ies Report

Institute for Employment Studies

The Power of Parity

A study of how Lewisham Council achieved gender equality at senior levels, the learning and implications.

Dr Duncan Brown

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Lewisham

Institute for Employment Studies

IES is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in HR issues. It works closely with employers in all sectors, government departments, agencies, professional bodies and associations. IES is a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and HR planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation.

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Contents

1   Introduction

Despite the proliferation of equality and diversity policies in major employers and passage of supportive employment legislation over the past 40 years, the UK still has a significant gender pay gap of almost 20 per cent. A major contributor to this is the so called 'glass ceiling' effect (Bryant, 1984), evidenced by a lack of women in the most senior positions.

Lewisham Council has a long history of promoting female equality and for some years has displayed gender parity in the make-up of its senior posts. Just what is it that explains Lewisham's success in this? Is it more equal representation lower down the organisation and bigger talent pools of women to draw on? Perhaps more active enforcement of its equality and flexible working policies? Better role modelling and mentoring support from the top of the organisation? Or clearer career paths and excellent talent management? Or have all of these played a role?

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) has carried out a short project for the Council to research these issues and highlight in this case how the glass ceiling impact on senior executives has been overcome here. The **aims** of the review have been to address and consider questions including:

■ What organisational policies and practices make for successful women's career development and senior representation?

■ What managerial and leadership approaches make for successful senior appointments? What is the relative importance, for example, of recruitment and career development policies, versus flexible working support, senior role modelling and so on?

■ What is the importance and impact of culture and climate in an organisation such as Lewisham?

■ How can organisations like Lewisham build on their success? What can be done to embed the success and good practice for the future?

■ What are the risks to continuing this success in achieving an equal gender mix from both internal (transformational) and external (political, economic, social) factors and how can these challenges be overcome?

Although this is a study of one organisation and a relatively small-scale, largely qualitative exercise, we have also attempted to draw out tentative learning and lessons for other employers based on Lewisham's experiences, and of course for the Council itself.

The work involved in the review has been as follows:

1. **Planning**, confirming the aims, contents, outputs and timings of each project stage, detailing the logistics and methodology.

2. **Information gathering and review**. Internally we have reviewed relevant Council information – equality and diversity policies, related HR policies such as flexible working and maternity, networks and training, talent management; and we have reviewed key HR statistics eg the gender pay gap and breakdowns. The current situation is summarised in Section 3. We have also briefly considered the wider national context and current literature on gender equality, which is summarised in Section 2.

3. Conducting one-on-one **interviews** with key senior stakeholders including female executive director post-holders and the Councils' Mayor and the Chief Executive.

4. Facilitating **focus groups**. IES have facilitated three focus groups involving ten female senior managers – summarised with the interview findings in Section 4.

5. This report.

IES would like to thank all of our interviewees for their time and support in taking part on the project, and particularly Mandy Shackleton-Toon and Andreas Ghosh for providing us with all of the HR policy details and statistics that we requested, as well as lots of helpful ideas and comments.

2   The Context

2.1 The UK situation

A little over 40 years after the first Equal Pay Act, gender equality appears to have re-emerged as a priority on the UK's political, employment and people management agendas once again. Last year the European Commission updated and extended its gender equality strategy from 2015 to 2019. In the UK, there has been a range of government initiatives almost competing for employers' attention. The Treasury, Government Equalities Office (GEO) and Parliamentary Women and Equalities Select Committee have all been undertaking work, the latter carrying out a wide-ranging inquiry into the gender pay gap for the over 40s. And of course we have the forthcoming gender pay reporting requirement affecting all employers with more than 250 staff, the public sector dimensions of which are currently being detailed, although under the public sector equality duty in Wales and Scotland, this type of reporting is already in place for local authorities.

This re-emergence of interest has been driven by a range of factors: the stubborn persistence of gender pay gaps; the apparent failure of voluntary initiatives such as the government's 'Think, Act, Report'; the economic benefits in a tightening UK labour market of increased female participation. The UK's median all-employee gender earnings gap is 19.1 per cent (Government Equalities Office, 2014), compared to the EU average of 16.4 per cent (European Commission, 2014). The McKinsey Global Institute (2015) estimates that as much as $28 trillion could be added to global GDP if women could replicate male levels of labour market participation, with Europe standing to gain some 21 per cent of GDP or $5.1 trillion. PwC estimates gains to the UK economy of £170 billion if we could match Sweden in terms of rates of female employment and earnings. Last year's United Nations-backed International Women's Day was branded as 'Planet 50-50 by 2030' yet the UK seems to still have a long way to go, ranking at 30th out of the 33 countries currently in the OECD's female employment ranking.

The latest annual report on progress from the European Commission finds that at the current rate of change, it will take almost 30 years to reach the EU's target of 75 per cent of women in employment; over 70 years to make equal pay a reality; over 20 years to achieve gender balance on the boards of Europe's largest publicly-listed companies; and almost 40 years to ensure that housework is equally shared between women and men.

In a much-debated field there does seem to be agreement on two points:

1. **That gender pay gaps are the result of multiple factors and therefore difficult to close in the short term**. IES's recent review for the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2016, unpublished) points to the complex, deeply rooted historical, cultural and social causes of gender pay gaps. These range from continuing patterns of schools' and parental career guidance, channelling girls towards traditional, female-dominated, low paying occupations, the so-called 'five Cs'; to the lack of affordable childcare provision, the continuance of maternal-dominated shared parental leave (despite the more flexible, in theory, government provisions); and what might be referred to as inflexible flexible working' provisions in many employers and effectively a 'glass ceiling' applied in practice to them. An excellent special edition of the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* highlights these multiple, shifting and complex causes in Europe. The introduction (O'Reilly et al, 2015) describes the complexity of the issue in shifting labour markets and economies with very different legislative contexts. As they conclude, perhaps unsurprisingly: 'progress towards closing the gender pay gap will not be easy, will require a collective effort of various actors, and will not be quick'.

2. **That addressing the lack of women at senior levels in employers is a key dimension** of achieving gender equality, as the European Commission describes it, in terms of power, participation and pay. Chartered Management Institute Chief Executive Ann Francke said at the launch of the gender pay reporting proposals in 2016 that: 'Unconscious or unintentional gender bias is still alive and well: The transparency of reporting on gender pay and the gender pipeline will be a watershed in accelerating change.'

The European Commission is also progressing a draft directive on female board participation – the current average in large European companies is 20 per cent. Targeting and setting quotas for women at senior levels is now spreading rapidly round Europe. In Finland the requirement is 40 per cent on Boards and Germany recently introduced a 30 per cent minimum on large company supervisory boards from 2016.

Employers individually and collectively are taking an increasingly wide range of initiatives in response, particularly in sectors with a history of poor female representation at senior levels. In large listed private sector companies the Davies Review in 2010 led to a voluntary target of 25 per cent being set to improve the gender balance on FTSE 100 company Boards, which was achieved last year.

In supporting the extension of the work to achieve a third of posts held by women, Education and Equality Minister Nicky Morgan stated that 'We must continue the good work and to grow the talent pool of women ready to fill seats in Britain's boardrooms by looking at representation and career progression at lower levels, if the momentum of more women on boards is to be maintained'. Research has also found that women on FTSE boards had worked in 1.3 functional areas in their careers, so they had generally

focused in one function in order to progress their career, rather than moving across general management roles (Davies Review report 2016). A new five-year plan was agreed, focusing on building the talent pool below board level and greater representation in executive as opposed to non-executive roles.

A report on the gender pay gaps for the over 40's earlier this year by the Common's Women and Equalities Committee called for a much more wide-ranging programme of initiatives to break glass ceilings including:

- Making all jobs flexible from the outset, unless there is a strong and continuing business case for them not to be.

- Bringing in non-transferrable leave for fathers and second parents and equal paternity pay to allow men and women to share care equally.

- Establishing industrial strategies for low paid, highly feminised sectors such as healthcare to improve productivity and pay levels.

- Creating a *Pathways to Work* scheme to support women to return to work after time out of the labour market.

In individual employers, there is evidence of more widespread actions, ranging from setting representation targets and carrying out equal pay audits, to unconscious bias training, to more widespread promotion of job sharing and part-time working at senior levels, and even encouraging the Nordic practice of including breaks for childcare as a positive experience on CVs.

Technology is a sector with one of the widest gender pay gaps. Intel's annual report for 2015, anticipating strengthening of equality legislation by the state of California, was entitled 'strong progress and more to do'. It revealed that employees with the same role at the same level achieved identical 100 per cent equal pay rates but there was an overall pay gap due to lack of women in senior posts. The firm announced a whole range of initiatives to promote higher rates of female representation at senior levels, including enhancing its parental and sabbatical leave programmes, and setting itself the goal of becoming the first technology business to reach full representation of women and minorities throughout the US.

Some academics and practitioners favour highly activist interventions as the only way to really address the deep-seated factors of causation of discrimination to achieve equality, such as 'blind' recruitment processes and compulsory pay audits. Unconscious bias training for example has been popular recently amongst local authorities. Yet recent research at Harvard University by Iris Bohnet highlights how hard changing individual attitudes is and supports the view that enforced 'organisational designs' are much more effective (Morse, 2016). In the UK, Warmington and Klein's research in the NHS found

that Unconscious Bias Training (UBT) and other 'softer' initiatives such as mentoring did not help to increase diversity. On the other hand, the research found that approaches which established accountability, through monitoring outcomes within a framework where leadership expected change, were more effective and were associated with increases in diversity. One approach, for example, was to oblige interview panels to make their decisions more transparent and accountable.

Dobbin and Kalev (2016) however argue on the basis of their research that 'you can't outlaw bias' and mandatory selection testing and monitoring programmes generally fail due to management opposition. They instead emphasise the need to engage managers in supporting diversity initiatives and encouraging social accountability for change, rather than trying to force or control it.

In the UK public sector we have the public equality duty which has contributed to a lower gender pay gap than in the private sector; and in local government, with a high female proportion of the workforce as a whole, there are some of the most comprehensive policies to help to promote gender equality, such as flexible working and maternity support.

2.2 The local authority picture

Local authorities are of course an integral part of the communities they serve and represent and their employer gender equality strategies must always be seen in this wider framework of how diversity is affected by the services they deliver. The Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) comprises five performance areas:

■ Knowing your communities

■ Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

■ Involving your communities

■ Responsive services and customer care

■ A skilled and committed workforce.

The purpose of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) remains to help organisations, in discussion with local partners including local people, review and improve their performance for people with characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010. By using the EFLG organisations can also be helped to deliver on the public sector equality duty (PSED).

The Gender Equality Duty was introduced into legislation in the Equality Act 2006, and came into force in April 2007. It requires public authorities, such as local authorities, to

promote equality of opportunity between women and men and eliminate unlawful sex discrimination and harassment. The duty covers all the functions of a public authority, such as policymaking, public services, and employment. The Duty places the legal responsibility on public authorities to demonstrate that they treat men and women fairly, which means they need to identify and prevent discrimination The Gender Equality Duty requires public authorities to publish a Gender Equality Scheme (GES) which sets out the priorities and actions they will take to further gender equality.

Of public sector employees in the UK, 3.6 out of 5.3 million are female, 1.8m of those working part time (ONS, 2016). Local authorities are also in terms of employment female-dominated organisations, with almost three-quarters of their total workforce of 2.23 million female (LGA, 2015). Councils also display the occupational segregation of women in employment that is evident in the UK economy and a key driver of the pay gap, with 75 per cent of teachers and 82 per cent of social services staff female (Harvey, 2012).

Amongst the London boroughs there are significant variations in the gender mix at senior levels – see Figure 1. The median average for the top five per cent of earners in councils in London who were women was 43 per cent. In shire districts the median was 35 per cent and in single and upper tier councils the median was 52 per cent. Of the councils surveyed, 55 per cent advertised all or most job vacancies on a flexible working basis.

The variations in gender mix evident in senior roles across London boroughs are evident in the chart below and also occur across the country. So what is it that explains how Lewisham has achieved gender parity in senior roles and why have some other councils not done so? In the next section we consider the HR and diversity policies in place at Lewisham designed to support diversity and gender equality; and in Section 4 we summarise the views of senior managers themselves in answering this question.

Figure 1: London Boroughs, top teams gender breakdown 2014

Gender breakdown of top teams in 2014
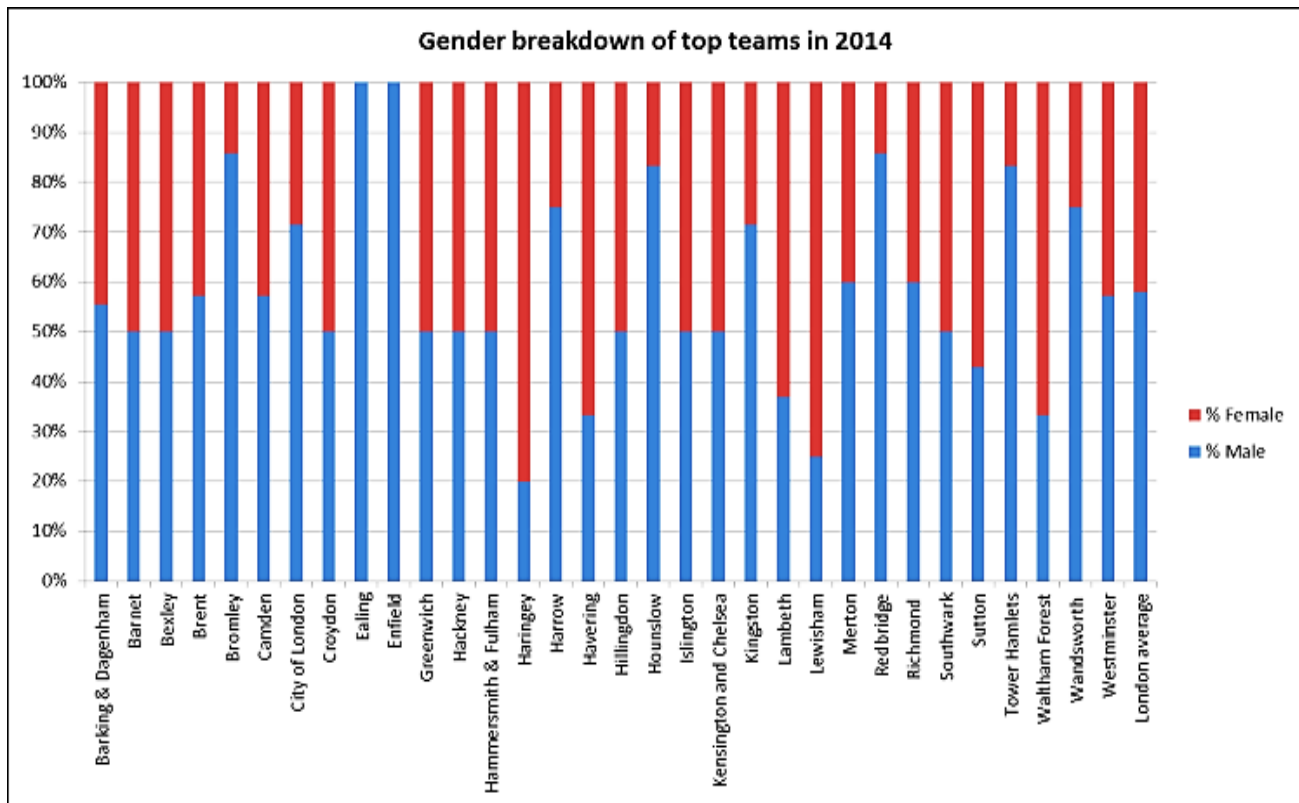
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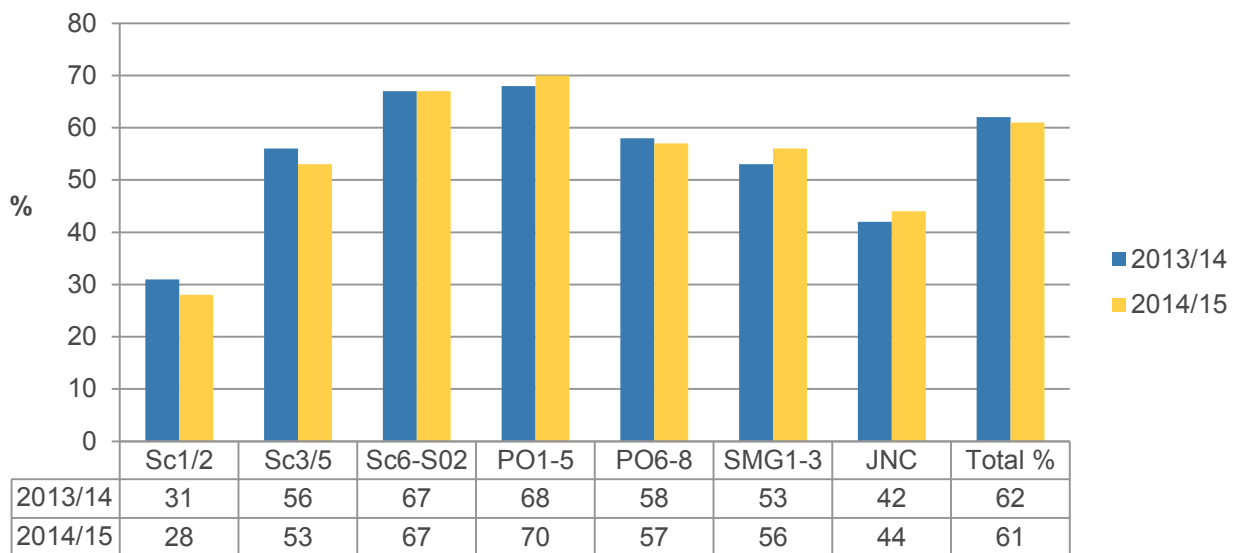
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3   Lewisham Council Situation

Lewisham Council in its last published workforce statistics (2014/15) had 9,450 employees of which 61 per cent are female. Twenty-three per cent work part-time (30% of women). Seventy-three per cent of women residents in the Borough are economically active; and 47 per cent of the Council's employees live in Lewisham.

The Council has a near equal gender breakdown at its senior levels, with 56 per cent of those in senior grades female, up four per cent on the previous year (see Figure 2 below). Three of its four executive directors are female.

Figure 2: Percentage of female employees, by grade

	Sc1/2	Sc3/5	Sc6-S02	PO1-5	PO6-8	SMG1-3	JNC	Total %
2013/14	31	56	67	68	58	53	42	62
2014/15	28	53	67	70	57	56	44	61

The Council's people strategy aims 'to have a highly engaged and diverse workforce and an approach to succession planning to ensure we are able to fill key posts through internal recruitment'. The HR department believes that a wide range of its policies and initiatives have helped to achieve this situation, and in the rest of this section we outline these policies.

3.1 Current HR and diversity policies

3.1.1 Recruitment and resourcing

■ The Council's recruitment approach stresses acquiring the best talent and an open, fair approach. Historically the emphasis has been on a 'grow your own' approach to senior talent but in recent years there has been more external recruitment. 12 out of 26 of the most senior roles at Lewisham are currently held by internal appointees.

■ Over years there has been a targeted approach to attracting women in under-represented areas but also a proactive campaign to position Lewisham as an employer with a flexible and collaborative workplace.

■ Embedding the monitoring of this approach into management reporting has translated recruitment policy into action.

■ The emphasis on bias free interviewing and selection using training and a disciplined approach to recording discussions has also played its part. At senior levels representative recruitment panels are required.

■ Since 2000 women have consistently represented over 50 per cent of applicants and appointments (see Tables 1 and 3 below). At senior levels the percentage of appointments in fact exceeds the percentage of women applicants (see Table 2).

Table 1: Gender breakdown: all appointments over the past four years

Female % of total	2011- 2012 %	2012- 2013 %	2013- 2014 %	2014- 2015 %
Applicants	51.9	52.9	54.6	56.4
Interviewed	57.6	60.3	60	55
Offered	54.6	50	58.2	55.7
Hired	53.2	48.1	54.5	53.7

Table 2: Gender breakdown: senior appointments last year

	PO6 and above No.			%	
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Applications received	149	142	291	51.20	48.80
Interviewed	59	68	127	46.46	53.54
Offered	25	20	45	55.56	44.44
Hired	16	16	32	50.00	50.00

Table 3: Gender Breakdown: all appointments last year

	All Grades No.			%	
	Male	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**
Application received	1,569	2,332	3901	40.22	59.78
Interviewed	458	798	1256	36.46	63.54
Offered	165	271	436	37.84	62.16
Hired	134	217	351	38.18	61.82

3.1.2 Pay and reward

■ The Council's pay approach is to balance reward and fairness. The reward policy has been used to drive gender parity, the corner stone of which is a single status approach which effectively re-evaluated all roles to ensure equity in pay now maintained by a rigorous job evaluation process.

■ This is supplemented by concentrated monitoring and pay audits undertaken fully on completing a single status exercise and at senior level as part of the production of the pay statement three years ago.

■ Led by its then gender equality officer Jo Morris in the 1980s, Lewisham was one of the first London boroughs to carry out equal value analysis of its workforce following the passage of the Equal Pay Act amendment.

■ The average pay for women has exceeded that of men since at least 2010. **Lewisham currently has a gender pay differential of 1:0.85. The council's independent pay panel reviews the impact of senior pay movements on women.**

3.1.3 Working arrangements

■ The Council is committed to having a fully engaged, productive, and flexible workforce which responds to the increasing demands of its customers in the most efficient and cost-effective way, whilst continuing to provide quality services.

■ The Council positively encourages flexible working and work life balance aimed at supporting individual employee requirements within the context of meeting service delivery needs. A range of schemes are in place with a quarter of the workforce not working the standard working week.

■ These schemes include:

- flexitime

- part-time work

- term-time work

- career breaks

- homeworking, and

- job sharing.

- What is available for individual employees depends on the service that they deliver, but all managers are positively encouraged to look creatively and sympathetically at requests for flexible working.

- Historically, a proactive campaign to promote job sharing demonstrated the Council's commitment to promoting gender parity, and flexible working and part time working are evident at all levels, including senior management.

3.1.4 Monitoring

- Lewisham adopts a rigorous and consistent approach to monitoring people management processes and profiling its workforce. The roots of the approach were established by the corporate management team's requirement to review the composition of the workforce and the impact of its people management policies on initially women, subsequently the BME workforce and presently all protected characteristics.

- Managers are provided with regular people management metrics such as: on pay, attendance, learning and appointments, analysed by under-represented areas including gender. Annually, each management team is asked to consider the profile of their workforce, particularly by gender, as part of their workforce planning process.

- The data has been used to change people management practise such as recruitment and job evaluation which have the greatest impact on gender parity.

3.1.5 Managing change

- The Council's approach to managing change is to ensure that it is managed in a fair, consistent and legally compliant manner while communicating in an open and transparent manner, with a key focus on consultation, involvement and participation.

■ The approach includes recognising the needs or impact of key decisions on specific groups of employees by using tools such as the Equalities Analysis Assessment (EAA). The EAA may highlight that there will be a particular impact on certain groups of staff, for example where the workforce is predominantly female. The outcome of the EAA is only one factor in the overall decision making process and other considerations such as financial savings, improvements in service delivery or legal drivers will also usually be factors. It is important however that the EAA is considered as part of the decision making process.

■ Sixty-nine staff were made redundant in 2014/15 and 69 per cent of these were female.

3.1.6 Learning

■ Equalities and diversity issues have now been integrated across all Lewisham's learning and development offering and is a key requirement that our managed service providers have to evidence as part of the tendering process.

■ Face to face development is scheduled on different days to accommodate part-time workers, the majority of which are female.

■ Nomination to Management and leadership development programmes are monitored to ensure representative of the workforce across the Council which includes gender.

■ Examples of management development programmes run by Lewisham include:

Development centre for service managers

Aimed to improve management and leadership capability, and in turn, Council performance. Participants, who through the Development Centre process, demonstrated potential to progress to a more senior role within the next couple of years, also had the opportunity to attend talent development sessions to explore what they might need to do to enhance their career prospects.

Future leaders' programme

For talented and experienced team leaders and project managers with ambitions to move to service group manager (SGM) roles.

Public sector leaders' programme

For senior leaders from across Lewisham's strategic partnership (LSP) organisations. It aimed to enable participants to be better able to: lead change across the public sector bodies in Lewisham; operate effectively, work collaboratively across boundaries and outside their level of authority; collaborate to share resources to deliver better outcomes at reduced cost.

2020 programme

As set out in the Chief Executive's 'Serving Lewisham Smarter' paper the aim was: 'Building on the Council's established vision, values, priorities and ways of working…to energise staff and managers to be more imaginative in developing new ways of working that serve Lewisham smarter'. In addition, 'working closely with service users and members, this group should develop a bold approach for redesigning services and renewing the Council's organisation'.

Making the leap to management programme

To develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours which are needed by highly effective people managers and ultimately build the managerial capacity of Council staff and aid succession planning. The programme was designed to prepare individuals who have shown potential to become people managers but are not yet formally in a people management role and would like to develop their skills and knowledge, and individuals who have just started to manage people for the first time.

360 feedback for senior managers

All Executive Directors and Heads of Service receive 360 feedback as part of a new performance appraisal scheme.

3.2 Attitude survey data

The Council's attitude survey includes questions across a wide range of areas. Specifically on diversity question 21 asks:

'Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: *'I am confident the Council values equality and the diversity of its employees when making decisions'*: 65 per cent of males and 61 per cent of female employees agreed with this statement in the last survey.

Other questions display a wider gender difference notably:

- *I feel comfortable working in an unpredictable environment*: 55% males agree, 41% females

- *The Council is performance-driven:* 71% males agree, 80% females

- *I feel proud to work for the Council*: 66% males agree, and 58% females

- *I have been involved in ways to make my work area more efficient*: 57% men agree, 46% women

- *I feel valued and recognised for the work I do*: 49% males agree, 43% females

- *I feel motivated to do a good job for the Council*: 69% males agree, 65% females

- *I have a say over the way I do my work:* 71% males agree, 64% females

- *I am able to achieve a balance between my work and home life:* 67% males agree, 60% females.

4   Stakeholder Interview and Focus Group Findings

This has primarily been a qualitative piece of research and the views of senior stakeholders and women in senior roles themselves comprise a key part of our review. What do they think based on their experience explains the situation of senior gender parity in the Council and what will ensure that this success continues?

4.1 Method

We first **individually interviewed** the Council Chief Executive, Mayor and female Executive Directors, gathering their personal views and experiences on what has been most important in explaining Lewisham's success and what is required to continue it in the future. The discussions were held to a structured agenda covering:

■   Introductions

■   Personal background and experience/involvement in gender and diversity issues

■   The history of how Lewisham has achieved parity

■   The current situation and HR and diversity policies

■   The future: challenges and how these might be overcome

■   Summary and conclusions.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. We also met with the HR Director and HR Business Partner on a number of occasions to gather information and discuss relevant HR policies in more details. And to develop our knowledge of the historical background we met with Jo Morris who worked on equality issues for the Council in the 1980s.

Figure 2: List of interviewees

Sir Steve Bullock, Mayor

Aileen Buckton, Executive Director, Community Services

Andreas Ghosh, HR Director

Barry Quirk, Chief Executive

Janet Senior, Executive Director, Resources and Regeneration

Mandy Shackleton Toon, HR Business Partner

Sara Williams, Executive Director, Children and Young People

Jo Morris, Visiting Professor in Practice at the Gender Institute London School of Economics and Political Science

We then ran three **focus group discussions** with a sample of 10 female senior managers. The meetings were held under Chatham House rules, to a structured discussion agenda and administering a short questionnaire at the end to capture the key opinions expressed. Again, the agenda focused on: personal experiences and careers; views on the relative importance of the different policies and practices which other research studies have highlighted as having some impact on gender equality; and future needs and requirements to continue progress. Each group meeting lasted between one and one and a half hours.

Figure 3: List of focus group participants

Kate Bond, Head of Standards & Inclusion

Dee Carlin, Head of Joint Commissioning

Liz Dart, Head of Cultural & Community Development

Robyn Fairman, Head of Strategy

Joan Hutton, Head of Adult Assessment & Care Management

Genevieve Macklin, Head of Strategic Housing & Regulatory Services

Kath Nicholson, Head of Law

Geeta Subramaniam, Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People

Emma Talbot, Head of Planning

Sarah Wainer, Head of Strategy Partnership & Improvement

The remainder of this section presents a summary of findings from the interviews and group discussions, drawing out the major common points and themes, illustrated where possible with examples and quotations. We have tried to be as representative as possible of the views expressed to us. The views are those of the interviewees and not necessarily those of IES.

4.2 Interview findings

4.2.1 The history

■ All of our interviewees emphasised **the importance of a long history of equality and diversity initiatives** by the Council in creating the current diversity mix and culture supporting that. In particular the Mayor, the Chief Executive and Jo Morris referred to the importance of the legacy of Andy Hawkins, Labour Council Leader from 1971 to 1984, who was responsible for the Council setting up the first women's' equality and race relations committees in a London council.

> *"How have we achieved gender equality? You have to go back 40 years"*

■ They described a very **concentrated effort to change the culture of the organisation** and consciously move away from the then all male senior team to a more diverse and merit-based authority, supported by Lewisham's early female councillors at that time, and employing for the first time a Women's Officer and Race Equality Officer in the then Personnel department. Jo Morris described the important components of that change and being part of the 'febrile' environment in London councils at that time, four of whom co-operated after the passage of the equal value amendment for example to analyse and highlight the gender pay gaps for manual workers in local authorities (*A Question of Earnings*, TUC, 1987). These included the commitment from the very top in both the chamber and the executive of the Council; and introducing a strategic plan and policies to support recruitment - holding chief offices accountable.

■ All interviewees also spoke of the importance of **continuity** in that message and in the senior individuals responsible for it, particularly the long serving Mayor, Chief Executive and HR Director.

> *'There has been no change of direction, and there has been a sustained priority from council leadership and management since then right up to the present that 'diversity is very important"*

■ The approach over that timescale to achieving parity at the top was commonly described as **'pragmatic'**, rather than for example a hard adherence to set targets and quotas. Diversity statistics are monitored but in the round and over time, with all appointments being merit-based, a position strongly supported by all the

interviewees. Examples were given though of 'taking opportunities' to make 'signalling appointments' in key areas where a female appointment would be very noticeable, both in the Council and in comparison even to other London councils.

> *'It's integrated into recruitment and development, we look at stats on applicants and appointments, we know that the Councillors will ask for this'*

■ Most interviewees also mentioned that because of this history, gender equality has become **self-sustaining** in the Council. Once you have this reputation, they explained, then women will apply as they know they will be treated equally. All of the women interviewees gave examples both of being provided with support and development themselves as they progressed their career (not just in Lewisham); and them now doing likewise for talented junior staff (not all women, they stresses).

> *'You have to believe it and live it. You can't just do it through numbers, it takes time'*

4.2.2 The Rationale and Business Case

■ According to the Chief Executive's book, *Re-imagining government: public leadership in challenging times* (2011), there are three key purposes of government: the necessity of solving community problems, securing welfare, and having the legitimacy to determine common good. A local authority has therefore to represent the communities they serve to be trustworthy, gender is a fundamental element of representing the diversity in the community, and management must reflect the diversity in the community they serve.

■ All of our interviewees agreed completely with this tenet, but also all strongly emphasised the importance of place in explaining Lewisham's unique position, as a not particularly attractive borough compared to some others, and one where a high proportion of employees live as well as work locally. Employing and developing local employees has therefore arisen from pragmatism as well as politics and philosophy. Some also mentioned the diversity of, and females in, senior roles in the rest of the public service in Lewisham – the NHS trust, local college, and so on, have all had women heads.

■ **The need for diversity at all levels** in the Council, not just at the top, is therefore 'accepted by all and unquestioned', the lettering in a stick of Lewisham rock according to one interviewee. A few interviewees did refer to the risks though of this strength of belief, both in terms of not always practicing diversity as the policy requires and lack of innovative thinking.

■ All interviewees also stressed that gender issues needed always to be seen as part of the wider diversity issue and so although having achieved equality at the top in terms

of gender was described positively, almost all mentioned 'not to rest on our laurels' and that the picture was less equal in terms of ethnicity, where there is still progress required (38.5% of the Council's employees are BME, above the London average but below the 46% in the local community; the percentage of BME staff in the grades PO6 to PO8 actually fell by 5% to 22% in the 2014/15 year). The priority of the women's agenda, however, most interviewees felt, is now helping the Council to address more difficult aspects of diversity – such as this low proportion of ethnic minorities at senior levels.

'We do well on gay managers too'

'It has been harder for BMEs'

'We can leverage off our success with women'

4.2.3   The Current Culture and Environment

■   If culture is how people in an organisation behave and their underlying beliefs, then **the example set from the top** is vital. All interviewees described the importance of their and colleagues example to show the Council 'practices what it preaches' on diversity – interviewees cited as examples the chief executive working a three-day week and a senior finance manager taking maternity leave and working flexibly.

'It's important to be a role model for women and set the example'

'The top appointments set the tone for the whole workplace'

'Nobody noticed any difference when I came back (after maternity break)'

'You get used to a slower pace at half-terms'

■   Interviewees joined the Council at different times, but all the women interviewed described how 'comfortable' and **'positive' an environment** for women it has always been, with none feeling they had ever been treated on the basis of their gender, though almost all mentioned having experienced sexist behaviour earlier in their careers and in other employers.

'Always treated us seriously'

'Always based on merit'

'Never crossed my mind they might prefer a man'

'Never occurred to me not to apply because I was a woman'

'We stood out from other authorities'

- Interviewees stressed that **councils are very different in culture** and tone and mood, and that some councils still had 'blokeish cultures' in management and their chambers. A number felt that gender discrimination in some councils has got worse, partly due to the denigration of public servants by minsters and budget and management cut-backs.

> *'I wouldn't go and work in XYZ South East Council, however much you paid me, it's not a good working environment'*
>
> *'Councillors' pressure has been key to pushing the agenda. Politics makes it easier; you back that up with culture and management'*
>
> *'You join based on how the organisation feels, the values, the non-macho culture'*
>
> *'Management team obsess about it, included in KPI's, important at the top, part of the culture'*

- **Cultures also vary within the Council** and so progress has been harder in some areas and professions than others, we were told. It had been easier to achieve senior representation for example in Children's Services where the working population is highly female, than in Planning or Finance, and interviewees stressed the importance of having a pool of female talent at lower levels.

> *'The senior level is more straightforward, the councillors make the appointments: it's harder with some of the professions further down'*

4.2.4 HR and Diversity Policies

- Those with a long history at the Council emphasised the informal, tactical and pragmatic approach adopted to securing higher female representation.

> *'You take practical steps to make it happen and then it becomes self-reinforcing'*
>
> *'We just did it'*
>
> *'Create the opportunity and give them the support – what any well-managed organisation does. It becomes self-fulfilling as it attracts people who think like this'*

- Formal networks and mentoring programmes in particular received almost no support, even though other London authorities have used these successfully. One female interviewee said specific female initiatives can 'make women look the victims, when we are not. You need to be tough and confident'.

> *'XYZ has been a role model without making her one, she worked her way to the top and people know that'*

> *'Mentoring is informal, it becomes artificial, too rigid, if it's forced'*

- However, monitoring actual and targeted gender figures on job applications and appointments are clearly a long-standing driver of action at the Council, (just as they are increasingly used at national and corporate level to drive and monitor progress by governments and corporations in Europe). The Members' personnel committee and Mayors' cabinet monitor and, we were told, review regularly targets for the senior workforce profile and representation at senior levels, including numbers of black and young people in the workforce.

> *'The political process means that you look at the detail of it and ask questions as to why we aren't representative and how we fix that'*
>
> *'We monitor it at senior levels politically and managerially and alarm bells go off if it worsens'*

- **Management and career development** was the HR activity most frequently mentioned as being the most important to achieving gender parity, although again, informally making and taking opportunities for people to develop (in secondments, on projects, etc was the most emphasised aspect of this.)

- Interviewees stressed that the Council has 'always been development (and talent)-oriented', with entirely merit-based appointments. The greater reluctance of women to apply and take risks with promotions was regularly mentioned and hence the importance of encouraging and supporting their development. Some interviewees also mentioned the importance of role models and mentors in other authorities where they worked.

> *'It's about identifying people with potential and giving them real opportunities'*
>
> *'I was always reluctant, but she encouraged me'*
>
> *'I was encouraged so I want to do the same for others now'*
>
> *'I took an interim role and then was appointed permanently the following year'*
>
> *'I moved from running an area with lots of women to one dominated by men, and showed that you didn't need to know every detail to be effective'*

- However, the HR staff reminded us that they have organised many development programmes over the years, some specifically targeted at gender representation some years ago, to really instigate progress and address blockages, for example women into management programmes, as well as organising diversity training aimed at all managers. A number of interviewees had also been involved in formal programmes with other employers and bodies to address diversity imbalances in professional and managerial roles.

> *'They (diversity programmes) can help get it into the bloodstream of the organisation'*

■ A number of interviewees mentioned pay levels as a problem for the Authority, in terms of recruitment and retention, though not specifically from a gender perspective. However, some felt there was now a greater challenge recruiting women, with living and childcare costs higher in London, and their pay levels 'not great', while others mentioned that it was also harder for women now to progress with fewer management roles in the Council following cuts.

> *'There aren't workplace nurseries anymore'*

4.2.5 The future

■ Most interviewees felt that retaining the focus on diversity and gender parity would **become more difficult in the future**, as Council services are transformed further. The cuts to date have disproportionately affected black and female workers, and also the wider range of service providers and greater use of contingent workers will make the policies and culture that have driven parity more difficult to sustain. NHS pay grades for example, were cited as not always compatible with the Council's.

■ Cuts to development and training budgets were seen as necessary but most felt they were going to have to be built back up due to the loss of staff. The cuts in middle management posts were also seen as restricting opportunities for the Council to continue to 'grow our own' in the future.

> *'It would be short-sighted not to invest in people'*
>
> *'We need to relook at the Council's development needs. We may need to go back to being more formal in the way we do it'*
>
> *'If you don't maintain it and the talent pool, you lose this at your peril'*
>
> *'We can get complacent, we will have to work harder to keep this focus…you have to make it part of what people do, not extra work'*
>
> *'We are trying not to lose the cultural focus on management development'*

■ Some also felt that the inevitable change in people at the most senior levels and wave of early retirements could also encourage a **'loss of memory'** and loss of the focus on diversity goals.

■ Some felt the diversity approach might need to be **formalised more** in policies and 'written down', to avoid the risk that it might not work as well when the same senior people aren't there, emphasised more for example in the Council's induction policy.

- But most seemed confident that it is deeply embedded and will continue. And a number mentioned new opportunities to support this agenda, for example through apprenticeships.

> *'It would be wrong to take it for granted and lose the history and how we got here…we need to build it into induction and socialisation'*

- More external recruitment had occurred since 2010, but most interviewees felt that this was a good thing as it introduced new thinking and that the Council 'needed to shake things up…needs more challenge in the organisation'. Most supported though combining this with the historic 'grow our own approach', a 'balance' of internal and external sourcing in senior posts.

- Two interviewees also mentioned the importance of workforce planning, to look at the workforce the Council wants and needs to have in five to ten years' time and to put measures in place to start building it now.

> *'How do we ensure our values remain when there will need to be significant external recruitment? Are we thinking enough about this and preparing for it?'*

4.2.6 Conclusions

- Our interviewees were genuinely proud of the Council's record on diversity and gender parity, with the consistent focus on it from the top over many years and a 'grow your own approach' being key to its success.

- **A values-based, culture-driven and pragmatic approach over many years** was seen as being at the heart of the progress made, with senior managers setting the example and signalling and monitoring its importance, and then a range of HR policies reinforcing it, particularly in terms of talent management and development. The nature of Lewisham and its community was inextricably bound up with both the diversity approach and its success in the Council.

> *'It probably doesn't matter where it starts if those at the top believe in it'*
>
> *'Place is important'*

- But the interviewees were far from being complacent. There was still lots of progress required; to break the 'BME glass ceiling' for example.

- There will be **big changes** in Council services and employment models in future, as well in leadership and management personnel. Cuts and restructuring threaten future development opportunities and terms and conditions, which support a diverse

workforce. There will likely be a need to formalise policies and to plan out the values and the shape of the workforce in future more clearly.

> *'Loss of our history and memory is a risk'*
>
> *'We have to continue to treat all employees well and to develop talent wherever we have it'*
>
> *'In future we will need to prioritise development and equality with our service partners'*

■ But the interviewees were optimistic that the historic and current situation of equal treatment and gender parity can and will be continued in the future, even if different people and policies will be taking it forward.

> *'We need to protect and enhance our legacy and enable a culture of individual rights'*

4.3 Focus Group Findings

Many of the points made by our interviewees were reinforced in the three senior management focus groups held. Because of the greater volume of material, we summarise the views and findings in the table below, with key overall points and themes in the left-hand column, and more detail and examples in the right-hand one.

Discussion topic & key themes	What was said, key points, examples, agreement/ disagreement
Personal background and experience • Very diverse backgrounds but no personal experience of gender discrimination in Lewisham.	• The personal situations, career paths and experiences of participants were highly diverse, for example: having children or not; working in different departments eg Children's Services which is a very female environment, compared to male-dominated Finance/accounts; and some had had lengthy careers in-house, compared to others who had moved away and come back, and others joined at a senior level.
• Almost all had experienced it in other employers, in public and private sectors.	• Interviewees had not directly experienced gender discrimination in Lewisham, although in one case it was more age-based (being regarded as too young/inexperienced for promotion). Most had though experienced it in the past in other public and particularly private sector employers.
• Development and promotion opportunities were key to their own career progression and many provided personal examples from Lewisham.	• 'When I started at XYZ council, I wouldn't let colleagues know I had young children'. • 'XYZ (private sector company) was totally sexist'. • 'I worked in private sector, it's a much more macho environment' • 'Lewisham felt different'
• This remains the case, they felt, so there is now a worry that there are less of these opportunities available today and that the	• They didn't really perceive any situation they had experienced in the Council as 'men versus women' and reinforced that the desire for an open tolerant culture and respecting all individuals was very much the case in practice. • 'There is no distinction here but it's easier initially to progress in

Discussion topic & key themes	What was said, key points, examples, agreement/ disagreement
emphasis may have swung too much towards external recruitment. • The groups were less positive than senior interviewees about the Council's ability to develop talented women (and men), being too hierarchical and rigid in their approach to job definitions and time-served promotions.	female-dominated areas' • But they did feel that all aspects of diversity are important and that Lewisham is worse on and needs to manage better some other non-gender aspects of diversity eg there is a need for better treatment for carers and the disabled. • Promotion opportunities were seen as key to their own career and many had moved sideways or out of the organisation to further their own career progression, when they couldn't get the promotion/development opportunities they wanted/needed in the Council. • 'I took my boss's job on an interim basis, then got the job'. • 'You need the experience here, they trust and grow you'. • 'Lewisham paid for my masters'. • 'One or two key senior people have encouraged and supported me here at important times'. • 'Other councils are more hierarchical, here as a case office you can get involved with senior management, your contribution is valued' • Some emphasised their own drive, confidence and wish to 'get on' in explaining their career progression; but probably the majority gave instances where they had not felt confident to progress and be promoted, but had been encouraged and supported by a senior manager (male and female examples given) to apply, get the job and succeed in it. • 'People are appointed on merit. But experience and internal fit is important'. • 'I had no great ambition, but they flagged me, told me I had potential. I felt like I was being nurtured'. • 'I went to a mixed school, I learnt to be confident when young'. • I got blocked early in my career, it taught me to be more confident and act like a man'. • 'The induction and informal mentors have been really helpful'. • 'I never thought I wanted to be a director.' • 'I didn't apply but they almost forced me to'. • 'Women can be a bit reluctant to apply'. • 'I didn't apply, I felt like it was a role for older men'. • 'I took more of a back seat for 5 or 6 years when the children were young. They were fine with that and then my career (progression) resumed'. • 'I covered for a Head of Service role while on secondment which gave me the experience I needed'. • Hence the participants were worried about a perceived decline in promotion opportunities now and in future as a result of management job cuts. Some surmised a current preference for

Discussion topic & key themes	What was said, key points, examples, agreement/ disagreement
	hiring in external specialists at senior levels over internal promotees.
	• 'There's a danger we overlook good people'.
	• 'Hiring in people from outside, looking for 'quick-fix' solutions'.
	• The groups were less positive than the senior interviewees about the strength of development activities in the Council. The structure and culture was described as quite hierarchical and fixed-job based. The Council and managers in many parts of it they felt don't currently do enough to create development opportunities – broaden someone's job, give them project work, second them to another area, etc, to get the skills and experience they need to be promoted.
	• These sorts of opportunities were regarded as key by participants to their own career progression, most felt they had benefitted hugely from them and that they remain vital to those with talent and ambition.
	• 'We define someone's role too tightly, don't see the development opportunities'.
	• 'We are more likely now to bring in someone else from outside'.
	• 'People get stuck, there's nowhere for bright and talented people to go'.
	• 'We have too much of a time-served mentality'.
The current situation – the culture and environment • Interesting work and the local area was the reason that most participants joined the Council. • Diversity is genuinely important and integral to the culture of the Council, reinforced by the long-serving leadership over many years. • But the Council doesn't always 'practice what it preaches' on equality in all areas and on occasions there can be something of a 'say/do' gap.	• Lewisham Council has a good reputation on diversity and it is genuinely integral to its culture. The same leadership emphasising it for 10 -15 years means it has become a core part of the Council's culture. • 'Gender had become irrelevant' • 'The male/female thing is not important at the top'. • 'Gender has been far less of a barrier in Lewisham'. • But for almost all participants that was not what attracted them and the primary reason they joined – this was more to do with the work/job interest. The area and the work serving it was characterised as generally and genuinely interesting and self-developing. • 'Lewisham is seen as a good place to get experience to support a promotion subsequently' • Participants reinforced the strong sense of 'place' in the Council, with a lot of people work in the borough, their kids at school here, meaning people often very committed to their job and life here and supporting the 'promote from within' approach at the Council. Many had benefitted and were grateful for the grow-your-own culture. But as just described, they felt increasingly that junior talented staff don't see the opportunities to develop their career here that they had had. • 'I am only head of X because of XYZ director.' • 'I needed to get out to reinvent myself'

Discussion topic & key themes	What was said, key points, examples, agreement/ disagreement
	• Some participants felt that while the Council promotes its success on diversity externally, the practice internally doesn't always match the policy/reputation of the Council in some areas. They felt there is still quite a traditional, hierarchical management style and 'presenteeism' culture in places and that this can inhibit innovation and fresh thinking, as well as personal and career development, especially for women who need to work flexibly.
	• -Some questioned whether diversity policies are applied consistently and fairly right across the organisation. Others felt that this was more of a societal/national cultural issue.
	• 'It's all very well for Mayor to say how important diversity is and get the PR, the Council really needs to embed good practice throughout the organisation'.
	• 'You have to punch above your weight if you work flexibly'.
	• 'Is there really flexible working at senior levels?'
	• 'Now some men work flexibly, they make a big fuss about leaving early. Whereas we just get on with it'.
	• 'It needs to be normal and accepted, like in Denmark'.
	• 'We need to create a more flexible approach. An environment where people are coached and developed'
	• 'You get developed and supported, but it's random, it depends on your manager'
	• 'We are entrenched in ways of working, not innovative, way behind the curve'.
The current situation – HR and diversity policies and practice • Participants tended to downplay the role of formal HR policies in achieving gender parity at senior levels, emphasising the culture and leadership more. • Training and career development policies were regarded as the most important contributor. Participants were strongly against gender-specific development but felt that career planning and support could be improved. • Policies such as mixed recruitment panels and the provision of HR statistics were	• As with the senior interviewees, the groups tended to downplay the role of formal HR and diversity policies and really saw culture and application as key to achieving true gender equality, not the policy.
	• Whatever the HR policies, some felt that it was too much down to the individual to work out their own route to progress and deal with childcare etc, and that there was in practice a lack of support for working women with children at the Council.
	• As just mentioned, flexible working was the policy most regularly mentioned in this regard in terms of varied management application and approval, but examples were also given of training and development being similarly 'patchy' in practice. The flexible working policies were described by some as outdated and out of line with those now promoted and promulgated by organisations such as Timewise
	• 'It shouldn't be so hard. They should be thinking 'how can we best support you/' rather than you having to battle for it'.
	• 'The view is you should be here all the time. You feel guilty for working from home'.
	• 'We struggle to make it happen…you have to be visible to get on'
	• 'It's a big ordeal to get it (flexible working) agreed'.
	• 'It's down to you, you have to make your own arrangements'.

Discussion topic & key themes	What was said, key points, examples, agreement/ disagreement
seen as helpful and playing an important supporting role. • Flexible working was seen as a vital enabler for many women and an area where participants felt the Council could improve practice. • Pay was seen as not that competitive, in a sense creating out of necessity, some felt, the develop-from-within approach	• 'We only go so far (with flexible working)…need to do better for carers'. • Again like the interviewees, the participants didn't expect special treatment and reacted against female-only activities such as training and networks. They were also sceptical of the effectiveness of diversity training programmes such as UBT. • 'You can take diversity too far – you don't have to have BME staff to work with BME families'. • 'I don't expect special treatment, I am fine to work late after the kids have gone to bed'. • 'It's not gender specific – it's about 'me' as a person, not whether I am a man or woman, let's create the opportunities for all'. • 'They did a women-only action learning set on development at X (previous employer) and they all left soon afterwards!'. • 'Why (gender specific development)? I have never felt discriminated against here'. • 'Anti-Bias training never really works'. • 'I did the standard development programme for all promoted managers, not just women'. • Also as with the interviewees, development and talent management policies were seen as being the key and most important HR policies for achieving a diverse and gender equal senior management. • 'Senior men trusted me, I felt listened to'. • 'They wanted to develop people to their full potential and so you do the same'. • 'The Council should be more active in planning people's careers, like the Civil Service'. • As managers, the participants did value the diversity statistics that HR provides for interviews and meetings (although they generally distrusted headhunter screened shortlists and felt these worked against achieving a more diverse workforce) • They also felt that ensuring there were women on selection panels when recruiting and appointing was good and helpful practice • These managers talked more about pay than the senior interviewees. They felt that the Council's traditional 'promote from within' policy partly reflected their comparatively low pay levels and lack of attractiveness of the area to outsiders, which had meant that they couldn't attract managers externally and so had to develop and promote junior staff. • Those externally recruited participants tended to be more

Discussion topic & key themes	What was said, key points, examples, agreement/ disagreement
	negative about the promote-from-within culture, in terms of limiting innovation and at times limiting the quality of managers.
The future • Uncertainty, cuts and the restructuring of services in the future pose serious threats to the Council's emphasis on gender equality, achieved through a promote-from-within development approach which is already coming under severe pressure.	• Interviewees generally felt that the challenges and changes that the Council would experience over the next 5 years could seriously threaten its continued focus on gender parity and equality. • 'I worry we might be complacent about it. There will be a huge change soon in leadership'. • We heard that cutbacks had created a lot of uncertainty, with people worried about their futures and jobs. Cuts to training budgets and the loss of middle management posts posed serious difficulties for continuing the policies of promoting talented women (and men) from within. • 'Massive change'. • 'In 5 years' time the Council will be unrecognisable'. • 'Will this issue have the same priority in the future?'. • 'Fewer, bigger senior jobs makes flexible/shorter hours working harder to provide' • 'People feel there is nowhere to go, no longer any promotion opportunities, a preference for external hires'. • 'There is concern at hiring in people at senior levels who don't fit the culture, with more aggressive management styles'. • 'You need a good pool of talented female staff to draw on. And it's shrinking…' • 'We are all looking to deskill: team roles are now paid £22,000 when 5 years ago they would have been on £35,000. It's the only way to carry on providing the service'. • 'In one case someone was offered significant extra responsibility but hardly any extra pay…we have to make it worthwhile for people'.
Conclusions and learning points • The business case and benefits from diverse teams at the top are greater than ever, but it is becoming harder for the Council to deliver this in an era of change and uncertainty. • The Council needs to update and 'practice what it preaches'	• The participants felt that the business case for gender equality and diversity more widely was stronger than ever and would continue to be so. • 'The real payoff is much stronger and better decisions from more diverse teams'. • But with cuts and restructuring and the replacement of key people in the most senior roles the emphasis on gender and all forms of diversity and equality and the operation and funding of key policies supporting it, notably talent management and development and flexible working, are already under severe pressure.

Discussion topic & key themes	What was said, key points, examples, agreement/ disagreement
on flexible working and talent management and development, providing opportunities for all to develop their careers and ensuring that the Council focuses on ability and performance and not presenteeism.	• 'We need to be careful. It can be reversed'. • 'We need to remind people what is appropriate and inappropriate' • 'We need to practice what we preach: our practice doesn't always match with the policy throughout the organisation'. • 'The issue is wider than just gender'. • 'We need to manage across all diversity streams, not just gender…carers, the disabled'. • 'Diversity not just about gender, we want mixed races, politics, everything' • Group participants felt there need to be changes to update and reemphasise HR and diversity policies, in order to ensure that gender parity continues to be delivered in the future. This was particularly evident in terms of flexible working where policy updating and stronger enforcement was required in future. • 'A lot of HR documents are a fantasy of what goes on in the organisation' • 'Practice what we preach'. • 'We need to really embrace flexible working, the culture is still too rule-based and inflexible compared to Health'. • 'We need to become more output-focused, rather than valuing 'presenteeism'' • 'We underestimate how hard it is for people working flexibly., how it affects your confidence…we need to support them. If you have talent, it shouldn't matter whether you have kids or not. • 'We need to trust our staff more to get the work done wherever, however they work'. • 'We need to embrace flexible working and change the culture to develop talent fully'. • 'We need to focus on achievements and reward appropriately'. • This was however, regarded as more of a talent management than just a diversity issue: the Council needs to provide more opportunities in future, as in the past, for anyone who is talented to progress, rather than hiring in from outside at senior levels and cutting back on development. • 'We should shift the balance back to internal promotions, rather than using headhunters for senior posts'. • 'Talent and development is key. We need to balance in house development and external recruitment and experience'. • 'We need to give people opportunities to develop new skills and take on responsibility, and base promotion on evidence about

Discussion topic & key themes	What was said, key points, examples, agreement/ disagreement
	performance'.
	• 'We have lots of talented people, give them the opportunities'.
	• 'Focus on genuine talent…open up opportunities for all'.
	• 'We need to encourage more lateral movement now that there are fewer promotions'.
	• 'It can be very difficult now to get the experience you need to get a promotion. And people from minorities can lack confidence, we have got to provide the support they need.
	• 'Not programmes targeted at specific groups – we should offer development to all'.
	• Make it worthwhile for people – one case someone was offered significant extra responsibility but hardly any extra pay

4.4 Questionnaire Findings

We administered a short questionnaire at the end of each of our groups. The first part asked participants to rate their level of agreement with the following statements on a 5-point Likert scale and in the table below we show the mean average responses, with 5 being strongly agree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, and 1 strongly disagree.

The results in Table 4 below show that a high proportion of the participants are confident that the Council values equality and diversity, with the example set by the leadership a critical part of that, along with the wider culture and supportive HR policies. But the majority felt that new policies/practices would be required to retain gender parity in future

Table 4: Agreement with statements

Question/Statement	Level of Agreement
The Council's reputation for promoting diversity / equal treatment influenced my decision to come and work here	3.1
The Council's reputation for promoting diversity / equal treatment helps to motivate and retain me	3.3
The example set by the leadership at the top of the Council is critical to us being a truly diverse and equal employer	4.4
We will need new policies and practices to retain an equal gender mix at senior levels in future	3.4
We have more effective HR. and diversity policies at Lewisham than in most other councils	2.4
Women have the same opportunities to progress their career here as men	4.1
I have experienced discriminatory / inappropriate / offensive behaviour during my career	4.1
I have experienced discriminatory / inappropriate / offensive behaviour while working at	2.3

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We need to train managers to be aware of and counter their biases	3.6
We need policies and practices in place to prevent management biases affecting hiring and promotion decisions	3.6
Having children or caring responsibilities does not affect your ability to progress your career here	3.1
I am confident the Council values equality and diversity of its employees when making decisions	4.1
The working culture and environment is supportive to women here	3.6
Lewisham is more serious than most other councils in promoting gender parity	3.0

N=7

The second set of questions asked participants to rate the relative importance of a series of policies and practices to, in the left hand column their own career progression; in the middle column to the current achievement of gender parity at Lewisham, and required in the future to sustain this in the right column. The scale was 5= very important/critical, 3= of medium importance, and 1= of no or little importance. Again, the mean scores are shown in the table below.

The results in Table 5 below show that participants rated the Council culture and leaders, role models/mentors and equal pay as critical to their own career, while in explaining the current gender parity in the Council HR policies, particularly flexible working, assume more importance. To preserve this in the future, these policies are regarded as even more critical; such as maternity/paternity support, and HR data monitoring.

Table 5: Rating importance of policy/practice

Policy/Practice	Supporting your career 1 – 5	Supporting current Lewisham situation 1 – 5	For the future 1 – 5
Council culture and senior management/leader example	4.0	4.4	4.6
Data monitoring, targeting and reporting	2.1	2.8	3.7
Flexible working	2.3	4.0	4.8
Maternity and paternity support	2.4	3.7	4.7
Recruitment eg blind interviews	1.6	2.7	3.4
Training and development progs eg women into management	2.7	3.1	3.4
Pay and performance management eg Living Wage	3.4	3.7	4.3
Anti-bias training programmes	2.3	2.6	3.1
Role models and mentoring programmes	3.8	4.1	4.6

N=7

5   Summary, Conclusions, Learning and Implications

'It probably doesn't matter where it starts if those people at the top believe in it'.

'You have to believe it and live it. You can't just do it through numbers, it takes time'.

'Place is important'

'It never crossed my mind they might prefer a man'

'We need to be careful. It can be reversed'

'It's all very well to say how important diversity is…the Council really needs to embed good practice throughout the organisation'

'No one formula works for success: parity needs to be central to things'.

■   This has been a fairly short, largely qualitative research study examining how Lewisham Council has achieved its current position of gender parity in its most senior positions, placed in the context of recent developments and research in this field. IES have reviewed current HR policies and relevant statistics, interviewed the Council's Mayor, Chief Executive and six other senior stakeholders, and discussed the issue with 10 female senior managers themselves.

■   Although this is just one organisation and the research largely consists of summaries of existing senior manger's views, given the significant difficulties that many employers in public as well as private sectors have been experiencing in progressing an objective of gender equality, the findings, although suggestive, should be of interest and potential relevance to many organisations.

■   From our work we would draw the following **tentative conclusions** as to how this has been achieved and the implications for Lewisham and other employers in the future.

■   The Lewisham managers we spoke to were genuinely proud of the Council's record on diversity and gender parity, with **the consistent focus on it from the top over many years and a 'grow your own' talent management and sourcing approach being key** to its success. A long-term approach appears essential; there are no 'quick wins'.

■ A **values-based, culture-driven and pragmatic approach over many years** was seen as being at the heart of the progress made, with the most senior managers setting the example and signalling and monitoring its importance, which has embedded it into the culture of how people behave and act in the organisation; and then a range of HR policies have been important in reinforcing it, particularly in terms of talent management and development.

■ **A consistent focus** and approach over time with clear goals and priorities, but with **flexibility and even opportunism in implementation** across the organisation appears to pay off. Culture has been critical and hence the importance of example and leadership set from the top and of diversity and gender being integral to the organisation's purpose and activities/services.

■ **No one formula works** for success. Parity needs to be central to the aims and services of the organisation, but the approach needs to be tailored to each setting and employer and over time, no one set of leadership behaviours or diversity policies will deliver parity in every employer. The 'place', the nature of Lewisham and its community was inextricably bound up with both the diversity approach and its success in the Council, to some extent forcing on the Council the need to develop talented individuals internally from all groups and from the local community. Even though the approach has been successful in terms of gender, as the people we spoke to pointed out, it has yet to have similar impact in terms of BME groups, a current area of focus.

■ In terms of the academic debate over the impact of HR and diversity policies and their 'hard' or 'soft' application, here again in Lewisham **a balance** of informal activities (such as mentoring) and formal policies (such as flexible working and recruitment methods and monitoring) appears to have been important, varying to suit over time. Early in the process these policies played perhaps a more important role in signalling and supporting the desired cultural shift, with dedicated gender development programmes for example, (which all the female managers we consulted now react against). Once the appropriate behaviours became ingrained, the policies could be relaxed.

■ But as these managers said, it appears likely that with future retirements and changes in leadership; and the pressures of further re-structuring and budget and staff cuts, **more authoritative application of formal policies will once again become more important** over the next few years, as well as the re-statement and re-emphasis of the importance of diversity and gender equality in written form. Updating and reinforcing flexible working policies in future were seen as being particularly important to maintaining gender parity in future.

■ **HR policies and quantitative data have played an important enabling and supporting role throughout**, and the learning from Lewisham would be that all

aspects of diversity need to be addressed, not just gender, given that fairness has been a key part of the rationale for action.

■ Also our findings would suggest that **HR policies of all types**, not just diversity ones, are important. Interviewees agreed that UBT training and similar were a 'good thing' to do but doubted their impact in isolation. Almost all emphasised **the importance of active career and talent management and development policies** as being the single most vital area for action, opening up opportunities to people at whatever level and from whatever background to develop the confidence, skills and experience needed to move into senior roles.

■ But we also heard that this 'promote from within' policy is not a universal 'good thing', given the potential downsides of the approach, in terms of lack of innovation and alternative ideas that more managers recruited externally might bring (also of course a rationale for greater diversity). We also saw the potential negative reaction to the more recent moves to bring in more talent at a senior level from outside.

■ Everyone in Lewisham agreed though, whatever their thinking on the optimum balance of internal promotions and external recruitment, that **appointing entirely on merit** and selecting the best person for the role was vital, whatever their current or previous post and employer .

■ The managers we spoke to were also self-critical of an **implementation, policy/practice, 'say/do' gap on diversity in the Council**, as for example when flexible working arrangements were not approved or supported in some areas. The risks of this dissonance, people felt, would increase in the future, and hence the need for a firmer and more consistent approach to policy and reviewing and monitoring its implementation in future, as well as adapting regularly to suit changed circumstances.

■ In terms of the implications of this study for possible further research to develop, detail and test these initial findings, we would list the following:

● Conducting similar but comparative quantitative as well as qualitative research in a range of other London councils would help to test the findings from this study, highlight the factors driving gender equality and help to explain the variations evident across the different councils in London.

● More work would be useful on helping to understand the facets of organisational cultures that uniquely enhance the way women work and help them to achieve progress to senior levels.

● The expansion of research to consider other groups and see if there is consistency with the findings on gender parity, and also research on the views and impact on men of gender parity would also be interesting.