

MINUTES WLGA Council, Special Meeting: Diversity in Democracy

Via Microsoft Teams Friday 5th March 2021

Cllr Nigel Daniels (Blaenau Gwent)
Cllr Dai Davies (Blaenau Gwent)
Cllr Huw David (Bridgend)
Cllr Cheryl Green (Bridgend)
Cllr Philippa Marsden (Caerphilly)
Cllr Nigel George (Caerphilly)
Cllr Sean Morgan (Caerphilly)
Cllr Huw Thomas (Cardiff)
Cllr Susan Elsmore (Cardiff)
Cllr Sarah Merry (Cardiff)
Cllr Peter Bradbury (Cardiff)
Cllr Christopher Weaver (Cardiff)
Cllr Linda Evans (Carmarthenshire)
Cllr Mair Stephens (Carmarthenshire)
Cllr Sam Rowlands (Conwy)
Cllr Goronwy O Edwards (Conwy)
Cllr Carolyn Thomas (Flintshire)
Cllr Michelle Perfect (Flintshire)
Cllr Dyfrig L Siencyn (Gwynedd)
Cllr Dafydd Meurig (Gwynedd)
Cllr Llinos Medi (Ynys Mon)
Cllr Lisa Mytton (Merthyr Tydfil)

Cllr Robert Greenland (Con)
Cllr R Greenland (Monmouthshire)
Cllr Rob G Jones (Neath Port Talbot)
Cllr Carol Clement-Williams (Neath Port Talbot)
Cllr Edward Latham (Neath Port Talbot)
Cllr Jane Mudd (Newport)
Cllr Roger Jeavons (Newport)
Cllr Rosemarie Harris (Powys)
Cllr Matthew Dorrance (Powys)
Cllr Aled Davies (Powys)
Cllr Andrew Morgan (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Cllr Robert Bevan (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Cllr Rhys Lewis (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Cllr Christina Leyshon (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Cllr Maureen Webber (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Cllr Rob Stewart (Swansea)
Cllr Andrea Lewis (Swansea)
Cllr Mary Sherwood (Swansea)
Cllr Clive Lloyd (Swansea)
Cllr A Hunt (Torfaen)
Cllr Neil Moore (Vale of Glamorgan)
Cllr L Burnett (Vale of Glamorgan)
Cllr M Pritchard (Wrexham)

Apologies for absence:

Cllr Emlyn Dole, Carmarthenshire
Cllr Peter Fox, Monmouthshire
Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn, Ceredigion
Cllr David A Bithell, Wrexham
Cllr David M Jenkins, Carmarthenshire
Cllr Peter Lewis, Conwy
Cllr Rhys Lewis, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Cllr Neil Prior, Pembrokeshire

Cllr Ray Quant, Ceredigion
Cllr Mark Spencer, Newport
Cllr Eluned Stenner, Caerphilly
Cllr Gareth Thomas, Gwynedd
Cllr Mark Thomas, Swansea
Cllr Richard Clark, Torfaen
Cllr Julian Thompson-Hill, Denbighshire
Cllr Ieuan Williams, Ynys Mon

WLGA Officers in Attendance:

Dr Chris Llewelyn, Chief Executive.
Naomi Alleyne, Director of Social Services and Housing
Jon Rae, Director of Resources
Daniel Hurford, Head of Policy Improvement & Governance
Sarah Titcombe, Policy and Improvement Officer (Democratic Services)
Lee Pitt, Democratic Services Officer

Others in Attendance:

Cllr Dhanisha Patel (Bridgend)

10:00 Welcome & apologies - Cllr Huw David, WLGA Presiding Officer

1. The Presiding Officer welcomed members to a significant Council meeting to consider a single report on Diversity in Democracy and acknowledged it was a meeting that would explore the core values of the WLGA – championing and promoting local democracy.
2. Cllr David acknowledged that local authority council chambers and this WLGA virtual council chamber are not as diverse or as representative of communities as they could or should be.
3. The paper under discussion, outlines work already being done to make progress and some proposals to help make the step change needed. He added that Council originally received the report at the meeting in November, but time over-ran so Group Leaders agreed to convene a special meeting to dedicate sufficient time and focus on what are fundamental issues for us as the WLGA and as 22 local authorities.
4. He added that the discussion is particularly timely as it is International Women's Day on Monday and the Welsh Government is soon to publish its ambitious Race Equality Action Plan.
5. He explained that the format for the meeting would be different from usual, which has been requested by Cllrs Sherwood and Elsmore our Equalities Spokespersons and would begin with Cllr Sherwood providing a PowerPoint overview setting the content, and the background and rationale to some of the recommendations.
6. Following the presentation, members joined group meetings to discuss and then reconvene for a proper debate of these issues as a Council.

10:05 WLGA Council Pre-meeting – Report presentation, Cllr Mary Sherwood Chair of the Cross-Party Working Group

10:30 WLGA Political Group meetings to discuss Diversity in Democracy

11:00 WLGA Council Main discussion

7. The debate was extremely positive and there was an overwhelming agreement that local government, collectively, needed to take concerted and proactive action with many leaders and members contributing to the discussion.
8. Members welcomed the opportunity for a dedicated discussion and stressed how important it is to bring those with different voices and experiences into local authorities, as both councillors and officers, to make them truly representative of their communities. Members recognised the challenges faced by every elected member but highlighted that women and those from BAME and deprived communities face greater challenges in society generally. Members were encouraged to support one another regardless of 'politics'.
9. It was acknowledged that political parties could and should do more to encourage more diverse representation, especially in multi-member wards, whilst recognising it was different for Independents. By adopting a Diverse Council Declaration there is still things that can be done.
10. Members were keen to engage with the Independent Renumeration Panel (IRP) for a frank and open discussion and the need for salaries to reflect the work undertaken and to attract candidates. It was remarked that it can be unhelpful if the 'opposition' refuse increases in salary for political purposes and mean salaries fall even further behind.
11. There was debate about some of the recommendations and several members wanted to go further, but it was noted that councils could go further locally through the adoption of more ambitious local Diverse Council Declaration if they wished.
12. The Presiding Officer summed up the discussion highlighting the real consensus and support among members. He thanked the Working Group for their work and said how important the report was and it will be the first thing that the WLGA Council will revisit following the 2022 local government elections. He said members need to reach out and work in their own communities to effect change and that the WLGA would work to combat the negativity faced by women and those from the BAME community.

13. Recommendations:

The WLGA Council resolved the following and amended some recommendations from the report:

- 13.1** Members recognised the work of the WLGA's Cross-Party Working Group on Diversity in Democracy;
- 13.2** Members agreed to encourage all political parties, through the WLGA Political Groups, to commit to proactive and coordinated activities (such as those listed at paragraph 80 of the Report) to improve diversity in local government democracy;
- 13.3** Members adopted a formal position calling for the introduction of resettlement grants for all councillors;
- 13.4** Members agreed to encourage all councillors to claim any necessary allowances or expenses incurred;
- 13.5** Members agreed 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; and
 - Set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 local elections.
- 13.6** Members agreed that councils should set targets to be representative of the communities they serve at the next elections;
- 13.7** Members supported the use of voluntary quotas for Welsh local elections; and
- 13.8** Members agreed that the WLGA reviews the impact of voluntary quotas following the next local elections.

13:00 Meeting closed