

Item 1

The work of the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee

Purpose of meeting

Clive Betts MP is Chair of the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee. Clive will be speaking at Councillors' Forum to put the wider work of the Committee in context, as well as making reference to the specific work about the role of local elected representatives. This Councillors' Forum is an opportunity for us to hear about the work of the committee and its engagement with the sector, and for the Chair to hear from Councillors about key issues surrounding their role and the sector.

The Committee has recently announced that it is undertaking an inquiry into the role of councillors. The brief for this is detailed below. The LGA is actively engaging with the Committee in this inquiry. We have submitted formal evidence to the Committee, and later this month will be hosting a joint private meeting with the members of the Committee and a number of Councillors.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the presentation and raise any issues on the implications for local government.

Action

As directed by the Forum.

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Background

Clive Betts MP

1. Clive Betts is Chair of the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee and the Labour MP for Sheffield South East. After graduating from Cambridge, Clive worked as an economist in London and South Yorkshire. Elected to Sheffield City Council in 1976, Clive became Chair of its Housing Committee, where he drove major changes in housing management, tenant involvement, maintenance and modernization, private sector renewal, and initiated a variety of partnerships with developers and housing associations. Under his leadership, Sheffield was consistently named in the top five housing authorities in England. He was also Chair of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities' Housing Committee. Clive was Leader of Sheffield CC from 1987-1992, when he was elected MP for Sheffield Attercliffe. He was a Government Whip from 1997-2001, and was elected Chair of the CLG Select Committee in 2010.

About the Communities and Local Government Committee

2. The Communities and Local Government Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the administration, expenditure and policy of the Department for Communities and Local Government and its associated public bodies.
3. More information can be found on their website at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/>

About the Inquiry into Councillors and the community

New Inquiry and Call for evidence

4. Councillors and the community
The Communities and Local Government Committee has decided to conduct an inquiry into the role councillors play in their communities and calls for submissions.

5. In the most recent National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010 councillors were asked about their work as councillors, their views on a range of issues and their personal background. The census revealed that:
 - 5.1 88% of councillors cited a desire to serve the community as their reason for wanting to become a councillor.
 - 5.2 67% of councillors intend to stand for re-election at the end of their term in office and 83% would recommend taking on the role to others.
 - 5.3 68% of councillors were male, 31% were female. The proportion of female councillors has increased from 28% in 1997.
 - 5.4 The average age of councillors has increased from 55 in 1997 to 60 in 2010.
 - 5.5 96% of councillors were white and 4% came from an ethnic minority background.
 - 5.6 On average, councillors spend 23 hours per week on council and political business. 15 per cent of councillors spend more than 35 hours per week on council and political business.
 - 5.7 Of those who are employed or self-employed, 69 % work in the private sector. 37% of employed or self-employed councillors described themselves as having a managerial background and 33% as professional.
6. The Committee invites submissions from interested parties on the work and activities of the councillors elected to principal authorities (county, district, unitary, metropolitan and London borough councils) in England. To assist those submitting memoranda the Committee suggests they may wish to cover the following areas:
 - 6.1 the role of councillors as leaders of communities and neighbourhoods;
 - 6.2 recruitment and diversity of councillors – and the implications for representation and local democracy;
 - 6.3 skills, training and support for councillors;
 - 6.4 the practicalities of being a councillor – including time commitment, time off work, casework and remuneration;
 - 6.5 localising decision making to divisions, wards and neighbourhoods;
 - 6.6 oversight, facilitation and accountability; and
 - 6.7 strategic leadership, governance and responsibilities.
7. Memoranda addressing any or all of these issues were invited by midday on Wednesday, 23 May 2012.