

26th November 2021

DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY UPDATE

Purpose

1. This paper updates members on Diversity in Democracy developments following the Council meeting on 5th March 2021.

Background

2. WLGA Council discussed and agreed the report of the Diversity in Democracy Working Group at a Special Meeting on 5th March 2021.
3. The report noted that despite actions and some progress, councils do not reflect the general population, with data indicating the following in Wales' local councils:
 - 28% of councillors and 29% of Cabinet members are women.
 - Councillors are proportionately older than the general adult population (47% of councillors were aged 60 years or older) and a higher proportion of councillors were retired (31%).
 - Only about 1.8% of councillors are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) compared to 4.7% for the Welsh population and few hold senior positions.
 - 11% of councillors stated that they had a disability, and there remain a range of challenges for disabled people participating in the democratic process.
4. WLGA Council agreed that the WLGA would support promotional work around Diversity in Democracy and support wider legislative developments such as family absence and job-sharing for councillors. The Council also agreed several other commitments including:
 - 4.1 Political parties should be more proactive around encouraging and supporting more diverse candidates to consider standing for election;
 - 4.2 Councils should agree 'Diverse Council' declarations by July 2021 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; and set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 local elections;
 - 4.3 The setting of council targets to be representative of the communities they serve at the next elections and there was support for the use of voluntary quotas for Welsh local elections; and
 - 4.4 calling for the introduction of resettlement grants for senior salary holders and agreeing to encourage all councillors to claim any necessary allowances or expenses incurred.

WLGA Be a Councillor and Civility in Public Life Activity

5. The WLGA's beacouncillor.wales website provides a range of information, guidance and support for prospective candidates. It has been updated to include:
 - 5.1 [Videos and case studies](#) of diverse councillors describing their roles and why they stood for election; and
 - 5.2 An [E-learning module](#) for candidates.
6. The WLGA regularly issues social media posts and links to the beacouncillor website to coincide with various diversity and equality awareness or celebratory campaigns.
7. In addition to the online beacouncillor guide and e-learning module, the WLGA is developing a suite of resources to support new and returning councillors and councils, including:
 - Online Councillors Guide;
 - E-Learning modules covering twenty topics including local government finance, equalities and planning;
 - Local and regional induction programmes; and
 - Cabinet development support and mentoring and peer support for new leaders.
8. The WLGA has **worked with partners to promote diversity and provide support to councils, including a partnership of WEN Wales, Disability Wales, Stonewall and EYST**. The partnership has written to all authorities and met with several leaders and/or Democratic Services staff to offer guidance and support around targeting under-represented groups, establishing mentoring schemes and setting targets.
9. The WLGA is also supporting a **WEN Wales Diversity in Democracy workshop** on 23rd November aimed at councillors and officers which will cover: *mentoring, online abuse and supporting local community leaders*. Cllr Jane Mudd, WLGA Spokesperson for Equalities is speaking at the event.
10. The WLGA is also supporting and has promoted the **Equal Power: Equal Voice mentoring scheme**, jointly coordinated by WEN Wales, Disability Wales, Stonewall and EYST. The scheme seeks to develop and support people from under-represented groups and encourage them to consider standing for public office. The scheme began on 8th November with 99 mentees, 11 councillors, including several WLGA Council members, are participating in the scheme as mentors.
11. The WLGA has welcomed and promoted the **Welsh Government's new [Access to Elected Office Fund](#)**. The Fund is available to disabled people standing for election and can contribute to the costs of support to overcome impairment related barriers that would enable participation in the election, including assistive aids and adaptations to equipment, travel around the constituency if you cannot use public transport, personal assistance and communication support workers such as BSL, Interpreters, Palantypists and Lip speakers.

12. The WLGA has worked with the Welsh Government in developing and promoting a **Survey of Councillors**, which is being completed by councillors during November (at time of writing, it had achieved a 29% response rate). The survey asks questions regarding diversity, support requirements, views on remuneration and experiences of bullying and intimidation. This information will be used to help inform future policy developments nationally and anonymized information will also be shared with local authorities to inform local development and support and any relevant policies. The WLGA is also working with Data Cymru on a **planned Exit Survey of councillors** who decide to stand down at the elections; this survey will build on previous exit surveys and provides valuable information about why councillors decide to stand down and any specific issues that may need to be explored further.
13. **Councillors' personal safety has been a focus and high priority** following the tragic murder of Sir David Amess MP. The WLGA re-distributed a range of guidance material regarding [Personal Safety](#) to councils for circulation to councillors, convened a meeting of Heads of Democratic Services to share practice, risk assessment approaches and support. The WLGA also wrote to the 4 Chief Constables requesting that they contact councils and councillors to provide assurance, risk assessment and guidance as appropriate. The Police confirmed public figures' personal safety and security had been considered at the Gold Group and local police teams would liaise with councils and councillors.
14. The WLGA continues to work with the LGA, COSLA and NILGA on the UK-wide Civility in Public Life campaign. The latest developments have been the **publication of a [series of infographic 'flash cards'](#)** (produced in English and Welsh) for councillors and candidates setting out 'rules' and expected standards of debate on social media platforms and top tips on handling online abuse.
15. The WLGA is supporting the work of the LGA in lobbying on the **Draft Online Safety Bill**, which is currently being scrutinised in the UK Parliament. The Draft Bill is broadly welcomed and is of significant interest to councils, covering a wide range of issues from child protection and public health to abuse and intimidation and free speech. The Draft Bill is broad and the LGA is developing its position on various elements, however, possible areas where the Bill could be further clarified or strengthened include:
- clear expectations on providers to demonstrate the effectiveness of their processes to prevent and tackle breaches of the Equality Act 2010 on their sites or face action by Ofcom;
 - consider how to limit the influence of automated 'bots' online;
 - social media platform providers should introduce specific safeguards for those holding elected office, including fast track routes to report abuse, intimidation and harassment; and
 - clear parameters around what content is "of democratic importance" – content related to elections, elected members and political processes must be subject to clear rules around accuracy and mis- and disinformation.

Local Diversity in Democracy Activity and Diverse Council Declarations

16. Following on from the WLGA Council meeting, councils have been developing local action plans and drafting and agreeing Diverse Council declarations.
17. Fifteen authorities signed a Diverse Council declaration by the end of July 2021. Nineteen have now signed a Diverse Council declaration and the remaining three are expected to have signed by the end of the year. The 'model' Diverse Council declaration is included in Annex A, although several authorities have made local adaptations to the declaration.
18. Many councils have also developed action plans underpinning their declaration and several had begun planning or developing 'diversity' work in advance of the declaration being signed.
19. Examples of completed or planned local activity include:
 - Councils have undertaken **targeted diversity engagement work**, for example, Cardiff Council through its Race Equality Taskforce which includes a Citizens Voice theme and Blaenau Gwent has undertaken a piece of discovery work to gauge the reason why young people, aged 16-25, don't engage with democracy;
 - Several councils are producing '**Get to know your Councillor**' or **beacouncillor videos**, including [Caerphilly](#), [Bridgend](#), [Gwynedd](#) and [Pembrokeshire](#), Cardiff and Carmarthenshire have plans to co-develop councillor videos and other councils are developing 'A Week in the Life' case studies, for example, the Vale of Glamorgan;
 - Many councils are updating their **beacouncillor** or '**Standing for Office**' **websites**, for example Monmouthshire has developed a bespoke '[Council Elections 2022](#)' website, which updates candidates and the public on changes to electoral and community boundaries following the recent Electoral and Community Reviews in the county;
 - Newport's Democratic Services Committee is developing a Participation Strategy, which will include becoming a councillor, and what the role of councillor involves. Several councils are hosting '**open days**' or **community engagement events**, including Gwynedd's Democracy Week in October, Pembrokeshire (week of 22nd November), and plans in Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan in the New Year;
 - Many councillors are also **informally or formally offering to mentor prospective candidates**, for example in Pembrokeshire where democratic services team will act as a conduit for candidates requesting mentoring and senior councillors in Bridgend, Cardiff, Monmouthshire, Swansea, Conwy and Rhondda Cynon Taf are acting as Equal Power: Equal Voice mentors. Conwy's Diversity Action Plan outlines plans for each political group to appoint 'Diversity Ambassadors' to champion the diversity expectations within the selection processes of their political parties; and

- Several councils, including Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taf, are planning to link **youth and school engagement work around votes for 16 and 17 year olds** with promotional and awareness raising work around the role of councillors.

Councillor Remuneration

20. The WLGA Council recognised the importance of appropriate remuneration for councillors, both to ensure fairness and also to encourage and promote greater diversity of candidates to stand for election.
21. WLGA Council agreed a commitment **‘to encourage all councillors to claim any necessary allowances or expenses incurred’** given some councillors can be disproportionately affected if they are on low income or have caring responsibilities. The WLGA Presiding Officer and Equality Spokespersons wrote to all Leaders, Council Chairs and Chairs of Democratic Services following the March Council meeting to inform them of this commitment.
22. **WLGA Council also adopted a formal position calling for the introduction of resettlement grants or parachute payments for councillors.** Councillors are one of the only paid public roles that do not have financial protection and are not entitled to receive a ‘redundancy’ payment if they lose office at an election. Members of the Senedd and Members of Parliament receive a significant resettlement grant should they lose office at an election. Redundancy payments are also a protected right for public sector employees. In particular, senior councillors tend to be full-time, often have to give up careers to focus on their councillor role and many have family as well as other financial commitments; the personal risk of a sudden and significant loss of a salary is inconsistent and unfair compared to other public roles. It is also a disincentive for more diverse people with careers or family responsibilities to consider taking on the most senior roles in local government.
23. The WLGA wrote to the then Minister for Housing and Local Government outlining the case for change, who responded noting it was a matter for the new Welsh Government following the elections.
24. The recent Ten Year Review of the Independent remuneration Panel notes that “The Panel takes the view that as these payments would, by definition, be made to people who are not (i.e., no longer) Councillors they fall outside the scope of their powers”. The Review however outlines two options the Welsh Government might consider and seek legal advice on:
 - 24.1 Councillors who are not re-elected remain Councillors for a short period (four days) after the election. It may be possible to devise a scheme of payments for Councillors who fall within those four days.
 - 24.2 Make additional payments to all Councillors who certify they will stand for re-election in the year before election, on the condition that should they be re-elected this sum is deducted from the basic salary for the year starting with their re-election.

25. The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales is currently consulting on its Annual Report 2022-23. The Report notes: "2022 is an election year for local government and the new five year term provides the opportunity to reset the basic salaries of elected members to align with the average earnings in Wales. This has been eroded in successive years, primarily as a result of austerity measures." The Report proposes the following salaries for 2022-23:

Role	Proposed 2022-23 Salaries
Councillor	£16,800
Leader	£53,550 - £63,000
Executive Member	£32,130 - £37,500
Committee Chairs	£25,593

26. Encouraging diversity is a central theme as the Panel proposes a resetting of salaries against its original methodology of alignment with the Welsh Median Salary. The Report notes:

"We consider that it is important that the payments to elected members of principal councils be fair and at a level that is not a disincentive to potential candidates for election...Levels of remuneration need to be set at a level sufficient to encourage a diversity of willing and able people to undertake local governance through elected, appointed or co-opted roles. It is important to promote a culture which encourages take up of remuneration to ensure that people from all walks of life can participate confidently in our democracy."

Recommendations

27. **Members are asked to:**

- 27.1 **Note the local and national progress in delivering the Diversity in Democracy programme;**
- 27.2 **Encourage the continued sharing of good practice and resources between councils;**
- 27.3 **Agree that councils review their online 'standing for election' or 'Be A Councillor' resources to ensure they are prominent and easily accessible via website homepages and link to WLGA Be A Councillor resources; and**
- 27.4 **Comment on the Independent Remuneration's Draft Annual Report.**

Report cleared by Cllr Jane Mudd, WLGA Spokesperson for Equalities, Anti-Poverty and Migration

Author: Daniel Hurford, Head of Policy
E-mail: daniel.hurford@wlga.gov.uk

Annex A

(DRAFT) DIVERSE COUNCIL DECLARATION

This Council commits to being a Diverse Council. We agree to:

- Provide a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy
- Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all, promoting the highest standards of behaviour and conduct
- Set out a local Diverse Council Action Plan ahead of the 2022 local elections. Including:
 - Appoint Diversity Ambassadors for each political group on the council to work with each other and local party associations to encourage recruitment of candidates from underrepresented groups.
 - Encourage and enable people from underrepresented groups to stand for office through the provision of activities such as mentoring and shadowing programmes and information and learning events for people interested in standing and official candidates.
 - Proactive engagement and involvement with local community groups and partner organisations supporting and representing under-represented groups
 - Ensure that all members and candidates complete the Welsh Government candidates' and councillors' survey distributed at election time.
 - Set ambitious targets for candidates from under-represented groups at the 2022 local elections
- Work towards the standards for member support and Development set out in the *Wales Charter for Member Support and Development*.
- Demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for Councillors by:
 - providing access to counselling services for all councillors
 - having regard for the safety and wellbeing of councillors whenever they are performing their role as councillors.
 - taking a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment by members including through social networks.
- Provide flexibility in council business by
 - regularly reviewing and staggering meeting times
 - encouraging and supporting remote attendance at meetings and
 - agreeing recess periods to support councillors with caring or work commitments.
- Ensure that all members take up the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled, particularly any reimbursement for costs of care, so that all members receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it.
- Ensure that councillors from under-represented groups are represented whenever possible in high profile, high influence roles.