

A talent-spotter's
recruitment manual for the
2010 London local elections
The X factor





Foreword

Local government is only ever as vibrant, effective and relevant as the people elected to run it. In London we're doing quite well - each election sees a steady increase in the numbers of young and female councillors elected, as well as those from Asian, black and other minority ethnic groups. But all these groups are still under-represented in London politics.

Increasing the talent and diversity of candidates and councillors is important if we're to make sure that London's local government is both relevant to and representative of Londoners. So, when communities look to their local councils, they see democracy as something they can be a part of and influence - rather than something done to them.

We've got an opportunity in 2010 to build on the improvements of previous elections, and to really reach out to our different communities to find inspiring new people to stand for their local councils.

This publication captures some of the good work already going on among London's political parties and in councils to find and encourage new talent and refresh local politics. However we can all learn lessons and pick up useful ideas from what's happening elsewhere.

If every council and political group put into practice even some of the ideas in this handbook, our councils in 2010 and beyond will better reflect their local communities in terms of age, gender, religion, ethnic origin and life experience. By harnessing talent wherever it is found, we will have councillors better able to both represent our communities and fight for every resident in our boroughs.

So, please take some time to read this booklet, and act on the suggestions that have been drawn from across London. Not everything you do from now until 2010 will be successful - but it's still worth doing. All our councillors should be representative, reliable and reputable - and connected to their communities.

This manual is part of a wider campaign by London Councils and the Leadership Centre; **Project 2010**, to raise awareness with the public of the work of local councils. Over the longer term, bringing in new talent - and making local government more relevant to its citizens - is not only one of local government's strongest hands for combating voter apathy and low turnout but is also vital in delivering the high quality local government services a world city like London demands and deserves.

Cllr Merrick Cockell
Chairman, London Councils

Message to leaders and selectors

Over the next few years London's local government has to face up to a very real challenge: how to make sure it connects to the aspirations and needs of its citizens. Turnout in the 2002 London elections fell below 33% and while 2006 saw it climb back to 38%, it's too early to say if this is a temporary or permanent recovery. The city is also becoming increasingly fragmented - 300 languages are spoken here - and the population moves and changes much more rapidly than in the past.

To meet this challenge, one of the things London's local government must do is to ensure it represents the very diverse range of its population. This is not just a case of encouraging more diversity - though harnessing the talents of the young, professionals, women and people from London's many ethnic communities will certainly make councils more vibrant. We also want to raise the quality of all councillors. We need different kinds of people willing to put themselves up for election, so that parties get a choice of quality candidates to select from.

To do that, parties have to go out and find new talent: people who are ordinary enough to be representative, but extraordinary enough to be representatives. It's time to get rid of the 'buggins' turn' mentality of councillor selection, where candidates are chosen from within a small number of committed activists.

Political parties should be more entrepreneurial in the way they approach councillor recruitment. As in industry, to get the right people, leaders and parties need to do more talent-spotting and to get those involved in selection to think more creatively about how to widen the talent pool.

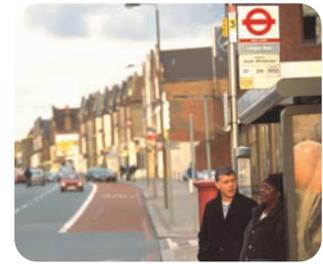
Parties will have to get out in the world, keeping eyes open for committed, enthusiastic people willing to do their bit for their communities. This isn't the way many parties usually approach the issue, and there will have to be a change of culture, for selectors to think outside their usual circles and for political parties to become more outward-looking in the way they approach councillor recruitment.

Leaders, parties and councils around London have already started the work. The London boroughs of Ealing, Islington, Lambeth and Tower Hamlets are examples where strong and successful efforts have been made to reach out to the wider community - more details of which can be found in the case study section at the back of this publication. We can all learn from their experiences.

In the end, it is the electorate who is in control - but we can make sure that the quality and diversity of all candidates

means that whoever is elected will be effective representatives for their localities. This publication outlines how we can achieve this, how talent can be found, how to make others' experience work in your area, and who can help you.

It takes between 12 and 18 months to select, train and embed a new council candidate - it's vital that councils and parties in London start to focus on the need for new blood in the 2010 elections now.



Are you ready to make a difference in 2010?

To be sure of getting the best candidates for the 2010 elections, a number of areas need to be considered beforehand and a few steps taken now:

The decision to do it

To find good candidates, get them selected, establish them in the ward, train them up to be part of the team. It's a long process that can't be done in less than 12 months, and probably takes more like two years. So it needs to be started now.

A gap analysis

Look at the current team and work out what the gaps are. What talent is lacking on the council - is it missing professional people, women or members of black and minority ethnic groups (BME), people from a particular area or community from within the borough? Are you looking for future cabinet material, and are there particular portfolios that require expertise? Or does the team need some of the energy and dynamism that comes from the quick turnover of people who are elected for a term and then move on? Before the 2002 elections in Islington, the Liberal Democrats did a skills audit across the group and across wards to find out what type of people and skills were lacking (see case study page 20)

Publicising and promoting the role

One of the reasons people don't put themselves forward as candidates is that they don't have a clue about what the council does, what being a councillor entails and what sort of people can be councillors - i.e. people like them. Start an education campaign:

- Articles in the council magazine and on party leaflets on being a councillor; councillor of the month column
- Party and council-led open days
- Question time events with councillors
- Information on the website
- Advertise the date for application

Getting the party inside

Political parties need to become more outward-looking if candidates who break the usual mould are to be encouraged and welcomed, but changing the way things are done can be upsetting and create resistance. Start by looking at party structures such as the constitution and selection process to see how they can be made more open. Then look at other roles: is there someone who could be asked to have an external focus so that it becomes their job to encourage more people to get involved? Who is going to be the person responsible for preparing potential and actual candidates for the job?

Systems analysis

A good look at the systems in place for supporting potential and actual candidates - do they help to develop confident, team-minded councillors?

What the council can and cannot do

While the council cannot involve itself in the politics it does have a corporate responsibility to make sure the organisation is run properly - so it can get involved in recruitment and training of councillors, with cross-party support. With the support of its member development committee Tower Hamlets set up a programme to encourage women to stand as councillors (see case study page 24).



Finding the talent

Unearthing the stars of the future takes determination - if it were straightforward everyone would already be doing it. First must come the understanding of why it is necessary, then a commitment to doing things differently, followed by a plan of how to achieve it - being clear about what you want to do and why will make it easier to spot the talent when you come across it.

Consider the following questions:



Who are you looking for?

Who are the under-represented groups in the community?

Who should be talent spotting?

- **Councillors:** every councillor should be thinking in terms of where the next intake of talent is going to come from
- **Political groups and local parties:** members will know other people who share their views
- **The council:** it should also be concerned with how to make sure there is a vibrant selection process in all parties in all seats, as it is competition that will raise the quality of councillors and keep standards high - this obviously has to be done with cross-party consent; officers must not be encouraged to influence politics

Why aren't talented people coming forward already?

- It can be as simple as never having been asked
- People don't know anything about the council and have strange ideas about what being a councillor means
- They don't know anything about politics and how it works
- They've never thought of themselves as councillor material

What are the qualities you are looking for in potential candidates?

Council teams need a range of skills, and very few of them are about academic achievement or material success. But there are a number of personal qualities that potential candidates do need to possess - most of the other skills councillors need can be developed in them before and after they are elected. Look for:

- Raw energy and the desire to improve things
- Team player
- Reliability
- Loyalty
- The ability to communicate



Where to find potential councillors

At the moment too many council candidates are selected from a small pool of people who are already active, which in some areas can mean a number as small as the party members who go along to meetings.

To be properly democratic, the field needs to be opened up to include a much wider range of people who have the potential to be exciting and committed councillors.

This should not be left to chance. While many council leaders are already in the habit of asking star performers they meet in the course of their activities to stand for election, it can be more difficult for those in opposition, even group leaders, to do so as they tend not to come across as many people. It is also not necessarily enough just to ask those they happen to meet, and effort and imagination needs to be put into thinking who are the people they don't meet who might make good candidates.



Where to start the search

In the local party

How many members on the party roll never come to meetings? These are people who may not find the monthly meetings a rewarding way to spend their time but are at least interested enough to pay for a membership. Write to every member and invite them to an event to learn about becoming a councillor, and ask them to bring friends or family they think could be interested. Or focus on a particular segment of the membership. Lambeth Labour group had a great deal of success in finding BME candidates by going through the membership lists of the three constituency parties (see case study page 22).

At the surgery

People who come in to complain about something that's not right in the area are people who care enough to voice their opinion. Their enthusiasm for change makes them potential councillor material.

From the business community

Most councils are short of councillors of working age. Talk to local businesses via the chamber of commerce or other forums.

Among local volunteers

Bright sparks can often be found spearheading local campaigns, or leading local bodies such as tenants' associations, youth clubs, residents' associations and neighbourhood watch groups.

Local faith groups

These can be both a source of recruitment and support for those selected.

Already active members of society

School governors; street wardens, neighbourhood watch co-ordinators, members of legal boards, learning and health trusts, JPs.

Anyone with a passion

These may be people who come along to consultations or neighbourhood committee meetings. Tap into their passion and persuade them that they can have more influence as a councillor.



Schools and colleges

Young people often have lots of energy for changing the world, but don't know where to begin. By talking to sixth formers and college political groups, councillors can let them know that there are opportunities for them - and that their participation is welcomed.

At public events and places

Council open days, fairs, even the local farmer's market or street market, leisure centres and libraries. Getting out, meeting people and talking to them about the job, what the council does, what it is responsible for, is crucial to promoting the profile of councillors.

Advertise

There will be people out there in your local community who aren't perhaps active currently, but either have been in the past or would like to be in the future. They need to know that local parties are looking for people just like them. Ealing Conservative group decided to act on this and took out an ad in the local paper inviting people who would like to find out more to come to a meeting - 55 turned up to the first meeting (see case study page 18).

Other boroughs

Young people in particular move around a lot in London. If you meet young people who you think would make good councillors in your borough, encourage them to move in.

How many people in these categories have you approached and talked to about their potential to make a good councillor?

Activists in community groups	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any local party member or known person retiring from a public service position (eg civil servant, teacher etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any of your deliverers who read the leaflets and comment on them	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any woman on any council estate who is worried about the quality of life and services for her and her family	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aspiring parliamentary candidates even those just starting the approval process	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chair of a local voluntary group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chairs of tenants' associations	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charity workers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contacts and supporters of former/retiring councillors	<input type="checkbox"/>
Especially if they are an ethnic minority group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Former candidates who only stood because they knew they would lose	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local business man or woman	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local party activists	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPs' political assistants and other paid party political officers neighbourhood forums or area committees etc	<input type="checkbox"/>
People who complain about the council	<input type="checkbox"/>
People who move into your area and who are party members already	<input type="checkbox"/>
People who put up posters and then do a bit more	<input type="checkbox"/>
People who respond to party political broadcasts	<input type="checkbox"/>
People you meet on the doorstep, on the bus and in the supermarket queue	<input type="checkbox"/>
People you think could do the job well (and don't forget to tell them that)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regular attendees at local community meetings,	<input type="checkbox"/>
School governors	<input type="checkbox"/>
Someone one of your councillors knows (from Church, from a community group, from a charity or from work)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student activists, even if they don't live in your area yet	<input type="checkbox"/>



Persuading people to stand

So, you've spotted someone you think would make a good councillor. How do you convince them?

First step - ask them - A recent survey showed that two-thirds of candidates in the 2007 local elections stood after being asked to do so - people tend not to think of themselves as councillor material until someone else sees it in them.

Follow them up - people who do not particularly see themselves as potential councillors will need to be actively encouraged before they get the confidence to commit themselves.

Tailor your approach - for example young people may be worried about how much time they will have to devote to being a councillor.

Invite them to an event - that explains exactly what a councillor does and what the expected commitment will be.

Arrange for them to shadow a councillor - they need to see evidence that they won't be wasting their time, and can really get things done.

Observe them in a number of informal settings - take them out campaigning to see how they interact with members of the public; hold an informal policy workshop or do some role play to check they have a common sense approach.

Reassure them - that there is no formal qualification and that all individuals do the job differently.

Assure them - that support and training will be available before and after election (and make sure this is true!).

Emphasise the benefits of being a councillor -

- The unique opportunity to change people's lives
- Support from the council to do the work
- Wide experience of people and place
- Professional development
- Small but significant level of remuneration
- The sense of belonging to your neighbourhood

Signing them up

Once a potential candidate has been talent-spotted, and expressed an interest in becoming a councillor, it's time to seal the deal.

This is the stage to make sure that people understand what they are letting themselves in for. What should they be aware of?

- That agreeing to stand as a council candidate via the party route means committing themselves to becoming a member of a political party
- The amount of time they will need to put into getting to know their ward and campaigning in the 12-18 months prior to election
- Any other demands on their time, such as group meetings and training sessions
- What you will do for them - for instance, identify their training needs, pair them up with an experienced colleague or help them with campaigning

Make sure they understand politics. Not understanding the politics of local government can be a real barrier to people even beginning to consider themselves as possible councillors. People can't be expected to work the system unless they understand the system. Lambeth Labour group found informing a group of interested people about how the politics of the party and the council worked helped demystify the whole selection/election process and encouraged them to stand.

Be aware that at any stage in the process between the original suggestion to become a councillor and selection, people may drop out, and you may find yourself investing time in people who don't stay the course - or worse, decide to stand for the opposition! Try not to lose those people. Encourage them to take on another public position such as school governor or member of the learning trust or hospital trust. This way you may get them to stand the next time round.



Preparing candidates

Potential candidates - particularly those who are not long-term members of a political party - will need careful preparation to make it through the complexities of the selection process:

Briefing them - so that they are clear about what is entailed in getting selected is vital. They will need to understand the ward they are up for, and be confident about writing and delivering a speech to the selection panel. They may also need help in how to answer particular questions, especially about their party values, and be briefed on what the panel is looking for. A party or group member should be nominated to guide new candidates through the process.

Matching party values - it is important to make sure potential candidates understand and share the values of the political party they are representing, and what it means to be part of a political group on the council - such as the need for team loyalty, following the whip and collective responsibility.

This isn't about having an encyclopaedic knowledge of party policy -

A large percentage of the work councils do is determined by central government legislation. Local councils vary widely because of their style and the approach they take to delivering these central government programmes, and it is here that party values come to the fore.

Running a successful selection process

The selection process is crucial to diversifying the intake of new councillors - because putting the right candidates in the right seats is the only way to ensure that a more representative set of councillors is actually elected.

Every party has its own way of doing these things, but all parties have learned the hard way that selecting an unsuitable candidate can cause great misery within any administration or opposition. It is much harder to stop people being councillors once they have been elected than it is to weed out the misfits at the selection stage.

Any selection process works best when there are more applicants than places - one of the aims of this handbook is make sure that there are sufficient high calibre candidates to make for a vibrant selection.

- Ask searching questions when vetting candidates:
 - Do they pass the Sun test (i.e. is there anything embarrassing in their past that the Sun would be interested in)? This will include: rent arrears, council tax arrears, county court judgements, previous convictions, being on the sex offenders' register - in fact anything that could inflict damage on the party and other candidates if it were highlighted in the media.
 - Are they fully signed up to the party, and do they understand the meaning of party loyalty and following the whip? How will they react if the party wants to do something they personally disagree with?

- Upsetting the old order, and changing the way seats are dealt out might put 'noses out of joint' - so it makes sense to have the party on side with the new aspirations very early on
- Selectors are often more cautious than electors, and may only want to select obvious winners in any particular seat - often this results in newer candidates being given the least winnable seats
- In Lambeth they experimented with putting new candidates in the safe seats, and leaving the marginals to more experienced people to fight, which proved to be a win-win situation for them
- Balance the ticket in three-member wards
- Could the selection process be refreshed? In some ward parties, selections are in the hands of a very small number of people. Opening up the selection process by inviting all ward members, or considering the use of open primaries - where all the residents of a ward are invited to attend - will mean that candidates are selected by a wider range of people



Supporting candidates

The more support candidates receive before election, the sooner they are likely to be up and running as councillors. Building an esprit de corps in the early stages will also pay dividends in terms of team building and loyalty later on.

Mentoring

Set up a mentoring system: pair up new candidates with experienced councillors, either within the ward or across the council.

Training

Talk to each new candidate to find out what his or her individual training needs are - and then provide the right training. Put on party training programmes that cover campaigning, policy formation and political knowledge.

Networking

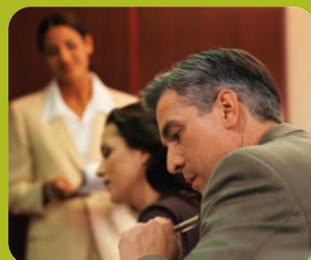
Bring all new candidates together frequently before the election so that they can get to know each other and form a support network among themselves. Introduce them to current councillors and put on activities that involve both new and seasoned candidates.

Practical experience

Set up the ward groups as action teams in the period up to the election to campaign. Invite candidates to sit in on a council meeting, so they know what to expect.

Team building

Get to know the prospective candidates, find out what they like, where their interests lie, so that you can start to form a team of all the talents and make sure that if they are elected they have a clear role.



Now it's up to you...

The number of Britons who are active members of any of the three main political parties is fewer than 200,000. From this small proportion of the total population, is drawn almost every elected politician who exercises democratic power. Statistically, we know that this small group cannot include all the best, or the brightest, in our community, or truly reflect the people they represent.

We risk ignoring the greater potential of our local population if we confine our councillor candidate recruitment to local party members, party activists, safe pairs of hands and 'friends'.

When local residents see a photo of their new council they'll want to pick people out of the photo and say: 'That one looks like me'. However this is not just about diversity by race and gender, but also by age, experience, education, and 'electability'. It's about talent and ability, potential and ambition.

Before you start looking, conduct a skills audit of your current group. Audit the whole group as well as ward by ward. This is a useful tool when you recruit candidates. It should give you a list of the types of people to consider approaching.

You need to consider the qualities that matter. The party line comes over more in how you do things than in what you do. So a close working knowledge of party policy over the past 15 years might not be essential. Whilst it is important to communicate with your local electorate, a lengthy track-record of leaflet delivery, or attendance at party meetings, is not necessarily an essential qualification either. Other qualities may resonate more with the community each new councillor represents.

The desire to improve people's lives is vital. Being ambitious (for their area, their colleagues, their council and even for themselves) is important. Loyalty to colleagues, to the area, and to the Party values is a definite must, as is a willingness to work as a team. Develop a list from your previous good - and bad - selection experiences.

Passion is also critical. People who complain about the council are usually people who want to do something about making it better. They are already half way to becoming an activist. Harness that passion and you are there.

Having identified the type of person, and then the individuals, you have to ask them to stand - sometimes again and again. Encourage them to have the confidence that they can do the job. With good advice, and your support, they will enjoy the role and become effective members of your team.

Good luck.

Clare Whelan, Paul Wheeler, Steve Hitchins

Project 2010

Leadership Centre party leads

Experiences so far

London Borough of Ealing

When Jason Stacey became leader of Ealing Conservative group in 2004 he realised very quickly that if his group - a rump of 17 out of 69 councillors, mostly male, all white - was to make headway in the 2006 elections, it needed to have a much broader appeal.

So he decided to do something they hadn't tried before - he put an advertisement in the local paper calling for people who were Conservative inclined to consider being a councillor. 'It was quite difficult to get through the party - some people thought it looked desperate,' he remembers.

The people who replied to the ad were unexpectedly broad in their range - a number of ethnic minority people, younger people, women and local people of commitment and energy. Stacey invited them along to one of two open evenings in the council chamber to learn what being a councillor was all about - 55 people turned up.

'I was keen to be totally honest about what being a councillor was all about. A few people wrote to me afterwards saying - looking at their



other commitments in life, it wasn't possible just at that point, but they'd bear it in mind for the future. We lost a lot of people at that stage - some people were just there to find out a bit more rather than get involved and one or two were sent along by our opponents.'

Of the 55, seven became serious contenders, but the next stage presented the biggest hurdle: 'I had to do two things at that point. Candidates had to understand that once they'd accepted, there were a number of caveats. It couldn't just be a one-way street.

'First I had to take them to the centralised selection committee where they faced a barrage of questioning from experienced local politicians. Second, since some of them weren't members - this was the point at which they had to join the party to prove their commitment. This took considerable changing of some attitudes - several of the long-serving politicians needed convincing just because someone hadn't been a

member for x number of years, they could still be a good candidate.'

All seven got through this stage, six ended up as candidates and four as councillors.

'What was clear was that most people don't understand where councillors come from, and when they realise it's people like them, they step up,' says Stacey.

'With the ad, a pack that we sent out to people, plus the events, it cost us about £1000. But it was definitely worthwhile. We got an article in the local paper too, and as well as finding some good candidates we got the message over to the wider public that we were making an effort to find good candidates.'



Councillor profile:

Anjana Patel
Conservative, Harrow

Anjana Patel says she is 'a councillor by accident', an illustration of how a member of the public, activated by a local issue, can be encouraged to use their talents on behalf of their community by becoming a councillor.

Two episodes roused Anjana to action: the first a community issue affecting the temple she attended, and a personal one concerning getting her son into a local school. In both Anjana came into contact with her council and councillors and found them wanting: 'I felt the council didn't listen to what people had to say, that our community had no effective representation on the council - and my own ward councillors didn't even reply when I contacted them.'

In the January before the 2002 elections she heard the Conservative Party was appealing for ethnic minority councillors. Eventually she was persuaded, joined the party and signed up just two months before the election.

'I looked at how hard I had had to fight to get my voice heard by the council, and realised I could help people who didn't have my opportunities and fighting spirit. It's not the politics that motivate me, I'm there to fight for people.'

Experiences so far

London Borough of Islington

Recruiting a talented and diverse team in Islington was a critical part of winning elections and later control of the council. It displayed the ability to represent all the community and do it well. Council leader (2000-06) Steve Hitchins explains their approach:

'In 1998 the number of Liberal Democrat councillors jumped from 12 to 26. Not one of those 26 were surprised to win. Each had been selected, rather, hand-picked because they suited the ward, they complemented their colleagues in the ward and made up a very diverse team across the whole council.

This was taken a stage further four years later in 2002 when 38 seats were won and the 'most diverse council group in the country' (IDeA) was elected.



More women than men, 36 (or under) years old, five council tenants and as many leaseholders, six BME councillors, a severely disabled councillor, six pensioners and 12 Oxbridge graduates! Of course, being Islington every sexual orientation was also well represented!

This was no accident and in fact the ability to win all those council seats in the election was a function of the commitment to the cause that members of this diverse team each brought.

The approach was quite forensic and was undertaken ward by ward. Factors taken into consideration included the skills and ability of the candidates, living in the ward, of course, their ability to win enough votes as well as the abilities of their incumbent opponents. Skills were matched such as pairing an assiduous ward worker keen on casework with an aspiring future MP in a complementary way.

The potential candidates were identified and then directly approached. If they said no - as they almost all did the first time, we asked again; telling them how good they would be, how right they were for the job and how much support they could expect from colleagues.

With just a very few exceptions they eventually agreed and were later elected.

The commitment to talent and diversity continues with 16 of the current 24 Liberal Democrats being women, the largest proportion in any majority group anywhere!



Councillor profile:

Hayley Matthews
Lib Dem, Brent

Hayley Matthews never really thought about being a councillor until it happened - she's a great example of what talent can be found by simply asking. She was only 22 and like most people of her age, didn't have a real understanding of what being a councillor was about. But back home after university, and interested in possible careers in politics, she decided to lend a hand helping her local party campaign for the 2006 local elections.

'It turned out to be really good fun and the second time I went I met Sarah Teather, the local MP, who said to me: "We need more women. You should think about standing." I didn't take her very seriously, but after six weeks they asked me properly'.

'I didn't really know what to expect but I loved the campaign and got swept along by the amazing team spirit. I woke up the day after polling day as a councillor - and I've loved it ever since. And now, a number of my friends are considering putting themselves forward because they now understand what a councillor does and that it's not just for older people'.

Experiences so far

London Borough of Lambeth



Lambeth Labour group's review of why they lost in 2002 threw up some worrying statistics, one of which was that a candidate from a black or minority ethnic group was seven times less likely to get elected than a white woman - mainly because they ended up in seats that were not winnable.

Alarmed by the lack of BME candidates for the 2006 elections, the Labour group embarked on a campaign, 'Integrated Voices in Leadership', to encourage more BME people to stand as candidates and, crucially, win seats. Armed with a budget of £800 - a fortune in local party terms - they began by identifying all the BME Labour members they could find and inviting them to an initial event to meet some political role models and discuss what more the Labour Party needed to do for BME communities, to encourage people like them to stand.

'One of the main things they wanted was to understand how the political world works - the feeling was they

couldn't work the system unless they knew what the system was' says deputy leader Jackie Meldrum. Subsequent events looked at party structures, how to succeed in politics ('hard work') and heard from real politicians like Baroness Amos about their experiences. **'We wanted them to have a real warts-and-all picture of what it's like,'** says Jackie.

A number of the original attendees made it to the selection process, which was fundamentally modified to allow BME candidates to be selected for winnable seats - previously, the safe seats were filled first, leaving new candidates to fight the marginal seats. **'We needed to win the marginals, so it made sense to have experienced people in those seats rather than newcomers, and it meant a number of BME candidates were bound to be returned,'** Jackie states.

Substantial support was given to candidates in the run-up to the election, including a 'buddying' system with longer serving colleagues, training in basic communications skills and encouraging BME candidates to support each other. The result was 12 of the 37 councillors elected for Labour were from BME communities.

'It was very successful in 2006,' says Jackie, 'and we're going to have to do something similar for 2010 as many of our councillors only serve for one term. We'll be looking at how to encourage women as well next time.'



Councillor profile:

Florence Nosegbe
Labour, Lambeth

Florence Nosegbe has always been political - brought up on a council estate she saw at firsthand many of life's injustices and went on to study politics at university - but the fact that she is now a Lambeth councillor is down to a combination of her own talents and the Labour group's Integrated Voices programme.

'It gave people like me the idea that we could be councillors by showing us role models, and helping us think how we could increase the representation of BME communities'.

'I felt very young - I was just 25 when I was elected - and I was also worried about the commitment that was needed and how it would affect my day job. But I got such a lot of support from the group and from other councillors during the eight months I was a candidate that I felt well prepared by the time I was actually elected in 2006'.

'I am now the Deputy Cabinet Member for Young People and there are days when things can get hectic - but I'm enjoying working with all the young people and the other residents of Lambeth'.

Experiences so far

The corporate perspective -
what a council can do:

London Borough of Tower Hamlets



Tower Hamlets' Councillors of the Future programme is an example of how councils can take a lead in encouraging people from many different walks of life to become councillors - it doesn't all have to be down to political parties.

Councillors of the Future aims to encourage women from the borough to consider standing for election - despite being a very diverse team of councillors in terms of ethnicity and age, just 12 of the current cohort of 51 councillors are women. Former assistant chief executive Sara Williams wanted to change that.

'Women are the people most reluctant to push themselves forward - they are conditioned against behaving like that,'

she says. 'They also have a more challenging mix of responsibilities than men that prevents them from taking up opportunities, so if we want more women on the council we have to really encourage them.'

Building on the success of a previous council programme, Women into Public

Life, which recruited a number of women into JP and school governor positions, Councillors of the Future is a cross-party initiative that will provide 12 women with the training and knowledge they need to feel confident to put themselves up for selection. Funded by Capital Ambition, a London wide programme to help councils improve, it will help potential recruits to understand the politics, find out what councillors do, meet some politicians and work through some case studies.

'Once they've done a course like this, it gives the political parties a reason to put them on the selection list, alongside people who have come through more conventional routes.'

It is as much in the council's interests as it is the political parties' to encourage more people to stand, believes Sara, and training is a fundamental part of attracting younger, more diverse candidates: 'If councils can help councillors develop in ways that improve their employment prospects, it makes being a councillor a more attractive proposition to people in the younger or 'striving' phase of their lives'.

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For more information on **Project 2010**
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Liberal Democrat group office
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