



Report of the Leader / Cabinet Member for Supporting Communities

Council – 29 July 2021

Diversity in Democracy

Purpose:	To update members on the work of the WLGA and the cross party working group set up to look at Diversity in Local Democracy.
Policy Framework:	Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 Equalities Act 2010 Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) This Council commits to becoming a Diverse Council to: i. Provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity; ii. Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all; iii. Consider staggering council meeting times and agreeing recess periods to support councillors with other commitments; and iv. Set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 local elections. 2) The Democratic Services Committee be tasked with undertaking a review of the Diversity in Democracy Programme. 3) A report be brought back to Council with an Action Plan setting out how the Council can support the Diversity in Democracy Programme.
Report Author:	Tracey Meredith
Finance Officer:	Ben Smith
Legal Officer:	Tracey Meredith
Access to Services Officer:	Rhian Millar

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) supported a Welsh Government led Diversity in Democracy programme ahead of the 2017 elections. However although the Diversity in Democracy Programme was the biggest and most resourced programme of its kind data shows that there remains a significant lack of diversity in Welsh Councils.
- 1.2 The WLGA Council agreed in September 2018 to take steps to advance gender equality and diversity in Councils before the 2022 elections. This was in recognition of the lack of diversity in Welsh Councils. A cross party working group was set up to explore broader under-representation in democracy. Part of the remit of the working group was to consider what activities councils and the WLGA could do to improve diversity in democracy and the role of the Welsh Government and political parties.
- 1.3 In addition to the working group the Minister for Housing and Local Government convened a stakeholder roundtable of regional stakeholder events. Key messages were:
 - there was a general lack of awareness of the role and contribution made by councillors
 - social media abuse directed at councillors is getting worse and is predominately directed at female/family members.
 - training and development for councillors was fundamental
 - time commitment was a barrier for many
 - a recurring theme was the provision of costs to those standing for election particularly disabled candidates or those with a protected characteristic
 - there was confusion about whether and what councillors are paid and on what basis and whether remuneration paid covers the costs associated with the role.
- 1.4 The findings of the working group and the stakeholder engagements was reported to the WLGA Committee on 5 March 2021 where it was widely acknowledged that representational equality results in better decision making and policy development when people with lived experience of issues are making the decisions.
- 1.5 It also identified that the 'right person for the job' of councillor needs to be a member of the community they serve in order to fully and consistently understand the lives and needs of that community. Councils also need to demonstrate to under-represented communities that they are valued and included in local democracy.

2. The findings of the Cross Party Working Group

- 2.1 The working group suggested that Councils might, in addition to their Strategic Equality Plans, commit to becoming Diverse Councils by publishing a 'Diversity Declaration' or a Council Motion outlining their

intentions to secure equal outcomes for all by working actively to drive cultural and structural change and pro-actively working to advance equality and remove the barriers to any individual's participation in the economy, public and social life.

2.2 This commitment would focus on ensuring that under-represented groups are more active participants in engagement and decision making and demonstrating a public commitment to improving diversity and an open and welcoming culture to all in advance of the 2022 elections.

2.3 The working group suggested that a commitment by each local authority to becoming a Diverse Council could include:

- Establishing 'Diversity Ambassadors' for each political group in the council who, working with each other and their local party associations could encourage recruitment of members from underrepresented groups.
- Encouraging and supporting Heads of Democratic Services, Elections officers/ Communications teams and /or Democratic Services Committees to undertake democratic outreach to promote the role of local councillor in, for example, schools or with underrepresented communities.

2.4 A draft example of what could be included in a Diverse Council Declaration was attached to the report of the WLGA Council and is attached at Appendix A.

3. WLGA Council

3.1 On 5 March the WLGA Council made a number of resolutions including a resolution to:

Encourage a declaration by July 2021 from councils in Wales, on becoming 'Diverse Councils' to:

- *provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity;*
- *demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all;*
- *consider staggering council meeting times and agreeing recess periods to support councillors with other commitments;*
- *set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 local elections.*

3.2 In signing up to be a Diversity Council the Council will ensure that it works towards ensuring that representatives from all backgrounds are encouraged to stand for election and represent the views of their communities.

4. Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

4.1 The above legislation includes a number of provisions promoting diversity in local government including:

- An entitlement to Job sharing for executive members and committee chairs.
- A duty on principal councils to produce a Public Participation encouraging people to participate in decision making and promoting awareness of how to become a member of the council.
- A duty on political group leaders to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of their group.
- Electronic broadcasting of full Council meetings.
- The ability to have multi-location attendance at council meetings including physical, hybrid and remote attendance.
- Provisions enabling the maximum period of absence for each type of family absence for members of local authorities to be specified within regulations and for adoptive leave to reflect that which is available to employees.

5.0 Financial implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report at this stage. The WLGA Diversity in Democracy Programme does include considerations around resettlement grants for senior salary holders which will have financial implications.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report at this stage.

7.0 Integrated Assessment Implications

- 7.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
 - Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
 - Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
 - Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- 7.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development.

Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

- 7.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.
- 7.4 An IIA screening has been undertaken and no adverse implications have been noted. This is a report to Council updating as to the work undertaken in respect of Diversity in Democracy by the WLGA and Cross Party Working Group. The Council is being asked to support this work which will have a positive impact on the community as a whole in ensuring that democratically elected members represent the diverse electorate and work towards the wider agenda of achieving diversity in democracy. A further report will be submitted to Council outlining an action plan for this work, this be subject to its own IIA.

Background papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A - WLGA report on Diversity in Democracy dated 5 March 2021