



ASSOCIATION OF NORTH EAST COUNCILS
ROLE OF ELECTED MEMBERS
TASK & FINISH GROUP FINAL REPORT
2008

SPEAKING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE REGION

INTRODUCTION

1. Triggered by the publication of the Local Government White Paper in October 2006, the Association of North East Councils set up a Task & Finish Group to examine the role of elected members. Led by and involving a group of councillors from across the region, the Group was keen to link its work to the Councillors Commission with a view to influencing its own recommendations to the Secretary of State. It identified its own work programme and invited a range of speakers to inform discussion, debate and recommendations. The Task & Finish Group's Terms of Reference is attached as Annex A and membership at Annex B.
2. The report covers the following themes, each with its own recommendations:
 - links with the Councillors Commission;
 - the growing role of the councillor;
 - support and training for councillors;
 - Community Call for Action (CCfA);
 - recruitment of councillors;
 - incentives and barriers to becoming a councillor; and
 - terms and conditions.

LINKS WITH THE COUNCILLORS COMMISSION

3. During the course of the work, links have been made to the work of the Councillors Commission. Officers have been in regular contact with the Commission's secretariat. The Commission's Chair, Dr Jane Roberts, attended an Association event with councillors and officers on 12 October 2007 to discuss the Commission's work. The Task & Finish Group has considered a range of questions presented by the Commission and has submitted responses to inform the Commission's work. The Task & Finish Group also responded to the Commission's call for evidence in the summer of 2007.
4. The Councillors Commission's report to the Secretary of State was published on 10 December 2007. The report ran to several hundred pages and contained 61 recommendations. The recommendations are grouped under four main themes:
 - making councillors central to local democracy;
 - making the role of the councillor more widely known and better appreciated;
 - making it easier for everyone with the potential, regardless of background, to come forward and for a more diverse range of councillors to be elected; and
 - making it easier for busy people to become councillors.
5. Virtually every recommendation put to the Commission from the Association has been picked up, although the Commission has addressed a number of areas, such as electoral arrangements, which were not part of the Task & Finish Group's remit. In February 2008 the Association formally responded to the Councillors Commission's report to the Secretary of State. A short comparison of the Association's recommendations and relevant ones from the Commission to the Secretary of State is at Annex C.



THE GROWING ROLE OF THE COUNCILLOR

6. A key reason for the establishment of the Group was in recognition of the changing (and growing) role of the elected member. Government expects councillors to undertake broader roles which will require a wider skill-set.

Implementing the White Paper

7. It is a reality that the role of councillors has changed fundamentally over recent years and will continue to do so. Councillors are now expected to have a much wider set of skills and attributes while still retaining their fundamental role as democratically elected representatives of local people. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 will change and develop councillors' roles still further.
8. There will be a significant impact on councillors' leadership roles, not just with Cabinet/Executive councillors, but for all councillors as community champions. Leadership takes many forms. The Act places a stronger role on local authorities to ensure Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) operate effectively. In many cases, some Executive councillors sit on LSPs, but there will be an increasing need for all councillors to be aware of the role of the LSP, as it is through this form of governance that a great deal of the new place-shaping agenda will be expected to be delivered. As well as being aware of structures and processes locally within the partnership setting, where the LSP is seen as the 'partnership of partnerships', steering the work of many themed partnerships locally, all councillors will need to know how the various partnership processes work and be able to bring partners and communities together to find solutions to local problems (see also Community Call for Action on page 5).

9. Through the LSP structures, councillors will be expected to ensure that refreshed community strategies genuinely reflect the vision and priorities of local communities. The new 'Sustainable Community Strategies' will need to reflect local needs at various levels: strategic priorities for the locality as a whole as well as reflecting the specific needs of geographical or communities of interest in pockets which may get lost in a more general community strategy.
10. The Act sets out the new approach to Local Area Agreements (LAAs) have now changed significantly. They offer considerably greater scope to meet local needs, with far fewer centrally driven targets, much less in the way of ring-fencing of funding streams and an overall allocation of funding to be channelled through LAAs rising from some £0.5 billion nationally in 2007 to around £5 billion within three years. LAAs will become the main delivery plan behind sustainable community strategies, setting out what will be done locally, by whom and so on. It will be imperative for councillors to:
 - be aware of the scope and likely impact of the new LAAs;
 - know what processes and timescales are deployed locally to produce and refresh LAAs; and
 - understand how these can be used to best effect in helping councillors undertake their strategic and community leadership roles.

SUPPORT AND TRAINING FOR COUNCILLORS

11. Councillors have considered this theme in some depth, especially in relation to the need for councillors to strike a balance between democratic, home and work lives and to reflect the growing demands on councillors as a result of what might be considered increasing professionalisation of the role. Government expects councillors to do more, therefore they will require a wider skills set and to be properly supported in their roles.
12. What is clear is that some councillors have sought to develop their roles full-time, others part-time. The role of the councillor is so diverse that the role should be flexible enough to accommodate differing time commitments offered by councillors (and potential councillors). To define the role narrowly may preclude some committed and talented people from putting themselves forward for election or discourage others to seek re-election. Councils should ensure they have a clear definition of the roles that councillors are expected to undertake.
13. It is recognised that many local authorities already provide many levels of support for councillors, but the Task & Finish Group is keen to ensure, as far as possible, certain minimum standards are introduced across the North East, building on good practice in the region. The following recommendations build on work that has been done by bodies such as the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) and Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), and both will be invited to support the implementation of these recommendations (or in the case of the RIEP, its successor body the North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (NEIEP)). In order to take a strategic approach an event for Heads of Members' Services/Democratic Services and others who support councillors in their roles took place in March 2008. This helped to build on councils' strengths and share good practice and to ensure high levels of support for councillors across the region.

The Task & Finish Group recommends that:

Recommendation: Councillors continue to take up opportunities to access training and development from a range of sources, e.g. the North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership, to develop their skills and capacities in these areas and that all councillors are encouraged to do so by their authorities;

Recommendation: The Association continues to develop proposals for the North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership for 2008 onwards in order that support for councillors in developing their roles can be maximised;

Recommendation: Councils review levels of practical and administrative support offered to councillors so that their time can be freed up to undertake their duties and solve local problems more effectively;

Recommendation: Councils ensure that they have adequate Member Support and Development Officers in the light of growing councillor roles and responsibilities;

Recommendation: Councils keep under review, with their councillors, the timing of formal Council meetings to allow a greater balance to be struck, where possible, between their democratic and employment roles;

Recommendation: Councils ensure there is a protocol in place for officers responding to requests from councillors seeking service-based solutions to residents' problems;

Recommendation: Councils consider implementing mentoring schemes with councillors, especially newly elected councillors, to help in their development;

Recommendation: Councils adopt personal development plans for councillors;

Recommendation: Councils prepare a clear written role for Councillors to target potential candidates as well as for new councillors;

Recommendation: Councils offer exit interviews with former councillors to seek feedback on their experience of being a councillor, with a particular emphasis on what might have been done to improve their experience and what might have been done to encourage them to stay on (where the councillor has decided to stand down of their own accord);



Recommendation: Councils assess the level of on-line support offered to councillors to help them in their roles, and to help councillors strike a balance between domestic and democratic duties;

Recommendation: Councillors be encouraged to collate e-mail groups of constituents who contact them to use as a pool with whom they might consult on ward issues; and

Recommendation: An event be held for Heads of Members' Services/Democratic Services to consider how recommendations aimed at North East Councils be taken forward.

COMMUNITY CALL FOR ACTION (CCfA)

14. Councillors have always had a fundamental role in ensuring that local people's concerns are raised and responded to appropriately; CCfA will put this on a statutory footing. The Group agreed to focus specifically on CCfA.
15. During 2007 Government was planning to introduce CCfA via two routes. The Police & Justice Act 2006 was expected to result in statutory guidance in 2008, following Sir Ronnie Flanagan's review of policing. This would enable residents to instigate a CCfA process relating to matters locally covered by the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 was expected to introduce CCfA for all local government matters. A key difference is that this CCfA process places a responsibility on councillors to instigate the CCfA process. There was some confusion over the practicalities of a 'dual' system which some argue would be confusing to councillors, officers and, more crucially, local people. Both systems would provide for community concerns to be raised through the scrutiny process if other processes fail to resolve them satisfactorily. CCfA, in either process, is not designed to replace councillors' usual means of finding solutions to local issues; councillors will still be encouraged to do this. What CCfA does is provide for councillors to approach the Executive for a solution and then, as a form of last resort, to request the matter be discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

16. The Task & Finish Group received a presentation on CCfA from John Heneghan, Overview and Scrutiny Team Leader at Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council. Kirklees has been piloting CCfA arrangements and their experience was shared with the Group.
17. Following the discussion, the Association Chair has written to Sir Ronnie Flanagan setting out North East local government's view that there should be one CCfA system introduced, rather than two, and that it should be the responsibility of the councillor to trigger a CCfA. It now appears that Government intends to introduce a single system, instigated by the councillor.

The Task & Finish Group recommends that:

Recommendation: Once timescales and Government policy on CCfA become clearer, the Association considers holding a bespoke event for Councillors on CCfA and scrutiny;

Recommendation: As part of any on-going work in relation to CCfA, and as a possible outcome from a bespoke event, a checklist for councils to support them in delivering their own processes for CCfA be developed; and

Recommendation: Councils consider developing a multi-party protocol and advice on dealing with vexatious calls to help make CCfA run smoothly.

RECRUITMENT OF COUNCILLORS

Profile of councillors

18. The Task & Finish Group recognises that more people should be encouraged to put themselves forward for election to ensure that the profile of councillors in council chambers across the region more closely reflects the local population. This aspiration is shared by the Councillors Commission and is one of the key issues it has addressed. However, it is not the aim that the profile should exactly match the population profile as this might inadvertently limit the input from older people who may have more time, skills and experience to dedicate to local government.

19. In support of the Task & Finish Group's work, officers have initially sought information from each local authority to ascertain the profile of councillors by gender, age and ethnicity. The full data is set out in Annex D. Two profiles have been compiled, one for just before the May 2007 election and one just after. Over 80% of the region's councils were able to provide information. The profile in terms of gender and age is similar to the profile nationally. Around 70% of councillors are male and 30% female. There was a very slight shift in balance from male to female following the May 2007 election. Around three-quarters of councillors are over 50. In terms of ethnicity, seven councillors (all male) were from ethnic minorities before May; this rose to thirteen (all male) after May – barely 1% of councillors in total. The post-election request for information included data on disability. 22 councillors considered themselves to be disabled, five of whom were women.
20. Not all councils collect data of this kind. Some councils have had to contact their councillors to ascertain data on age etc. Collection of this kind of data also requires the individual's permission who has the right, of course, to decline to give it.
21. That said, councils routinely collect data on the profile of their workforce. This information is essential if councils are to have in place policies and strategies to help ensure the workforce of the local authority more closely matches the profile of the populations they serve. This is a key part of councils' action plans within Generic Equality Standards, and is fundamental to local authorities' abilities to demonstrate they are working towards the aims of various elements of equalities legislation.

The Task & Finish Group recommends that:

- Recommendation:** Councils are encouraged to routinely collect data on the profile of councillors, in a similar way to that done for council employees;
- Recommendation:** Councils routinely collect data on the profile of councillors covering gender, disability, age, ethnicity and employment status; and
- Recommendation:** That this data is used appropriately by local authorities to inform the development of plans to encourage under-represented groups to stand for election.

Public awareness of the role of councillors

22. The Group agreed to focus on how the positive image of the councillor can be portrayed more widely across the region. Councillors were interested to explore:
- how third party endorsements might aid the raising of the profile of Councillors with the population generally;
 - getting positive role models from under-represented communities, e.g. black and minority ethnic, women, younger and disabled councillors, to front awareness raising to encourage more people from those communities to consider standing for office; and
 - linking this work with the wider image and reputation work being undertaken by councils and the Association in the region.
23. Hilary Knox, Deputy Director at the Association attended the October 2007 meeting of the Task & Finish Group to present a communications perspective to aid discussions. It was noted that much is already being done to raise the profile of councillors but there remains a challenge to identify and promote positive examples of the work of councillors in a range of ways, and use this to share good practice across the region.



24. It was agreed that it was important to build on the many existing means of communication that exist regionally and locally. For example, the ShiNE Awards are an excellent way of portraying the very best of local government service. The Careers in Councils initiative helps to raise the profile of local government amongst younger people who may be seeking a future in public service delivery. Events, including the Tackling Climate Change Debate with young people or Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) events organised by the Association are also very effective at placing councillors at the forefront of innovative work with communities and other sectors.

The Task & Finish Group recommends that:

Recommendation: Existing means of communication at regional and local level continue to be used as a means of portraying the positive image of local government and councillors;

Recommendation: The North East Local Government Communications Network of officers explore opportunities to highlight individual councillor role models, e.g. younger, ethnic minority, women or disabled councillors and that these be shared widely, especially to groups outlined in the section of this report entitled, "Routes to becoming a councillor: community activity" on page 9; and

Recommendation: The profile and image of the councillor is promoted alongside building capacity of councillors in the future Improvement and Efficiency Strategy for the North East.

Routes to becoming a councillor: Political Parties

25. The Group has considered a range of further issues around the recruitment of councillors. In particular, councillors are keen to explore with political groups how they might work, possibly collectively, to encourage more people to stand for election. The overall majority of councillors in the North East are elected via political parties. Just one council, Teesdale, is independently controlled and most councils have very few independent councillors. The role that political parties could play in recruiting more councillors is therefore potentially significant in securing a wider pool and a wider diversity of potential candidates.

Recommendation: The Task & Finish Group recommends that regional political groups consider further developing a range of ways in which more people may be encouraged to stand for election.

26. The Group felt that there was a role for employers in valuing the civic and democratic roles and skills held by employees who are councillors in order to further encourage others to get involved in civic and community life.

Routes to becoming a councillor: business / employers

27. James Ramsbotham, Chief Executive of the North East Chamber of Commerce, attended the September 2007 meeting of the Task & Finish Group to consider barriers from a business perspective to people putting themselves forward for election. Mr Ramsbotham discussed this issue with a range of business people, at top management and other levels to gauge a range of views. Discussion focussed around three themes:

- political and cultural barriers;
- time and money; and
- conflicts of interest. These are set out here as a case study, as this section of the report is based on the findings of these discussions.

Case Study

Mr Ramsbotham had found that the perception was that councillors tended to be males over 50, and there was, in some cases, a feeling that you had to be 'part of a clique' to become a councillor.

In terms of barriers to becoming a councillor, there were three broad themes:

Political and cultural issues

There was a perception that one had to join a political party to become a councillor. Sometimes people's immediate perceptions of local government were a barrier. However, there was also a strong sense that people in businesses wanted to make a contribution to their communities/make a difference but they had not made the connection between this and the role of the councillor. Once that point had been established with business people/employees, there was much more interest in the role of the councillor. This was sometimes further enhanced when the idea of becoming elected outside of the political party processes was considered.

Mr Ramsbotham suggested that there was a challenge for local government to see how it can further open up its processes to engage people from the business community through a variety of engagement mechanisms. It was felt that this kind of wider engagement would help to challenge perceptions held by some which, in time, might result in more people from the private sector standing for election.

Furthermore, it was noted that the Prime Minister was seeking a "Government of all talents" and that the same might apply to Councils locally, e.g. through co-options, as advisors etc.

Time and resource issues

When business is growing, time pressures on business people is great. Finding time to take on another demanding role would be difficult. The same can be said for people in other sectors, including the public sector e.g. could a school teacher find time to become a councillor too?

Mr Ramsbotham expressed interest in the idea put forward by the Task & Finish Group about a national system to provide financial support to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to back-fill posts to allow time off for employees who become councillors (see paragraph 39). He expressed a particular interest in where the boundary would lie between SMEs and others in any such scheme as it is the latter who would be expected to fund it themselves. The business community would want to discuss this further.

On the issue of attracting people in promising careers to become councillors, remuneration as a form of compensation was considered as important. The example was cited by Mr Ramsbotham that someone on, say, £50,000 p.a. who became elected to a council, and was required to sacrifice a proportion of their salary to undertake democratic duties, may need to be compensated by £20,000 p.a. for two days a week as a councillor. It was queried whether local authorities could instigate such a system.

Conflict of interest issues

Conflicts of interest fell broadly into two categories: political parties and procurement.

Political parties: Mr Ramsbotham outlined a view that a business person might not want to be aligned directly to a political party, e.g. as Party X's candidate/councillor, or simply by association, if elected, either as a party member or even as an independent, onto a council controlled by another political party. It was felt that this could be perceived to impact on the image of the business.

Procurement: Business procurement from the public sector presents its own challenges. Some views from the business community were expressed to Mr Ramsbotham that political association with a council through an employee also being a councillor on that council could become a barrier to businesses competing for contracts let by that council. This could be further enhanced if an employee is a councillor and that business has submitted a planning application into the same council. Businesses are concerned about how this arrangement might be perceived. Views of business people were that it was preferable to have a 'very safe' distance between the business and the local authority and that having an employee as a councillor could blur this.



28. The Group used the findings of Mr Ramsbotham’s work to discuss implications for its work. It was felt that some of the key issues that need to be addressed are not just encouragement of people from business to put themselves forward for election, and to encourage employees to consider doing so, but to ensure councils continue to explore other means of securing business expertise and skills in their ways of working. There remain misunderstandings about the role of the councillor. In particular, there appears to be a disconnect between understanding the councillor’s role and the desire for people to want to do something positive for their own community.

The Task & Finish Group recommends that:

Recommendation: Councils continue to look for opportunities for business engagement in their activities, e.g. through partnerships, working groups, sounding boards etc;

Recommendation: In order to help all employers, not just business, consider the merits of supporting employees becoming councillors, a “myth-busting” sheet be developed, maybe in the form of common questions, highlighting the barriers, and answers (challenging misconceptions and highlighting benefits to employers of employees becoming councillors);

Recommendation: As a way of promoting the idea of employees as councillors making a positive contribution to community and civic life, the idea be explored of an annual ‘Civic Involvement’ award to a North East business in recognition of both the support given to an employee to undertake democratic roles and the benefits this has brought to the business concerned, e.g. in the form of skills brought into business; and

Recommendation: Councils, through the North East Local Government Communications Network, explore the scope to work with Business in the Community to seek support in sharing a positive image of the role of councillors and in the issue of time off work to undertake democratic duties.

Routes to becoming a councillor: community activity

29. Historically, a common route for many individuals to take to becoming a councillor or engaging in other aspects of public life was through bodies like Trades Unions and the former public utilities. Changes in recent decades have altered the way in which these bodies operate which some argue has altered their scope to act as a pool for potential election candidates. In the same period, Government policy has encouraged a greater move towards community engagement in public policy in a wide range of formats, including the development of:

- tenants and residents associations;
- faith networks;
- focus groups;
- community empowerment networks;
- single issue groups, like Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Networks etc; and
- Local Strategic Partnerships (community representation therein), many of which involve individuals having a degree of responsibility to represent others’ views within a ‘corporate’ body.

30. These kinds of routes for engagement are seen as a potential route for encouraging more local people to stand for election.

31. A recent example of this happening was in the local elections in May 2007 in Middlesbrough, where three residents involved as community representatives on the Local Strategic Partnership were elected onto the Council, one of whom was involved in the town’s Black and Minority Ethnic Network.

Recommendation: The Group recommends that councils and political groups could consider exploring how networks of local people might provide an opportunity to encourage more people to stand for election to their council.

Local election turnout as a mandate for councillors

32. The Group felt that local election turnout played a very important role in creating a vibrant local democratic mandate for serving councillors. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 places a duty on Returning Officers to encourage participation in the electoral process.

Recommendation: The Group recommended that the Councillors Commission and local authorities, under the Electoral Administration Act 2006, consider measures to promote higher turnout.

INCENTIVES AND BARRIERS

Interviews with former councillors

33. Interviews have been conducted with a small number of former Councillors to determine their experiences, good and bad, with a view to eliciting:

- what support could have been given to encourage them to stay on as councillors;
- what barriers they perceive there being that prevent people putting themselves forward for election; and
- what their views are on the levels of remuneration and potential loss of earnings through an alternative career, etc.

34. Many of the findings from the interviews reflected the views of councillors on the Task & Finish Group. The following is a brief summary of the main findings from the interviews:

- being asked to stand for election is, in many cases, a key motivating factor for potential councillors;
- there is often a stark contrast between the perception and the reality of the role of the councillor and that new councillors can find the complexities of councils' roles, systems and processes confusing; and
- remuneration, especially in relation to covering additional costs like child care, should be examined in more depth as financial barriers do prevent some people from standing, especially women with children.

35. The Group noted the findings from the interviews and the recommendations throughout this report address many of the issues raised from this piece of work. It was also noted, however, that some of feelings of powerlessness to address community problems felt by some of the interviewees could be a reflection of both a lack of devolution from central to local government as well as the role of the back bench councillor still emerging in relation to scrutiny processes. As the role and significance of scrutiny continues to grow, and it becomes more firmly embedded as part of the policy development process and key processes like Comprehensive Area Assessment, councillors should feel more empowered.



Terms and conditions

36. It was noted that work had already been undertaken to improve terms and conditions for councillors in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland including:
- the abolition of attendance allowance for councillors in Northern Ireland to be replaced with basic annual allowances plus special responsibility allowances based on the population of the local authority; and
 - the abolition of the basic allowance in Scotland to be replaced by a salary scheme and the introduction of a severance package linked to length of service.
37. Given that the Councillors Commission is looking at incentives and barriers to standing and serving as a councillor, it would be important for it to look at a number of areas including terms and conditions, time off work to undertake democratic and civic duties and severance. The Group felt that similar issues should now be reviewed in England, as they have been in other parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland, but on a national scale.
38. The Group would be keen to ensure it supported the gathering of evidence from across the North East to feed into any future national body of this kind.
39. In relation to time off work for councillors in employment to allow them to undertake their democratic roles, the Group proposed that the Councillors Commission recommend to Government that it considers a system whereby employers are required to demonstrate how they are providing cover, e.g. by back-filling part of a post for an employee who gets elected to office. A scheme where larger employers, e.g. public sector employers and large businesses, would make arrangements for providing and covering the costs of such cover could be considered. For smaller businesses, a case for Government meeting those costs could be made so that SMEs are not disadvantaged and over-stretched by providing cover; perhaps through a Government-funded system administered by local authorities.

40. Finally, the Group was concerned to ensure that terms of the Local Government Act 1988 around restrictions for certain public sector positions acting as a barrier to serving as a councillor be reconsidered to widen the potential pool of skills and abilities amongst potential councillors.
41. The Task & Finish Group therefore recommended the Councillors Commission propose to the Secretary of State, that:

Recommendation: A national committee be established to consider issues such as remuneration, pensions, severance, death in service and time off work etc;

Recommendation: A national scheme whereby employers are required to show how employees who become elected are supported in their democratic role; and

Recommendation: A review be considered on the barriers arising from the Local Government Act 1988.

CONCLUSION

42. A summary of recommendations is attached as Annex E. Councillors are keen to share the work and recommendations of the Task & Finish Group locally and nationally, including with MPs, the Councillors Commission, the Local Government Association and others in order to influence future policy and legislation in these areas.

Annex A

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- To consider and assess the impact on the role of elected members of current policy at national, regional and local levels, especially in light of the Local Government White Paper.
- To prioritise a small number of key issues impacting on the role of elected members to examine in some depth, in order to reach policy conclusions on each for the region for further action.
- To draw on knowledge, expertise and experience etc from across the region and beyond, inviting expert speakers from the local government sector, academia, central Government etc as required to inform the Group's work.
- To work alongside, where possible, the Government's Councillors Commission, to ensure the Group's work informs and is informed by the Commission.
- To agree appropriate potential means of implementing the Group's conclusions, through the Association, including, for example:
 - communication of information, best practice;
 - articulation of policy that can be implemented by local authorities in the region;
 - identification of training needs to assist elected members in their role; and
 - lobbying and advocacy for change in central Government policy, guidance and legislation as appropriate.
- To report the Group's conclusions and recommendations to the Association's Executive Committee or Plenary for approval and, subsequently, to other key opinion formers, stakeholders.

Annex B

TASK & FINISH GROUP: THE ROLE OF ELECTED MEMBERS

Members:

- Councillor **Lynn Camsell**
Northumberland County Council – Lab
- Councillor **Betty Carey**
Northumberland County Council – Lab
- Councillor **Kevin Dodds**
Gateshead Council – Lab
- Councillor **David Faulkner**
Newcastle City Council – LD
- Councillor **Bob Gibson**
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council – Lab
- Councillor **Ian Haszeldine**
Darlington Borough Council – Lab
- Councillor **Simon Henig**
Chester-le-Street District Council – Lab
- Councillor **Steve Kay**
Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council – Ind
- Councillor **Frank Lott**
North Tyneside Borough Council – Lab
- Councillor **Peter Mole**
Gateshead Council – Lab
- Councillor **Claire Vasey**
Durham County Council – Lab
- Councillor **Brian Walker**
Durham County Council – Lab (Chair)
- Councillor **Paul Watson**
Sunderland City Council – Lab
- Councillor **Simon Westrip**
Chester-le-Street District Council – Lab

Officer support:

- Rob Mitchell**
Association of North East Councils
- Jonathan Rew**
Gateshead Council
- Annette Stansfield**
IDeA

Annex C

Comparison of Recommendations of Task & Finish Group and Councillors Commission

Task & Finish Group	Councillors Commission
<p>1. Support and Training for Councillors</p> <p>The Group makes a number of recommendations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Councillors continue to take up opportunities to access training from a wide variety of sources;• the Association continues to develop proposals for the North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership;• Councils review the support offered to councillors and ensure they have adequate Member Support Officers;• Councils ensure they have a protocol for officers to respond to councillor enquiries regarding residents' problems;• Councils implement mentoring schemes and introduce personal development plans;• Councils prepare written role descriptions to help potential candidates as well as new councillors;• exit interviews are offered to former councillors; and• Councils review IT support to councillors and encourage them to collate email groups of constituents as a pool for consultation.	<p>All these proposals are strongly endorsed in the Commission's report (except that there is no specific reference to Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships).</p> <p>In particular the Commission calls on IDeA/LGA/Leadership Centre Local Government to develop a Charter regarding minimum standards of support which authorities should agree to provide. Councils should only be awarded IIP status if they can demonstrate a high level of service to councillors as well as employees.</p> <p>Councils should also support councillors to develop their skills through induction, personal development plans, tailored support packages and mentoring. They should develop and introduce clear role descriptions for councillors.</p>
<p>2. Community Call for Action (CCfA)</p> <p>The Group recommends that the Association of North East Councils support Councils through holding an event on CCfA and helping them to develop processes for CCfA. Councils should consider developing a multiparty protocol on CCfA.</p>	<p>The Commission does not specifically address the issue of CCfA. However, it does refer to scrutiny as being an important means by which councillors can engage with local people and communities.</p>
<p>3. Recruitment of Councillors</p> <p>The Group recommends that councils should routinely collect data on the profile of councillors covering gender, disability, age, ethnicity and employment status; and that councils should use this data to develop plans to encourage under-represented groups to stand for election.</p>	<p>The Commission also recommends that this data should be collected. Indeed it goes further in proposing that councillor equality targets should be included as an element of race, gender and disability equalities schemes, and that the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) should monitor councils' compliance with their councillor diversity targets and work with those authorities who are least reflective of their communities to change the situation.</p>

Annex C (Continued)

Task & Finish Group	Councillors Commission
<p>4. Public Awareness of the Role of Councillors</p> <p>The Group recommends that existing means of communication at regional and local level continue to be used as a means of portraying the positive image of local government and councillors. Opportunities should be explored to highlight individual councillor role models.</p>	<p>The Commission endorsed this, recommending that councils should promote the role of councillors as part of their corporate communications strategy, using their resources to build positive relations with the media.</p>
<p>5. Routes to becoming a Councillor: Political Parties</p> <p>The Group recommends that regional political groups consider developing packages of proposals to encourage more people to stand for election.</p>	<p>The Commission endorses this. It urges party leaderships to encourage their local parties to recruit able people who share their values but may not have a long record of party activity. Parties should address gender and other imbalances in selecting candidates and should encourage those from under-represented groups.</p>
<p>6. Routes to becoming a Councillor: Business/Employers</p> <p>The Group recommends that councils should seek opportunities to engage business and should help employers to consider the merits of supporting employees to become councillors, e.g. through the use of a 'myth-busting' sheet. We should explore the idea of an annual 'Civic Involvement' award to a North East Business in recognition of support given to an employee to undertake democratic roles and the benefits this has brought to the business.</p>	<p>The Commission endorses this. It urges councils to actively engage with employers to raise awareness of the councillor's role and its transferable skills. IDeA/LGA should develop a generic information pack and work with employer organisations to publicise the role employers have in supporting councillors. They should re-introduce a Good Employer Award.</p>
<p>7. Routes to becoming a Councillor: Community Activity</p> <p>The Group recommends that councils and political groups explore how networks of local people might provide an opportunity to encourage more people to stand for election.</p>	<p>This is similar to the Commission's previously quoted recommendation (para 5 above) about recruiting able people with shared values who do not have a history of political party history.</p>
<p>8. Local election turnout as a mandate for Councillors</p> <p>The Group recommends that councils, and the Commission, consider measures under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 to provide higher turnout.</p>	<p>The Commission makes a number of recommendations that are designed to raise the visibility of local elections. These include introducing a uniform cycle of all-out four-yearly elections in multi-member wards, across the whole of England. All authorities in a given region should be elected on the same day. Local authorities should be enabled to pilot incentive schemes for voting (such as entry into a lottery) and to pilot the use of single transferable voting.</p>

Annex C (Continued)

Task & Finish Group	Councillors Commission
<p>9. Terms and Conditions</p> <p>The Group recommended the Councillors Commission to propose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The establishment of a national committee to consider issues of remuneration, pensions, severance etc;• A national scheme whereby employers are required to show how employees who become elected are supported in their democratic role;• A review of the political restrictions on officers arising from the Local Government Act 1988.	<p>The Commission have gone some way towards addressing these points. They proposed that a national framework of guiding principles for allowances schemes should be developed, with a national minimum basic allowance for each type and size of authority. As regards severance, there should be 'parachute payments' for elected Mayors, Leaders and executive portfolio holders who lose their seats. A scheme should be developed to allow small businesses to claim reimbursement for absences resulting from employees' councillor duties. Political restrictions on council offices should be retained for very senior posts and those that are politically sensitive; political restrictions based on salary bands should be abolished.</p>

Annex D

THE DEMOGRAPHY OF COUNCILLORS IN NORTH EAST COUNCILS

Introduction

At the outset of the Task & Finish Group's work, it was agreed to seek to develop a profile of the region's councillors.

Methodology

Data was sought from all 25 councils in the North East and responses were received from over 80% of them. Information was requested before and after the 2007 May election to offer a demographic comparison.

Data Accuracy

There are a number of gaps in the data that must be recognised within the research analysis:

- Five councils could not supply the required information as they either did not retain the relevant information or used a differing information gathering system;
- not all councils held elections in May 2007, but some of these councils recorded changes arising from by-elections; and
- data on disabilities was only requested after the 2007 May election.

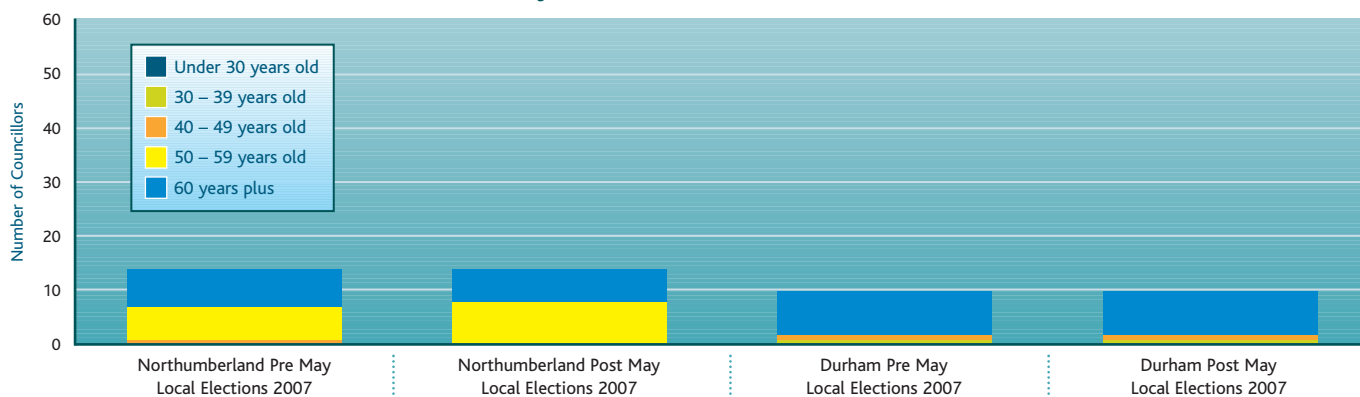
Conclusions and recommendations in this report take in to consideration these factors.

Key results/observations

It is clear from the data provided that councils in the North East of England, in line with the national picture, have:

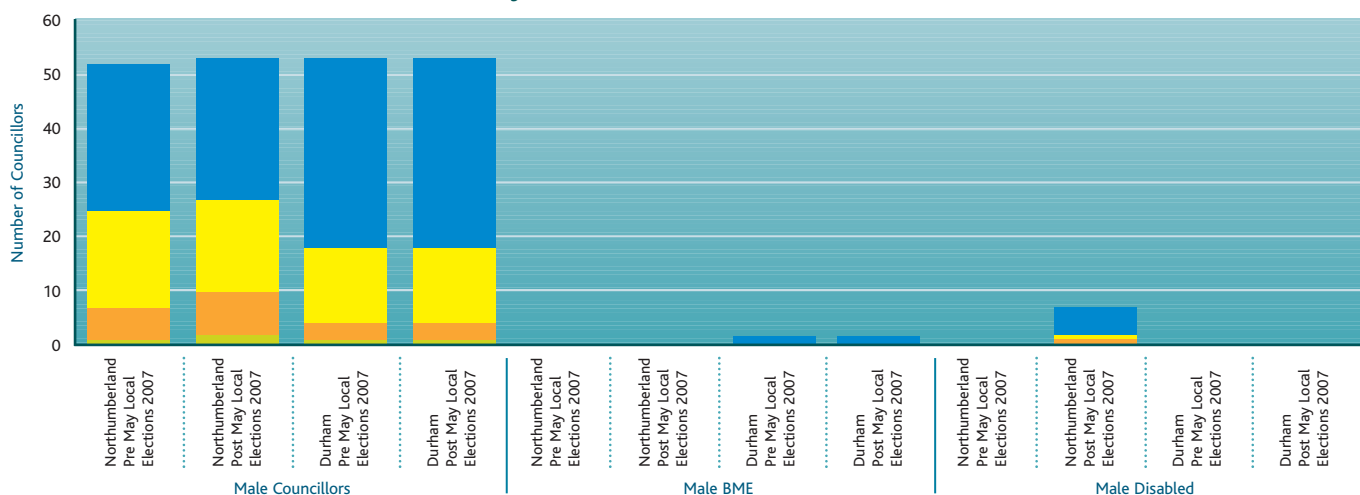
- a male dominated gender profile;
- a predominantly older age profile;
- limited numbers of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Councillors all of whom are male, but the number appears to be rising; and
- small numbers of disabled councillors, either male or female.

Female Councillors in North East County Councils



Note: There was no data for female BME or disabled Councillors.

Male Councillors in North East County Councils



County Council Data

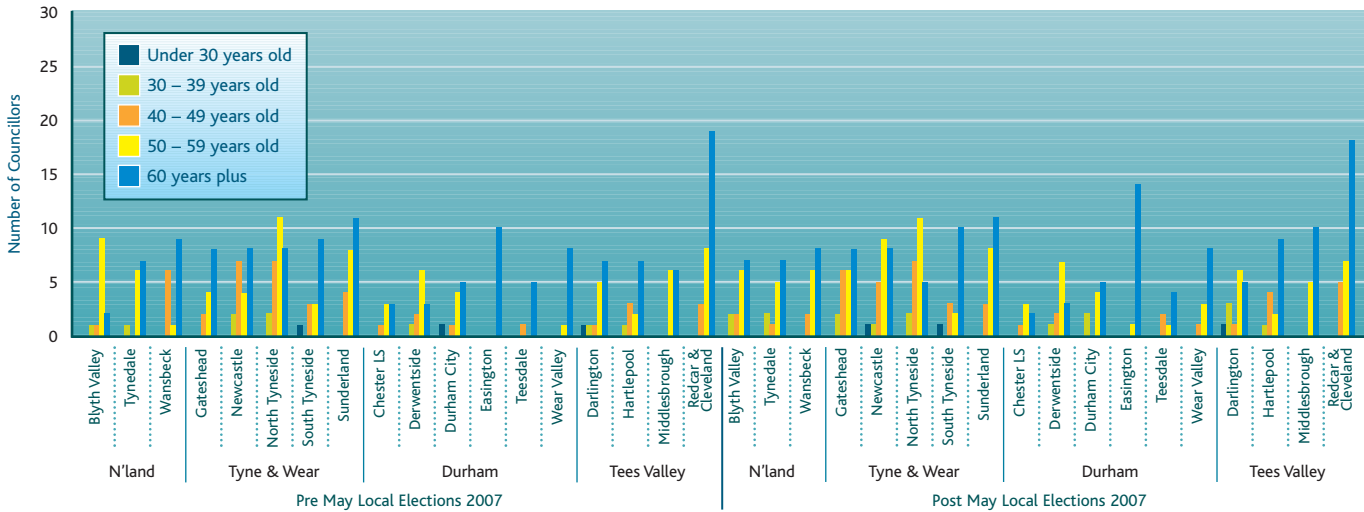
Analysis

The gender ratio of the two County Councils is similar with a clear male majority in both Councils. In total, before the 2007 May election there were 24 female councillors and 105 male councillors recorded in the County Councils. By-elections resulted in minor change in Northumberland post 2007 with the election of only one extra male councillor taking their total of male councillors to 106.

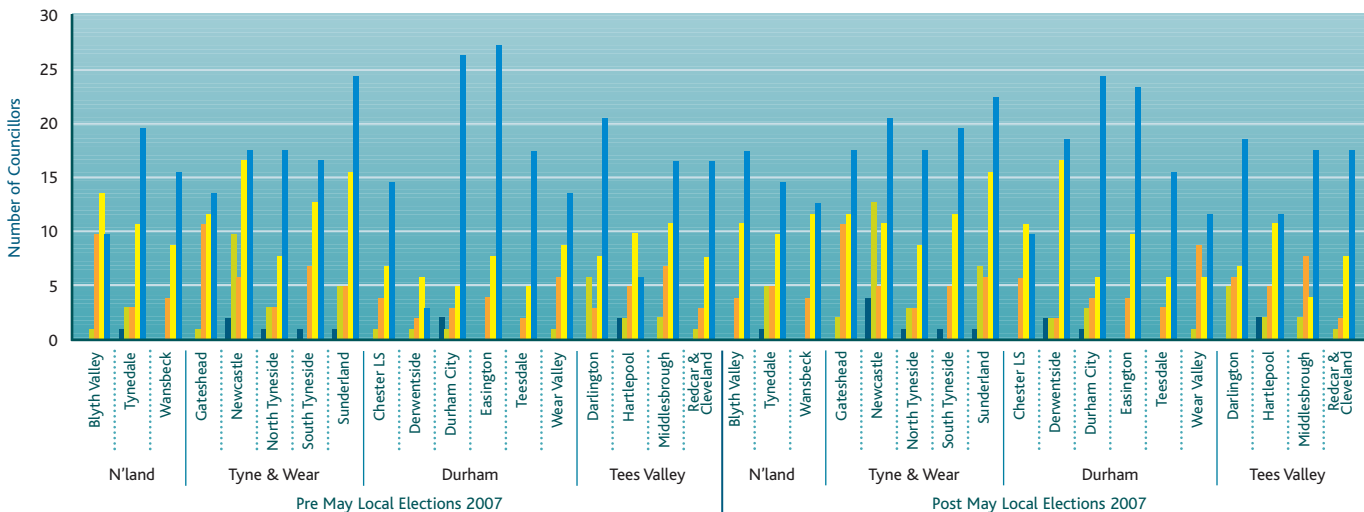
Both genders in the County Councils have predominantly older age profiles. Before and after the 2007 May election there were no councillors under 30 years old and only three rising to four 30 – 39 year old councillors. In both councils councillors are predominantly aged over 50 with the highest proportions aged 60 and over.

There were no female BME or disabled councillors recorded in either County Council before or after the 2007 May election. Northumberland has no recorded male BME councillors and Durham has only one BME councillor who is over 60 years old. Durham has no recorded disabled councillors but Northumberland has seven male disabled councillors five of whom are aged over 60 years, one is 50 – 59 and one is aged 40 – 49.

Female Councillors



Male Councillors



District, Unitary and Metropolitan Councils by Sub Region

Summary

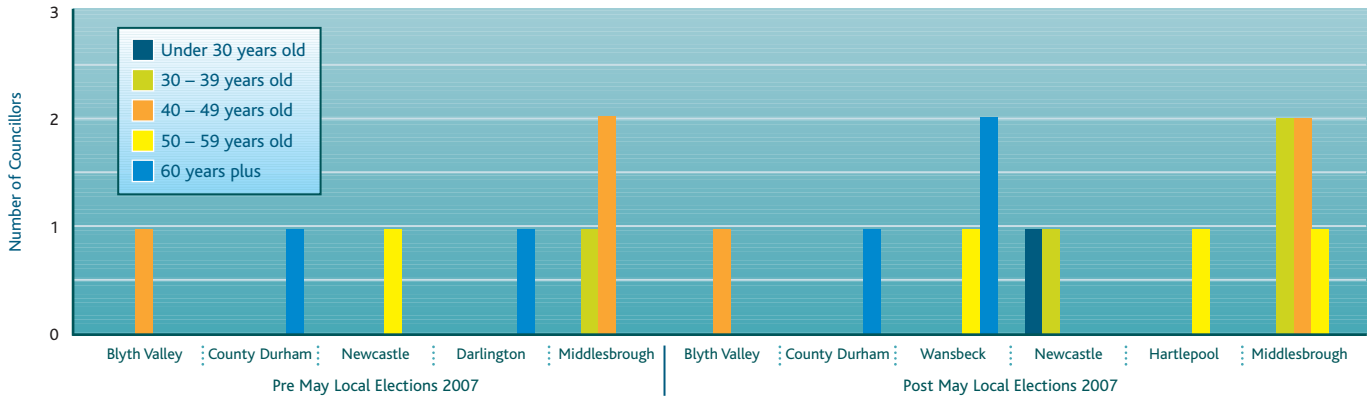
The majority of councillors are male. The age profile of both female and male councillors at district level is predominately older with the majority of councillors aged 60 years and over. Notably, there are only three women councillors under 30 years old.

In the female councillor data after the 2007 May election the profile alters little with a small rise in the age profile of female councillors.

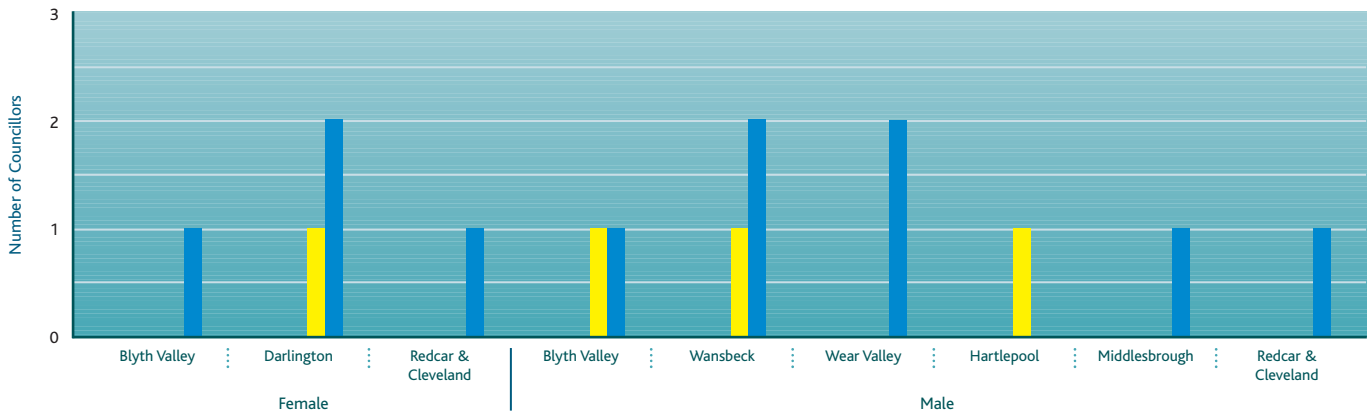
In comparison to the small number of under 30 year old female councillors (three) there are a total of ten male councillors under the age of 30, half of whom are from one sub-region, Tyne and Wear.

The male profile shows little change pre and post May 2007.

Male BME Councillors in North East Local Authorities



Disabled Councillors in North East Local Authorities



Black and Minority Ethnic Councillors

Summary

No data was received on female BME councillors therefore no gender comparison can be made.

There are limited numbers of male BME councillors. There are a total of seven male BME councillors (including the one BME councillor from Durham County Council) before the 2007 May election but this rises to 13 (including the one BME councillor from Durham County Council) after the May election.

Sub-regionally, Tees Valley has the majority of BME male councillors with a total of four before the May election and six after. Northumberland had one BME councillor before the May election rising to four after the 2007 election.

Although there are no under 30 year old BME councillors the majority of BME councillors are aged between 40 – 49 years old; this is markedly different from the age profile of councillors as a whole.

Post the 2007 May election the age profile of BME councillors changed with a more balanced spread across the age categories with more younger BME male councillors.

Disabled Councillor Profile

Summary

Data on councillors with disabilities was only asked in the post 2007 May election questionnaire.

There were a total of five female disabled councillors and ten male disabled councillors.

All disabled councillors were over 50 years old and the majority were over 60 years old.



The Association of North East Councils is the political voice for local government in the North East. It represents all local authorities in the region, throughout Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and the Tees Valley on issues of concern to them and the communities they serve.

It is a cross-Party organisation, with all of its members democratically elected and accountable politicians.

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