

<b>Report to</b>	Democratic Services Committee
<b>Date of meeting</b>	28 <sup>th</sup> January 2022
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	Councillor Hugh Evans, Leader of the Council
<b>Report author</b>	Gary Williams, Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services
<b>Title</b>	Diversity in Democracy – Action Plan

## **1. What is the report about?**

1.1. The report is about a draft action plan to support the Diverse Council Declaration made by the County Council on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

2.1. On 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021, Council approved the declaration set out in Appendix 1 to this report and delegated the preparation of an action plan to support the declaration to the Committee. The purpose of the report is to seek the Committee's views on the draft action plan attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

## **3. What are the Recommendations?**

3.1 That the Committee considers the draft action plan contained in Appendix 2 and approves it subject to any amendments considered necessary by the Committee.

## **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. A WLGA cross party working group was set up to explore broader underrepresentation in democracy. It produced a report that 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

4.3. The WLGA Council agreed unanimously that a concerted and collective effort was required across the local government family and political parties.

4.4. On 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021 Denbighshire County Council resolved to commit to being a Diverse Council and approved the declaration set out in Appendix 1 to this report. Council delegated the task of preparing an action plan to support this commitment to the Democratic Committee.

4.5. 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.

4.6. 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.

4.7. 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 Council approved proposals for New Ways of Working at its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> December which will assist to overcome some barriers to participation relating to the timing and conduct of meetings.

## **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. There are unlikely to be direct costs arising out of the activities set out in the draft plan. The majority of the resource required will be in officer time. Where there are costs they will be met from within existing resources.

## **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. The service have confirmed that there are unlikely to any additional costs and if there are they will be low and can be kept within existing budgets.

## **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. s111 Local Government Act 1972