

# Lewisham Council

Lewisham seeks inspiring new Chief Executive to help turn social agenda into reality



Lewisham excels at being quietly good,' admits the borough's elected Mayor Damien Egan.

London's second fastest growing borough is a magnet for investors and is an increasingly popular place to live – in part thanks to the high quality of life it can offer. For example, this year it was named the best place in London for parks and green spaces.

But now it's ready to come out from under the radar and the council is looking for a new Chief Executive with the skills and experience to help deliver an ambitious social agenda.

That's because despite seeing an upsurge in investment in recent years, Lewisham is still a place of marked inequality with wards in both the most affluent and most deprived quintiles in the country.

'We have seen a lot of regeneration and there's much more to come but over the years it hasn't necessarily worked for everybody,' Damien explains. 'The challenge for the next decade is how we make the investment and regeneration in Lewisham work for all of our diverse communities.'

He was elected a year ago with a bold vision, setting out more than 100 pledges around key issues such as the shortage of social and genuinely affordable housing and driving improvement in schools.

Since then a new Corporate Strategy for 2018-22 has been launched that sets out seven priorities



**Damien Egan – Lewisham elected Mayor**

– from tackling the housing crisis to building an inclusive local economy.

Progress has been rapid with £37m already secured to deliver 384 new council homes and 28 sites identified for social housing. The council itself has undergone a number of changes, including services being brought in-house and a restructuring of the senior management team.

Damien believes the foundations are now in place for the new Chief Executive to take forward the council's vision and turn it into reality. But he says it will require someone who genuinely buys into what he and elected members are trying to achieve, who understands the challenges ahead and the 'Lewisham way' of working.

'We have a lot of developer interest here because we're an inner London borough with lots of potential. Lewisham is an attractive place to invest and that means we should get the best for our communities. We have got to make the most of our assets and drive a hard bargain.

**'The challenge for the next decade is how we make the investment and regeneration in Lewisham work for all of our diverse communities'**

'As a community we need to come together to lead change. The new CEO will be someone who shares our passion for community-led development and wants to work in a collaborative way across the board.'

That approach is summed up by the way his priorities were developed. 'More than 500 residents had input into the work that informed the new Corporate Plan', says Damien, 'it's a plan that's rooted in our communities'.

The council recently held events with staff and team leaders to take stock after nine years of austerity – to look at what is working well and what could be improved. 'Our staff inspire me with their dedication and determination to deliver for residents. Even when budgets are being cut, they want to co-create and invest in new ways of thinking and working.'

The next Chief Executive will embrace this collaborative approach, be willing to explore new ideas and capitalise on the borough's assets, he says, whether it's looking at ways to link public sector spend with the local economy or bringing forward innovative housing schemes.

Above all else, Lewisham Council wants to work with its partners and communities to tackle generational poverty and improve social mobility – particularly among those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

'It's crucial that the Chief Executive is someone who is able to build an understanding of why our BAME communities are so often disadvantaged in terms of education, access to jobs and health and help us to address these issues.'

He cites the fact that the Mayor's office has a bird's eye view of The Shard, home to world-leading companies.

'It's so close and yet I know very few Lewisham residents who are accessing jobs there. Young people from Lewisham growing up here, going to our schools – we want to make sure that they have the confidence and the qualifications to be able to get any job they aspire to. As an organisation, enabling all our young people is a key priority.'

The council is prepared to 'cast the net far and wide' to get the right candidate – with a strong background of leading in local government, and running an organisation, plus a deep understanding of London and Lewisham's place in it.

'It will be somebody who has the experience and knowledge to inspire confidence in councillors and the leadership team and who's collaborative and able to empower staff,' says Damien.

'Ultimately, it will be someone who naturally fits with our social agenda and who will help Lewisham make the most of the opportunities we have and ensure growth works for everybody.' ■

