



Securing Political Sign Off

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Securing Political Sign-off

The success of London Councils as a lobbying body is based on its ability to speak on behalf of all London local authorities. In order to achieve multi-authority consensus, it needs to operate on a cross-party basis and in addition, ensure the confidence of member councils not subject to party political control. Care always needs to be taken to ensure that no party considers that its view has not, at least, been taken into account.

Clearly, there is a suite of agreed policy and lobbying positions that members have agreed and action can be progressed in any case in respect of those. This note applies to new areas of potential clearance.

Quotes from source documents are in italics

Formal mechanisms

1. Leaders' Committee - Decision-making power:

The London local authorities have devolved to London Councils' Leaders' Committee the power to:

formulate policies for the development of democratic and effectively managed local government including matters relating to Transport, the Environment and Grants¹

Rationale: The boroughs have given broad powers to London Councils Leaders' Committee to develop policies in the boroughs collective interest. They have also made explicit that, despite the existence of the Grants and Transport and Environment Committees, it is Leaders' Committee that has been devolved strategic oversight of these matters.

2. Executive Committee - Decision-making power:

Leaders' Committee has devolved to the Executive the power to:

- *play an active role in giving effect to the policy direction already agreed by Leaders' Committee*
- *broker a London Councils' position on strategic issues for submission to Leaders' Committee and*
- *agree routine consultation responses²*

¹ The London Councils (Leaders Committee) Governing Agreement, dated 13 December 2001 (as amended)

² Agreed Terms of Reference for the Leaders' Committee Executive

Rationale: While retaining to itself overall power to determine policy, Leaders' Committee acknowledges that there are frequently matters that can better be determined by a smaller group of members within the general parameters set by Leaders' Committee

3. Securing political sign-off for decisions between meetings – Urgency decisions Decision-making power:

There is a procedure in Standing Orders that allows for decisions to be made between meetings if the Chief Executive considers them urgent, by consulting:

- *the Elected Officers of London Councils. If at least two of the Elected Officers, of whom one will be the Chair, if available, and the other will be from another political party or no party, agree in writing that the matter is urgent and agree the Chief Executive's recommendation, then the matter is agreed³*

Rationale: Matters can crop up that require a decision before the next scheduled meeting and which do not merit convening a special meeting.

Non-formal mechanisms

1. Urgency decisions - Decision-making power:

If the portfolio-holder of the policy area of an urgency is not amongst the decision-making Elected Officers, they are copied into the urgencies circulation and their view taken into account even though their view cannot be counted as the two requisite agreeing members.

Rationale: The portfolio-holder needs to be 'on board' and should, in any event, have been consulted before the matter came to be dealt with as an urgency

2. Urgency decisions - Decision-making power:

If any member asks for a decision requested under the urgency procedure to be amended then that amendment is circulated to all Elected Officers, effectively as a fresh request for an urgency decision. If any member objects to an urgency or if unanimity cannot be achieved on an amended urgency it is deemed by officers to have been rejected

³ London Councils Standing Orders - Section 19

Rationale: Even though an urgency could have obtained the agreement of the two requisite members, an objection lodged by a member clearly denotes a lack of political buy-in and it would normally be inappropriate for that objection not to be considered at least one more time by the other members.

3. Obtaining political buy-in - Decision-making power:

When developing any policy, the relevant portfolio-holder would need to be involved from the outset. Those portfolio-holders would consult the other party groups to gauge the likelihood of cross-party agreement depending on circumstance. Liaising with identified party leads is a responsibility of the portfolio holder as set out in the role profile (which has been agreed by Leaders' Committee).

This course of action is one which the more controversial an item the broader and deeper the necessity of the cross-party consultation. In all cases the Party Group Advisers would need to be copied into the consultation with members. In many cases it would be wise to consult with them before taking it to members to see if there was a fundamental problem that they are aware of, but the policy officer may not be and in some cases, it may be possible to obtain sign-off from them without needing to trouble a member for a view.

Rationale: A policy officer will need to take a judgement on what mechanism to use in order to obtain political buy-in ranging, on a spectrum from decision by Leaders' Committee to sign-off by a Party Group Adviser. The mechanisms are governed by rules on which Corporate Governance can advise but the judgement is one that a policy officer will need to make for themselves normally in consultation with their manager/corporate director/chief executive.

In short, there is a judgement on the depth of feeling on the issue in the parties. The deeper the feeling the further towards the formal end of the decision spectrum would need to go.

A policy officer should of course draw upon previously agreed policy or action in helping this consideration, where relevant.

One further caveat is that some issues have distinct spatial dimensions – inner/outer London and sub-regional, for example. This would also need to be taken into account.