

# LGIU Local Government Information Unit

Independent Intelligent Information

## Councillors Commission begins work (LGIU)

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### Overview

The recent local government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*, reviewed the evidence on the need to encourage a wider range of people to become councillors. It advocated the establishment of an independent commission to investigate the incentives and barriers to being a councillor.

This Councillors Commission has now been established, chaired by Dr Jane Roberts, DBE, the former leader of the London Borough of Camden. The membership of the Commission, in addition to the chair, is: Yaseer Ahmed, Cllr Cathy Bakewell, Jessica Crowe, Cllr Margaret Eaton, Ben Page, and Matthew Taylor.

The Commission is seeking views from local government and elsewhere, through written submissions, web forums, regional events, and commissioned research. It is expected to report by November 2007.

### Briefing in full

#### Background

The local government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*, set out evidence that current councillors did not reflect the population in terms of age, gender, and ethnic identity, and that there was concern from some political parties that it was hard to encourage a wider range of people to stand for office.

A Commission to investigate the incentives and barriers to being a councillor has now been established, which will report with recommendations to improve the situation.

#### Timetable

The Commission has been asked to report to the Secretary of State by November 2007. It will be conducting a series of consultation events in early summer (further details to be announced) and running a web-based discussion forum hosted by the DCLG website.

Councils will also be encouraged to give their views in writing, although no deadline for this has been announced it is likely to be in early autumn. The Commission can be contacted on: [councillorscommission@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:councillorscommission@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

## Membership

The Commission membership is:

Dr Jane Roberts DBE (Chair): the former leader of London Borough of Camden

Yaseer Ahmed: a Commissioner on the Commission for Racial Equality and involved in voluntary and community work in Bolton

Cllr Cathy Bakewell: Leader of Somerset County Council

Jessica Crowe: Executive Director of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, and former deputy Mayor of the London Borough of Hackney

Cllr Margaret Eaton: Leader of Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council

Ben Page: Chair of the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute

Matthew Taylor: Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Arts and former Director of the Institute of Public Policy Research

## Scope of the Commission

The terms of reference of the Commission set out that they will look at:

- the requirements and time commitments expected of councillors and cabinet members
- support for councillors to develop the necessary skills for their role
- how councils operate to facilitate councillors in carrying out their role
- current restrictions on who can become a councillor
- time off work for public duties, and remuneration
- public perceptions about councillors, and communications about their roles
- real or perceived barriers to becoming a candidate.

Information about the Commission is available on the website of the Department for Communities and Local Government from the link above.

## Relevant resources from LGIU

Over the past few years, LGIU has campaigned on a range of barriers to public service as a councillor, and has published various resources which are of relevance to councils seeking to put views to the Commission. These include:

*Perilous Democracy*: a series of factsheets on time off work, political restriction, age of candidacy, and pensions and remuneration, which make recommendations for change

*Promoting councillor diversity: A guide to achieving effective representative democracy* - gives examples of work councils are already undertaking to attract a wider range of candidates

*Leaders at work: Making the councillor life possible* - a pamphlet published jointly with Business in the Community, which makes recommendations to improve the framework for time off for public duties.

Information about these is available on the LGIU website.

## All-Party Parliamentary Group inquiry

LGIU is also supporting and advising the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Local Government Inquiry into the role of councillors. This is investigating how the role of councillors impacts on the motivation to seek office, and how councils can better support the role of councillor. This is currently receiving and reviewing evidence and will report in the summer. We anticipate this report will be submitted to the Councillors Commission.

## Comment

LGIU welcomes the Councillors Commission and encourages councils to put their views forward on changes they wish to see. These are likely to cover practical and legal changes, for example on requirements for time off for public duty, but also wider debates about the position of local democracy and how it can be strengthened.

## Additional Information

### Covers

- Equalities, Social inclusion, Community cohesion
- Democracy, Governance, Councillor issues, Standards board, Neighbourhood governance, Regional governance, Local government information

## Question

[Send Feedback for this briefing](#)

### Related links

- [DCLG website information](#)
- [Relevant LGIU publications](#)

### Related briefings

- [Strong and prosperous communities: an overview of the Local Government White Paper](#) 

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