

Report to	Democratic Services Committee
Date of meeting	5 th November 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. On 7th September 2021, Council approved the declaration set out in Appendix 3 to this report and delegated the preparation of an action plan to support the declaration to this Committee. The purpose of the report is to seek the Committee's views on the matters that may be contained in such an action plan.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1 That the Committee considers the matters that may be contained in a Diverse Council Action Plan in order that a detailed draft plan may be prepared for consideration.

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. On 7th September 2021 Denbighshire County Council resolved to commit to being a Diverse Council and approved the declaration set out in Appendix 3 to this report. Council delegated the task of preparing an action plan to support this commitment to the Democratic Committee.

4.9. The Leader has invited all of the female councillors of Denbighshire County Council on 9th November in order that there can be a discussion about their experiences both of the barriers that women may face in standing for election and any improvements that can be made in the way in which the Council works that may demonstrate an open and inclusive culture and the practical steps that may be taken to make the experience of women councillors better

4.10. A number of councils have already adopted action plans to support their commitment to becoming diverse councils. Common features of these plans are steps to increase engagement with the public and raise awareness of the role of a councillor and the positive contribution that councillors make. 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/>. This can be promoted to ensure that potential candidates are fully informed about the role.

4.11. Other common features of these action plans is a recognition of the importance of the health and safety of councillors and steps to ensure members receive the appropriate training and awareness to assist them with their wellbeing, making clear that the council will not tolerate the bullying and intimidation of councillors, including on social media.

4.12. The action plans also contain steps to improve the ways in which meetings are conducted to ensure that people who may be in full time employment, running their own business, or have a disability or caring responsibilities can participate in local democracy. The outcome of the work contained in the report on the Committee's agenda relating to the New Ways of Working will inform the Council's action plan in this regard.

4.13. The Committee will also be considering the draft report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales which sets out the Panel's determinations in respect of the remuneration of members for the civic year 2022-2023. The Panel is keenly aware that one of the barriers to participation can be financial and in its draft report, it asks Councils to encourage members to take their salaries in full, and to claim allowances, such as that made available to members with caring responsibilities to encourage wider participation from underrepresented groups.

4.14. The Committee is asked to consider and discuss the issues raised in the WLGA's report and to consider the steps that can be included in an action plan to support the Council's declaration as set out in Appendix 3.

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. 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 in future years.

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