



The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 450 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and five partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.



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The X factor

Recruiting talent for the 2010 London local elections – what happened next





Foreword

Last year, London Councils and the Leadership Centre for Local Government unveiled Project 2010, a joint campaign to increase the talent and diversity of candidates putting themselves forward for the 2010 London elections.

If we're to make sure that London local government is both relevant to, and representative of, Londoners – so that when people look to their local councils they see a body they can identify with – we have to ensure that the candidates standing for election are selected from across all our communities.

Across the country, the latest survey of council candidates shows that 68.7 per cent of candidates are men, 98 per cent are white, 55 per cent are aged 55 years and over and only 16.1 per cent are aged 40 years or younger. It's better in London, but the survey tells us clearly that unless we take action to change the situation, change won't happen on its own – and democracy will be the worse for it.

I believe it's important for London Councils to take the lead on such an important issue, so I'm very pleased with the way this pioneering and innovative project has taken off since its launch at last year's party spring conferences.

It's been a very successful campaign involving political groups on a dozen London councils, and while the real effect of this and the simultaneous **Be a Councillor** campaign won't be known until the electorate has had its say in 2010, early indications are that it has more than met its ambitions, with over 1,800 new people expressing an interest in becoming a councillor.

This is all due to the special effort councillors around London have put into finding new talent. But this search for new blood has to become a way of life, embedded in the way councillors, council groups, and political parties think and work. It is just too easy to slip back into the old way of doing things – selecting new candidates from those people we know and feel comfortable with.

This update on **Project 2010** describes some of the imaginative and successful initiatives that have been happening in London over the past year to reach out to the communities that are currently under-represented in London local government. It also introduces a sample of those who have taken the plunge and stepped onto the path towards selection. These potential candidates are of various ages and come from a range of backgrounds and professions but they have one thing in common – they only started to consider themselves as councillor material once it had been suggested to them by someone already elected.

If we learn one thing from this booklet, it is that we are surrounded by talented, interested and enthusiastic people who would make excellent councillors. All we have to do is ask.

Cllr Merrick Cockell
Chairman, London Councils



Overview

Reaching out – most councillors would like to think they do it naturally. After all, it's what the job's about isn't it? Finding out about what different communities want, bringing them together, balancing their needs, being accessible and representing people.

Yet when it comes to the numbers, they tell a different story: at the last London elections in 2006, just 20 per cent of councillors elected were of BME origin (compared to 29 per cent of the population) and 33 per cent were women. Only 20 per cent were under the age of 40, although 60 per cent of Londoners are under 40.

The truth is we are reaching out – we're just not reaching out enough. The **Be a Councillor** campaign set out to do two things: to raise awareness with the public of the work of local councils and councillors so that people could see it is something they might contribute to, and to encourage existing councillors themselves to be more proactive in their approach to recruiting a wider range of people to become councillors.

So over the past year, **Project 2010** has been working with a targeted number of political groups to help them become their own 'talent scouts' and identify new candidates who share their party values and understand the concepts of collective responsibility and team working.

"All the councillors I've worked with have been really positive and willing to talk and do new things", says Clare Whelan, the Conservative party lead who has been working with a number of Conservative groups across London.

Paul Wheeler, the Labour party lead, has found a similar level of energy for the programme from a wide group of supporters. He said "We have arranged meetings with active trade unionists and community organisations from the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities. All of them wanted to find out more about the councillor role and how they can represent the party they support in elections. The elections in 2010 will be a big challenge for London Labour and it is encouraging that we have a new generation of potential councillors willing to come forward."



Steve Hitchins, former leader of Islington, and Lib Dem lead, agrees. In his work with London Lib Dem groups, he's found a general acknowledgement that widening recruitment and representation is an issue that needs to be addressed: "It's been a wake up call for politicians to look outside the party for new talent and to trust their judgement as to whether people they meet socially or in the course of their work would make good Lib Dem councillors".

In one borough, just one afternoon spent by councillors identifying people they might approach as potential candidates achieved a list of 46 names. "Not everyone of those will be able to or want to put themselves forward, but the idea is to ask them – and people have been really surprised by the positive reactions they get when they do ask", says Steve.

In Lambeth, Cllr John Whelan, leader of the Conservative group, found exactly this. Inspired by the campaign to start to 'broaden the DNA bank' of aspiring councillors to include people who aren't even party members he set about finding them. Starting with local people who had worked in the Boris campaign, some experiencing politics for the first time, and



moving on to sympathetic community activists, he invited them all to an event introducing them to the work of a councillor. The results exceeded his expectations, with around 30 people attending and, a couple of months on, 12 of those, all new to the party, had applied to become candidates for the 2010 elections. "Having begun as sceptics about the **Be a Councillor** initiative, there's no doubt that the Conservative group in Lambeth has been converted to a new way of doing things," he says. Cllr Jason Stacey, leader of Ealing was similarly enthusiastic: "The X factor event at the Ealing Town Hall was well attended and enjoyed by those present. It was good to see the level of interest and enthusiasm and I would certainly wish to do a similar event in the future".

Cllr Muhammed Butt, deputy leader of the Labour group in Brent, had an even more overwhelming experience when he decided to make the most of the Obama election to get more women and more people from the black and Asian communities to come and stand as Labour candidates.



He explains: "We woke up to the Obama factor because a lot of people were talking about him being the next black president in the run-up, and it made sense to capitalise on people's ideas of what's happening in the world. We decided to write to members and to friends, to all the people that we know, all the communities that we mix with as councillors to put out a message that we're looking for people to put their names forward...so that they can ask questions; what a councillor does, what our roles are, how we do things in the council chamber, community structures, and how they could be a part of it."

Cllr Butt and his group sent out 500 invites to an event – and 100 people turned up, all Labour-leaning, all interested in finding out about being a councillor and from a whole span of faiths and communities. The next step is to convert this huge enthusiasm into people prepared to actually stand. "We had no idea that there was this level of interest out there – we were quite prepared to get no response at all – it's really changed the way we think about recruiting."

If you add to these stories the 6,500 people who have visited the **Be a Councillor** website, the 5000 people who have received a **Be a Councillor** booklet, the 2000 *X Factor* recruitment manuals that have been distributed to councillors giving them lots of ideas about how to go about spotting new talent among people in their communities, it is evident that the whole campaign to widen the talent pool of London councillors has really struck a chord – with recruiters and potential candidates alike.

No one can rest on their laurels – all this interest has yet to be converted into actual councillors selected and elected – but these stories show it's possible for us all to change the way we think about recruitment. The case studies that follow are inspiring stories of some of those who've been drawn in by the campaign.



Tulip Siddiq

Labour, Camden

By standing as a councillor in Camden Tulip Siddiq wants to break the mould of local politics in her borough: "There's a large ethnic minority community in Camden, but only one female Asian councillor in the Labour party there. I want to make sure the voices of all constituents are heard equally."

Tulip was born in the UK but moved to Bangladesh aged 4 where she was brought up in a politically active family. She then returned to this country ten years ago to do her A-levels. She soon started to volunteer at the Labour Party, and has been involved in politics one way or another ever since. She's met some inspiring role models, such as Oona King and Baroness Uddin, and has used her language abilities (her mother tongue is Bengali) to help members of her local community find their way through English bureaucracy.

It's given her a real insight into the problems that many immigrant communities face. "Women from BME communities are being marginalised from the mainstream of political life. That must change – I want to show people that a young woman from a BME community can have influence and can actively participate in the policy-making process."

Tulip is keen to emphasise that she has wider interests too, and if she is elected will be looking at employment, social housing and other local issues. "My ultimate aim is to increase community engagement as a whole" she says.



Dr Max Chauhan

Conservative, Kensington & Chelsea

A talent-spotter's dream – active in local faith groups, the local Conservative Association, residents' association, societies and church – Max had never thought about being a council candidate until it was suggested to him by local councillor Ian Donaldson.

Even though he and his wife were both very involved in the community, and had lived in the ward since 1987, he didn't warm to the idea initially. "I thought he was just being neighbourly, but he was so persuasive so I eventually agreed to formally declare an interest to stand", said Max. This was the cue for a whole raft of support which is offered to all potential candidates in his borough: attending committee meetings, going out canvassing in the London mayoral election – which reassured him that it was something he wanted to do.

Meeting other councillors also set Max's mind at rest that it was possible to be an effective councillor and do the day job – he is a specialist oral surgeon at King's College Hospital. "The more I look the better it is. I keep asking everyone I meet to put me off, but they can't", he says.

Now he's eager to get past the selection panel and get elected – to help his constituents get access to whatever they need and improve the quality of life of the local community – for his constituents, himself and his family in the process.



Julia Memery

Conservative, Lambeth

Julia has always been interested in politics, but the demands of a busy career in banking, alongside studying for an MBA, didn't leave much free time.

After completing her studies in 2008 she found she had some time to spare, and – having lived for six years in Clapham – she realised she'd like to become more active in the community. She approached her local Conservative party to see what more she could do at a local level – and it was suggested that she think about becoming a councillor. "My aunt is a councillor in the Midlands and so I knew a bit about what was involved", she explains. "And it seemed like a good way of being more active in the community, and helping out on local issues."

Before she knew it she was approved as a candidate and has now been selected to stand in 2010. As a 29-year-old businesswoman she hopes to bring a different dynamic to the group in her borough, and to bring her local knowledge and commitment to bear on a number of issues such as post office and police station closures.

But what if she doesn't get in? "I'll definitely stay involved with the local party," she says. "The party still needs activists and my overall objectives have always been to support and raise awareness around local issues and to promote the party."



Keadean Rhoden

Labour, Southwark

Keadean saw her teenage life as stagnant and uninteresting before becoming a Prince's Trust Ambassador. The experience of working in a team encouraged her to spread her wings and she's now a student of psychology at London Metropolitan University.

In addition to her studies, she also runs a project for young people in Bermondsey, as well as being active in her local tenancy association.

At school, Keadean had studied politics, and was drawn to the traditions and ethos of the Labour Party, and soon became convinced that by becoming a councillor she might be able to fulfil her goal of helping the young black community find a more representative and potent public voice.

An invitation to join Gordon Brown at a Downing Street dinner in celebration of Black History Month brought a nervous Keadean face to face with her heroine Oona King, who, when informed of the young woman's ambitions, was able to offer guidance and encouragement.

Passionate about altering the negative perceptions of the young Caribbean community, and about helping young black people discover what's possible, Keadean is a determined 2010 candidate for council election in Southwark.

"Being a councillor would be my way of changing my community and changing the way people think about young people. It's important to get those voices out there, get them heard", she says.



Darren Thornton

Lib Dem, Richmond

Darren Thornton is already well known in his community as someone local people can turn to if they need help. He's the former chair of his estate residents' association and does a lot of voluntary work with local children and old people, and is a community development co-ordinator in his day job. By his own admission he's someone who won't let

go and often takes up issues on behalf of friends and neighbours, and isn't afraid to take the council on if need be.

His fighting spirit led a local Lib Dem councillor to suggest recently he should stand for the council himself. Giving a voice to the people and area where he lives was an attractive prospect, but at first he thought he should stand as an independent as he didn't feel especially politically driven. However, the Lib Dems offered him support and advice, and he realised that he did identify politically with them, so he joined the party, and is now hoping to be the candidate for the 2010 election.

"I wouldn't even have thought about being a councillor without the guidance I got – it's a big role to step into without knowing anything about it", he says, but now he is very excited about the prospect of being able to fight for his neighbours and help the people who make the judgements understand what life is really like for them.



Vamsi Velagapudi

Lib Dem, Islington

As a 30-year-old banker in the City, Vamsi started to feel the need to do something worthwhile, to "balance the karma", as he puts it. He had always voted Lib Dem, and began to get involved at a national level at the time of Nick Clegg's election.

But it was only when he became active in the local Islington party that an idea started to form. "The party there is very strong", he explains, "very young and really diverse. It was an inspiration to me. Before, my impression was that you had to be older – with loads of experience of the local area – to be a councillor. I've only lived in Islington for three years, but seeing lots of other people rather like me – who were on the council – made me realise that becoming involved was really feasible". He's now put himself forward as a candidate for the 2010 elections, supported by councillors in the group.

If he's elected, Vamsi hopes to put his financial skills from the corporate sphere to good use. But what really motivates him is the chance to make sure that everyone's views are represented, and that people are aware of what the council is doing on their behalf. It's why he's passionate about electoral reform. "People, particularly in my own community, don't vote", he says. "I want everyone to understand that their vote can make a difference and I hope to be able to do that as a councillor."

The next steps

When London Councils entered a partnership with us to mount the **Be a Councillor** and **Project 2010** campaigns, we each were, if we were honest, uncertain about what outcomes would be achieved. We had aspirations, but there was little firm good practice across the country on which to build. In our comments to the Councillors Commission we highlighted some of the best practice from the 2006 elections; in particular the approaches of the Conservatives in Ealing, Labour in Lambeth and the Liberal Democrats in Islington. Ultimately it will be London voters who will make the choice as to whom will be their elected representatives, but the evidence to date suggests we have progressed even further. In particular we can show three simple truths:

1. To get more people to stand as councillors first you must ask them.
2. If asked and encouraged there are talented people willing and able to make a contribution to their local communities through seeking elected office.
3. Recognising that the majority of councillors are elected with the support of political groups, those whose previous experience of political organisations may be more limited should be given some help to understand the particular cultures, selection procedures and organisational quirks of the party of their choice.

Politics is a team sport and one of the important lessons is that those taking part can learn new skills and become advocates for the elected role. Political parties have a lot to learn about how to ask and support new team players more effectively but they also have to teach regarding the importance of local democracy.

We therefore commit to the following:

Within London:

1. We will collaborate with London Councils so that the invitation to and purpose of the 2009 London Summit will be extended to

embrace not only all existing London councillors but also those intending to stand as candidates in May 2010.

2. Through the support offered to the intake we aspire to make the first time elected in 2010 a cohort of councillors that:
 - a. Recognises itself as a cohort.
 - b. Is seen as making a discernable difference in the places they represent.
 - c. Is a cohort that within the political groups through whom they are elected, they are seen as changing the culture so that this rate of change is sustained.

Beyond London:

1. To mount versions of the **Be a Councillor** campaign in every single English region.
2. To have exemplar illustrations of innovative practice and achievement in each region.

Within each major party:

1. To increase the offer of support to new cohorts of councillors by extending our existing Next Generation programmes to encompass a **First time is the right time** programme, particularly focused on newly elected councillors in top tier authorities.
2. To improve the offer of support for people coming from particularly underrepresented groups – not least councillors under 35 years old and those from BME backgrounds.

Beyond the parties:

1. In consultation with the Independent group at the LGA to develop an information and guidance offer for those who do not wish to join the existing major parties.
2. To use this whole approach to encourage wider civic engagement which may be a precursor to ultimately seeking elected office.

Joe Simpson

Director of politics

Leadership Centre for Local Government

Appendix

A talent-spotter's checklist

Finding and establishing good candidates can take a year –
so start now!

First steps

- Find out what's missing from your group; any ethnic minorities under-represented, skill sets lacking, neighbourhoods without a voice on the council? Or maybe you need a quick, dynamic turnover of people who are elected for a term and then move on?
- Start an education campaign telling people what being a councillor means. Use websites, press ads, council-led open days etc, to let people know that councillors are people just like them.
- Look at your party's political structures. See if they can become more open, and facilitate a wider selection process. Look to break the mould – even if it means stepping on a few toes! Consider what support systems are in place for potential and actual candidates – are they effective?

Find the talent

- Council teams need a range of skills, not just based on academic achievement or material success. Raw energy, reliability, loyalty and the ability to work in a team and communicate effectively are values which can be identified early on. Other skills can be developed once the individual is elected.
- Every councillor should be on the lookout for talent. Political groups should keep an eye out for dynamic people who share their views, and the council should make sure

there is a vibrant selection process in place right across the board.

Start the search – places to find prospective council candidates should include:

- Your political party – write to every member and invite them to an introductory event.
- At the surgery – identify people who care about their community, they may be ideal councillor material.
- The business community – talk to local businesses via the Chamber of Commerce or other forums.
- Local volunteers – bright sparks can often be found spearheading local campaigns.
- Faith groups – identify leadership material.
- Schools and college political groups – young people often have lots of energy.
- Local events – get out and meet people at open days, farmer's markets, leisure centres and libraries, talk to them about the job; organise a fact-finding event, and advertise it in the local press.

In fact, keep your eyes open for any active members of society, tap into people's passions and persuade them that they can make a real difference as a councillor.

Persuade people to stand – you've spotted a potential councillor. What's the next step?

- Ask them – perhaps they've never considered it.
- Follow them up – instil confidence.
- Invite them to an event.
- Arrange for them to shadow a councillor.
- Observe their communication skills.
- Reassure them that support is always on hand.
- Emphasise that being a councillor is a unique opportunity to change people's lives.

Sign them up

- Make sure that people understand that they're committing to joining a political party. Inform them of the demands being made on their time, the kind of campaigning required and the amount of support available.
- And if you lose someone on the way, encourage them to take on other public duties such as becoming a school governor. You might get them to stand next time round!

Prepare candidates

- Brief potential candidates – so they're properly prepared to deliver a speech and field questions from a selection panel.
- Make sure potential candidates share the core beliefs of the party they're representing.



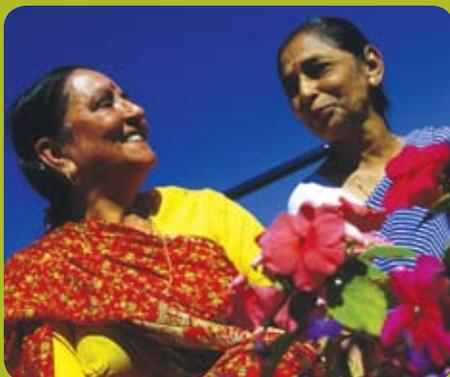
The selection process

- Ensure a more representative set of councillors is elected by looking to diversify the intake.
- Refresh the process by opening it up to a wider selection group.
- Ask searching questions when vetting candidates – are there any skeletons in the cupboard? Do they understand the meaning of following the party whip? It's far easier to remove an unsuitable candidate at selection stage than it is after they're elected to office.

Support candidates

- Building up team spirit early on can pay dividends later.
- Set up a mentoring system – pair up new candidates with experienced councillors.
- Put in place party training programmes covering campaigning, policy formation and political knowledge.
- Encourage your people – new and experienced – to mix with one another through networking events.
- Invite candidates to sit in on council meetings so they know what to expect.
- Get to know your candidates – what makes them tick, what are their passions and talents?

Now it's up to you...



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