



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE – 22ND NOVEMBER 2021

SUBJECT: DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY ACTION PLAN

**REPORT BY: HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND DEPUTY MONITORING
OFFICER**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to ask the Committee to consider and agree the action plan a draft of which is attached at Appendix 1 to this report to support the Diversity Declaration agreed by Council at its meeting on 13th July 2021.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 To consider the draft action plan attached at Appendix 1 to this report in support of the Council's commitment to diversity in democracy.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To consider and make representations on the draft Action Plan attached at Appendix 1 which will be taken forward in the period leading up to the 2022 elections and beyond.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To comply with the recommendation endorsed by Council on 13th July 2021 in relation to its commitment to diversity in democracy.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Members will recall that a report was presented to Council on 13th July 2021 which highlighted the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Diversity in Democracy Report. A copy of this report is included in the link within the background papers. The overarching aim of the Diversity in Democracy programme is to ensure that Council chambers across Wales are more representative of their communities with the Action Plan supporting this aim in readiness for the elections in May 2022 and beyond.

- 5.2 At its meeting in July, Council endorsed the Diverse Council declaration in support of the WLGA's Diversity in Democracy programme and formally declared that it will *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.*
- 5.3 Council delegated the role of developing and progressing the Action Plan to the Democratic Services Committee with progress updates being brought back to Council. The purpose of this report is to seek members views on the draft Action Plan attached at Appendix 1.
- 5.4 The draft Action Plan has been prepared having regard to the key messages and outcomes contained in the WLGA report which are summarised below.
- 5.5 Key messages which arose as a result of the work undertaken by the Cross Party Working Group and the round table discussions held by the Minister for Housing and Local Government included the following
- There was a general lack of awareness of the role and contribution made by Councillors
 - Social media abuse directed at Councillors was getting worse predominately but not exclusively aimed at women which has had a direct effect on diversity in the role
 - Training and Development is fundamental
 - Time and commitment were identified as a barrier particularly by people with family commitments or jobs
 - Providing help with costs to support individuals stand for elections was a recurring theme particularly for disabled people and other individuals from protected characteristic group
 - Childcare costs were also seen as a barrier to campaigning.
 - There was confusion about whether and what councillors are paid and on what basis.
- 5.6 As a result a range of actions emerged which are being implemented by the WLGA and or Councils, which are set out below. However members will also note that there is also an expectation on political parties to support diversity in the democratic process.

Awareness/Value of Role

Councils and WLGA to develop a consistent and coordinated campaign demonstrating how much councillors are valued, developed and supported.

WLGA has launched a Be a Councillor website <https://www.beacouncillor.wales/> which will be further developed in 2021 with pen portraits and 'day in the life' case study videos of councillors from a cross-section of characteristics. It will also include an e learning module for people interested in standing to enable them to understand the role in more detail and "hit the ground running" should they be elected.

Coordinated activity between authorities, including information and awareness campaigns and open days, linked to key events such as Local Democracy Week,

International Women's Day, Black History Month, Disability Awareness Day, LGBT History Month etc.

Targeted WLGA promotional work through Welsh political party conferences in 2021

Targeted engagement work with third sector organisations to encourage discussion and interest in volunteers translating their informal community role into an elected community role. The COVID 19 Pandemic has increased the levels of voluntary and community-based work. The WLGA will engage with individuals and groups who may now wish to continue this work by standing for office.

Candidate/Councillor Abuse

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 will facilitate a change in the requirement to use personal addresses on ballot papers. The Act will also place a duty on political group leaders to promote high standards of conduct. It will also require councils to publish official rather than personal addresses for councillors.

The WLGA, in partnership with their colleagues in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, are involved in developing the Civility in Public Life campaign to promote mutual respect and promote high standards of conduct. The WLGA, working with the LGA, has produced an online Councillors guide for handling intimidation <https://www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-handling-intimidation> .

The WLGA is working with authorities to encourage an informal but comprehensive duty of care for members.

The WLGA is also contacting and providing advice and support to individual councillors who receive online abuse and, where appropriate, issuing supportive messages challenging online abuse via social media.

Training and Development

The WLGA, with authorities, will continue to review current and future training provision. This will include a focus on new ways of delivering support and development post COVID 19.

Work will be undertaken to identify ways in which ex councillors can use their experience and skills to enhance their CVs or continue to use their skills and experience through involvement with training / support mechanisms.

The National "curriculum" for member induction is being updated. This overview of what members would find useful to learn is agreed with councils and includes subjects considered mandatory. As well as traditional subjects like Ethics and Standards, The Well-being of Future Generations and Scrutiny skills, this will now include unconscious bias, personal safety and remote working skills.

A new online Councillors Guide will be developed for Councillors for the 2022 elections

The suite of National e Learning modules specifically developed for members which is freely available via the NHS learning@wales website will be updated for the 2022 elections. This work is being undertaken by authorities working together with the WLGA and is particularly important as a result of the pandemic.

The national Competency framework for elected members is now being developed prior to the 2022 elections to include new requirements such as the understanding of unconscious bias, civility, remote meeting attendance and ICT skills. Councils undertake personal development review with members to personalise training support. WLGA offers guidance and training in how to conduct PDRs.

Councils undertake personal development review with members to personalise training support. WLGA offers guidance and training in how to conduct PDRs 54. The Leadership programme for elected members developed and delivered with LGA and Academi Wales is being re commissioned and refreshed. There are challenges associated with delivering the programme in the current climate which will be addressed as part of the commission.

Mentoring

Work will be undertaken to explore work shadowing/apprenticeships and other opportunities to expose individuals to the work of councils which taken together will form a pathway to participation

The WLGA has promoted and is supporting mentoring schemes run by EYST and the Women's Equality Network Wales. Several councillors have participated as mentors in these programmes.

Newly elected members are offered mentors when they join the council (WLGA provides guidance and training for member mentors).

There are opportunities for individual councils/councillors to provide shadowing and mentoring opportunities for people interested in standing for office ahead of the 2022 local elections.

Flexibility

Local authorities' rapid adoption of virtual meetings via platforms such as Teams, Webex or Zoom during COVID 19 has transformed the way councils do business. Meetings are more accessible for many members, significantly reducing travel commitments and time, allowing members to attend meetings from work and, in the main, from home. Whilst there are potential impacts on 'work-life' balance and setting boundaries between council work and home-life, this approach has provided greater flexibility for members with caring responsibilities. Virtual meetings have also encouraged a less formal and flexible approach to meetings. Councils have bid for WG funding to facilitate digital engagement through the Digital Democracy Fund.

*The LGA have produced a tool to enable women, parents and carers to become councillors and has a range of ideas that could be adopted in councils including a way of assessing the councils support for diverse councillors.
<https://www.local.gov.uk/twenty-first-century-councils>.*

Education

Councils will continue to engage with schools, including links with school councils and Youth Councils.

Councils are also using the Electoral Reform Support Grant to engage with newly enfranchised groups to help them understand the democratic process and encourage them to register and vote.

5.7 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 also includes the following provisions

- job sharing in some offices in principal councils (including the offices of executive member and executive leader);
- a duty on principal councils to publish an electronic and postal address for correspondence for each council member;
- a duty on principal councils to produce a Public Participation Strategy and for it to be reviewed regularly;
- a duty on political group leaders to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of their group;
- electronic broadcasting of certain meetings;
- extended provision for remote attendance at local authority meetings;
- provisions enabling the maximum period of absence for each type of family absence for members of local authorities to be specified within regulations to enable the provision to be kept up to date.

5.8 Further areas for consideration within the Action Plan include the following

- The appointment of 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
- Proactive engagement and involvement with local community groups and partner organisations supporting and representing underrepresented 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.

5.9 Members are asked to consider and comment on the draft actions and to suggest any changes or additional provisions which could be included. The action plan sets out intended activity prior to the elections in May 2022 together with work to be progressed in the longer term. The action plan is a fluid document and may be updated as and when new areas of work are developed.

5.10 **Conclusion**

The committee is asked to consider the detail of the report and provide its views on the appropriateness of the draft Action Plan set out at Appendix 1

6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

6.1 No assumptions have been made in the report which is based upon the work undertaken by the WLGA and the recommendations endorsed by Council at its meeting on 13th July 2021.

7. **SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 An integrated impact assessment has not been undertaken as the report is seeking support of a suite of actions aimed at assisting the promotion of diversity in democracy. It sets out mechanisms for both the Council and political parties to promote diversity and encourage people within underrepresented groups to stand for election in May 2022. This support will assist the Council in discharging its duties and responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The actions identified within the Action plan do not result in any additional expenditure over and above the commitments already made for example in relation to training, support and remuneration etc.

9. **PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The work necessary to meet the requirements of the action plan will be undertaken within the Democratic Services Team with assistance from the Communications and Elections Teams or such other service areas which may be involved from time to time.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The report has been circulated to the consultees below and any comments have been included within the report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Local Government Acts Equality Act 2010 Local Government and Elections Wales Act 2021

Author: Lisa Lane Head of Democratic Services and deputy Monitoring Officer

Consultees: Cllr Martyn James Chair Democratic Services Committee
Cllr Philippa Marsden Leader of Council
Cllr Colin Mann Leader of Plaid Cymru Group
Cllr Kevin Etheridge Leader of the Independent Group
Dave Street Acting Chief Executive
Richard (Ed) Edmunds Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services
Mark S Williams Corporate Director Communities and Economy
Robert Tranter Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Stephen Harris Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer
Emma Sullivan Senior Committee Services Officer
Cath Forbes-Thompson Scrutiny Manager
Dave Beecham Electoral Services Manager
Stephen Pugh Communications Manager
Anwen Cullinane Senior Policy Officer

Appendix 1 draft Action Plan

Background paper – Council 13th July 2021 Diversity in Democracy

<https://sc->

[ptdmod2.corporate.group.local/documents/s36053/Diversity%20in%20Democracy.pdf](https://sc-ptdmod2.corporate.group.local/documents/s36053/Diversity%20in%20Democracy.pdf)

<https://sc-aptdmod2.corporate.group.local/documents/s36054/Appendix%201.pdf>

