

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Report to | County Council |
| Date of meeting | 7 th September 2021 |
| Lead Member / Officer | Councillor Hugh Evans, Leader of the Council |
| Report author | Gary Williams, Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services |
| Title | Diversity in Democracy |

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1. The report is about the work of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) as part of its Diversity and Democracy Programme.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1. To bring to the attention of members the WLGA's Diversity and Democracy Programme and the actions approved by the WLGA Council, together with a request for all Welsh Councils to commit to becoming 'Diverse Councils'.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1. That Council notes the content and actions outlined within the WLGA Council report and letter contained in Appendices 1 and 2.
- 3.2. That Council commits to being a 'Diverse Council' and supports the principles set out in the draft declaration in Appendix 3.
- 3.3. That the Democratic Services Committee is tasked with developing a Diverse Council Action Plan ahead of the 2022 local government elections.

4. Report details

- 4.1. The WLGA has an ambitious Diversity and Democracy Programme to try and ensure that council chambers are more representative of the communities that they serve. They have been considering ways in which greater diversity can be achieved following the local government elections in May 2022.
- 4.2. In September 2018 the WLGA Council agreed 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 underrepresentation in democracy. At a special meeting in March of this year the WLGA Council received a report from that cross party working group with proposals designed to achieve a step change in diversity following the 2022 elections. This report is attached as Appendix 1.
- 4.3. The report identifies barriers to participation which could broadly be summarised as:
 - Time-commitment and meeting times;
 - Political and organisational culture;
 - Childcare and other caring responsibilities;
 - Public criticism and online abuse;
 - Remuneration and impact on employment; and
 - Lack of diverse role models and incumbency
- 4.4. The WLGA Council agreed unanimously that a concerted and collective effort was required across the local government family and political parties. As a result of that meeting, a letter was sent to each local authority in Wales, signed by each of the leaders of the political groups represented on the WLGA Council. A copy of that letter is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.
- 4.5. The WLGA Council agreed to encourage all political parties, through the WLGA Political Groups to commit to proactive and coordinated activities to improve diversity in local government democracy. They also agreed a formal position calling for the introduction of 'resettlement grants' for all councillors and senior salary holders, and to encourage all councillors to claim any necessary allowances or

expenses, to ensure that participation was available to all and not just those who could afford it.

4.6. The WLGA Council also decided that they would support the use of voluntary quotas for Welsh local elections and that Councils should set targets to be representative of the communities they serve at the 2022 elections.

4.7. The WLGA Council also agreed to encourage a declaration 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.

4.8. A draft declaration is attached as Appendix 3

4.9. It is important to note that some aspects of the diversity agenda are outside the Council's remit and such areas need to be taken forward by political parties and other stakeholder groups

4.10. The WLGA has launched a 'Be a Councillor' website containing information about the role of a councillor and the support and development opportunities that can be made available. This can be found at <https://www.beacouncillor.wales/>

4.11. It is suggested that if Council agrees to the making of a declaration in the terms set out in Appendix 3 that the task of preparing an Action Plan be delegated to the Democratic Services Committee.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1. The Council's Corporate Plan contains a commitment to engage challenge and where possible remove barriers to opportunities for those with protected characteristics.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1. The declaration itself will not cost anything. Any costs associated with the action plan will be identified during the development of that plan.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1. There is no requirement for a well-being impact assessment for this report.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1. This report has not been considered by Scrutiny

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1. As stated in section 6 there are no direct financial implications of this report. Any net pressure from the action plan in-year would need to be covered from existing contingency and will be factored into the budget process for 2022/23.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- 10.1. There is a risk that failing to tackle some of the issues that provide barriers to some groups within society from participating in the democratic process will dissuade some members of the public from standing for election thereby restricting the diversity of representation.

11. Power to make the decision

- 11.1. s2 Local Government Act 2000
- 11.2. s111 Local Government Act 1972