Party Democracy Review from the Local Government Association Labour Group

The Local Government Association Labour Group

The LGA Labour Group exists to provide a strong voice for Labour in local government, both within the cross-party LGA and within the wider Labour Party. We represent and support Labour councils and opposition Labour Groups in England and Wales, including political support, leadership training, and sector-led improvement. Our leadership, officers, and regional representatives are elected by Labour Groups on an annual basis, and our elected leader, Cllr Nick Forbes, is the de facto leader of Labour in local government.

Our approach to the Democracy Review

The LGA Labour Group is delighted by the recent surge in membership of the Labour Party, and the opportunities that this brings. In responding to the Democracy Review we have considered how our party's rules and processes can be improved to assist councillors and Labour Groups to be effective in delivering for their communities, to be as open and accountable as possible, and to ensure that the role and importance of local government is properly understood and recognised.

Our submission sets out our eight main areas of recommendation to the Democracy Review:

- 1. A stronger voice for local government**
- 2. Helping more members understand local government**
- 3. Reforming and improving local government party structures**
- 4. Developing accountability and transparency**
- 5. Respecting councillors as elected representatives**
- 6. Ensuring our councillors reflect our communities**
- 7. Labour Group rules that support modern working patterns**
- 8. Candidate selection procedures**

1) A stronger voice for local government

Labour councils and councillors are the beating heart of our communities, running services that support tens of millions of people across England, Scotland, and Wales, and making decisions covering almost all aspects of social policy. Over 31 million people in England and Wales (over 55% of the population) live in an area run by a Labour council or a Labour Mayor. Local councils are responsible for spending £1 in every £4 of public expenditure in the UK, and run hundreds of services, including adult social care, children's services, the environment, economic development, highways, planning and licensing, public health, libraries, arts and culture, leisure, and a range of responsibilities in housing. If we include those areas where councils and councillors work with local partners and neighbouring authorities and have at least an indirect influence – such as in health, public transport, the local economy, fire and rescue, and policing – we are left with a list that covers almost all key public services. At a national level, local government works well beyond the remit of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, with responsibilities in policy areas overseen by at least seven other government departments, in particular, the Departments of Education, Health, and Transport. Councils are the only bodies able to take a strategic role across all areas of policy in each locality, placing Labour councils and councillors in a hugely influential position.

But for too long, the importance of local government has been severely undervalued within the Labour Party – with few councillor representatives given places on key party structures. This is despite contributing over £2 million annually to the party via the councillor levy, and many millions of pounds more through donations to local campaigns. Labour in local government has long argued for a more fundamental review of party reform which would address the historic undervaluing of the importance of local government. The time has come for the contribution of Labour councils and councillors to be recognised with a strong voice at every level of the Labour Party.

This should begin with the National Executive Committee, the NEC as currently composed is unrepresentative of the importance of local government, with just two places reserved for local government. The NEC should continue to have reserved places for elected representatives (front bench and backbench MPs, Lords, and local government representatives) but the balance between these groups should be amended to reflect the importance of local government. As a minimum, councillor representatives should immediately be increased to six. Participation in the election of NEC local government representatives should of course continue to be limited to councillors.

Regional boards should also have more reserved places for local government representatives, directly elected by councillors from that region. If regional boards are to be asked to oversee the development of local economic policies, then it is vital that local government is properly represented on regional boards. This should include the relevant elected ALC regional representative and the elected LGA regional representative, and a number of places elected by local government representatives in that region.

The current composition of the National Policy Forum is a reasonable reflection of the different stakeholders in the party whose voices need to be heard in policy-making, and includes many people with considerable policy expertise. However local government currently only has eight places on NPF, four of which are elected and four of which are nominated by the LGA Labour Group. Considering the range and volume of responsibilities carried out by local government, this should certainly be increased. Should the NPF arrangements be retained, this should be increased to match the number of representatives from by the PLP, reflecting our relevant importance. Should there be considerable changes to the mechanisms for determining national policy, for instance the replacement of the NPF with a delegate-based national policy conference, then it is vital that places are reserved for

local government delegates, and that the delegation from local government should be of equal strength and size to that of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

2) Helping more members understand local government

Local government in the UK is incredibly complex – a confusing jigsaw of different council types, varying responsibilities, electoral cycles, voting methods, and governance models. In England, some areas have two-tiers of local government, including a district council and a county council, each with differing powers and responsibilities. Some areas have unitary councils. Some have directly-elected Mayors, some have ‘strong leaders’, and some operate the committee system. Areas operate with regional structures like Combined Authorities, of which some elect ‘Metro mayors’. Local government boundaries are almost always completely different to Parliamentary constituency boundaries. To all but a handful of experts, the structure of local government is a confusing morass of arrangements which often changes from year to year.

Local government funding is also complicated, derived from multiple sources including general and specific grants, non-domestic (‘business’) rates, local council tax, and an array of fees and charges. Most people believe that the council tax they pay is what funds their council services – when in fact it makes up less than a quarter of an average council’s income, with the majority coming from central government.

Alongside this, the last eight years have been extremely challenging for Labour councils. Councils have faced unprecedented funding cuts – by the end of this decade, local authorities in England will have seen a reduction to core funding from the Tory Government of nearly £16 billion since 2010. That’s almost 60 per cent in real terms – larger than the entire budget for adult social care in 2017/18. Over the same period, demand for services has increased; for instance, an ageing population has seen rising pressures on adult social care, as more people are living longer and with more complex health needs.

Against this background, it is no wonder that many people (including party members) are somewhat confused about what local government does, who is responsible for running key public services, and how they are paying for them.

Labour groups have mobilised local campaigns to expose the impact of government cuts, and opposed damaging cuts to other public services. Labour councils up and down the country are doing the best they can and are continuing to find innovative ways of delivering social and economic progress for their residents. But Labour groups have felt under attack from their own side, as some members have wrongly attributed blame for the cuts to them, rather than to the Government. This is because many members, understandably, do not understand the legal frameworks within which councillors have to operate and which are set down by legislation in Parliament, such as the requirements of Best Value, or the quasi-judicial powers that determine planning and licensing matters.

One of the most common misunderstandings is around the annual setting of council budgets. It has been disappointing for many Labour Groups to have been criticised by a minority of members, who have appeared to blame local Labour councillors for cuts rather than the Conservatives, or who have made the impossible demand to Labour councillors that they refuse to accept the cuts, instead encouraging them to accept being ‘surcharged’, or even go to prison, rather than setting a legal budget. In reality, the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the Local Government Act 1992, mean that these routes, even if they were desirable or politically acceptable, are simply not open to councillors. If councillors fail to produce a balanced budget then the statutory officers of the council are required by law to step in, and take over budget setting powers.

This was recognised by our party leader Jeremy Corbyn who wrote to all Labour Groups in 2016 calling on them to resist calls for illegal or ‘no cuts’ budgets, and warning that a failure

to set balanced budgets would see 'a Tory minister deciding council spending priorities', and that 'their priorities would certainly not meet the needs of the communities that elected us'. A subsequent party rule change made it clear that councillors cannot act illegally, stating that 'Members of the Labour Group shall not support any proposal to set an illegal budget' and that 'any councillor who votes against or abstains on a Labour group policy decision in this matter may face disciplinary action'.

The vast majority of Labour members are very supportive of their local Labour councillors, and understand the constraints that are placed upon them. Of course, they rightly expect to be able to hold their councillors to account for their decisions, and to have their voices heard on local priorities and policies, but they do so in a way that is respectful of the restraints on their councillors' freedom to deliver and the appalling financial situation they are dealing with. But as we welcome hundreds of thousands of new members to our party, and give them the opportunity to shape local policy development and hold their elected councillors to account, the Labour Party should do much more to help them understand the roles, responsibilities, and restrictions which Labour councillors have to grapple with.

To assist in developing the relationship between local parties and local elected representatives, the Democracy Review should recommend to the Labour Party that it sets aside resources, to establish materials which set out, as clearly as possible, the role and importance of local government and the framework which governs the actions of Labour councillors.

This should include written materials, videos, and webinars which would assist members in understanding what their elected representatives are responsible for and the legal framework within which, and to set out how they can effectively scrutinise their actions, and hold them to account for their decisions. It should also establish a website in which members can identify, based on their postcode, which services their local council or councils are responsible for, the cycle of elections for each council, the governance arrangements, and their local representatives.

Ensuring that all members have access to this information, provided by the Labour Party and therefore a trusted source, would help councillors, Labour Groups, local parties and local members come to a common understanding of the background against which lively debate (and disagreement) can be had in a comradely manner, and reduce the number of unwarranted attacks on the integrity of elected representatives.

3) Reforming and improving local government party structures

The huge increases in membership that many local parties have enjoyed provide new challenges to organisation for established party structures. The Labour Party's organisation into units based on constituency boundaries (CLPs) is problematic when it comes to local government, as CLPs do not match local government boundaries. Many CLPs include wards from two or more local authority areas, which sometimes operate on entirely different local election cycles, and local government boundaries may include a large number of different CLPs, particularly in upper tier English counties.

There is an understandable desire for standardisation of structures and approaches to be an outcome of the Democracy Review, but this is very difficult as local Labour parties vary significantly from place to place. The recent huge increase in membership has not been evenly spread across the UK, with many individual branches now having far more members than entire CLPs. While consistency of structures across the country could be desirable in an ideal world, the widely differing size and geography of local authorities in different parts of the country, the differing structures and responsibilities of councils in England, and the significant variations in party membership, make it largely unworkable. So the Rule Book should recognise that no one organisational pattern will suit all local parties, and continue to make provision for local variation that takes into account local circumstances.

The Review should instead focus on ensuring consistency of approach – ensuring that all members, wherever they live and whatever the local government arrangements in their area, can be confident that there are sufficient structures and processes in place to ensure that their local government representatives are accessible and accountable, and that the decisions of local Labour Groups are as transparent as possible. There should be no default structure in the rules – but there should be options for organisation which suit different circumstances and from which local parties can choose. To assist this, Labour Party rules should be as simple as possible, setting out minimum standards which parties are expected to try and exceed.

One structure which is regularly debated is the Local Campaign Forum (LCF). The introduction of LCFs in 2011 has generally improved cross-constituency co-ordination in most areas, and has played a considerable part in improving candidate recruitment and selection, and ensured appropriate focus on campaigning to win control of councils. However we recognise that some members feel that the central focus of LCFs on candidate selection and campaigning has in some areas led to confusion over the appropriate forums for debate over local policy choices and scrutiny of Labour Group decision making. There has also been concern expressed over the membership of LCFs, and the involvement of councillors and candidates.

In the view of the LGA Labour Group it is absolutely imperative that the Labour Party retains a structure that ensures cross-constituency co-ordination on local authority boundaries. CLPs are not appropriate bodies for organising candidate recruitment and selection, overseeing a strategic campaign on local government boundaries, or ensuring that there is effective accountability and engagement on issues of policy development with all members within a local government area.

We agree that the name 'Local Campaign Forum' is unhelpful, as it does not properly describe the full range of functions and responsibilities that these cross-constituency bodies are rightly responsible for. We would suggest that these bodies should be called 'Joint Local Government Committees', reflecting their primary responsibility for overseeing all issues related to local government, including member engagement with policy and manifesto development, and which also underlines the fact that membership is drawn from local members, trade unionists, and the relevant Labour Group.

The objectives of this body should (as now) include coordinating the activities of CLPs and branches for the purpose of securing Labour representatives on the council, overseeing new candidate recruitment, and the process of compiling a panel of approved candidates. The objective of the body to work with the Labour Group to organise opportunities to enter into dialogue with the Labour Group on current local government policy issues and ideas for the Party's future programme and manifesto should be expanded and clarified. We develop this idea further in the next section of our submission.

It is important that membership of Local Campaign Forums (or similar bodies) should continue to be drawn from all sections of the party, including representatives of the Labour Group. All members of the LCF should be directly elected by either members, trade unions, or the Labour Group. We would suggest that 40% of members should be CLP delegates, 20% trade union affiliates, and 40% should be elected by the Labour Group.

It is particularly important that the Leader and Deputy Leader, both elected positions within the Group, are always included as ex-officio members of both the LCF and the Executive of the LCF. It would be perverse for decisions about local government campaigns, policy engagement and discussion, or candidate recruitment to be made without their input. In addition, most local government election campaigns are largely funded from Labour Group funds, as a result of contributions made by individual councillors from their allowances, over and above the 2% levy that is collected by the Labour Party nationally. It is imperative that the Labour Group continues to be represented on the LCF, and has influence on the election

campaign – if they are excluded then they may not be willing to fund a campaign over which they have no control, and would instead fund a separate campaign.

We entirely reject the suggestion that councillors should not be allowed to hold positions on LCFs, CLPs, or other local structures. Councillors are members of the Labour Party and have just as much right to stand for any position as any other member, and there is no evidence whatsoever to support the argument that councillors have an automatic conflict of interest. There should be absolutely no restriction whatsoever on councillors standing for election as either CLP or trade union delegates to their LCF should they wish to do so. Councillors are party activists, and to exclude and disenfranchise them would be an insult to their hard work and experience. Individual members can use whatever criteria they want when choosing who to vote for as their delegate or officer, and are capable of making a decision about whether holding office as a councillor would be a benefit or a hindrance.

However we recognise that the direct involvement of existing councillors in selection procedures can raise concerns and would recommend that councillors should not sit on selection panels or disciplinary hearings in their own local authority area to avoid conflicts of interest. However it is important that members of Labour Group are able to provide relevant information to selection panels and disciplinary hearings, including whip reports.

4) Developing accountability and transparency

We would strongly assert that Labour councillors are the most accountable elected politicians in the country. They are accountable to the law, to their council's code of conduct, and to the Labour Party rules. Individual councillors are subject to their Group standing orders and through formal council scrutiny arrangements. Council leaders and cabinet members are the only politicians who can be formally asked questions, on any area of their responsibility, by members of the public in council chambers. Councillors are accountable to their local media, and most importantly to their constituents when they come to see them in surgeries or stop them in the street.

Individual councillors are accountable to the party through their formal declaration in writing that they will abide by Labour Party rules and standing orders. They are visible and accountable to their local parties and party colleagues, entitled and encouraged to attend meetings of their branch and constituency party to report on activities and decisions, and make themselves available for questions and comments. Councillor contracts, used in many parts of the country, are a generally fair and transparent way of ensuring that councillors meet their varied responsibilities, including attending party meetings, town hall responsibilities, and campaigning. Adjustments can and should be made to take into account individual circumstances, including caring responsibilities or differing physical abilities.

The LGA Labour Group believes that the current provisions in the rule book and model group standing orders are effective in ensuring that councillors are accountable to members. To ensure that councillors are able to effectively communicate with members, they should continue to be entitled to access the contact details of the membership of the branch they represent.

Existing rules set out minimum requirements for the group leadership to provide reports to members, and most Labour Groups greatly exceed these provisions, and strive to keep members informed through regular newsletters, emails, and social media activity. But the rules are silent on how often, or in what form, reporting should occur. But in some areas arrangements are less satisfactory, and may have contributed to some members feeling that their Labour Group is not sufficiently transparent or responsive to queries.

The LGA Labour Group suggests that existing rules could be amended to increase clarity for members and Groups about the regularity and type of reporting.

Labour Party members should be able to receive regular reports from the Labour Group, and in a mass membership party it is practical to ask that these should be distributed by email. The Group leadership should be required to provide a monthly email update to members, outlining forthcoming key council decisions, campaign activities, and events, and progress on implementing the current manifesto. It should also include a mechanism to receive questions and comments from members.

When requested to do so, Labour Groups should also nominate a member of the group to provide a verbal report to any meeting of the General Committees of CLPs within the local authority boundaries. Where local authority boundaries include more than three CLPs, Groups should not be compelled to provide such representatives to more than three CLPs in a month, to be organised on a rota basis.

We also propose that the Labour Group should be required to prepare and submit a written annual report to the LCF, outlining progress on implementation of the manifesto and any new developments that have arisen since the manifesto was produced, and a report of the programme of policy discussion and development that has taken place in the previous year, and the proposed programme of engagement with members over the forthcoming year. Responsibility for the preparation of this report should lie with the group leader, but it should be endorsed by the wider Labour Group. The LCF shall have the right to ask Group to consider amending the report to reflect any observations, before it is distributed to all members. The report should also be sent to Regional Board, which may in turn review the Report and ask the Group to respond to observations made.

Currently, Labour Party rules give responsibility to Groups and to LCFs to jointly organise opportunities for individual members, groups, trade unions, affiliated and community organisations to enter into dialogue with the Labour Group on policy issues and manifesto development. In most parties there are good arrangements in place, and there are countless examples of recent good practice in manifesto formation, ongoing policy discussion, and regular updates on activities of Groups. But in some areas arrangements are less satisfactory, and there continues to be a perception that more focus should be given to engaging with members on issues of local policy, and to seek ideas for local manifestos. We should also consider how this can take into account the large increases in membership in many local parties.

Repurposing the LCF arrangements and creating a Joint Local Government Committee, with representation from members, unions, and the Labour Group, would provide an opportunity to give this body the overall responsibility for organising opportunities for the Labour Group to enter into dialogue on current local government policy issues and ideas for the Party's future programme and manifesto with members and the wider community. This would not exclude the contributions Labour Group or preclude them from helping to shape development of the programme, as the leadership would be represented on the Joint LGC, and would reduce the perception that Groups stifle debate. Coupled with the development of a party-wide political education programme about the roles, responsibility and funding of local government (as outlined in section 2 of this response) this would help create a more open, transparent, and member-led forum for discussion of local issues and policy direction.

Good practice should be developed and published by the Labour Party to support the delivery of good quality policy consultations and events, and provide suggested approaches for parties that best suit their local circumstances.

LCFs should convene an annual conference which all members are able to attend, and which would make recommendations to the Labour Group regarding the strategic direction and key policies, and in election years would make recommendations regarding the local manifesto. To ensure that the programme put forward is deliverable within the local government framework, the final decision on the content of the manifesto must remain with the Labour Group. This respects the rights of Labour Groups to remain sovereign in their decision-making, which is explored further in the following section.

5) Respecting councillors as elected representatives

Whilst all Labour councillors welcome scrutiny, it is vital that the principle of accountability and improved engagement is not misinterpreted as an expectation that local parties can mandate individual elected representatives or Labour Groups to make a particular decision. It is a vital and long-standing principle in the Labour Party that local Labour Groups are sovereign – that they alone have the responsibility of final decision-making. This is vital to the independence of local government, and was recently reaffirmed and endorsed by the National Executive Committee, but is also underpinned by the legal framework under which local government operates, and which has been established by legislative changes over the previous 30 years.

The Labour Party must continue to be absolutely clear that neither councillors nor Labour Groups cannot be mandated on any matters, as this could be seen to be encouraging councillors to act in contravention of legal frameworks, which in some cases would be a criminal offence. Members must not make demands of Labour councillors that would undermine these legal responsibilities, or prioritise accountability to one particular group of people over the overriding accountability of any directly elected politician to their electorate. This is vital both to ensure that Labour councillors are not fettered from acting in accordance with the law, but also to uphold public trust in the democratic process, and for the right of any elected councillor to make the decision that they believe in the best interests of the entire community.

These key accountabilities and legal requirements extend to the importance of ensuring that individual Labour councillors and Labour Groups retain the right to elect their leaders, and to have the final say on manifestos. Under the Leader and cabinet model which is prevalent in the vast majority of councils, the most important individual power retained by a Labour councillor is exercising their right to speak and vote in Labour Group, both on particular policies or decisions, but also crucially the power to elect the leader of the group. It is the power to remove or elect their leaders which allows individual councillors to hold their leader to account, and the power to vote on the content of the manifesto that allows councillors the right to block any policy which they do not believe to be deliverable, either for reasons of practicability or because it would be in contravention of the law. Labour council leaders serve with the confidence of their group - if that is lost, the Group must have the power to remove or replace the leader, in accordance with the Labour Party Rule book. This is a vital check on the power of a leader, and ensures that they must retain the confidence of their colleagues.

The suggestion that local party members should have the power to determine the leader of a Labour Group, either through OMOV or a delegate based election, completely undermines this important principle, and disenfranchises councillors in a way that makes no sense. We believe it may also contravene the Local Government Act, and be illegal. There are also a host of practical and organisational reasons which make the concept of 'directly-elected' leaders virtually unworkable.

It is a widely held principle of any political system that those who have the power to elect to a position should also have the power to remove them. Directly-elected leaders would be elected by the membership, but could they also be removed by the membership? How would this work? What happens if a directly-elected leader does not have, or goes on to lose, the confidence of their group? What happens if a leader does not keep the promises they made when elected? What happens if a directly-elected leader loses the confidence of the membership that voted for them? What happens if a directly-elected leader refuses to carry out a policy that has been democratically agreed by a vote of councillors in Labour Group, or if the Cabinet elected by Group cannot support a position set out by the leader?

It is unclear whether proponents of directly elected leaders are suggesting the leadership ballot would take place before local elections or afterwards – but both options have serious drawbacks. If before, it would be a serious distraction from actual local election

campaigning, and it would also exclude any candidates who are not yet councillors, but may be elected at the next election. Similarly, a councillor may win the leadership election, but go on to lose their seat as a councillor. If it is suggested the leadership vote occurs afterwards, it would mean having to choose between waiting many weeks before electing the leader (and cabinet) and postponing the transfer of power from the previous administration, or having a rushed elected process that did not allow members to understand the positions and qualities of all the candidates and would necessarily preclude OMOV.

The resources and time required to organise an annual OMOV election, including the nomination process, circulation of statements from candidates, organisation of candidate hustings, and the ballot process itself, for every Labour Group in the country would be astronomical. The cost to councillors of participating in an OMOV ballot would be similarly prohibitive – a single mailing to all members would cost thousands of pounds in many local authorities, and would make it impossible for candidates who have not got financial means or backing to participate properly.

There is a general acceptance, borne out by practice around the world, that politics is regarded as by default male, that patriarchal practices reinforce this, and that even where there are efforts to minimise that, unconscious bias kicks in. This is particularly the case in internal selections for single positions. All-women shortlists have been effectively used to combat this in Parliamentary selections, but would not be possible for directly-elected leader positions. How would we ensure progress on electing more women leaders is not reversed?

These are just some of the practical questions that would require answering. But no proponent of directly-elected leaders seems to have even tried to answer them – possibly because many are simply unanswerable.

The existing rules that set out how Labour Groups elect their leadership should be retained.

6) Ensuring our councillors reflect our communities

The most successful Labour Groups reflect the community they represent, and are in touch with the needs and views of local people. A diverse Labour group, made up of people from all ages and backgrounds within the local community, and made up of councillors who bring different skills, perspectives, and experiences is better equipped to make the difficult decisions that face councils today. This is also why it is so important that Labour continues to select and elect more women, BAME, disabled, LGBT and working class councillors.

For many years, local government led the way in terms of increasing diversity and participation in the Labour Party. Until recently, the proportion of women councillors was significantly higher in Labour in local government than within the PLP, but the success of all-women shortlists for Parliamentary selections has seen the PLP approach gender balance, while the representation of women in local government has remained at around 35%. Similarly, there is not appropriate representation of BAME, LGBT, and disabled candidates and councillors.

It is disappointing that equalities data on councillors of all parties is not required to be collated by the government. In the absence of a national all-party approach, the Labour Party should provide an example. We would encourage the Labour Party to be more proactive in collecting and sharing data related to selection of candidates, and election of councillors, so that local and national parties can monitor improvements and take appropriate positive action where necessary.

Local Campaign Forums that have been most successful in significantly increasing the diversity of members have several things in common – including a commitment to identify, train, and support talented people interested in local government, and the use of all-women shortlists (AWS) and other ways of positively influencing selection outcomes. More could be done to encourage members from under-represented groups to consider standing as a

candidate, and to understand what the barriers are. The LGA Labour Group has developed excellent materials tailored towards women, disabled members, and BAME members, and these should be used more widely by the party. The Review should consider how this best practice can be rolled out to all local parties.

In the absence of it being legally possible to have BAME quotas and all BAME shortlists, initial progress should be made by political encouragement of LCFs and wards to identify, encourage and select BAME candidates, particularly in areas where there are multi-member council wards, and use of de facto all-BAME shortlists where possible.

Many disabled members incur considerable extra costs in accessing Labour Party activities, and we would support the party setting up a national fund that people with disabilities can apply to cover these costs. There are good examples of best practice where groups of members with disabilities have encouraged and mentored disabled council candidates to come forward, and this should be developed and shared nationally. The LGA Labour Group will look at further assistance through mentoring schemes and Be A Councillor programmes.

Recent introduction of positive action procedures have improved the rule book, and should lead to more balanced Labour Groups, but only if it is properly enforced by the Regional Party. It is unacceptable that there are still three-member wards where all the Labour councillors are men, and there must be a zero tolerance approach to eliminating this.

7) Labour Group rules that support modern working patterns

It is important to focus on the barriers to selection that are faced by many under-represented groups, and that the Labour Party takes positive action to remove them, to encourage more members to stand in local elections, and ultimately to improve the diversity of Labour Groups around the country. But for this to be sustained, Labour must also look to do more to support options that make it easier to remain in local government once elected. Being a councillor is a demanding and often thankless role, and the considerable demands that are placed on local councillors (including council meetings, casework, campaigning), combined with often archaic council working practices and unsocial hours, are significant reasons cited by councillors who choose not to seek re-election. Research has shown that this is particularly the case for women councillors, younger councillors, and councillors with disabilities, and it is clearly a major contributory reason for the disappointingly low number of women and people with disabilities in senior leadership positions in local government.

Despite recent improvement, there are still only 26 women Labour council leaders (22%), out of a total of 118, despite 40% of Labour councillors being women. The LGA Labour Group recently established a Women's Taskforce, led by LGA Labour deputy leader Cllr Lib Peck, to examine what can be done to dramatically improve this situation. Although many of their recommendations are likely to be for government and for councils to implement, there are also specific actions that the Labour Party could take now to improve the situation.

One of the most urgent changes that the Democracy Review should implement is to require all Labour Groups to adopt a policy that supports parental leave. In 2017 the Fawcett Society noted that only 4% of local councils in England have a formal maternity, paternity or parental leave policy in place for councillors, and while some have informal arrangements, three quarters of councils that responded to a Freedom of Information request said that they had nothing on offer for women councillors who get pregnant. This is largely due to unhelpful guidance from government, but some Labour councils have adopted and implemented progressive parental leave policies, and more should be encouraged to do so.

However even in the absence of a council-wide parental leave policy, Labour Groups are free to adopt a parental leave policy as part of their own standing orders. The Democracy Review should recommend that the Labour party produces a model parental leave policy alongside the model Group standing orders, and require all Labour Groups to adopt a

version that takes into account local circumstances, to be approved by the Regional Director, by April 2020.

By encouraging a more diverse range of people to be councillors, it is essential that local parties and Labour Groups understand that some people's individual or family circumstances may limit their contributions in some areas. For instance, some councillors have a physical disability that makes it difficult to campaign as it causes them constant pain. Single parents may similarly find it difficult to attend group campaign sessions if no childcare is available, but could campaign at other times that are more suitable. The use of councillor contracts, used in many parts of the country, are a generally fair and transparent way of ensuring that councillors meet their varied responsibilities, but adjustments can and should be made to take into account individual circumstances, including caring responsibilities or differing physical abilities. The Democracy Review should recommend that guidance be produced for Labour Groups and LCFs, and a model statement of access and participation circulated for Groups to adopt. The Labour Party should also seek to implement all recommendations of the LGA Women's Taskforce.

8) Candidate selection procedures

The process of overseeing candidate recruitment and selection is a difficult and time-consuming process when it is done correctly, particularly in large councils, so this must remain a major focus of LCFs.

Considering the thousands of Labour council candidates that are required to be interviewed and approved each year (in May 2018 there were 4379 Labour council candidates on ballot papers in England), it is unsurprising that every year there are claims made that selection panels have made decisions on political grounds. But when investigated, there is rarely any supporting evidence to substantiate the claim. Panel interviews are only used to screen out candidates who demonstrably fail to meet the necessary criteria, and are a vital aspect of ensuring that Labour candidates are capable of meeting high standards of conduct in all aspects of their work. There is a well understood system of appeals should candidates be deemed not to meet the standards required to join the panel of candidates.

Prospective candidates should certainly be able to demonstrate a record of commitment to the Labour Party. In addition to fulfilling any statutory requirements for the relevant public office, members wishing to stand as a Labour candidate in a local election should continue to be required to hold continuous membership of the Party of at least 12 months, with any exceptions to these conditions approved by the NEC.

Councillors already face an open selection each time they seek to be re-elected. Recent procedural guidance that has allowed branches to choose to follow a 'trigger' process, and automatically reselect sitting councillors helped reduce the number of meetings needed when there is majority support amongst local members, and there is no practical reason why they should be removed.

It is an important principle of membership of the Labour Party that only members should be allowed to participate in the selection of elected representatives, and this should be preserved. Affiliated supporters who wish to participate in the selection of Labour candidates for elections should join the Labour Party.

Overseeing candidate recruitment and selection is done by volunteers, with the support of regional offices, and while it is inevitable that there are occasional mistakes in process, in general it is carried out in a professional and comradely manner. The much improved reputation of Labour in local government in terms of efficiency and improvement is a testament to the success of these procedures, and we would warn against making changes that increase bureaucracy and risk reducing the high standards that are rightly set for Labour candidates.

Overall, the rules governing selections have proven to be fit for purpose when followed correctly. Problems with selection processes have only emerged where procedures have not been applied consistently, and in accordance with the rules. This is ultimately the responsibility of Regional Directors, and the Review should consider whether they are sufficiently resourced to be able to carry out this important task.

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